

Investigation

The Nunnery Murders



Chris Deggs

This is a work of fiction apart from the bits which aren't

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Chapter 1

As a coastal area of outstanding natural beauty, Ilfracombe boasted sharp cliffs and magnificent landscapes, all destined for exploration. Little did Alan Dymond, who loved living on that stretch of coastline, know his North Devon community would soon be famous for something else - the murder capital of the West Country. Natural beauty was forgotten for DI Dymond, as he stood staring at the horrible scene before him. Three people lay dead on the cold floor of the disused nunnery. He looked over at DS Copperwaite, his face a question mark. He'd never, in all his years as a policeman, come across such a murder scene. It looked so peaceful and bloodless. "Who called it in?" he asked his colleague.

Alisha Copperwaite checked her notes. "An anonymous male."

"What was he doing here?"

She shrugged "Up to no good, Oi'll be betting."

"We need to find him. Make that a priority."

"Yes, Guv."

Puzzled, he asked, "So why were they brought here?"

"Don't know, Guv," Alisha shrugged.

Taking a closer look, he said, "Have they got any ID on them?"

"No, Guv."

"How inconsiderate of them," he retorted. He often made light of murder victims - his way of dealing with the horror. More sensitive types found some of his remarks to be offensive. But DS Copperwaite, having worked alongside the DI for five years, had become impervious to his cold, dispassionate and sometimes eccentric ways. He would stare intensely at people but say nothing. He could be suddenly irritable, but she put up with it because he was a good detective - instinctive copper - a plodder who usually got results. Besides, she had a bit of a soft spot for the middle-aged officer who put her in mind of the American movie star, Robert Duvall.

The building had been there for as long as Alan could remember, but it was the first time he had stepped foot inside the Sacred Heart Nunnery, in Queens Road. From outside, the grey stone building resembled a mixture of both a church and a country home. Its grounds, confined by an eight-foot stone wall that ran around three sides of the building, cut it off from the wooded landscape at the back of the nunnery. Until the three bodies had turned up there, it had remained empty since its closure, 15 years before.

DI Dymond saw Jimbo Barnes crouching over one of the victims. Approaching the police pathologist, he said, "So what have you got for us?"

The Forensic scientist looked up. "You took your sweet time getting here."

"Well, they're not exactly going anywhere," Alan quipped, indicating the bodies. "So what have we got here?"

"Three bodies. Two male, one female."

"Tell me something Oi doesn't know."

Jimbo looked at him. "They were shot."

"Time of death,"

"Preliminary guess. Somewhere between two to three days."

"Don't you mean hours?" Alan, enquired, puzzled.

"I know what I mean, inspector."

DI Dymond crouched to get a closer look. "Oi am no expert, but they look loike fresh deaths to me,"

Jimbo smiled, "Yes, puzzling isn't it."

"Unless they were killed somewhere else and brought out here."

"Why would the killer do that. And why here?" Alan mused.

Jimbo looked at him and smiled. "It's your job to work that out, inspector. Mine is to get these three on the slab ASAP."

Chapter 2

Alisha Copperwaite, compared photos of the victims' faces, taken at the scene of the crime, with the images in the missing person database kept by the UK Missing Persons Bureau.

"Any Joy." DI Dymond said, upon entering the small information centre.

"There's nothing joyous about dead victims," she sighed.

"You know what Oi mean."

Scrolling through a list on the screen, she responded, "Nothing that matches our people, Guv." She sighed and stretched. "Looks Loike nobody's reported them missing. I guess we'll have to wait and see what forensics come up with."

He nodded, then said, "Keep on with it. You moight get lucky." Just then, his phone rang. It was the police pathologist. "Jimbo, have you got anything on the IDs?"

"Can you come over to the morgue?"

"Oi suppose so if it's important."

"There's something Oi need to show you."

Alisha looked up. "What's Jimbo found out."

"Bugger won't tell me. Wants me to go traipsing all the way over to Exeter."

"Do you want company?" She added, "We can discuss the case on the way."

"There nothing much to explain. Best if you stick with what you're doing."

Jimbo Barnes, the senior doctor responsible for the performance of autopsies at the Exeter General Hospital, was busying determining how the three individuals had died. This task, of all the roles within the forensic science sector, was the most demanding and not for the faint-hearted. The Exeter Hospital mortuary accommodated, not only those who died in hospital but also those across Devon, whose cause of death was either unknown or not thought to be from natural causes. It was the latter type that concerned Jimbo.

"Now that you have me here Oi hope you've got something useful for me," Alan stated as he entered Jimbo's clinical world with its offensive rotten but sweet smell. He always had to hold his breath at first.

The doctor turned to him, scalpel in hand. "They were all shot three times - two in the body, one in the head. They most likely died instantly. But not in the Nunnery."

"Oi'd already figured that, Doc. What with there being no blood an' all."

"They were each murdered at different times; the murderer killed our Jane Doe first. The young fellow copped it last, no more than a day ago, Oi'd say."

"Then the killer must have stored the bodies somewhere before depositing them in the nunnery."

"Possibly in a chest freezer," the pathologist suggested.

"Yes, but where?" Alan pondered.

Jimbo laughed. "You don't seriously expect me to know that, do you?"

"Just thinking out loud."

The pathologist resumed his autopsy."

"That's all you've got?"

"Right, inspector, that's all I've got for you at present."

Alan frowned, "Not much is it."

Just then, his phone rang. Dr Elwood's name came up. "Allard, anything on the bullets yet?"

The head of forensics said, "Yes but it's probably best if I show you."

"Foine. Oi's already in Exeter so Oi'll pop over and sees you."

Dr Allard Elwood ran the base that operated as a regional centre for police forensic services. His team looked after ballistics, fingerprint and chemical services. Allard, below average height at 5 foot 2 inches, was no pushover. Swamped by his lab coat, he could easily be mistaken for a junior assistant. He was a straightforward leader, much respected by his team members. Those who met him for the first time got fooled by his cherubic look, but not for long.

Alan knew the man for who he was and treated him with the respect he deserved. Entering the lab, the detective approached the scientist. "Dr Elwood, what have you got for me?"

The doctor flashed a beatific smile. "All bullets came from the same gun. We've matched the slugs to a 9mm pistol."

"And the make?"

"G lock 17. It's a common enough gun. Thousands of them out there."

"How about IDs?"

Allard shook his head. "Not yet. None of the fingerprints is on file. We're waiting for dental records. How are you going with missing persons?"

"Nothing showing up. We're relying on you."

Allard stared at him, poker-faced. "There is one thing that might be helpful."

"Yes?"

"A couple of shoe prints near the nunnery entrance. size eleven, off-road tread."

"That should narrow it down to about a million suspects."

Dr Elwood gave him a look.

"Anything else that 'could' be useful?"

"We're going over the clothing with a fine tooth comb. I'll let you know if we find anything."

By the time DI Dymond got back to Ilfracombe Police Station, he was ready to call it a day and go home. He knew the Chief Inspector wanted a report on the murders, but that could wait until tomorrow. As he passed the desk sergeant, Tom's voice rang out. "Alan, the boss wants to see you before you leave."

"Tell her you didn't see me, roight," he winked.

Then he heard someone say, "Ah! Just the person I'm looking for,"

It was too late. She'd been lying in wait, like a female lion stalking its prey. That was all he needed after a long day. He didn't get on very well with Chief Inspector Doreen Gallagher. It was mutual, though. She didn't like his abruptness which she saw as rudeness. If he was into women in uniform, he might have seen her as a turn on. But it wasn't his thing, and he found the extreme way she bunned her hair objectionable. Especially as it seemed to stretch her skin, giving her eyes an Asian look. It was not that he was racist. He much preferred women with free-flowing hair.

"So where are we on the multiple murders, Alan?"

"Not very far."

"What do we know about the victims?"

"Their gender and the fact they were all shot with the same gun. Oh, and the victims weren't killed in the Nunnery."

"How do you know that?"

"Oi don't. Dr Elwood does. It's got something to do with rigour mortise or lack of it."

"Any idea where they 'were' killed?"

"Oi wish."

"Yes, will we don't wish, DI Dymond. We gather sound evidence. So get out there and find me some."

"Perhaps you'd loike us to find the lost golden city of Eldorado while we're at it, ma'am."

She glared at him. "Don't be facetious. I can easily have you replaced."

Alan slid away, his mind afire with the various ways he could bring about her demise. "The bitch!" he swore silently, heading to his office, to wind down. The case had hit a flat spot. He still didn't know the mystery caller's identity. He desperately needed a breakthrough or failing that a bit of JW libation to forget his blues. He reached for the half-full bottle of whisky in his desk drawer when his phone rang. "Yes."

"Dr Elwood here. We have a name for one of our bodies."

"Which one?"

"The eldest one. Dental records list our John Doe as Grover Birkbeck. Last known address 64 Fern Way, Ilfracombe."

"Well done. Send the details to me immediately and work on the other two."

Remarks like that got Elwood's back up. "What do you think we've been doing. There's nothing from dental records for the other two."

While he awaited Dr Elwood's report, Alan poured himself a liberal amount of the mood-lifting alcohol into a small tumbler. Booting his laptop, he waited for the pinging sound signalling the arrival of new mail in his inbox. Within minutes had had a printed copy in his hands. Downing the remainder of the whisky, He checked the time on his phone. It was getting late, and Megan was expecting him for dinner. Alan grabbed his things and left. On the way out of the building, he stuck his head around the door of the incident room. DS Copperwaite was the only one there. He handed the print-out to her.

"What's this?"

"The name and address of one of our victims. See what you can foind out."

"Aren't you coming, Guv?"

"Not tonoight. The missus has got some legal types around for dinner. Oi'm expected to put in an appearance."

Chapter 3

Fern Way, just off Marlborough Road, was a leafy suburban area. The drizzly night had taken a turn for the worse. Alisha's wipers were hardly up to the task of clearing the pelting rain. The bright lights of the holiday park and her NavSat told her she'd overshot the turn-off. A U-turn put Fern way on her left. It was easier to make out the sign from that direction, although it was partly obscured by foliage, spreading out from untidy branches. She wished so much that she was home with hot cocoa, instead of being the messenger of bad tidings. Alisha sighed. It went with the job and never got any easier.

She arrived at 64 Fern Way at around 8 pm. It was getting late, but it was never the right time to deliver bad news. Wrapping herself up against the night's inclement weather DS Copperwaite

steeled herself for the encounter to come. Grabbing an umbrella from the back seat, she stepped out into the wet, inky night. Lights were on in the house, strongly suggesting the presence of occupants.

In response to her knock, a woman's voice called through the door, "Who is it?"

"Police. Open the door please."

The door opened to reveal a grey-haired woman, probably in her seventies.

"Are you Mrs Birkbeck?"

"Yes. Why?"

"DS Copperwaite. Can we speak inside?"

Mrs Birkbeck looked disparagingly at the officer's wet clothes and dripping broly. "I suppose you'd better."

The cottage, filled with traditional farmhouse furniture as well as modern conveniences, retained its rustic charm. The exposed beams, low ceilings and uneven floors appealed to Alisha's quirkiness. A silver Menorah in the centre of the dining table offset the cottage's unmistakable Englishness.

"Now what is all this about?" Mrs Birkbeck asked, sitting in an armchair facing the open fire.

There was no way to break the news gently. "We found the body of a man we believe to be your husband."

The senior woman remained strangely calm. "Where did you get that body?"

"In the disused nunnery."

Still composed, she said, "When was this?"

"Early this morning."

The woman smiled. "Then it cannot be Grover. He is visiting his brother in Israel."

Alisha, nonplussed, uttered, "Are you sure?"

The woman rose and went over to a bureau. Picking up a postcard, she handed it to the policewoman.

Alisha noted it depicted the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. On the back was a short message from her husband. It was postmarked in Jerusalem and had been posted two days previously. "Alisha stared at the woman. "But the dental records show our victim to be your husband."

The woman shook her head. "You must be mistaken. That's his handwriting. I would recognise it anywhere."

"There's one way we can prove this. Would you mind coming to identify the body? That way we will know for sure."

"Not tonight!" the woman said, startled. "The cold will aggravate my arthritis something terrible."

"The sooner we do it, Mrs Birkbeck, the sooner you can have peace of mind."

The woman smiled. "Detective, I rather think it's you who needs peace of mind."

Alisha couldn't argue with that. "Oi will pick you up 9 am tomorrow."

Alan didn't fancy having dinner with the legal types, as he referred to his wife's work colleagues. Even Megan wasn't that taken with the idea, but she was one of three candidates vying for a

partnership in Lowel, Bent and Hardy, the firm of solicitors for whom she worked. It was the Hardy part of the business she was entertaining. Both Clarence and his wife, Martine, were in the firm, with him specialising in family law, while her expertise was in corporate law.

The roast chicken with potatoes and green beans went down well but not so the conversation. Alan did his best to be the genial host for his wife's sake. As a police officer, he only had contact with criminal lawyers and even then mostly in court. In most cases Alan found them to be insufferably manipulative, with no respect for the law, unless it served them in their case. He tended to tar all legal eagles with the same broad brush. So when Clarence Hardy started on about how, in his opinion, many domestic violence cases weren't taken seriously by the Police, Alan's hackles rose. He responded angrily, "We take all matters seriously. DV cases are moinefields for the Police. Our hands are toied unless violence is involved or one of the parties brings charges against the other."

Clarence puffed out his chest. This subject was his area of expertise. "Violence can be defined in many ways, inspector."

"Yes, such as the violence meted out to our members. We investigate because somebody reports a disturbance. We foind one of those involved, usually the woman, scared, bleeding or both. We go to restrain her partner who, most loikely drunk, invariably puts up resistance. We have to use some force to control him. Then his bloody wife attacks us for hurting her man."

"Then the police should be trained to deal with the situation differently," Clarence scoffed.

Alan, having had enough of the lawyer's arrogant attitude, lashed out with his tongue. "You people only see the best of these thugs when in court. We have to deal with them when they are at their worst. You, in your safe, sanitised little world haven't got a fucking clue about what goes on at the coal face!"

Megan shot Alan a look that made Circe seem like an amateur. Forcing a smile, she said, "Let's just agree to differ, shall we?"

Alan, realising he'd gone too far, agreed.

"Who's for dessert then?" Megan smiled.

Martine Hardy, who had shrunk back in her seat, said in a timorous voice, "That would be lovely.

Alisha was adding some information to the whiteboard when Alan entered. Turning to face him, she said, "Morning Guv. How did the dinner go?"

He grimaced, "Don't ask. More to the point how did you get on with Mrs Birkbeck."

"It was odd. Mrs Birkbeck claims he's in Israel, visiting his brother."

Alan put his hands together, as though in prayer. It was one of his affectations. "Odd indeed. You'd better get her to ID the body."

"Already sorted. Oi'm picking her up at nine, Guv. But there's something else."

"Yes?"

"She showed me a postcard. It was postmarked three days ago from Jerusalem."

His eyes widened. "It was definitely from him?"

"She claimed it was his handwriting."

He intensely stared at her. "Could the boffins have gotten the wrong dental records?"

"Beats me Guv. But if the body is that of Mr Birkbeck, which is most loikely the case, why would he tell her he was going to Israel if he didn't intend to do so?"

"Or did intend to but was stopped by his murderer."

She shook her head. "It makes no sense. Why would somebody stop him from going to Israel, murder him and leave him with the other two in the nunnery?"

"Too many bloody questions and not enough answers," he grumbled.

Jimbo Barnes and his team cared for some 2,500 patients and their families each year. But apart from its role as the Exeter Hospital Mortuary, the morgue also took care of the general public. This location was where DS Copperwaite took Mrs Birkbeck for the identification. Alisha went into the viewing room with Mrs Birkbeck, while her sister waited in reception. There was a pane of thick glass between the living and the deceased. Mrs Birkbeck looked at the face of the body on the trolley, fully expecting it not to be her Grover. But it was him!

Alisha, seeing the elderly woman's look of pained surprise, asked, "Is this your husband?"

The impoverished woman looked at her and nodded.

"You are certain that this man is Grover Birkbeck."

"Yes," she nodded tearfully. "Then she said, "But I don't understand. There's the postcard and ..."

Alisha agreed, "Yes, it's all very puzzling. Can you give me his brother's contact details?"

"I have them at home." She dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief. Turning to the police officer, she said, "How did he end up like this?"

Alisha had no answers. She took the woman's arm and led her out to where her sister waited in reception.

Martha knew by the look in her sister's eyes that it was Grover. The younger sister, rising from her seat, hugged her sibling. "Oh, I'm so sorry for your loss," she consoled, in an attempt to offer comfort to the widow.

Alisha interrupted, "Oi'm sorry to do this now, but Oi need answers to a couple of questions."

Martha immediately went into protection mode. "This is not the time."

Mrs Birkbeck patted her sister's arm. "It's okay, ask your questions."

"Do you know of anybody who wished your husband harm?" Noting the blank expression on widow's face, Alisha elucidated, "Had he been arguing with anybody - a relative, a neighbour perhaps."

She shook her head. "Nobody. He is very well liked by most people he meets."

DS Copperwaite didn't correct her. It takes a while to adjust, to refer to a departed loved one in the past tense.

Dr Elwood rang DI Dymond around 11 am.

"Have you got anything for me?"

"I have the ID for the second victim."

"Great! What's the name?"

"Her name is Flavia Morgan."

"Anything else?"

"She's 56 years old, divorced and in the early stages of cervical cancer. That's how we found her, through her medical records."

"The medical profession must be becoming more liberal with patient details these days."

"It was Jimbo Barnes' lead. He mentioned his Jane Doe's condition to Mr Aubrey Sewell, the Chief Oncologist at St Martin's. He pulled a few strings, and Jimbo passed the info onto me."

"You! Why didn't pass it onto me? Oi'm after all in charge of this case."

"You'll have to ask him that."

DI Dymond called his troops together in the incident room. The case board was filling up with photos, names, addresses and other relevant details. Two of the victims now had IDs. Only one remained with a question mark above it. "Foinding out about our second body, that of a Flavia Morgan is our next task. He scrutinised his team. "O'Ryan foind out all about Ms Morgan. Take Ferguson with you." Seeking out DS Copperwaite, he said, Alisha, where are we on victim one?"

"The deceased has been confirmed as Grover Birkbeck. He does have a brother on a Kibbutz in Jerusalem, but he hadn't seen Grover for many years."

"Was he expecting a visit from his brother?"

"He says no. He did say that Grover had sent him the card and asked him to post in in Jerusalem."

Dymond put his hands together and raised his eyes. "Why?"

"He doesn't know. He didn't see any harm in it and didn't see any reason to question his brother's motives."

Alan said, "We need to know why he acted in such an odd way. When we have an answer, we'll have much more of an idea what this is all about."

"Yes, Guv. It's a bloody big mystery," Alisha said,

"Then demystify it, Sergeant. "Talk to the widow again. She's holding back on something."

Alisha said, "Oi could also try her sister, Martha. They seemed pretty close."

Good. Follow that up."

Detective Sergeant Quinn O'Ryan tended to be quiet and observant in his dealings with suspects and witnesses. His partner, Detective Constable Niall Ferguson was much more outgoing, opinionated and downright cheeky at times. In some ways, the pair complemented each other. At times O'Ryan felt like an older brother looking after his younger sibling, under sufferance.

Arriving at the south-eastern edge of town, they knocked at the door of 21 Furze Hill Road. This area was a new and upmarket suburb with two-car garages and water features in the front gardens. According to the Department of Social Security rental records, it was where Enya Woodruff lived with Flavia Morgan.

Enya, responding to the insistent knock on her door, opened it and faced the two detectives.

An apparition with long dark hair shot through with grey met the pair. Enya had sharp features and a tongue to match. O'Ryan reckoned she looked like a refugee witch from King Lear.

She pushed her straggly, unkempt hair away from her eyes. "Who are you and what do you want?" she demanded, suspicion oozing.

O'Ryan answered, "DS O'Ryan and DC Ferguson. We believe you know a Flavia Morgan."

"Yes, What about her?"

"We have some terrible news, I'm afraid. Do you mind if we come in, Niall said, stepping over the threshold.

Enya, in a flurry, managed, "Tell me what has happened."

"We discovered Ms Morgan's body in a disused nunnery a day ago. We only just found out who she is," Ferguson stated.

With her eyes darting from one cop to the other, she fiddled with her fingers. "Flavia dead. How?"

"She was murdered."

Enya stared at them, uncomprehending. "No, you've got it all wrong. She can't be dead. She's away, visiting relatives in Carmarthen."

"When did you last see her?" DS O'Ryan asked.

"It would have been about a week ago."

"How do you know she's in Carmarthen?" Ferguson asked.

"Because she sent me this," she explained, retrieving an object on her dining table. She handed Ferguson a small book called the 'Mabinogian'. It had an inscription:

To my Enya. Best wishes and much love from the land of my birth."

DS O'Ryan scratched his head. "If she's visiting Wales how come her body is discovered just over a day ago in the old abandoned nunnery?"

Enya backed off, folding her arms. "You people have made a mistake!"

Ferguson said, "Do you want me to phone a friend to come and stay with you?"

She shook her head. "Flavia is my only close friend here."

O'Ryan said, "We'll need identification of the body. Are you willing to come with us to do that?" He added, "At least you'll know one way or the other."

"What? Now?"

"Yes, the sooner, the better,"

"I'd better grab my coat then." As she opened her closet, she felt a few tears began to gather in the corner of her eyes. No, it couldn't be; her mind screamed.

Chapter 4

Safa Hussaini, one of those people who put 110 per cent effort into what they do, looked up from his microscope and rubbed his eyes. His father told him that was the kind of selfless dedication needed if the Kibbutz was to be efficient and worked for all its members. Safa had taken his words to heart. Hair and fibre were Dr Hussaini's primary interest in forensic science. He believed crime

laboratories now solved more crimes than foot slogging police in investigations. Although being a private man, he never voiced such opinions in public.

For two days he had been crouched over his microscopes searching for any stray hairs that may have come from the perpetrator of the 'Nunnery murders' the name given to the case. So far, he had come up empty. Although hair got classified as dead matter, it still contained DNA. Discovery of hair on the victim or the clothes of the assaulted person could often determine race and sex. Safa, very private and dedicated, never yearned for the company of friends and seemed not to need a social life. He removed his glasses and applied drops to his tired eyes. Blinking to disperse the drops he peered down the eyepiece of a microscope he had set up. The woman's coat, made of coarse fabric, was most likely to trap any hairs or fibres. The young man's leather jacket and the old man's gaberdine mackintosh were less useful as they held no valuable clues. Then something caught his eye. Safa adjusted the lens to magnify the item. It looked like a different fibre, one that didn't come from the woman's coat. Her coat was a beige tone, making the red thread stand out. Safa got up and strolled across to where Allard was still working. "I have discovered a thread not belonging to the garment."

Allard looked up from his paperwork. "That's promising. Show me."

Dr Elwood peered into the microscope. He looked at Dr Hussaini. "Okay, log it. But we can't read too much into it at this point. It could have come from anywhere. A human hair would be much more useful."

Safa Hussaini, round-shouldered from twenty years of crouching over scientific instruments, thought about grandmothers sucking eggs. "We can only work with what's available, Dr Elwood."

"Yes, Safa. Go home and get some rest."

Winter was fast approaching. The stiff easterly breeze from the Atlantic heralded yet more rain, which began lancing down spattering on the windscreen. Alisha turned up her car heater another notch. Rain fell heavily as Detective Sergeant Copperwaite drove along The Quay. The wind blew intermittently from the north, whipping into foam the waves as they crashed on the sandy shore. Casting high their white crests, they seemed to Alisha to be racing after one another.

The Ship and Pilot, one of the oldest pubs in the area, was where Martha had agreed to meet with DS Copperwaite. Alisha was considering eating on the premises but instead walked into a bar where she had difficulty reaching the counter. Surrounded by local drinkers, who seemed to have a sense of an enemy in their midst, Alisha found they were unwilling to move to allow her access. When she eventually got served with one of the many types of cider, the bar staff were efficient and pleasant. But the punters gave her a strong feeling that she was encroaching on their space and they didn't like it. The pub was in dire need of some TLC. As Alisha took her seat by the window, she couldn't but help notice the faded swirly patterned carpet, sticky tables and tired decor, all of which was off-putting to her. Alisha, although not the fussiest of people, did still have some standards when it came to interior design. But to be fair, she did enjoy her Ploughman's lunch, as she waited for Martha to show.

Martha Swanson, dressed in dungarees and wearing a baseball cap, approached the police officer. She took a seat near a window that gave a view of the cold grey ocean.

Alisha smiled, "DS Copperwaite. We met at your sister's place."

"Yes, I remember you. You were the one who told Mrs Birkbeck the terrible news about Grover."

"Yes, never an easy thing to do."

"So how can I help you?"

"There are a few loose ends to tie up regarding his death. But first, why are we meeting here?"

"I'm fixing up a boat in a shed just down the road."

That's why the work clothes, Alicia thought. She nodded, "Grover's brother knew nothing about his intention to visit him in Israel. But he did send the postcard to Mrs Birkbeck, which Grover had already written. Why would he do that?"

"I don't like to speak ill of the dead, but Grover was an inveterate liar. It was some game to him."

"In what way?"

Martha remained impassive and spoke without showing emotion. "He came over as everybody's friend. Once he had someone's confidence, he fed them wild yarns about his many imagined intrepid experiences."

"So he wasn't to be trusted."

"I certainly didn't believe him. I raised my concerns on many occasions with my sister, but she wouldn't hear anything against him. Jewish wives are subservient you know."

Alisha swigged her beer. "So what was he up to that got him murdered?"

Martha shrugged, "Who knows, but there was one incident that might shed some light."

"Please tell me."

"One day, when I went to visit my sister, she wasn't home, but he was. He was on the phone and didn't hear me enter." Martha touched Alisha's arm. "I wasn't trying to listen in, but I heard him say he needed more time for something. I couldn't listen to what the caller said, but Grover became agitated and shouted something like, Well you'll just have to wait."

"He needed more time for what? It could have meant anything."

"I know." She finished her beer, saying, "I have to do some more work on the old girl before the light fades. You can walk with me if you like."

The rain had eased to a drizzle as they walked to The Quay Alisha noticed several rowing boats upside down on the sand.

"Do you think he had borrowed money and couldn't pay it back. That could be a motive."

Martha responded, "That's not good business practice. If you kill them, they can't pay you back."

"You have a point," Alisha chuckled. Noticing they had arrived at the old boathouse, she turned to Martha, "Thanks for giving me this toime. Oi'll let you get back to your work. Oi may have to contact you again and if you think of anything here's my card."

Safa Hussaini had lived in England for most of his life. He had some early childhood memories of being brought up in a kibbutz-style community in Palestine. His parents were happy enough working on the land, for wealthy Jews but, as Safa grew up, he thought it demeaning and became increasingly sure that the ways of the old settlements were not for him. He did not want to live, with Jews on top and Arabs working for them. In his youthful idealism, he thought that there shouldn't be employers and employed at all. There must be a better way. The better way for him was to live and study in England. He hadn't been back to Palestine since. A private and shy person, he just got on with the work he loved, seldom socialising with even his colleagues. He was first in the next day and was working on the fibre when Dr Elwood arrived at the lab.

"You been here all night Safa?"

"No. I've been doing some tests on the fibre."

"Have you found any other trace elements?"

"No, but I think this is significant to the case."

"What have you discovered?"

"The thread comes from a Royal Marine uniform dress jacket."

Allard stared at his colleague. "Really?"

"Yes. I'm trying to age it."

"Then our murderer could be in the military."

Safa suggested, "Or associated with it in some way. Maybe he's an aficionado of military memorabilia?"

"Or maybe he only picked the jacket up in a charity shop."

"An officer's dress jacket is unlikely to end up there, Dr Elwood."

"I'll pass on the information about the fibre if you're sure."

"I am."

On the third day of the investigation, DI Dymond arrived at work at 7 am. His team was already assembled in the incident room when he entered. Addressing them, he said, "Okay boys and girls gather around and tell me what you know."

DS Copperwaite said, "I spoke with Martha Swanson, Guv. Her expression didn't give much away but it was obvious to me that she didn't like Grover Birkbeck much. She says he was a liar and a bit of a conman."

"That would explain him conning his wife about his trip to Israel. But what the hell was he covering up?" Alan asked. Then he said, "Quinn, how did you go with Enya Woodruff?"

"When I told her about her live-in friend's demise she took it stoically."

"Stoically. Aint that posh, That's not a word you usually find in a copper's notebook," a DC teased."

"We're not all fucking ignoramuses, Den," Quinn retorted."

Alan intervened. "Okay, that's enough you two. Any more ribaldry and you'll both be in detention after class."

Nobody in the room dared mention 'ribaldry'.

"Right, carry on Quinn,"

"When I asked her why she hadn't reported her special friend missing after three days she explained that Flavia Morgan had told her she was going to Wales to see her family."

Alan became attentive. "Now there seems to be a pattern forming and Oi love patterns. So why would two people say they were going away end up murdered on their home patch?" Then he asked, "Has this live-in friend identified our victim as Flavia Morgan?"

"Yes Guv," DS O'Ryan said.

"Roight. Now before you go away and bring me, suspects, we have one new piece of forensic evidence. "The boffins have found a red thread on Ms Morgan's coat, which comes from a Royal Marine officers jacket. Now, it's pretty slim, but Oi want you, Denis, to see if there are any military memorabilia shops or collections in this area."

Denis said, "You can probably get RM jackets on eBay. But Oi don't see why a murderer would wear such a unique article of clothing to kill someone."

Quinn quipped, "At least you could disguise the blood stains."

"If there was any blood," DS Copperwaite commented.

DI Dymond said, "Maybe wearing the jacket was part of the ritual." Then he had an idea. "Copperwaite go and see Mrs Birkbeck. Foind out if her husband was into military stuff."

"It's a bit of a long shot, Guv."

"Have you got something better to do, Sergeant?"

"No Guv."

"Then don't argue."

Sometimes Alan's snappiness pissed her off, but she bit her tongue and remained quiet.

Quinn asked, "Shouldn't we check to see if Flavia Morgan did dress-ups with her live-in friend."

There were a few chuckles at the inference.

DI Dymond scowled. "Al roight, enough of that. Get to your tasks."

The Military Shop in South Street, Ilfracombe, was run by Ernie Harris, who saw military service in the Falklands. He looked up from a gun magazine as DC Monkhouse entered his cluttered domain. "Can Oi help you?" He said mustering all the enthusiasm he could drum up.

Denis looked at the sallow-faced owner. "DC Monkhouse. Do you deal in military jackets?"

With the prospect of a sale, Ernie brightened. "We have a few in stock. What are you looking for?"

"A Red Royal Marine officers dress jacket."

The shop keeper's face dropped. "Nothing loike that at the moment. We do have some blue dress coats ..."

"Have you sold any Red ones?"

"The original item is a rare foind. But Oi have sold one or two in the last year."

"Oi don't suppose you have records of who you sold them to," Denis said, holding little hope."

"Not if the customer paid cash, which they mostly do." He added, "Why are you asking?"

"Police business. Look, are there any other shops loike yours in the area."

"Not unless you go to the city."

Denis, deciding the whole thing was a waste of his time, left Ernie Harris to his wares and found a cafe for morning tea.

Alan Dymond stood looking at the photographs of the murder victims. "Who the hell are you?" he said to the picture of the young man. He heard someone enter. It was Chief Inspector Gallagher.

She said, "And how are Dymond's 'dynamic detectives today'? Solving the Nunnery murders, I hope."

Being equally sarcastic, Alan retorted, "Waiting to hear good news from the 'fantastic forensic findings'."

Her face became stern. "What have you got for me, after three days of the investigation?"

"The IDs of two of our bodies and red thread."

"Not much to show for all the resources we have put into this case, inspector."

"We're following up a couple of new leads today, ma'am."

"Let's hope they bear fruit." She turned to leave, then hesitated. "Keep me posted about any new developments, inspector."

"Yes ma'am," Alan answered.

DS Copperwaite, back at 64 Fern Way, was walking down the path when she nearly bumped into A man who had risen quickly from a flower bed. "Oh, sorry. Didn't see you there."

He looked at the beautiful woman, who put him in mind of Ava Gardner, one of his movie star favourites from the Golden Hollywood era. "My fault. wasn't looking where I was going."

Appraising the man wearing gardening gloves, she said, "Are you a friend of the family?"

"Oh, just helping out. Mrs Birkbeck lost her 'usband recently, you know."

"Yes, that's why I'm here. DS Copperwaite. Do you know Mrs Birkbeck well?"

"Toby Bennett. So, you're a policewoman."

"We're all called police officers these days."

"Oh ah! It's all that PC stuff."

At first, she thought he meant police constable but quickly realised it was 'politically correct'. "Is Mrs Birkbeck in?"

"Yes, but she's having an 'ard time. My wife is with her."

"Were you a friend of Mr Birkbeck?"

"Grover. We've known each other for years. We both worked together before we retired."

"Oh! What work did you do?"

"We were tailors."

"Tailors! That's interesting," she said, making a note. "Do you know if he was interested in military stuff?"

He looked at her as with suspicion. "Why do you want to know?"

"Because we want to find out who killed your friend."

"No, he had enough to do with that stuff at work."

"What do you mean?"

"We specialised in tailoring for army officers."

She made another note, bolder this time. "Where did you work?"

"Grieves & Hawkes Military Tailors."

"Where are they based?"

"Savile Row."

"London?"

"It's the only one I know of."

Another note and Alisha felt like someone winning a lottery. Copperwaite felt like doing something mad, letting her hair down. Occasionally the detective would do things on a whim, like swimming with sharks or skydiving. Her friends thought she was reckless, but she sometimes needed the rush to feel alive. She didn't respond to the urge on this occasion. She had to follow up on this new gem of information.

Chapter 5

Something was gnawing at Alan's mind. There was something, staring him in the face, he wasn't addressing. Then he had it. He grabbed his phone and pressed Quinn's contact.

"Yes, Guv."

"How did the book get sent to Ms Woodruffe, if Flavia Morgan never went to Wales?"

"An excellent question."

"Well, go and see Ms Woodruffe and find out."

"She's a weird one. Gives me the creeps."

"Just do it, Quinn. And tell me straight away."

Dr Jimbo Barnes came from a long line of medicos. The family tree was fairly bristling with them. But, apart from him, they all tended to live people. He was the first to become a pathologist. But then he was out of step with most members of his family. The black sheep they called him. Why a black sheep should be deemed rebellious was beyond him. He was busy prepping a corpse for an autopsy when Philip Ross approached him, excitedly. The cat with the cream look on his face caused Jimbo to respond. "What's got into you?"

"Oi've just discovered something interesting about the youngest John Doe from the nunnery murders."

"Oh!"

"He has a military tattoo on his right shoulder."

"Yes, that's noted in the report."

"Well Oi did some checking, and it's the motto of the Royal Marines."

"Yes," Jimbo responded, unimpressed.

"You have to be a Marine to get one of those. And if our boy was in the RMs, they will have records."

Jimbo came up short. "You're right. We might be able to find out who he is at last." He grabbed his phone and rang Alan's number. "Inspector Dymond, our unnamed victim may well have been serving or had served in the Royal Marines."

"Are you sure?"

"Pretty much so, and they'll have a way of finding out who he is."

"Bloody Hell! You're right Jimbo." With that, Alan terminated the call, determining to carry out this part of the investigation himself, with Alisha to assist him. The armed forces were a difficult lot to deal with and played their cards very close indeed. Then he realised he hadn't seen DS Copperwaite all day. Where the hell was she, he wondered?

DS O'Ryan felt uneasy talking with Enya Woodruff. He had her down as a witchy lesbian, but that particular 'elephant in the room' stayed concealed. His uneasiness being around the gay woman wasn't a moral issue. It brought back unpleasant memories when his then-wife had walked out on him for another woman. Interviewing the strange woman, he said, "We know that Flavia never got to Wales. So how do you account for receiving the book posted from Carmarthen?"

"I've no idea."

He rose from his seat. "Who was Flavia supposed to visit?"

"Her brother, Gordon."

"Do you have his contact details?"

Enya pushed back her straggly hair. "Surely you don't suspect him."

"As far as I'm concerned everyone's a suspect until proven otherwise."

"And there's me being under the illusion that we're innocent unless proven guilty."

"His details, please."

"Flavia may have them in her room."

In her room. O'Ryan thought he might have been wrong about her being queer after all. But then many hetero couples sleep in separate beds - him and his ex for one. "Where's her room."

"It's Flavia's private sanctum. I'll go and look. You stay here."

He bristled, "This is a murder investigation, and I know what I'm looking for."

She smiled sweetly. "Getting all alpha on me doesn't work. Now just wait here."

He took a long deep breath. "Were you and Flavia lovers?"

She scowled at him. "That's also none of your business."

Alan had just come from the coffee machine armed with an anaemic looking flat white when he bumped into Quinn. "Ah! Oi've wanted to catch up with you. How did you get on with finding out about the book?"

"I got a contact number from Ms Woodruffe. I phoned Ms Morgan's brother. He posted it at his Sister's request after she'd written her personal message in it."

He stared at the DS. So she bought it here and sent it to Wales so her brother could send it back to Ms Woodruffe?"

"Yes. What the hell is going on?" Quinn asked.

"We've got two murder victims who covered their tracks by lying to their family, so this seems to have little to do with Grover Birkbeck's nature."

"I'm stumped, Guv."

"Go home, Quinn. Come back fresh in the morning."

After the DS had left, Alan phoned Alisha. "Pick me up at eight tomorrow morning. We're going to Bickleigh Barracks."

"What for Guv?"

"All will be revealed."

"Guess what Oi found out today."

"I don't do guesses DS Copperwaite, especially when Oi'm bloody tired."

"When Oi got to Mrs Birkbeck's place an old cockney guy was doing some weeding for her. it turns out that he and Grover worked as tailors before they retired."

"And this is interesting because?"

"They worked for a firm in London that specialised in military dress uniforms."

Alan became alerted. "Now that is interesting. Well done Sergeant. London you say. Oi used to work at West End Central. Oi know a couple of coppers who still work there. They could be useful."

"Guv, Oi'd loike to follow this one up."

"And Oi'd like to win the football pools. I have to put my resources where I think they're most useful and I want you with me tomorrow."

"Why can't Quinn go with you?"

"Because we're going to visit the fucking Navy and you're better for the job. End of."

Chapter 6

RM Bickleigh, Alan found was located in the village of Bickleigh some 8-9 miles North-east of Plymouth City Centre. Home to 42 Commando RM, the location was chosen for its proximity to both: Dartmoor, with its ideal training areas and ranges; and its proximity to Plymouth for secure maritime access. As he and DS Copperwaite drove up to the checkpoint arm that blocked the road, a sentry in camouflage fatigues approached his car.

"Can I help you, sir?" he said politely."

"Yes. You can direct us to your commanding officer."

"And who are you?"

Dymond flashed his warrant card.

"And why are you here?"

"Police business, soldier. And we'd loike to get on with it."

While a second guard prevented them from entering the base, the sentry checked a clipboard he got from a small booth. He looked in the car at DI Dymond. "You're not on the visitor's list."

With agitation building, Alan stared at the soldier. "Just phone his office and tell Colonel, what's his name, that the police are here in a murder inquiry and would like his assistance."

Sentry one turned to sentry two. "You'd better phone him."

"Yes, you had," Dymond said, as the soldier went back to his booth.

He returned and said, "Carry on past the parade ground. Turn left at the flagpole and park in the visitor's car park. You will be met there and taken to Captain Fanning's office." He handed Alan a sheet of paper. "This is a map of the base with guidelines. Make sure you stick to them."

A guard lifted the boom gate, and the police drove through.

"It's good to know their security is tight," Alisha said, as Alan followed the instructions. Then she said, "You still haven't explained why we're here."

"Because it seems that our third victim was a Royal Marine Commando."

A Red Cap met them at the car park. "Follow me, sir," was all he said, giving a disparaging look to Alisha. As far as the military police officer was concerned, this was a male's domain. One of the old school who didn't think women should be allowed in the armed forces, he showed his disdain. The police followed him into a building, to an office marked 'Capt W Fanning'. The Red Cap knocked and entered. Saluting, he announced, "The police to see you, sir."

The Captain, tall and sporting a pencil-thin moustache, rose to his full height. "How can the Navy help the police?"

Alan said, "DI Dymond and DS Copperwaite. We're investigating a murder. The victim has a Royal Marine tattoo. Apart from that, he has no ID. We would loike to know who he is and hope you can furnish us with that information, captain." He turned to DS Copperwaite. "Give him the picture, sergeant."

She did so, wondering about his officious behaviour.

The Marine officer glanced at it. He scoffed, "Is that all you have to go on, inspector?"

"Don't you keep photographs of all your soldiers?"

"Sailors actually," he smirked. And to answer your question, no, we don't keep them here."

"You'd be able to access them on a computer though?"

"With just this to go by it could take some time,"

"Alroight, we'll go to the mess, and my sergeant can make me a noice cuppa, while your people find out who he is."

Captain Fanning said, "We do have more important things to do you know."

"What's more important than foinding out why one of your men was murdered?"

"Very well, I'll see what can be done." Fanning sighed, reluctance showing in his voice.

"Perhaps you can get someone to point us to the mess," Alan smiled.

DC Denis Monkhouse, a 'hail fellow well met' type irked Niall Ferguson at times, mostly because of his cynical outlook on life conflicted with that of his colleague. Niall detested those 'glass half full' people who put on a false positive front. Denis, on the other hand, looked upon the pessimists as lesser beings, more to be pitied than hated. He asked Niall, "Where's the Guv gone?"

Niall, the only other person in the incident room, said, "Dunno, but Alisha has gone with him."

"Why's it so hush, hush?"

"Maybe they have it off in some motel room."

The boss and her together. That's not a pretty picture." Then Quinn said, "It seems like we're partnered up today."

"Jesus, that's all Oi need."

"I'm not that thrilled myself. But we have to make the best of it."

Niall sighed, "So what are we supposed to be doing?"

Denis said, "We've got to go to London."

"London! I hate the fucking place."

"We have to go and visit a tailors shop."

"Why?"

"If you'd been at this morning's briefing, you'd know."

"I had a personal matter to attend to."

Denis said, "Our Alisha found out that Grover Birkbeck used to work there with a mate from the 'smoke'. And get this, they specialised in making fancy military clobber."

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"The Guv thinks it might have something to do with the bit of red thread."

"It's a bit thin."

"Yeah, loike the thread."

Niall cringed at Denis' poor wit. "Anyway, I thought you were interested in this army memorabilia stuff. Didn't you use to have a shop?"

"Oi used to buy and sell authentic military gear when Oi dropped out of uni. Oi set up an online business with a mate. 'Military Collectables' we called it."

"Then you became a cop."

"Yes, for my sins."

As they drank mess coffee, Alisha said, "So why did you bring me here, Guv?"

"You want to know the truth?"

"That would be helpful."

"They don't like women with authority."

"Oi know that. Did you see the look that Red Cap gave me?"

"Well, me telling you what to do fits in with their idea of the natural order of things."

She looked at him. "You mean, keep the little woman barefoot and pregnant?"

"That's one way of putting it," he grinned.

"You arrogant bastard! Oi bet you're enjoying my humiliation."

"Relax Sergeant; it's only an act."

"Well Oi'm not here to entertain their fucking egos." She slumped back in her seat, firmly crossing her arms.

Just then, the Red Cap approached. "The captain is ready for you now."

"Let's go, sergeant," Alan said, with a sadistic smile.

Alisha mouthed, "fuck you," and followed him out of the mess.

As they entered his office, Captain Fanning smiled, "We think we've worked out who your man is."

"Your man, don't you mean?" Alan retorted.

"Not since he left the Marines two years ago. He is, we believe, Corporal Mason Thomas. He contracted malaria while on exercises overseas. That's why he left the armed services."

Alan took the print-out with blanked out words. "Thank you, captain. You've been a great help."

As they drove off the base, Alan phoned Dr Barnes. "Jimbo, DI Dymond here. We're pretty sure we have a name for you, John Doe."

"So he was in the Army?"

"Navy. But can you tell me? Did he have malaria?"

"Malaria? Well, we didn't pick it up in the autopsy."

"Could you have missed it?"

"Post-mortem identification of malaria in non-endemic countries is challenging."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"We don't often encounter cerebral malaria because the infection is rarely documented ante-mortem."

"Did he have malaria or not." Alan pressed, agitated.

"It's not that simple. The deceased may have contracted the disease, but post-mortem diagnosis of malaria is often only done when there is a suspicion based on anamnesis or available medical information."

"Anamnesis! What's that?"

"A preliminary case history of a medical or psychiatric patient."

"What if the Marines gave us a copy of his medical history?"

"I doubt you'd get it. Besides, unfortunately, medical records are generally incomplete, unreliable or absent when bodies are admitted to the mortuary for medico-legal investigations."

Alan, frustrated said, "Okay, Jimbo, you've told me what you can't do. Now tell me what you can do?"

"Tests can be carried out but not here. We'll have to send samples to the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. They can carry out tests to enhance malaria diagnostic in areas with limited diagnostic facilities or poor experience, such as us. Tests are based on the detection of different malaria proteins."

"Then, get on with it."

"Are the police going to foot the bill?"

Alan hadn't thought of that. "Get me a quote ASAP."

"It's not going to be cheap, inspector."

"It never fucking is."

"So what's our boy's name?"

"Corporal Mason Thomas."

Chapter 7

Savile Row, a street in Mayfair, central London, was known principally for its traditional bespoke tailoring for men. It was for this reason that Niall and Denis found themselves looking for a firm called Grieves & Hawkes Military Tailors. DS Mike Tallow met the pair outside the Royal Geographical Society at 1 Savile Row. Tallow, greeting the two DCs he said, "So you're Dymond's boys. Is he still a cantankerous old bastard?"

Niall, smirked, "Nothing much has changed there."

The seasoned cop said, "I remember being under him as a raw recruit. Dymond always used to give me the shit jobs."

"Yeah, like having to traipse up to fucking London to visit a tailor shop," Niall complained.

"So what is this visit to our great city all about?"

Niall said, "A bit of fucking red thread found on the coat of a murder victim."

"Isn't it always," DS Tallow grinned. Then he said, "All joking aside your Guvnor is a Dymond by name as well as by nature. He's got his quirky ways, but he is solid. You won't get a better one than him when it comes to defending his troops. That's why he's never gotten further up the promotion ladder."

Uncomfortable talking out of school, Denis said. "So where's this shop?"

Grieves and Hawkes, bespoke tailors to the military, was located at number 3 Savile Row. The grand looking establishment, with the opulence and feel of a gentleman's club, made Niall feel very out of place. Mike Tallow took the lead and approached a smartly dressed man with a tape measure around his neck. "DS Tallow and colleagues. We're here on a police investigation."

Taking one look at the trio, the tailor said, "Well dears I didn't think you were clients."

Niall said, "This is a murder investigation. The victim used to work here."

"What's his name?"

"Grover Birkbeck. He was a tailor here."

"Before my time, I'm afraid. You need to talk to Mr Grieve's junior."

"Can you get him for us?" Mike said.

The tailor tutted, "Very well. Wait here." he gave them a look as though he had just discovered something disgusting on the bottom of his shoe.

After a couple of minutes, he came back with another man in tow. The man, whose beaked nose and a waddling walk put Denis in mind of a penguin, said, "I'm Samuel grieves. I believe you are policemen. How can I help you?"

"We're investigating the murder of one of your former employees - Grover Birkbeck," Niall explained.

"Grover Birkbeck - murdered!"

"Yes."

"What a tragedy. Such skill is exceedingly rare. A significant loss when Grover retired. But I haven't seen him for years, so I don't know how I can help you."

"We discovered a red thread at the scene of the crime. It came from the jacket of a Royal Marine officer. Do you make such garments?"

"Yes, we provide dress uniforms for all the services, but I still don't see how that helps."

Denis said, "The murderer was wearing such a jacket."

Niall, knowing his colleague's penchant for exaggeration, corrected. "We believe somebody at the scene of the crime wore a Royal Marine jacket."

Samuel Grieves gave a weak smile. "We have no control over what happens to our garments once they leave the shop."

Mike said, "Of course. Thank you for your assistance."

"Wait a minute. I haven't finished," Niall objected. "Did you know Mr Birkbeck well?"

"Of course. We worked together for many years."

"Did he collect military stuff as a hobby?"

Samuel tapped his nose. "I probably shouldn't be telling you this; he swore me to secrecy."

"If you know of anything that can help us to catch his killer you are duty bound to tell us." Denis pointed out.

"He had a secret hobby. His wife hated anything to do with the military, so he had to keep it private."

"What secret?" Niall asked, getting impatient.

"He kept a collection of our seconds." He qualified this, saying, "As bespoke tailors, we destroy any garments not up to our fastidious standards. We allowed Grover to keep them, provided he didn't sell them."

"Where did he keep them, Niall pressed."

Samuel Grieves shook his head. "He never told me."

Shit! The investigation had hit a brick wall. In desperation, Niall said, "Is there anybody else that might know where he stashed them?"

"If anybody knew about his hobby it would have to be Toby, his friend who also worked for us. He's retired now too."

"Toby who?"

"Bennett. That's his name."

"Where can we find this Toby Bennett?"

The senior tailor shook his head again. "I have no idea. Now I do have to get back to work. So if that's all, gentlemen."

DS Copperwaite and DS O'Ryan arrived in Molecat Cross, a small hamlet on the B3343. Alisha looked up directions to the Thomas farm. It was 6:30 pm and already dark. It looked like being another late night. "Where the hell is this bloody farm?" she asked, fed up.

Quinn opened his door. "Looks like the pub over there," he said, pointing in the direction of the only building lit up in the village.

"So you're sliding off for a quick half?" she said, accusingly.

"Sliding off for local knowledge. For all, we know Mr Thomas could be in there himself,"

"Forget it. They'll smell pork a mile off and clam up." Pointing at the map, she said, "There's Thomas Lane. What's the betting his great great grandfather had it named after him?"

"And if it's not the roight place?"

"We implement your plan."

There had been some cold, drizzly rain and remnants of puddles splattered her freshly cleaned Ford. The small farmhouse, isolated and in darkness was at the end of a long muddy drive. The rain had started again, enough for the wiper blades to sweep across the windscreen intermittently. As they neared the farmhouse, they saw the light escaping from a gap in the curtains in just one room. Now came the awkward bit. It was always tricky telling people they had lost a loved one, but when it was a child who had died, it was heart-wrenching. Alisha kept telling herself she was just delivering a message, but she didn't believe it. Her knock on the wooden door elicited staccato barking from some dog. A woman's voice berated the creature, which was only doing what it had been trained to do. The door opened, revealing a large, blousy woman with flour-spattered hands, which she wiped on her apron.

"What do you want?" she asked abruptly, eyeing the two strangers.

"Are you Mrs Thomas?" Alisha asked.

"Yes, but what's it to you?" The farmer's wife asked suspiciously.

