

# Termination

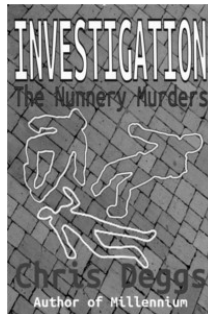
The Eugenics Agenda



Chris Deggs

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

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## Foreword

The tall, gaunt figure stood alone amid the ruins of the old abbey, his long white hair blowing in the chilly wind. He stood resolute, a man with a mission in life. Now, at long last, he had the key to carrying out his role, which he believed had been mapped out since his birth. Tucking his muffler into his long dark coat and adjusting his Tam-o-shanter, pulling it down over his frozen ears, he walked to where a circle of stones that stood tall and erect, moulded by the ravages of time. He spent a long time scrutinising the symbols engraved in the ancient megaliths before him. To his satisfaction, the glyphs corresponded exactly with those on the parchment he held in his gloved hand.

Satisfied he was alone in front of the standing stones he intoned, "Oh, great guide-stones, grant me the will, strength and resolve to do what I know I must do. I know the journey will be hard at times, but I must stand resolute to carry out my noble task others merely talk about or avoid altogether. For the sake of this wretched, misguided species, called human, I must overcome all frailties and sensitivities as would a surgeon cutting out a cancer patient's tumour."

He stood, as long as he could stand the cold, in the circle, while contemplating the task ahead. The fewer people who knew what he intended, the better. If the police caught him, society would paint him as a monster. But history would hail him a hero, or even a Saviour.

## Chapter 1

At around 10 am, Air Traffic Controller Dennis Fry became fully alert. "Looks like we have a wanderer," he announced to those present in the control tower.

Supervisor Jane Sparks, well aware that 'Wanderer' was work-speak for plane off course, rushed to his console, asking, "Who are we talking about Dennis?"

He looked at her, ashen-faced. "Air Express flight 67. It's just gone off course and dropped below 5000 feet, somewhere over Fordham Heath."

"Let me look," she demanded, staring over his shoulder at the radar screen.

"Shit! We've lost it all together now. It just went off the radar," he declared.

The supervisor froze. The plane had probably gone down. Gathering her wits, Jane ordered, "Contact the CAA and inform them immediately."

As he quickly dialled the emergency number for the Civil Aviation Authority, Jane said, "Also, alert the local emergency services."

"Which ones?"

"The nearest centre to 67's last radar sighting, of course?"

Dennis checked his map. "Looks like Colchester."

"Then alert Colchester emergency services. Meanwhile, I'll try and get Harry up here."

Dennis' 12 years on the job told him the plane had most likely crashed. A cold chill came with the realisation. Radar had been known to fail but only very rarely. Besides, if it were only radar failure, the plane would have been sighted by the tower. In any case, all airline pilots are trained to fly without radar guidance when required, so communication breakdown so close to the airport would not have been a major problem. He was shaken back to the present by a voice at the other end of the line. He responded, "Stansted Air Traffic Control here. We've lost contact with Air Express, flight 67 near Fordham Heath."

"Has the aircraft crashed?"

"We don't know, but it seems likely."

"Your name is?"

"Dennis Fry, Senior Air Traffic Controller."

"Okay Mr Fry, we'll look into it."

Dennis stared at the dead phone, horrified at the thought of the carnage awaiting the emergency teams.

Jane eventually tracked down Harry Krakow in the Air Express baggage handling area. He was dressing down one of the staff. She interrupted and got straight to the point. "Harry, it looks like AE flight 67 has gone down."

Harry froze. "Do you mean it has crashed?"

"We're not sure yet but it certainly looks that way. We lost radar contact with the craft over Fordham Heath. Nothing since then."

Harry, head of flight operations for Air Express, had never had a crash on his watch. Quickly pulling himself together, he responded, "Shit! This incident is terrible. I'll get right onto it."

The concealed patrol car at the corner of Turkey Cock Lane and Halstead Road lay in wait for cars speeding through the tiny hamlet of Eight Ash Green. Only a push bike had passed in the last twenty minutes and Senior Constable Stan Parkes said, "Did you know the first cop car was a waggon powered by electricity?"

Unimpressed, Probationary Constable William Morrison only managed, "Oh yeah," while scanning the road ahead.

"Cheer up mate. I know sitting in this car is not much fun for a young go-getter like yourself, but it's an important part of the job."

"What, sitting here bored off our tits waiting for somebody to go over the limit? It's a bloody waste of time if you ask me."

"Well, Colchester Central is not asking you, Bill, so stop bloody moaning and count your blessings."

He did not only stop moaning. He sat bolt upright, nearly hitting his head on the car ceiling in the process, "Bloody hell! Just look at that!" he cried out, as a passenger plane came into view. Smoke billowing from its fuselage showed it to be in trouble.

"What's up?" Stan asked. He didn't need an answer. He saw and heard it. An aircraft, blowing out black smoke, screeched low overhead, as it plunged earthward in the vicinity of Fordham Heath. A

massive explosion instantly followed, rocking the ground, so hard Stan, and Bill even felt the patrol car, which was miles from the crash site, shudder.

Parkes got on the radio. "Charlie Oscar two to base. A passenger aircraft has crashed on Fordham Heath. Should we help with traffic control?"

After a short pause, he turned to his mate. "We have to stay put."

"Fuck it. A change of scenery would be good."

## Chapter 2

### Essex, England

Lisa Parton was showering when her phone rang. 'Bloody typical,' she thought while working the full body conditioner into her short straight hair. Quickly rinsing off, she wrapped herself in a big fluffy towel and trailed water to the phone. It had picked up the message. It was from work. There had been a plane crash near Colchester. She was to get there ASAP. "Shit!" she cursed into the phone. It was her day off and those red patent leather shoes in the sale, she had set her heart on, would soon be snapped up. Sometimes she hated her job.

Harry Krakow was already on his way to the crash site. As Air Express' director of flight operations, it fell to him to go to the scene. The company, now in its sixteenth year of operation, had never experienced any such disasters. He had only ever seen air crashes on the news. Now, it was for real, and he wasn't looking forward to it one bit. As he drove along the A120, his hands-free phone rang. It was Lee Burneski, the airline's proprietor. "Hullo Lee."

"I just received the news. Get to the site and assess the damage."

"Already on my way. Should be there in about 30 minutes."

"Harry, I want you to stick with the CAA investigator. They can be a pain in the ass but be as helpful as you can. I need to know every detail. I don't want any nasty surprises. Have you got that?"

"Yes, Lee."

"I believe it is one of our new 320s."

"Yes, and the other one is grounded for maintenance."

"Regular maintenance?"