"Mrs Thomas we're from the police. Oi'm DS Copperwaite, and this is DS O'Ryan. May we come in?"

"What for?"

"Oi'm afraid we have some bad news. Is there a Mr Thomas around?"

"Why? What's happened?" the woman asked, fear showing in her eyes. "Is it about Mason? Has he had an accident?"

Alisha said, "Is there a Mr Thomas at home?"

"Over in the dairy."

"We need him here as well," Alisha said.

"He has to milk the cows. Can't just leave them."

Alisha, silently cursing herself for her bad timing, couldn't keep the woman in suspense any longer. "May we come in, please?"

Mrs Thomas moved aside, and the police officers entered.

The farmer's wife had to sit down. "Now what's this all about?" she asked, warily.

DS Copperwaite showed her the photo of Mason Thomas. "Is this your son?"

"Yes. What's happened to my boy."

Alisha braced herself. "Oi'm sorry to inform you that we found Mason dead four noights ago. He had no identity on him, and we only found out who he is today." She paused, noting the look of shocked disbelief on the woman's face. She said, "Oi'm sorry for your loss."

Mrs Thomas went stiff. "My - son - dead," she muttered, uncomprehending. Then she burst into tears.

Alisha's instinct was to comfort the bereft mother, but she had to remain professional. "We need to tell your husband. Is there any way you can contact him?"

The farm woman, usually robust and vigorous, dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief. "Sorry, Oi don't usually fall to pieces like that."

"You have nothing to be sorry about," Alisha crooned.

She reached for a short-band two-way radio on the coffee table. "Fred, you need to come to the house. The police are here about Mason."

She looked at the female detective, her eyes glistening with tears. "He's on his way."

There was an uneasy silence in the air. DS O'Ryan spoke for the first time since he'd arrived, "Is there anyone we can call to give you support?" It was in the police manual.

Alisha shot him a look, thinking Quinn was a useless waste of space in the situation. Alisha said, "Did your son tell you he was going away anywhere?"

"He said he was meeting up with some of his army friends at some reunion."

"Do you happen to know where?"

Just then, a stocky man, in overalls entered the room. Shedding his gumboots, he said, "what's this about?"

Mrs Thomas said, "Mason is dead." She burst into tears again.

Fred Thomas said, "Dead! What do you mean?"

"We discovered his body four noights ago," Alisha said.

"Then you've made a mistake. We got a letter from Mason just two days ago, saying everything was okay."

"Can Oi see the letter?" she asked.

He went and got it.

Alisha read it. It followed the pattern of the previous two. She showed Mr Thomas the picture. Is this your son?"

"It looks like him but as Oi said ...," Fred responded angrily.

"We'll need one of you to identify the body."

"Damn you, woman! Oi said it couldn't be him."

Things weren't going well. Following the police, manual wasn't going to cut it. "Oi hope, for your sake, you're roight, Mr Thomas. But we need you to see the body make sure. If he's not your son, we have to foind out who he is. Will you help us, please? We can pick you up tomorrow morning."

Mrs Thomas looked at her husband. "We have to find out, Fred."

Alisha said, can we borrow the letter?"

"Why?" he asked brusquely.

"Because it will help us with our enquoeries."

He gingerly handed it over.

Chapter 8

At the next morning's briefing, Chief Inspector Doreen Gallagher sat in as an observer. Alan addressed his team. Pointing at each victim, in turn, he said, "So far we have a retired Jewish tailor, murdered on our patch, who was supposed to be in Israel. Next, we have a middle-aged Lesbian who, instead of being in Wales, is also killed in our locale. Foinally we have a male sailor in the Royal Marines, also murdered when he was supposed to be away at a military reunion. The only clue we have that binds them together, apart from the fact they were all left in the nunnery, is a red thread. We now know that Grover Birkbeck made military dress uniforms. We also know that Mason Thomas was going to attend a military reunion." He scanned his team. "O'Ryan, foind out about that reunion. We want to know if they wore red dress uniform jackets. Copperwaite, we need to foind out where Grover Birkbeck keeps his military uniform collection. Talk to Toby Bennett again. Monkhouse, I want you to speak to Enya Woodruff. Foind out if Flavia Morgan had any connection with the military. We've got to get onto this so, chop, chop troops. Alan turned to Doreen Gallagher. "Do you want to add anything, Ma'am?"

"No. Carry on DI Dymond."

"Roight, let's get to it," he said, clapping his hands together.

Alisha Copperwaite called around Mrs Birkbeck's and asked where Toby Bennet was?

The newly bereaved widow called out, "Bonnie, do you know where Toby went. There's a policewoman here to see him."

Stair descending noises preceded the appearance of a fat bottle-blonde woman wearing bright pink lipstick. She seemed flustered.

Alisha announced, "DS Copperwaite. Oi need to speak with your husband."

The large woman pushed in front of her friend. Knowing her hubby was no angel and had had a few brushes with the law in the past, she became defensive. "What do you want him for?"

"There's no need for you to be concerned. We spoke the other day. Oi just have a couple of questions for him. That's all."

"He's gone to the gardening centre."

"Roight. Where is it?"

"just down the Rd, right at the beginning," Bonnie said, pointing.

"Thank you," Alisha smiled.

Adams Back Yard Centre, much like any other Alisha had seen, sold gardening tools, soil additives and outdoor furniture, as well as the usual wide variety of plants. As a journalist for a local rag in the old days, Alisha had to cover flower shows and other rural pursuits. So she got to know a bit about gardening, although she had little spare time in which to do it. She noticed Toby by his craggy, lived-in face. He was loading some mulch onto a trolley. "Mr Bennett, I need to speak with you."

Seeing the attractive woman police officer, who reminded him of his Hollywood heartthrob from the silver screen days, he responded, "Bloody' ell, if it ain't Ava come back to see me."

Having no idea why he called her that, she said, "We spoke with Samuel Grieves. He told the detectives that Grover had a military uniform collection. You didn't tell me about that the other day."

"Well, you didn't ask me."

Not listening to him, she continued, "He told me that any uniforms with even the slightest imperfection got destroyed. But Grover was allowed to keep them for his private collection. So my question is, why would the fastidious Mr Grieves allow such an oversight."

"You'll have to ask 'im that."

"As Grover's close friend and colleague, Oi'm asking you."

"Well, I didn't know anything about it."

"That's not what Mr Grieves told us."

He snapped, "What did that little fag say to you?"

"He told my colleagues that you were acutely aware of Grover's clandestine activities. What would he have to gain by telling us that if it isn't true?"

Toby shrugged, "Like I said, you'll have to ask 'im."

"Oh come on, Toby. Don't mess us around. We can charge you with obstructing the police." She looked him in the eye. "I know he kept it secret from his war phobic wife but he's dead now, and by assisting us you're helping us catch his killer. So why don't we have a cup of tea, and you can tell me about it."

Despite sharing a pot of Earl Grey tea with the attractive policewoman, Toby Bennett still admitted nothing.

Alisha persisted. "All Oi need to know is the whereabouts of the collection,"

"Why's it important?"

She leant towards him. "I probably shouldn't be telling you this, but we found a red thread at the scene of the croime in the nunnery. It came from a red woollen Royal Marine officer's jacket. By comparing the thread with the clothes in Grover's collection, we hope to find a match."

Toby's eyebrows arched. "So you think someone was wearing the jacket when they murdered Grover?"

"We have to look at all possible scenarios. So where is the collection?"

"Wherever poor old Grover hid it. God rest his soul."

"Come on," she said, nudging him, "you can do better than that."

Toby sighed, "He'll probably curse me forever. I won't tell you. I'll show you where it is. But only you, mind. I don't want coppers all over the joint-damaging the goods."

She put down her cup. "Withholding evidence is a chargeable offence, and we make the rules where gathering evidence is concerned. However, Oi will agree to your conditions, but we have to go today. So where is this collection?"

"Where do you reckon, detective? London of course."

Niall Ferguson called into the George and Dragon pub on Fore Street. Mike Stanton, the landlord, had the Royal Marines badge enlarged over the open fireplace in the snug. Niall knew Mike from way back in their orphanage days. Both young boys found the hard, loveless environment of the home difficult. They soon became the best of friends in that hostile environment, looking out for each other. Although their closeness as mates had waned over the years, they still helped each other out when they could. As Niall entered the bar, the only two punters at that time of day, engrossed in whatever topic, hardly cast him a glance.

Mike grinned, "Look what the cat's dragged in. So what's your poison these days, Niall?"

"Thanks for the offer, Mike, but I'm here on police business, so I have to say no."

"Go on, have a half. Nobody here's going to dob you in".

"All right, but I need five minutes of your valuable time."

Mike turned around, booming, in his Sergeant Major voice, "Gwen, look after the bar for a few minutes, there's a love."

Seated with a half of bitter each, Mike said, "So what do you need help with?"

"There was an RM reunion recently. A Mason Thomas was supposed to be there but couldn't make it."

"Can't say I've heard of him. But why does it matter to you?"

"He was a corporal at RM Bickleigh."

Mike laughed, "It's a while since I was there."

"That's not my reason for being here. I need to know where ex-Marines would stage reunions around here."

"Well, I have them here from time to time."

"Any recently?"

"We had a few of the lads in about three weeks ago."

"Did any of them wear red jackets?"

Mike laughed again. "Most of them wore officers' dress tunics."

"Were they all officers."

"None of them were. NCOs at best but mostly privates."

"Then why the officer's redcoats?"

"A bit of Navy hi-jinks, that's all."

"Where'd they get the uniforms."

The landlord shrugged, "Buggered if I know, eBay maybe?"

"I need to know who was here, Who organised the event?"

"That'd be Sergeant Lloyd Hunt."

"I need to talk to him. Do you have a contact number?"

"Yeah. I'll get it. Then I'd better get back to the bar."

Beau Durand had always been self-conscious about his looks, especially his ears, which stood out like handles on an ancient Grecian Urn. Used to jibes About him being 'Prince Charles' love child and Dumbo Durand' he brushed them off while seething inside. At first, the reporter tried gaining the respect of fellow journalists by going that extra mile to secure a good story for the Exeter Clarion. But they just thought he was a brown noser, with big ears. Then he found a source, an insider with the police, and his standing in the pecking order changed in his favour. It was always a dangerous business treading on the police's toes, but he couldn't shirk his responsibility as a journalist. Looking at the man he had met by lamplight, like some cloak-and-dagger spy from a 50's thriller, he said, "I'm always curious when a cop feeds me inside info."

Niall, standing, hands deep in his coat pockets, said, "You know what curiosity did to the cat."

"Lucky Oi'm not a pussy. So what gives?"

"What do you know about the three murders in the last week?"

"Only what we've been given to report. Why, is there something your lot isn't telling us?" he said, in mock disbelief.

"They were all found together."

"What, at the same time?"

Niall nodded.

"So why were they killed?"

"We don't know the answer to that one, but there seems to be a link to the Royal Marines."

"What sort of connection?"

Niall put out his hand. "What about the wedge?"

Beau handed him over fifty quid. "Now give."

Forensics discovered a thread from a red military jacket at the scene. One of the deceased, Mason Thomas, was in the Royal Marines."

"Thanks, mate. This info should raise a few questions."

"Don't mention me or that will be the end our my tip-offs."

Beau Durand winked. "Don't worry mate. It'll be something like 'a source close to the investigation etc."

After Durand had left, Niall Ferguson pondered his dilemma. He'd had a bit too much to drink the night he met Beau Durand. Somehow he'd let slip that he thought the police brass were also secretive about aspects of cases the public had a right to know. Beau's face had lit up, like a forty-niner who'd hit the mother lode. The next day Niall realised to his horror what he'd done. His loose lips could well wreck his career. He's wanted to be a policeman as far back as he could remember. He'd joined the police, as a cadet, shortly after leaving school. His father had warned him about his surly attitude and lack of respect for authority. Now it had set him on a perilous path. If he didn't keep feeding the beast, it would consume him. Beau Durand had him dangling on a hook.

Chapter 9

As Denis drove up to the boatyard, he saw many rowboats, abandoned in differing states of repair, lying upside-down along the pebbly beach beyond the high tide mark. Winter was a busy time for the fisherfolk as they maintained and repaired their boats in readiness for the coming fishing season. But all the ships had not been abandoned, though. DC Monkhouse heard the harsh noise of a circular saw coming from inside a rusty shed. He ventured to look inside. The sound was deafening. Unable to converse verbally Denis flashed his warrant card, and the ear-piercing racket abated. He had no idea who it was under the earmuffs and protective goggles. "Hi. Oi'm looking for Enya Woodruff."

She raised her goggles away from her eyes. Watching the detective's cheerful face, she said, "Who was it that ratted me out?"

"So you're her?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"DC Monkhouse. Oi need to ask you some questions about Flavia Morgan."

She sighed heavily. "I've been all through that with another one of your lot."

"This is different."

She looked at his warm, open face and figured he looked honest enough. "Okay, what do you want to know?"

"Did Flavia have any connection with the military?"

"That's a strange question. What does it have to do with..?"

Interrupting, he said, "So she did have a connection or not."

"She was once married to a soldier."

"Oh, what happened?"

"She got fed up with being shunted from post to post. She wanted her life back."

"How long ago was this?"

Enya picked up a plane and began smoothing a piece of wood. "We met around five years ago. It would have been a year or so before that when they separated."

"You said she was married to a soldier. Do you know which regiment?"

"No. It didn't interest me."

"Did Flavia keep any photos from that time?"

"Your people have been all over the house. You'd best ask them."

"We didn't come up with anything about the case."

"Well, there you are then, DC Monkhouse. Now I have to get back to work."

Damn! He was losing her. He had to pull a rabbit out of the hat quickly. "What about the things the police didn't find. Personal mementoes she would have stored in a safe place."

"If she kept such things I know nothing about them."

He smiled, winningly, "So where would you conceal such intimate stuff?"

She smiled back, "You want to come round and look, don't you?"

"It may help us catch Flavia's killer."

She thought about it. "Okay, I'll meet you there in thirty minutes."

He turned to leave. Then, in real Lieutenant Columbo style, he turned around, saying, "One other thing. Do you know a woman called Martha Swanson?"

"We are acquainted. Martha sometimes gives me a hand fixing up this yacht."

Denis grinned, "And go sailing off into the sunset together."

"That is the aim – yes."

Almost everything about DCI Doreen Gallagher cried out style. From her designer hair to her Gucci shoes, she was the envy of most of her female colleagues. How could she do it on her salary? They would say. Was she on the take, protecting some big crimelord? The truth was that Arnold Gallagher, her husband of ten years, was a very successful Exeter dentist. As she kept her private life to herself, few of her colleagues were even aware she was married. Doreen was well mindful of the fact that the higher you climb the greasy pole of promotion, the more you become married to the job. A job in which she was one of the few female officers to make it to the rank of Detective Chief Inspector. With her promotion came the move to Ilfracombe nick. She contemplated this as DI Dymond entered her office. "Hello, Alan. How are you today?"

She didn't usually greet him like this. Something was amiss; he could feel it. "Foine, how are you?" The words were inevitable, but he soon regretted falling into her trap. She threw the paper at him, disgust in her voice. "Have you read today's paper, inspector?"

"No, not yet."

"Well, you need to. Some weasel has been blabbing to the press about our triple murder."

The front-page headline read 'What the police are not telling us'."

Doreen spat, "They make it look as though we are holding back on a dirty little secret."

"With respect ma'am, they were bound to find out sooner or later. I'm not sure why we kept it from the papers."

She stared at him, removing her Pierre Cardin spectacles. "I wanted to announce it in my own time; once your people have some idea regarding the motive for the crime. Now, 'a source close to the incident' has made us look like guilty incompetents. Your task is to find out who is responsible and let me know."

"Yes, ma'am. Now, if that's all I have to brief my team," Alan said, rising to leave.

"You'd better have an answer, DI Dymond, by 5 o'clock, because you're going to front a media press conference about this."

Excited chatter filled the incident room as DI Dymond strolled in. He marched up to the message board, brandishing a rolled-up newspaper. "Shut up you lot."

The room quietened down.

"Right, Oi've just had a meeting with DCI Gallagher because of some traitor, as she put it, has been blabbing to the press." He paused for a moment to let it sink in, then added, "So my question is was it one of you lot?"

Many "Nos" and shakes of the head followed.

"Oi didn't think so, but Oi had to ask the question."

"Who could it have been sir?" Niall asked.

"If Oi knew that and if it were one of you lot they'd be out on their arse in a flash. Now Oi've been given the task of fronting the bloody media vultures later today."

"Maybe it was the anonymous witness who reported the crime?" DS Copperwaite proffered.

"Maybe our witness was also the murderer," Denis suggested.

Alan knew that some murderers unconsciously wanted to point the police to their crime. If we hadn't been called out because of a disturbance in the disused nunnery, we moight not have found the bodies for weeks. "It's an angle we haven't yet pursued."

Denis said, "By the way, Guv, it turns out that Martha Swanson and Enya Woodruff know each other."

Alan rubbed his chin. "So the sister of one of the murder victims knows a friend of another one."

"Yes, Guv." It could just be a coincidence, but Oi don't believe in them."

"Yes, well don't worry about that for now. Oi want you to find out who the mystery witness is. Now, where are we on the Flavia Morgan case?"

Denis said, "Enya Woodruff told me Flavia used to be married to a soldier. She showed me a little hide hole in their house where Flavia kept her personal mementoes. She had letters from her husband to be, while he was serving overseas and some photos of their courting days. He wasn't a soldier, though."

Alan said, "Let me guess. He was in the Royal Marines."

"You must be psychic," Denis laughed.

"There seems to be some military angle connecting the victims."

"Yes Guv," Niall said, "I spoke to a landlord mate of mine who used to be an RM himself. He holds military reunions at his pub. He had one a few weeks back in which NCOs and privates dressed up as officers in Red dress jackets."

"Now that could be useful. Well done, O'Ryan. Follow that up today." Turning to Alisha, he said, "How did you go with Tommy Bennett?"

"Toby Bennett, SIR," she said with the emphasis on sir."

He sighed. Alisha still hadn't gotten over the business at the Navy base. "What did he have to say for himself."

"He's taking me to London to see the collection, today."

Alan's eyes raised. "Great! That's a significant breakthrough. But Oi think Oi should come with you."

She shook her head. "He'll only take me if Oi'm alone."

"She's just after a dirty day out in the smoke in some sleazy hotel," Niall Ferguson teased.

"You must be kidding. Bennet's 75 if he's a day, Copperwaite retorted."

"Some women are into older men." O'Ryan added, keeping up the banter."

"That's enough children," Alan said. "Now get out there and bring me some good news. It's high time we started getting suspects in here."

The old lock-up garage, in Whitechapel, looked much like any of the others in the row. Toby turned the key in the lock, while Alisha looked on. The journey from Devon to London had taken just over four hours, with one-stop for coffee in Bristol. Toby, excited by Alisha's presence, was full of it, regaling her with stories of his childhood, especially about how his dysfunctional parents left him in charge of his younger siblings and the sort of mischief they used to make. The door opened, and they stepped inside. Hanging racks filled with cellophane covered military uniforms, lined the interior walls. They looked pristine, lined up like dry cleaned items awaiting reunion with their owners. Alisha asked, "Are there any Royal Marine officer dress jackets here?"

"Is this what you're looking for?" he said, indicating beautiful scarlet jackets with white shirts and bow ties."

"Oi need to get them bagged and tested by our people. They'll be able to see if the thread we have as evidence came from any of these."

"I seriously doubt it. These things have been locked up in here for years. So whoever killed Grover couldn't have worn one of these jackets?"

"You Moight well be Roight, Mr Bennett. But we still have to check."

He turned to her. "But I'm the only one who knows about his place." His rheumy eyes widened, "Surely you don't think I murdered him."

"Toby, there's something I need to tell you."

"What's that?"

"We discovered two other bodies with that of your friend."

He stared at her. "What the woman and the soldier I heard about on the news?"

"Yes, they were all found dead together. So unless you killed all three, which Oi seriously doubt, you're not in the frame. But my Guvnor may need to question you formally."

"Me and 'im were like brothers. I couldn't have 'armed him no more than I could cut off me own arm."

She sighed. "Now we have to load this lot in my car."

Denis Monkhouse was brought up to believe in God. But after being caught up in an un-winnable war in Afghanistan, and seeing his best friend blown apart by a landmine, He couldn't bear to think a God would let such things happen. Denis came back from war as an atheist and worked to cut a deal with black marketeers smuggling military equipment out of Afghanistan. When he found out he dealt in stolen goods, he blew the whistle on the thieves, in return for immunity from any charges. Special Branch cut a deal, and he was allowed to join the police. None of his colleagues was aware of his history. Not wanting anyone to start delving into his chequered past, Denis happily carried out the drudge jobs without a fuss. Trying to find out who had reported the murders was one such task.

So Denis found himself outside a public phone box in Queens Road, looking for any surveillance cameras that might have picked up the caller entering or leaving the cabinet. Having found out the phone box used for the call, it was a matter of carrying out old-fashioned police work. The telephone exchange registered the call at 11:14 pm. The likelihood of anybody seeing the caller was slim at best. Denis sighed; he still had to go through the motions, door knocking and asking irrelevant questions. He didn't even have an image of the caller, but maybe someone somewhere had seen the man exit the nunnery. He needed a coffee to motivate him to carry out the difficult task ahead.

He found a small cafe in Queens Road. It was mostly empty, allowing him to sit quietly drinking coffee and partaking of a blueberry muffin while writing down some notes:

First, What was the caller doing in the nunnery? It was private property and boarded up, so whatever he was doing it was probably illegal. That would account for him making an anonymous call.

Secondly, why would he bother to make the call at all? If he was up to no good, why bring attention to himself by phoning the police. Unless of course he was the murderer and wanted to play some perverse game with the police.

Strangely it was the only scenario that made any sense. Denis decided he was looking for the killer, not some nervous Samaritan type.

Queens Road was an up-market, leafy suburb with designer homes. Of these Denis considered only four dwellings worth canvassing. They were the only ones with windows affording a view of the nunnery. Now, with a plan, Denis approached the first of the four homes. Chimes, with the sophistication of a mobile ring-tone, assaulted his ears. A man wearing a cardigan and puffing on a pipe came to the door. Looking at Denis as though he were something unpleasant stuck to the sole of a shoe, he said, "Yes. Can I help you?"

"Oi'm with the police. DC Monkhouse. Oi'm investigating a crime that was discovered foive days ago around 11 pm at the nunnery, across the road. Oi was wondering if you heard any disturbance at that time."

"I would have been well and truly asleep by then. So no, I cannot help you."

"Just one question, can you see the nunnery from your window?"

"Yes, but I cannot help you, Sorry."

The door closed.

A large barking dog was the sole occupier at one of the remaining dwellings. Another was the home of an octogenarian couple who could hardly hear or see very much at all. But Denis' fourth call proved much more promising. The modern house belonged to Alistair Bevis, a retired headmaster and his wife. Beryl Bevis, who went to answer the door with a small terrier in tow, looked at the stranger. "What do you want?"

"Oi'm DC Monkhouse. Oi'm here in connection with an incident at the old nunnery."

"Oh, so they've sent someone at last."

"What do you mean?"

"My husband has written letters to the council for months, but they have done nothing. So I contacted the police and spoke to a very friendly Sergeant."

"About what?" Denis said puzzled.

She smiled, saying, "Do come in Constable, and we will explain."

The ex-headmaster came out of his study to see who was speaking with his wife. DC Monkhouse introduced himself, and they sat down. As they drank tea out of delicate china cups, Alistair Bevis explained, "The disturbances started over a month ago. Nearly every night we heard noises coming from the nunnery."

"What sort of noises?" Denis asked, reaching for a ginger nut.

"Oh, things being moved around, scraping, dragging noises. That sort of stuff. Well, I rang the council, and they said it was church property. So I contacted the Catholic Diocese and was told the building had been empty for some ten years. The priest I spoke to suggested it might be homeless people seeking shelter for the night, but I don't think so."

"Why not?"

Beryl answered, "Tell him about the van driving in and out."

"What van," Denis asked, reaching for his notebook.

"Somebody drives in loads up stuff and drives out again,"

Denis took a deep breath, "Did you by any chance ..."

The ex-headmaster interrupted, "Yes, I recorded the number." He got up and came back with a piece of paper. On it, he had written, in an elegant hand, the number, colour and type of van with the times he had spotted the vehicle."

"He's an amateur astronomer and has a powerful telescope, Beryl explained."

Denis, thinking all his Christmas's had turned up, said, "Thank you very much. If only all people were as observant as you, it would make our job much easier."

Alistair said, "Only too pleased to help our police. Now I hope you can put an end to the disturbances."

"Oh, we will. Have no fear about that."

Chapter 10

A quick check with the National Motor Registry revealed that the van was licensed to an Edmund Sunderland who lived at 25 Wilder Road. Denis phoned DI Dymond from his car. "Guv, I'm pretty sure I know who called in about the murders."

"Really. Who?"

"His name is Edmund Sunderland."

"Has he got any form?"

"Petty theft - lead from roofs. That sort of thing."

"Do you think he's the murderer?"

"Don't know yet. But Oi've got his address. He's got to be worth a pull, but Oi'd like some backup."

"Why? Is he dangerous?"

"Don't know Guv. But Sunderland might even be the murderer."

"That's pulling a bit of a long string, Denis."

"Maybe, but Oi don't fancy playing the hero if he acts up."

"Okay, I'll get him checked for previous offences and get back to you."

Alan entered the forensics laboratory and looked around for Dr Elwood. The man always managed to look innocent. If it weren't for the devilish pointy little beard, he would seem to be too good to be true. "Dr Elwood can Oi have a discreet word."

Allard looked up from his computer. "Flashing a sweet smile, he said, "Inspector, how can I help you?"

Alan took him aside out of earshot of the other scientists. "Somebody's been squealing to the press."

"So?"

"It could be a member of your team?"

Allard looked at him square on. "It's much more likely to be someone from your task force."

"Yes, possibly, but I have to cover all bases."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Gather your staff around and ask them, while I'm here."

Dr Elwood said, "I would like everybody's attention for a moment."

All eyes turned in his direction. "It seems that somebody has given information about the nunnery murders to the press. Do any of you know anything about this?"

There was silence.

Allard turned to Alan. "Inspector, is that all?"

"Other than have you discovered anything else that can help us?"

"I will let you know if and when, Inspector."

Alan felt very uneasy. This crap about leaking info to the paper was the last thing he needed. Now the detective had to talk to Jimbo. He phoned into the Ilfracombe Nick to see if the check had been carried out on Sunderland. There was some previous for 'B and E' but nothing of a violent nature, except resisting arrest on one occasion while being interrupted stealing from a church. Alan phoned DC Monkhouse.

"Yes, Guv."

"Sunderland has had some previous convictions for robbing religious buildings. Bring him in for questioning."

"What about back up?"

"No one to spare. Besides Sunderland's never been violent."

"Loike I said, he could be the murderer."

"Just bring him in before the press conference."

Denis checked out the van in the driveway of number 25. It matched Mr Bevis' details. As Denis approached the door, he heard a TV inside. Somewhere else in the house he heard loud music. He knocked on the door, and a dog started barking. A male voice yelled, "SHUT UP, MAX!" Then, a woman wearing track pants and an oversize sweater opened the door.

"Police. Is Edmund Sunderland home?"

She turned, yelling, "Ed, There's some pig here to see you."

Charming, Denis thought.

An unshaven man wearing dirty jeans and a Black Sabbath T-shirt emerged, "What do you want?"

"Oi have reason to believe you made a phone call to us about finding three dead people in the nunnery."

He shrugged. "Wasn't me?"

"We have evidence to the contrary, Mr Sunderland. So Oi want you to accompany me to the police station for further questioning."

"Fuck you! Oi told you it wasn't me."

"If you resist Oi will have to arrest you. And with your record, it won't look good."

Edmund glared at him.

Denis spoke into his radio. "Backup required immediately, 25 Wilder Road, Ilfracombe." He smiled at the thief. "Now let's go inside and wait for my colleagues to turn up. That's unless you want to tell me what you were doing at the nunnery late that night."

As they sat in threadbare armchairs, Denis said, "At present, we're only interested in you as a witness. But that can soon change if you don't cooperate."

"The place was abandoned. Nobody cared about the stuff there."

"So you were there?"

Edmund lit up a cigarette. "Yeah, Oi was there."

"In the disused nunnery? "Yeah."

"What did you see?"

"Three fucking bodies."

"Where?"

"On the bleeding floor."

That would have given you quite a shock. So why did you phone us?"

"Doing my civic duty," Edmund sneered.

Denis grinned, "Oi think there was more to it than that."

"Oi don't give a flying fuck what you think. You can't prove nothing."

Just then there was a loud knock, followed by "POLICE! OPEN THE DOOR."

Max kicked up at the excitement.

DC Monkhouse stood. "Time to go, Edmund."

"But you said..."

"You're still telling porkies, Mr Sunderland. Oh! And put out the fag. We don't allow smoking in police cars."

"Fuck you!" Edmund mouthed, stubbing out his fag and grabbing his leather jacket.

Hamilton Cabinets, the sign said. Quinn O'Ryan entered the business premises, crossed the yard, attracted by the noise of a buzz saw. There was a pick-up truck with the company name on the doors. A man in overalls was unloading some boxes. Quinn approached him, flashing his warrant card. "DS O'Ryan. I'm looking for a Lloyd Hunt. I believe he works here."

The worker pointed to the large shed, "He's cutting timber."

There were half a dozen employees in the shed, all wearing ear protectors to drown out the screeching band saw. It was deafening. Quinn, approaching the man using the bandsaw, got his attention by showing him his police ID and beckoned him away from the noise."

As they stood outside, Quinn said, "Are you, Lloyd Hunt?"

The muscular man looked at the detective suspiciously. "Why do you want to know?"

"Because I think you might be able to help us with our enquiries."

"About what?"

"I'll ask the questions."

Becoming agitated, Lloyd said, "Let's make this quick. Oi have a lot of work to do today."

"It'll be a lot quicker if you just answer my questions. "You used to be in the Royal Marines, right?"

"Yes.

"Do you know a Corporal Mason Thomas.

"Yes. Is this about the sailor's murder?"

"Yes. we have reason to believe that the murderer wore a red military jacket when he carried out the deed."

"Really? What's that got to do with me?"

"I don't know Mr Hunt. You tell me."

"Fuck off! Oi know nothing about that."

"Calm down. Nobody's accusing you of anything. Now you sometimes organise reunions at the George and Dragon pub."

"Yes, but what's that got to with anything?"

"And you dress up as officers in red jackets."

"There's no croime in that, is there?"

"Did Corporal Thomas attend,"

"Usually, yes."

"Sergeant Hunt, we need to test those jackets."

"You've got to be fucking joking mate."

"I need a list of all those who have such a jacket and their contact details."

"Jesus, you don't seriously think any of my mates had anything to do with it."

"No, but we need those jackets for elimination purposes."

Hunt thought about it. He didn't want any truck with the cops. The best Oi can do see if the guys will bring their jackets to the pub."

"Thanks. I appreciate it." He handed the cabinet maker his card. "Phone me when you've got it organised. And make it soon. We want to catch the bastard who killed your mate."

DI Dymond felt distinctly uncomfortable standing in front of the microphones. DCI Gallagher sat beside him, officially to offer her support but in reality to see that he didn't make matters worse. He cleared his throat. "Ladies and gentlemen of the media the police are currently investigating the deaths of the three local people found murdered in the Sacred Heart Nunnery."

A seasoned journalist, pasty, rotund, asked, "Why did you hold back the fact that the three people died together."

"Because we don't know if they did die together. We discovered them at the same time in the same location, but it looks as though they were killed separately, elsewhere."

Well fielded, Doreen thought.

A female reporter, with big hair and gypsy bangles that clinked together as she raised her hand, said. "Do you have any idea who the murderer is yet?"

"We have somebody helping us with our enquiries."

"WHO IS IT?" some of the media people yelled out."

"We are not at liberty to divulge that at present. Next question." Alan was getting into his stride.

A young man from the local television station rose. "Why were the bodies placed in the nunnery?"

"We don't know that at present. Perhaps the killer thought it would take us longer to discover the bodies."

Following a few more questions, DCI Gallagher rose and took the microphone. "We will keep you informed of any further developments. Thank you all for attending.

"You did a good job. Maybe I'll leave press conferences to you in future," Doreen said, as they left the media centre.

"Oi don't think so," Alan laughed.

"DC Monkhouse and DS Copperwaite entering the room," Alisha said to the tape recorder.

Eddie Sunderland sat across the table, arms folded, gritting his teeth. "How much longer are you going to keep me in this fucking room?"

"Why? Is there somewhere important you have to be?" Denis said.

Alisha said, "It must have been quite a shock to see those bodies."

"It was."

"Unless you put them there. Then you wouldn't have been surprised," Alisha taunted.

Eddie glared at her "You're not gonna fit me up with that. Oi thought they were sleeping but why would they be sleeping on a cold stone floor?"

"Why were you there, Edmund?" DC Monkhouse asked. "With your form, you were probably up to no good. You must have quite a collection of religious stuff by now, and Oi want to see it."

"Okay, so I nicked a few trinkets from the place. It was all abandoned anyway. Nobody cared about the stuff."

Denis got close up to Sunderland. "You've been rumbled old son, so you moight as well come clean. Did you see anybody else in the nunnery on the noight you came across the victims?"

"No. Course not."

"What about any other night?" Denis pressed.

"There was this one time when Oi was disturbed."

"What do you mean, Eddie," DS Copperwaite asked.

"There was someone there, with a powerful flash loight. So Oi hid."

"Did you see who it was?"

"No. Loike Oi said, he had a bright torch, near blinded me."

"What happened then?" Denis asked.

"He went away. Oi heard a car starting, so Oi went out to look, but he was driving away."

"Did you see what sort of car it was?"

"Yeah, it was one of them Jeeps,"

"What loike a Jeep Cherokee," Denis prompted.

"No. It was loike one of the old ones with a canvas top,"

"What, an army Jeep?" Denis said,"

"Yeah, one of them."

Denis looked at Alisha. They had gone as far as they could with the suspect. She announced, "Interview ended at 8:16 pm." She turned to Edmund. "You can go now. But we may need to speak to you again."

He got up, "Can you give me a lift home. Can't get a bus this toime of noight."

"Do you think we're running a fucking taxi service. Get lost before Oi charge you with theft," Denis said.

After Eddie had scampered away, Alisha said, "Why would someone bring attention to them self by driving a noisy car to look in the nunnery."

"He might have been casing the joint."

"You watch too many fucking yank detective b-movies, my lad."

"You know what I mean, Sarg."

"All we are aware is that Sunderland told us a story. He could have made it up to get us off his back."

"He's not smart enough to work that out. Besides he didn't know anything about the military connection," Denis stated.

"Oi grant you that, Denis but it's still pulling a long bow."

"Come on Alisha. Some guy checks the place out. Then, just days later three bodies are left there. It's got to be worth following up."

She chewed her lip, "Oi guess there can't be that many people driving Army Jeeps around here."

"Moind you, it makes me wonder why Alistair Bevis didn't mention it."

Chapter 11

Megan Dymond couldn't help but blame her husband. Him and his fucking ego. He couldn't keep his opinions to himself for just one night. She had kowtowed to Lowel, Bent and Hardy for many years and partnership opportunities came around with the frequency of Halley's Comet. She'd had forebodings when Clarence Hardy had summoned her to his office that afternoon. The words he had used were "conflict of interest on the home front." Her Rival, Agatha Fielding, whose partner, a chartered accountant with a major firm in Exeter, who had advised the Hardys in financial matters, beamed as staff members congratulated her on her success. Megan couldn't handle facing Alan that night.

Alan arrived home and found the note. It read:

Have gone to stay with Judith for a few days. She added, Didn't get Partnership!

He felt frazzled after the news conference and found solace in a fine malt whisky. He stared at the note again. It wasn't like Megan to disappear without a bye or leave. After a second drink, he rang her sister's number. "Hi Judith, is Megan there?"

"Alan, she's distraught. Now isn't the right time."

"Oi'd like to speak to her."

"She's resting. Missing out on that Partnership was a huge blow to her."

"That's why Oi want to speak to her - give her my support.

"Bit late for that, don't you think. Megan will ring you if and when she feels like it."

"Fuck it!" he expounded to the empty house. He and Judith had never gotten on together. It wasn't a problem, though, as he didn't have to see her very often. Now she'd poisoned her sister against him; Alan needed someone in his corner. The only one he could think of was Alisha, and she had been cold towards him since the Navy camp visit. Women, Alan just couldn't figure them. He phoned Quinn O'Ryan. "Can you pop round to my drum and bring me up to scratch on our case?"

"Can't it wait for the briefing tomorrow, Guv?"

"There something Oi need to run by you. And Oi've got half a bottle of JW here Oi need help with."

"Oh, you silver-tongued devil, you."

"Can you pick up a curry take out for me on the way over?"

Beau Durand saw the headlights flash three times in quick succession. Pulling a warm beanie down, flattening his ears, he left his car and walked to the one signalling him. Seeing Niall in the car, he slipped into the passenger seat.

"You said it was urgent, so what have you got for me?"

"Got for you! Oi'm lucky to have a fucking job owing to you and your dodgy info.

Niall swung round to face him in the dim light of the car interior. "What the fuck are you on about, Beau? I told you the murders were connected. I said we found the bodies altogether."

"Yes, but you omitted to say the murderer didn't kill them in the Nunnery?"

"You didn't ask."

"Oi was made to feel a right prick after the press conference."

"Don't you try laying the blame on me."

"You've got to make it roight."

"What do you mean?"

"Who's the suspect you lot have been interrogating?"

"You don't seriously think ..."

"The way I see it is that Doreen Gallagher could find our little meetings absorbing."

Niall stared at the reporter. "You fucking threaten me, and you might find it unsafe to walk the Ilfracombe streets."

"So now you're threatening me. Well, I've just been recording our conversation and ..."

Niall grabbed Beau around the throat. "Give me your phone."

The reporter, choking, handed it over.

"You recording it on this?"

"Yes."

"Delete it."

Shaking, Beau did just that. Recovered, he said, "As Oi was trying to say before you tried throttling me is that Oi'd already uploaded the recording to my private cloud account. So you'd better give me the witness."

"Fuck you!" the informant snapped. "Some layabout called Edmund Sunderland."

DS Copperwaite looked at the report from the DMV. There were only five old Army Jeeps registered around the Ilfracombe area. She figured it wouldn't take long to locate them, but she felt it was a waste of time. There could be any number of unregistered Jeeps for use on farms and the like. She didn't think Alan would go for it and decided to visit Mrs Thomas instead.

It was almost dark by the time she reached the farm. Mr Thomas, just back from the evening milking, removed his Wellington boots, using the edge of the concrete steps, leading to his front door. Seeing somebody with a flashlight heading in his direction, shielding his eyes, he said, "Who are you?"

"DS Copperwaite."

"Don't you people have homes to go to."

"Sorry to disturb your evening but did your son have an officer's red dress jacket?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"It could help us in our investigation, Mr Thomas."

He paused, then said, "Woife moight know. You'd best come inside and tell us what it's about."

While Mrs Thomas looked among her son's clothes, the farmer listened while Alisha explained, "We believe the killer wore a red military jacket. We're checking your son's Navy friends, who wore them at mock reunions."

"Are you saying that the killer could have worn Mason's jacket."

She smiled, "It's more to do with eliminating those that don't match the forensic evidence."

Just then Mrs Thomas emerged a red dress jacket in her hands. "Is this what you're looking for"

"Yes, thank you very much."

"What's going to happen to it?"

"We just need to carry out tests on its woollen fibre. Oi will let you have it back afterwards if you loike."

"That would be noice," Mrs Thomas said.

Mr Thomas showed Alisha out. Standing in the light of the porch, he said, "She'll be terribly upset now. Next toime you want to see us phone first and speak to me."

Megan loved Judith who, always the wiser sister offered good advice -- sometimes too much of it. But she needed her support, and Judith willingly gave it. Judith's registrar husband, Matthew added in his two pennies worth about how to make relationships work. Megan envied Judith for that. Megan had just begun to relax when, in the middle of dinner, around 7 pm, the phone rang. Matthew took the call. It was from Alan.

"Hi, Alan. Haven't heard from you for a while."

Alan, not feeling like pleasantries, said, "Is my woife there?"

"Yes. But this probably isn't..."

"Put her on, Matthew."

The next voice he heard was Megan's. "Yes, Alan."

Not the greeting he wanted to hear, officious and business-like. "Oi'm sorry to hear about you not getting the Partnership."

"Don't you dare go there. Oi don't want your sympathy, but Oi did want your support."

"Oi have always supported you, Megan."

"Until your prejudice and ego got in the way."

"You mean that dinner party! We laughed about it afterwards."

"Until it wrecked my career. Oi may have to look for another firm now."

Alan couldn't help himself. "Maybe it's not such a bad thing to get away from those small-minded pricks."

"Damn you, Alan. This problem is about us, not them. Oi don't want you to phone me here. I'll contact you when I'm ready to discuss the next step."

"The next step!" He blurted to the dead phone. His next step was to reach for the JW, but the bottle was as empty as his life. He had to keep focused. He rang Alisha."

"Alan, what do you want?"

"Toime to bring in the prospects. Start with that worm, Sunderland."

"He's just a toime waster. Unless you want him charged with stealing religious trinkets."

"The little prick lied about that Jeep."

"We don't know that for sure."

"And bring in that Toby Bennett. It's time to rattle a few cages."

Detecting underlying anger in his voice, she ventured, "Are you okay, Guv?"

"Why?"

"It's just that you sound a bit choked about something."

He paused, took a deep breath, said, "Oi think Megan has left me."

"Shit! No! Why?"

"She lost out on the partnership and blamed me for it."

"You sound loike you need a friend."

"Yeah."

"Do you want to share a two-day-old pasta and stale red wine?"

"Are you sure?"

"Oi could change my mind very easily, Guv, so say yes quickly."

Chapter 12

The next day Alan entered the incident room, with more spring in his step. "Okay, boys and girls tell me something encouraging."

Alisha repeated some pillow talk. "Oi went round to the Thomas' and picked up their son's red jacket. Forensics has it now."

Niall piped up. "I've collected the Marine jackets they wear for their reunions. They're with the scientists as well."

DC Dymond commented, "Oi know all this is tedious, but it's the best lead we have. If we can match the coat with the foibre sample and if the killer wore that jacket while committing the crime there could be other trace evidence to help us. Meanwhile, it's toime give our prospects a tug. Get them in. Question them. If they lie to us, provide them with some cell toime. We have to get a break in this case."

Denis spoke up. "Do you want me to bring the headmaster in?"

"Why? Do you suspect he's telling porkies?"

"No Guv. it's just that we could ask Mr Bevis about Sunderland's Jeep."

"Good idea, DC Monkhouse. But do it straight away, before we bring Sunderland in." Then Alan asked, "Any other riveting news to help solve this bloody case?"

Quinn spoke up. "Lloyd Hunt has cooperated so far, without too many questions. I'm a bit suspicious of him, though."

"Why?"

"He seems a bit too obliging, Guv."

Alan said, "He was an NCO in the RM, used to following orders, not questioning them. Leave him for now. But you could bring in Enya Woodruff for questioning. See what else she knows. Oi want to be in on that one." Then he added. "Alroight, chop, chop. Get out there and bring back results."

As they drank tea out of delicate china cups, smartly dressed, pipe-smoking Alistair Bevis said, "What happens when the nunnery is no longer a crime scene, Denis. Will that ghastly person be back again."

DC Monkhouse flashed him 'trust me' smile. Tell me something. While looking through your telescope have you ever seen an army Jeep parked near the nunnery?"

Carefully considering the question, the ex-headmaster said, "Can't say I have. No, only the van."

"You're certain?"

"Denis, I neither saw it or heard it."

DC Monkhouse put his cup in its saucer. He smiled, "Well that clears that up. Oi can show myself out."

Alistair followed him. "Did the van driver mention the Jeep?"

Denis turned to him. "Now we know he was lying."

Alan looked across the table at Edmund Sunderland. The young man put him in mind of Hollywood

bad boy, Sean Penn. "We know you've been nicking stuff from the nunnery. Is that what you were doing the noight you say you saw the Jeep?"

"Oi was just looking around."

"What, late at noight? We already know you lied about the Jeep, So what else are you holding back?"

"Oi didn't lie about the fucking Jeep."

Alan leant into Edmund's face. "Bull shit! We know there wasn't any Jeep."

"Well, Oi saw it. It was one of them camouflaged jobs."

DS Copperwaite, assisting in the interview, said, "Then how come our witness stated that only your van was there."

Edmund threw his hands up. "Maybe they're fucking bloind. Oi don't know."

Alan looked at Alisha, then at Edmund. "Interview stopped at 10:15 am." He turned to the constable by the door. "Show Mr Sunderland our accommodation to give him time to reflect on his lies."

Edmund, up on his civil rights, said, "You can't do that unless you charge me."

"If that's how you want it. Edmund Sunderland Oi'm arresting you for breaking into private premises." After informing Edmund of his legal rights, Alan watched as the prisoner got led away.

"Why is he so insistent about such a minor thing?" Alisha asked as they went back to Alan's office.

"Yeah, Oi was wondering the same thing. It doesn't make any sense."

"Unless he did see a Jeep there."

"But our Mr Bevis is adamant there wasn't."

"Perhaps we'd better get him in."

"No, Alisha. Oi, think it's a red herring, distracting us from the real business in hand."

"But what if the killer did use a Jeep?"

Alan sighed, "Unlikely. Why use an uncomfortable, noisy vehicle? It makes no sense."

"There's not a lot about this case that does."

Alan Dymond had had some tricky cases to solve, but none like this one. As far as he could see, there was nothing substantial to link the three murders. Every time the detective got a lead, it quickly became a dead end. He still didn't know where the murders took place or even if all the murderer had killed the victims at the same location. He did know they had died at different times, all with bullets from the same gun. Feeling unusually sad, he rang Lowel, Bent and Hardy, asking for Megan. She wasn't in. He got another idea, not one of his best. "Put me through to Clarence Hardy."

"He is rather busy. Would you like to leave a message?"

"Yes, you can tell him Oi pay a great deal to this firm. Oi would have thought he would at least give me foive minutes of his 'valuable' toime."

Assuming the pushy man to be a significant client, she backtracked. "Please hold, Oi'm putting you through now."

He smiled, having just scored his first victory in some time, albeit against some PA trying to protect her boss from the big bad world.

"Yes, who's calling?"

"Alan, er Detective Inspector Dymond."

"Yes, well as much as I would enjoy one of our debates I'm..."

"Oi know. Very busy. Well, this won't take long. Oi know that we don't get on, but that's no reason to stop my woife getting her well-deserved partnership."

"That was a joint decision taken by all the partners."

"She was as good as told she'd got it. That was before the dinner at our place. You're going to say me ..."

"I'll tell you this. I've wasted enough of my valuable time with you, Inspector. So goodbye."

"FUCK YOU!" he yelled into the dead phone. Feeling even worse for the humiliating experience. Alan, lost in the ocean of his mind, was about to fire a 'help me' flare when his phone rang. It was Alisha. She wanted to run something by him and invited him over for dinner. He started having erotic fantasies about him and Alisha. No. Best not to go there.

Alisha's impulsiveness, mixed with a Florence Nightingale complex, with a bit of mad hatter thrown in for good measure, tended to be self-destructive in pushing away the things she most desired. It wasn't that she wanted Alan Dymond. He was a bit too, old, chauvinistic and aggravating for her taste. He also happened to be her boss; he was married, and he was vulnerable. But now she had glimpsed his vulnerability she was ready with the emotional band-aid. In her mind, he had become another cause, someone who needed fixing. This odd relationship became a weird sort of turn on for her. But it could be interesting, she thought, slipping into her sexiest dress.

Denis thought the petty thief was telling the truth. If not, why was Eddie Sunderland still sticking to his story about the Jeep? After half a day in gaol, he still insisted the Jeep had been there. Edmund was one of those non-aggressive cat burglars who couldn't help themselves. Or, more to the point, did help themselves. Breaking into empty premises gave them the only adrenalin buzz their life provided. Denis grabbed Niall as they finished up for the day. "We can't leave him in there over noight."

"Why not? It'll give the weak prick more time to change his story."

"But what if his story is roight?"

"Why would your bloke say there wasn't a Jeep there if there was?"

"Why would Sunderland insist there was if there wasn't?"

Niall, walking to the door, said, "Let the boss sort it out in the morning."

"Niall, this is the first piece of conflicting evidence. Oi think we should get Alistair Bevis in for questioning."

"What tonight?"

"It could wait till morning. But Oi want to interview Sunderland before we leave."

"Den, it's the Guv's decision, not ours."

"Oi should be running the interview."

"So you want to do it behind his back."

"Oi want to be able to report some progress when he gets in tomorrow."

Niall smirked, "And you reckon questioning that little weasel again is going to do it?"

"We'll never know if we don't try." Denis grinned, "Oi'll buy you a drink afterwards."

Edmund Sunderland (he didn't like Eddie, which made him like some lowlife American gangster) was beginning to wonder if he'd mistaken the Jeep for something else. It would be best to say he'd made a mistake to get out of the pigpen. Edmund sat in his cell philosophically contemplating his current dilemma. He put it down to being a 'test-tube' baby. A fucking science experiment, Benj, his closest mate called it. Some bright spark referred to the test tube as a 'womb with a view'. Edmund blamed his dad for his life of crime because, as it turned out, his father wasn't averse to a bit of 'B and E' as a lad, growing up in Liverpool.

Just then, his door opened, and the custody officer stood there."

Edmund looked up at him. "Can't a bloke get some rest around here?"

"Never moind that. You're coming with me."

"What is it now?"

"You'll foind out,"

Denis and Niall led the prisoner to the interrogation room, where they left him alone, wondering what was going on?

Niall and Denis entered. As Denis took a seat opposite Edmund, he asked, "Okay, so what else can you tell me about this Jeep?"

Edmund leant forward in his seat. "So you pigs believe me now."

Denis scowled, "We're giving you chance to convince us you're telling the truth."

"If you believe me why the fuck am Oi still here?"

"Oi have to convince my boss. So help yourself and give us something specific to go on."

Niall, bored and tired, said, "This is a waste of fucking time. He never saw anyone at the nunnery and can't even give a decent description of the Jeep."

"There was one thing," Edmund stated, "It had one of those spare wheel covers on it."

"And?" Niall pressed.

"It had some badge on with Latin words."

"Would you recognise it if you saw it again?" Denis asked.

"Maybe. But it was dark."

"So how did you know what it was?" Niall asked.

"I shone my flash loight on it."

"Wait here," Denis said, leaving the room. He came back with a laptop computer, displaying a Royal Marine badge. "Could this be the symbol you saw?"

"Could be. I recognise the lion on the crown."

"You sure about that?" Niall pressed.

"Yeah. That's it."