Harry knew what his boss meant. If it were a mechanical fault, the ACC would start checking other Airbus models. Air Express was already heavily in debt and any grounded planes could send the company to the wall. "A minor problem with an aileron, nothing serious."

"It is fucking serious. Get it fixed immediately and have that plane up in the air before ACC come snooping around."

"Right away boss." Harry cursed himself. He should have been onto it, but the crash had thrown him.

Lisa Parton raced along the A12, the flashing orange light on her car clearing her passage, as she headed to the accident site. She checked with Colchester police for any updates. The police had confirmed the crash and emergency vehicles rushed to the site. As air crash investigator her primary task was to secure the location of the accident to make it easier to determine the cause of the disaster. This exercise could prove difficult with police and rescue personnel, having gotten the

jump on her, rushing all over the place. To have the authority she needed, Lisa had to work with the police officer in charge, who turned out to be Detective Chief Inspector Martin of the Essex police.

Frank Martin was already at the crash scene. In all his years in the job, he had never seen anything like it. The burning, smouldering debris scattered over such a vast area made it difficult to see where it began and ended. A large area of Hill-house Wood, a favourite picnic place, was destroyed, as the flaming wreckage ploughed through stands of trees, leaving some pieces of the plane embedded in trunks or caught up in branches. Unrecognisable charred bodies lay amid the wreckage.

Inspector Crane, having secured the crash site, approached him. "You wouldn't even know it is a plane, would you?"

Frank knew what he meant. There were no wings, no discernible pieces of fuselage. The explosion was so powerful it had blown the plane to smithereens. "Nobody could have survived this lot," he said, dourly.

"It's a hell of a mess to clear up."

Frank looked at the sky. Gray clouds were gathering. "Yes, and it looks like rain, which is not going to help one bit." He walked over to the Emergency crew captain. Before he reached him, he heard a voice. Turning, he saw a woman, short in stature, with creamy coloured hair. Wondering what she was doing there, he asked, "Hello, can I help you?"

She proffered a small hand, "I'm Lisa Parton from the CAA. I'm here to investigate what happened and why it happened. To do so, I need to secure this site."

Frank had an aversion to pushy types. He Scanned her with his hawk-like eyes. "As to what happened, I would say that was bloody obvious. Regarding why I don't know, but I can tell you one thing."

"What's that inspector?"

"Chief Inspector. There were two explosions."

Lisa's eyes widened. "What do you mean?"

"My men reported the plane was on fire before it hit the ground." Making a broad hand gesture, he continued, "Another explosion could have only caused this mess."

She ignored his assumptions. "I see," she responded, making a note on her smartphone. Looking up, she said, "Chief Inspector I will need to speak to your witnesses. When can you arrange it?"

"But I've told you what they said."

"I need to know everything they saw to the smallest detail," she explained, handing him her CAA business card.

He shrugged, "Okay, I'll arrange it with your office. Now, if you will excuse me I have to liaison with the Emergency Team Captain."

As Lisa made her way around the pieces of wreckage, Orange jacketed emergency personnel were putting charred human remains into black body bags. She had to agree with DCI Martin. It looked as though a massive explosion occurred as the plane impacted with the ground. Of course, she needed good solid evidence before such findings would go into her report. The whole thing was like some giant puzzle to her. All the pieces once fitted together into a highly efficient incredibly technical flying machine. Now she had a jigsaw puzzle comprising thousands of pieces and worse still, most of the pieces were damaged or burned beyond recognition. Wondering where to start in

the aluminium and plastic nightmare, her attention got drawn to a movement behind her. She turned around to see a civilian heading towards her. "Who are you and what do you want?" she asked, abruptly.

The man put out his hand. "Harry Krakow, Director of Flight Operations for Air Express. I would like to work with you on this."

She thought this unusual. Typically in air crash situations, airlines involved, immediately go into damage control to cover their backsides. For the first time in her experience, a flight operations manager wanted to team up with her. Lisa smiled. "This is refreshing Mr Krakow, with your knowledge of the aircraft this could speed up the process. So do you have the flight manifest?"

He handed her a copy of the form documenting the passenger list and crew details. Another, incident form, stated Air Express Flight 67 crashed in Hill-house Wood at 1003 am. On board were 64 passengers and crew.

"Poor Buggers didn't stand a chance," he commented.

She sighed, "First, let's see if we can find the main black box."

As they made their way around the debris looking for the flight recorder, Lisa noted the plane had crashed into Hill-house Wood, destroying a huge bed of bluebells in its wake. It appeared the plane had been ripped apart by an avenue of trees. She also noted there was an awful lot of paper and packaging scattered around. "Harry, isn't all this paper a bit unusual in an air crash scene?"

"This is my first one so that I wouldn't know."

"I remember my first crash. You never forget it," Lisa commented.

"A bit like the first time you make love," Harry mentioned.

"Now, that is something I try to forget," Lisa said, making light of the moment. She played along seeing his remark for what it was. A way to help come to grips with the seriousness of the situation. Any other time, Lisa may have read such comments as a come on, but not amid such scenes of human carnage. Collecting herself, she said, "Harry, mail gets carried in fire and impact proof containers. So, what happened here?"

Harry knew she was looking for any fault. "I will check into it. But it hardly has anything to do with the cause of the crash."

She noted his defensiveness. "At this stage, we cannot rule anything out, Mr Krakow."

## **Chapter 3**

### **Hill House Wood**

At the hastily erected control centre, Frank Martin overlooked the operation. Usually, such a task would fall to a senior uniformed officer, but he was the only one available. Frank had grumbled about it at first, but once the Chief Inspector realised the crash scene was most likely a crime scene, he became more animated. He was setting up his cramped temporary office area when he received news that one of his men had found what he thought might be the black box flight recorder. Answering the call, he ordered, "Okay don't touch anything. Give me your location and stay put. I'll have an expert there shortly." Turning to one of his officers he handed him Lisa's card. "Phone this number and tell the woman investigator where to find her black box."

The officer stifled a giggle.

"What do you find that is so funny?"

“Nothing sir,” the officer replied, straightening his face.

Rodger Potter, eavesdropping, heard the instructions. He had been waiting to speak with DCI Martin, but he now decided to follow the messenger instead. A shot of the black box would be good for the Colchester Clarion. As luck would have it, Rodger was the first reporter on the plot. He was already following up a story in the area, checking out some big pumpkins in Aldham, when he heard the news. The opportunity was just too good to miss. Sure, Mr Albert Grossip was annoyed his pumpkins did not rate as high as an air disaster, but Rodger had made his decision. The horticulturist had complained and threatened to report the reporter. Rodger was willing to take the chance. After all, his Editor would back him up for using his initiative. Getting the scoop on the crash would help him reach his goal, which was to become a journalist on the crime desk.