The two detectives conferred outside the interview room. "We should let him go," Denis said. "He's the only decent witness we've got."

Niall looked at his colleague. "He didn't know about the Royal Marine connection, which makes his version of events more plausible."

"Do you want to run it by the boss first?"

"No. Let's just get Sunderland released and get on with looking for that Jeep."

"So what is it you want to tell me about?" Alan asked, trying to raise his eyes from Alisha's generous cleavage.

"Would you like some more pasta?" she smiled, reaching for the bolognese sauce."

"No, Oi'm full. Wouldn't mind another drop of red, though."

Topping up his glass, Alisha, noticing his leering looks, said, "We could relax in the lounge."

"Oi hope you didn't get me here under false pretences, Sergeant" he grinned.

"Is that a chargeable offence, officer?" she said, batting her eyelashes at him."

Enjoying his uneasiness, she added, "If so, Oi have some handcuffs in the bedroom."

He felt his jaw almost hit the floor. Alisha's cheeky behaviour went beyond flirting. The subtext was a clear invitation that more than pasta and wine could be on the menu. The good angel told him it would also be a terrible mistake. The one with the pointy tail whispered, "Go for it. You know you want to. He had to change the subject."

"And there's me thinking you were going to tell me about a new idea to help with the case."

"Oi have had one or two thoughts."

"Oi'm all ears."

"Well, what if the victims didn't know each other, but each had some connection with the killer."

On the more comfortable ground, Alan, somewhat relieved, said, "Oi've thought about that, but it still doesn't get us any closer."

"Taking the theory a step further, what sort of person would have been in a situation to mix with a young soldier, an old tailor and an elderly lesbian?"

"Could be anybody."

"Yes but this person can get close to them. So it would have to be somebody they trusted - a priest or doctor, maybe?"

"Or it could be somebody who had a reason to kill them. Maybe the killer was after an unpaid debt."

Alisha slumped back in her seat. "Jesus, we're clutching at straws."

Alan said, "We need to find out more about this Flavia Morgan. Bring Enya Woodruff in tomorrow for questioning and see where that leads us."

Feeling her chance slipping away, Alisha made her move. "How about sitting somewhere more comfortable," she said in a husky Monroe voice.

Alan got up. They stood close to each other, He said, "Alisha, you're a very sexy woman and Oi'm very tempted, but we'd regret it in the morning."

"Fuck the morning, Alan. Let's grasp the moment."

He moved back, taking the hardest step of his life. "Oi'd better go. Thanks for the meal and the company."

What about me, she thought, sexually turned on and annoyed at the same time. Catching up with Alan at the front door, she said, "You only have a right to leer at my body if you've the guts to do something about it."

He stared at her, then grabbed her to him fiercely. "Fuck it! Let's go to bed."

Chapter 13

Doreen Gallagher had to look at the matter realistically. Any DI would give their eye teeth to head up a major murder investigation, but she wasn't sure DI Dymond was up to it. He would do his best and give his all. Of that, she was sure, but it was not enough. The ACC had his doubts, and when the Assistant Chief Constable suggested someone more suitable and senior take over the murder case, she had to listen. She left a message for Alan Dymond to go to her office, as soon as he arrived, before the briefing. Doreen meticulous about her clothes, checked herself in a full-length mirror The Chief Inspector had fitted inside her cupboard. She looked, as usual, a picture of sartorial perfection, from her carefully coiffured hair to her immaculate Armani shoes.

Alan, Tramp like by comparison, despite his sharp but off-the-peg suit, had hoped to sneak in before she caught up with him. But he couldn't ignore her summons.

She looked up from her report as DI Dymond entered her domain. "Alan, I want a full report on the nunnery murders, on my desk by ten this morning."

"Oi'll do my best Ma'am but ..."

There was no easy way to break the news, so she took the direct approach. "No buts, DCI Lynch may be taking over the case."

"Lynch, from Homicide?"

"That's the one."

Alan stared at her. He hated having to defend his territory, but once the Homicide Division got their claws into the case, he'd end up being a glorified messenger boy. "That won't be necessary, Ma'am, we've made a couple of breakthroughs. Oi'm going to the incident room now, Come and see what we've got."

"Have you got at least one strong suspect?"

"Not exactly, but ..."

"Then I'd be wasting my time. Have the report on my desk ASAP."

Alistair was out ostensibly walking the dog. Wrapped up against the morning chill, He waited while

Chuffy sniffed around a tree in their local park. The retired headmaster had a more important objective, meeting someone near the playground. His quarry was already there, waiting, hunched up, hands in pockets. "Well, this is a fine mess," he huffed by way of greeting.

"Father, I don't know what you're worried about."

"I'm concerned about a witness to the nunnery murders who has reported your Jeep to the police."

Daniel stood wide-eyed, looking at his father. "A witness! I didn't see anyone when I checked on the place."

"Nevertheless someone was there."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. All I do know is that the lout is the thief who has been looting the nunnery."

"We have to find out who it is."

"I don't know how. The thief is hardly likely to go back there with the police investigation taking place."

Alistair looked at his son. "Which reminds me they want to question me this morning."

"What do they want to ask you about?" Daniel said, concern showing in his voice.

Alistair shrugged. "I guess I'll find out very soon. So I'd better take Chuffy for his walk and get ready to face the inquisition." As they parted, he said, "Just keep that confounded Jeep well hidden."

"You let him go!" Alan spluttered, exasperated.

Niall responded. "He was telling the truth about the Jeep, Guv."

The Inspector hit Niall with one of his penetrating stares. "Just how the hell do you know that?"

"He gave us some more details. He told us the Jeep had a spare wheel on the back ..."

"And you morons let him go for that!"

"Let me finish, Guv. There was a painting of the Royal Marine badge on the wheel cover."

Alan's mood softened, giving way to surprise. "Are you sure?"

Niall nodded. "It's too much of a coincidence for him to have made it up."

"Right, I want you to find that Jeep."

"Already on to it, Guv. Apparently, there's a Jeep club in Exeter. I'm seeing a member there today."

"Better take Denis with you."

"Right, Guv."

Remembering about Digger Lynch taking over the case, Alan said, "I need to know about that Jeep ASAP. The Homicide Squad is trying to elbow us out and take over. So I want you to find that Jeep right away."

"We'll get right onto it, Guv."

Alisha wondered, why the killer had placed the victims in the abandoned convent. It didn't make sense. If the murderer didn't want them seen why didn't he bury them or throw them to some pigs? Ironically, if it weren't for Edmund Sunderland, they wouldn't have come across them so quickly. She shook herself from her reverie. It was time to get some background on the place.

While Niall and Denis followed the trail of the Jeep, Alisha, having got a lift with them to Exeter, stood outside the Cathedral Church of St Peter, a grand edifice, dedicated to 'Peter', the 'Rock of Jesus', since 1050 AD. Inside the Church, her senses reeled with, the cloying aroma of incense. The visual feats of stain-glass window creators; the iconic carving, combined with the ubiquitous organ music, reminded her of the 'Phantom of the Opera'. A man scurrying, lifting his cassock slightly to afford faster forward movement, rapidly approached. "Are you here to pray or on some other sort of business?"

Eyeing the young prelate, she said, "Other business. I'm here to see Cardinal Welling."

"And you are?"

"DS Copperwaite," she stated, flashing her warrant card."

"Oh, I see," he answered flustered. "I'll see if his eminence is free."

The Cardinal, tall, head covered with a red cap, proffered a sizeable bony hand. "Now, DS Copperwaite, how can I help the police?"

"Oi need some background on the abandoned nunnery in Ilfracombe."

He cocked an eyebrow. "Would this by any chance have something to do with those people found dead there?"

"Yes. Oi, think if Oi knew more about the nunnery it could help with the case. And Oi need to know more than Oi can foind on the Internet."

"It closed down before I took up the post here, so I fear there's little I can help you with."

She turned to face him. "We want to know why did the killer choose the old nunnery to lay down the bodies? There has to be something that made the nunnery special for him."

Cardinal Welling said, "Will you walk with me outside. In a conspiratorial fashion, he whispered close to her, "I'm not allowed to smoke in here."

Resisting commenting something about 'holy smoke' she followed the tall prelate outside.

As they walked among grey gravestones, trimmed damp grass, with the accompaniment of warblers and chatter by the avian visitors, the Cardinal, deeply inhaled his cigarette smoke. "I have very little to do with the daily running of things. That's left up to trainee priests and other acolytes. But we do have an extensive archive listing all the Church's holdings for at least the last five hundred years. I'm sure the records include the Sacred Heart Nunnery,"

"That could be very useful."

"If I may be so bold as to ask why do you want to know these things?"

"Oh, history can be very revealing."

"Yes, I'm sure it can." He stubbed out his cigarette, clasped his hands together. "Now I really must be getting back. Come with me and will get somebody to take you to the archives."

While Niall checked out the directory board, Denis said, "I didn't expect to meet with a car lover in the City Morgue."

"Unless he's a Morgan owner," Niall quipped.

Missing the play on words, DC Monkhouse led the way. The Coroners office was next to the morgue, on the ground floor. The pair pushed through the double swing doors, went along the corridor and paused outside the office marked County Coroner. The two officers entered, to be confronted by a stout woman, bottle blond, her matronly approach, putting Miss Marple to shame.

"Yes. Can I help you, gentlemen."

"DS O'Ryan and DC Monkhouse to see Dr Ross."

"Wait here. I'll see if the doctor's free."

Dr Ross was. He invited the police detectives into his office. "You said on the phone that you are looking for a Jeep."

"Yes. It has a spare wheel cover with the Royal Marine badge painted on it," Denis explained.

Philip Ross' brow furrowed. "I do recollect seeing a Jeep of that description at a show last year. They don't have spare wheel covers as a rule. That's why it stood out."

"Do you know who the driver was?" Denis asked.

Philip gave a slight shrug. "Afraid not. Certainly not a regular. I know most of them."

Niall said, "What about registration. Surely competitors had to fill out some form."

The Assistant Pathologist smiled, "True, but it's unlikely he was a competitor?"

"Why is that?" Denis queried.

"Because only purebreds are allowed."

"Purebreds?"

"Vehicles in their original factory condition. The wheel protector alone would have prohibited his inclusion."

Denis, frustrated, ventured, "He could have taken the spare wheel guard off."

Philip smiled, "Yes of course. But then the Jeep wouldn't have stood out, and I wouldn't have remembered it."

Niall threw his hands up. "Sounds like Catch 22."

Philip, curious, asked, "Why is this Jeep important to the police?"

Niall said, "Everything about this case is important to us."

Philip looked straight at the pair. "I'm sorry I can't help you, officers, any more. Now I have a body to attend to."

After the police had left, Philip Ross picked up his phone. Daniel answered. He said, "I've just had the police here. They're interested in your Jeep. They don't know that you own it yet. But be ready for a visit."

"Why are they interested in my old Jeep?"

"They say it was seen at the nunnery a few nights before they found the bodies."

"It wasn't me."

"Just say you heard some noises and stopped to investigate."

"But it wasn't me."

"Do you want to spoil everything we've achieved so far by having the cops find out what we're doing, before time?"

"Of course not."

"Then admit to being there, and they won't ask any awkward questions."

"I suppose it does make sense."

Alisha, wading through dusty Catholic Church records, paused to answer her phone. It was from Denis. Hi, how's it going?"

"Another fucking dead end. We're heading back. You ready?"

"No. Wading through archival stuff at the at the St Peter's Library."

"Well, we're finished here, so there's no point us hanging around."

"Oi could do with a hand here."

"You wish. See you back in the Nick."

You bastards, she thought. "This isn't a dead end. It's very revealing."

"In what way?"

"The nunnery was a workhouse for down and out women and children."

"So?"

"It was run by tyrants who treated the women like slaves."

"Hm, that does give pause for thought."

"So get your arses over here and help me find out more."

"So, what the hell are we doing here?" DS Ferguson asked, going through Diocese records.

"It's called 'police work'," Alisha retorted.

"That's amusing, Lish. What I mean is why have you got a bee up your arse about this?"

"Because it may point to why the killer dumped the bodies in the nunnery."

Denis suggested, "Oi've read reports of how women in these workhouses were used as slaves for menial tasks. Maybe the killer is a relative of some poorly treated women who worked there."

"Yeah, and maybe Mickey Mouse landed on the fucking Moon," Niall retorted.

She turned to him. "Okay, just for a minute let's suppose the murdered people were somehow connected, not to the nunnery, but to the workhouse. Supposing something happened there that profoundly affected the murderer."

"What, are we talking revenge?" Niall asked.

"It's the best motive we have so far."

"Alisha, it's the only motive we have," Denis added.

"Great!" Niall expounded. "So all we have to do is find out what went on there that pissed someone off to the extent that he would track down descendants, who have nothing in common with each other, and commit multiple murder as some warped payback."

"It's a start," Alisha argued. "Let's find out who ran the workhouse and what went on there."

"It was bad enough having to learn history at school," Denis moaned.

"Waste of time. No future to it," Niall jibed.

Alan Dymond, having been summoned to DCI Gallagher's office wasn't at all surprised seeing her and DCI Lynch having a cozy little chat. He had the report. He also had his story ready.

Doreen turned to him as he entered her office, smiled and said, "DCI Lynch and I have been comparing notes on the nunnery murders."

"What a surprise," he said, oozing sarcasm."

"Oh! And you think comments like that are going to help your cause?"

"And what cause would that be, ma'am?"

Daryl Lynch, thinning on top and fattening in the middle, said, "I know you've worked hard on this case but hard work and getting results can be two different things. DCI Gallagher and I both believe the trail has gone cold and a fresh approach is needed."

"For your information, DCI Lynch, the trail is not bloody cold. I have officers gathering new evidence as we speak."

"And what is the nature of this new evidence, Inspector?" Doreen asked.

"We're looking for a Jeep parked at the scene of the crime. And we're looking into the nunnery archives to find out why the killer used it as the venue for disposing of bodies."

"And what have you discovered?" Daryl said, knowing the DI was grasping at straws.

"Oi haven't had the latest reports yet but ..."

"So you have nothing new to say?" Doreen said.

"Not yet, but..."

Lynch interrupted, "My money is on a relative of the deceased. We need to question everyone."

"We've already questioned them," Alan argued.

Daryl looked at him. "I don't mean get them in for a cozy fireside chat."

Alan stared at Lynch, fixing his gaze. No words came forth.

Lynch, new to the Dymond death stare, felt uneasy. "I know your people have done their best, but let's face it you guys are out of your depth here."

Doreen said, "Bottom line, Alan, You and your people get behind DCI Lynch with this, or he will bring more of his people in."

Knowing the outcome to be inevitable, Alan acquiesced.

Lynch said, "We'll convene in the incident room in 30 minutes."

Chapter 14

Daryl Lynch looked at the sea of faces, most of whom he didn't know. Turning to Alan, he said, "Anyone missing, Inspector?"

"DS Copperwaite, DC Ferguson and DC Monkhouse.

Daryl nodded, "Right, you'll have to bring them up to scratch." Addressing the whole team, including his two members, he said, "For the record, I'm DCI Lynch, and I will now be heading this case." Turning to Alan, he said, "Strip the board. We're starting from scratch."

Alan gave him one of his off-putting stares. "There's foive days work there!"

"Do you expect me to get on the horse halfway through the race?"

His men laughed.

"Apart from yourself, inspector, who were the other officials at the scene?"

Alan sighed, "It's all recorded."

"That's not what I asked, inspector."

So this was going to be who can piss highest up the wall contest, Alan thought. "DS Copperwaite, Jimbo Barnes, our pathologist, Allard Elwood from forensics and some uniforms."

"Right, and you were the SOCO on duty."

"Yes."

"Okay, you arrived at the scene - then what?"

"Oi was shown through to where the victims lay on the floor."

Lynch made a mental note that the SOCO wasn't the first on the scene. "Did you check for any life signs?"

"Jimbo had already done that He pronounced them dead on August 13."

"Had he determined how they had died?"

"All three had been shot, by the same gun, as it turned out."

"I think we're jumping the gun a bit here, inspector."

Chortles emitted from his cronies.

"Right! What evidence did you find at the scene?"

Alan shrugged, "Three dead bodies, two male, one female. Someone had killed them somewhere else."

"How did you know that?"

Another shrug. "No blood at the scene." He resisted a Duh! to finish off the sentence.

"Have you got something wrong with your shoulders DI Dymond?" Lynch asked, eliciting more mirth from his team-mates.

He turned to those assembled. "Let me make this clear to you all. Anyone who hinders me by arguing some point or other is out of this investigation. No second chances. Now somebody come here and pin the pictures of the three victims to this board."

The phone rang. Matthew took the call. "It's Alan," he mouthed quietly to Megan. She took the phone from Matthew. "Alan. What do you want?"

"You to come back home, of course." Probably not the best response, he thought, but his emotions had taken charge.

Megan, about to finish the call. (You can't slam mobiles down like you can receivers.) Said, "Oi cannot believe you would phone Clarence Hardy. What the hell did you think you'd achieve by that futile action."

"Oi was only just ..."

"Only just trying to appease your conscience, perhaps. Well, Oi don't need the loikes of you to fight my battles,"

"Okay, Oi'm sorry. Oi wasn't thinking straight. Look, can we meet for a coffee and talk about this?"

"Okay, when and where?"

Surprised at her answer, he fumbled "I don't know Truro. You pick a place."

"The 108 Coffee House in Kenwyn Street, 10 am tomorrow. I'm only waiting 10 minutes; then I'm gone."

"Fuck! "Alan mouthed to the dead phone. It was a bastard of a day.

For some solace, Alan met up with DS Copperwaite for a drink after work. The Appletree was your usual sort of boozier, but it did have a small garden, where they could converse in private." Armed with suitable alcoholic painkillers, Alan asked, "So how did it go in Exeter?"

"The nunnery became a workhouse for women and girls in 1920. An organisation called the 'Moral Watch' ran it under the beady eye of Sister Abigail, for at least some of the toime. We think it loikely there is a connection between the workhouse and the reason why the bodies got dumped in the nunnery."

"We?"

"That's Denis, Niall and myself."

He sighed deeply. "We're going to need a lot more than that."

"I'm checking to see if any of the victim's surnames crop up during that period."

"What period?"

"Between 1920 and 1962. Although it's more loikely that it would have occurred before the National Health Act in 1948."

"Why before 1962?"

"That's when it stopped being a workhouse and once again got used as a convent. That was until ten years ago when it became abandoned."

He took a swig of beer and stared at her. The longer the stare, the more critical the statement that followed. At length, he said, "Regional Homicide have taken over our case?"

"Surely you're not surprised, Alan. We haven't had much success with it so far."

"Fucking DCI Lynch is now in charge."

"Oh!" Alisha said. His reputation preceded him.

"The prick thinks he's a fucking primary school teacher."

She touched his arm. "Calm down Alan. You'll have a coronary if you're not careful." She finished her beer. "Has he developed any theories yet?"

"Yes, the murderer is a family member of one of the deceased."

"Statistics are on his side."

"Not when there are three unconnected bodies."

"He could be right, though, Guv. We can't discount that."

Alan was silent for a moment. Then, collecting the empties, he said, "I'll get some more in then."

"Only one more. Oi'm bushed from studying all those ledgers." She stood up. "Guv, on second thoughts I'll give it a miss."

He followed her out to her car, a late model blue sedan with LED lights. Resting his elbow on her door, he said, "We're still okay, aren't we."

She looked up at him. "Why shouldn't we be?"

He grinned, "Yeah, why shouldn't we be?" he turned to go away, then said, "I think we should discuss what happened."

"Not tonight," she shot at him.

"No. it doesn't have to be this evening." She was already driving away.

Chapter 15

DCI Lynch sipped the almost undrinkable coffee dispensed from the machine. He turned to DS Doherty, whom he always saw to be a straight-up guy. "Dymond's team want me to fail. I need you at my back."

"Aren't you being just a little over the top, mate?"

"Maybe but I need an excuse to get rid of Dymond. Without him there they'd all toe the line."

"Leave it to me, Guv."

"We're not getting very far with this case. I want you to get Mr Thomas, Mrs Birkbeck and that Enya Woodruff, here for questioning at nine tomorrow morning."

"Right Guv."

Alistair Bevis enjoyed walking Chuffy to the park, after tea. There was still a cordon around the entrance of the old nunnery, which loomed cold and dark against the inky sky. It was peaceful, him and his dog with no else around. He'd been looking forward to retirement, away from the glare of public service. Beryl had been looking forward to it as well - a quiet life in a modest house in a quiet suburb. That was until the day Daniel told them about his assignment. Some people had begun to speak out. As the evidence grew, people connected with the nunnery started to voice their concerns. It was still only a murmur against the noise of life, but it was a beginning. When they first heard of the fantastic and terrifying story, he couldn't believe it. Such atrocities only happened in third world nations, not in Great Britain.

Alistair saw his son up ahead. He was sitting on one of the swings. Another person was with him, a woman.

"Hi dad, this is Martha Swanson, the lady I was telling you about."

Giving nothing away, Martha, darkly clad, hooded, yet still feeling a chill, said, "Mr Bevis, I have it on good authority that they have plans to demolish the buildings very soon. Daniel tells me you want to help uncover this atrocity. We need your friend to come forward now."

"If it's that imminent I'll contact him."

"You're a good man, Mr Bevis. Still, I guess you want this terrible business to be over with as much as your son."

Alistair responded, "Ms Swanson what I want is to have a quiet retirement. I wish Daniel hadn't burdened me with this. But now that he has I cannot ignore it. But we have to get our timing right."

Daniel said, "They are bringing their programme forward. Somebody must have snitched."

"That means they have a spy in our camp!" Alistair expounded.

"Somebody with authority has to hold up the proceedings, Mr Bevis. Your friend, the professor, has to act now."

It was 6:30 am. The tension was palpable in the incident room, as DCI Lynch addressed his team. He began, "I can see from the reports that you have gone off on different tangents. The way to solve these murders is for a close, efficient team to work on the same page. Today we will be interviewing Mrs Birkbeck, Enya Woodruff and Mr Thomas. They are what I call 'prospects' I am confident that among them we will find our suspect. I am assigning DS Copperwaite to assist DI Prime. DS O'Ryan will support DS Doherty, and DI Dymond will work with me."

Alan sat tight, gritting his teeth. It wasn't going to be an easy day.

DS Copperwaite spoke up. "What new line of inquiry are we to use."

Lynch stared at her. "DI Prime will direct you to that. Now let's all get to work."

Doreen Gallagher, even at that early hour, she still looked a million dollars. She caught sight of DI Dymond as he grabbed a coffee from the machine. "Hi, Alan, how is the new team shaping up?"

He looked at her sourly. "It's not. How in God's name do you expect me to work with that patronising ...?"

"Stop right there, Alan. This case is now Lynch's. So live with it or stand aside."

He stared at her. We have valuable new leads, and all he wants to do is ..."

"Alan, I'm not taking sides. If you want some 'biggest dick' contest keep it outside of my Nick. Is that clear."

"Jesus, ma'am, he wants me to be his fucking assistant!"

Doreen took Alan aside. "Now listen to me. Oi had to fight to get him to agree to keep you on the team. If you mess things up, you're on your own. Now get back there and show him the professional cop you are."

DCI Lynch saw DI Dymond chatting with Doreen Gallagher. So Alan was running to mummy, he smirked. And she would just bounce him straight back. As Alan walked away from Doreen, Lynch caught up with him. "Mr Thomas is coming in around 10. Make sure you're available to assist me."

Alan checked his watch. It read 7.02. It would take around two and a half hours to get to Truro. "Sorry Guv, Oi have to be somewhere else. Should be back by early afternoon."

Daryl stared at Alan. "The only somewhere you have to be is right here."

"Oi have a prior engagement this morning. Besides you won't need me with Mr Thomas."

Lynch glared at him. So what so critical it's worth pissing me off?"

"It's personal, and Oi haven't got time to argue," Alan said, striding away.

"If I can't rely on you, you're no use to my team," Daryl said to his back.

Alan joined all the other drivers on the A30 going west. Overtaking where and when he could, he was tempted to use his portable blue light to clear his path but resisted the urge. Alan saw the minutes ticking away, and his wife fading from view. Sure they'd had their ups and downs over the years they had been married. What married couple didn't? But this time his transgression had been such that even Brunel couldn't bridge the gap. Compared with North Devon, Truro, with its blue-grey sea, perforated by hundreds of yachts and other small sea-going craft, was a tropical paradise.

It was 10:02 by the time Alan had found a parking place and walked the 200 metres to the 108 Coffee House. Megan was already there, sitting, staring out of a window. She looked up as Alan sat down.

"You look a roight mess, she said."

"Yes, well that matches my life." Then he added, "So how are you?"

"Judith and Matthew have been very kind and supportive. Which is more than Oi can say for some people," she retorted, her voice indicating resentment.

He didn't want to mention the support Alisha had given him. "Megan, Oi miss you. Oi'll do anything Oi can to make it up to you."

"That means the laundry must be piling up."

The waiter delivered the lawyer's coffee. Alan ordered one, and some jam and cream scones.

He became pensive. "Did Oi ruin your chances of getting the partnership?"

"You certainly didn't help."

"Oi'm sorry about that. But Oi'm no good at diplomacy. Never have been. Call a spade a spade, that's me."

She looked into his tired eyes. "You're so wrapped up in your work you don't see how important moine is to me."

He stared at her. "That's not true. Oi, do respect what you do, Megan."

She drained her coffee just as his arrived. "It's not just that, Alan. We hardly communicate any more. Now the children are grown up and living their lives Oi think we should both go our separate ways."

A cold chill shot up his spine. "You want to divorce me!"

"A trial separation. Oi'm going to stay down here for a while and see how things go."

"My God, Megan, surely it hasn't come to this."

She gently squeezed his hand. "It has, Alan but you haven't seen it." She rose from her chair and walked to the door.

Alan sat there, staring at the coffee and scones that had arrived that he could no longer stomach.

Chapter 16

Frank Prime was happy to let Alisha do most of the work. He was just there to see that she stayed on task. So she led most of the questioning.

Alistair felt distinctly uncomfortable as DS Copperwaite laboured the same point.

"Mr Bevis, Oi think you did see a Jeep near the nunnery that night and Oi want to know why you keep denying it."

"Because it wasn't true."

"Our witness is adamant he saw it, and he has nothing to gain by lying. You, on the other hand, may have an excellent reason for doing so."

"Now wait a minute!"

"Mr Bevis, Oi think you are an honest man, so you are probably lying to protect someone?"

Frank, nicknamed 'sloth' in Homicide, loved to play the 'good cop'. "Okay, let's move on from that. In your statement, you say you kept tabs on what went on at the nunnery. Why was that?"

Alisha stood up. "Can Oi have a private word, Inspector?"

Outside the interview room, she said, "Why did you interrupt my line of questioning?"

"Because it wasn't getting us anywhere."

"Oi'm certain he knows about that Jeep but he's denial means he's covering up for somebody."

"Well, I'm more interested in his obsession with spying on the nunnery."

"Which is all the more reason he would have seen that Jeep."

"Then show me the Jeep."

"We've looked, but so far we can't find it."

"Then there's no evidence. Forget the fucking Jeep, DS Copperwaite and follow my lead."

Alisha, known by her friends for having a radical temperament at times, got an idea. Back in the interview room, she said, "Mr Bevis, why are you so interested in the nunnery and the goings on there?"

"I've already told you. The comings and goings and noise is disturbing to my wife and myself."

"How far away is your house from the nunnery?"

"Well, I don't know exactly."

"Well Oi do. It's over 300 metres away, which is why you need a powerful telescope to see what's going on. So it's not the disturbance, you claim, that keeps you interested. So what is it?"

"I don't know what you mean," Alistair said, folding his arms.

"Oi think it's the nunnery you're interested in, not the disturbance. Do you know anything about its history, from the time it was used as a workhouse, perhaps?"

DI Prime interjected. "Mr Bevis, did you ever see the trespasser responsible for the disturbance?"

Alisha jumped up. "Inspector, a private moment if you please."

Outside the interview room, Frank demanded, "What's it this time?"

"You stopped me again. The prospect was close to telling us the truth. Anybody would think you are trying to sabotage this investigation."

He glared at her. "How dare you talk to me like that. I'm in charge here and don't you forget it. Any more interruptions and you're off the case."

She returned the stare. "Just who the fuck do you think you are, coming here and throwing your weight around. Didn't you see the look on Bevis' face when I mentioned the workhouse? He's obsessed with that place alright but because of something in its history. Once we find out what that is, we'll get somewhere with solving this case."

"This is not some fucking history lesson. It's what's happening here and now. This warning is your last chance to get with the programme, or you're no use to me."

She turned on him. "And you are no fucking use to me. So up yours." She stormed away, leaving him to find someone else to help with the interview.

DS Doherty reminded Quinn of a Nazi commandant, ramrod straight, clipped tones, highly polished shoes. Everything about him seemed highly polished and correct. After knocking loudly, they waited for Edmund Sunderland to come to the door.

"Alright! Alright! There's no need to knock the fucking door down," Eddie complained. It was only 7 am; much too early for the petty cat burglar to be up. He opened the door, to find himself staring at the two men detectives. "Who the fuck are you? Jehovah's fuckin' witnesses."

"DS Doherty and DS O'Ryan."

"Look, if someone nicked the fucking crown jewels it wasn't me – roight?"

"Edmund Sunderland," DS Doherty said, more as a statement than a question."

"Yeah. What do you ..."

"Edmund Sunderland I'm placing you under arrest."

"What the fuck for? Oi was here all night. Ask my girl if you ..."

"You are being arrested in connection with the deaths of three people."

Eddie, pop-eyed, said. "This is fucking madness Oi didn't kill no one."

A large woman wearing flannelette pyjamas came bursting into the room. "Leave him alone you pigs. He's done nothing wrong."

Doherty said, "Come on Eddie. You don't want to add resisting arrest to your list of crimes."

Edmund said, "Don't worry love, Oi'll be back soon after Oi've made my complaint about harassment."

DI Dymond got back to Ilfracombe Nick around 1:30 pm, Feeling hollow with no energy he had no enthusiasm for anything. He needed Alisha to confide in but soon found out she had her problems. "What do you mean she walked out in the middle of an interview?" Alan asked, Niall, as they ate a canteen lunch.

"All I heard is Pride got under her skin, and she pissed off."

Just then DCI Lynch strode in the canteen. "Alan Dymond, so you've decided to grace us with your presence at last. Come with me - now!"

Alan took a sip of his coffee, got up and followed the DCI to his office.

Alone with Alan, Lynch closed his door then closed in on his DI. "I have never, in my career, seen such a shambles as your lot. It's no wonder your people aren't team players with you in charge. You deliberately disobeyed a direct order from me. Then DS Copperwaite acts in a most unprofessional manner and leaves DI Prime stranded?"

Alan felt too flat to respond. He sighed heavily. "Oi had something personal Oi had to deal with."

"Personal stuff you deal with in your own time, not police time."

"Well, sometimes it's not as clear-cut as that."

"Well, you're no good to me now. Piss off and come back tomorrow with a better attitude."

Alan hadn't the energy to argue. He just got away from Lynch as fast as he could.

Professor Sergio Columbo had studied Anthropology in Rome before taking up a post at the University of Exeter. How he had ended up, there was anybody's guess. Sergio never said much about it. He listened to what Alistair had to say, then responded. "There has to be an excellent reason for my team to become involved. You can only call me in to investigate once you unearth an important discovery. You find me something the gives me a legitimate reason to intervene, and I'm only too happy to help."

Alistair listened to his friend and colleague of long-standing. "It's going to be damned difficult to excavate while the police have the place cordoned off."

"And you'll need an excellent reason for being there."

Alistair nodded. "A legitimate reason."

"A burst water pipe for example."

It wasn't as straightforward as Alistair had considered. "So we have to find a plumber."

"First there has to be a burst pipe that leaks water into the vault."

Alan turned up at Alisha's place, a half-empty bottle of JW libation in his hand. He hadn't even phoned. He rang the bell a third time, finally getting a response."

"Whoever it is, fuck off!"

"Hi Lish, it's Alan, bearing gifts. Well, a gift."

She unlatched the still chained door. "What the hell are you doing here?" Wearing a flannelette bathrobe bearing the Hilton logo, long woollen socks and pink fluffy slippers she knew she looked a sight. She also didn't care. Alisha, eyeing the bottle, said, "Oi can only handle one gentleman caller, so leave Mr JW and piss off."

He gave her a look, "It's a threesome or nothing. Your choice."

"I supposed you better come in as well."

"What a shit of a day," he said, slumping into an armchair."

"Don't come here to offload your problems. Oi've got enough of my own." She got two glasses and poured a liberal amount of golden fluid in each. "So where did you piss off to this morning? Herr Lynch was spitting chips."

"I had to go to Truro."

She looked at him. "To see Megan."

He nodded and took a slug of whisky. "Never mind about that how did you manage to get booted off the team?"

"DI fucking Prime. Prime by name and Prime as in idiot. We were questioning Mr Bevis. Oi was about to find out why he is so obsessed with the nunnery when fucking Prime lets Alistair off the hook. After the third time, Oi told him what Oi thought."

Alan laughed. "Oi take it he didn't like what you told him."

She sipped her scotch. "Oi'm thinking of taking off some time owed me, so Oi don't have to deal with the 'Lynch Mob'."

Alan laughed again. "Good one. I'm sure we can put that to great use." Then he said, "You're probably right. Take some time off."

"He wants to kick you off the team, Alan. Don't do anything to give him the excuse he's looking for."

He grinned at her. "Don't think Oi don't know what your devious mind is cooking up."

She batted her eyelashes at him. "Oi don't know what you mean."

"That devil may care attitude could well land you in trouble, especially if Lynch gets a whiff of your moonlighting."

She poured two more measures of scotch. "Why don't you take some time off and sleuth with me."
DS Copperwaite, you're incorrigible."

David Doherty addressed the Rotary Club meeting with his usual stiff humour, a trademark that gained him some popularity and invitations to the after-dinner speaker circuit around North Devonshire. He finished up with, "When I first heard of Neil Armstrong's Moon landing I decided I wanted to be an astronaut. My father said I was mad and reckoned I was a waste of space."

There were chuckles from those who got the pun.

"But seriously folks, raising money for the orphanage is not a waste and your club has done a fantastic job in this regard. Your efforts have raised 100, 000 pounds, which I now present in the form of a rather large cheque to Amanda Singer of the All Saints Orphanage."

David left Amanda to make her speech. Disappearing into the audience, he sought out his quarry. Alistair Bevis was sitting at a table, drinking with his wife. Doherty approached them. "Good evening headmaster."

Alistair looked up, "David, great to see you. Come and join us."

Doherty sat down. "Mum said to send her regards. She'd love you both to call around."

Mrs Bevis smiled, "I've often thought about contacting her, but I seem to have lost her number."

"Let me get you a drink, David," the ex-headmaster offered.

Once they were all settled with fresh drinks, Doherty said, "So what was it that you wanted to see me about?"

"It's to do with the nunnery."

Alistair's wife said, "Can't we leave that alone tonight."

He gave her a withering look. "Perhaps you'd prefer us to leave the table to discuss this."

David saw the hurt in her eyes. So Alistair was a bit of a bully, still the headmaster, despite his retirement.

"No, I don't want to be left here alone."

The elderly man said, "David, you're involved in the investigation, right?"

"I'm a member of the murder team, yes. Why?"

"When will the place stop being a crime scene?"

David shrugged, "I don't know. When we've finished with it, I guess. Why do you want to know?"

"Oh, just curiosity. Pay it no mind."

Doherty cocked an eyebrow. "You didn't ask me to meet you just for that. So why did you phone me?"

Alistair drank some beer. He didn't know how much to let on. David's mum had taught at Alistair's school. They were colleagues and became firm friends. But her son was a policeman, and he had to be careful what he said, for his son's sake. "I heard they're going to knock down the old place."

"What old place?"

"The Nunnery. That is what we're talking about."

"What about it?"

"Well they can't do it while you lot are still investigating, can they?"

"No, but the forensics people have just about finished there." cocking an eyebrow, he said, "Why are you concerned?"

"Well, it's got a lot of history. Pity to demolish it when the community could use it as a museum or some other public building."

"If it's a historical building it would have a preservation order on it. Would it not?"

"Yes, David, we need to find out about that."

"Well, Alistair, you need a historian, not a copper."

Doreen Gallagher stood up as Daryl Lynch entered her domain. "Good morning inspector. How's the case going?"

"Settling in ma'am. We have a couple of prospects but no solid suspects so far."

"Oi hear you have asked DS Copperwaite to leave the team."

Daryl said, "It's in DI Prime's report. But she was disruptive and walked out of the interview."

Doreen brushed an imaginary speck of her dark twin set. "How are you and Alan getting along?"

"He went AWOL yesterday for some personal reason. We've had words about it. I've put him straight now."

"Oi see. Well, Inspector if you can't work with my people you have to bring in your own."

"I wish. But the manpower is just not available."

She looked at him. "Oi know that, Daryl. Oi just wanted to be sure you appreciated the fact."

He looked at her blankly.

"You'll just have to pull in your horns and work with Alan's team. He may not be a high flyer, but he's a bloody good grass roots cop, and you'd do well to work with him."

"Are you telling me how to do my job?"

"No inspector, I'm telling you how to do our job. This murderer is the enemy, not Alan and his people. Focus on that."

Holding himself in check, Daryl managed, "Is that all, ma'am?"

"Listen to any theories they have. It might just be the break we are looking for."

Glad to be out of the dragon's den, Lynch went to the canteen for a coffee. Alan was already there. He joined the DI.

"Morning Guv, I hear you've got our Eddie banged up."

"Yes, while we follow up a few things."

Alan slowly shook his head. "He didn't do it."

Daryl glared at him, then remembered Gallagher's words. "And how do you know that?"

"The guys a wimp. he wouldn't kill anyone let alone commit multiple murder."

"His dabs are all over the crime scene," DCI Lynch argued.

"Well, they would be. The creep was looting the place. But I don't see him as the murderer."

"I wouldn't put it past the little git."

"We already know the killer didn't murder them in the nunnery. I'm more interested in Sunderland as a potential witness."

"Yeah, well he can sweat it out in a cell for a couple more hours."

Alan turned to leave. Then he said, "Oh, by the way, DS Copperwaite is taking some leave."

"I don't care what she does as long as she's not here."

"She's a bloody good detective. A bit unorthodox at times but she gets results."

"So you think she should get another chance."

"It would raise team morale." Alan watched as Daryl mulled it over. He then suggested, "Look, she's got a bee in her bonnet about this having to do with the nunnery when it was a poor house for fallen women."

"So?"

"Let her get buried in the archives. She's out of your hair but still on the team. It's win, win for you."

Daryl brightened. "I never had you pegged for a crafty bastard."

Chapter 17

Daniel pored over the ground plan. His father pointed out where the water pipes were under the ground. "That one seems to be closest to the target area."

Daniel said, "Have you got a pickaxe?"

"Yes, son. Now, are you sure that's the right place?"

That's what Martha told me. She said they used to bury them out back, near the old laundry."

"She's was too young to know such things."

"Yes, but her mother used to work there - remember?"

"Well, you're only going to get one crack at this so you'd better be right."

"And we're going to have to be fast. The cops took down the crime scene tape today."

Alistair looked at his son. "Are we doing the right thing?"

Daniel sighed. "Once that place is flattened, and concrete laid nobody will ever know what went on there. They must not be allowed to get away with it. Grandmother suffered at their hands, dad. If we don't do it, who will?"

"I know, but those murders complicate things."

"They certainly do. But in a way, all this focusing on the nunnery could work in our favour."

"How so?"

"Because it will quickly become big news."

"How did you manage to swing it, Alan?" Alisha said as they stood looking out at the grey ocean."

"No problems there. Lynch wasn't such a cocky bastard this morning."

She smiled. "Oi reckon Oi'm onto something."

Pulling up his coat collar against the cold, he asked, "What?"

"It's to do with something that happened in that workhouse. Oi'm not saying any more until Oi'm sure."

"Then go and bring home the bacon. I'd love to see Lynch's face if you're the one to catch the murderer."

"What are you going to do?"

"Thought Oi'd have another chat with Mr Bevis."

"Oi'm talking about you and Megan."

"Oi have a nasty feeling the next communication will be through a lawyer."

"Shit! That bad huh."

"To tell you the truth Oi'd rather be thinking about Alistair Bevis."

They walked along the jetty, close but not touching. As the pair parted Alisha said, "If you need someone to talk to you know where you can find me."

He grinned, "Yeah, buried in the Church's archives."

Brett Rowe sounded like a line of terrace houses. But this Brett Rowe was a person who knocked down homes and other unwanted buildings, such as the nunnery in Ilfracombe. His genial manner belied the bearish look of the man. He had nothing to prove and got things done without throwing his weight around. The demolition business had changed a lot over the years. It had mostly become automated with hi-tech machinery, not like the old days when his dad ran the firm. Nowadays Brett employed brain over brawn. He climbed down from his Toyota truck and strolled to where Barnaby Rudge stood, hands in pockets, deep in thought.

"Mr Rudge?"

"Oh, yes. You'd be Mr Rowe."

"That's roight. Shall we see what we've got here?"

"Bit of a famous building now by all accounts."

"Yes. It's a wonder you're not cashing in - tourist wise."

"Ignoring the remark, Mr Rudge, administrator for the diocese of Exeter, said, "How soon can you get started?"

"All things being equal I reckon next week."

"Not this week then."

"Why such a hurry, Mr Rudge. It's still going to be here in a weeks time."

"Yes, that's what I'm worried about."

"A rush job will cost double."

"I can't make a decision on that, but I think next week will be okay. Can you start on Monday?"

"It should be okay, but I'll have to check first. Now I need you to show me around."

Alisha Copperwaite alighted from her Toyota sedan around 7 pm and walked up to the Bevis' door.

Mrs Bevis, home alone, watching a rerun of East enders, while knitting baby socks, wondered who could be calling. Sometimes Alistair forgot his key. He seemed to be ignoring a lot these days.

"Who is it?" she asked, reaching the door.

"DS Copperwaite. Can we have a word?"

She opened the door. "Alistair isn't in at present."

"It's you Oi've come to see," she lied.

"Well, you'd better come in then."

As they sat down in the lounge, Margaret muted the TV and said, "Would you like a cup of tea, Detective Sergeant?"

"No, I'm foine," Alisha smiled. "Do you know anything about the nunnery when it was a workhouse for poor women?"

"It's been empty since we moved here."

Clever avoidance, she thought. "It's just that your husband seems very interested in the place and I was wondering if he or someone in his family had a connection with the workhouse in the past."

Margaret tried keeping calm. She couldn't lie to a police officer. "I don't know for sure, but I think Alistair's mother worked there."

DS Copperwaite held her breath. Masking her excitement, she said, "Is she still alive?"

Margaret laughed, "Very much so. Coming up to ninety and still bossing the staff around."

There was a knock at the door. "Seems like Alistair might have forgotten his key again. Margaret made to get up.

Alisha said, "I need to know where she is."

"Hang on, I have to get the door,"

"Which home is it?"

Alistair, surprised by DS Copperwaite's presence, said, "What are you doing here?"

"I just need answers to a couple of questions."

He turned on her. "I've just had about enough of you people. Now get out of my house and stay away."

"Sir, this is a murder investigation."

"Yesterday I was treated like some lowlife criminal. I've made a formal complaint. Now go," he ordered, pointing to the door.

Summing up all the grace she could, Alisha left the house." She had seen another side to the polite, helpful ex-teacher. Shit, She'd almost got the address then he had to turn up.

Around midnight a Transit van showed up outside the nunnery and disgorged its occupants in true Trojan Horse fashion. Daniel led a crew of six people with lanterns and pickaxes. To any witnesses, they would have looked like a troupe of giant dwarfs, 'hey hoeing' their way to work. In a single line, they made their way to the back of the nunnery, where they approached the old laundry. Daniel took off his gloves to unfold his map. He addressed his crew. "Right lads, this is it. Let's do it."

First, they had to break up the stone floor in the laundry. Jack-hammers would have speeded up the job and made it much easier, but the noise would also have woken up the neighbourhood. Daniel and his crew set about removing the concrete floor, stone flags, stone kerbs and buskins. They had no excavator and had to remove everything by hand. Two of the men, burlier than the rest, carted the stone slabs outside, where two other workers carefully stacked them in piles.

By 3 am, six tired, sweating men looked at the earthen floor, which showed no signs of an underground chamber. One of the crew said, "There's no fucking burial ground under here!"

Another man said, "We might as well give up."

Daniel, close to losing his helpers, said, "I know it's here somewhere."

An angry man said, "Yeah, well when you've worked out where it is, give me a call."

Daniel, tired and frustrated, said, "We don't have that luxury. They're going to demolish this in the next few days. It's tonight or never." He took out his map and took another look at it. Then he said. "Just bear with me guys. During the deadly feuds of the Middle Ages, the nuns would have taken some precautions to deal with sudden surprises. There has to be some form of concealment or escape here. That would be the logical place to hide the bodies."

One of them said, "It's too late, Daniel. "We're all fucked, and it'll be light soon."

Daniel pleaded, "Look, guys, we've got another three hours before daylight. Let's go inside and find the hidden hole."

"Well, this will be our last chance," one of the men said.

The others grudgingly agreed.

It had taken another hour before they located the concealed entrance to an underground path. Carrying flashlights, they trudged along the damp passage where they found gaps in sections of the crumbling walls, where rising damp had softened the cement binding the bricks and stones. It was there they got the first glimpse of a grisly discovery. Bones! Lots of them, in secret compartments behind the walls. Daniel couldn't believe it. Everyone was speechless. Then someone broke the silence saying, "How many do you think are buried down here?"

Ignoring the unanswerable question, Daniel said, "Well done men. We have our evidence."

Despite not using jackhammer's, half a dozen blokes with pickaxes make a lot of noise - especially in the quietness of the night. So by the time Daniel, at the head of his crew, emerged into the nunnery, he had company in the shape of two uniformed police officers. It is hard to know who was surprised the most.

"Who are you?" one of the uniforms asked.

"Daniel. Look, we've discovered a mass grave down there."

"How many of you are there?" the other cop asked, as the men climbed out of the subterranean passage, one by one.

"Six." Daniel answered, adding "Didn't you hear what I just said, There's a mass grave down there."

One of the uniforms was on his radio, "Backup needed at the old nunnery. Intruders on site."

The other addressed the men. Indicating a corner of the building, he said, "Stand over there, and we'll get your names and addresses."

Within ten minutes another patrol car and a black Mariah had turned up.

Daniel spoke to a Sergeant who had just arrived. "Isn't anybody interested in the mass grave that's down there?"

"And you are?"

"Daniel Bevis. I've already given my details."

"Why are you and these other people trespassing on private property?"

"We had reason to believe there was a secret burial site here. And it turned out we were right."

"You're still breaking the law."

Daniel exasperated, exploded, "For fuck sake, there's a mass grave with children's skeletons down there. Heaps of them, so why don't you go down and look?"

The Sergeant turned to a Constable. "Take a light and go and check it out."

"At last somebody is listening," Daniel muttered.

"You're still under arrest for trespassing."

"So charge me for Christ sake."

The constable returned from his subterranean adventure, his face waxen.

"So, is there anything down there?"

The cop answered, "It's horrible. It's like the intruder said, bones everywhere."

The Sergeant radioed. "There's a mass grave in the old nunnery. Better get homicide onto it."

DCI Lynch and DI Dymond arrived within minutes of each other. They strode into the nunnery. Locating the Sergeant in charge, Lynch said, "Who discovered the bones?"

"Tall bloke, Daniel Bevis."

Alan went over to him. "Daniel Bevis?"

"Yes."

"Not by any chance related to an Alistair Bevis are you."

"My father, yes."

Lynch said "I'm going down the tunnel. Are you coming, DI Dymond?"

"Roight, yes."

"It's not pretty," Daniel said to his back.

"What the fuck is it with this place?" Lynch said as they trudged along the passageway. Soon they saw human bones, spilt out from the crumbling sections of the wall. Daniel pored over the ground plan. His father pointed out where the water pipes were under the ground. "That one seems to be closest to the target area."

Daniel said, "Have you got a pickaxe?"

"Yes, son. Now, are you sure that's the right place?"

That's what Martha told me. She said they used to bury them out back, near the old laundry."

"She's was too young to know such things."

"Yes, but her mother used to work there - remember?"

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He grinned, "Yeah, buried in the Church's archives."

Allard Elwood greeted Jimbo with a beatific smile. "Thanks for involving me, Jimbo."

"Don't thank me yet. You might change your mind in a few days time."

"It's a big job then?"

"We won't know how big until we get all the bones out."

"Have you organised a forensic anthropologist?"

"Professor Columbo. But he can't get here until late morning. He said to start bringing out the bones."

Allard smiled, "Okay, show me what to do."

Dymond shone his torch in the hole behind the wall. It seemed to be bulging with skeletons. This job is going to keep Jimbo busy for a while, he thought, as more and more bones and partial skeletons showed up in the torchlight.

"Right, let's get the boffins onto it," Lynch said.

Half an hour later, Jimbo Barnes was changing into his plastic suit.

Dr Philip Ross turned to Jimbo, "Looks loike we're in for the long haul so Oi thought maybe Oi should go back to base to oversee the work there."

"Whatever is there can wait. I need you here with me."

He looked at the pathologist. "Dark, narrow spaces make me claustrophobic."

Jimbo stared at him. "You haven't mentioned anything to me about it before."

"Oi haven't had to go down a dark, narrow tunnel with you before."

"Bloody hell, Phil, I haven't got time for this." Then he said, "Phone Allard. Get him to take over."

Alan came up to Jimbo. "Problems?"

"Phil tells me he's claustrophobic. I'll have to wait for Elwood to get here before I can get started."

"Anything Oi can do to help."

"Get me a bloody great tarp and put it on the ground so we can begin to make sense of this skeletal jigsaw puzzle."

"What was the cause of death?"

"Very bloody funny. Get me that tarp."

Lynch approached the Sergeant, indicating the intruders, he said, "Why are those lot still here?"

"We're waiting to process them, sir."

Lynch sighed, "Just get them out of my face and down to the Nick."

"But there's no one there to process them yet."

"Stick them in holding cells until there is."

"Right sir."

"Do you want me to wipe your arse while I'm about it?"

The Sergeant passed on the roasting. Seeing two of his officers standing around, he barked, "You two, don't stand there dreaming. Take the prisoners to the police station."

Chapter 18

Alan Dymond addressed the troops. Lynch had left a message to say he had to deal with another ongoing case. DI Dymond was to bring the team up to speed. There was a lot of excited chatter when he entered the incident room. He strode up to the board. "Okay, you may or may not have heard, but some intruders uncovered a mass grave in the old nunnery. There are many skeletons, and forensics are up to their eyes in bones,"

DS O'Ryan said, "Is it true they're the bones of little kids."

"Children's skeletons have been found." He inwardly shuddered, remembering the gruesome sight.