Tailing a cop was a tricky business but with all the other red and orange reflective jackets around, Rodger's red leather bomber jacket blended in well. He saw the policeman approach the tall man and the short blond woman. He said something to them, and then they all headed off in a different direction, away from the rescue team. The question in Rodger's mind was should he follow or not? Not one to take unnecessary risks, he decided to hold back. But his curiosity, an attribute of his that scared him most, also drove him forward.

Secretly following the trio at a distance was no problem, with so many trees to hide behind. The game of hide-and-seek came to a stop when the trio met up with another cop. Rodger saw him point at something on the ground. It was box-shaped, but it was red. Rodger looked through the viewfinder of his camera and zoomed in on the target. There it was, the 'inaptly named' black box of the crashed aircraft, intact and untouched. Mentally pushing the fear of being discovered aside, he waited for a moment when all the conditions would enhance the shot. In the end, he had to snatch a quick one before the machine was taken away by the police. He got another two quick shots in before his view of the black box was obstructed.

“Do you think it was sabotage?” Harry Krakow asked, as Lisa and he walked back to the dark crater, where the plane had first hit the ground.

Busy taking photographs of the hole, she missed his question. Then she noticed an open Bible about twenty yards from the crater. She tried not to read anything into it. It was an anomaly, not part of the puzzle. What was strange was the lack of wreckage. Small charred plane parts filled crater, but no real evidence they came from a passenger jet. No suitcases, clothing, or other personal effects remained, suggesting to the investigator, the explosive device was in the cargo hold. Lisa noted it in her electronically recorded report.

“So, do you reckon it was sabotage?” Harry asked again.

“It certainly looks like it, but we need some physical evidence of an explosive device.”

“If anything survived the explosion.”

Giving a knowing look, Lisa said, “You'd be surprised Mr Krackow. There is always something left over – a clue to work with.” At that moment something bright caught her attention. She looked and saw a height challenged Black guy, wearing a bright red jacket. “Who are you and what do you want?” she asked aggressively.

The man grinned sheepishly. “Rodger Potter, a reporter for the Clarion. I just wanted to get a shot of you both for the paper.”

Harry took command. “I don't think that is a good idea. Now get lost before I call the police.”



Lisa, quietly amused by Harry's abrupt reaction, said, "I've got nothing to hide. You can take my photo."

Harry shot her a black look. "It's not that Air Express has anything to hide. It's the intrusion I object to."

Rodger said something that made him seem bolder and braver than he was. Without running it past his internal security, he blurted, "What, like the way the passengers of flight 67 had their lives intruded upon when one of your planes exploded for whatever reason?"

Lisa thought Rodger had spunk. Harry thought Rodger was a pain in the ass.

Lisa smiled, "Come on Mr Krackow, he has worked hard for this. Give him a break."

Remembering his boss' words about keeping sweet with the CAA, he acquiesced. "Okay, but make it snappy."

The reporter smiled at the pun, whether intended or not and took his shot. Afterwards, he asked Lisa, "What do you think caused this air disaster?"

"We are not sure at present, but it does look as though there could have been an explosive device on board the plane."

He then turned to Harry, asking, "Do you think the cause of the crash was an explosive device or mechanical failure?"

"I am not prepared to speculate at present."

"And if you were prepared to speculate which would you go for?"

"That's enough questions, for now, so go away."

Rodger, not wanting to push his luck, handed each of them a card, saying, "Just in case you want to call me." Drops of water appeared on his camera, as the forecast rain began to make its presence felt, so Rodger went on his way.

Lisa walked around the crater, looking for pieces of wreckage. The rain began falling harder. Harry, who had no raincoat, said, "Lisa, I have to get back, Here's my card. Let me know what, if anything, you come up with."

"Thanks for your help Harry. I dare say we will meet again." Lisa then donned a lightweight plastic poncho she carried in her bag. Then she headed off to an area she hadn't searched.

Thunder rumbled in the distance, a portent the storm was getting closer. The light shower, which was now heavier, ran in rivulets off Lisa's poncho. As there was nowhere for her to take cover, she battled on regardless. After a few flashes and some more rumbles, the storm petered out. She continued to sort through some pieces of wreckage when she came across a metal briefcase attached by a chain to the charred arm of one of the passengers. Taking hold of the briefcase she pulled it from some debris. Flinching suddenly, she dropped it. Only the arm attached to it was left!

Once she was over the initial shock, Lisa took a closer look at her discovery. The durable metal case was locked. Working so close to a decapitated arm was very unsettling, despite her many years as an air crash investigator who had experienced many macabre sights. She took a deep breath and approached the problem scientifically. Using the Swiss penknife she always carried with her, she tried prising open the locks. Finally, the catches sprung open. Much to her surprise, the case was almost empty. The only item inside was a leather folder titled the 'Ten Secrets'. The correct thing to do was hand the evidence to the police. But her curiosity got the better of her. Lisa untied the cord



securing the folder, to reveal a piece of parchment, inscribed with an array of symbols, geometrical shapes and various acronyms.

A quick look at the paper offered no clues as to what the title might mean. The geometric shapes abbreviated words, and binary sequences meant very little to Lisa. It looked all very complicated. However, the fact it was so complex is what intrigued her. She was addicted to working out puzzles, riddles and cryptic clues and this was just too good to pass up. Besides if she could crack the code it might offer clues about the investigation. Why she focused on this one passenger, or what remained of him, as having some connection with the crash, she didn't know. Perhaps it was intuition or maybe she was barking mad. She hoped it was the former. She secreted the folder and its contents in her shoulder bag and made her way back to where the police had their control centre. On the way, she wondered if she had done the right thing. Taking evidence from a crash site was a sacking offence, as was not reporting the briefcase and the severed arm. But nobody saw her take it, so nobody was the wiser. People do strange irrational things when under pressure, and she was certainly that.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Cape Town, South Africa 1978**

Young Matthew had no idea he was an orphan. Nobody had ever mentioned it, so he naturally thought Jan and Erika Hoffman were his birth parents. They had always shown him love and care and treated him as if Matthew were their natural son, instilling their Lutheran faith and sending him to Sunday school. There, under the strict tutelage of Pastor Van Keipt, he learned the Christian way of life, which, to young Matthew, seemed to be a mixture of glorification and guilt.

Life in Durbanville was mostly good for Matthew. Unlike most other Protestant white boys his age, who preferred sport and Kaffir baiting, Matthew enjoyed pressing flowers, and sketching pictures around Three Anchor Bay, his favourite artistic location. Tall, yet slightly built, Matthew had to put up with a lot of cruel jibes and many insults. However, once Bunsen burners and chemicals surrounded him he quickly forgot the bullies. Science, his great passion in life, extended into his home, where Matthew carried out his simple experiments. Using simple household products he combined ingredients to make flashes, bangs and some unpleasant smells, much to the chagrin of his long-suffering parents.

Matthew only came to hear about his true parentage in early adulthood. Jan and Erika kept any adoption details from him, reasoning that knowing his true heritage was unnecessary and would only confuse him. It was much better for things to go on as they always had. But such wasn't the way of the world and the truth always, eventually, finds a way to reveal itself. Such a revelation took place for Matthew when, while studying chemistry at a Cape-town high school, he received a letter from Markham, Philps and Jessup, a firm of solicitors in Cape West. The senior partner, Francis Markham had important news to impart to Matthew. Intrigued, he contacted the law firm and arranged an appointment.

It turned out a trust fund had been set up for him that could only be accessed by him once he turned 18. It was only a modest endowment, but it was to change his life. He sat in Mr Markham's office and scanned the document. Puzzled, he looked up at the solicitor. "There must be some mistake. This fund is for somebody called Matthew Atreides. My name is Hoffman."

The attorney pushed a photocopy across to Matthew. "Mr Atreides, Parish records show your natural mother died when you were a baby and your father, having no financial means to support you, had you placed in an orphanage, from which the Hoffmans adopted you. Once he became established in business your natural father set up this fund to help compensate."

Matthew sat stock still, as the words percolated in his brain. Aghast, he contended, "There must be some mistake. If what you say is true my mother and father would have told me. They have always been open and honest with me. They would never have kept this from me."

Markham placed a comforting hand on Matthew's shoulder. "I can see this is a bit of a shock for you. Would you like some tea?"

"Yes, My throat has gone dry."

Mr Markham ordered tea through his intercom. Then he asked, "Do you have a bank account for us to transfer funds?"

Money was the last thing on Matthew's mind. All he could think about was his parents and how he was going to broach the subject of his lineage. "I'm having some difficulty taking all this in."

The solicitor smiled, "Yes, it must be a shock for you. But there is something else I need to impart."

"I don't think I can take any more news today" Matthew responded his emotions all over the place.

"You also stand to inherit property."

Matthew, instantly alert, uttered, " property! What property?"

"A piece of real estate in Scotland."

Matthew's green eyes widened. "What sort of land?"

Markham checked his notes. "It's called Cambuskenneth Abbey. But that's all I know."

"This is crazy. What would I want with an Abbey?" Matthew asked, bemused and befuddled.

The solicitor shrugged. "I have no idea Mr Atreides. My function is to furnish you with the facts. The rest is up to you."

Matthew rubbed his chin. "Let me see if I have this straight. My parents aren't my parents, my mother is dead, my father, whom I don't remember, has set up some trust fund for me and somewhere in Scotland there's an abbey with my name on it."

Markham sighed, "That's the measure of it, yes."

Erika, just home from work, heard crying coming from Matthew's room. She knocked on his bedroom door, but there was no answer. She didn't like to intrude on his privacy, but something was obviously wrong. She went in and asked, "Matthew, what's the matter?"

Matthew sat, his head in his hands, just looking at her. Then he said, "Guess what I did today."

"What did you do, darling?" she asked, wondering why he looked so troubled.

"I went and saw a solicitor."

Erika's face became a question mark. "Why on earth do you need a lawyer?"

"I didn't go to him. He summoned me because he had some news for me. Personal news."

Erika's face became porcelain white. "Oh dear Lord."

"Exactly mother, or should I say adoptive mother."

She froze. Then she said, "Darling, I've always been a good mother to you, haven't I."

“This is not about that!”

“We've always had a close open relationship, haven't we, dear?”

“In all things barring being open about the most important aspect of my life - my roots. Or did you forget that you got me from an orphanage?”

The accusation hit her like a bucket of cold water. “We were trying to do what was right for you. We've always been your parents and always will be. Your biological father put you up for adoption when you were a tiny baby. We've cared for you ever since.”

Matthew stared at Erika. “Mother, I don't know what is worse. Me learning now that I am adopted or that this piece of juicy information came from a solicitor.”

Erika's eyes clouded over; then she burst into tears. “I'm sorry darling. I thought I was doing the right thing. I would never do anything to hurt you, darling; you know that.”

Feeling tears welling up again, he said, “Mother, this is a huge shock for me. Now please leave me alone.”

Matthew's stepfather arrived home to find his wife in an emotional state. She explained the reason for her upset. Jan, shocked by the turn of events, went to his son's room. There was no response to his knocking. He thought it best to leave Matthew to deal with the news.

Eventually, Matthew came into the kitchen to get something to eat.

Jan said, “It was wrong of us to withhold the details of your lineage, but we did it for the best of reasons.”

Matthew swung around to face his stepfather. “You had no right to keep it from me!”

“You are right. It's sometimes difficult to know how to protect your child. We acted from the best of motives.”

Matthew said, “I'm going to look for my 'real' father.”

The kitchen went silent. Erika stared at him. Shaking her head slowly, she turned and left the room.

Matthew wanted to go to her, but couldn't. Jan said, “Your mother is very upset. She feels she has let you down. I know it's difficult for you to come to terms with this shocking news. But when you do you will realise we have only ever had your best interests at heart. We will always be here for you.”

Matthew's emotions were in turmoil, with anger and sadness both vying for pole position. “Jan, all I know right now is I have to find my father.”

Looking Matthew in the eye, he said, “Son, you must follow your heart but do you know where he is?”

“I can find out from Mr Markham. He has been looking after a small legacy left to me by my father,” Matthew said, reaching for the phone.

Jan said, “Before you ring him, listen to me. I never met your dad. All I know about him is he didn't want to know anything about you. So why do you want to look for him? You will only end up being disappointed.”

Matthew became defensive. “If he didn't care, why did he put money in a fund for me?”

“I am not talking about money.”

Matthew looked at his adoptive father. Seeing a tear in his eye, he softened. "It may all lead to nothing but it is something I have to do."

Jan smiled weakly, "I know. Take care Matthew and remember, we love you very much."

"Yes, I know," the young man said. "Tell mum, er Erika; I will contact her soon."

Jan shook Matthew's hand. "We are still your parents. Look after yourself son."

Matthew returned to his phone call.

Matthew Atreides researched into his past and found his father's name in some parish records. His name was Albert Atreides, and he had advanced from the status of an itinerant worker to shoe shop chain owner. Following a long tiring flight from Johannesburg to London and a restless night at the airport Holiday Inn, Matthew managed to track down his father at the Central Budget Footwear warehouse, in Wandsworth. It was a huge shed stacked with every type of footwear he could imagine. He wondered how his absent father could have built himself such a business. Most of the shoes, Chinese imports, would probably wear out quickly or fall apart. But they were so cheap to buy nobody cared. There was a portable office in one of the corners; Matthew headed in that direction. Some workers stopped and stared at the lanky youth, but nobody challenged him. Having located his father, Matthew needed a plausible reason to get in to see him. He needed to be family but not too close. A distant cousin would do. Having passed the secretary's suspicious scrutiny, Matthew found himself face to face with his biological father, whom he had never seen. His father, a tall, thin man like him, stood guarding the entrance to his office, barring the young man's way.