"I want a piece of the bastard responsible," O'Ryan said.

Alan continued, "This discovery may or may not have anything to do with the murders. So we stay focused on that. Today's tasks are to contact Flavia Morgan's ex-husband. Prime and O'Ryan you can follow that up. Niall and Doherty, I want you to track down the weapon used in the murders. Monkhouse, you come with me. I need another chat with the headmaster."

Barnaby Rudge got rudely awoken at 8:03 am. Preciseness, his watchword, was all part of his extremely well-ordered world. So when Cardinal Welling asked him to come over to his residence, he became panicky. "What's this about, your Eminence?"

"I can't discuss it over the phone, but it is crucial that you come here right now."

"It's not as simple as that. I have appointments this morning and ..."

"Nothing you have arranged is as important as this. Get over here now!"

The Cardinal had never made such demands on him before. So it had to be dealt with post-haste. Thirty minutes later the harried accountant arrived at the Bishopric, where Cardinal Welling presided. The Cleric's housekeeper showed Barnaby through to the oak-panelled study.

"Come on man and shut the door," the Cardinal said.

"So what's this urgent matter that you couldn't tell me over the phone, your Eminence?" Barnaby said, sitting in a comfortable armchair.

"It's about the nunnery in Ilfracombe."

"Oh! What's happened now?"

"A mass grave has been uncovered."

Barnaby had trouble keeping his eyes in their sockets. "A mass grave!"

"Yes. From what I can gather a bunch of people went there last night to dig it up."

"Who on earth were they?"

The Cardinal looked Barnaby in the eye. "Did you know anything about a mass burial there?"

The accountant shook his head. "No, your Eminence."

"I want you to find out as much as you can about this. It's not looking too good for the Church, and it's up to you to make sure we aren't sullied in any way."

"Where do you suggest I start my enquiries?"

"I don't know, but you need to do so quickly."

"Do you have any contacts who are involved in the case?"

"Of course not!"

"Who contacted you, your Eminence?"

"Professor Sergio Columbo rang me. Apparently, he's going to be the head scientist on the case."

"Give me his details. I'll need to speak with him."

The Cleric shook his head. "I will talk to him and pass on anything relevant to your task, Barnaby."

Barnaby Rudge sighed heavily. "I'm not sure how to proceed, then."

"A policewoman was nosing around in the Church archives. She was asking about the nunnery and the bodies dumped there. You might like to speak with her."

"Do you think there is some connection with the murders?"

"I have no idea, but the old nunnery does seem to be drawing a lot of unwanted attention these days."

Alistair kept to his usual daily routine and walked Chuffy to the children's playground. His son had phoned to say he had discovered the grave and the police had arrested him. Alistair kept this nunnery business from his wife. He figured. It was best under the circumstances to carry on as usual, so as not to raise her suspicions.

As Alistair and Chuffy entered the small park DI Dymond and DC Monkhouse approached. Alan said, "Mr Bevis, we have Daniel in custody."

"Yes, he rang me."

"You don't seem at all surprised."

"What do you mean?"

"Did you know what Daniel planned to do?"

Alistair turned to Alan. Detective Dymond, he was doing your job for you."

"My job! How do you figure that, Mr Bevis?"

"He led you to the crime scene, did he not?"

"What he and his friends did was illegally enter the nunnery and dig up a stone floor."

Chuffy, agitated at being held captive on the leash, barked at a dog some 20 metres away. Alistair defended, "Only because they believed the grave was under the floor."

"What do you know about it?" DC Monkhouse asked.

Before he had a chance to answer, Alan said, "That Jeep, that you claimed not to see, belonged to your son, didn't it?"

The senior man nodded. "I couldn't tell you. It would have spoiled everything."

Monkhouse said, "Impeding the police in their investigation is a serious crime."

Dymond gave him a look that said 'back off'. Then he asked, "So how did you know about the burial ground?"

The ex-headmaster went silent.

Alan pressed, "Did your mother tell you what happened at the workhouse?" Mr Bevis.

The old man paled, "She has nothing to do with this."

"Well, we do have to talk to her. So where is she?"

Bevis shook his head. "No! I just can't allow it. She's nearly 90 and frail. Please leave her alone."

"Mr Bevis, we understand that she worked there. If she knows anything that could shed light on what happened, she has to tell us."

Alistair's face showed confusion. "If you must speak with her I want to be present."

Alan nodded. "Agreed. Now let's take the dog home, and we'll bring you to your mother."

It was many years since Alisha had worked as a reporter on the Exeter Express, but there was still a couple of people she knew floating around. An old hack by the name of Tom, who used to run the crime desk, still haunted the corridors of the newspaper offices, filling them with the foul toxic smoke of his French cigarettes. Now relegated to the archives, he hung in there waiting for either pension or death, whichever came first.

Whatever brain cells still survived his excessive drinking, struggled to work out who the classically beautiful woman was, as she entered his domain. He had a feeling he ought to know her from somewhere. She was approaching him, so he ought to say something. "Can I help you?"

"Tom, don't you recognise me. Surely the years haven't changed me that much."

"No, but they've changed me."

Alisha knew he wouldn't look a pretty sight, but the grey, balding, apparition who stood in front of her took her breath away. 'Gone to seed' didn't begin to describe the red eyes, drooping jaw, the beer gut struggling to break free from the confines of his ash-covered shirt. 'It's Alisha. Oi used to work on the crime desk. But that was over 15 years ago.'

Some dim bulb flickered above his head. "Alisha. My God. Haven't seen you in yonks. How are you, my girl?"

"Oi'm DS Copperwaite these days, which is why Oi came to see you."

His mind struggled, "DS, DS. Ah! Detective-Sergeant. You a cop now!"

"Yes, Tom, and I need your help."

"So, what are you looking for?"

"Do these records go back to the 1920's?"

"They go back to Queen Vic herself."

"Oi want anything you've got on the Ilfracombe Nunnery from, say, the 20s to the 60s."

"What, where you lot found them bodies?"

She looked at the veteran journalist. "It's now much bigger than that. Tom."

"Oh!"

"A mass grave has been discovered."

"Fuck!"

"Oi couldn't have put it better myself."

"How many bodies?" he asked, becoming interested.

"Don't know. Lot's off kids skeletons."

"Double fuck!"

"So where do we start?"

He stared at her. "What do you mean 'we', Kemo Sabe. Love if you want to wade through that nightmare, knock yourself out. But I'm not touching it."

"Oh, come on Tom. It's your job, isn't it?"

"Job! They don't expect me to work down here, but they can't fire me, or they'll have the union on their backs. It's a funny old world, isn't it?"

Alan didn't think so. His world was very unfunny and seemed to be shitting on him from a great height. He turned to Alistair, who was wearing a concerned look. "What did the nurse say?"

"She took a nasty turn during the night. She's been stabilised but can't receive visitors."

After driving to the Exeter nursing home, Alan was not impressed. His loud "shit!" got the attention of two disapproving workers. "So, Alistair, if your mother can't help that only leaves you."

"I don't think I help you very much."

"Don't underestimate yourself. We can either have a cozy chat over a coffee or I can drag you back to the nick and make it formal."

"Oh. I don't think that will be necessary, inspector. There's a café I frequent just down the road.

Harry's had three tables outside for the more hardy types. Couples occupied two; Alan And Alistair took the remaining one. Having placed their orders inside (No table service at Harry's) they sat outside waiting to have their number called. Alan said, "What work did you mother do in the workhouse?"

"She was on staff to help look after the women."

"Look after them. How?"

"She made sure they followed the rules and sometimes had to administer punishment if they went against them."

"What kind of punishments?"

"She wouldn't say. It pained her to speak about it."

A cafe waiter called Alan's name; he retrieved his coffees. DI Dymond, sitting down again, asked, "Was there a rule about getting pregnant?"

I don't know, but mum said babies were born there and put up for adoption."

Alan sipped his coffee. "If they were adopted how come they ended up in a mass grave under the nunnery."

Alistair remained silent.

"But of course you knew about that didn't you? And you told your son, and he acted on your suspicions."

"Somebody is responsible for covering it up. Somebody has to pay."

Alan finished his coffee. Come on, Mr Bevis. I'll give you a ride home."

Professor Columbo looked at the collections of bones on the large tarp. To the highly trained eye bones contained a lifetime of personal information. There was a broad mix of male and female skeletons, all babies, most just a few months old. Sergio found it increasingly difficult to contain his sense of horror as more and more bones were retrieved from the underground passageway. The tarp was already filled up. Sergio looked at Jimbo. "That's enough for now. We have to get these catalogued according to age and gender."

Jimbo, a mixture of physical and emotional exhaustion, had been on the go since the early hours. "Sergio, I have to take a break."

"Okay, let's wrap it up for the day." He walked over to where a uniformed constable was on his mobile. "Make sure you guard these bones all night. I'll be back at first light."

The PC said, "Gotta go. Catch up soon." He turned to the professor. "I'm off duty soon. Nobody told me about guarding bones."

"It's crucial evidence. Organise it before you go and don't leave until you are relieved."

"With respect sir, I don't take my orders off from you." the young constable argued.

"These bones must not be left unguarded. Organise it please." Sergio, responded, his energy levels running on empty.

Safa Hussaini finally made a breakthrough with the fibre and found a match. He phoned Alan Dymond.

Alan, having a relaxing drink with Daryl at the Chain and Anchor, grabbed his ringing phone. "Yes, Safa. What have you got for me?"

"A match between the fibre and one of the jackets."

"Yes. Who's is it?"

"Lloyd Hunt's."

"Thank you, Safa. That's a great help."

"A breakthrough?" Lynch said, reaching for some cheese and onion crisps.

"A match with the fibre. A Sergeant Hunt's jacket."

"About bloody time we had a breakthrough. Who's been following that lead?"

"DS O'Ryan. Oi'll get him to bring Mr Hunt in."

Daryl swigged his beer. "Better get on home. Johnny's got Soccer practice this evening." As he grabbed his coat, he turned to Alan. "How's DS Copperwaite going with her research?"

"Oi'm going to phone her tonight."

"Get her in for the team briefing tomorrow morning."

Alan smiled, almost, "She's allowed back in the fold then."

Daryl just grunted. "See you tomorrow."

DI Dymond picked up DS O'Ryan and went round to Lloyd Hunt's home, The semi-detached bungalow was, like many other 70's style council houses, later sold privately. But what made it stand out was the vehicle parked in front of the garage. Somebody had lovingly restored the Jeep but what got Alan's attention was the Royal Marine badge painted on the spare wheel cover. "Look at that?" Alan said as they approached the illuminated family home.

"Could there be two the same, Guv?"

"That we will shortly find out," Alan said, before knocking on the door.

A child opened it, with Lloyd two steps behind.

Alan flashed his card at the man, "DI Dymond and DS O'Ryan. Are you Lloyd Hunt?"

"Yes. Why?" Lloyd said, a puzzled expression showing on the man's bemused face.

"We would like you to come with us to answer some questions."

"Questions about what?"

"You will find out once we get to the Nick."

"It's not convenient, inspector, We're just about to sit down for dinner." He turned to his son. "Go back inside."

Alan said, "Very nice sir but you'll have to have yours later."

Lloyd remained calm. "You can't do this. Oi've done nothing wrong."

"Sir, we have reason to believe you can help us with our enquiries. The sooner you come with us, the sooner you can be back in the bosom of your family."

"Oi protest! This behaviour is outrageous."

"Protest away, sir, but you're coming with us."

At the police station, Lloyd Hunt waited in interview room two, alone, angry and frustrated. It was a long, tedious and excruciating hour before the detectives entered the room. They sat down opposite their suspect.

He glared at them. "Now what is this all about."

Alan said, "DI Dymond and DS O'Ryan have entered the room. Interview with Mr Lloyd Hunt commencing 9.06 pm."

"Please get on with this farce," Hunt said, forcing a smile.

Alan said, "Anyone would think you didn't like our company." He put what looked like an empty sealed evidence bag on the table. "Have you heard of a Flavia Morgan, Mr Hunt?"

"No. Next question."

"She was one of the people found murdered in the old nunnery."

"So," Hunt shrugged.

O'Ryan pushed a photograph of a middle-aged woman with a scarred right cheek. "This is Flavia Morgan. Are you sure you haven't had anything to do with her."

"Look, Oi've already told you, Oi don't know anything about the woman."

Alan asked, "Then how come we found a thread from your officer dress jacket on the coat of the dead woman?"

Hunt stared at Dymond. "You are kidding me!"

Alan shook his head. "Afraid not. And you don't seem to be able to offer an explanation."

"Oi want my solicitor."

Alan smiled almost. "Why? We haven't charged you with anything. All we know is that somehow a thread from your jacket got onto Ms Morgan's coat and we want to know how it happened."

"Chroist, I don't know."

O'Ryan suggested, "It had to be either when you were wearing your red jacket or when you put it down where it made contact with Ms Morgan's coat."

Then Lloyd got an idea. "She moight have been a barmaid at the pub."

Alan grinned, "I can see a couple of problems there old son. Barmaids don't usually wear overcoats in the bar, and Flavia Morgan wasn't your usual waitress type."

"Then she moight have brushed against me in the pub."

"That's a possibility, Mr Hunt. That would certainly explain the transference of the thread."

Lloyd made to get up. "Roight, now if you've finished wasting my toime Oi'll get back to my family."

Alan said, "Oi haven't said we've done yet, Mr Hunt. Who's Jeep was that in your driveway?"

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"It has a very distinctive badge painted on the spare wheel cover."

"So what?"

Alan tutted, "You're not very cooperative, Mr Hunt. Now do you own the Jeep or does it belong to a friend?"

"Inspector, will you please get to the point?"

Quinn said, "That Jeep was seen parked outside the old nunnery late at night."

Alan added, "We've got forensics linking you to one of the victims, and we've got your Jeep at the scene of the croime a few nights before we discovered the bodies. So unless you've got some plausible explanation, Mr Hunt, we have enough circumstantial evidence to charge you with murder. Is that getting to the point enough?"

"It's not my Jeep."

"So why is it in your driveway?" Quinn asked, getting close to Lloyd's face.

"Oi'm looking after it for a friend."

'A Daniel Bevis by any chance?' Alan said.

"Yes, it's his Jeep." Lloyd smiled, "I know nothing about his nocturnal habits."

"How did you come to know him?" Quinn asked.

"It was at one of those car shows. He had his Jeep there. We got talking. He was asking me about the RM."

"Did he say why he had the badge painted on his Jeep?" Alan said.

"He hadn't had it done at the time."

"Why did he have it done then."

"Inspector, you'll have to ask him."

Alan smiled, "Alright, Mr Hunt, you can go. But before you do, we've been looking all over for that Jeep. It will be picked up by forensics tomorrow. So we might as well get your prints while you're here - for elimination purposes."

Chapter 19

On his way home, Alan remembered to call Alisha. It has been a long, frustrating day leaving him tired and frayed at the edges. Her voice perked him up. "How are you going with the historical stuff?"

"Oi think I've found a link but Oi'm not certain yet."

"Do you want to run it by me over a chow mein?"

"What, tonight?"

"Yes."

"Oi don't know, Alan. Oi'm settled in with cocoa and my book. Besides, the Chinese has closed."

"Oi know of a takeaway that's still open." Then he said, "Look, the reason Oi'm calling is that DCI Lynch wants you back in the fold tomorrow morning for the briefing."

Damn, she wasn't expecting that. "Oi need another day or so."

"He'll want to know tomorrow morning."

She sighed, "God, you're insufferable. "Okay come on over but all you're going to get tonight is cocoa."

"And your scintillating company."

"Oh, you silver-tongued devil."

Alan sat across from Alisha, who, rugged up in a terry-towelling robe, explained. "As Oi went through the records a name kept popping up - Margaret Morgan. She ran the workhouse between 1933 and nineteen 1947. By all accounts, she was a hard taskmaster, with her staff, as well as the women, staying there. The braver women brought charges against her, but they always dropped them."

"Do you know why?"

"It's not made clear in the articles, but intimidation is a loikely scenario."

"You mean she intimidated her accusers."

"There are references made to the 'Moral Watch'. It seems that they were Margaret's enforcers. It's likely that they did the intimidating for her."

Alan sat back, yawned and rubbed his jaw. "That sounds awful, but it still doesn't give us a motive for the murders."

"There is one thing, Alan. It's pretty tentative, but one of Margaret's closest supporters was a Catherine Bevis."

"Alistair's mother!"

"Could well be."

"We have to speak with her. Find out what she knows."

"She must be ancient now,"

"90 years of age but, according to Alistair, still has her marbles."

"Then we do need to speak to her."

"Oi'll need Alistair's permission."

Professor Columbo sat down, exhausted. Another fifty-two skeletons and parts thereof lay in their body bags waiting for transportation.

Safa emerged sweating as he exited the subterranean passageway, yet again, carrying more bones on his makeshift trolley. Seeing the professor in repose, he said. "Sorry to trouble you but I've come across adult skeletons."

Sergio, instantly alert, said, "Keep them separate. And get Chief Inspector Lynch here."

Just then he heard a large lorry pull up outside. He went to the entrance of the nunnery.

The lorry driver, a local haulage operator, had served in Iraq. He knew body bags when he saw them. He'd been shifting them all week, but nobody would tell him what was going on, least of all the professor. He and his mate started loading more bags onto the truck.

Sergio, outside the nunnery, smoking was interrupted by the driver. "How many more loads?"

"We don't know yet. But I hope to God we come to the end of it soon."

"They're body bags - right?"

"They are designed for that, yes."

"So we're not carting bodies."

"Of course not! Well, they were once corpses. Now they're just bones. We have to find which bodies they belong to."

"Rather you than me mate. Oi, think Oi'll stick to driving."

The professor left the lorry driver and nearly bumped into another visitor. "Oh! Who are you?" he asked, eyeing the, expensively suited mouse of a man wearing a trilby hat.

"Let me introduce myself. My name is Rudge. I oversee all the properties of the Catholic Diocese, this nunnery being one of them."

Sergio said. "Well, this is a crime scene, so you'll have to speak to the police about that."

"And you are?"

"Professor Columbo. Now if you don't mind I have a lot of work to do," Sergio said, walking away.

Barnaby followed him. "You don't understand. I have to assess the damage and lodge a report."

"And you don't understand. You are in the middle of a crime scene."

Barnaby just caught a glimpse of a man dressed in a plastic hazard suit and hard hat emerge from an open door, with bones in a plastic crate.

Just then DCI Lynch and DI Dymond entered the nunnery. "Professor, why am I here?" Lynch said.

Barnaby, getting nowhere with the professor, said, "Are you the police?"

Daryl looked at the wimpish office type. "And who are you?"

"Barnaby Rudge. I'm here to assess the damage to the Church."

Daryl walked up close to the administrator. "I don't give a fig. If you're not part of my team or the professor's people you can sling your hook."

"Inspector, I protest."

"Yeah, well piss off and complain somewhere else, or I have you arrested."

"You haven't heard the end of this," Rudge sulked, quickly leaving the nunnery."

having dealt with the obnoxious administrator, Lynch said, "Now, professor why did you ask for me?"

"Follow me. I have something to show you."

The police officers followed. They came to three body bags on the ground. Safa unzipped them, exposing the skeletons.

Alan stared at them. Then he twigged, "These are adults."

Lynch asked, "Were they with the others?"

Safa nodded.

Alan grabbed his phone. "Jimbo, get over to the nunnery pronto. We've found adult skeletons."

Chapter 20

Alan received a phone call at 3:22 am. He was to go to a crime scene at 24 Wilder Rd. He arrived amid a sea of flashing blue lights, parked his vehicle, walked up to a constable guarding the door and showed his warrant card. "Where's DCI Lynch."

"Haven't seen him, sir."

Alan cast one of his stares at the hapless PC. "Who's been running this show?"

The PC shrugged, "DS Doherty, I think."

So bloody Lynch doesn't want to get out of bed, Alan thought, as he looked for Doherty. He wasn't downstairs. Alan found him in one of the bedrooms, looming over the body. There, lying in a pool of blood on a beige carpet was a young male. "So who do we have here?"

Doherty turned to face DI Dymond. "His credit cards list him as a Daniel Bevis. Been shot in the head and chest."

Alan shuddered. "Where's forensics?"

"On their way." Doherty stood ramrod straight.

Alan resented Lynch's man's air of self-importance. "DS Doherty either address me as Guv or Sir. Now Oi'm taking over this crime scene, Sergeant."

"You'd better check with the Guvnor about that - Sir."

"What do you mean, Sergeant?"

"I phoned him. He told me to be the SOCO on this one."

Alan stared at the man. "That only applies unless a more senior officer arrives on the scene. So now you will assist me, Sergeant."

Doherty glared at him. The Guvnor won't be happy about this."

"That doesn't concern me, Sergeant. Now, if you're not going to be any help to me go back to bed."

After Doherty had stormed off, a harried Jimbo Barnes appeared. He heard something of the altercation. "Trouble in the ranks," Alan.

DI Dymond, ignoring the remark., indicating the body, saying, "It's Daniel Bevis. He organised the group that found the mass grave."

Thinking of all the extra work he had to cope with, Jimbo responded, "His grisly find has us all running ragged. I felt like killing him myself."

"Is that a confession?" Alan grinned.

Casting a dirty look in the SOCO's direction, Jimbo made a closer examination of the corpse. "Gunshot wounds to the forehead and chest. Either injury could have been fatal." He then looked up at Alan. "They've found 578 kids skeletons so far."

"Jesus man, that's terrible. Do we know anything about the adult skeletons yet."

"Only that two of them are female, between 20 and thirty years old,"

"Jimbo Oi'm pretty sure there's a connection between the mass grave and our murder victims."

"Have you any idea what it might be?"

Alan shook his head. He sighed deeply. "Oi guess Oi'd better break the news to his folks," Alan sighed.

"That's why I prefer dealing with the dead, Inspector."

Alan moved away, grabbed his mobile and dialled Alisha's number.

The Beatle's song 'Help' mixed with the dream of being lost in a vast library, assailed Alisha's ears, as she regained some semblance of consciousness. Realising it was her phone playing the 'fab four's' tune she lunged for it, nearly upsetting the glass of water beside her bed. "This better be fucking important," she barked into the device.

"Alan here. Oi need your assistance. Someone has murdered Daniel Bevis. Oi need you to come with me to tell his parents."

"Christ Alan! It's not even five o'clock. Can't it wait till the daylight hours?"

"Oi don't want it broadcast on the morning news before we tell them."

She understood his motives, if not his method. "What's the address?"

"Oi'll pick you up. Be there in ten minutes."

"Christ! Give me time to get dressed."

As they drove through the quiet streets of Ilfracombe and came to Queens Road, Alisha said, "There's another reason for this urgency, isn't there?"

"Oi may soon be kicked off the team."

"Why? What have you done?"

Lynch got me up to go to the crime scene. He'd put Doherty in charge. Oi went in, boots and all, and took over."

"Shit! Lynch's blue-eyed boy."

"Never mind that, Oi need to speak with Alistair's mother."

"This is hardly the time, Alan."

"It may be our only chance."

There were no lights on when Alan knocked at the door. Then a light did go on, followed by a grumpy voice. "Who's there? What do you want?"

"Police! Open the door please."

The door opened. Alistair stood there, in a dressing gown. "Inspector Dymond, what are you doing here this time of the night?" he queried, sensing lousy news coming.

"Can we speak inside?"

"It's Daniel, isn't it?" he muttered, standing aside.

"Mr Bevis, is your wife able to join us?"

"Why? What's happened?"

"Please sit down, Mr Bevis," DS Copperwaite said.

"As the elderly man half-collapsed into an armchair, his face grey, brow knitted into a frown, he uttered, "Daniel's hurt, isn't he?"

Alan, taking a deep breath, said, "Oi'm afraid Oi have some bad news for you. Daniel is dead."

The silence in the room was palpable. The first to speak was Alistair. "I knew digging up those bones would come to no good."

"Yet you supported him," DS Copperwaite said.

"Of course! He's my son?" Alistair defended, tears glistening in the corner of his eyes.

Alan said, "We will need you to identify his body."

The elderly man, looking much older, said, "How did he die?"

"He was shot." Then DI Dymond added, "Oi'm very sorry for your loss, but Oi do need to ask a couple of questions."

Alistair gave an almost imperceptible nod.

"Does 24 Wilder Road hold any significance for you?"

He shook his head, then asked, "Is that where someone killed him?"

"Yes," Alan answered. "Can you think of anyone who would want have to harm your son."

"Whoever it was they didn't want the mass burial discovered."

"Can you be more specific?"

A shake of the head was followed by, "Please leave me now. I have to break this tragic news to my wife."

"Certainly Mr Bevis, "DI Dymond said, "We'll contact you later regards your son's identification."

Then he added, "One other thing. We need to speak with your mother. Under the circumstances, you can be present."

"Why is it so important?"

"She used to work at the woman's workhouse, didn't she," Alisha said.

"Just leave now, please."

Daryl arrived at work before the briefing. He'd left instructions at the desk to let him know the moment DI Dymond arrived. He knocked back a glass of Epsom salts to appease his grogginess, as his office phone rang. DI Dymond had come into the Nick. The desk Sergeant called Alan back and handed him the receiver.

Lynch was ready. "DI Dymond, my office 'now'."

Alan didn't need two guesses to know why. Oh well, better get it over with, he thought, heading for CID.

Daryl Lynch was waiting at the door to his office. "Come on in DI Dymond, and close the door."

As Alan took a seat, Daryl launched into his tirade. "What the hell gives you the right to countermand my instructions?"

A weak defence is no defence, but it was all Alan had. "You're referring to last night's murder?"

"Of course I am. I put Doherty in charge but you just had to pull rank, didn't you?"

"Guv, it's normal for the senior officer at a crime scene to take the SOCO role. Oi was just following standard procedure."

Daryl stared at him. "Not when I made it clear that DS Doherty was to be in charge."

"With respect Guv, Oi figured if it was important enough for me to present at 24 Wilder Rd it was because of my experience as SOCO."

"I don't give a monkey what you figured, DI Dymond. Doherty is putting in for promotion to DI, and I gave him first SOCO experience. And you fucked it up for him!" Daryl, momentarily silent, shook his head. "I can't have officers on my team who don't work with me. As of this moment, I'm standing you down."

Alan glared at him. "Fuck you, Lynch. Oi didn't know what was in your mind."

"Doherty told you I had put him in charge, but your fucking ego couldn't handle that, could it?"

"Oi shall take this higher, Lynch."

"I don't care if you take it to the fucking Moon. I'm in charge of this investigation, and while I am, I will make the important decisions. Now piss off and stay out of my way."

"Fuck you, Lynch," Alan snarled, storming out of the office.

"What did you expect, Guv?" Alisha asked as they drank tea in the police canteen.

"Oi'll speak with Gallagher."

"It'll only make things worse, especially as he has legitimate reasons for his actions."

"Who's side are you on?"

"Come on Guv, you made the wrong call and have to live with it." She then said, "Look, Oi have to get to the briefing."

"You'll have to get Bevis in for the ID. Persuade him to let us speak with his mother."

"I'll try," she smiled, leaving the table.

Alan's phone whistled and vibrated. It was a message from Doreen Gallagher. Now she wanted a piece of him.

She was tidying her desk as he walked in. Before she had a chance to say anything, Alan said, "I want a few days off to sort out some personal stuff."

She rose from her seat, brushed down her Armani skirt. She picked up a sheet of paper. "This is a report from DCI Lynch."

"Oi can imagine what's in it."

Her look of disapproval floored most of her adversaries, but Alan stood his ground. "you need to apologise to DS Doherty. Then you can be back on the team."

"Oi can't do that, ma'am. Oi didn't do anything wrong."

She sighed, "Very well, you can take some time off, Alan. But you are to have nothing to do with Lynch's case. Is that understood?"

He nodded, "Perfectly."

"Right. Put in your application for leave and I'll fast-track it."

He handed her the already filled in form. "Oi need to go immediately."

"It should only take a day or two." Then she added, "You haven't been off sick for some time."

He got the message, grinned, and left.

Chapter 21

Some things concerning corpse identification were done with a little more sensitivity these days, and Alisha was thankful for that. Gone were the days when the bereaved identified the bodies of loved ones in cold morgues, assailed by the overpowering smell of disinfectant. Mr Bevis breathed deeply as the curtain over the viewing window parted, to reveal his son's face in peaceful repose.

Alisha said, gently, "Mr Bevis is this your son, Daniel?"

He stared at the form covered to the neck and above the eyes. He nodded, then stood on shaky legs. "Yes, that's Daniel."

She looked at him, sadness showing in her eyes, "Oi'm terribly sorry for your loss. He was a brave man to do what he did."

He nodded, took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his misted eyes. "You must find out who did this," he said with pent-up emotion.

"We will." Then she said, Mr Bevis, it seems that your mother worked in the nunnery when it was a home for unfortunate women."

"She had nothing to do with this," he said, abruptly.

"Oi'm not suggesting she did. But she may know something that can lead us to your son's murderer."

"There must be no mention of what has happened to Daniel. The shock would kill her."

"Oi will tell you what questions to ask. You do the talking. Oi won't say a word. Fair enough."

The older man sighed heavily. "On that basis, I will do as you ask."

Pathology labs, Alan deduced, were a mixture of boffins and coffins. The lab investigated all kinds of pathologies, not just those resulting in death. But it was the deceased that Alan usually got to see. Seeing the pathologist peering into a microscope, he said, "So Jimbo, why do you want to see me?"

"Dabs and DNA, inspector. While collecting evidence from 24 Wilder Street, we took samples of dried blood from the scene. Lo and behold they match those of Flavia Morgan and Mason Thomas."

"Now that is good news."

"Yes, I think we've found the murder room."

"And just after Lynch kicked me off the case."

Jimbo took a step back. "You and Lynch had a showdown?"

"That's one way of putting it."

"So I should be telling him about this."

"Oi'm officially on holiday, but Oi want you to keep me in the loop."

"And you unofficially doing what?"

"Following up leads on the mass burial ground."

"That's very much a cold case."

"Oi know, Jimbo, but Oi think the two are linked and Oi need to find the connection."

The pathologist, never too concerned with the machinations of others, said, "It's no skin off my nose, but you'd better ring me for any updates."

Alisha never felt comfortable in nursing homes. The elderly residents, malfunctioning in many ways, old machines no longer serviceable who were once fully functioning, rational human beings. It was lunchtime, and the nursing home dining room filled with staggering, slobbering exhausted, older people. Then Alistair took her to a frail-looking woman, in a wheelchair.

Her eyes sparkled when she saw her son. A bony hand reached out then fell in her lap. "Alistair, you've come to see me."

"Yes, mother. Let's go out into the garden. It's beautiful weather out there."

Alisha glanced at Mr Bevis. He was a man bereft but still in control emotionally. He found a sunny spot, applied the brakes on the wheelchair, took his mother's hand and asked, "Do you remember working at the old workhouse?"

"All those poor women, some little more than girls."

"What did you do there, mother?"

"Looked after them as best we could, but some couldn't be helped, like Carol."

"What happened to Carol?"

"Sweet girl but out of control. I showed her how to knit, for the baby."

"What happened to the baby?"

"Carol couldn't cope after they put Bobby up for adoption. Slit her wrists."

Alisha kept in the background. But he was going off-script."

"Did they put many babies up for adoption?"

"All the babies."

Unable to hold back, DS Copperwaite came forward and asked, "Mrs Bevis who were the Moral Watch?"

"Who's she?" The older woman said startled.

Before Alistair could answer, Alisha said, "Oi'm a police officer, and Oi need to know about the Moral Watch and what they did."

Mrs Bevis turned to her son, "Take me in now. I need a rest."

Shit! Alisha knew she'd blown it. "The Moral Watch. Oi need to know," She said following the wheelchair indoors.

Alistair turned to Alisha, his face showing disapproval. "You've upset her now so please leave."

"Ask her about the Moral watch. It's important," she said to the ex- headmaster's back.

Alisha's phone rang. It was from Alan. "How's the vacation?" she quipped.

"Never mind about that. The three victims found in the nunnery were killed in the same place as the murderer killed Daniel."

"Are you sure?" Alisha gasped.

"Jimbo is. He found samples of their blood."

"Shit! That's great news."

"Yes, now listen carefully. A Greta Robinson owns the house. We have to find her quickly before Lynch gets onto it."

"You don't want me to share this info?"

"You know him. He will either try to discredit you and claim all the kudos. Anyway, you can find this Ms Robinson at the Nat West in Ilfracombe."

"Thanks, Alan. I'll get onto it."

"The problem with banks is they don't have a secretary or receptionist you can go to for enquiries. So Alisha ignored the death dagger looks of the customers as she went straight to the front of the queue. Flashing her ID at the surprised teller, she said, "DS Copperwaite. Where can Oi find Greta Robinson?"

The surprised woman stared at her. "She's head of finances over there," she said, pointing.

The windowless door was closed. There was a small waiting area with two seats, old magazines on a little table and a rack containing Greta's business cards. She took one and dialled the phone number. After hearing about the banks' wonderful services on offer, she listened to a human voice. "Greta Robinson?"

"Who's speaking?"

"DS Copperwaite. I have to talk to you."

"Make an appointment. I'm with clients."

"Oh, I'm sure you can spend a few minutes with the police, Ms Robinson, either here or down at the police station."

"Oh, very well, but it will have to be quick," Greta said brusquely.

Alisha turned as the tall, thin woman emerged from her office.

"Now what's this all about?" The bank officer said, sitting down.

DS Copperwaite sat beside her. "Do you own the property at 24 Wilder Road?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Do you live there?"

"No, it's an investment property."

"So you rent it out?"

"Of course."

"When did you last visit the place?"

Greta glared at her. "Why do you want to know?"

"Please just answer the question."

"Around three months back, when my new tenant moved in."

"And the name of your tenant."

"What is this about?" Greta demanded.

"Your house is now a crime scene. Somebody committed murder there last night."

Greta forgot all about her waiting clients. "Murder! How? Who?"

"Do you know a Daniel Bevis?"

"No, the name doesn't ring a bell."

"Who is your tenant?"

"Harry Lynsey."

"Where can Oi find him?"

"Such a nice man. I'm sure he wouldn't..."

"Ms Robinson. Do you know where he works."

"He's a travelling salesman."

"Who does he work for?"

She shrugged, "I don't know. Now, as unsettling as all this is, I still have a job to do."

"Yes, so do Oi. Now Oi assume there would have been a contract between you and Mr Lynsey."

"It's private and confidential."

"Oi can get a warrant to search your place and your belongings."

"Not without arresting me for some crime,"

"Where murder is concerned we do not necessarily require warrants for search and seizure."

Greta, desperately trying to remain calm, said, "I shall ask my lawyer about this."

Alisha smiled, "Yes - of course. We'll soon be in touch."

Barnaby Rudge, responding to the booming "Enter" crept demurely into the Cardinal's luxurious chambers. Sidling up to the big desk, the wooden barrier between mere mortals, such as himself, and the great holy man, he said, "The police will soon be here to question you about the mass grave and its contents."

The Cardinal mopped his sweaty brow with a handkerchief, "It has nothing to do with us - correct?"

"No, your Eminence. It happened after that ghastly workhouse took over."

"Then tell them that."

"It's not that simple, Your Eminence. As the property owners, we had a responsibility as to how the building got used."

"What exactly was that responsibility."

"I have a list here, Your Eminence," Barnaby said, handing the Cardinal a few sheets of paper stapled together."

"You don't expect me to wade through this, do you?" he emphasised, waving the wad of papers at the hapless administrator. "Just tell me this. Were we obligated to search those ancient subterranean tunnels."

"There's nothing here that suggests that."

"Then, Barnaby, we're in the clear," the Cardinal smiled.

DCI Lynch waited in the antechamber, with growing impatience. It had been nearly 15 minutes since the verger had informed him the administrator would soon be with him. Still, there was no sign. Then he saw the crouching figure, reminding him of Marty Feldman's portrayal of Egor, enter

the room. He had seen the man before, but his brain couldn't make the connection.

Barnaby made the connection, though. He didn't like people being rude to him. Keeping the policeman waiting was a pathetic form of revenge, but it made Rudge feel better. "I'm Barnaby Rudge. How can I help you, Inspector."

"Chief Inspector. I was hoping to speak with Cardinal Welling."

"Alas, he is unavailable. But, as administrator of this Diocese, I am well placed to answer your questions. Please take a seat, Chief Inspector."

Daryl sat down. "Following up on a phone call about a disturbance at the old nunnery we discovered a huge burial site that contained the remains of nearly seven hundred children. How do you explain that?"

"The Church has no explanation to offer, I'm afraid. We're as much in the dark as you."

"But you own the property. Are you seriously telling me that the Church knew nothing about this?"

"The property ceased to be a nunnery in the 1920's when it became a women's home for down and outs. From that time the council leased the property from the Church."

"Yes, Mr Rudge, we already know that. What I want to know is how you didn't know your tenants were burying all those infants in your building. Didn't you undertake inspections?"

Barnaby clasped his fingers together. "You have to understand, chief inspector, that we had certain obligations towards our tenants but inspections concerning the running of the home came under the auspices of a different authority."

Daryl smiled, "Right, we'll come to that in a moment, Mr Rudge. But for now, let's stay with the Church's responsibility. "

"What do you mean?"

"Building inspections, that sort of thing. As I understand it, the workhouse had use of the nunnery for nearly fifty years. Surely it would have needed a lot of building maintenance during that time."

"Of course."

"And nobody, in all that time, checked the underground passage."

"It would appear so, chief inspector."

"I find that very hard to believe. Unless of course the tradespeople involved were forbidden to go down there."

Barnaby issued a nervous laugh. "Really chief inspector, you make it sound all very sinister."

Daryl glared at the obsequious little man. "A mysterious mass grave containing seven hundred babies is very sinister in my book. So who is this agency that set the policies and regulations for the running of the workhouse?"

"Chief Inspector, from 1913 onwards, the term workhouse was replaced by poor law institution. As for those who oversaw them, it covered many departments: health, welfare and even employment.

"Mr Rudge, I will find out what happened with or without your help. And if it turns out those babies didn't die naturally, I will be back knocking on your door."

Barnaby forced a smile. "whatever you find out in your murky world, Chief Inspector has nothing to do with us."

"The nunnery is Church property. So it's your murky little world, Mr Rudge, not mine."

Chapter 22

Alan entered the Exeter morgue, where three skeletons lay assembled on trolleys. Professor Columbo stood over one of them. Safa Hussaini, assisting the forensic anthropologist saw Alan arrive at the crime scene. He nudged the professor. "DI Dymond is here."

The professor turned to face the officer. "Ah, we have an update for you. Jimbo said to let you know that one of the adult skeletons turned out to be male."

"Oi don't suppose you've found out who they are yet?"

Sergio smiled, "You're not asking much. They didn't have DNA matches back in the 1930's."

"So he's that old. Do you know how he died?"

What we know so far is he was Caucasian, working-class lifestyle and he died as a result of trauma to the skull."

"So he was murdered?"

"It's the most likely scenario."

"Oi see. So what about the other two?"

"Ah! Now, this is where it becomes interesting. The females were both young women, late 20's, lower class. Difficult to tell how they died, though. No broken bones, no evidence of being struck or shot."

"What about poison?" Alan queried, becoming excited by the findings.

"No residue in the bones to suggest that."

"Disease?"

"No visible evidence to show that either. My best guess is the young women either died of natural causes or starved to death."

"Could they have taken their loives, Professor?"

"It's possible."

"Probably best to concentrate on the male then."

Sergio nodded. "I'd say so, yes."

The next morning there was uneasiness at the briefing when Daryl Lynch announced that DI Dymond had taken time off to deal with some personal issues. A further surprise was that DS Doherty would be taking over as Lynch's number two. Then he said, "Okay DS Copperwaite, where are we with this Harry Lynsey?"

"Greta Robinson claims to know nothing about his personal life, except that he's away a lot, working as a travelling salesman."

Daryl addressed those in the room. Pointing to Greta Robinson's name on the board, he said, "We know that Greta Robinson owns number 24 Wilder Road, where Daniel Bevis got murdered. We also know that Harry Lynsey rents the place. Furthermore, we are aware that at least two of the nunnery murder victims also met their end there. So we need to find this Lynsey." Lynch, addressing DS Copperwaite, said, "Bring in Greta Robinson for a formal interview. I'll bet she knows more than she's letting on."

DS O'Ryan spoke up. "Do you want me to follow up on the mass grave case?"

Daryl said, "No. It's distracting us from the main case, causing us to lose focus. I'm handing that over to the Cold Case Squad. We are only concentrating on the nunnery murders." To the room, he said, "Have you all got that?"

There was a chorus of, "Yes Guv."

Alan, pottering around in his garden, tended his organic turnips. A closet gardener, his fast-growing vegetables thrived in the cold temperature. He'd found that hot weather made the leaves tough to digest and the roots woody and bitter. But his mind was still on the case, and he fervently wished he hadn't stuffed things up and given Lynch the excuse for which he had been waiting. After mentally kicking himself for a few minutes he went back in the house and tinkered around with his model railway - his second hobby. Starting with a modest Hornby 00 gauge set, as a child, Alan had added to it over the years until one entire room got taken up with 200 metres of track, little buildings, grass, hills, rock faces, railway stations, trees, etc. His biggest regret was that he never had much time to share his passion with his sons. Come to that he hadn't had much chance to use it at all since becoming an Inspector. His lamentations were cut short by a phone call. "Hi Alisha," he said, recognising the voice. "What's up?"

"Edmund Sunderland lives opposite to the house where the murders took place."

He smacked his forehead. "Shit! How did Oi miss that?"

"Maybe he's not as innocent after all."

"Jesus! Do you think he killed them?"

"It looks that way, Alan. Oi'll have to let Lynch know."

"He's probably already worked it out. Oi mean it was staring us in the face." Then he said. "Oi've got something for you."

"Promises, promises," she laughed.

"One of the three adult skeletons was male, and it looks loike he was bludgeoned to death."

Serious again, she responded, "That's interesting, but Lynch has handed the burial case over to the cold case people."

"Can you find out who's running it?"

"Oi'll try. But why. Oi mean you're off the case."

"Only the nunnery murders. Doreen said nothing about the mass burial."

"You cunning sod. And of course, you're banking on there being a connection between the two."

"Jesus, with all the circumstantial, even blind Freddie without his guoide dog can see that."

"Lynch doesn't see a connection."

"There's none so blind as them that don't want to see."

"Oi'll contact you later,"

"Sure, Lish. You can come and play railways with me if you loike."

"Oi've never heard it called that. But Oi wouldn't mind playing with Thomas the tank engine."

Alan laughed and went back to his trains. Then he got an idea. One he would have to act on quickly.

He turned up at 25 Wilder Rd to find The Jeep gone but the van parked in the driveway. The day was windy, with intermediate showers, the kind of day any sensible person would stay home if they had no pressing engagements. Alan hoped Eddie Sunderland was one such person. Loud heavy rock music vibrated the house. Alan thumped the door hard to be heard over the noise. The dog listened to his knock and alerted the household. A woman, smoking, wearing a thick sweater and a scowl, said, "What the fuck do you want now."

"To speak with Eddie and your good self."

"What about?" she demanded, holding her ground.

"Can I come in?"

She turned towards the source of considerable noise pumped out of the vibrating speakers at a high rate of decibels. "THERE'S A PIG HERE. WANTS TO TALK TO US ABOUT SOMETHING."

"WHAT'S IT ABOUT NOW?"

"I CAN'T HEAR YOU. TURN THE FUCKING MUSIC DOWN."

With the loud noise quietened to a dull roar, Alan said, "I need to ask you some questions."

Eddie, bored, considered some cop baiting might be entertaining. "All right come in."

Alan entered a room that looked like Hurricane Katrina had paid a visit. He shoved some old magazines aside to sit down. "You've probably noticed the police presence over the road."

"Yeah. Some bloke got offed - right."

"It was your friend, Daniel Bevis."

Eddie's automatic defensive response was, "He wasn't a friend. I just knew him, that's all."

"Well you were fixing his Jeep, which I see is no longer here."

"Yeah, well I fixed it, didn't I."

"Where is it now?"

"Fucked if I know. Some bloke came to collect it and paid me. That's the last I know."

Alan nodded, got up, walked to the window, then turned, saying, "You have a clear view of number 24 from your front window. Before the murder, did you see anyone coming or leaving the place."

"I didn't see nothing, and I don't know anything."

"What about you Ms ?" he asked the girlfriend.

"I've got more important things to do than look out of the fucking window."

Alan sighed, "This is not looking good for you, Edmund."

"What do you mean?" he said, the smug look wiped off his face."

"Too many coincidences and my boss don't believe in them. And he'll soon be here to tell you, himself."

"What the fuck are you on about?" Eddie said, confused.

"You live opposite a place where a murderer has been killing people. You were at the nunnery when the killer deposited the bodies there. It doesn't take an Einstein to see that you are our most loikely suspect. So either you tell me what you saw, or I'll leave you to the tender mercies of DCI Lynch."

Edmund decided it was time to dismount his high horse. "Okay, Oi saw Daniel enter the house."

"Was that after he picked up his Jeep?"

"How did you know it was him?"

"An educated guess. was anyone else in the house?"

"Must have been. Lynsey's car was there."

"Who?"

Eddie shrugged, "I don't know. The bloke renting the place."

"Harry Lynsey?"

"Is that his name?"

"How did you know it was his car?"

"The sign on the side."

"What sign?"

"Oi think it was a running shoe with wings."

Alan stared at Eddie, making him feel uncomfortable. "Apart from Mr Lynsey and the victims have you seen anyone else enter or leave the property?"

"No. Oi've told you all Oi fucking know. So leave me alone."

"If all you've told me pans out and you don't come up on my radar again, good luck. But if it turns out that you've been telling porkies, You'll be banged up before you can say Jack Flash."

Greta Robertson waited in the interview room, her patience wearing and her agitation growing by the minute. She had to cancel appointments with clients, an action she abhorred. Investment banking was a very competitive business. Clients were very fickle, and if their busy routines were upset, they had plenty of other institutions to go to with their savings. The police seemed impervious to that, with the Hitler tactics they used in dragging her away from her workplace. She silently prayed to Jesus to make this inconvenience end soon.

Shortly after, DCI Lynch and DS Copperwaite entered the room and commenced the interview. "Ms Robertson," Lynch began, "thank you for coming here today to help us with our enquiries."

"I didn't have much choice," she muttered.

"Yes, I know it can be inconvenient, but at least one murder has been committed in a property owned by you. So you can understand why we need your help."

She sighed, "Can we get on with it please."

"Very well. We need to contact your tenant, Harry Lynsey. So can you give us his details?"

"As I told your officer here I am not prepared to divulge personal contractual information."

Having been warned by Alisha that Greta Robertson was no pushover and seemed to grasp some aspects of her legal rights, Lynch smiled, "I don't think you understand the seriousness of your situation, Ms Robertson. At least one murder has been committed in a property you own. Unless you can prove, you knew nothing about this I can charge as an accessory after the fact."

She stared at Lynch, "You have to be joking. I know nothing about it. I haven't been there since my tenant moved in."

"Ms Robertson, I would have thought that to clear yourself from any wrongdoing you would cooperate with us. Now, I want to see a copy of the contract."

She glared at him. "Before I say another word I want my lawyer here."

DS Copperwaite said, "But we haven't charged you with anything."

She looked at Daryl. "Then charge me or let me go."

Knowing he was on shaky ground, he said, "All right. Phone your lawyer. But it's going to take a lot longer."

Chapter 23

Mercury Footwear, an enormous warehouse store located in the Stone Lane Retail Park on Marsh Barton, wholesaled men's, women's and children's shoes along with slippers, Wellington boots and a few handbags. DI Dymond made his way past sturdy multi-level racks containing Mercury brand foot ware, other name brands and budget stock, before coming to the office. Entering, introducing himself and showing his ID, he asked to speak to the manager.

The receptionist looked up from inspecting her long, well-manicured, nails, spoke into a phone, saying, "Mr Fisher, there's a policeman here who wants to see you."

Shortly afterwards, a fit-looking man, putting Alan in mind of Tom Selleck, showed his firm handshake. "How can I help you, officer?"

"DI Dymond. Do you have a Harry Lynsey working for you?"

"We have a lot of people working here. Come into my office, and I'll check."

Following the manager, Alan said, "He's one of your travelling salesmen."

"Oh, in that case, I'll ask Mr Tremelow to join us. He's the sales manager." before pressing the extension, he asked, "Why are you interested in him?"

"Oi'm not at liberty to divulge that, sir. We just need him to help us with our enquiries."

"I appreciate that. It's just that if one of our employees is in trouble with the law, we have to be very careful."

"Oi just need to speak with him."

"Yes, of course, Inspector," the manager said, pressing the button.

Tremelow, one of those Cheshire cat types, bright, active and positively effusive, yet masking self-disbelief, proffered his hand.

Alan shook it.

Fisher said, "The inspector wants to know if we have a salesman called ..."

Alan helped him out. "Harry Lynsey."

Tremelow beamed, "Harry. Yes, one of our top sales personnel."

"That's great. Now Oi just want his contact details."

Percival Prince, wiping his spectacles with a crisp, ironed, handkerchief, looked at the officers, saying, "My client is not happy with the duress she was put under and will be making a complaint. Much against her judgement, she will give you a copy of the rental contract between her and her tenant."

Daryl smiled, "It is a matter of urgency."

"My client will e-Mail the relevant details to you as soon as she can get back to work."

"That will be satisfactory," DCI Lynch said. Turning to the bank officer, he said, "You are now free to leave, but we may need to speak with you again."

"Do you fancy this Lynsey for the murders, Guv?" Alisha asked as they drank coffee in the canteen.

He took a sip. "Don't know till we give him a grilling. But he certainly has the means and the opportunity."

"But what's his motive?"

Daryl shrugged. Lynch, changing the subject, said, "have you been in contact with Alan Dymond?"

Taken aback Alisha wondered what he knew if anything. "What do you mean?"

"It's a simple enough question. Either you've had contact with Alan, or you haven't."

"Yes. Why?"

"Did you talk about this case?"

Flustered, uncomfortable and annoyed at his probing, she responded. "What we talked about was personal -not business."

He smiled again. "That's all right then. Changing the subject again, he said, "I've been checking up on you DS Copperwaite. You're a good detective - Inspector material. Why don't you go for it? I'll put a good word in for you."

DI Copperwaite sounded good to her, but for Lynch to sponsor her, she wondered what it was going to cost. "Thank you, sir. Oi've been thinking about it, Guv. Oi'll give it a go."

He winked, "No more chatting with Alan out of school – right."

Because of the fragile line between the murders and the burials, Alan felt justified in following his lead. That and the fact he wanted to put one over DCI Lynch and the Lynch Mob. But the Inspector knew by treading on thin ice and could well find himself drowning in deep water. Still, he phoned the number. A man's voice said, "Hi, this is Harry from Mercury Quality Footwear. Please leave a message."