Suspicious, he asked, "What do you want?"

Matthew, feeling very uncomfortable, said, "We need to have a talk."

"Then talk. I haven't got all day."

"In private."

Albert Atreides looked at the young man addressing him. "My receptionist tells me you are a distant cousin."

Matthew's eyes burned into those of his father. "That's not strictly true."

"Then who the hell are you?"

"I am your son," Matthew muttered, nervously. He didn't expect the prodigal son treatment, but he did think he might receive some welcome, even a cool one.

Albert stood mouth agape. Gathering his wits, he ushered Matthew quickly into his office and closed the door. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"A Mr Markham told me about the account you set up for me. I've come to thank you; Matthew said, a hint of sarcasm in his voice."

Albert stared at his son. "You came all the way from Africa and hunted me down – to thank me?"

"Yes. Plus I want to know about my roots."

Albert stared at his son, "This is ridiculous. It cannot be happening."

"I also wanted to look at what kind of person would abandon their child."

"I didn't abandon you. I had you placed in an orphanage." Albert said, firm-jawed, concerned his secretary might hear.

"You wanted nothing to do with me."

Albert paced around his office. Turning on Matthew, he said, "And that still stands. You have to go and never contact me again. I have a new life with a new family, and I can't afford any complications concerning my past."

Matthew flared, "So that's all I am to you, a fucking complication! Look, all I want is to know something about my ancestors and their connection with Scotland."

"I don't know anything about that, and I don't want to have anything to do with you. Is that clear?"

"I don't believe you don't care about me. If you don't have any feelings for me why the trust fund?"

"I'd forgotten all about it. I must have set it up years ago to appease any vestiges of guilt I may have had. But I have no such feelings now. You shouldn't have come here. Now please go and don't contact me again."

Matthew stifled a tear. "I thought I'd dealt with some bastards in Cape Town, but you take the biscuit. You and your precious new family can get well and truly fucked. You will rue this day." With that, Matthew stormed out of his father's office never to set eyes on him again.

His father was no use to him, so Matthew had to find another source of information concerning his heritage and the in particular Scottish connection. He contacted the Scottish National Trust and spoke to a Duncan McLaren, who said he would check the records and get back to him. Matthew's inheritance was confirmed, and Duncan arranged for them to meet in Stirling, the location of the ancient abbey.

Stirling, Matthew discovered, was once the capital of Scotland. Nestled in the Forth valley and dominated by its magnificent castle, Stirling stood as a proud city, half way between garrulous Glasgow and the more genteel Edinburgh. Duncan was waiting at the railway station when Matthew arrived. Attired in tweed jacket and kilt, he could have been an actor from *Monarch of the Glen*.

"You'd be Matthew Atreides then," Duncan stated, noting the strong resemblance to a painting of his great, great-grandfather."

"So I'm led to believe," Matthew returned, giving no explanation for his strange remark.

"Aye, well we'd best be on our way before the evening chill sets in."

Upon reaching the abbey ruins, Duncan said, "Well Laddie this your inheritance, what's left of it, which is the bell tower, over there." He pointed to the lone edifice, all that remained of a once vast and sprawling Abbey. "In its day Cambuskenneth Abbey held a vital position in this area."

"What happened to it?" Matthew asked, disappointed.

Fumbling around in an old looking leather briefcase, Duncan produced a rolled document tied with a red ribbon. "Before we get into details I have here the deed of rights and all the conditions clearly set out." He handed it to Matthew, saying, "It's some time since an Atreides used the tower for meetings. What sort of meetings will you be holding?"

"Meetings?"

"Aye, you have exclusive rights to hold meetings in the tower."

Matthew grinned, "I haven't given it any thought. Besides, I'm not ready yet. I have to go back to South Africa."

“Somewhat different to this wee cold place.”

“That's for sure,” Matthew answered, tucking the document into his inside pocket.

Duncan became pensive. “Now, in answer to your question, according to the Scottish Trust archives, by 1559 the abbey was all but deserted by the monks. It subsequently closed down, and most of its buildings were looted and burned. Later, the military governor of Stirling Castle had removed much of the stonework to renovate the castle. Pointing at the bell tower, Duncan continued, “As you can see, only the Thirteenth-century campanile remains intact.”

“How did my family become connected with the abbey?”

“Your great, great-grandfather, Sir Spencer Albert Atreides, funded extensive renovations in 1869. As a result, he managed to be granted special dispensation from the crown to set the Campanile up as a meeting place for the Order of the Golden Thistle, an offshoot of the Bavarian Illuminate. Although the king officially acquired the Abbey in 1902, unofficially it became part of the Atreides family property.”

“Since Spencer Atreides used it, has the Order of the Thistle used the Abbey for meetings?”

“Its correct name is the Order of the Purple Thistle, and no, it has not been utilised by an Atreides for many years past.”

Matthew smiled at Duncan. “Then we'll have to see what we can do about it.”

## Chapter 5

Jim Newman had been the managing director of the CAA (Civil Aviation Authority) for seven years. Coming from an RAF background that included five years as a safety instructor, he was well suited to the job. As the UK's specialist aviation regulator, the CAA dealt with all aspects of aviation security, consumer protection, airspace regulation, etc. He stroked his moustache thoughtfully as he perused Lisa's report. There were blanks to be filled in, but Jim expected that as the forensic investigation was still under way. A knock at his office door alerted him. Whoever it was had passed his secretary's scrutiny, so their appointment was kosher. “Come in,” Jim said.

Harry Krakow entered. “Hello, Jim, how's tricks?”

Not one for small talk, Jim said, “We're waiting for Ms Parton. She's caught up in traffic. Would you like a tea or coffee?”

“A coffee would go down well. White, one sugar.”

Jim ordered coffee through his intercom. Turning to Harry, he said, “We've got to get to the bottom of this flight 67 incident. It rather looks as though there was some explosive device on board.”

Harry sighed with relief. He knew it would be the case. The visual evidence made it very clear. But until the scientists confirm it, the box is not ticked. Now he had some good news for his boss. “So your boffins have confirmed it?”

“A thorough search of the site yielded elements of what could have been an explosive device.”

“Then we are off the hook.”

“Nobody is completely off the hook yet. And we will be looking into the AE operations.”

“No probs there, Jim,” Harry smiled.

"I hope not Harry. I know competition between airlines is eating into your bottom line. The last thing we want to do is cause you further hardship. So with your cooperation we will, hopefully, get this business sorted out very soon."

"I'll drink to that, Jim."

"Which reminds me, where have those damn coffees got to?"

Lisa, out of breath, burst into Jim's office, "A truck turned over. It took ages to get through. Sorry," she smiled. Then noticing Harry Krakow, she said, "Hi Harry, so we meet again."

"You two know each other then?" Jim asked, concerned about conflicts of interest.

Lisa, picking up on his meaning, covered herself. "We only met at the crash site and checked things out together."

Relieved that there were no complications, Jim said, "Okay, let's get down to business. I believe in bringing this all out into the open. So I will tell you both here, and now I have had both Special Branch and MI6 onto me about the air disaster."

"Then they must go along with the sabotage theory," Lisa suggested.

"It's more than a theory. Forensics have confirmed evidence of an explosive device," Harry stated.

"What Harry is saying is that an explosive device was responsible for the first explosion before the plane crashed. The fireball resulting from the impact would have been the ignited fuel remaining in the aircraft."

Lisa doubted the remaining jet fuel would have produced such a big crater, but she kept silent on that point. Instead, she asked, "Okay Jim. So why are the spooks interested?"

His next words sent a chill up her spine. "Apparently an empty briefcase was found attached to a severed arm. The case had been forced open and was empty. Somebody at the crash site took whatever was in that case, and Commander Jacobs of SB is interested in finding the culprit. However, that's got nothing to do with us. So we just let them do their thing while we deal with the crash."

Lisa's heart skipped a beat. "Maybe the case got damaged on impact."

"It still doesn't explain why it was empty," Jim said. He added, "Let the spooks worry about that, we have more pressing things to work out."

## **Chapter 6**

### **Over the English Channel**

"It's not fucking fair." Elvis moaned, checking his light aircraft's compass bearings. Calla des Solis was left behind for the last time. It was time to start a new life. 'More likely a slow death' the pilot thought gloomily, as Avila and his history there, faded into the distance. Following a nasty divorce, Elvis Hall had decided to stay on in Spain. His air charter business was thriving, so why leave? That was his thinking until he received the devastating news. He remembered staring at the biopsy report and the blank look on Dr Calveros' face. For Elvis, it was a time freeze frame moment. He had stomach cancer, in its advanced stages. It had already spread to his oesophagus and lungs, and he needed immediate radiography treatment in Madrid. Elvis could still feel the cold clamminess of his skin. He had put the heartburn and abdominal discomfort down to the stress of his marriage breakdown, not to a terminal disease.

As Elvis flew northwards across the choppy Bay of Biscay, he wished he had thought things out more clearly. He had traded some minor discomfort for significant symptoms. His fair hair was



coming out in clumps. Apart from hair loss, the chemotherapy in Madrid left him with tiredness, diarrhoea, and nausea, side-effects not at all compatible with flying. He vowed and declared he would never undergo such radical treatment again. He was also worried about the Spanish Aviation Authority finding out about the information he had provided. He had told the hospital administrator he worked as an aircraft mechanic. Well, he could hardly put his occupation down as a pilot, not with his medical condition. It was unlikely that the hospital authorities would check with the SAA, but there was always the chance that some over-zealous type at the hospital may do so.

As the French coast and the small town of Vannes came into view, Elvis' mind went back to his stay in the hospital, the loneliest time in his life. Stuck in the cancer ward with no friends or family to visit him, he felt very unloved. The nursing staff were very helpful and attentive, but that was hardly the same thing. He had always been the stoic and dependable one, the pillar of strength who had done all he could to support Consuela in overcoming her alcohol addiction. But in his hour of need, there was nobody in his corner. He knew he could have told Lois, but he didn't want to involve her. He hadn't communicated with his sister for many years, other than the customary Christmas and sometimes birthday greetings. They had fallen out when she, his big sister, had interfered once too often in his marriage, which was on the rocks but he couldn't see it. The loneliness of his time in the hospital showed Elvis how much he needed to connect with her, his only surviving family. He contacted her and told her he was leaving Spain. He never went into any details, except that he was coming back to England. He could hear the joy in her voice and accepted her invitation to stay with her until he was on his feet.

After flying in the north, northeast direction, Portsmouth came into view. The nearest airstrip to his sister's place was Earles Colne, a village not far from Colchester. Elvis had arranged to rent a shed and run his charter business from there. He reached Earles Colne and got clearance to land. Having landed the Piper Seneca with a perfect three-pointer Elvis had to rush to the toilet. "Fuck that chemo." he cursed, slamming the door behind him.

## Chapter 7

Lisa parked her car outside 1 Victory Rd, Clacton on Sea. She was relieved to be home. Being at the centre of a Special Branch investigation freaked her out. The fact that they didn't know it was her they were looking for didn't make her feel any easier. Since breaking up with Peter, she got lonely at times, and this was one such time. She berated herself for thinking about the bastard and work. She made a coffee and sat down with the cryptic manuscript. Lisa had gotten the puzzle bug from her father. He was always doing crosswords, for as long as she could remember.

She had worked out some tricky conundrums herself. With an IQ of 172, she could have been in with the MENSA crowd, but riddles and puzzling problems were personal for her. Even her colleagues at CAA had no idea of how much puzzles turned her on. She wished she had a loving man to comfort her when she felt like this. Peter had been that someone, at first. But he had a wandering eye and a body that followed. Yes, it would be nice have a bloke give her a cuddle and bring her a cuppa, when she arrived home from work. But there is always a trade-off, and she didn't want to lose her independence. She had a weird fantasy in which her male comforter manifested out of thin air whenever she needed him and disappeared when she wanted privacy. As that was not likely to happen, she usually settled on the next best thing – a good cryptic crossword. It was better than gorging on chocolates as a lack love substitute. Not that she didn't eat chocolates while she worked out the clues. And the tougher the clue, the more chocolates slipped down her throat. Which was why Lisa was broad in the hip, the result of which made her feel unattractive and frumpy.

Her strict upbringing didn't help either. She was programmed to be polite and proper at all times, well maybe not when she was alone, which seemed to be a lot of the time. "Oh well," she sighed, getting back to the parchment manuscript she had liberated from the plane crash. There seemed to be ten parts to it, but she still couldn't find the key that connected all the parts. The odd mixture of

geometric shapes abbreviated words and symbols still had her baffled. Googling geometric images explained some of the individual forms but did not help in giving an overall picture. She wondered if her intuition was right about the briefcase wearer's connection to the sabotage.

She contacted her Brother, Rob. He was a bit of a puzzle buff as well. "Hi Rob, it's Lisa."

"Hi, sis. What's cooking?"