"DI Dymond. We need to talk." Well, he needed to talk, Harry didn't even know the Inspector existed. But he soon would.

Then his phone rang. He grabbed it. "Hello,"

"Alisha. Can you talk?"

"Sure. What's up?"

"Lynch is checking up on you. He suspects you're still working on the case."

"Suspects?"

"Well he's got no solid proof but be careful."

"Always am where that bastard is concerned." Then he said, "Oi've got a lead on our Mr Lynsey, Can we hook up later."

"As long as you buy me a drink."

Alan was about halfway between Exeter and Ilfracombe when he got the call. "Harry Lynsey here. You left a message."

"Yes. DI Dymond here. "I need to speak with you as soon as possible."

"What is it about, Inspector?"

"Will you be home tonight?"

"Not sure. Look what is it about."

"Your home is now a crime scene. Until we have concluded our investigation, no unauthorised person is allowed to enter."

"What do you mean, a crime scene?" Harry asked, concerned.

"An unknown person committed murder there three nights ago."

"My God! Are you saying I can't go home?"

"Yes. We apologise for the inconvenience, but we can't help that."

"How long is this going to take?"

"I'll have a better idea when I've spoken with you. So where will you be staying tonight?"

"Chulmleigh, the Red Lion."

"I'll see you there around 8 pm. I'll explain everything then."

"I'll be in the restaurant."

As Alan wandered around the quaint little village of Chulmleigh, wondering what to do with the three hours he had to wait till his appointment with Harry Lynsey, he phoned Alisha.

She picked up. "Alan, what's happening?"

"Meet me at the Red Lion in Chulmleigh around 7:30."

"Why would Oi want to do that?"

"Because Oi want you to meet someone."

"Unless it's Clooney or Pitt forget it," she giggled.

"No, but it is Harry Lynsey."

"No shit!"

"Thought Oi could treat you to pub grub and involve you in the interview."

"Alan, Oi think Lynch has his spies out. Oi can ask him the questions. You can't."

"Jesus, let's not spoil the moment."

"How about Oi get there around 7 and you school me on the questions, over a drink or three."

"That might work, but we need to take it gently."

The Red Lion restaurant, spacious and welcoming boasted a massive stone hearth with a roaring fire. The room's white painted ceiling beams and white stone walls made it too bright for Alisha's taste. However, her feelings defied any semblance of logic. Alan bought the drinks and sat down to work out some questions with her. Satisfied with what they agreed to ask their suspect, the pair relaxed, waiting for him to enter the restaurant.

By Eight o'clock there were three pairs of diners and only one man sitting by himself. Alan approached him, introducing himself. Harry took his sturdy polymer Dudley briefcase off a spare seat. Alan noticed it had a small brass plate with the salesman's name engraved.

They took their seats, and Alan handed Alisha a menu,"

Harry Lynsey smiled, "I think you'll find they only cater for guests."

A waiter was soon at their table. Alan and his guest made their choices from the home-style cooking menu. Seeing the puzzled look on Harry's face, Alan explained, "They had a break-in. I managed to get most of the stolen stuff back for them. The manager was most grateful."

"So it's a matter of who you know."

"More a case of who you help."

As they settled down to eat, Harry, a most affable fellow, asked, "Okay Inspector, tell me what happened."

DS Copperwaite said, "We were hoping you might tell us."

"What do you mean?" Harry spluttered, eyes widening.

"Your car was parked at your place on the night of the murder."

"What date would that be?" he asked, calmly.

"That would be three nights ago, the 14th Oi believe," Alisha said.

"Ah yes, My car was there, but I wasn't."

"Why was that?"

The entrees arrived, Mushrooms stuffed with cheese, garlic, onions and breadcrumbs.

Harry, enjoying the last mouthful of his stuffed pepper filled with couscous, answered,

"I went to a stag night do. So I took a Taxi."

"When did you return home?"

Harry smiled, "I haven't been home since that night."

"How did you pick up your car then?"

"I didn't. A colleague collected it for me and drove it to his place."

Alan thought Harry had a very well practised story ready, or he was telling the truth. Alan couldn't figure which it was. He found it tremendously difficult to remain silent, but he didn't want to blow it."

Alisha said, "Oi'll need the names of the people at the stag party and the name of your friend who took the car."

"Of course, Detective Sergeant."

"Did you know the deceased, Daniel Bevis."

"I've never heard of him."

"What was he doing at your home?"

Harry opened his hands. "It's a mystery to me."

The mains, a Carbinara for him, a Goat cheese pasta for her, turned up, along with a carafe of Riesling. Alisha arranged her napkin, then asked, "So why did the killer choose your place to carry out at least one of the murders."

Harry said, 'search me' giving a palm upward gesture. "Look, this is all completely beyond me."

"Who, apart from your landlady knew you lived there?"

"Not many people. I haven't lived there that long."

"People at work, perhaps, such as your friend who collected the car."

"Well yes, a few people at work know,"

"I want a list of all the people who know where you live."

Harry's roast lamb arrived.

They settled down to a pleasant meal.

Chapter 24

Beau Durand stamped his feet to keep warm. It was his ears that were most affected by the cold night. The reporter tucked them into his beanie, but it still left gaps for the cold air to get in. "Where the fuck are you Niall?" he mouthed to the frigid air. He couldn't remember ever feeling as cold, including the time he took part in that expedition to the South Pole. Of course, there he wore all the thermal layers to combat the expected cold in the desert that was Antarctica. Upon his return, he fell into the same bad habits that nearly cost him his life. He cleaned up his act and joined the Exeter Clarion as a cub reporter.

His attention got drawn to a car that stopped a little way from him. The lights flashed twice. He walked over to the vehicle, recognising Niall Ferguson, he opened the passenger door and climbed in. "This better be good. I've been freezing my fucking ears off waiting for you."

Niall looked at him. "Oh, this is good. Bigger than anything yet and it's going to cost you more this time."

"Fuck off! we have a deal."

"Yeah, but this time it could get you in the nationals. That's got to be worth, say, two hundred quid."

"Tell me about it."

"There's only a mass grave with kiddies skeletons under the nunnery."

Beau stared at him, open-mouthed. "Tell me more."

"When I see the wedge."

"Oi've only got the usual fifty quid on me. But Oi can get it for you. You just have to trust me."

"It's all on there," the informant said, handing over a memory stick. "You'd better not screw me."

"We can go to an ATM if you loike."

Niall shook his head. Someone might see him with the reporter and put two and two together.

GRUESOME DISCOVERY UNDER NUNNERY was how the Exeter Clarion headlined the story. It went on to say that, under the nunnery, buried beside an ancient passageway, the police discovered the skeletons of over six hundred infants and three adults. The bones are estimated to be around 90 years old, meaning the burials took place between the 1920s and 1930s. Doreen Gallagher did not need to read any more. The damage was done. A media feeding frenzy beating on her door was imminent, and she had to be ready for the onslaught. She'd already summoned DCI Lynch to her office. She touched up her new perm and brushed any creases out of her Armani skirt as she waited for his arrival. Someone was knocking at her door. "If you're DCI Lynch come in. Otherwise go away."

Lynch entered. "You asked to see me ma'am", he said, resenting being dragged from his morning briefing.

She thrust the paper at him. "I want this informant found and stopped."

He scanned the paper. "They were going to get wind of it sooner or later Ma'am. Anyway, the cold case geriatrics are dealing with it now. Just refer them to Bully ..."

"Yes, well, it's not that easy. Inspector Jessie Bull has only just received the poison chalice. I have to go over and give them a briefing. Then she said, "How's the nunnery murders going?"

"We're very close Ma'am. We have a suspect at the scene of the crime. A Mr Lynsey rents the house with the 'kill room'."

"Excellent DCI Lynch, reel him in. And find that informer. He or she is somewhere in the ranks."

DI Prime, Having taken over the briefing, listened to DS Copperwaite's report about the elusive Harry Lynsey. He passed the information onto Daryl Lynch when he got back to the now deserted incident room.

Lynch read the notes. "Has he furnished her with the names and numbers she has asked for?"

"Not yet Guv. She'll pass them on as soon as she receives them."

"Right, well bring our Mr Lynsey in for questioning."

"Is there any point until we've checked his alibi?"

Daryl stared at Prime, as though he had two heads. "Are you questioning me, Frank?" Lynch asked in measured, clipped words.

"It's not that Guv," Frank said, his mind furiously pedalling backwards. "It's just that ..."

Cutting his subordinate off with the precision of Rabbi's circumcision blade, Lynch said, "It's just that you're a lazy bugger sometimes. Whereas as I want first-hand information from the first decent suspect, we've laid our hands on."

Rapidly replacing the dirt in the hole faster than a manic wombat, He said, "Gotcha Guv. I'll get onto it."

Barnaby Rudge felt his blood pressure rising as he read:

In the light of a recent scandal in which the Catholic Church took 60,000 babies for adoption in the 1950s and 1960s, with many being shipped to America in return for substantial payments disguised as 'donations', this latest macabre discovery under the old Ilfracombe nunnery makes the picture for the Church even blacker. The police, attending a bizarre murder case discovered the skeletal remains of over six hundred babies, in an unmarked mass grave. The infants, victims of the nunnery's primitive conditions, were consistently neglected; infection and disease were rife; and dysentery killed hundreds of innocent, helpless babies. It is now time that this atrocity came to light. The Clarion welcomes comments concerning this from the Church.

Before he had finished reading, his phone rang. He didn't need two guesses as to whom the caller might be. He received Cardinal Welling's rant with his usual lackey's obsequiousness. "Your Eminence I have no idea who leaked the story to the press. We'll just have to tell them what we told the police."

"The media doesn't play by the same rules." The prelate grumbled.

"Should I get in touch with that reporter and put our side of the story."

"No, if we do that we will fall into their grubby hands. Don't comment unless the media approaches you. In which case you say we are appalled by the discovery and offer our prayers to the departed spirits of those poor souls. Tell them I will be holding a special mass in their honour."

"Are we going to do that?"

"Of course, Rudge. I wouldn't say it otherwise. Now study that article and have your answers ready."

DCI Lynch looked straight at the suspect. "So let me see if I have this straight, Mr Lynsey. You rent 24 Springfield Rd, a house in which three and possibly four murders have been committed since the beginning of your tenancy. Your company car was parked at the property the night Daniel Bevis died there. You claim you were at some stag do at the time and that you haven't been back to your home since. You furthermore claim that a friend came and picked up your car and drove it to his place." He stared at Harry, deeply suspicious. "It all seems a bit too fanciful to me."

Harry sat, looking at him. "I agree it seems somewhat unbelievable Inspector, but that's what happened."

DS Doherty, sitting in on the interview, asked, "So who is this friend and where can we find him."

"Andrew Spice of 6 Fern Way."

Lynch said, "Right, Mr Lynsey, I want a list of all the people at the stag do."

Harry looked at him, perplexed. "I've already e-Mailed that to the woman police officer."

Daryl out perplexed him, his face a question mark. "What policewoman?"

"A detective Sergeant, er, Copperwaite, I believe. She was with a man - another officer. But she asked all the questions. I thought it a bit odd but didn't say anything."

Lynch, fuming inside, had never felt so much yolk running down his face.

Just then there was a knock at the door, and DS Copperwaite walked in. She avoided eye contact with Harry, whose presence, surprised her. She wanted a large hole to swallow her up. With a choked voice, she uttered, "Chief Inspector can Oi talk to you for a moment?"

Outside the room, she showed him a print out of Harry's list. "Oi'll start checking these out right away."

He rounded on her. "DS Copperwaite, I'm not having a good day. First, some little weasel told the press about the mass grave. You should read the article - very graphic, creative and full of half-truths. Then a little birdie tells me that you and Mr Lynsey had a cosy little chat last night and YOU DIDN'T FUCKING TELL ME AND MADE ME LOOK LIKE A RIGHT PLONKER IN THERE!"

She shrivelled at his outburst. "Oi was going to wait till Oi had this list, Guv. Oi had no idea you would bring him in for questioning."

"Jesus Copperwaite, he's a suspect in a murder case. Interrogating suspects is what we do!"

"Sorry for any embarrassment it caused you Guv. Oi didn't mean ..."

"Didn't mean what? Have me find out that you and DI Dymond were undermining me and my investigation."

She felt her blood turning to water. "What do you mean, Guv?"

"Don't play the innocent with me. I know you conspired with a police officer who no longer has anything to do with this case. So don't deny it. Now you wait for me in the incident room. Then, Chief Inspector Gallagher, you and I are going to get to the bottom of this. Do you understand?"

She nodded, feeling the blood run from her face.

Alone, she rang Alan's number. "Alan, Lynch knows about our interview with Harry Lynsey."

Alan, groggy from the previous night's excesses, groaned, "How the fuck did he find out?"

"He got on to Lynsey, had him brought in for questioning this morning."

"Shit! That makes things a bit awkward."

"You don't say, Sherlock. He's dragging me before her majesty. I'll be lucky if I have a fucking job after this."

"Relax Lish. Did he tell you he was going to question Lynsey?"

"Of course not - no."

"Then he's as much to blame as you where lack of communication was concerned."

"But how do I explain your presence at the interview?"

"We were having a friendly dinner together when we espied Harry Lynsey eating by himself at the Red Lion in Chulmleigh. You, a dedicated police officer, couldn't let the chance slip by."

She beamed, "Alan I knew your cool head would work out a positive spin. But how did I know it was Harry Lynsey?"

"Hm, good point. Wait a minute. "You found out Lynsey worked for Mercury Footwear in Exeter. You didn't have time to go there, so you checked out his licence details through the DMV. They e-Mailed you his driver's license picture and ..."

"No Alan! It has to be straightforward and plausible."

He said, "I've got it. He had his name on his briefcase. You saw it and asked him if he worked at Mercury Shoes. He said yes and you, being smart, turned our intimate dinner into a laid back interview."

Barnaby Rudge firmed his jaw as he approached the nunnery. He wouldn't accept the short shrift this time. To his pleasant surprise, the blue and white tape blocking off the convent entrance was no longer there. There was no police presence to challenge him his right to enter. There was no one to ask the location of the mass grave. He would just have to find out himself. Only then the sound of footsteps on the stone floor gained his attention. Looking up, he saw a tall man with jug ears walking his way.

Barnaby, acknowledging the stranger, said, "Can I help you?"

"Possibly. I'm Beau Durand from the Chronicle," he announced, extending his hand in greeting.

The press! With heart-struck terror, he stared at the tall apparition. He had to say something.

"Barnaby Rudge. I administrate for the Diocese."

All of Beau's Christmases had come at once. He couldn't have planned it better." So what can you tell me about the mass grave?"

"Nothing."

"Oh come on Mr Rudge. You're in charge of a building containing over six hundred infant skeletons, and you have nothing to say."

"No comment." the frazzled Cardinal's man said, Brushing past the reporter, as he fled the building.

Beau's long legs soon caught up with the panicking administrator. Standing between him and his car, Beau pursued, "You can't run away from this you know. It won't look good for you in tomorrow's paper."

"I'm not running away. I just remembered I have another appointment."

"Is it true that you were planning to demolish this building to make sure this grisly find never came to loight."

Barnaby, like a cornered rat, turned on his tormentor. "That's an outright lie. If you print it, you'll be sued by the Church."

"Which bit," Durand pressed. "the planned demolition or hiding evidence?"

"Both."

"So you deny your intention to flatten this building for development?"

Seeing the carefully set trap just in time he back-pedalled, "The Nunnery has stood unused for over 40 years. The convent hasn't been well maintained and, as a result, is a safety hazard. So yes, regrettably we have to demolish the building."

Beau smiled, "What bad luck for you that the burial ground was discovered before the demolition contractors got started."

"We knew nothing about the burial site."

On a roll, Beau continued. "Did you know Daniel Bevis, the man who exposed your skeleton hoard was subsequently murdered?"

Rudge took on a hue that would have made Casper jealous. He hadn't made the connection, Now confronted with, what amounted to a veiled accusation, trembling, he said, "The Church has no knowledge of this."

"First we have three murder victims left in this nunnery. Then we have the grim discovery of around six hundred child skeletons. Then the killing of the man who exposed the bones. Surely you can see your Church has a case to answer."

Rudge pushed the reporter aside. "Out of my way. I have to get going."

"It's no good avoiding this issue, Mr Rudge. It's not going to go away," Beau yelled to the frazzled man's back.

Quinn O'Ryan quietly observed the watercolours. Apart from some landscapes in the collection, Mason's later work had a more disturbing element to it. Mrs Thomas looked on as Quinn pored over the mediocre artworks. "How long ago did Mason take up painting?"

She answered, "Since he left the Navy."

"Have you seen these images before?" he said, indicating pictures of babies in distress.

Shaking her head, she said, "He must have kept these hidden."

"But why. What is there here that your son didn't want anyone to see?"

"Mason was quite a private person. As a teenager, he backpacked around Europe, by himself."

"Before he joined the Navy."

"Yes, after he dropped out of university."

"What was he studying?"

"Archaeology. But my boy had a phobia of heights and confined spaces. So it was not a good career choice."

"How did Mason get on in the Marines?"

"Oh, he loved it."

"Yes, but what about his phobias? Didn't they affect him."

"He went to see a hypnotherapist. He was better after that."

Quinn, becoming interested, said, "And who is this hypnotherapist."

Mrs Thomas frowned, "Oh, I don't know that. It was someone on the Internet, that's all I know. Why, does it matter?"

"It could well matter." Forensics had Mason's laptop so that would be his next port of call. He turned to the grieving mother, "Can I take some of his paintings?"

She shrugged, "I suppose so - if you think it will help find his killer."

"It may well do," he said, getting a wild idea."

Doreen Gallagher hated being caught up in inter-team squabbles. She wished she'd never agreed to Homicide taking over the nunnery murders. But she had to consent to the voices on high. DS Copperwaite told her story about having a meal with DI Dymond at the Red Lion Hotel; how they saw their suspect at another table; how pleasant he was in answering their questions while eating his meal.

"I don't believe it happened that way, for a minute. Lynch argued. "It's too bloody convenient."

"Nevertheless that's how it happened," DS Copperwaite persisted.

"It does seem very far-fetched," Doreen said,

Alisha replied, "That's why Oi asked the questions. DI Dymond felt very awkward being there, having been removed from the case."

Doreen threw open her hands. "As implausible as it seems It's all perfectly logical. I don't see that DS Copperwaite has any case to answer."

Lynch tutted, his eyes going heavenward.

Doreen turned to Alisha, "You can go." She turned to Daryl. "You can stay. We have something to discuss."

The brisk wind blowing in from the sea had Quinn pulling up the collar of his jacket. The sky and ocean competed for greyness as he trudged up the sandy path leading to the old boat shed. Enya Woodruff was inside, using an electric sander on a large piece of wood.

The high-pitched noise assaulted Quinn's ears.

Enya switched off the tool as soon as she saw him. "Oh, hello. Can I help you?"

"I'm with the police."

"We met before. You're Detective Sergeant O'Ryan if I'm not mistaking."

"You've got a good memory."

"Yes. Is this about Flavia?"

"Do you know if Flavia ever saw a hypnotherapist?"

She removed her goggles and looked at him. "That's an odd question."

He grinned, "Yes it is, isn't it. It's a wild hunch."

"The odd thing is she did."

"Really!" Quinn responded with sudden surprise. "Can you tell me about it?"

"It'll cost you a drink, detective."

"Deal."

The Chain and Anchor pub was almost silent when the pair walked in. There were only four customers in the bar. Two were playing played a casual game of darts, while the only two men were hunched over their beers, bemoaning the state of the world. The landlord, a kindly soul carrying a massive gut, the result of 25 years in the pub game, asked what he could get them.

Armed with two pints of bitter, Quinn followed Enya out into the deserted garden. She found a table sheltered from the wind, and they sat down.

As they sipped their beers, Quinn said, "So what's the story?"

"Flavia was self-conscious about her face. It was severely scarred from a hot iron that fell on her when she was five. Years of skin grafts had repaired most of the damage, but she was still concerned about her looks."

"It must have been terrible," Quinn sympathised, swigging his beer.

"It didn't worry me. I told Flavia it didn't matter, but she still felt the slight disfigurement made her look ugly."

"So where does this hypnotherapist come into it?"

Enya lit up a cigarette. "Flavia found him online. Now what was the name of the Website?" she asked herself, her eyes going heavenward.

"And the name of the hypnotist?"

"Andrew somebody. I can't remember his surname.

Quinn took out his phone, Googled Andrew hypnotherapist. Among the results was a page titled 'hypnotherapy in Exeter' In the bio, Quinn read:

My name is Andrew Spice, and I'm confident that my skills will help you overcome your challenges. I recommend my services to you as someone experienced and efficient in assisting clients to overcome their problems. I believe I have the skills and experience to help you overcome your challenges. I have been established in Exeter for 12 years and have treated over 4000 clients. And I have also featured on some TV shows helping people overcome their fears and anxieties.

I look forward to working with you to achieve the changes you desire.

Call 0479 035 563 for your free consultation.

"Andrew Spice. Yes, I think that's his name."

"Did Flavia go and see him?"

"Yes, and the result was surprisingly successful."

"How long ago was that?"

"Around six months, if my memory serves."

Quinn drained his beer. "Thank you, Enya. You've been most helpful."

"Good, But what does that have to do with her murder."

"I'm not sure yet. I'm working on a hunch. I feel like I've won the first two races in a trifecta. But I don't want to get my hopes up yet."

She grabbed his arm as he rose from the table. "If you win the third race I'd love to know about it."

"Okay, but you're buying next round."

Chapter 25

Beau Durand found it strange to be on the other side of the interview. But he was currently the journalistic flavour of the month - well at least the week. When the reporter received a call from the producer of 'Review' a current affairs type programme, asking him to be a guest on the Friday edition of the show, Beau jumped at the chance. He passed it to the Clarion's legal department, a

grand-sounding name for the editor's brother and licensed advisor. (Word had it that The lawyer had fallen on hard times after being disbarred. His brother got him dried out and signed up to AA.) After He'd gone over Beau's contract, the lawyer told him just to stick to personal stuff that he knew to be true and not even to mention the paper.

So Beau found himself in the spotlight, the centre of attraction on the Review. The Interviewer, Shelly Morse, said, "The shocking news about six hundred babies buried under The disused Sacred Heart Convent in Ilfracombe came to light when a reporter from the Exeter Clarion alerted the world about this. His name is Beau Durand, and he is my next guest this afternoon. Now a huge welcome for Beau Durand."

After welcoming him to the hot seat, she asked, "How did you find out about the burial site?"

"I was alerted to it by a source who thought there was a cover-up taking place."

"What sort of cover-up?"

"I have tried to find out from the Church, but their spokesperson refuses to comment."

"Who is this spokesperson?"

He thought, do your research. He smiled, "that's confidential at present."

"It must have been a terrible experience to see all those tiny skeletons crammed into that mass grave."

"Yes, it was harrowing. Let me just say, that in nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent, I covered stories of mass graves in far-flung locations in Eastern Europe and Russia. The thought of them has remained lodged in my memory. But never did I expect to be covering a mass grave from modern times on my doorstep."

"Isn't it true, Beau, that the nunnery closed in 1924 and was taken over as a workhouse for the fallen woman."

"Records show that to be true."

"So these atrocities were committed when the building got to run as a workhouse?"

"Yes, that probably right."

"So shouldn't you be talking to whoever was in charge of the workhouse, not the Church."

Beau looked at the attractive middle-aged host. "The Church was still the landlord and had certain responsibilities and access to the premises at any time."

Daryl Lynch didn't often think about what had happened that had turned his life upside down. It was too painful for him. But he found himself pondering over it as he waited outside Harry Lynsey's home. He and Marion had been married for 25 years. When she, agreed to his marriage proposal, everything seemed perfect. But the honeymoon period soon became tarnished with thinks cracks in their relationship becoming dark crevasses. After the birth of Arnie, the situation improved for the couple. Daryl doted over his only child, regaling him with the exploits of his job as a tour guide before he joined the police force. For the first few years of Arnie's life, Marion and Daryl did all they could to make their marriage work. Then, when Arnie became a teenager, everything changed. Arnie no longer communicated with his parents. There was an uncomfortable silence between Daryl and his son. Then Arnold disappeared for days at a time. These elements put even more pressure on the fractured marriage. Daryl suspected hard drugs had a lot to do with his son's behaviour, but he

couldn't prove it. If he was honest with himself, he didn't want to find out. Then two of his officers turned up at his door with the news that his son had died from a heroin overdose.

Harry Lynsey's arrival shook DCI Lynch from his reverie.

Harry, relieved to see the blue and white tape gone from around his door, was somewhat irked to find DCI Lynch blocking his path. "What do you want now, Inspector?"

"Do you have a briefcase monogrammed with your name."

"Yes. Why?"

"Can I see it please?"

"It's in the car."

Lynch stared at him "Yes!"

Harry scampered off and got the case.

Lynch scrutinised it. The name was there, engraved in minuscule lettering.

"Can I enter my home now?"

"Oh yes, Mr Lynsey. But before you do, I wonder if you can clear something up for me."

"What's that?"

"How far away from the police Sergeant's table were you."

"I don't know. Two or three tables away. Why?"

"Well DS Copperwaite said that she recognised you by the name on your briefcase. So you would have to be sitting very close for her to read your name."

Harry, perplexed said, "Why would she need to recognise me by my name when the Inspector had already arranged to meet me there."

Daryl had trouble hiding his smugness. "Well, that would explain it then." Then he added, "Your landlady will need to get rid of the blood stains."

Harry froze. He wasn't looking forward to moving back in."

Quinn O'Ryan arrived at 64 Fern Way. his pulse racing. He took a few deep breaths and knocked on the door.

Martha Swanson opened it. Eyeing the detective, she said, "Yes. What do you want?"

"I want to speak with Mrs Birkbeck," he said, flashing his warrant card.

"My sister is not here. As you probably know, she had a bereavement recently. She's gone to spend time with our brother." She went to close the door."

"Wait a moment. You might be able to help us."

"What do you mean?"

"This is probably going to sound a bit odd but do you know if Grover ever saw a hypnotherapist?"

She stared at him a though he was something better left outside. Sounding like a Sergeant Major giving orders, she said "Come inside then,"

Sitting opposite Quinn, in the living room, she said, "I don't know how much you know about Grover but he was an inveterate liar. Oh, he came over as a friendly person looking after your interests. But he played people. It was a perverse game with him. I called him on it many times, but he just couldn't help himself."

"I see. What did Mrs Birkbeck think about it?"

"She made excuses for him. Then when she got sick Grover seemed to want to change."

"In what way?"

"He blamed himself for her cancer."

"Why?"

"He thought it was his lying. Then he told me he was going to see a hypnotherapist. That was so unlike him. But then the impending death of a loved one can do strange things to you."

"Did he say who this hypnotherapist was."

"Oh, I can't remember it, but I do know it made a vast improvement."

"Was it Andrew Spice?"

"Come to think of it, he was called Andrew Spice."

The trifecta had come in. Quinn beamed, "Thank you. You've been a great help."

Quinn O'Ryan was bursting. He just had to share the big break with someone before he exploded with suppressed excitement.

Alan wasn't around, so he phoned Niall Ferguson, inviting him to come round to his drum for pizza and beer.

"What's the occasion mate. Is it your birthday?"

"I've just made a huge breakthrough in the case. I just have to tell someone."

"What the hell are you on about?"

"Just come over, and I'll tell you."

"Why can't you tell me over the phone?"

"Jesus man. Do you want to know or not?"

Niall sighed, "Okay, give me thirty minutes."

"And you say they all went to the same hypnotherapist," Niall queried, eating his second slice of Hawaiian pizza.

"It's the first thing that links all the nunnery victims. It's got to mean something, Quinn said, downing his can of beer.

"Have you contacted this Andrew Spice, yet?"

Quinn leapt up. "Holy shit!"

"What's up, mate?" Niall said, surprised.

"Doherty told me that the bloke who helped Lynsey with his car was a - wait for it - Andrew Spice."

"Fuck me! Are you sure?"

"That's what he told me."

"We might as well go and arrest the bastard right now."

Quinn yawned, "It's been quite a day. Now the adrenaline is wearing off I'm feeling stuffed."

Niall got up. "Have to go to the boy's room."

"Upstairs. Second on the left."

As Niall left the room, his phone rang.

Quinn went to his coat pocket, took out the phone, and said, "Niall's phone. Who is it?"

Without thinking, the caller said, Beau Durand. There are a couple of things I need to know about that burial site. See you at the usual place."

The phone left like a hot potato in his hand. Beau Durand, the journo was writing about stuff to which only the police had been privy. He heard Niall descending the stairs. He tried getting the phone back in the coat pocket.

Niall saw him. "What are you doing with my phone?"

"Someone tried to call you, but I was too late," he lied. He was too tired to deal with this shit.

Beau Durand waited at the rendezvous point. Who had answered the phone, he wondered? And what had they made of the call? He hoped he hadn't said anything to incriminate his best source of forbidden information. Then he knew he would soon find out. Niall Ferguson had turned up. He climbed into the warm interior of Niall's car. "What's the latest on the burial ground saga?"

"You'll have to ask DI Bull. She's head of the cold case unit."

"Right. What's Bull's number?"

"How the hell should I know?" Niall snarled.

Changing the subject, Beau said, "Oi phoned you earlier, but someone else answered your phone."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I should have been suspicious, but I didn't twig till afterwards," the reporter said, nervously.

"Didn't twig about what?"

"It was the way he answered. That should have given me a clue."

Niall glared at him. For fuck sake, what are you mumbling on about?"

"He said something like this is Niall's phone? You never said anything like that."

The detective blanched. So Quinn had lied. He didn't get to the phone too late. "What the fuck did you say?"

"I think I mentioned the mass grave case and confirmed we'd meet at the same place."

Niall grabbed Beau by his coat lapels, dragging him close to his face. "Fuck! You fucking idiot. Jesus, what Am I supposed to do now?" Quinn, releasing the hapless journalist then pushed him against the door. "Fuck off you cretin, while I try and repair bridges."

With Durand out of the way, Niall dialled Quinn's number. Message bank kicked in. "Quinn please don't report me until I've had a chance to explain." Frustrated and feeling very insecure, he hoped that many years of mateship stood for something, that and the unwritten coppers' code of loyalty to colleagues was intact.

I thought I'd seen it all..., by Martin Sixsmith, Daily http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2014/05_06/2014_06_08_Martin_UK_I_seen.htm

Chapter 26

DCI Lynch, unusually full of what the French refer to as Bon Homme, entered the incident room with a spring in his step. To his surprise Quinn O'Ryan was already there, using his coffee mug as a hand warmer.

He leapt up at Lynch's arrival. "Guv, I've found a link between the three victims."

"I hope it's not something like a tenuous military connection."

"They all saw the same hypnotherapist."

Daryl came up short. What the hell has that got to do with the murders?"

"I Don't know yet, Guv. But get this. The hypnotist's name is Andrew Spice."

Daryl looked at him blankly. Then it clicked, "Harry Lynsey's good friend."

"Right Guv. I reckon he's got to be worth a pull."

"Yes. Well done O'Ryan. Follow it up."

"Can DS Ferguson come with me?"

"No. DI Prime can go with you."

Shortly afterwards, Alisha walked in. She saw Lynch checking the whiteboard and went to walk out again.

Lynch looked up. Ah, DS Copperwaite, the very person I wanted to see."

It sounded ominous to Alisha. "Oi just need to do something, Guv."

"No Copperwaite, you need to hear what I have to say."

"Oh."

"Oh indeed. You see I had another chat with our Mr Lynsey and he had some fascinating things to say."

"What things."

"I asked him to show me his briefcase. You know, the one with his name monogrammed on it."

"Yeeses."

The writing is quite small, and unless you or DI Dymond have the eyesight of an eagle, you couldn't have read it unless you were just a couple of feet away."

Alisha looked at him with a sense of foreboding. "All Oi know is that we saw it."

Daryl smiled. "Of course I can't prove that you didn't see it. Now here's the best bit. He told me you wouldn't have to see the case to know who he was because a police officer had rung him at work and made arrangements to see him in the Red Lion that evening."

Alisha gulped. "It wasn't me."

"No, it was a male police officer's voice. He was adamant about that. And we all know who that was, don't we."

"We still got a result, Guv."

He stared at her. You haven't earned the right to call me that; you will refer to me as Sir. That's if I don't boot you right off the team."

"Are you going to, Sir?"

"I haven't made up my mind how to deal with you yet. In the meantime, you will go over all the reports on this case with a fine tooth comb."

"But sir ..."

"But nothing Copperwaite. Don't forget you're here on sufferance. Now get to work and don't argue." As she went to move, he added, "And no communication with DI Dymond."

Alan received two calls in quick succession, the first from Jimbo Barnes. He had something new to report; the second from DCI Gallagher, who commanded him to report to her ASAP. Usually, he could use work to justify putting off the inevitable, but he had a suspicious feeling what this invitation to her inner sanctum was all about. Shit! He was dying to know what Jimbo had found. Alan managed to avoid bumping into any of the murder team as he made his way to the second floor of Ilfracombe Nick. As he opened Doreen Gallagher's office door and entered her chilling domain, his usual winning smile met with a frozen front that made even Antarctica seem tropical. She took a deep breath and tried calming herself. Then, unable to hold back, like a New Orleans levee wall, burst forth. "WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU, ALAN?"

"I can explain."

"You're supposed to be on leave. You were told to leave the case alone. But - oh no - you know better, and you go tracking down a suspect."

"With respect Ma'am that's what I'm paid to do."

"Not when you're off the case. You know that."

He stared at her. "Fuck it, Doreen! This job is about catching the bad guys and bringing them to justice. Not about feeding Lynch's fucking ego. I had a substantial lead and followed it up."

She tried stifling her apoplexy but to no avail. "DON'T YOU TAKE THAT TONE WITH ME, ALAN!" Calming a little, Doreen said, "Lynch is demanding that you get hauled before 'Ethics and Standards' and quite frankly I tend to agree with him."

"FUCK! I DON'T BELIEVE THIS. WE GOT A FUCKING RESULT. It's bad enough that that prick got the credit but charging me for doing my job is beyond the fucking pale."

Doreen sighed heavily. "Alan, your attitude leaves me with no choice but to suspend you on full pay. Hand over your warrant card and leave this station. You will have nothing to do with anyone here and, especially DS Copperwaite, whom you've done no favours by involving her in your private schemes."

Alan stared at her. And stared and stared - with no words forthcoming. He threw his warrant card on the desk, screamed "FUCK!!!" and stormed out, slamming her door behind him."

Andrew Spice's leased office space in one of the red-brick Georgian style buildings that occupied one side of Queens St. DI Prime entered with DS O'Ryan and checked the directory board. Andrew Spice was listed on the second floor - suite 4B. The pair took the stairs, located his office, knocked and entered the plush reception area. The detectives approached the desk, where a woman typing looked up from her forms. The attractive brunette smiled sweetly. "Can I help you?"

Frank Prime quickly flashed his ID "Police, to see Andrew Spice."

"I'm afraid he's with a client at present and can't be disturbed."

He returned a smile. "Tell me," he said, looking at the name badge, "Jennifer, If there was some emergency how would you alert Mr Spice - if he was with a client?"

She looked at the policeman as though he was dumb. "Use the intercom of course."

"He leant closer to her. "This is an emergency, love. So be a sweetheart and tell him the police are here."

Flummoxed, she hesitated. "But it could be detrimental to the treatment."

"And you could be charged with obstructing the police."

She gingerly picked up the phone. "Mr Spice, I have two rather insistent policemen to see you."

Spice was out in two minutes. Hiding his anger and frustration, he confronted the detectives. "What do you want, that's so urgent?"

"We want to ask you some questions," Prime said. "Do you have somewhere private or shall we talk here."

"Very well. We'll go into the additional office, but I can't leave my client for long."

"Then I suggest we get on with it."

Andrew closed the door and faced the detectives. "No what's this all about?"

Prime answered, "It's about murder, Sir. Well, multiple killings."

"Murder!"

DS O'Ryan said, "Do you know a Harry Lynsey?"

"Yes, he's a friend. Why?"

Quinn continued, "Have you heard of a Flavia Morgan?"

"No. I don't recall that name."

"How about a Grover Birkbeck?"

"No. Look, what's this about?"

"How about a Mason Thomas?"

Andrew, flummoxed, snapped, "I demand to know why you are questioning me."

Quinn remained calm. "How about Daniel Bevis."

Spice stared at the detectives. "I know nothing about these people."

"That's strange sir because three of them are have recently been your patients."

"I have a lot of clients. I don't remember all their ..."

"And all three have been murdered," Quinn interjected.

Andrew's ruddy complexion instantly went white. "Jesus! You surely don't suspect me."

"Quinn continued, "They were all murdered in Harry Lynsey's home."

"No!"

"Yes, Mr Spice."

Frank said, "Sir, I think you should take the day off and come with us."

Andrew deflated collapsed into an office chair. "Yes, very well. I'll help you all I can."

Chapter 27

Alan's life had gone to shit. That was the only way he could read the events of the last few days. The universe, God, the source or whatever lurked behind existence, must have some personal grudge against him. Else why were his marriage and his career down the toilet? He thought back to events that prompted him to join the police force. For young Alan, it began with an offer on the

back of a cereal box. He was eating his Weetabix for breakfast when he noticed a cut out police car on the back of the packet. He cut it out and glued it together and added it to his collection, not giving it any more thought. He was living with his grandparents at the time. Granddad Jim was a sweet genial old soul who read him bedtime stories, the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes mostly. Jim would even don a battered old deerstalker, his father's, and his granddad and he would go on missions together, looking for clues to catch their imaginary bad guys. With granddad Jim as his primary role model when growing up, it wasn't surprising that Alan yearned to be a real-life detective.

Approaching the pathology lab, Alan sighed heavily. It looked as though all that was over now. He didn't know why he was going to see Jimbo, seeing as he wasn't an active a police officer any more. But they had been friends for many years and right now he needed a friend.

The police pathologist looked up as Alan approached him. "You look like the cat just dragged you in."

Alan gave a semblance of a smile, one of those that hardly changed the curvature of the lips. "This particular cat was too embarrassed and left me outside."

"What's wrong, man?" Jimbo said, becoming serious.

"Apart from the fact that Megan wants a divorce and the Dragon lady has kicked me off the force - nothing."

Jimbo stood open-mouthed for a second. "I think this calls for some soothing libation."

"What the hell? Oi'm not on duty."

"So what are you going to do about Megan?" Jimbo asked, sipping his considerable measure of Jack Daniels."

"Can't see there's anything Oi can do," Alan said, despondently.

"What do you mean mate. It's a golden opportunity. You've got time off so why not forget about this shit, spend some of your hard-earned and whisk her off to some exotic clime. It'll do wonders for you both."

Alan sighed, finished his double shot and replenished his tumbler. "Regretfully Oi think it's gone way beyond that."

"Nonsense! I bet if you turned up with tickets for a cruise on a luxury liner she'd jump at the chance."

"What about the job?"

"Christ man! It's like some sadomasochist bullshit to which you're addicted. The more it demeans you, the more you crave for it. Take a break and If you still want to do it when you get back, return to it. But at least give yourself a choice."

Alan sighed heavily, downing his second scotch. He brightened, "You know what. Jimbo. Oi'm going to give it a fucking go." Then realising he hadn't asked the pathologist what he'd found out, he said, "So what were you going to show me?"

"It doesn't matter now. Let Lynch deal with it."

Alan turned on him. "Oh no Jimbo! You don't get away that easily. Tell me what you've discovered."

The pathologist slowly shook his head. "I knew you weren't serious. The addiction is too strong."

"It's not that. It's just that it'll gnaw at me and spoil my cruise."

Jimbo eyed him, disbelieving. "Okay. But you're not to act on it. Right?"

"Right."

"It's for your curiosity only."

"YES! Now for fuck sake tell me."

"It was Elwood who found it. He was going through Lynsey's bathroom and came across a disposable razor. He checked it for evidence and concluded that it has Grover Birkbeck's DNA on the bristles."

Alan's eyes became saucers. "So all three victims were in the house at one time or another."

"Yes, but why did Grover shave there? That's the mystery."

"He must have been staying there."

"When he was supposed to be in Israel, perhaps."

"Jesus! So they stayed there when they were expected to be somewhere else."

Jimbo said, "Which suggests they were all being held there at the same time."

Alan shook his head, "I think it's time I spoke with Eddie again."

"No Alan. It's time you went to Truro armed with holiday bookings."

Quinn saw Niall talking to DCI Lynch. He didn't know what they were talking about, but he knew the pair were going to interview Andrew Spice. They could be questioning him for hours. Seizing his chance, he approached his friend. "Niall, we need to talk."

"Can't right now. We're about to start the interview."

"Five minutes, That's all."

"Why can't it wait?"

"because I should be reporting it right now."

Niall's look was one of utter disbelief.

"Come outside now and tell me what's going on between you and Beau Durand."

Niall gripped Quinn's arm and ushered him into the car park.

Okay, Niall, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"You should never have touched my phone."

Quinn glared at his friend, "It's gone way beyond that. So you told him about the burial ground. You're the fucking snitch."

"You don't understand."

"Too right I don't fucking know. So tell me. Why are you peddling confidential police info to the press?"

"I'll come round and tell you tonight, Mate. But I've got to be going now."

"You'd better turn up," Quinn said as Niall darted back inside.

DCI Lynch was already in the room when DC Ferguson announced himself to the tape.

Lynch flashed him a look.

"Now can we get on with this. Mr Spice has clients to see," Laurent Michel, Spice's legal representative stated.

The lawyer looked more like a pugilist than a legal representative, Lynch thought. What with his poorly set broken nose and his blustery manner. "We are dealing with four murders, Mr Michel, and that's going to take some time." Turning to Andrew Spice, he said, "Are you a friend of Harry Lynsey who resides at 24 Wilder Road, Ilfracombe?"

"Yes."

"Did you visit that address on the 12th of this month, the night Daniel Bevis was murdered?"

"Yes."

"What was the purpose of your visit, Mr Spice."

"Harry asked me to pick up his car. He'd been drinking and didn't think he should be driving."

"What time did you pick up the car?"

"Around 7 pm as I recall."

"Did you go inside the house?"

"No."

"Where were the keys to the car?"

"Underneath the mat on the driver's side."

Lynch looked at his notes. "Had you been inside the house on previous occasions?"

"Yes."

"What occasions were those?"

"I would have to check."

Laurent Michel objected. "What is this, Inspector, some fishing expedition. If you haven't got anything else to bore us with I want my client released now."

Lynch sneered, "Mr Michel this is just the warm-up round." He moved closer to Andrew, "I'll tell you what I know, shall I?"

"I'm waiting with baited breath," Laurent said, sarcasm oozing.

"I know that you treated three people who subsequently ended up dead in the old nunnery. I also know that these people were murdered at 24 Wilder Road, where you, Mr Spice visited your friend Harry Lynsey. Furthermore, I know that Daniel Bevis, who discovered the mass grave under the said nunnery was also murdered at 24 Wilder Road, the very night you went there to pick up your friend's car." Lynch got into Andrew's face. "It's not looking very good for you, is it Mr Spice."

Michel laughed, "This is farcical. Are you going to charge my client with anything or are you going to stop this Nonsense and let him go?"

Lynch smiled, "He can go for now, but I want a DNA sample from him before he leaves."

"Inspector. You can't just go taking swabs from innocent people."

Andrew said, "It's okay. I don't mind."

"Good. DC Ferguson, take a cheek swab."

Chapter 28

Beau Durand parked his blue Nissan hatchback and made his way to unit 16 in the Freedom Villas Retirement home. The term 'freedom' seemed a bit of a taunt to the residents, most of whom were way past their prime, which tended to constrain any of their attempts to break free. They felt like free-range chickens with clipped wings. One of the Autumn chickens was Jane Fuller, the person Beau had come to see. Now in her 80th year, she was a child when she lived in the workhouse.

As they sat drinking Earl Grey tea and eating digestive biscuits, the reporter asked, "What was it like to live in those conditions?"

The elderly woman laughed, "I was a pretty little thing in those days. To look at me, you wouldn't think it now. I was the tallest girl, as a seven-year-old, bright as a button and full of mischief. I kept playing practical jokes on the other children."

"Did they punish you for it?"

"Oh, yes. There was a Mrs Bevis. She was tough. Sometimes I cried myself to sleep. But in the morning, I was irrepresible," she laughed. She added, The master of the workhouse, he called me a 'saucy little madam and vowed to break my spirit."

"Did he do that?"

She poured some more tea. "What do you reckon?"

He grinned. "Obviously not."

"I did a drawing of him once, with a square head, beady eyes and a fat stomach. He sent me to the discipline room for that. A small cell without windows and only a wooden stall to sit on. Mind you it wasn't much use. I couldn't sit down for days after he canned my arse."

"Were there many babies there."

"I think that was the worst thing. New mothers had their babies taken from them, to be adopted, they said.

"You don't believe that they were adopted out then?"

"My mum took me there when I was three. Some of the poor women came there already pregnant. Many miscarried because they were made to work so hard. A lot more of the babies were born but soon disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"My mum was told they were adopted but nobody came to collect them and they were never seen to have left the workhouse."

"What do you think happened to them?"

"One day I overheard one of the guards - the Moral Watch they were called, say that there was another dead baby and was told to put it with the others."

"How did the babies die?"

"Poor little mites lived in terrible conditions. They would cry and cry. The so-called carers tried quietening them by shaking them. Some would die. Others succumbed to diseases that were rife among the little ones."

Getting back on track, Beau said, "You mentioned a Mrs Bevis. What do you remember about her?"

"Bevis the beast, we called her behind her back. She was under Sister Agnes, who ran the place."

Beau's eyes widened. "Who was Sister Agnes?"

"She was the nun who ran the place."

"Oi thought you said there was a master in charge."

She finished her tea. "Mr Birkbeck, a black-hearted soul if there was one, was a government man. I suppose you'd call him a registrar these days. But the Church owned the property, so there was always a nun in charge of the women."

"Are you saying the Catholic Church always had a say in the running of the workhouse?" he asked excitedly.

Jane smiled, "It was a nice little earner for the Church, Of course, they kept an eye on their nest egg."

Beau said, "Thank you, Jane. Oi may need to speak with you again."

"That's okay sweetie. I enjoyed our chat."

"There's just one little thing." He handed her a form. "This is to say that you give us sole rights to this story. Sign there," he indicated, "and give me your bank details so I can arrange for the five hundred pounds to go into your account."

Niall was getting his clothes out of the commercial dryer when Beau walked in, a grin on his face that would put a Cheshire cat to shame.

The Detective checked to see if the all-night laundrette had any other customers. Asserting that the coast was clear, he turned to the journalist, "The cop that answered my phone is demanding an explanation from me."

"What are you going to tell him?"

"I haven't worked that out yet."

"You have to come out of it smelling of roses."

"Tell me something I don't know," Niall complained.

"That's why I'm here."

The Detective, puzzled, said, "What the hell are you on about?"

"I've been talking to a dear old lady who lived in the workhouse as a girl. And she was very forthcoming about what went on there."

Niall started folding his clothes. He felt a draught as the door opened and a woman, weighed down by large stripy bags, entered.

"What did she tell you?" Niall asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

"That there was always a Nun in charge of the institution. And she regularly reported to the head of Diocese."

The police officer brightened. "Now that is interesting. But this is now being handled by the cold case squad."

"Yeah, I heard that. But wait till you hear this. The women's supervisor was a Mrs Bevis." He looked straight at the policeman. "Name ring a bell."

"The light dawned. "Daniel Bevis' forebear perhaps? Of course, it could be a coincidence, but it's an unusual name."

Beau stood closer to the Detective. Keeping his voice down, he said, "So what does that tell you?"

"The two cases could be connected."

"Precisely. Now don't say I don't give you anything."

Niall looked at the reporter, quizzically. "What the name of this witness?"

"back off mate. She's mine."

"We going to want to know."

"Yes, I know that. But you'll have to wait awhile. I'll let you find out when I'm done, and you get the kudos. Deal?"

"Don't keep me waiting long."

"I reckon just another couple of days."

"Any longer and I drag you in." With his clothes roughly folded and place in the black plastic bag, Niall said, "Good work. Keep me posted."

Chuffy was enjoying his walk, sniffing around - the dogs' version of social networking. He didn't mind holding his master up by checking the latest posts, but it was different when humans stopped and talked to each other. But as patience seemed to come as second nature to dogs, he didn't complain. He did tangle his leash around their legs, though. Chuffy didn't know it, but Alistair was talking with Alan Dymond.

"So you want to go through my son's things."

"There may be a clue as who did this terrible thing to him."

"Your Inspector Lynch said you have a suspect."

"That's why we need the evidence to tie him to your son."

Alistair rubbed his chin, thoughtfully. "Okay but only if I go with you."

Alan cocked an eyebrow. "You wouldn't be trying to keep anything from me, would you?"

"No, of course not. It's just that sorting out Daniel's things is personal."

"Roight, let's get around there then."

"What, right now."

"After you take Chuffy home."

Martha Swanson looked at the picture of Flavia she always kept with her for when she had doubts and felt pangs of guilt. Despite her medical condition, with the right health regimes, her sister could have had a few more years of quality life. She'd had looked forward to the Mediterranean cruise she'd planned. Now it was her who would be sailing with Enya, not her sister. She felt a little jealous when Flavia had announced her grand plan and Martha had secretly wished to be taking her place. Logically, she knew she'd played no part in her sister's death but deep down Martha harboured a feeling that she had somehow, albeit unconsciously, had some hidden hand in her sister's sad demise. Sighing heavily, she attended the job in hand, checking the bilge pump. The damned thing just wouldn't work. She called up to Enya, who was on deck. "HOW LONG BEFORE WE GET THE NEW BILGE PUMPS."

Enya peered down through the open hatch. "I'm having an electrician check the wires first. In most cases, it's wet wiring that stops them working."

"And what about the second pump. We did agree it would be a good idea."

Enya, the purse-string watcher on the project, said, "Oi'm not sure about that. The manual reckons one pump is quoite ample."

"Safety guidelines weren't very stringent when they built this old gal. The latest edition of Boats and Yachting says a backup bilge pump is essential."

"Martha, what's essential is that we get away before they track us down."

"You don't think Daniel would have told them about the boat?"

"There's no telling what he might have told the Moral Watch before they had him shot. You know what they're capable of."

Martha sighed, "Okay, when's that electrician getting here."

"Supposed to be here this afternoon."

Alan thought DCI Lynch had been slack in not making Daniel's flat part of the crime scene, by extension. Frank Prime had given it the once over, merely as a formality, to tick that particular box. Alan realised it could be a total waste of his and Alistair's time but, in his mind, it still had to be done. "Have you any idea at all about who murdered your son?" Inspector Dymond asked, rifling through the kitchen drawers.

Alistair paused from checking under the kitchen sink, "I bet it had something to do with him uncovering that burial site."

"But anybody who had anything to do with that would be long dead. So why would the killer commit murder over it now?"