"I'm trying to work out a kind of code,"

"Why doesn't that surprise me," he laughed.

"It's the trickiest one I've ever come across."

"So, it's got even you stumped".

"I could do with another brain on it."

"And you think mine is up to it?"

"I don't know. But a fresh mind on it might trigger something."

"Can you eMail it?"

"It's on parchment, but I can scan it in."

"On parchment! Where the fuck did you get it?"

"I can't tell you that yet. I need to solve the puzzle first."

"Yeah, well if you win something I want half."

Rodger Potter parked his red Vespa at the end of the cul-de-sac in Belgrave Place. After securing his pride and joy, a classic Vespa 150, 1957 vintage, he entered the offices of the Colchester Clarion, a provincial daily newspaper and his current mode of employment.

"How is it going, Rodger?" Buller, an old hack, greeted.

"Trying to keep a low profile," Rodger said, putting his finger to his lips.

"Oh I get your drift, but I wonder how far you will get before the DL radar kicks in."

Rodger grinned. DL was office speak for 'Dragon Lady'. "A bloody sight further if you'd shut up about it," the young coloured man said, scanning the office to see if she had been alerted. He had a file to drop off, but he wanted to be in and out before Bernice caught him.

Then he heard her heavy footsteps, and it was too late. She had an uncanny knack of knowing what was going on around the place and she had spotted him trying to make a quick getaway. As he headed for the door, he heard her dreaded voice, "Rodger, the very person I want to see." He turned to face Bernice Bringham, the Clarion's editor in chief. She resembled a square being nearly as wide as she was tall. The look on her broad face told him she was not happy. He knew that to avoid her now would only bring greater grief later. So he meekly followed her into her office, a forbidding den from which he may not return. The Dragon Woman was in her lair, and he was at her mercy.

"I had to get Richard to follow up on your horticultural piece," she stated, accusingly.

"I did start the interview but..."

"...But you decided the plane crash was more worthy of your inestimable writing talents."

“Oh come on Bernice, I was using my initiative. If it weren't for my quick action, you wouldn't have those shots of the black box.”

“Well, Mr Grossip has made a formal complaint against you.”

“Big deal. My air crash story sold a hell-of-a-lot more newspapers than bloody pumpkins would!”

“That may well be, but while you are working for this paper you will follow up all your assignments,” she said, pointing her finger at the tired looking reporter.

Despite appearing tired, owing to his droopy eyes, which were reminiscent of a Cocker Spaniel's, he was alert. “So, what did you think of my article on the air crash?” he asked, sheepishly.

Bernice lightened a little and smiled, “So you're fishing for compliments now.”

“I'm not against a bit of praise when it's due,” Roger said, unabashed.

“Yes, well now the excitement is over we can all get back to our regular work.” Bernice opened her office door to let him out.

Rodger walked by her without saying a word. He breathed a sigh of relief. It could have been a lot worse.

Back on his scooter, Rodger felt free. Once again he had escaped from the dragon's lair or rather been kicked out of it. Rodger and Bernice had an odd working relationship but despite her overbearing ways and his cavalier attitude it seemed to work. But he had to work on his terms. These included a self-preservation no risk policy. The problem was that the no risk assignments tended to limit his investigative skills to church fetes, dog shows and biggest pumpkin type competitions. Being a newspaper journalist who was afraid to take risks limited his potential to get the big stories, which was why Rodger hadn't made the career leap to the crime desk.

Rodger's phobia against personal harm had persisted since his was at school, where he became a magnet for all manner of ignorant, vindictive types. At school, being black, short and slightly built made him a perfect target for racist bullies. They despised Rodger, seeing him as a coward who would run from his own shadow. Although this was a pretty good judgement of character, there was no need for them to keep putting it to the test, so much, so that young Rodger had to develop practical avoidance skills. This practice earned him the nickname 'Rodger the Dodger' or just plain 'Dodger' As soon as somebody shouted 'Hey Dodger' the bullies came out of the woodwork and there seemed to be no shortage of them.

Amazingly, despite being treated poorly by such ignorant oafs, Rodger still managed to like people. He often wondered if it had anything to do with what happened after the death of his parents. As a young child, losing one parent is tragic enough. But to lose both at the same time was devastating to young Rodger. It happened during their skiing holiday in Switzerland. Rodger received the sad news from his tearful aunt Mel, with whom he was staying. They had been swallowed up by an avalanche at San Moritz. It was decided by the family, after the funeral, that young Rodger was to be permanently ferried out to his Uncle Sam and Aunt Mel in the East End of London. Rodger always liked Sam. He was funny and did magic tricks with cards.

Sam was what some people call a 'Jack-the-lad' an endearing term for petty criminals and small time grifters that are excellent at separating the gullible from their money. But when it came to family, Sam was as straight as a die. He looked after his family and wouldn't allow any booze or drugs into the home. Sam also did a good line in hot second-hand cars. That was until he tried selling one to an off duty copper. He did time for that, and this left Mel in charge of the family. She missed Sam and took to the bottle. Her vigilance became impaired, and drugs began to find their way into the home. So Rodger grew up among junkies, and he nearly became one himself. However, despite their addiction his stepbrothers didn't, as far as he knew, go around mugging

people for drug money. In fact, they went out of their way to help their neighbours, if they fell on hard times. The friends reciprocated of course. The neighbourhood was like that.

It was journalism that rescued Rodger from the brink. He hated school and never thought he would want to go back. But he took to evening classes at the Tech College like a duck to water. He saw the program at the local library and, despite his determination to not take risks, he took a chance and enrolled. Rodger had a keen, inquiring mind so becoming a reporter seemed a logical step for him to take. Week in and week out wrapped up warmly in his Red parka he rode to night school on his push bike, until he got his cherished diploma. He now had his bit of paper declaring him a reporter.

## Chapter 8

“He was definitely on the plane,” Elvis Hall confirmed.

“That doesn't concern me. I want to know what happened to the folder,” Matthew stated, as he sat in Elvis' Panel Van.

“It could have been destroyed when the bomb went off.”

“Don't be stupid! How then did the arm and the briefcase survive?”

Elvis stared at Matthew. “How do you know that.”

Matthew tapped the side of his generous Roman nose. “Let's just take it that I know. So that means somebody took the contents from the case at the crash scene.”

“Then the pigs have probably got it.”

“I am not interested in your opinions. Find out who has it and get me that folder.”

“Just how the hell am I supposed to do that?” Elvis asked, his heart racing.

“Oh, I'm sure you'll find a way, what with your contacts in low places.”

Elvis reddened. He wanted to smash the bastard in his grinning face, but he held back. Who else would employ him in his condition? Besides, one word from Matthew Atreides and his flying career would be over. “I'll see what I can do, but I am not cut out for this.”