"I've been thinking about that a lot. Maybe the killer is a descendant of someone involved with the workhouse."

"I suppose it's a possibility."

Alan got an idea. The Inspector, grabbing his phone scrolled through his contacts till he came to Alisha. When she answered, he said, "Lish, Alan here. Are you still delving into the Church archives?"

"Yes, but you're not supposed to be contacting me."

"Never mind about that. Find out about anyone working at the workhouse was charged with any offences."

"What sort of crimes, Alan?"

"Oh Oi don't know. We're looking for someone who might have been wrongly accused or who someone else thought they were innocent."

"Alan, you're still working the case?"

"Just follow it up. It could give us the motive we're looking for."

With the call ended, he resumed his search, in Daniel's bedroom.

Alistair said, "Oi'm going to have to sort all this out. But Oi can't deal with it yet."

Alan, checked the wardrobe, a bedside table and a dresser, then he looked under the bed. Apart from slippers, some old trainers and an accumulation of dust, there was a shoebox, just out of reach. "Can you get me a broom?" he asked.

"Why. What have you found?"

"Don't know yet. Can't quite reach."

"I'll be looking in the cupboard then."

Alan reckoned it was probably nothing, but he had to check.

"Here, this should do," the ex-headmaster said, passing the broom handle first.

"Nudging the box closer, Alan grabbed it and placed it on the bed. The Detective, removing the lid, lifted out something wrapped in a piece of rag.

Alan undid the old tea towel and found himself staring at a gun."

Alistair eyed the pistol, "Whatever is that doing there?"

Alan knew he'd have to report it. But how the hell would he explain his presence in Daniel's flat?" He just stood there staring at the weapon. It was a Glock 17 nine millimetre pistol, the same sort as that used in the murders. A chill shot up his spine. Had he happened upon the missing murder weapon?"

If so, what was it doing in Daniel's room? Unless Daniel was the murderer? But that was unthinkable. Turning to the waxen-faced father, he said, "Did you know he had a gun?"

"No, of course not. My son never mentioned it."

Alan thought for a minute. Then he grabbed his phone. "Alisha, Oi need to come and see you."

"Why?"

"Can't talk about it over the phone."

"What are you up to?"

"Let's meet at that pub near your place."

"The Dog and Hounds?"

"Yes. That's it. Say in one hour."

Finishing the call, he said, "Mr Bevis, this flat is now a crime scene. So I have to put the gun back for forensics when they arrive. So Oi'll be taking you home now. Looking Alistair in the eye, he said, "You mustn't mention the gun to anybody. Roight?"

"Why's that?"

"Because we don't want the killer to know that we've found it."

"You don't think it was Danny's gun then."

"Oi don't roightly know. But Oi believe that someone, maybe the killer, planted it there?"

"All right, Inspector, my lips are sealed."

The Fox and Hounds still kept up with the unwritten tradition of having a caged jackdaw on the bar. Alisha said, "Hello, Bill.

The bird wolf-whistled and said, "What are you doing later?"

The three punters perched on bar stools laughed. One said, "Play yer cards Roight Darlin', and you could be in there."

Picking up the glasses of beer, she smiled and went over to where Alan sat. She thought he looked dead tired and stressed out. Placing the beers on the mats provided, she said, "If Lynch gets wind of us together it's my bloody career down the toilet."

"Or score you some brownie points."

"What do you mean?"

"I've found the gun. Well, one like the one that killed those people."

"Where is it?"

"Where I found it. Daniel Bevis' flat."

She stared at him. "Alan, you're un-fucking-believable! What the hell were you doing in Daniel's apartment?"

"Went there with Alistair."

"Does he know about the gun?"

"He was there when I found it. But he's promised to keep quiet about it."

"And what happens if the Lynch mob start questioning him."

"Why would they. You found the gun and Alistair wasn't there."

Alisha backed off, shaking her head. "Oh no, you do not involve me in your dangerous little games."

"Come on. If that turns out to be the killer's gun, you'll be the flavour of the month."

"But why was Oi there?"

"You found a broken window and thought someone was robbing or had robbed the place. You entered and by looking around found the gun. Simple."

"Oh come on! I just happened to be outside Daniel's place while somebody was robbing the place. Do me a favour, Alan."

"Cat burglars often prey a deceased estate."

"I don't know, Alan. All sorts of things could go wrong."

Alan stared at her. "Oi can't report it but you can. How else is this relevant evidence going to come to light?"

Chapter 29

Beau Durand parked his blue Nissan hatchback and made his way to unit 16 in the Freedom Villas Retirement home. The term 'freedom' seemed a bit of a taunt to the residents, most of whom were way past their prime, which tended to constrain any of their attempts to break free. They felt like free-range chickens with clipped wings. One of the Autumn chickens was Jane Fuller, the person Beau had come to see. Now in her 80th year, she was a child when she lived in the workhouse.

As they sat drinking Earl Grey tea and eating digestive biscuits, the reporter asked, "What was it like to live in those conditions?"

The elderly woman laughed, "I was a pretty little thing in those days. To look at me, you wouldn't think it now. I was the tallest girl, as a seven-year-old, bright as a button and full of mischief. I kept playing practical jokes on the other children."

"Did they punish you for it?"

"Oh, yes. There was a Mrs Bevis. She was tough. Sometimes I cried myself to sleep. But in the morning, I was irrepressible," she laughed. She added, "The master of the workhouse, he called me a 'saucy little madam and vowed to break my spirit.'"

"Did he do that?"

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He grinned. "Obviously not."

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"Are you saying the Catholic Church always had a say in the running of the workhouse?" he asked excitedly.

Jane smiled, "It was a nice little earner for the Church, Of course, they kept an eye on their nest egg."

Beau said, "Thank you, Jane. Oi may need to speak with you again."

"That's okay sweetie. I enjoyed our chat."

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"Yes, I know that. But you'll have to wait awhile. I'll let you find out when I'm done, and you get the kudos. Deal?"

"Don't keep me waiting long."

"I reckon just another couple of days."

"Any longer and I drag you in." With his clothes roughly folded and place in the black plastic bag, Niall said, "Good work. Keep me posted."

Chuffy was enjoying his walk, sniffing around - the dogs' version of social networking. He didn't mind holding his master up by checking the latest posts, but it was different when humans stopped and talked to each other. But as patience seemed to come as second nature to dogs, he didn't complain. He did tangle his leash around their legs, though. Chuffy didn't know it, but Alistair was talking with Alan Dymond.

"So you want to go through my son's things."

"There may be a clue as who did this terrible thing to him."

"Your Inspector Lynch said you have a suspect."

"That's why we need the evidence to tie him to your son."

Alistair rubbed his chin, thoughtfully. "Okay but only if I go with you."

Alan cocked an eyebrow. "You wouldn't be trying to keep anything from me, would you?"

"No, of course not. It's just that sorting out Daniel's things is personal."

"Roight, let's get around there then."

"What, right now."

"After you take Chuffy home."

Martha Swanson looked at the picture of Flavia she always kept with her for when she had doubts and felt pangs of guilt. Despite her medical condition, with the right health regimes, her sister could have had a few more years of quality life. She'd had looked forward to the Mediterranean cruise she'd planned. Now it was her who would be sailing with Enya, not her sister. She felt a little jealous when Flavia had announced her grand plan and Martha had secretly wished to be taking her place. Logically, she knew she'd played no part in her sister's death but deep down Martha harboured a feeling that she had somehow, albeit unconsciously, had some hidden hand in her sister's sad demise. Sighing heavily, she attended the job in hand, checking the bilge pump. The damned thing just wouldn't work. She called up to Enya, who was on deck. "HOW LONG BEFORE WE GET THE NEW BILGE PUMPS."

Enya peered down through the open hatch. "I'm having an electrician check the wires first. In most cases, it's wet wiring that stops them working."

"And what about the second pump. We did agree it would be a good idea."

Enya, the purse-string watcher on the project, said, "Oi'm not sure about that. The manual reckons one pump is quite ample."

"Safety guidelines weren't very stringent when they built this old gal. The latest edition of Boats and Yachting says a backup bilge pump is essential."

"Martha, what's essential is that we get away before they track us down."

"You don't think Daniel would have told them about the boat?"

"There's no telling what he might have told the Moral Watch before they had him shot. You know what they're capable of."

Martha sighed, "Okay, when's that electrician getting here."

"Supposed to be here this afternoon."

Alan thought DCI Lynch had been slack in not making Daniel's flat part of the crime scene, by extension. Frank Prime had given it the once over, merely as a formality, to tick that particular box. Alan realised it could be a total waste of his and Alistair's time but, in his mind, it still had to be done. "Have you any idea at all about who murdered your son?" Inspector Dymond asked, rifling through the kitchen drawers.

Alistair paused from checking under the kitchen sink, "I bet it had something to do with him uncovering that burial site."

"But anybody who had anything to do with that would be long dead. So why would the killer commit murder over it now?"

"I've been thinking about that a lot. Maybe the killer is a descendant of someone involved with the workhouse."

"I suppose it's a possibility."

Alan got an idea. The Inspector, grabbing his phone scrolled through his contacts till he came to Alisha. When she answered, he said, "Lish, Alan here. Are you still delving into the Church archives?"

"Yes, but you're not supposed to be contacting me."

"Never moind about that. Find out about anyone working at the workhouse was charged with any offences."

"What sort of crimes, Alan?"

"Oh Oi don't know. We're looking for someone who moight have been wrongly accused or who someone else thought they were innocent."

"Alan, you're still working the case?"

"Just follow it up. It could give us the motive we're looking for."

With the call ended, he resumed his search, in Daniel's bedroom.

Alistair said, "Oi'm going to have to sort all this out. But Oi can't deal with it yet.

Alan, checked the wardrobe, a bedside table and a dresser, then he looked under the bed. Apart from slippers, some old trainers and an accumulation of dust, there was a shoebox, just out of reach. "Can you get me a broom?" he asked.

"Why. What have you found?"

"Don't know yet. Can't quoite reach."

"I'll be looking in the cupboard then."

Alan reckoned it was probably nothing, but he had to check.

"Here, this should do," the ex-headmaster said, passing the broom handle first.

"Nudging the box closer, Alan grabbed it and placed it on the bed. The Detective, removing the lid, lifted out something wrapped in a piece of rag.

Alan undid the old tea towel and found himself staring at a gun."

Alistair eyed the pistol, "Whatever is that doing there?"

Alan knew he'd have to report it. But how the hell would he explain his presence in Daniel's flat?" He just stood there staring at the weapon. It was a Glock 17 nine millimetre pistol, the same sort as that used in the murders. A chill shot up his spine. Had he happened upon the missing murder weapon?"

If so, what was it doing in Daniel's room? Unless Daniel was the murderer? But that was unthinkable. Turning to the waxen-faced father, he said, "Did you know he had a gun?"

"No, of course not. My son never mentioned it."

Alan thought for a minute. Then he grabbed his phone. "Alisha, Oi need to come and see you."

"Why?"

"Can't talk about it over the phone."

"What are you up to?"

"Let's meet at that pub near your place."

"The Dog and Hounds?"

"Yes. That's it. Say in one hour."

Finishing the call, he said, "Mr Bevis, this flat is now a crime scene. So I have to put the gun back for forensics when they arrive. So Oi'll be taking you home now. Looking Alistair in the eye, he said, "You mustn't mention the gun to anybody. Right?"

"Why's that?"

"Because we don't want the killer to know that we've found it."

"You don't think it was Danny's gun then."

"Oi don't rightly know. But Oi believe that someone, maybe the killer, planted it there?"

"All right, Inspector, my lips are sealed."

Chapter 30

Beau Durand couldn't see anybody about in the old boathouse. The yacht was in a small dry dock, a stone pit that the boat sat in while undergoing repairs. He saw a gangplank and walked onto the ship. Beau called out, "Ms Swanson, are you here?"

A disembodied voice called out. "I'm down here, in the bilge. Is that the journalist?"

"Yes."

"Right. I'll be up in five."

Some interesting things had come to light about the mass grave. Now the reporter hoped to learn more.

Martha, clad in oily dungarees and baseball cap looked at her visitor. He seemed a bit ungainly, leaning over the side of the hull.

Beau, turning to face Martha, extending his hand in greeting. "Do you think there's a link between the tragic death of your sister and the old workhouse at the nunnery?"

Martha said, "It's possible, I suppose. Like all the mother and baby homes run by the Church, conditions in Ilfracombe had been primitive. The girls were denied basic medical care and refused painkillers for even the most difficult birth."

"Why were the overseers so cruel?"

Martha said, matter-of-factly, "Because the pain was 'God's punishment for your sin'. The Moral Watch made sure that was understood."

Beau queried, "Are you saying the Church ran the workhouse?"

"Of course that's what I'm saying."

"Do you have any proof to back this up?"

"There are records,"

"How do you know?"

I used to work for the Diocese."

"In what capacity?"

"I was their archivist. I came across reports written by somebody who worked in the home. Reports about neglected babies. They crowded the poor little mites into communal nurseries where infection and disease ran unchecked. The writer claimed the result was a shamefully high death rate, with measles and dysentery killing hundreds."

"Can you show these reports to me?"

Martha lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. Words tumbled out with the smoke. "Not now, since I was let go."

"Why were you fired?"

"They called it downsizing. The truth was I knew too much."

"How do you know they still have the reports. They may have destroyed them."

"It's not very likely. The Church is notorious for keeping all its records. You see, they're untouchable."

"If only Oi could get in to see them - photograph them. Then the Church could no longer deny its culpability."

"It's much too dangerous, Mr Durand."

"Can you draw me a plan showing how to get to those archives?"

"Yes, but there are alarm systems and security guards patrolling the area."

Beau looked at Martha. It was unsettling the way she never showed any emotion. "Can you do it?"

"Yes, but ..."

"Leave the details to me."

While growing up in Exeter, Alisha got doted on by her now elderly aunts. She spent more time with one in particular - Auntie Beth - than she did with her parents. She liked Beth's wayward attitude to life and adopted some of her odd ways. One of which was to use a pendulum as an oracle when making difficult decisions. Her aunt showed her how to interpret the swinging crystal wand

attached to a delicate gold chain. Alisha wrote down the question, 'Should I Break into The flat and find the gun?'

The pendulum began swinging in a clockwise direction, over the piece of paper. But then, as though changing its mind, it spun in the opposite direction. It was a 'NO'.

She then asked it if she should report the weapon without breaking in. This time the pendulum kept to a clockwise orbit. Now the question was, how?" The crystal wand couldn't help with open questions. Then the answer hit her. She just had to tell Lynch that an anonymous caller told her where the gun was. He probably wouldn't believe her, but that would be his problem.

When the laughing died down, during the morning briefing, Lynch said, "Copperwaite, do you expect me to use our valuable resources on what some nutter told you?"

Alisha countered, "You lot may think it's a joke but what if the gun is sitting there, under the bed, like the caller said, the very gun we've all been looking for."

Lynch said, "Frank, you and your people went over the flat didn't you?"

"Yes, Guv."

He turned to Alisha, "Don't you think, if there were a gun there, DI prime would have discovered it?"

"If the place had been searched thoroughly, Sir," she answered.

He turned to Frank again. "Frank, did you search the flat thoroughly."

"Yes Guv," he lied.

Daryl, smirking, turned to Alisha, "Now let's get on with some real police work."

She answered, "Foine, sir. I've told you what happened. The ball is now in your court."

Lynch realised she was right. He also knew Frank Prime's reputation for cutting corners. But his pride wouldn't let him admit it.

Prime was looking unusually sheepish and kept a low profile for the rest of the briefing.

Alisha, frustrated, didn't know what else to do to get the arrogant prick to take notice. She could go over his head, but that would probably backfire and have her directing traffic for the next six months.

As the team dissembled. each going off to carry out their tasks for the day, Lynch grabbed Prime. "Stay behind. We have to talk."

With all the other officers gone, Daryl pointed at Frank saying, "I don't want to end up with egg all over my face, so I want you to be straight with me. Did you do a thorough search of the flat?"

"It wasn't a crime scene, Guv. Bevis got killed at the other place."

"I'm acutely aware of that. Now you and I know you're a lazy bastard at times, and you cut too many corners. Did you cut corners when searching that flat."

"I wouldn't say that, Guv."

"Let me be more specific about your search. Did you or your team look under the bed."

Prime shrugged, "I can't remember."

"Jesus Frank. If there is a gun under Daniel Bevis' bed, I'm going to look a right prat."

"Course there's no fucking gun there."

"I don't think there is either. But take DS Copperwaite and go and have a look."

"I don't think it's a good idea me working with that uppity bitch."

Daryl grinned, "But she'll be the one with egg on her face when she realises there's no gun."

"Yeah, that will put her in her place."

King Real Estate and Commercial Leasing had graced Ilfracombe Hill Road for over 60 years, as the plaque proudly displayed. Fresh from the morning motivation meeting Joel, as yet unlicensed but full of promise, burst into enthusiastic action as the man and women entered his domain. Going straight into his well-rehearsed mantra, he enthused, "Good morning. Welcome to King Real Estate. How may I help you?"

"By getting your boss, son," DI Prime said.

With the smile still fixed firmly in place, a deflated Joel said, "Oh, yes. Wait a moment, please. He went away and came back with a sandy-haired man of middle age, sporting a Navy blazer, with an Exeter Yacht Club badge, over a crisp white shirt. "How can I help you?"

Prime flashed his warrant card. "You have a Daniel Bevis on your books. He was renting one of your flats. We want to enter the premises. So we need a key."

"Let me check for you,"

He turned to Joel. "Get me the rentals ledger."

"The address is 14 Bay view Avenue," Alisha added.

The agent said, "Ah yes. Here we have it. Wasn't he the murdered man. I read something about it in ..."

"Just get me the key, sir," Prime pressed.

"Yes, of course, officer. Just sign here please."

The closer the pair got to Daniel's flat, the deeper the lines of concern became etched into Frank's face. Knowing he hadn't looked under the bed gave him cause for alarm. What if there was a gun there and he'd missed it in his cursory search of the flat?

Alisha, on the other hand, a picture of confidence, couldn't wait to claim her prize. They entered the flat and went straight into the bedroom, where she ducked down and looked under the bed, reached in and pulled out the shoebox. Placing it on the bed cover, DS Copperwaite revealed its contents. She tried not to gloat as Frank Primes eyes nearly popped out of his head.

She smiled sweetly. "Well Frank, it looks loike my anonymous caller got it roight."

Wishing he didn't have her with him, he expounded, "Fuck me! There is a gun."

"Yes Frank, how could you have missed it with your thorough search 'n' all?"

"Bitch," he snarled through gritted teeth.

"Enjoying her moment, Alisha said, "Better call it in. This place is now a crime scene."

Chapter 31

In his 'Work House of Horrors' the leading article in the Exeter Chronicle, Beau pointed out that a close source to the Church revealed dark secrets about the way they treated women and children.

He wrote:

Not only were the destitute confined in the workhouses, but the authorities also used the institutions as a dump for the mentally and chronically ill, and the disabled. Dormitories regularly held 70 people, with beds of small bags of straw laid side by side. Heating was minimal, even in the depths of severe winters. Paupers' heads were shaved to protect against lice, and meals, such as they were, were often eaten in silence, overseen by the ever-present 'Moral Watch'. On the upside, could venture outside to look for work or attend a wedding or a funeral. But only with the permission of the master. They could also discharge themselves at any time, but this generally happened only when a relative found them a job. However, the insidious workhouse system eroded all human dignity. Even inmates were forbidden to do 'useful' work. Since cheap workhouse labour would undercut prices and lead to lay-offs, the paupers were given profitless, arduous tasks such as breaking granite with a mallet or grinding animal bones by hand. Women scrubbed the floors or sewed sails.

Beau finished the damning article with:

During all the years the workhouse occupied the nunnery The Catholic Church oversaw and profited from its operations. The Diocese always put a nun in charge, who regularly reported back to the Church Administrator.

Cardinal Welling, having read the article, found himself sweating more than usual. He had never been a robust man. As a Jesuit missionary, he had gotten caught up in the civil war in Mozambique, where Friar Welling caught malaria. Now, in his late 70's, he was ready for retirement. The last thing the cleric needed was a scandal in the Diocese. He summoned Barnaby Rudge to his chambers for a private meeting.

Barnaby, having also read the article, had a pretty good idea why His Eminence had ordered him. Any whiff of impropriety by the Church and the media became a wolf pack out for blood. There was only one person he knew of who had access to the damning reports and who had an axe to grind. Bracing himself, Barnaby entered the inner sanctum which had enough chilliness about it to make a freezer jealous.

The Cardinal, his back to Rudge, said, "I take it you are versed in Mr Durand's latest outrageous accusations." Spinning round to face the crouching lackey, he fired, "So what are you going to do about it?"

"Me! Nothing! I mean, well, the Press is a law to itself. How can I control them?"

The cleric looked down on the quivering excuse for a man. "It's your job to shield the Church and me from any embarrassment, so I don't want your excuses. I want results. Find out who is leaking this garbage to the Press and get them to stop. Do I make myself clear?"

"As a bell, your Eminence, but..."

"No buts Mr Rudge. Action."

As Allard Elwood bagged the pistol, Lynch said, "So, is it the murder weapon?"

The forensic scientist grinned, "I'm good but not that good. I'll need special equipment to tell me that. Mind you, inspector, it's certainly the same type of gun."

"Right. Let me know as soon as you do."

"Of course, Chief Inspector."

Alisha seemed to have a permanently fixed smugness about her. Lynch was determined to wipe it off her face, but he had to step carefully. Leaving the scientists to comb the flat from top to bottom, inch by inch looked for DI Prime. Finding Frank smoking outside, he strode up to his subordinate. "So you did a thorough search, Inspector?"

"I did what was required, Guv." Frank defended.

Lynch poked his right index finger into Prime's chest. "You were required to find any evidence. If we'd had the gun before we might have solved this bloody crime by now."

"The gun must have been planted after we searched."

Daryl glared at him. "How the hell would you know. You didn't even look under the bed."

"We did. it wasn't there."

"Do you take me for a fool. Now Copperwaite is walking around like a pussy who's found the cream. Jesus, I may even have to apologise to her. And it's all down to your laziness and incompetence."

"Guv, that's not fair..."

"I'm sick of carrying you, Frank. You may be family, but my support can only go so far. I want you out of homicide."

"But, Guv ..."

"Either you ask for a transfer, or I organise it for you. Your choice."

Beau felt like he spent half his life waiting for people to turn up. Oh well, it seemed to be part of a reporter's lot. It wouldn't be so bad if they showed up on time, that's if they even kept their appointments with him. True, in his line of work, he had to deal with some unsavoury and downright dodgy customers at times. This occasion was one of those times because he had made an arrangement to meet with a local undesirable called Edmund Sunderland. He hadn't come across him in the 'Yellow Pages' under 'V' for the villain, but he did hear about him on the news-hound hotline. The bloke was a thief who specialised in breaking into and entering religious buildings. He seemed made to order for what Beau had in mind.

Edmund Sunderland suffered from a not uncommon disease called 'siticus arsicum' which, briefly translated means he found it challenging to get off his arse. To be truthful, he was still a bit shaken by his gruesome discovery in the nunnery. So when he received a call from the journo, his first response was to tell Beau to "fuck off!"

Beau, used to such responses, said a hundred quid was involved.

Money, a mysterious energiser to the layabout, had him sitting up straight with pricked ears. So what's this job all about?"

"Can't say over the phone. how about you meet me in one hour down near the jetty?"

"Okay, Oi'll listen to what you got to say."

Andrew Spice didn't like Barnaby Rudge one bit, but their destinies seemed to entangled, like conjoined twins. The insipid little man was in Spice's office making new demands. The hypnotherapist argued, "I had no idea that the killer would murder them. Now I have the police all over me. No, Oi won't do it."

Rudge looked around at the office. "You've done very well for yourself, Andrew," the Church registrar said, picking up a silver pen holder. It would be a shame if something happened to tarnish your reputation." He gave a weak smile.

"Oi used my pr, pr, professional skills to lead the three of them loike lambs to slaughter. Oi was responsible for their deaths. Oi can't g, g, go through that again."

Rudge pointed to the folder he had given Spice. "Martha Swanson is too loose-lipped and has to be stopped. All you have to do is gain her confidence and do what you do best. There's only one this time, but we'll still pay the same fee."

"I'll need toime to think about it."

"Time is a luxury we don't have. You have to see her today."

"Today! How am Oi supposed to gain her confidence in such a short toime?"

"She's expecting an electrician to turn up to work on her boat in three days time. Tell her you can be there today. She'll be overjoyed."

Andrew objected, "That's impossible. It means driving over to Ilfracombe and Oi have a full booking today."

Rudge half-smiled. "I'm sure you'll work things out."

Andrew sighed heavily. He just wanted the little toady off his back. "This will be the last toime."

"But of course Mr Spice. The last time."

Chapter 32

A weak sun tried extending its rays to get them to touch the overall greyness. Everything seemed to take on shades of greyness during the Ilfracombe winter, which had come earlier this year. The usually peaceful seaside town, besmirched by a run of murders, on the surface, functioned as usual. But the horrific crimes left the citizens in private mourning. Not so much for the victims but for the community itself, which grieved for its lost innocence. Beau Durand pondered this as he stood out of the shade, encouraging Sol's pathetic rays to warm his spirit. Edmund was late. It didn't surprise him, but it did cause him annoyance. Then he saw the van stop twenty or so feet away. Edmund, wearing jeans and hoodie over a faded Che Guevara T-shirt approached the reporter. "You Durand?"

"Yes, you're late, Mr Sunderland."

"So are ya gonna keep me in after fuckin' school." Then he said, "Tell me about this job before Oi freeze my fuckin' tits off."

"Oi need you to get a file for me."

"And where is this file?"

"In the St Peter's Library archive at the Catholic diocese of Exeter."

Edmund stared at him as though the reporter had just grown an extra head. "No fuckin' way!"

"Oi thought to break into religious places was your speciality."

"Empty churches and nunneries are one thing. But this is where a fuckin' Cardinal lives. There'd be guards, alarms and even fuckin' dogs for all Oi know."

"Only one guard and no dogs."

"Is he armed?"

"Of course he is. What do you expect?"

"Sounds fuckin' risky to me."

"Which is why Oi'm paying you a hundred quid."

Edmund stared at Beau again. "A hundred quid. You've got to be fucking joking."

"Look, Oi'll deal with the guard, okay."

"A thousand but don't kill the fucker."

"Jesus man! Oi'm a reporter - not a hit man. But Oi can't raise a thousand pounds. Three hundred is the highest I can go."

Edmund, short of funds, said, "Alroight, I'm in."

"Deal." Beau smiled, shaking Edmund's tattooed hand.

The old boathouse, Andrew discovered, was set back from the beach, just above the high tide line. A pair of parallel lines ran down to the sea. Andrew realised it was a track that carried repaired boats down to the water. He hefted his toolbox, crossed the damp sand, and approached the building. The door was open. He heard some hammering and gravitated to the source of the noise.

Hearing the gangplank creaking Martha came out of the hatch to investigate, a hammer held firmly in her hand. Seeing the Man coming towards her, she said, "Are you the electrician?"

He grinned. "That's me. Oi believe you have a broken water pump."

"You think correctly," she responded, wondering where he kept his tools? She said, "If you follow me, I'll show you the pump."

Andrew had to stall her. The wiring in her brain interested him, not the installation of the pump. "I'm Andrew. And you would be?"

"Martha."

He looked around. "Your Yacht's a beauty. How old is it?"

"She was built in the 1950's."

"There's nothing loike a timber deck."

"I know what you mean. It's all fibreglass these days."

Sensing he was in no hurry, Martha invited, "I'm about to have a coffee. Can I brew you one?"

"That would be lovely. Just black'll be foine."

As they drank their coffee and chatted away, she relaxed more and more. This effect was necessary for Andrew to use the power of suggestion. He cleverly wove several link words into their conversation. Keywords that when triggered, would cause her to act in a certain way against her will. If he were successful, she wouldn't have any control over her actions. These tags included: Ilfracombe, Springfield, road, 24, 11, at night. Having drained his coffee cup, he said. "It was great, But Oi'd better be looking at the wires."

He wasn't gone more than five minutes before he was back on deck."

"My, that was quick," Martha said, much impressed.

"Oh no, it's not fixed yet. It's an old pump. Oi need special parts for the job. Oi'll be back tomorrow."

"Oh! Can't you possibly do it today?"

"Fraid not my love. By the toime, I get home noight will be coming on. Should be here around 8:30 tomorrow morning."

She was disappointed, but it couldn't be helped.

"You should have seen his face. It was proiceless," Alisha laughed, as she and Alan had a beer together."

"Oi wish Oi'd been there to see it," he grinned.

"His jaw nearly hit the floor."

"So the planned worked?"

"My one did."

He took a mouthful of beer. "What do you mean, your plan?"

"Yours was too risky. Oi had an anonymous caller tell me where the gun was."

"And Lynch bought it?"

"No. But that made it all the sweeter when Lynch saw Oi was right." She sniggered, "Oi'm going to make that bastard eat crow tomorrow."

"Do we know if it's the murder weapon?"

"Should find out tomorrow. But my money's on it being the one."

After a couple of beers, they left the Fox and Hounds and strolled towards his car.

Alisha said, "have you heard anything from Megan?"

"Jimbo reckons Oi should take her on a cruise."

"Is that what you want?"

"Oi don't rightly know. Oi think so but what if she rejects me."

"A luxury cruise would score brownie points in my book."

"You're roight Lish. Reckon Oi ought to go for it."

She turned to him. "Then why the fuck are you hanging around here with me?"

"Oi don't know really."

"Oi do. You just can't let go of the case."

Getting into Saint Peter's Church library was Edmund's most significant challenge to date. Armed with a map of the ground plan of which a red 'X' indicated the position of the archival section, the cat burglar found a suitable window to gain entry. The suction pad with the circular cutter made a hole big enough for him to reach through to access the latch. With the window, open Edmund pulled himself up and soon found himself inside the cold, foreboding building. Using a penlight torch to check his map, the petty thief stealthily made his way to the library door, which had a

burglar alarm system beside it. He hoped they hadn't changed the code since Martha had left. Entering the numbers she gave him he got a green light and heard the satisfying click of the doors unlocking.

Beau had never actually committed a criminal offence before. He had gotten close to the wire at times but had never incriminated himself in an assignment. But using Rohypnol on the security guard indeed came in that category.

Martha told him the lone guard did his rounds each hour on the hour. It took him around ten minutes to do a circuit, plenty of time for Beau to duck into his hut and lace his Thermos of coffee. He hated himself for doing it but getting hold of those records was as precious to him as the gold ring was to Gollum. Armed with such evidence, the fallout for the Church would be massive. No more hiding beneath the priest's skirts. No more local news. It would be hello to Fleet Street, and the sought after Pulitzer. For such a prize, it was worth taking risks. He just prayed that Edmund Sunderland could keep up his end.

Edmund searched the racks, looking for a safe. Martha said that confidential archival material was kept separate, in a small vault with a mechanical combination lock. "Thank God it isn't electronic," he mouthed to the cold, empty building. His father had taught him how to have a safe breaker's ear. In the stark silence, he waited for the click of the tumblers as each one fell into place. Within ten minutes he was in the vault; another five and he had a file box marked 'Work House Reports in his hands.

The guard was still snoring loudly in his hut when Edmund emerged from the side of the library.

"Did you get it?" Beau asked.

"You got my money?"

"Certainly. Now give me the box."

"Money first."

"Oh for God sake here it is. Now the box."

Edmund handed it over. "A good night's work Oi reckon."

"Oh yes indeed." Beau concurred.

"Workhouse of Horrors: How this Medieval Hell of Beatings ... (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1044152/Workhouse-horrors-How-medieval>

Chapter 33

Armed with two first-class tickets for a 12-night Iberian Discovery cruise, Alan tentatively phoned his wife. "How are you, Megan, he asked as soon as he heard her voice."

"Oi'm good, Alan. How are you?"

"Suspended from duties at present."

"How come? What did you do?"

"That doesn't matter. I think we need some time together to sort things out."

"What do you mean, sort things out," She retorted, feeling her hackles rise.

"Oi want to see if we can rescue our relationship."

"Alan, the last thing I want to do is save the kind of relationship we've been having. Improve it yes. And there's plenty of room for that."

"Oi agree me lover and Oi want to do something to make amends."

"Oh! And just how do you think that's going to work."

It was time for Alan's big announcement. He took a deep breath desperately hoping he wouldn't blow this, his one chance. "Oi thought it moight work on the Ocean Countess, as we cruise the Mediterranean, visiting such exotic places as Cadiz, Tangier, Malaga and Gibraltar."

There was stunned silence. Alan didn't know if that was a good or bad thing.

Having done a double-take, Megan said, "You want to sort out our differences while cruising the Mediterranean sea!"

"Oi have the tickets. We sail out on the 2nd. What do you say?"

"Oi say this, Alan, Do you think you can buy me with trinkets? Do you think Oi'm that superficial? Oi'm not some leery teenager with stars in her eyes. You haven't got a fucking clue. Alan, GROW UP!"

FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! He yelled into the dead phone.

Alan Dymond, failed husband, failed copper was how he summed up his life. He felt lost, alone and yes, frightened. The police officer stood in the chilly rain, not knowing which direction to take. His usual escape was to have a drink with Lish, But it was a crutch, and he didn't like crutches. Megan had told him to grow up. She rejected his gift. She made him feel empty; that was if he had any feelings left. "FUCK IT! FUCK HER! He yelled to the drizzly night sky. At some point during the journey to his cold, friendless home, he changed his mind and ended up at Alisha's apartment. The car clock indicated it was 10:22 pm. Too late for a social call. He pressed Alisha's contact and waited with trepidation."

"Alan, what the fuck do you want?"

Yes, what did he want? "Oi spoke to Megan about the trip."

"Do you have to concern me with your marriage problems at this toime of night?"

"She fucking threw it in my face."

"Oi'm sorry to hear that, Alan, but what am Oi supposed to do about it, hold your hand and say there. there?"

Another rejection. "You're right. Oi shouldn't bother you with my problems."

"Are you drunk. Alan?"

"No."

"Well get fucking drunk. Now good night."

For the second time in a week, 24 Wilder Road became a crime scene. The SOCO Daryl Lynch said, "So what's happened in this house of horrors, now?"

The constable to whom he was addressing said, "We found another victim. A murdered woman."

Lynch brushed the constable off and approached Allard Elwood, who, stooped over the bloody body on the plastic sheeting, looked up at Lynch's approach.

Daryl said, "Do we know who she is?"

Allard smiled, "Ah, Chief Inspector Lynch. Welcome to the party. This here is Martha Swanson."

"Cause of death."

"Her throat was cut."

"Change of MO then."

Allard said, "We do have his gun."

DS Copperwaite, now taken more seriously by Lynch, said, "Martha Swanson, she's Flavia Morgan's sister."

They both turned to her. "That's right," Lynch agreed.

"And Enya Woodruff's boating companion."

Lynch addressed Allard. "Do you know what sort of blade the killer used?"

"Not right now, inspector. wait till I've run a few tests." Then he added. Oi'll tell you something though inspector, she was seated when the killer slit her throat."

Looking at the bloody figure laying on the plastic sheet, Lynch cocked an eyebrow. "Oh. And how do you know that?"

"Well, she didn't put up any struggle."

"Oh!

"Which suggests the killer probably drugged her before he slit her throat."

"Drugged!"

"Yes, Chief Inspector, which also suggests this was not some frenzied killing. I'll know more once I get back to the forensics factory."

"Oi'll go and see Enya, shall Oi, sir?" Alisha suggested."

Lynch nodded, "Very well, Sergeant."

Before she left, she said, "Why did she come here?"

Lynch shrugged, "No idea."

"Look, sir, it's been all over the news. The media dubbed it 'The House of Horrors'. A little bit over the top, admittedly. But why on earth did she come here to be killed?"

"Loike I said, Oi've no idea, Sergeant."

"It makes no bloody sense, unless ..."

"Unless what?"

"Unless something compelled her to come here."

"What, by that freak hypnotist?"

"Oi think we should question him again."

"Do you Sergeant? Well, thank you for your opinion on the matter. Just go and see the dyke."

"Fuck you," she quietly mouthed, heading for the door.

Enya Woodruff prided herself on not following trends, but she was hardly a trendsetter. Her unkempt long knotted hair became part of her character. She was low maintenance when it came to cosmetics, a trait that had attracted Flavia to her in the first place. Now there was Martha. She was a different kettle of fish, expressionless most of the time but with a wicked sarcastic wit. She called out to Enya, who she assumed was in her room, "Coffee is ready my lover. Come and get it."

There was a knock at the door.

Who could that be at 6:17 am? She wondered. Upon opening the door, she came face to face with DS Copperwaite. "Oh! What are you doing here."

"The bearer of bad news, I'm afraid, Can I come in."

"Yes, of course," Enya said, standing aside. "I'll get Martha." She was about to go upstairs when Alisha's announcement nearly floored her.

"It's about Martha. I'm afraid she's dead."

Enya spun around. "Dead!"

"She was killed late last night. Oi know this as a terrible time for you, but Oi need to ask some questions."

Enya nodded and sat down, as though in a trance.

"We found her body in a house where four other murders have been committed."

"You mean the House of Horrors?"

"Yes. So why would Martha go there?"

"Maybe she wanted to see where her sister got killed."

"What eleven at night?"

Enya slowly shook her head. "She shouldn't have said anything. I warned her, but she wouldn't listen."

Alisha looked at the shaken woman. "Say anything to whom, about what?"

"Oh, what does it matter now. Martha spoke to that journalist doing the nunnery articles."

"Beau Durand?"

"Yes, Oi think that's the one."

"What did she know that could have gotten her killed?"

"Oi don't rightly know. But she did work in the Church library. She told me he was looking for evidence that showed the Church ran the workhouse and profited from the misery of all those women who lost their babies."

Alisha nodded, "That could certainly be a motive for murder." She grabbed her phone, hit a contact.

A voice said, "CID, who's that?"

"DS Copperwaite."

"Alisha, Niall here. What's up?"

"Get some uniforms over to Beau Durand's drum. I want him brought in for questioning."

"I'll have to run it by the Lynch mob."

"There's no time. Just get Durand."

Niall sat in his chair, stunned. Why the fuck did she want to question Beau? This state of affairs did not bode well. He could just not make the call and say he couldn't reach the reporter, but that would only delay the inevitable. What the fuck had the reporter done? He wondered.

DCI Lynch had something gnawing at him he couldn't put his finger on it. He was on his way to the police station when he realised what was troubling him. It was the plastic sheet that worried him. It made sense that the killer would wrap their victim in plastic so as not to leave any bloodstain evidence. But why leave the sheet and blood there? Unless of course he was interrupted by someone before he could finish the job. Yes, that was the only logical explanation. He'd been surprised by someone and had to leave in a hurry. So who spooked him before he could tidy up? The most likely candidate was a neighbour. In a blinding flash, he knew who it would be - Edmund Sunderland. Lynch, convinced the thief knew a lot more about the house of horrors than he was letting on, was determined to find out. Without thinking, he did a screeching U-turn on Sunnyside road, and skidded on the wet road, straight into the path of an oncoming tip truck. The stringent blast of the truck's horn was the last thing he heard.

Chapter 34

Megan Dymond found it challenging to sleep. She was in the kitchen drinking tea when Judith emerged, bleary-eyed and wrapped in a dressing gown.

"My, you're up early."

"Yes. Couldn't sleep."

"Is something troubling you?"

Megan poured some tea into a cup for her sister. "Alan rang me yesterday."

"That's enough to give you nightmares," Judith said, venom oozing.

"He's bought tickets for us to go on a cruise."

Judith stared at her sister. "You're too smart to fall for that, surely."

"Of course I rejected him, and that was probably a bit unfair."

"You have no reason to feel guilty about him. Not after how he treated you."

"It's not that, Judith. He had known for a long time that I wanted to go on a Mediterranean cruise and he went ahead and bought the tickets."

"Expecting you to go, of course."

"Hoping I would go - more like."

"My God! You're not having second thoughts, are you?"

"Oi don't know. A holiday would probably do us both a lot of good. And he was thoughtful."

"Selfish more like."

"We could calmly discuss the issues."

"You know what he's like. You'd end up arguing and have a miserable time."

Megan looked at her sister. "You've never had a good word to say about him. So he's got his faults, but who hasn't? Maybe I should give him one more chance to mend his ways."

Judith sighed, "If you go running back to him don't come to us when it all goes wrong."

Megan stared at her sister. "Is that what you think. I came running to be protected by my big sister? Oi needed a break and thank you both for providing me support but ..."

"Oh come on! You were at your wit's end when you rang. You needed me, and I was only too happy to support you."

"Then why aren't you supporting me now?"

"I am, but you can't see it."

"No, you're not. This business isn't about supporting me. It's about persecuting my husband." She paused. She hadn't called him that for a long time. Now she was defending him. What the hell was going on?

Alan had taken Alisha's advice and wished he hadn't. With a jackhammer going on in his head and his mouth feeling like a toilet, he staggered to the phone, to shut the bloody thing up. By the time his wobbly legs had manoeuvred him to the annoying deafening device, the phone had rung out. "Fuck!" he expounded, leaning against the wall for support. Then his mobile rang in the bedroom. "Double fuck! He muttered, trying to make it to the phone before 'it' rang out. It did, but the caller had left a message - a missed call SMS from Doreen Gallagher. She'd have to wait until he'd had a least three coffees.

Doreen, shaken and stirred, Not exactly a picture of her usual perfection, stood in front of the evidence board, addressing the troops. She got straight to the point. "DCI Lynch was involved in a fatal road accident last night. He was barely alive by the time the ambulance arrived and died on the way to the hospital."

The stunned silence was deafening as all the brains in the room synchronised, and faces took on an expression of utter disbelief.

"How did it happen?" DS Doherty said at last.

"We don't know the details. It's best that you concentrate on finding our murderer. When I face the media later today, I want something positive to tell them."

"Who's going to run the op now, Ma-am?" Quinn asked, hoping he'd be in line."

"I will be making a decision on that later. "For now, DS Doherty can organise the team," Doreen said. "

As Alan sipped his second strong coffee of the day, his mobile rang again. He heard Megan's voice. With a thumping heart, he prepared himself for more bad news.

She said, "Alan, I've been thinking about your proposal, and I want to apologise."

"For what? Oi probably deserved what Oi got."

"For Christ sake don't play the saint. What I want to say, before I change my moind, is that I accept your gift and think we should take that cruise."

Alan couldn't believe his ears. "That's bloody excellent."

"Don't get too excited. You're not out of the doghouse. This voyage isn't some romantic interlude. But as long as we can calmly work out the next step, whatever that may be, I'm willing to chance it."

"That's splendid news, Megan. We'll play it any way you want." Then he said, "Does that mean you're coming home?"

"You'd better have it ship shape."

It was then that he realised the house was a mess. He steeled himself for household chores, but he needed to get himself ship-shape first.

Being on cloud nine was useful for his feelings but useless for the tasks at hand. First, a shower was in order. But he never made it to the bathroom before the phone rang again. It was Doreen Gallagher. He couldn't avoid her this time."

"Alan, I've been trying to get you."

"What's up, Ma'am?"

"I need you to come to the Nick."

"Why? I'm still on leave."

"Not if you want to head the murder investigation."

Unbelieving, he asked, "What's happened to Lynch?"

"Just get here ASAP, and I'll explain. And don't speak to anyone until you've seen me."

The Clarion screamed out with the front-page headline "THE EXETER CATHOLIC DIOCESE RAN THE HELLISH WORKHOUSE!"

Cardinal Welling's eyes nearly popped out of his head as he read on:

Secret reports recently uncovered show that after the Sacred Heart Nunnery had become a workhouse for poor, destitute women and children, it was still the Church's responsibility. One of the Sisters managed the workhouse, but the rules and guidelines were set up by the Church. The conditions were positively mediaeval with torture as punishment a common practice. Babies not adopted out got taken from their mothers. Many died of untreated illnesses in crowded, disease-infested nurseries. It was considered sweet relief when they died, for both the infant and those looking after them. The Moral Watch, the workhouse warders, said, the deaths were God's way of punishing the mother for her sins.

The cleric threw the paper down in disgust. He phoned Barnaby Rudge and demanded his immediate presence.

Alan couldn't believe it. He stared at Doreen. "How did it happen?"

"The truck driver's statement says that DCI Lynch's car swerved head-on into his path. he had no chance of avoiding the accident."

"So now you want me to pick up the pieces of the case."

"You the best officer I have to do the job."

"You didn't think that before, ma'am."

"Alan please don't make this any more complicated than it already is. This tragedy puts us all in an awkward position, but we have to move forward. My question is are you big enough to put the past behind you and get on with it?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

With the tragic and surprising news about Daryl Lynch and his reappointment as head of the murder team, Alan had forgotten entirely about Megan and the cruise. The gambit of emotions driving him came to an instant halt at the red warning light in his brain. He waited for the go-ahead to show him which direction to take, but it stayed on red. "FUCK IT! he exploded. He had to make a choice. Either he cancelled the trip or gave up the case. Just when he thought the gods were smiling down upon him, he felt he had been shit on from heaven. How on earth could he make such a choice? He phoned the travel agency and found that his holiday could be rescheduled but not for six months. That was all very well, but his wife would be home soon, and he had to let her down again. Another shock hit when he realised Megan was coming back to household chaos. Alan looked up cleaning agencies and hired a woman to deal with it, explaining it had to be that morning and he would be there to meet her.

Alan entered the empty incident room. Everybody was out following up various aspects of the case. DI Dymond, out of the loop, had to find out what his team were doing. Without realising, he had already made his choice, to get an overall view, Alan set about trying to pick up the pieces of the case. He understood what Lynch meant when he said you couldn't mount a horse halfway through a race.

Barnaby wished he'd stayed in his garden tending his veggies instead of going back into the house. Although the Church Administrator had little choice about returning to his home as he needed to use the toilet. But Barnaby didn't have to respond to the red flashing light on his phone, an indication that somebody had left a message. And he didn't have to listen to the saved call. But he did so. Then it was too late. He had to drop everything and rush over to Cardinal Wellings' office. It wasn't going to be good news. It never was when he got summoned at a minute's notice.

He shrunk back in his seat as the apoplectic red hat thrust the paper in his face, "How do you explain this, Rudge?"

He didn't need to read beyond the headline to understand His Eminence's angst. He ventured, "Well, I guess he must have gotten access to ..."

"Fool! I already know that much. Who told him about the Church records? That's what I want to know."

"I guess that it would have been Ms Swanson. But she is no longer a problem."

Erasmus Wellings stared at the hapless administrator, fire in his eyes. "Have you checked the library?"

"No, not yet, Your Eminence. I haven't had ..."

"No excuses. Check immediately.'

"Yes, Your Eminence, Right way," he said bowing and scraping as he reversed out of the Cardinal's inner sanctum.

As Alan drove down his street and stopped outside his home, two things instantly became apparent. The cleaner hadn't arrived, but his wife had. Her bags were still standing on the porch. This situation did not bode well. Tentatively he entered, calling out, "Megan, are you there?"

She emerged from the lounge room. "Of course I am. Didn't you see my bags."

"Er, yes. Oi'll go and fetch them in."

"I left them there because I wasn't sure if I was in the right place."

Here we go, he thought.

"I figured I'd entered a rubbish dump by mistake."

"Oh, Oi can explain that." he said, realising too late that it was a 'foot embedded in mouth' moment.

"It's quite self-explanatory."

"The cleaning woman hasn't turned up yet."

"Oh, so we have a maid now!"

"Just for today, except she isn't here."

"Alan, can you stop stating the obvious."

"Yes. Oi'll bring in the bags."

"I'll put the kettle on if I can find it."

As they drank tea, Megan said, "So where have you been?"

"Oi was called into work."

"I thought Doreen had suspended you for something."

"Doreen wanted to get my advice on something."

"Why would she do that?"

"Lynch was killed in a road accident last noight."

Megan became silent. "Oh, that's terrible. So she called you for advice about what?"

"About who should head up the investigation."

"But you're not a currently serving police officer so why did she do that?"

Feeling the eggshells underfoot, he ventured, "Yes, odd isn't it."

"Not if she wanted you to come back to work."

Feeling the cracking sensation beneath his feet, He responded, "No. She asked who Oi thought should take over."

That made sense to her. "Who did you suggest?"

He didn't mention DS Copperwaite. Best not to bring her into the strange and increasingly troubling line of enquiry. "DS Doherty."

"Oh! Don't think I know him."

"He's one of Lynch's team - a good bloke, though."

"Did she agree?"

"Yes." He added, "I feel Loike Oi'm getting the third degree here. Can we move on to something else?"

She smiled, "Yes. Tell me about this wonderful cruise we're going on."

He would have to break the news to her but now was not the time.

Two uniformed police officers were already at St. Peter's library when Barnaby arrived. A gardener had seen the window with the circle of glass removed and reported it to the police. A Sergeant and a Constable were in attendance. As Barnaby made his way to the small vault in the wall, which had been left open, the constable said, "Sir, this is a crime scene. You cannot enter."

He turned to the policeman. "I know a crime has been committed. I'm the Church Administrator."

"That may well be sir, but this area is off limits."

"Yes, you have already told me that, constable, but I have to check to see if the intruder took anything from the safe."

The Sergeant, hearing the altercation, went over to check. The Sergeant, addressing his subordinate, said, "Now just what seems to be the matter, constable."

"This man is persistent about checking the safe."

"Who moight you be sir?"

"Barnaby Rudge. I'm the administrator. I have to see if any thing's missing."

"Good idea. Go with Mr Rudge, Constable, make a list of anything that's Missing."

Barnaby said, "Thank you, Sergeant. It's good to know that someone's got a modicum of sense around here."

Upon inspection, it was evident to Rudge that the reports were missing.

"Has anything been stolen sir," The constable asked.

Checking the less controversial documents were still there, he turned to the officer. "No. It all seems to be there."

The policeman looked at him, quizzically. "Why did the thief break into the safe then?"

Resisting uttering duh! Barnaby replaced the insult with, "I would have thought a safe suggested there might be something valuable inside,"

"But that's not so in this case, sir?"

"No Constable. It isn't."

Chapter 35

As Doreen faced the sea of journalists, she had nothing new to offer them.

A reporter opened with, "There has now been a fifth person murdered at the same address, and still the serial killer is on the loose. What are you doing about catching this psychopath?"

"This is proving to be a very complicated case that appears to have links with a much older case. We are working with the Unsolved Cases Squad. We believe working together we are more likely to find the motive and the killer."

"Is your slowness in catching the murderer to do with dissent in your ranks," a woman reporter asked.

"There is no dissent in the ranks. Next question."

The woman persisted, "Then why have two of your senior officers been suspended or transferred?"

How the hell did they know that, unless there was a spy in the ranks, Doreen wondered? "Our goal is to catch this killer as soon as possible. If that means reshuffling some of our personnel to get the best results, then that's what we do."

A reporter piped up. "The word is that DCI Lynch is no longer running the case because a lorry hit his car, killing him. Can you confirm or deny this?"

"With deep regret, I can confirm this. We have lost a treasured member of our team, but this isn't going to stop us finding this murderer."

"Who's going to take over?" A tall skinny guy asked.

"You'll find out tomorrow."

Another journalist said, "Why were those people all killed at that address and what measures are the police taking to ensure there are no more?"

"Concerning your first question, at present, we are not certain. In answer to your second question, the house is a crime scene and is out of bounds to anybody not authorised to be there. That means you lot," she smiled.

There were chuckles from within the media group.

After fielding many more unanswerable questions, Doreen closed the conference. All it had achieved was making the police look incompetent.

"I support freedom of the press but not when it comes to the assassination of our Mother Church." Cardinal Welling said, in a rare statement to the media, outside his residence. Silently cursing Rudge for letting him get caught in such a predicament.

"Is it true that the Church controlled what went on at the workhouse?" a reporter boldly asked.

"That was long before my time here. However, as far as I am aware, the workhouse came under the auspices of the 'Poor Act' and was governed accordingly."

"Your Eminence isn't it so that the Church put a nun in charge of the home for the destitute women and children?" another journalist asked.

Cardinal Wellings responded, "I have no idea about what went on before I took over running the Diocese."

It seems from the records that one of the holy sisters took on the

A TV journalist asked, "Is it true that somebody has stolen those reports what recorded went on in the workhouse?"

The Cardinal remained silent for a few moments, completely caught off guard by the question. How could the press have known about that when it wasn't in the police report. "There is no validity in

what you suggest. Now that I have answered your questions this impromptu conference has come to a close."

Rudge, waiting nervously in the wings, didn't like the black look on the Holy Father's face, as he stormed up to him.

"Rudge. My office, now!"

Once they were behind closed doors, he turned on the hapless administrator. "If you ever place me in such an untenable position again you're finished."

"My humble apologies your Eminence. I was trying to track down the reports."

"I don't want your pathetic excuses, man. I want you to find out who is responsible and deal with the problem once and for all."

Many a naturist and sunbather had they known about Safa Hussaini's skin tone, would have been envious. People who knew him thought he must have spent many hours a day working on his tan. But the truth of the matter was that he hadn't spent much time out in the sun in years. Those who knew his name assumed he came from somewhere in the fertile crescent, when he had been born in England, the west country to be precise. A rare genetic anomaly that left him with the dark pigmentation in his skin caused his skin condition. There was little chance of the sun getting to his skin, notably since he spent most of his working hours in the lab carrying out tedious, repetitive tests. In this instance he had spent hours with the Glock 17 handgun used in the murders, to try and determine who owned it. It had its serial number still intact, which made the job somewhat more manageable, in-as-far as he knew who originally purchased it. It was part of a batch sold to the Royal Marines in 2007. It was one of the new guns that ended up at the Bickleigh base.

Safa reported his find to Dr Elwood, who relayed the discovery to DS Doherty, the officer currently in charge of the murder case. He, in turn, told DCI Gallagher, who phoned Alan Dymond. Megan got to the phone first. She called Alan, who came running, and mouthed "Your boss."

The look she gave him was enough to turn Circe to stone.

He took the phone and listened, Then he said, "So it's back to RM Bickleigh."

"Alan, you sound a bit unsure. Is everything okay?"

"Yes, of course, ma'am."

If you're not up to it, I can send DS Doherty."

"No, it's foine. I'll get onto it."

Megan waited with arms folded. "So you're back on the team then?"

"She wants me to follow something up at the Bickleigh Royal Marines camp."

"You know the cruise leaves in under a week."

He smiled, "Of course, Megan. How could Oi forget it."

DCI Lynch's death affected the murder team profoundly, in particular, David Doherty and Quinn O'Ryan.

DS Doherty was bringing the board up to date when DC Dymond walked into the incident room. Only Alisha showed no surprise.

Alan addressed his team. "We're all shocked and saddened by the tragic loss of DCI Lynch, but we have to rise above this and focus on catching this murderer. I think that's the best way we can honour Daryl Lynch." He turned to Doherty. "Bring me up to date."

Doherty, using a pointer, said, "We have a couple of new leads since the fifth murder, that of Martha Swanson, who was killed with a knife like this." He pointed to the photo of the Fairbanks-Sykes dagger, which is standard issue for Royal Marine Commandos. Then, referring to another image, he said. "This is the Glock 17 used in the first four murders. Again, it's a conventional weapon employed by RMCs. So we're going to take a look at the military angle again."

Alan took over. "Thank you, David. Now we need to re-question Lynsey, Robertson and Spice. They know something, and we need to know what it is. So the kid gloves are off, but we still work within the guidelines. DS Copperwaite and I will go over to the Bickleigh base. Now someone needs to grill Beau Durand. I'm sure he was behind the break-in at the Church Library. If possible get him to give up his source of information."

Niall spoke out, "I can follow that up, Guv."

"No, I want you to door knock around 24 Wilder Road. Somebody must have seen something. Quinn can question Mr Durand."

"With respect, Guv, "Niall argued, "I know the way this reporter thinks. Let Quinn do the door knocking."

"Okay. you two sort it out but if Quinn doesn't want to change things they stay as they are, roight?"

"Right Guv," Niall said.

As they drove to RM Bickleigh, Alan felt a distinct chilliness between Alisha and himself. "Is anything wrong," he asked.

"You'd better not use me like a skivvy this toime."

Alan grinned. "No, that won't be necessary."

"Oh! It was necessary, was it?"

"Please don't give me grief, Alisha. Oi'm getting enough of that at home."

"Oh! So things aren't entirely rosy on the Megan front?"

"They won't be when Oi tell her Oi've postponed our cruise."

"So she decided to go then?"

"Yes. And it was just my bloody luck that Lynch died and Doreen hauled me back in to run the case."

"You could have said no to her."

"It's not that easy."

"No, not when you're addicted to the case."

"Just this one. Then Oi'm hanging up my handcuffs."

"Oi'll believe that when Oi see it."

Before they knew it, they came to the turnoff for Bickleigh and drove up to the base. The checkpoint barrier blocked the road. The guard on duty approached the unscheduled vehicle. "Can I help you, sir?" he said politely."

"Yes, you can direct me to Captain Fanning's office?"

"And who are you?"

Dymond flashed his warrant card.

"And why are you here?"

"Police business, soldier. But Oi've been all through this rigmarole before. He's helping us with our enquiries."

While a second guard prevented them from entering the base, the sentry checked a clipboard he got from a small booth. He looked in the car at DI Dymond. "You're not on the visitor's list."

"Well of course not. But Oi needs to speak with him, now." Seeing the young soldiers hesitation, he added, "Phone him and tell Captain Fanning that the police are here in a murder enquiry and would loike his assistance."

Sentry, one turned to guard two. "phone him."

Sentry one stood ramrod stiff, hands behind his back. Sentry two returned and said, "Carry on past the parade ground. Turn left at the flagpole and park in the visitor's car park. You will be met there and taken to Captain Fanning's office." He handed Alan another map. "This will show you how to get to the car park. Make sure you stick to the guidelines."

The guard raised the boom gate, and the police drove through.

As Alan followed directions, Alisha said, "You still haven't explained why you wanted me here."

"Because I noticed the way Captain Fanning looked at you. So you can do the questioning. This new tactic will have him eating out of your hand."

"So, have you gone from master to fucking pimp now?"

He grinned, "Just see it as Inspector training. "

The Red Cap, who met them at the car park, ordered, "Follow me, sir," and led them to Captain Fanning's office. The military police officer knocked and entered. Saluting, he announced, "The police to see you, sir."

The Captain rose from his chair. "Inspector Dymond. What do you want from the Navy this time?"

Alisha took over. "Just your cooperation, Captain Fanning."

Excellent riposte, Alan thought.

She said, "We are investigating some murders in which the perpetrator used weapons issued to Royal Marine Commandos."

Alan produced two photo prints and handed them to the Captain."

Fanning, confused at the police's role reversal, but delighted to be dealing with the delectable Sergeant, looked at the pictures of the gun and the knife. At length, he said, "These are weapons issued to Commando personnel, but I don't see how I can help you."

Alisha said, "We've traced the serial number of the Glock 17. It came from this base."

Captain Fanning smiled. "Unfortunately weapons and other equipment sometimes end up on the black market. I suspect this was the case."

"We want to know who got issued these weapons," Alisha pressed.

Captain Fanning laughed derisively. "I'm afraid this is not some private gun club, Sergeant. Personnel do not have personal weapons."

Alan said, "When Oi did my national service we had our own roifles that we cared for like children. Captain, isn't that the case now?"

"Let me explain myself. What I mean is that, although what you say is technically correct, we can distribute any weapon at any given time."

"Are you saying that you cannot trace who last had this gun, Captain?" Alisha asked.

"We can track it down, but it could have gotten into civvy street via the black market."

Alisha smiled sweetly. "If you will just check please."

"Oh, yes Sergeant. It could take a while, though."

"We'll go and get a cuppa in the Mess then," Alan said.

As they drank tea, Alisha said, "So when are you going to break the news to Megan?"

"When the moment is roight, Oi suppose."

"Alan, the moment for bad news is never roight. You know that."

He sighed. "Megan will probably pack her bags and never come back."

"Alan, she's a lawyer who has lived with you for twenty fucking years. Do you think she can't read you."

"Then why hasn't she said anything?"

"Because she's playing you like a worm on a hook, enjoying watching you squirm. She sees it as your penance and feels thoroughly justified in her actions."

"How do you know that?"

"Because Oi'm a woman, dick head."

"So, as a woman, how you think Oi should play it."

"The way Oi see it, it doesn't matter."

"Why not?"

"Because whatever you do you're fucked."

"Not a very comforting thought, that."

A private entered the mess and approached. "Captain Fanning will see you now,"

"The last person to have the gun was Mason Thomas," The Captain announced, as the detectives sat open-mouthed."

"Well, he certainly didn't shoot himself," Alisha said.

"Then, somebody must have taken the gun from him," the Captain said.

"That would appear to be the logical conclusion," Alisha agreed.'

"Was the knife also issued to him?"

"It does have a serial number on the blade. But, no it wasn't granted to private Thomas."

"Do you know who did have it?"

"Yes. A Sergeant Hunt."

"Would that be Lloyd Hunt by any chance?"

"Yes, that would be him."

Alan rose.

Alisha, following Alan's lead, said, "Thank you, Captain. You've been a great help." She handed him her card. "In case you want to tell me anything that could be pertinent to the case."

As they drove back to Ilfracombe, Alan said, "Roight. The question in my moind is why did Mason Thomas take the gun when he left the Navy?"

"Oi think we need to get Lloyd hunt in for questioning and to get his dabs and DNA."

"Would you say he's our man?"

"Well, Guv, it is his knife."

"Yes. We'll take a closer look at our Mr Hunt."

Niall felt like a door-to-door salesman as he knocked at doors of houses nearby number 24 Wilder Road. He got the sense that most people wanted to help but couldn't offer any useful information. They asked most of the questions concerning what had been going on at that fateful address. His "Sorry, but we can't divulge that," became his mantra at most of the doors. Frustrated and annoyed at not being able to question the reporter, he walked away from his umpteenth door feeling tired and rejected. Then a Mrs Relish asked him in and made tea. In answer to his questions, yes, she had seen Mr Lynsey come and go from the place. She recognised him from his company car.

As Mrs Relish passed Niall a digestive biscuit, she added, "But there was another man who sometimes used the place when the sweet Mr Lynsey wasn't there."

"Do you know who this man is?" Niall asked.

"No me dear. But the droiver has a very noisy old car - one of the old army ones."

His interest piquing, he asked, "Was it a Jeep?"

"That's Roight. It was one of them Jeeps."

"Was there anything distinctive about it?"

"No me dear. Oi don't think so."

He didn't want to do too much prompting, but he needed to know. "Did it have any signs painted on it."

"What loike a badge or something?"

"Something like that," he smiled.

"Come to think of it there was some koind of a badge on the back."

"Did you get a look at the driver?"

"No, me dear. It was dark, you see. But the droiver was wearing some sort of peaked cap. Oi did see that much when one of them automatic garden loights went on."

"Sergeant Lloyd Hunt left the Marines two years back, Guv," Alisha said as she and Alan went over the case files together. He's married, two kids, lives in Chichester Park, number 6 - one of the new subdivisions ."

"Why did he leave the Navy?"

She shrugged, "Don't know, Guv.

"And why did he take the gun and knife with him."

"I thought the pistol belonged to private Thomas, Guv."

"Yes, but somebody put it in Bevis' flat and it wasn't Thomas or Daniel because they were both dead."

"It could have been Spice."

"No, but Oi'll bet he knows who it was."

"Maybe there was a struggle, and the killer got hold of the gun."

"Oi don't think so Lish. There weren't any signs of a struggle at the scene."

"Well criminal records don't show anything."

"family history?"

"Nothing of any particular interest there."

"Okay, forget him for now. Let's pull in Andrew Spice. See if he knows Hunt."

"That means another trip to Exeter."

"Yes. Roight I'll get an interview organised for tomorrow. "

A constable entered Alan's office. "Mr Lynsey is downstairs; Sergeant Doherty wants to know if you want to take the interview."

"Tell him yes. Oi'll be roight down."

"Why am I here?" Lynsey complained after DI Dymond and DS Doherty announced themselves to the tape."

Alan smiled, "That's what we're here to foind out, Mr Lynsey."

"Are you charging me with anything?"

"Why, have you done something naughty?" Alan responded.

"I think I should have my legal representative here."

"Only if we decide to charge you with anything," Alan said, "The reason you are here, Mr Lynsey is because people keep getting murdered in your house."

"I know nothing about it. As you know, I'm away a lot and ..."

Alan shook his head. "Oi don't buy it! Some killer murdered foive people in your house in the last month, and you claim to know nothing about it."

"It's the truth. Besides, I'm moving out."

"Oi can't say that Oi blame you, but it still doesn't let you off the hook."

"Why am I on the hook when I had nothing to do with the murders?"

"Maybe you have some arrangement with the killer."

"Now look here!"

"No. You look here, Mr Lynsey. You know more than you're letting on."

"Right! That's it! I'm not saying another word till my legal representative is present."

Alan handed over his phone. "Phone him."

Chapter 36

DS O'Ryan looked at Beau Durand and asked, "Did you break into the St Peter's Library in Exeter and steal some documents?"

Beau looked at him in mock surprise. "Of course not!"

"We have CCTV footage showing you were outside the library at the same time somebody was burgling the place. So what were you doing there late at night?"

Beau had his answer ready. "Oi'm a reporter. A source informed me there were damning reports there that showed the Church's awareness of the atrocities that took part in the workhouse. I went there to elicit information from the security guard on duty."

"This would be the guard who someone drugged; I'm guessing, Mr Durand."

"I wouldn't know anything about that."

Quinn smiled and glanced over at the constable sitting in with him. "What information were you trying to get from the guard?"

"The layout of the place. Where the files moight be."

"Why were you skulking around outside the library to elicit information when it is freely available at the information desk when the library is open?"

Beau just shrugged.

Quinn said, "Did you have prior knowledge that somebody would break into the library that night?"

"No. Of course not. Otherwise, Oi would have informed you lot."

"What with you being such an upright citizen I wouldn't expect anything less," Quinn said, sarcasm oozing.

Beau smiled, "Well, that's all Oi can help you with, so if you don't moind." He got up to leave."

Quinn switched off the tape and told the constable he could leave.

Beau wore a worried frown, especially as DS O'Ryan was rolling up his sleeves.

"You can't do this."

"Do what?" Quinn taunted. "I just want to let you know about your clandestine meetings with a friend and colleague of mine."

"You were the one who answered his phone."

DS O'Ryan, ignoring him, got into his face. Poking him in the chest, he said. "He's off limits. If you try to contact him again, I'll take your 'Swiss cheese statement and point out the holes sentence by sentence."

"What I said is true, and you can't prove otherwise."

Quinn said, "You know what I think, Mr Durand. You set up the break-in and got a professional cat burglar to steal the documents for you. But first, you needed somebody who knew where the Church kept the files. A former librarian, perhaps. Somebody like Martha Swanson, who subsequently ended up with her throat cut."

Beau could feel the blood draining from his face. Objecting, he uttered, "Do you have any proof of this fantasy?"

Ignoring him and carrying on, Quinn said. "You hired someone to break in, somebody who wasn't opposed to plundering Church property."

"An interesting if fanciful theory, detective."

"A theory that may well turn into fact once we speak with the burglar. Then you could be the star of your gutter rag as an accessory to murder."

Beau, visibly shaken, said, "Can Oi go now?"

"Yes, piss off. But if you try eliciting info from a police officer again, I'll be questioning you again real soon."

Exeter showed many signs of its ancient heritage, which pre-dated the Roman invasion. Exeter was as far as the Romans got, but they had left their indelible mark on the city. Alan was fascinated with the town's attractions, notably the model railway exhibition. But he and Alisha were there on police business, with no time for sightseeing. DI Samuels, an old colleague of Dymond, had set up the interview room. Andrew Spice was looking morose when Alan and Alisha entered. DI Dymond announced their names to the tape and sat down. He launched in with, "Do you know a Lloyd Hunt?"

Andrew looked at them darkly. "Inspector, why have Oi been dragged here?"

"To answer our questions relating to three and possibly more murders."

"We've been all through this before, and quite frankly it's becoming tedious."

"As is finding bodies at 24 Wilder Road, Mr Spice. Now please answer my question. Do you know an ex-Royal Marine Commando called Lloyd Hunt?"

"Oi want my lawyer here."

Alan looked at Alisha. Smiling, he said, "He wants his lawyer. Do you reckon he's hoiding something?"

She played along, "Well, honest people don't need lawyers."

Spice folded his arms "Oi'm not saying another word until my legal representative gets here."

"Fair enough," Alan grinned. "But that doesn't stop me telling you a story. It goes loike this. Somebody wants people dead. This someone has chosen a particular place to kill them. The killing room is in a house close to other houses whose occupants can see what's going on. So the killer wants them to go to his lair quietly and passively. This part of the murderer's plan can prove awkward unless he hires a professional hypnotist who convinces them to go there."

Spice exploded, "OI HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT!"

Alan winked at Alisha. "He said he wouldn't say a word till his brief gets here."

Andrew glared at him, saying nothing.

"Roight, Mr Spice, that's the theory. Now I'll tell you the facts. The first three victims, found in the nunnery, were clients of yours and were susceptible to your mesmerising methods. Secondly, you are a friend of the person who rents the house in which those murders and two others were committed. Thirdly, and I loike this bit best, by your admission, you drove the tenant's car away from his home the night the killer murdered Daniel Bevis." He stared firmly into Andrew's eyes. "It's not looking too good for you, is it. Now unless you can give me a good reason for not making you number one suspect you'd better start cooperating. Or I can charge you with aiding and abetting in these murders and get your brief in for you. But he'd better be a good one to get you out of the mire."

Spice's glossy mask cracked. Beneath it, his bitterness got revealed. "Okay, Oi know Lloyd Hunt."

"There, that wasn't so difficult was it." He paused then said, "Oi'm parched. Would you like a cuppa Mr Spice?"

Spice nodded.

Alan got up. "How about you DS Copperwaite."

"Yes, Inspector."

He turned to Spice. "Did Hunt commit the murders?"

Andrew said, "Oi, Oi, wouldn't know anything about that."

Alan smiled, I'll leave you with DS Copperwaite, while Oi sort out the refreshments."

After Alan had left the room, she said, "Oi didn't know you had a speech impediment."

"It's only mild. It happens when Oi'm stressed."

"It must make it difficult in your profession."

He shrugged, "Oi cope."

Alisha looked him in the eye. "How did you get involved with Lloyd Hunt?"

"Oi said Oi know him. That's all."

"Okay, how did you come to know him?"

"That's classified information."

"What do you mean?"

"It was while he was in the Navy. That's all Oi'm saying."

Alan returned, introduced himself to the tape again, and set down the three polystyrene cups. Taking a sip, he said, "How did Lloyd Hunt persuade you to come over to the dark side. Was it money or did he have something on you?"

"Oi don't know what you're talking about."

"It's usually motivated by greed or fear. Which was it, Andrew? Or was it a bit of each?"

"Oi didn't do anything for him. Oi just know him, that's all." He paused then said, "Now Oi want my lawyer here."

Alan said, "No need for that Mr Spice. You can go - for now."

"It's about toime," Andrew said, rising to his feet.

"We may need to see you again, once we've spoken to your friend."

As they left the interview room, Alisha said, "While you were out of the office, he said something that could be useful."

"Loike what?"

"He met Sergeant Hunt at the Navy base, Apparently there something hush, hush going on and he was involved. He wouldn't say more than that."

Alan smirked, "Oi can't see the Navy using a hypnotist, can you?"

"We don't know what sort of secret stuff went on, but we could put it to Hunt and watch his reaction."

"Okay, let's go and haul him in."

Beau Durand was sitting down at his computer when the phone call came. In retrospect, he wished he'd just ignored it and continued working on with his latest article. But he was mentally wired to answer phones when they rang. So he swiped the screen and listened.

"Am Oi speaking with Mr Durand, the reporter?"

"Yes, who's speaking."

"Oi'll remain as Mr X for the present."

"What do you want. I'm rather busy."

"Oi'm sure you are. Well, Oi've got such hot info on the nunnery it'll make hell seem like a mild summer's day."

"Really," Beau said, assuming another nutter was trying to climb aboard the already over-full bandwagon. "What have you got?" he sighed.

"It'll cost you."

"It always does." Becoming agitated, he said, "Can you get to the point?"

"How about evidence showing the Church was behind getting rid of those babies."

"Oi would have to see the evidence."

"Roight. Meet me at 1 o'clock at the Tides Inn, on Beach Road. I'll be at the bar wearing a camouflage baseball cap."

Beau went back to his article, taken from the stolen records.

I came in pregnant, and the 'Watch put me to work in the nursery,' It was awful. There was no medicine, and the babies were always getting sick. When one of them caught something, they would all get it, and nuns did nothing about it. The worst was the green diarrhoea. It just poured out of the little things. It was so bad that you couldn't even put nappies on them. They just lay there in it.' I was one of the lucky ones. My daughter survived, but most didn't. 'There was nothing anyone could do. The diet was terrible, there were overcrowding and disease, and no doctor to call on. Babies were dying every day.'

He looked at the clock. It was time to meet Mr X. Beau thought it would be a waste of his time, but it might just be the connection he needed to complete his story.

Alan sipped his scotch and rang a number he hadn't used in a long time. He didn't even know if Owen Kennedy was still around. It had been a good ten years since his friend had switched from being ordinary copper to joining Special Branch. He was surprised when he heard his ex-colleague's voice. "It's Alan Dymond here. Oi need some info for a murder case."

"Alan, you old dog. Haven't heard from you in yonks, What are you up to these days?"

"Still a copper in Devon. Look, Oi'm trying to find out about a moind control experiment at RM Bickleigh between two and five years ago."

"That's MOD's province old boy."

"Oi know that. Oi thought you moight be able to check up on someone for me, a civilian who was involved."

"Who are we talking about?"

"Man named Andrew Spice. He's a hypnotherapist."

"Alan, I don't see the Marines using some pseudo-scientist, do you?"

"Who knows what they get up to behoind closed doors?"

Owen chuckled. "It's not going to be easy, and if I'm sprung, SB will ditch me."

"Look, this man is very dangerous. I believe he has led at least three people to their deaths."

"Do you think he's a murderer."

"No, Oi don't believe that. But Oi think he is in league with the killer, who we believe is an Ex Royal Marine."

Owen twigged, "You're talking about the 'Nunnery Murders'."

"Yes, it's my case. Can you help?"

"Only unofficially, if at all. But it would be nice to get some Devonshire fresh air If you can bivouac me for a few days."

"It'll be my pleasure. Thanks, Owen, Oi Look forward to seeing you."

Alan finished his scotch. Megan looked around the door. "Dinner is on the table."

"Be roight there me lover."

She came over to him and hugged him. "Only two more days and we'll be on that cruise. Isn't it exciting?"

"Er, about that. Well, Oi'm in charge of the case again and ..."

Megan backed away. "There's not a problem with going on the cruise, is there?"

"A problem. No, not with taking the cruise. But we may have to postpone it."

She stared at him. "No Alan. You're coming with me on that cruise. No excuses. That's if you want us to work out things together."

"Megan, this is my last case, and Doreen has trusted me with it. We're close to getting a result. Oi can't let everyone down."

"Except me."

"We can go in six months when Oi've retired."

She glared at him. "No, not good enough Alan. The deal was Oi come back to you, and we take the Mediterranean Cruise in two day's time. Now, you either take me or Oi'l I go alone. And if Oi do go by myself, Oi won't be coming back."

Alan, not knowing how this inevitable showdown would play itself out, had imagined that his wife would take his decision badly. But he never thought she would go on the cruise without him. Then Alan said the worst possible thing, under the circumstances. With his size n foot, he filled his mouth. "Megan, this case is of paramount importance to me."

The next few moments of silence was deafening. Alan couldn't take the words back.

Megan felt a pressure building in her. She knew she was about to erupt with Vesuvian effect, with the next outburst her only form of release. She exploded, "YES! LOIKE MY PARTNERSHIP WAS IMPORTANT TO ME!".

Feeling like a circus assistant having daggers thrown at him, Alan cringed away. "I'm very sorry, Megan. Oi didn't mean to upset you. It's just that ..."

She glared at him. "Don't make fucking excuses! Marry your fucking job because Oi'm over it." She slammed the door to seal her argument.

I found nuns' secret grave for 800 babies in Tuam, by ... (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2651484/I-thought-Id-seen-Philomena-And-h'](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2651484/I-thought-Id-seen-Philomena-And-h)

Chapter 37

Beau saw the caller immediately he entered the pub. Beau quickly spotted the man wearing the camouflage baseball cap. One o'clock was a busy time in the pub, but with three members of staff serving the thirsty punters, Beau soon had his beer. Mr X led the reporter out into a small garden, where they could talk in private. There was only one couple outside, and they were much too preoccupied with each other to care about what Mr X had to say. Beau shivered as a chilly wind, blew in from the ocean. Mr X seemed impervious, wearing just a t-shirt and jeans. Beau's attention got drawn to the tattoo on his forearm, which he recognised as the emblem of the Royal Marine Commandos.

"So, what have you got for me?" Beau asked.

"Let's just say that one of the children who managed to survive has an interesting story to tell about her special relationship with the Monsignor who was in charge of the diocese at the time."

"What do you mean by special relationship?"

"It's going to cost you."

"How much?"

"I want the documents you stole from the library."

Beau stared at him. "Just who the hell are you?"

"I'm the son of a survivor. My mother somehow managed to survive the shit, the starvation, the disease those monsters subjected her to as a baby. Somebody has to pay for that. With those documents, I can sue the Church. He paused for effect, then said, "Now do you want to hear my story?"

Beau finished his beer. "Okay, but Oi need to keep a copy."

"Just give me the originals."

"They're back at my place."

"Let's go and get them."

Alan was missing something. It was staring him in the face, but he just couldn't see it. He went back over the notes for the first three victims. There had to be something that linked them together. They'd all suffered from phobias that had severely affected their lives. Flavia Morgan had been concerned about her looks; Grover Birkbeck, his compulsive lying and Mason Thomas suffered vertigo and claustrophobia. Andrew Spice had helped each of them. Alan picked up the phone. "Put me through to DCI Gallagher." Very soon, he heard her voice.

"Yes, Alan?" Doreen said.

"Ma'am, I want a warrant to search Andrew Spice's home and office."

"On what grounds?"

"Because he treated all three nunnery victims. I'm sure it had something to do with their phobias, which had something to do with their childhoods."

"Why do I get the sense you're clutching at straws, Alan?"

"Ma'am, Oi need Spice to cooperate with us. The threat of us turning his office upside down, once we show him the warrant, will have him singing like a bird."

"So you fancy him for the murders?"

"Indirectly but Oi'm bloody sure he's involved and knows who the killer is."

She sighed, "I hope this isn't a fishing expedition."

Owen Kennedy didn't like driving. In Special Branch, a subordinate always drove him around. On the odd occasion, he left London for personal reasons he took the train. This reason was why Owen stood waiting at the Barnstable railway station (Ilfracombe station had been closed since the 70s) for Alan Dymond to pick him up. He looked up at the sign that told him he was in Barnstable. He couldn't believe his luck when his old friend rang. This set-up was just perfect for him. Alan's place would make a great bolt hole until the heat was off. Then he saw a man approach. He wore a broad smile. "Alan Dymond."

"Owen. It's been quite a while."

"So you're a Detective Inspector now."

"Yes. For my sins."

"So, what do we do now?"

"Fancy a drink so we can catch up?"

"Sounds good to me. But let's drop my gear off at your drum first."

"Rather not. The woife is packing to go on a cruise. A taxi will pick Megan up soon."

"Don't you want to wave her off?"

"Rather not. We're nor exactly on the best of terms."

Oh, dear mate. Why's that?"

"Oi was supposed to be on the cruise with her."

"Oh!"

Owen was hungry, so they stopped for lunch at a cafe. As they ate, Alan said, "Don't suppose you've had toime to look into that thing with the hypnotherapist and the Navy."

"Sounds like an unlikely combination."

"Oi know. But Oi think it's the key to unlocking this case."

"How so?"

"Well, there's a link between this Andrew Spoice and the murders."

"Haul him in and grill him."

"Haven't got any proof. That's why Oi need your help. Foind out what you can about a Sergeant Hunt and if he worked with Spoice on the experiments."

"Could be tricky."

"Yes, that's why Oi need your help. You people can open doors Oi can't. So drink up, and Oi'll take you to the Nick."

Owen blanched. "I don't think that's a good idea."

"Why not?"

"I want to keep this strictly between you and me." He stared at Alan. "You haven't told anyone else about me being here?"

"No, but why does it have to be a secret?"

"I have my reasons. If you want my help, you have to play it my way."

"Alroight, I'll play it your way."

"Right. Do you reckon your old lady has left yet."

She had, and Owen went to work on Alan's laptop. As a major in SB, he had a high degree of clearance in MOD affairs. Owen typed his PIN and got a green light to access usually restricted information. A search for Bickleigh RM got him into the base files. He turned to Alan. "What year are we looking at?"

"Let's see now. Do a search for Sergeant Lloyd Hunt."

Owen checked the personnel files. "Ah! Here we have something. Sergeant Lloyd James Hunt served at Bickleigh from 2002 to 2006, when the Navy had him dishonourably discharged."

Alan cocked an eyebrow. "Oh, what did he do?"

"Doesn't have those details in this file."

"Roight, leave that for now. Look for Andrew Spoice."

"He's not personnel. But we could try a search for special projects."

"If they met at Bickleigh Base it would have to be while Hunt was there."

Owen looked up at the detective. "I'd already worked that out for myself." He opened up another page link. "Ah, here we have something."

"What?"

"It's listed under paranormal warfare. It says that some experiments concerning mind control were carried out in 2004."

"Good. It's in our Toime frame. What else does it say?"

"Not much, I'm afraid."

"So it does say something?"

"Wait a minute! This information could be useful. It lists an Andrew Spice as the expert. And, get this! Sergeant Lloyd Hunt was chosen to look after him while on the base."

"Is that it?"

"As much as my clearance will allow."

"Roight."

Toby Bennet didn't give the vagrant a second thought until he saw the patch of blood near the body. As far as old Toby was concerned the man sprawled out on the pavement was either a drunk or a druggie and he wouldn't have paid him any mind except for the ears. Not many people had ears that stood out like jug handles. He'd seen him on TV talking about the nunnery mass grave and all those poor little mites buried there. It was that Durand bloke. He was sure of it. He ought to phone the police, but he tried to avoid them like the plague. But there was that lovely and very sexy policewoman who accompanied him to London. She was the spit of young Ava Gardner. She'd given him her card. He knew he had it somewhere.

Alisha was in the middle of her yoga exercises when the phone rang. Untangling her legs from under her, she made it to the device before it rang out. DS Copperwaite here. Who's that?"

"Toby. Look, I found a body."

Her heart skipped a beat, "Whoa, slow down, Toby. Explain what you mean?"

"You said to ring if I discovered anything. Well, I've found the reporter. I'm sure it's him, with them sticking out ears. Well, he's dead, on the path."

"Where are you, Toby?"

"Morthoe Road, Dunstan Alley."

"Roight. I'll be there shortly."

"Make it quick, love. I'm bloody freezing standing here."

By the time DI Dymond arrived, Alisha had already gotten Jimbo and his team on the job.

"So what have we got?" Alan asked.

Jimbo looked up from the body. "a dead Mr Beau Durand," the pathologist said, flippantly. He added. "Stabbed in the gut. Died slowly while bleeding out."

"It doesn't take two guesses to know who he's been pissing off lately."

Jimbo grinned. "Are you going to bring the Cardinal in for questioning?"

"Very bloody funny."

"Alan it seems that this sleepy little town is becoming the murder capital of Britain."

DS Dymond brushed off the comment and went to join DS Copperwaite, who was talking to Toby.

"DI Dymond. So you're the one who found the body."

"Yes mate. Fair sent the chills up me back."

"And you worked with Grover Birkbeck, your brother in law?"

"Yes. Why?"

"No particular reason."

"Yeah, well it's about time you lot stopped booking innocent people and caught his murderer."

Alan shrugged it off. He'd heard it all before.

"Do you know why jug lugs copped it?"

"Thank you for your help, Mr Bennet. We'll contact you if we need you."

Alan sought out Alisha. "Take the little jerk home."

"Right Guv." Then she added, "This complicates things."

"Maybe. Unless it's all connected in some perverse way."

"Oi don't see how Guv. Someone killed him to shut him up."

"Possibly, but let's not jump to conclusions."

Sergio Colombo whistled as he checked the samples. Being eternally optimistic he was sure that the skeletal remains of the male could still offer up clues as to its identity.

He was interrupted by the presence of Jimbo Barnes.

"Do we know who he was yet, professor?"

Sergio, distracted from his happy refrain, said, "We are aware he was in his late thirties, suffered severe head trauma pre mortem. Stereoscope and radiology reveal that he was a manual labourer."

"How can you work that out from his remains?" Jimbo asked, a puzzled expression furrowing his brow.

Sergio smiled, "You'd be surprised what these bones can tell us. But we still can't pin down his ancestry."

"DI Dymond's not going to be happy. He thinks the identity of this skeleton will help him solve the murders."

"I thought we were working with UCS, now."

Jimbo sighed, "It's complicated. Dymond believes both cases are connected."

"Well, don't tell him. I haven't completely exhausted my bag of tricks yet. There are still some test results I'm waiting for that could reveal this victim's personal history."

"Such as?"

"The teeth, they can tell us all kinds of interesting things, as can the bones. The only injury to John Doe's bones was when somebody stoved in his skull with something blunt and heavy. The absence of any other bone damage suggests he was either rich enough not to have to earn a wage or he was in a profession that didn't require any physical labour."

Jimbo sighed, "Let me know when you have something positive."

After Jimbo had left, Sergio sought out Philip Ross, who Dr Elwood had loaned to the anthropologist, at the scientist's request. He found the scientist peering through a powerful microscope. "Have you completed those hair samples yet?" Sergio asked with some impatience.

Philip turned his narrow, penetrating eyes on the professor. "The DNA only tells us what we already know."

"What about dental records?"

"Not much joy there. No computers back then."

Owen Kennedy looked up as Alan walked into the kitchen. "I found out some interesting stuff old boy."

Alan reached for the jug and filled it with water. "What sort of thing?"

"Our Sergeant Hunt was a bit of a naughty boy."

"Oh?"

"He was given a dishonourable discharge after being charged with the theft of 38 sets of hi-tech night vision goggles. He was found out trying to sell them on e Bay."

Alan, puzzled, said, "it still doesn't explain how he got Spice involved."

"The report states that he had an accomplice who persuaded the quartermaster to hand over the keys to the stores."

"Does it say who it was?"

"The quartermaster didn't know the man. He claims he was drinking with the man in the mess, where he must have handed over the keys."

"Must have! Didn't he know?" Alan queried.

"That's where it all got a bit strange. In the quartermaster's evidence, he said it was like he was compelled to do what the stranger said."

"Sounds loike our Mr Spoice." Alan needed more information to back up his assertion. "Did this happen at the toime Spice was helping the Navy with their moind control experiments."

"All it says is that the Navy was prepared to drop all charges against Sergeant Hunt as long as he accepted a dishonourable discharge,"

"Still, it doesn't explain the strange bond between him and Spoice," Alan persisted.

"Or why, when he had an exemplary service record, in which he had distinguished himself in the most difficult of circumstances, he had so badly blotted his copybook by thieving from the PX stores."

Alan stared at Owen. His blank expression gave way to a sparkle in his eye. "Oi think we moight be looking at this all wrong, What if it was Spoice who was manipulating Hunt and not the other way round. What if he mesmerised Hunt to carry out the robbery after he'd gotten the keys to the PX stores."

"It would certainly explain a few things. But could Spice entice somebody to commit murder by hypnotising them?"

"We need to find an expert to answer this question."

Dr Davis Powell, head of the Psychology Department at Exeter Uni was preparing for his lecture tour when the phone interrupted his packing. "Yes, who is it?" he asked brusquely."

Detective Inspector Dymond. We're investigating a crime involving a hypnotherapist and need your expertise in this matter."

"Yes, well this is the wrong time. I have to catch a plane in two hours."

Caught by surprise, Alan tried, "Are you flying from Exeter International?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Oi'm already in Exeter. If Oi meet you at the airport can you give me foive minutes of your time?"

"Oh, if you insist. Say, one hour at domestic bookings."

Alan parked his car at the airport, which, located at Clyst Honiton, wasn't far from the city. Alan couldn't believe how expensive parking was, but he had no choice. He encountered the professor, leaving the booking desk, and discovered him to be in an irritable mood.

Moaning, the teacher, said, "I intensely dislike this airport. They rip us passengers off by charging us for a plastic bag at security. At many other airports, they provide this at no extra cost. Parking is a shambles. Passenger areas are mediocre, poorly heated and refreshments are vastly overpriced. I couldn't even get a morning newspaper at 1100 in the morning." Ceasing his tirade, he eyed the Inspector. "So what do you want to see me about."

"Oi have a question. "In your opinion, is it possible for someone under hypnotism to be influenced against their will to commit a major crime, loike murder?"

The academic eyeballed the policeman. "This is strictly off the record."

"Of course, Professor."

"Then the answer is yes and no."

"Can you explain that please?"

"Well, of course, I can. For example, there was a television program on which an employee had to stand with one leg on top of a suitcase, on a tall building. Another worker, under hypnosis, was told to get the suitcase at all costs. This action would result in the balancing subject to be pitched, by the case seeking employee, over the side of the building. Later, when questioned about it, he said that he was aware of what he was doing, 'but it did not matter' at the time."

"Are you saying that a hypnotised subject could commit murder because it doesn't matter at the time?"

"Yes, but they could be convinced that they are doing a good thing. For example, subjects could be induced to believe that the target was dangerous and would commit mass murder if not stopped."

"Could the subject be successfully charged with murder if they experienced a distorted view of reality at the time?"

"That would depend on the court's findings; I would have thought, Inspector. And prosecuting the mesmerist would require the jury to not only believe in the power of hypnotism but to prove beyond any doubt that hypnotism took place."

"But that's impossible!"

"Precisely, Inspector. Now I have to catch my plane."

Chapter 38

Although 99.9 per cent of human DNA sequences is the same for each person, there was enough different DNA to distinguish that of Beau Durand and that of anybody else. Because of this Jimbo Barnes was able to isolate foreign DNA from the body. Once analyses was completed, got DI Dymond to come to the mortuary.

Alan looked at the body of the journalist as it lay on the examining table. "So what's new?"

Jimbo looked at the detective. "Broken fingernails and defensive wounds on his forearms show he put up quite a struggle before succumbing to the fatal stab wound. This fight means we were lucky enough to get a sample of the assailant's DNA," Jimbo grinned.

Becoming interested, Alan said, "Do you know who it was?"

"We are aware of who was fighting with him." He paused for effect, then said, "The DNA matches that of the sample we got from the Navy dinner jacket."

"Who's jacket was it?" Alan demanded, fed up with Jimbo's teasing game.

"Sergeant Lloyd Hunt."

Alan stared at Jimbo. Then he said, "Then we've got our murderer."

"Possibly but let's not jump to conclusions yet."

"But if we've got his DNA ..."

"We know they were involved in a struggle. The knife made the defensive wounds, but we don't have proof positive that Hunt delivered the fatal blow."

Alan grabbed his phone. "David, pick up Hunt and bring him in. Oi'll be back in an hour or so."

Safa Hussaini didn't accept Ross' assertion that before computers obtaining dental records from the 1930's was nigh impossible. He was convinced, that with dedication and persistence, he could find

out to whom the male bones belonged. Safa, working late into the night, finally tracked down a dentist who had taken radiograph images of a patient whose teeth matched those of the skeleton. The dentist, a Ronald May of Exeter, had treated a Henry Ross of Ilfracombe when he was eighteen. Safa went home happy but exhausted that night. But he still wasn't satisfied. He needed to find out who this Henry Ross was and why he was buried in the children's mass grave in the Nunnery. The dedicated forensic scientist joined an ancestry Website and began his search for Henry Ross. The dental records gave him the date of birth and address, which was a good start. Parish records showed that he was born in Ilfracombe in 1899. His father was an NCO in the Royal Marines. Henry attended schools in Exeter and Plymouth. He enlisted in the Royal Marines in 1907 and left the Navy in 1934. Henry rejoined as a security officer in the Intelligence Corps, under MI5 and served with distinction, for which he was awarded both the MC and the DCM. That was as far as that line of enquiry took Safa.

He brewed a strong cup of coffee.

He checked an old newspaper Website and keyed in Devon 1930. To narrow down his search, he looked for Ilfracombe at that time. Nothing of any particular importance showed up. So he searched for Sacred Heart Nunnery. Apart from a brief article about it becoming a workhouse, there was nothing. In frustration, Safa keyed in Henry Ross. His eyes nearly popped from his head as he read:

Local war hero dies in an industrial accident.

He read on avidly:

In April 1930, the workhouse, which came under the control of the Devon County Council, was rocked by the death of Workhouse maintenance man, Henry Ross, who had fallen off a ladder outside the building while repairing the roof. His brother Edward, whom Henry had confided in, reckoned it was no accident. Although he had no proof of foul play, he told a reporter from the Exeter Clarion that his brother had been deeply disturbed by what he had witnessed in the workhouse:

Women, many of whom came in pregnant, were put to work in the nursery. Henry said it was awful. There was no medicine, and the babies were always getting sick. When one of them caught something, they would all get it, and nuns did nothing about it. He said his brother, reported his observations to the Administrator at the Exeter Catholic Diocese. He stated that they would look into it, but instead, they just looked the other way. Two days later Henry was found dead at the bottom of the ladder. Edward said the Church spokesman stated it was a tragic accident. Edward wasn't convinced. He went to the workhouse to collect his brother's effects from the tool shed. While there Edward saw the ladder Henry had used. Two of its rungs were broken. Edward, a carpenter, knew a saw cut and he deduced that someone had sabotaged the ladder.

Safa couldn't sleep that night. He couldn't wait to tell Allard in the morning.

As soon as Safa informed Dr Elwood of his discovery, Allard was on the phone to DI Dymond. Alan, having not heard anything from his wife, was feeling a bit sorry for himself when he received the call. DI Dymond, turning the bacon in the pan, grabbed his mobile. "Yes, who is it?"

"Allard here. Look, Safa has made an extraordinary discovery."

"Oh!"

"He discovered the ID of that male skeleton."

"You should be telling UCS, not me."

"Alan, you asked me to keep you informed of any major break-through."

"That was before the mass burial case was handed over to DI Jessie Bull."

"I'll tell her then."

"Good idea." Then he was deafened by the shrill scream of the smoke alarm as his bacon burned to a crisp in the now ruined fry pan.

Allard turned to Safa "Why was he buried at the nunnery?"

"That was a question asked by Edward Ross."

"And?"

"According to a newspaper report, He was told his brother was resting in the chapel, but the body disappeared."

Allard stared at him. "What do you mean - disappeared?"

Safa shrugged. "It was no longer there. Of course, now we know different. But Edward was in an agitated state and demanded an explanation from the Church."

"Did he ever find out what happened to his brother?"

"I haven't come across anything to suggest that."

Knowing how thorough Safa was Allard didn't press him further.

As soon as Philip Ross arrived at work, Allard summoned him to his office. He showed Philip Safa's report. Allard's usual gentle demeanour changed. He pierced Dr Ross with his eyes, fixing with his gaze. "It's amazing what we can find out from dental records."

Ross looked at his boss, wondering where this was going?

"Not only has Safa discovered the identity of our John Doe he knows of his connection with the Nunnery. Now, that's what I call real forensics work."

"So who is he?"

"A Henry Ross. He did maintenance work at the Nunnery."

Ross paled

Allard asked, "Are you all right?"

Allard was talking about his grandfather but didn't know it. "Yes, of course. His name surprised me, that's all."

"Why, is he a relative?" Allard smiled.

"Ross is a common enough name," Philip said, not letting on.

"At least we know who the bones belong to."

"That's good news doctor," Philip managed, unenthusiastically.

"So, today you can assist Safa in finding out who the women are."

Philip nodded, thinking, Dr Hussaini is becoming a problem.

"How's our Guest," Alan said, back at the Ilfracombe police station.

David Doherty said, "He won't sing till his brief gets here."

"Oh, won't he now. We'll see about that," Alan said, walking off to the interview room. David followed and entered the room with his boss.

After dismissing the constable watching over Lloyd Hunt, the officers introduced themselves to the tape. Then Alan said, "Mr Hunt, do you know why you're here?"

"Is my brief here yet."

Alan stared at the suspect. "You're here to answer some questions about the death of Beau Durand."

Lloyd froze. He wasn't expecting this. "Oi know nothing about that."

Alan got closer to the suspect's face. "You may lie, but your DNA doesn't."

Doherty looked puzzled. He wasn't expecting this either.

Lloyd said, "Oi want to speak with my lawyer."

Alan turned to Doherty. "Is his brief on his way?"

"Yes, but he won't be here for an hour or so."

DI Dymond said, "You weren't expecting the reporter to put up a foight, were you. You thought your Mr Spoice had done his job. But Mr Durand didn't go loike a lamb to the slaughter loike the others."

"What others? Oi don't know anything about any others," Lloyd insisted.

Alan said, "So, you're admitting to killing the reporter?"

The suspect glared at him. "Oi'm admitting nothing."

"Very well. Lloyd Hunt, you are at this moment charged with the murder of Beau Durand. Anything you say will be recorded and used in a court of law." Turning to David, Alan said, "Escort him to the cells, DS Doherty. He can wait for his brief there."

The prisoner turned to Alan. "Oi was hired to do it. What if Oi tell you who hired me? Will that help my case?"

"Oi have a pretty good idea who hired you. Oi used to think you were the one who had power over Andrew Spice but now I know it was the other way around."

"It wasn't him."

Alan looked at Doherty. "Bring him back here so he can explain himself."

Lloyd sat down again.

"So who was it?" Alan demanded.

"Oi want to do a deal first."

Alan shook his head. "Oi don't make decisions on deals, but Oi can put in a good word with the Public Prosecutor. But you have to give me the name first."

Lloyd hesitated. He didn't trust the pigs, but he had little choice. "Barnaby Rudge."

Alan wasn't expecting that. He couldn't imagine the obsequious bookkeeper organising murder contracts. But then he'd seen a lot of unexpected things on the job.

DI Bull hadn't been at all enthusiastic when asked to head up the West Country Unsolved Crime Case Squad, but now she led the high-profile mass burial mystery her mood had improved. Having received a briefing on the latest findings from forensics, she was on cloud nine. Addressing her team, she explained their conclusions with renewed vigour, and she set off to confront the Church about Ross' accusations. On route to the Bishopric her phone rang. It was DI Dymond.

"Jess, it's Alan Dymond. Oi think it's toime we compared notes."

"Why's that?"

"Oi think our nunnery murder case and your burial site case is beginning to dovetail."

"Oh! What do you suggest then?"

"Can you come over to Ilfracombe?"

"Not till late afternoon."

"Roight, I'll see you at the nick, then."

Two men, one taller than other, one sporting a moustache, both in smart shiny suits, were waiting for Alan when he got back to Ilfracombe. The desk Sergeant called DI Dymond over. "That pair over there," he said, nodding slightly in their direction, "Have been waiting for you. They won't tell me what it's about, but they look loike heavy duty official types to me."

Alan approached the seated men. They immediately stood. Moustache said, "DI Dymond,"

"Yes. Who are you?"

Ignoring his question, Moustache said, "Where can we talk in private?"

Alan led them to an empty interview room. They entered and closed the door.

"Now what is this about?" Alan asked.

"Do you know an Owen Kennedy?"

"Who are you, people?"

Moustache flashed an ID that read the Internal Affairs Bureau.

"Why is the IAB inquiring after one of their own?"

Moustache repeated, "Do you know Owen Kennedy?"

"Yes, Why?"

"When did you last see him?"

Alan had a sneaking suspicion they already knew the answers. "For the record, Oi saw him last noight. He was staying at my place."

"Where is he now?"

Alan shrugged. "Oi don't know. Oi've been at work all day." He paused, checked his watch, and said, "I have an appointment with another officer, so if we're finished here Oi need to be going."

Moustache handed him a card. "Contact this number as soon as you see him."

"Why are you after him?"

Moustache tapped the side of his nose. "Need to know only." he then said, "Why did he come to see you after all this time?"

"Oi needed his advice on something. He said he needed a break. That was it?"

The shorter man said, "What did you want help with?"

Alan stared at him. "Need to know only," he said with suppressed smugness.

DI Dymond had never met DI Bull, despite them both being officers in the Devon Constabulary. She wasn't like the beautiful blonde bombshells that headed up UCOS in 'New Tricks' She was shorter, dumpier and had permed grey hair. Alan extended his hand. "So we meet at last," he laughed.

"You make me sound like some villainous adversary from a bad B-movie," she smiled. Then she said, "So why are we having this meeting?"

"Because we now have a reliable connection between your mass grave and the motive for the nunnery murders."

"Oh! Tell me more."

Alan regaled the story of the Ross brothers; Henry's death; evidence of foul play; and the disappearance of the body,

She interrupted, "Dr Barnes has already told me this. You mentioned the motive for the recent murders."

"That's roight. We believe a descendant of this Henry Ross has been looking for descendants of the people he thinks were behind his brother's alleged murder and subsequent cover-up."

"Do you know who?"

He shook his head. "We have a couple of suspects, but we haven't found any links with our Henry."

She looked at him quizzically. "So what is it that you want from me?"

"Get your people to focus on this revenge motive and let me know the moment you find anything."

"And you let me know anything new concerning the burial site."

They shook hands. Then Alan invited Jessie Bull to the canteen for a coffee."

The grey Ford parked just across from Alan's house stood out like a sore thumb. Alan parked his Subaru and walked over to the parked car. He tapped on the driver's window, which slid down. Staring at the two occupants, Alan flashed his warrant card, "Special Branch must have a bigger budget than ours to be able to pay you to sit here and do nothing all day."

The driver brushed some crisp crumbs off his protruding stomach. "Just fuck off and let us do our work. And don't bring attention to us, you fucking country bumpkin."

"You moight as well stand outside with a big SB sign on you, for all the good you're doing." He tapped twice on top of the car. Well, Oi'm going into my comfortable home with all the mod cons, so good luck freezing your balls off out here."

Once inside his home, Alan checked for bugs. There was nothing visible but Alan knew with the latest technology they could be challenging to spot. There was no sign of Owen, but that was no surprise. His belongings were still there, so he intended to return unless he'd gotten wind of Internal

Affairs on his trail. He had no idea what they wanted Owen for, but the SB officer should have come clean with him. Alan felt like a patsy, wholly taken in by Owen's helpfulness. People sometimes took advantage of his general good nature, but this went beyond the pale. He was sorely tempted to phone Owen and give him a piece of his mind. But it was best if he just distanced himself from the man and let IA take care of it. He wasn't going to set Owen up, but he wasn't going to warn him either.

Just then there was a knock at the back door. Nobody ever came to the back door at night, so it had to be Owen. Alan answered the door and stared straight at his friend. "What the hell is all this about?"

Feigning ignorance, Owen said, "What do you mean."

"Why did your IA people question me about you?"

Owen stood wide-eyed. "Christ! what did you tell them?"

"How could Oi tell them anything? Oi have no idea why they're after you."

"That's for the best. I didn't want you getting involved in my problems. I just needed a bolt hole for a couple of days, to get my head together." He made to push past Alan, but the detective held his ground.

"Well, you're in my home. The spooks are waiting outside. So I am bloody well involved."

"Okay Alan, I'm sorry. I just need to collect my things, and I'll be gone."

Alan shook his head. "If Oi let you go they'll charge me with being an accessory. So tell what Oi would be an accessory to?"

Owen knew that any altercation would bring the IA officers into the house. "All right I got caught taking kickbacks. Now please let me pass."

"On one condition. You go out the front door."

Owen stared at Alan. But they'll catch me."

"Do you think you're going to get very far. Best to give yourself up and face the music."

Owen hesitated. "I need my iPad. It's got important stuff on it. I'll stay here while you get it."

Alan thought about it. It seemed the easiest way to get the fugitive out of his hair. "All roight. But you'd better stay here, moind."

"I won't move."

Alan returned with the laptop and handed it to Owen. "Now piss off and don't come back,"

"Thanks, mate, I won't forget it."

DI Dymond felt grubby. He never dreamt he'd be helping a fugitive keep one step ahead of the law.

He headed for the front door when he noticed the mail on the doormat. Amongst the usual junk mail was a postcard - from Megan. Alan's spirits lifted. The short scribbled message read:

Hi Alan, I hope all is well. I'm having a well-needed ball. The tough bit is having to push away all these Latin lotharios. See you when I get back.

Megan.

There were no love or best wishes. Still, it was a start.

There was an insistent knock at the door. Alan opened it and faced the two SB officers.

"Has he been here?" the overweight one asked.

"You've just missed him. He shot in, grabbed a few of his things, and left."

Fat gut glared at Alan. "Why didn't you let us know?"

"Jesus man. He only just left. That's why Oi was near the door."

"Where'd he go?" number two asked.

"How would Oi know? But you'd better get after him. There's no point hanging around here now."

Fat gut said, "Search the house." His colleague jumped to it."

Alan said, "Moind my model railway while you're upstairs." He added. "He's not here, and he's not coming back."

The SB minion said nothing until his subordinate emerged, shaking his head. Then he said, "Which way did he go?"

Alan indicated, "down the path and through the back gate that leads to a meadow. That's all Oi know."

Fat gut turned to the lesser minion. "Go and see where that meadow leads to; I'll meet you round the front."

"Moind my turnips out the back as you go."

They left without a by or leave. Alan was only relieved they had gone.

I found nuns' secret grave for 800 babies in Tuam, by <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2651484/I-thought-Id-seen-Philomena-And-I-nuns-secret-grave-800-babies-By-Martin-Sixsmith-exposed-Sisters-sold-children-fallen-girls.html>laced the two SB officers.

Chapter 39

Andrew Spice came from what became known as a dysfunctional family. His early life experiences left him bitter and cynical. With an alcoholic father whose brain got rotted by neat scrumpy and his mentally challenged mother, young Andrew had a difficult start to life, which left him with a nervous stutter that cruel children thought great fun to imitate. He hid so deep in his shell even a hermit crab would have been impressed. If it weren't for the kindly Mrs Dickens, a teacher at his school, taking him under her wing with private tutoring, young Andrew would have remained illiterate. But she saw something in the deeply disturbed boy, and little by little he developed more confidence. In time even his stutter became just a slight impediment. In his mid-teens, he left home to seek his fortune in Europe. He lived in Italy with restaurant owners from whom he learned to be a chef. One night they took him to a stage show in which a hypnotist made people do odd things. Andrew sat raptly and a little envious. The mesmerist, a picture of shining confidence, had his subjects do his bidding. Andrew knew then how he wanted to live his life. He pondered these things as he, once again, waited in the interview room, for his interrogators to turn up.

DI Dymond and DS Copperwaite entered the room, introduced themselves to the tape, and sat opposite their suspect. Alan commenced the interview at 6:10 am, much to Andrew's displeasure. "How did you come to meet Sergeant Lloyd Hunt. Mr Spoice."

"Oi'm not saying a word till my brief gets here."

"Oh come on, Andrew, we're just having a little chat."

The suspect remained tight-lipped.

Alan continued, "At first Oi thought it was when you carried out the experiment at the Navy base but it was before that, wasn't it?"

"No comment."

"Then Oi realised before you became a hypnotist you took an interest in motor sport. In fact, you participated in a few rallies, as Lloyd Hunt's navigator."

Andrew remained tight-lipped

"You and Lloyd became good friends. Then he joined the Marines, and the two of you lost touch. So what was it that led you to become a hypnotist, Mr Spoice?"

"No comment."

Alan turned to Alisha, "They love saying that, don't they?"

Back to Andrew, Alan said. "Oi guess you did that because you wanted power over others. All your life you'd been pushed around but becoming a hypnotherapist changed all that, didn't it?"

Unable to help himself, Andrew burst forth, "What Oi do helps people overcome their fears."

"Such as the fear of walking into a trap," Alisha commented.

"What are you talking about?"

Alan sneered, "Come on Andrew, we know you enticed many people to their deaths at the hand of Sergeant Hunt, your good friend."

Andrew stared at him, wide-eyed. "No! You've got it all wrong."

"Give us your version of events then."

"Sergeant Hunt had nothing to do with it."

"So who did then?" Alan pressed.

"No comment."

Just then DI Dymond got word that Laurent Michel was demanding to see his client. He turned to Andrew Spice. "Your brief is here, so you'd better come up with a good story to entertain us with when we return."

Laurent Michel wore a cheeky smirk when the police officers walked back into the interview room. Addressing DI Dymond, he said, "My client tells me you are charging him with mesmerising people to death."

"He hasn't been charged yet,"

"Then he's free to leave."

"When he's helped us with our enquiries."

"He has nothing more to add, Inspector."

Alan, ignoring Michel, said, "Mr Spoice how can you be sure that Mr Hunt didn't commit the murders?"

Michel showed puzzlement.

Alan smiled, "It's something your client was telling us before you arrived." Back to Andrew, he said, "The only way you could be so certain Hunt isn't the killer is if you witnessed the murders being committed by someone else."

"I, I, d, don't know. I, It's just that Oi know him and he's not a murderer."

"Oi beg to differ, Mr Spice. As we speak your good friend, Mr Hunt, is sitting in a cell waiting to go on trial for murder. How do you explain that?"

Michel became agitated. "My client knows nothing about that."

"That may well be so, but he certainly knows a lot about the other foive people killed by Mr Hunt." Addressing Andrew, Alan said, "We are aware that you treated the first three victims and that they were susceptible to your mesmerising methods. We know you are friends with Harry Lynsey, who rented the house where these foive murders took place. We are aware you were at his home the noight Hunt killed Daniel Bevis. Furthermore, Mr Spoice, you are a good friend of Lloyd Hunt, who's gun and knife are known to be the weapons used in the commission of these crimes."

"That's all only circumstantial, inspector," Michel smiled.

"Mr Spoice, there's enough circumstantial to put you in the frame. Now if Mr Hunt didn't do it and you know that, who did?"

"Really inspector how could my client possibly know that. Not only is he a 'mesmerist' are you now suggesting he has clairvoyant powers as well?"

Alan, ignoring the sarcastic barb, said, "Mr Spoice do you have the skill to mesmerise people?"

Michel didn't like the change of tact.

"Of course. Yes,"

"You make them do things they wouldn't ordinarily do."

"Yes. That's right."

"Do they have any choice but to obey your commands?"

"No."

"Did you tell Flavia, Homer, Mason, Daniel and Martha to go to 24 Wilder Road?"

"Why would Oi do something like that?"

Alan stared at Andrew. "They went loike lambs to the slaughter. Now tell me this. Why would Daniel Bevis and Martha Swanson go to that address willingly, knowing it was where the nunnery murders took place?"

Andrew shrugged. "Oi have no idea."

"Unless they were mesmerised, which is where you come into the picture, Mr Spoice."

Michel jumped up. "Right, that's enough. My client has answered your questions so unless you are going to charge him with something he is leaving with me now."

"Regretfully lying to police is not grounds for locking you up, Mr Spoice. But mark this. When we found the murderer, and we will find him, I will find out the part you played in all this. Then we will be charging you as an accessory to many murders."

Michel turned to his client. Come on; let's get out of here."

Safa, having succeeded in working out the identification of the adult male skeleton, decided to try the same methodology on the female skeleton teeth. The scientist, drawing on the vast dental database on the computer, tediously went through the lists. Starting with Devon, he checked all local records as far back as the 1930s. There were fewer dental practices back then, which made his task a little easier. So engrossed was he that he didn't see Philip Ross approaching.

"Come on Safa. It's time for lunch."

The scientist looked up from the database, "I think I'll stick with this for a while."

Philip stared at the screen. "That stuff will drive you mad. You need a break. We can pop out for a Chinese."

"No, you go ahead. If I can find out who those women were, we might just see why they got buried with the babies."

That was what Philip feared. He had spent the previous evening with Safa, to find out more about him. Philip found his colleague to be a self-righteous prig to whom he wouldn't usually have given the time of day. He'd never come across anybody so meticulous and persistent in their research. He said, "Well if anybody can it will be you."

Away from the forensic lab, Philip phoned Andrew Spice. "Oi need your help tonight," he said, upon hearing the Hypnotherapist's voice.

Andrew, taken by surprise, said, "Can't help tonight Oi'm afraid."

"If you don't give me a hand Safa is going to find out about the two woman. Once the police find out, it won't take much for DI Dymond to put the rest of the picture together."

"Christ man, they're watching me. They grilled me for most of yesterday. Oi can't take the chance."

"All you have to do is meet us after work on the pretext that you are a historian with exclusive information about the role of the Moral Watch."

"It's too risky. What if the cops are following me?"

"You just have to talk to him and do your magic. It doesn't matter about the police. You're not doing anything wrong. Anything they know about anyway."

Andrew nervously puts down his phone. It was simple enough for him to use hypnosis to get subjects to act in ways that went against their usual instincts and patterns. He remembered experiments his class had tried in the laboratory. In one classic study, subjects were hypnotised and told to throw acid in the face of the experimenter (who, unbeknown to the subject, was protected by transparent glass). He remembered shooting the experimenting tutor with a gun (which he didn't know was loaded with blanks). Although the subject's rational mind said, it's just an experiment because the lecturer wouldn't put himself in harm's way to prove a test, for the exercise to be useful the reasoning ability of the subject got overridden. Very well, he silently agreed, he would do Philip's bidding just one more time.

Safa Hussaini, unable to restrain himself, yelled out a resounding "YES" into the empty laboratory. He had their identities at last. Maria Morgan and Sally Birkbeck were the two women. He had their names but no idea why they got buried in the mass grave. Still, that was the work of the police, not him. He phoned DI Bull with the news.

At that moment, Philip came back into the room, mock excitement showing on his face.

"Are you okay?" Safa asked.

"Okay! Much more than merely good. Oi met somebody, a historian who knows a great deal about the Moral Watch, the overseers of the women and children in the workhouse."

Safa looked at his colleague. "I know who they were."

"Who?" Philip asked tentatively.

He took the forensic scientist over to where the bones were. "Meet Maria Morgan and Sally Birkbeck."

Now Philip knew what he had to do. Grinning, he said, "He wants us to meet after work today."

"Who?"

"The historian I met. Now we have the names of the deceased he can help us put their story together."

It all seemed a little bit to fortuitousness, but Safa agreed. Although he didn't exactly trust Philip, it was an opportunity he couldn't afford to pass up.

DI Bull received the latest information and passed it on to Alan Dymond. He phoned DS Copperwaite. When she answered, he said, "Meet me near Alistair Bevis'."

"Why. What's up?"

"We need to speak to his mother."

"Oi don't think he'll agree to that Guv. Not after the last toime."

"That's why Oi need you there."

"What for, the gentle touch of the fairer sex?"

"That's roight."

She cringed. Alan could still be an MCP at times. "So, why is this important Guv?"

"Because we now know the identities of the two buried woman."

"Who are they then?"

"Oi'll explain when we meet."

Alan put the phone down. He couldn't force Alistair Bevis to let him speak with his mother but, knowing that she held the key to the murder mystery, he had to try. Then his eye caught Megan's card. He quickly sent an SMS, thanking her for it and saying he missed her. He pressed send, leaving their relationship in the lap of the gods.

"Okay, so who are the two women," Alisha asked, as they approached the Bevis household."

He turned to her. "Maria Morgan and Sally Birkbeck."

She whistled, "Relatives of the murder victims."

"Yes. So why were the women buried with the babies and Henry Ross?"

"What do you mean, Guv?"

"Well me lover, if someone murdered Henry and one of his descendants was killing descendants of the people he considered responsible, Maria Morgan and Sally Birkbeck would have to top the list."

She brightened, "So if they were the bad guys why were they buried with the good guys?"

"Now you've got it."

"And you think Catherine Bevis moight hold the clue."

"So we have to ask her."

"She'll probably respond better to you."

"Oi've got a question, Guv."

"What?"

"Where does Mason Thomas fit into all this?"

"Apart from his RM connection with Hunt, Oi've no idea."

Alistair was home but not happy to see the police. He eyed the pair warily upon responding to the knock on his door.

"Mr Bevis, we need to ask you a few questions. may we come in?' Alisha asked, sweetly.

"Oh, yes I suppose so. what do you want this time."

"We want to catch the murderer," Alan stated.

"What Inspector Dymond means is that we are close, but we need to have a couple more pieces of the puzzle in place before we make our arrest," she explained throwing Alan a dirty look.

"So what do you want to know?" Alistair said, indicating for them to take a seat.

"Did your mother ever mention the names Maria Morgan and Sally Birkbeck, about the workhouse?"

"Not that I recall. I'm afraid mother never said much about the place at all."

Alisha said, "We need to know what role they played."

Alistair shook his head despondently. "I'm afraid I'm not much help."

"Perhaps your mother would know."

The ex-headmaster stared at her. "I'm not letting you people near her again. You upset her terribly. It was days before she recovered."

Alan said, "She's the only one who can help us. If we don't foind out what these women did we may never catch your son's killer."

"How dare you. Inspector? Are you resorting to emotional blackmail now?"

"It's nothing of the ..."

Alisha interjected, "All we need to know is what these women did there. "You could ask her the question when you next see her. Let me know what she says." Alisha said, handing him a business card.

Alistair thought it over. "On two conditions. One, none of you police are there. And Two, if my mother shows any signs of distress I back off."

"Can you see her today?" Alan asked, adding, "This is quite urgent."

"I wasn't planning on going there today. My wife is away, and she has the car."

Alisha said, "Oi'll drive you there, wait for you and take you back here." She added, "We could go now if you loike."

Alistair hesitated, then he stood up. "Oh very well, if it's that important. I'll just grab my coat."

"You should be selling encyclopaedias," Alan whispered to Alisha as she headed for her car.

Alan stood and watched them leave. He had a strong sense that he was close to unmasking the killer, but there was still something missing, apart from the workhouse files, that is. It had something to do with DCI Lynch's accident. The truck driver said Lynch did a u-turn right in front of him. Why would he have done that? Lynch was heading away from 24 Wilder Road, the scene of Martha Swanson's murder. So why did he make that fatal U-turn? And head back to the place of the crime? Had he missed something? At a loss, Alan drove around to 24 Wilder Road. All was silent except the sound of the blue and white crime scene tape fluttering gently in the breeze. He turned around, facing the house opposite and saw Edmund Sunderland's van parked in his driveway. Before confronting Sunderland again, he had to have his story clear. He made a phone call "Hey Quinn, DI Dymond. Oi need your help with something."

"Yes, Guv, what is it?"

"You interviewed Beau Durand about the Church library break-in, roight?"

"Yes, Guv."

"What was he loike in the interview?"

"Loike?"

"Yes. Being, as Beau was, on the other side of the microphone. Was he uncomfortable, nervous, cocky, worried, in control?"

"He was lying through his teeth. I couldn't break him down, though. He was koind of agitated but stuck to a bullshit story that he was only there to get information from the guard."

"The drugged one?"

"There was only the one."

"How did he explain the break-in?"

"He said he didn't know anything about it. It was all BS Guv. It's obvious he set up the break-in and got a professional cat burglar to steal the documents for him. But first, he had to foind out where the location of the files. Maybe his source was a former librarian? Somebody like Martha Swanson."

"It certainly makes sense O'Ryan." Then he asked, "Was Sunderland ever questioned about the break-in?"

"No Guv. I was going to ask him about it but when Durand was found murdered. Oi couldn't confirm it with him. Besides, it was distracting us from the main game."

"Well, it's toime to confront him with it. So get over to his place now. Oi want you with me."

"Why Guv?"

"I want you to tell him that Durand admitted the robbery and Eddie's part in it."

"But that's not true Guv."

"O'Ryan don't get all self-righteous on me now. Sunderland won't be any the wiser. If he was the cat burglar involved Oi want to know where those stolen documents are. Now how far away are you?"

"About ten minutes, Guv."

"Roight, I'll see you here in ten."

Just then Alan saw Sunderland leave his house and walk to the van.

Shit! He was going to leave. Alan had to move fast. Strolling up to the cat burglar, Alan said, "Hello Eddie. You going somewhere."

Edmund spun around. Seeing the detective, he said, "What's it to you?"

Alan stood between him and the van, silently praying O'Ryan would soon be there. "Do you know a Beau Durand?"

"No. Now get out of my way."

"Not before you tell me the truth. Because the reporter knew you."

"What the fuck are you on about?"

"Durand worked for the Exeter Clarion as a reporter. He masterminded the break-in at the Church library. He was subsequently murdered for doing so."

"So what the fuck does it have to do with me?"

"He told us who his accomplice was. Any guesses?"

Edmund paled, "Oi don't know nothing about any murder."

Just then, DS O'Ryan arrived.

Alan said, "Now my colleague is here, let's go inside and have a cosy little chat about the night of the break-in."

As the police entered his threshold, Edmund roared, **WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU PIGS WANT NOW?**"

Eddie's girlfriend, startled by the warning quickly put out a joint, her heart beating furiously.

The dog barked as soon as the cops entered its territory."

"Shut the fucking mutt up!" Eddie said, urging his girlfriend to deal with the German shepherd.

She came back into the room. "What the fuck do you pigs want now. This persecution is fucking harassment."

Alan said, "Were you involved in the robbery at the Church Library, Miss?"

"She don't know nothing about it?" Eddie said, defending her.

Alan turned to her. Then this has got nothing to do with you, so piss off."

"She glared at him and stomped out of the room."

"Roight Eddie," Alan smiled, "Now stop pissing around and tell us about Beau Durand."

Cornered with nowhere to go, he admitted, "He said he had a job for me. A nice little earner. All I had to do was get into the place and nick some records."

Quinn O'Ryan commented, "Are you saying that Beau Durand was behind the robbery?"

"Course he was. But you already know that" Then he realised the trap. Turning on DI Dymond, he snapped, "You bastard. You didn't know it, did you?"

Alan flashed a withering stare at him. "It doesn't matter Eddie. We've got you bang to roights. So where are the records you stole?"

"Fucked if Oi know. I gave them to that Beau Durand bloke."

Alan believed him. He had one more question. "Has anyone approached you about the documents." Edmund hesitated.

Quinn said, "Shortly after Mr Durand had been chatting with us he was found dead."

"As was Ms Swanson, after telling Mr Durand where the documents were to be found," Alan added. "Which puts you in the frame as an accomplice in two murders," Quinn said.

Alan, turning to Quinn, asked, "What do you reckon Sergeant - ten years before parole?"

"More like fifteen to twenty with his form," Quinn corrected.

Eddie's eyes danced from one cop to the other. "All Roight, there was a man who asked me about the documents."

"Who was it?" Alan demanded.

"Wimpy little bastard. The bloke was dressed smart, though."

"Did you tell him?" Quinn asked.

"Yeah, he gave me some readies."

"That'd be roight," Quinn said, "You'd sell your mother for a few quid."

Alan said, "Sergeant, Oi think there was more to it than that," Turning to the hapless cat burglar, he said, "Did he threaten you in any way?"

"He said the reporter hadn't said where he's hidden the reports and had paid the price."

"Did he now? So who was this man?"

"Can't remember his name."

"Don't forget we've got you tied in with two brutal killings," Alan reminded.

"But he did leave a card."

"Then get it for me," Alan demanded.

Edmund scurried away and returned with a plain white business card with black embossed type. Alan grabbed it. Neatly written, in a copperplate script was the name, Barnaby Rudge.

Chapter 40

Cardinal Forrest Wellings came to his vocation late in life. Indulgent parents raised their only child Forrest on a military base in Africa. Having been caught up in a civil war, he developed a mean, subversive streak, and gained a reputation that labelled him a troublemaker among his peers. He put all this down to the harsh African climate, especially as the African heat made him sweat buckets. As soon as he could, Forrest migrated north to cooler climes that were much kinder to his glowing pallid skin. But the rebellious streak persisted until he joined a Catholic seminary where both a sense of superiority and humility in the face of God, were drummed into him. But occasionally the mean streak still showed itself, as it did on this occasion when Barnaby Rudge stood trembling in front of him. Towering above his minion, the cardinal, pointing at the Clarion on his desk, said, "Now that reporter is being hailed as a martyr, while we're labelled sneaky, secretive and suspect."

"Yes, your Eminence."

The cleric glared at Rudge. "Is that all you have to say. You shouldn't have had him killed."

"With respect, your Eminence, you asked me to deal with it and ..."

"Stop right there, Rudge! I do not want to know anything about that. That has nothing to do with me or the Church."

Barnaby froze. "Your Eminence, I thought the Church would protect me."

"Protect you! This whole mess is embarrassing enough for the Church without our involvement in criminal activities." He added, "Are those reports back in their rightful place?"

"Yes, your Eminence."

"Good. I'm dismissing you now."

Barnaby backed out of the chamber, bowing as he went.

"Mr Rudge," The cleric said before the administrator had gone. "I don't think you understand the full implications of being dismissed."

It clicked. Barnaby looked beseechingly at the great cardinal. "You don't mean ...?"

"Sadly I do. You're damaged goods, and you can no longer be associated with the Church. You do understand, don't you?"

Barnaby Rudge stood stock still in the doorway. "But what will I do?" "Where will I go?"

"Close the door behind you, Rudge,"

Barnaby Rudge, a selfless lackey with no backbone, having served the Church for most of his life, felt like he'd been cast away like a broken shoe. He had always played the role of a slavish servant, mostly within the protective walls of Mother Church. That was since his accountancy company had collapsed along with his marriage. Since being held within the bosom of Mother Church, Barnaby Rudge had never had to protect himself. But now, for the first time in his mostly quiet existence, self-preservation kicked in. The sheep was becoming the wolf. He left the diocese and went to St Peter's library. The staff knew him, so nobody questioned him when he went to the vault. He removed the documents and put them in his briefcase, and Nobody challenged him on the way out. One of the security guards even wished him a pleasant afternoon. Word of his dismissal hadn't reached the library. He was clear to go except he almost collided with DI Dymond, on his way out.

"Well, well Mr Rudge. Fancy bumping into you here."

"Yes well, I'm in a bit of a hurry. So if you'll excuse me, the administrator said pushing past Alan.

He didn't get far, though, as two uniformed policemen restrained him.”

Barnaby, struggling, demanded, “let me go. You have no right to ...”

Alan approached the suspect. "Barnaby Rudge. I am arresting you in connection with the murder of Beau Durand,” Alan announced, lots of satisfaction showing on his face.

At the police station, Barnaby asked to make one phone call. Having had his request granted to called the Diocese and asked for Cardinal Welling.

The cleric picked up the phone and saw Rudge's name showing. “Yes Barnaby, what is it?”

“I've been arrested and taken to the Exeter police centre.”

“I see. So why are you phoning me?”

“I need legal representation. Can you please call our lawyers?”

“I would, but we only use their services when our personnel are in trouble.”

“But I am in trouble - deep trouble. That's why I ...”

“But you are no longer in our employ.”

Barnaby gulped. At length he replied. “Your Eminence I think you should reconsider. The police have the missing records, and I can point out some interesting entries.”

The cardinal snarled, “Are you trying to blackmail the Church?”

“I am desperate, and you have cast me aside. Helping the police is my best option.”

“Yes, I see. Very well, I will phone our legal people.”

The Cardinal, true to his word, had Paul Bell and Rajid Choudary of Peters, Bell and Choudary, to drop what they were doing and get to the police centre post haste.

Rudge was cooling his heels in the interview room when DI Dymond and DI Bull entered the room, with Alan carrying the suspect's briefcase. He put his hand out towards Rudge. “The keys to this case please, Mr Rudge.”

“There are private documents in there.”

“Don't you mean stolen ones?” Alan said. He turned to the constable. “Get me a hammer and chisel from the stores.”

“There's no need for that,” Rudge said, handing over the keys.

Just as Alan went to unlock the case he was interrupted by a uniformed Sergeant

“What do you want. can't you see Oi'm busy here?”

“There are two lawyers here to see you.”

“Don't you mean they're here to see him?” Dymond said pointing at the cringing Rudge,

“No sir They're looking for you.”

Alan spoke into the microphone. “Interview paused at 2:04 pm DI Dymond leaving the room.”

“This better be good,” Alan grumbled while being led to where the suits were waiting.

The lawyers stood, smiled and extended their hands in politeness.”

“Why have Oi been interrupted from my work?”

“Bell took the lead. “We have reason to believe that you have personal papers belonging to our client.”

“Oh, and what personal papers would they be?”

Choudary said, “I think it fair to warn you that those papers are the property of the Exeter Catholic Diocese and, as such do not come under your jurisdiction.”

“And Oi think it fair to inform you that certain evidence was seized from our suspect while he was the commission of a croime. The police will keep this evidence and used as such if this offence should go to trial.” Alan smiled, “Now perhaps you would like to speak with our suspect, Mr Rudge.”

Bell said, “We are only here to get those papers. If you don't return them forth with this will go much higher.”

“Is that the best you can do,” DI Dymond said, “threaten us with a big stick from upstairs? It's pretty pathetic, don't you think?”

“We'll see how pathetic it is,” Choudary stated, as he and Bell turned tail and marched out of the station.

“Where are my lawyers?” Barnaby asked as the interview recommenced.”

“They weren't interested in you. All the Church's lawyers wanted was the records you stole.”

Rudge couldn't understand it. The Cardinal promised to send him a lawyer. Then he thought back to the cleric's words. All he had promised was to contact his legal people. His hackles rose. He'd been left high and dry. He looked up at DI Dymond. “If I give you a statement showing my part in the reporter's demise and help you with the records I stole can we make some deal?”

“What sort of deal, Mr Rudge?” Alan asked.

“I don't want to go to prison. Maybe some community service instead.”

Alan turned to Di Bull. “What do you reckon? If he tells the truth and helps us with our enquiries?”

“Well, the court will be inclined to look favourably upon a repentant and helpful prisoner.”

Safa Hussaini agreed to meet the historian at 'The Tide's Inn' restaurant. Philip sold him on the fact it was laid back, not very busy in the off-season and served classic dishes made from local produce. Safa hadn't had a restaurant meal in months and as Philip was paying he didn't pass the chance up. “Tell me more about this historian.” Safa said as they sipped red wine.

“You can ask him yourself. He's now approaching our table.”

Safa looked up at the bearded man in a black suit.

Andrew said, “You must be the brilliant scientist Philip told me about.”

“Oh, I wouldn't say that. Persistent and diligent, yes. Brilliant - no.”

“Tell Safa about your discovery concerning the workhouse.”

Safa was all ears and very susceptible.

Andrew spoke of Maria Morgan and Sally Birkbeck, adding in trigger words every now and again. Safa Hussaini had no idea he would be going willingly to the house of horrors later that night.

Alan scanned the statement. Barnaby Rudge, at the Church's behest, had been tasked with silencing the Clarion reporter. He had contracted Lloyd Hunt to deal with Beau Durand. Barnaby explained that he knew of Hunt only as Mr X. He noticed a Royal Marines tattoo on his forearm. After seeing a picture of Hunt in the paper, after his arrest, he knew who Mr X was. Short and to the point, the statement, signed by Rudge, would seal Hunt's fate. But he wasn't the one responsible for the other murders. Alan sat down with Rudge. "Oi want to know why Maria Morgan and Sally Birkbeck got buried with all those babies at the workhouse."

Barnaby grabbed the reports folder, flicked through the pages, then stabbed his finger on one in particular. It mentioned the two women's names. Alan took back the document and read:

Maria Morgan seemed very troubled and asked to speak with Sister Agnes. They had a meeting, and the Sister in charge said she would look into the practices that troubled the Moral Watch member. Maria confided her fears to Sally Birkbeck who tried to persuade her not to pursue the matter because she had heard of a case three years before in which a Watch member who questioned the practices, disappeared. This story worried Maria even more.

Dymond turned to Rudge. "What was it that troubled her?"

Rudge thumbed through more pages. Then turned the folder around to face Alan. "Read that," he said pointing at a paragraph with his finger.

Alan read:

Henry Ross and Maria Morgan announced their betrothal and set a date for their wedding. But before they were married tragedy struck when Henry, the workhouse maintenance man, fell off a ladder and died. Henry's brother Albert, unconvinced it was an accident, pursued the matter but couldn't prove any foul play. Maria also began having her doubts, but her grief overwhelmed her. Her good friend Sally Birkbeck supported her through those difficult times. It was then that Maria became deeply troubled and distrustful of the Moral Watch. Ms Birkbeck tried calming her down, but Maria told her she was going to the paper with her story. Ms Birkbeck felt it her moral duty to inform Sister Agnes.

"What happened to Maria after that?"

Rudge said, "I don't know. But as their bones got discovered in the mass grave, I would say they were done away with."

Then it hit Alan Dymond like a blinding light in his brain. He suspended the interview and left the room.

DI Bull caught him up. "What's going on?"

But Alan was on his phone. "This is DI Dymond. Get me, Allard Elwood."

"Allard here. How can I help you, Inspector?"

A slight pause then, "Oi need to speak with Philip Ross."

"Afraid he's left for the day with Safa."

"With Safa. What could those two possibly have in common?"

"I wondered the same thing."

“Any idea where they went?”

“Afraid not. The pair could be anywhere.”

“Thanks anyway.” Alan thought about his options; then he rang Alisha.”

“What do you want, Alan?”

“To catch the villain. Are you game?”

“Which bad guy?”

“All will be revealed. Meet me at 24 Wilder Road.”

“Why?”

“A hunch.”

“A fucking feeling.”

“Yes.”

She thought about it. “Fuck it, Oi’ll come. But it better not be a waste of toime.”

Chapter 41

“Ross! Why Ross?” Alisha asked. “And why this address,” as she and Alan waited across from 24 Wilder Road.

Alan pulled up the collar of his coat. “Because Henry Ross was Philip's grandfather.”

“Shit! So it is all about revenge?”

“Yes, But misguided revenge visited on the descendants of Maria and Sally.”

“But they were also victims.”

“Be on the lookout for a Jeep,” Alan said, changing the subject.”

“Why a Jeep?”

“Oi don't know. Maybe it's all part of the ritual,” he shrugged.

“So how did you make the connection, Guv?”

“Something Hunt said about meeting Ross at Jeep 'show and shine' shows.”

A car's headlights came into view. Then Alan made out the shape of a Jeep.”

The detectives hunkered down in their car.

“Quick! Kiss me, ” Alisha said, pulling the startled Alan into an embrace.

The Jeep drove by and parked at number 24.

The kiss lingered for longer than necessary. Alan grinned, “Now that's what Oi call doing surveillance.”

“Yes, well don't go getting ideas,” Alisha laughed.

They watched Philip Ross enter the house.

It was another hour before a second vehicle came into view.

“Maybe we'd better have another kiss,” Alan grinned.

“Watch it buster. You're bordering on sexual harassment.”

They watched as Safa Hussaini parked his Ford wagon and walked purposefully to the house, then go inside.

“Who was that?” Alisha asked.

“If my hunch is roight that was Safa Hussaini.”

“From the forensic lab.”

That's roight. Now we'd better move. Alan grabbed his radio. “Inspector Dymond. Get me armed support at 24 Wilder Road.”

Alisha turned to him. Guv, they moight not get here in toime.”

He looked at her. “We're unarmed and have no back-up.”

“We can't just sit here.”

“It's police procedure, DS Copperwaite.”

“Fuck police procedure. Safa moight be in mortal danger.” She got out of the car and walked towards the house.

Alan followed her up the driveway. DI Dymond, using his flash light he saw the Jeep with the RM badge on the back.

Alisha knocked at the door “Open up. Police.”

Alan grabbed her. Jesus, Oi hope that back-up gets here soon.”

The door was opened by Safa, wearing a white plastic suit and gloves.

Alan noted the vacant look in his eyes.

“Inspector Dymond, what are you doing here?”

“Oi moight ask you the same question.”

“Just collecting more forensic evidence with Philip.”

Alan, not expecting that, wondered if he'd gotten it wrong.

“What are you going to do about the armed response that's coming?” Alisha asked after Safa had gone back inside.

Realising he'd probably made the wrong call he grabbed his phone. “DI Dymond. Cancel the request for back up at 24 Wilder Road. Repeat, abort the request.”

“So much for your fucking hunches, Alan,” Alisha grumbled, as they approached his car.

He stopped dead in his tracks, a shiver shooting up his spine. Alan, slapping his forehead, said. “Philip is going to kill him! He began running back to the house.”

“What the fuck!” Alisha expounded, running after him.

Alan kicked at the front door. It wouldn't give. DI Dymond, rushing around the back of the house, tried the kitchen door. It was locked. At his strong third kick, it gave way. “His adrenaline charged

heart pounded like a bass drum as he burst into the kitchen. Rushing through the living room, he yelled, "ROSS, COME DOWN HERE. THE GAME IS UP. IT'S ALL OVER."

Alisha was by his side. "What the hell are you up to now?"

Philip stood at the top of the stairs, about to slice Safa's throat with the Commando dagger, said, "Out of my way or he gets it."

Alan backed away as Philip forced Safa down the stairs. The police watched helplessly as the murderer approached.

Ross ordered, "Open the door and let me pass."

Alan said, "Safa's ancestors had nothing to do with your grandfather's death."

"No, but he's too smart for his own good," Philip snarled, nicking his captive slightly with the razor-sharp blade.

"There's no need for that. We'll let you leave," Alan said, making way. "But you won't get far."

Ross glared at Dymond. "But I'll finish what I came to do."

"NO!" Alan yelled, grabbing the knife as it slashed across Safa's throat. Di Dymond's forward momentum threw Ross off balance, as they crashed to the floor. Ross younger and fitter got to his feet first.

Alisha, on the phone for an ambulance and armed back -up, got just a brief glimpse of the blade as it arced towards her. Alan desperately grabbed Ross around the neck, pulling him backwards. The knife missed Alisha by mere inches. As Philip and Alan struggled, the detective felt searing pain as the scientist stabbed him in his thigh. Alan crumpled to the floor in pain, blood soaking through his pants. Ross was then able to make his getaway. Alisha rushed to Alan's aid. Seeing the wound, she quickly grabbed a tea towel and applied it as a tourniquet. Acting purely on instinct, with adrenaline pumping, Alisha attended Safa. Alan's dangerous manoeuvre had stopped the knife from slicing the jugular vein, but if the scientist didn't get a transfusion within minutes, she feared for his life. Then she heard the sweetest of sounds - the ambulance siren, as it got increasingly louder.

DS Copperwaite quickly put out an APB on the Jeep with the RM logo. She watched as Paramedics put Safa into the ambulance and pumped, life-giving plasma into his veins. Then she went to check on Alan, whom other Paramedics had loaded onto a stretcher. She took his hand and smiled, "We got him." Then she asked, "How do you know Safa was in danger?"

"It was what he said at the door. He said he was collecting forensic evidence with Philip."

"So?"

"Oi'd never heard Safa refer to colleagues by their first name before. Oi figured he wasn't feeling comfortable and was sending a distress signal."

"You smart bugger. But if it weren't for your hunch, Safa would be the next victim, and we wouldn't have got Ross."

Alan nodded. "It's a good note for me to retire on."

"You're kidding."

He shook his head.

"What will you do with your spare toime?"

He looked at her as ambulance officers loaded him into the ambulance. She may have been unorthodox and a bit wacky at times, but she was his closest and most intimate friend. Grinning, he said, “Fancy a luxury cruise around the Mediterranean?”

The End

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Anunnaki – the greatest story never told – book 2 - challenge, change and conquest

Anunnaki – the greatest story never told – book 3 – prophesy, power and politics

Black Pope – secrets of the vatican

Democracy on Trial – the verdict

Hack – world bank in crisis

London Lies - The Terror Agenda

Marlowe – A Quantime experience 2

Millennium – countdown to chaos

Nanofuture – the small things in life

Plane Truth – What happened on 9/11

Termination – the eugenics agenda

Vincent – a quantime experience 1

Ziggurat – the real agenda in Iraq

About Chris Deggs

Chris Deggs was born in 1948 in Bury St. Edmunds, England. For many years he has lived in Australia. He is now happily retired and lives in the Tweed Valley in Northern New South Wales, Australia. He is a colleague of the Science-Art Cancer Research Institute of Australia where he is actively involved as a visual artist and author, He writes contemporary works of fiction: mysteries, adventure, crime, ethics, conspiracy, global domination etc., as well as reference books for the betterment of the human condition. He has published a number of articles on the Academia Website reflecting ethics and Human Survival. Chris has written 16 books to date. Writing and painting are Chris' two main passions in life in which he is always looking for new ways to express himself.

Connect With Chris Deggs

Internet

www.coloursandwords.com

chrisdeggs63@gmail.com

<https://www.facebook.com/artystyck>

<https://www.smashwords.com/books/search?query=chris+deggs>

<https://www.feedaread.com/search/books.aspx?keywords=chris%20deggs>

Outernet

If you are in the area you can catch up with Chris and say G'day at local art and craft markets in Tweed Shire, New south Wales, Australia.

First Sunday of month Tweed Heads Men's Shed Markets

Second Sunday Chillingham Markets

Third Sunday Uki Buttery Markets

Fourth Sunday Murwillumbah Showground Markets

This is a bonus excerpt from another book by Chris Deggs.

Vincent A Quantime Experience

Foreword

I looked at the handsome guy opposite me. He put me in mind of Jack Kennedy, as a young naval officer. “So, how can I help you, Mr Goodfellow?”

“I need you to carry out an investigation for me.”

I had already figured that much seeing as I had Oswald Doyle Private Investigator painted on my door. “Okay, give me the details,” I said, reaching for pen and pad. Then he came right out with it, and you could have knocked me for six.

“I want you to investigate the death of Vincent Van Gogh.”

I almost quipped I do not do cold cases but resisted it. I needed to find out if this guy was for real. “Vincent Van Gogh, the famous artist?”

“Yes,” he grinned sheepishly.

“The one who shot himself, if my basic art history serves me?”

“That is the official line - yes.”

“And that happened when?”

“July 1890.”

I tossed the pen onto the desk and sat back looking at him. “Well, unless you have access to a time machine it's going to be pretty bloody impossible.”

He laughed. “Oh no, I don't expect you to carry out an actual investigation. I need your expert advice in carrying out a virtual one.”

I'm a pretty tolerant bloke usually and, being an ex-copper, I have met some nut jobs in my time. But this was a first. “Virtual stuff, that's got something to do with computer games, hasn't it?”

He looked at me. “I know you might think this is crazy but all I want to do is give you the case and see what you come up with. I will pay you your usual rates, and you don't even have to leave your office.”

Well, how hard could it be? And I certainly needed the readies. But first I would have to do a background check on Mr Goodfellow. As it happened, it wasn't so much how hard could it be, more a case of how weird it could be. I had no idea when accepting this case, just where it would lead me, which turned out to be Nineteenth-Century France.

I came to meet Nathan Goodfellow through a series of seemingly random events. It all began with me spying on a bloke on compo. Martin Skopes didn't mean anything to me, except my being able to pay the bills for another week. I parked outside 21 Chaldon Rd, nondescript semi-detached, three up three down and watched from my Ford Fiesta as I took photos of the man filling a wheelbarrow with sand. I was bored off my tits, but it's what I had to do to earn my fee. I certainly admired Skopes' stamina as he loaded the barrow for the twentieth time that day. Having got my photographic evidence of the man, without his back brace, I put my Canon away. Another fraud case closed, I thought, as I started up my vehicle. I had nothing personal against Martin Skopes. Down the pub, I would probably pat him on his injured back and say, “Good on you. It's about time we got something back from those thieving insurance companies.” But dobbing people in is how I make a living these days.

When I took the plunge and left the Metropolitan police to reinvent myself as Oswald Doyle Private Investigator, I hadn't envisaged spending my time working for big insurance companies, by spying on small-time fraudsters. But that's the current reality of my life. Now I had to go back to my office and write up yet another boring report.

Back in my rented, one room and compact kitchenette office, in East Acton, I glanced at the framed photograph on my cluttered desk. At moments like these, I wondered if I had made the right decision. Being a private investigator was not all it was cracked up to be. Feeling somewhat melancholic, I reached for my bottle of Johnny Walker and sat staring at the image of Bill Munter and myself, taken on the day of our passing out ceremony at Hendon Police College. Having passed our exams and become fully fledged probationary members of the London constabulary Bill and I were itching to start pounding the beat. It was a fascinating time for me, with great potential for advancement. But after fifteen years in the job, the gloss had somewhat dulled. Long hours, low pay and an avalanche of red tape finally took their toll. So I gave all that up to become a private detective. I had been a detective sergeant for five years; the job had become less appealing and promotions harder to come by. But those weren't the main reasons I had left the force to start up on my own in civvy street. Being able to work to my own schedule appealed to me most.

Pushing these nostalgic thoughts from my mind, I shuffled papers around on my desk, to reveal a folder marked 'Insurance Fraud Reports'. More bloody paperwork, I thought, as I searched for a pen. Then I changed my mind and grabbed the phone. There were one or two coppers I still kept in touch with. One was my old partner, Tommy Creane, who had left a couple of messages for me to contact him for a drink. This seemed like a good time if he was free.

The Wishing Well, an enjoyable drinking hole not far from the East Acton tube, had a charming garden area, which is where I found Tommy, nursing a glass. I joined him, armed with refills. I hadn't seen old Creanie - now detective sergeant Creane - since his promotion. So this was an auspicious occasion.

Creane wiped beer froth off his moustache, and asked me, "So, how's it going? I heard the divorce rate sky-rocketed since you became a sleuth."

"Cheeky bastard. I do get some interesting cases as well you know."

"Oh yeah! name one," he demanded, cockily.

I grinned, "The Royal Unity Assurance Company for one."

"What, spying on compo cases?"

"Don't knock it. It pays the bills."

"Yeah, but does it have the thrills of Willesden nick?" he teased, nudging me in the ribs.

"Sometimes I wish I had the security and camaraderie of the job, but other times it's good to be independent."

He swallowed a mouthful of beer. "You can't have it both ways, mate."

"I know that, but an interesting case would make all the difference."

"So what do you consider to be an interesting case?" he asked me, gathering up our glasses for another round.

I had to think about that one. When Creane got back with the drinks, I said, "In answer to your question, I guess something that posed a challenge to the old grey cells."

"What like discovering what happened to Lord Lucan?" he smirked.

"Smart arse."

"Seriously though mate I have a friend who tries solving historical mysteries. He's a computer programmer, and he makes computer games about unsolved murders from the past."

"And that's supposed to interest me?"

"Maybe. Let me explain. This nerd - Nathan is his name - is looking for someone with investigative skills to help him build a case."

"Sounds a bit wacky."

"Maybe, but I reckon you ought to talk to him. It could be a nice simple little earner. Dr Goodfellow, I think he is called."

I can never be sure when Tommy is serious, and it's always a good idea to check. I looked at him. "Are you taking the piss?"

"What me, Ossie old mate?" He put on a hurt look that got him out of a lot of trouble, especially with women. "Look, I got talking to him while on a case. The bloke is obsessed with mysterious deaths in the past. I just thought you might be able to give him some of your Sherlock Holmes expertise."

I was mildly interested. "Do you have a contact for this Nathan?"

He jotted down some details on a beer mat. "He's a maths lecturer at the London School of Economics." He checked his mobile contact list, then added the contact number to the other details. He handed me the beer mat. And that's how I got to meet Dr Nathan Goodfellow.

Since that first brief meeting in my office, set up by Creanie, I hadn't heard from Nathan Goodfellow for a while. Yet I couldn't stop thinking about his crazy idea. I started imagining being in Nineteenth-Century France carrying out my investigation. Knowing what I had learned about the subject, if I took on Nathan's case, I had a virtual six months to solve an imaginary murder, if one had been committed, that is. I must admit, in my research, I did come across some anomalies, and the people who may have wanted to harm Vincent were piling up. Fellow artists he may have pissed off with his erratic behaviour; prostitutes who did not enjoy receiving his body parts; and landlords trying to protect their young daughters from being enticed by the crazy genius.

Perhaps, because it was an unusual assignment, it stuck with me, and I played with it in my mind. Theo Van Gogh, my imaginary client, Vincent's doting brother was terminally sick, but he had no idea he only had six months left to live. I had an advantage over him knowing, from history, this to be the case. So my task was to find out how his brother died, within this narrow time-frame.

I'd been intrigued by mysteries since my early childhood days. The stories in Boys Own magazine had me rapt but the intriguing subject of 'time', the biggest mystery of all, gained most of my attention. I mean we don't really understand it, do we? We measure time by calendars and clocks, but I don't think that's what time is really about. I mean we can't see it, touch it or hear it, can we? We only know of it by us getting older. I reckon that for all our success in measuring the smallest parts of time, it still remains one of the great mysteries. Now, I'm no scientist, but even I know that going back in time is considered impossible because we would have to travel faster than light, which of course can't happen. So I took Nathan's crazy idea with a pinch of salt. Who was I to question scientists about such matters?"

Since our first meeting in, what passed for, my office, I had checked out this Nathan Goodfellow. It turned out he was a maths lecturer at the LSE. His Linked-in profile showed his discipline to be in complex numbers math, a subject that would leave most people preferring to watch the wet paint dry on a park bench. His youthful, Jack Kennedy type visage, in his profile photo, made him look more like a male model than a numbers cruncher. He didn't fit the usual mould of balding, chain-smoking bores with chalk dust all over their tweed jackets. But, apparently, he, like most anally retentive mathematicians, found algorithms to be intriguing and he spent most of his working day

delving into the unpredictable or is it predictable, properties of what he called fractal logic. So why was he interested in the death of a nineteenth-century artist? Oh well, it takes all sorts, I thought, mentally shrugging my shoulders. And the case would be a nice little earner for minimal effort.

Then I received his e-Mail. It contained various links to websites concerned with the life and death of Vincent Van Gogh. I was more interested in all things about his death. The trouble with these websites is that they all virtually say the same thing. But every now and again someone is putting forward a different view, another angle, an added clue. So far though it all pointed towards a mad genius taking his own life. I conveyed as much in my e-Mail reply. Nathan didn't email me back – he phoned, and put forward his game concept, which posed the question, did Vincent kill himself or was he murdered? The official line, history tells us, is he had taken his own life while in an inescapable depression. It indeed seemed to be the case. But, in his computer game idea, Vincent's brother wasn't convinced. He ardently believed foul play was involved. So, he hired the game's detective character, to be modelled on yours truly, to find out if the artist was murdered and, if so, who had committed this terrible crime? We arranged to meet in a pub, near the LSE to discuss this.

Drury Lane, which led to the university, in its modern incarnation was a far cry from its early design. Back in the Eighteenth Century, it was one of London's worst slums. You wouldn't think so now, what with the significant developments that have taken place. Kingsway and Aldwych now reflect the affluence and style of patrons of the Royal Theatre, the Lane's most famous landmark. As I alighted from the cab in front of the Coach and Horses, in Wellington Street, I readied myself for another encounter with Nathan. The pub, a four storey building, squeezed between two others, seemed typical of many of the City's taverns, noisy and crowded. Nathan was seated back in a corner, away from the live music. I jostled my way past drinkers, to join him. I sat down. “Okay, I'm here. Hit me with it.”

“It gets hectic in here around this time, so I took the initiative to get you a beer,” Nathan said, grinning widely.

I certainly wasn't looking forward to fighting my way to the bar. “That's great. Now, why are we here?”

“I felt we had to meet again in person. I don't know why but I keep thinking about this case, and I wonder if we have missed something.”

I took a swig from the pint mug. “You mean have I missed something.” I fixed him in my gaze. “Nathan, save your dough. I can't find anything to suggest any foul play.”

He looked downhearted. “I know we lack something. What about the missing gun?”

“That can be explained any number of ways.”

“What about his dying words to his brother?”

“With his state of mind, it could have been nonsense.”

He took a sip of beer. “Wouldn't it be amazing if we could actually witness what happened?”

Jesus, now he was getting into wishes. “Let it drop and save your money. That's my professional advice to you.”

“Okay Mr Doyle, I bow to your greater wisdom in this matter. But if I come up with any evidence suggesting murder, will you help me?”

As I was pretty sure he was pissing against a hurricane, I said, “Sure, if it's solid.”