“I'm sure you will.” Matthew then ducked his head and got out of the van, leaving Elvis Hall to his thoughts.

Matthew Atreides was sure of two things. The first of these was that the plane crash, which culled around 70 useless eaters, as he referred to the ordinary people, was caused by parties unknown, to teach him a lesson. The second thing was that they set out to destroy the 'Ten Secrets' code, the only known copy. They hadn't achieved their goal, and the item had survived the crash. But now, according to his source in Special Branch, it had gone missing. Matthew needed it back, so he was able to decipher the mystery of the standing stones at the Abbey. He had found out that the Ten Secrets went back to the time of the Knights Templar, who, after the Crusades, had built up a veritable banking and property empire throughout Europe. They even had their fleet of ships, and they were highly secretive about their internal affairs. Following a purge on Friday 13th October 1307, persecution of the Templars was most strenuous, especially in France. However, despite the great witch hunt against them, many of the Knights managed to escape from La Rochelle, with much of their treasure intact, in the Order's fleet of ships. After fleeing the Pope's wrath in France the remaining members of the Order established settlements in Scotland and Ireland. Amongst their treasures was the Ten Secrets, a secret code that when cracked would reveal the sequential steps to complete world domination.

Matthew had heard about the Ten Secrets from Ian St Clair, the curator of Stirling Smith Museum and Art Gallery, which boasted the earliest known Christian gravestone in Scotland. Duncan McLaren had introduced Matthew to Ian at a Trust function. It was held in the banquet hall of the historic Stirling Castle. After a few drinks conversation centred around Cambuskenneth Abbey. During the interchange, Ian said, "There is another interesting connection between your great, great-grandfather and the Abbey, Matthew,"

"Oh! What's that?" Matthew asked, intrigued.

"History has it that Sir Hugo Deveaux, one of the Templars who settled in Scotland, was given a special task by the Order. Fearful that the papists would seek out their prize in Scotland, Sir Hugo was given the task of finding suitable hiding places for the Templar's treasure, which was still on the ships. Apparently, he chose to bury some items in the Stirling burial ground. He reasoned that a burial ground would be the last place the papists would suspect. Among this booty was a mysterious document called The Ten Secrets."

"The Ten Secrets! What is that?" Matthew asked, more alert.

"I don't know exactly, but legend has it that whoever can correctly decipher it can become the master of the world."

Matthew laughed, "Ian, I think you are having a lend."

"No Laddie. As true as I stand here that is what the code is supposed to represent."

"So where did this document come from?"

Ian took a sip of single malt. "Along with many other artefacts, it was liberated from the Holy Land during the Crusades. It stayed hidden until sometime in the 1780's when the burial ground no longer got used as a cemetery."

"So, where does my great, great- grandfather come into this saga?"

Ian explained, "Apart from being the Grand Master of the Order of the Purple Thistle, Sir Spencer Atreides was also an amateur archaeologist. Apparently, he was digging in the disused burial ground, when he came across a metal box containing the Templar's ten secrets. He spent many years trying to decipher them but to no avail. Then, through his connection with the Order of the Purple Thistle and its association with the Bavarian Illuminate, he heard of a man in Prussia who may be able to help him."

"And did he?"

"Alas, Laddie, we dinna know. You see, Sir Spenser went to Bavaria to seek this knowledge, but both he and the Ten Secrets disappeared, never to be heard of again."

Matthew's hand flew to his mouth. "My God! So my great, great- grandfather vanished without a trace?"

"I'm afraid so. The last thing we do know is that Spenser met with a Herr Herman Von Schlessinger, a man closely associated with Adam Weishaupt. What happened after that, who knows?"

"And what about the document in question?"

Ian shrugged. "It's rumoured he showed it to Von Schlessinger, but that is merely speculation."

After that, Matthew became obsessed with finding the missing code. He felt it might give him some clue about the fate of Spenser Atreides. But even more important, he wanted to crack the code himself.

Lisa looked at the e-mail image of her and Harry Krakow. She hadn't expected the reporter to send her a personal copy. The investigator then looked at the pieces of paper scattered on her coffee table. The shapes, numbers and letters didn't seem to follow any of the cryptic sequences known to her. Popping another chocolate into her mouth, Lisa knew she was stumped. Sighing, she laid back on the lounge and closed her eyes. After a couple of minutes, Lisa sat bolt upright. Of course, she needed someone to confide in, somebody who could help her solve the puzzle. But who could she trust? It had to be somebody who was at the crash site, somebody who had shared in the whole horrific and bizarre experience. Not Harry Krakow. If he had something on her, it could compromise the investigation. Then she thought of the e-mail and the Black reporter. The danger there was that he might reveal her misdemeanour in a story. She slumped back feeling defeated. Then she sprang up again. He wouldn't tell her secret, not if there happened to be an even bigger story for him if he kept quiet. It was worth a try.

Rodger was going through his e-mails when he came across one from someone called Lisa. It was the short blond woman from the crash site. She had left her phone number and wanted him to call her. He wondered why she wanted to contact him? They didn't know each other from Adam. They had only exchanged a few words, so what could she possibly want? There was only one way to find out. He typed, I am curious as to what you want from me. Satisfied with his message, he pressed send.

Elvis took a mouthful of coke to wash down the pill. The stomach cramp was subsiding a little. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat. His piles were playing up, and he was passing blood. He looked out of the van window at the two men. They seemed to be having a heated conversation. Then he saw Niles hand over some cash. The other man walked away, and Niles was returning to the van.

“Well?” Elvis asked as the doctor seated himself.

“He'll do it. These low lives will soon want payment for scratching their arses.”

“Every labourer is worth their hire; my father used to say.”

“It's bad enough having to do Matthew's dirty work for him without trying to guess what it is about.”

Elvis fed up with Niles' whining, looked at his passenger darkly. “I used to be curious about his motives, but now I don't give a fuck.”

“With that attitude, he must have something big on you, Elvis.”

The driver countered, “And what's he got on you to make you clean up his shit?”

Niles, not wanting to divulge his sins, smiled, “Maybe it's best if we avoid the personal stuff.”

“Yeah. So when is your man going to get back to us?”

“He'll ring me when he has something.”

“Yeah, well it had better be soon, or I don't give much for our long-term futures.”

Rodger looked at the e-mail again. It still didn't make a lot of sense. Lisa said she had something of interest to show him. It was a puzzle that may well point to the reason for the plane crash. If he is



interested they could meet, but not at her place. The family had a caravan in Wivenhoe. They could meet there. Rodger found the messages bizarre but enticing. What did Lisa mean about a puzzle and what did it have to do with the air disaster? With piqued curiosity, he e-Mailed back asking for direction details.

Niles sat beside Elvis in the van. He had never harmed anybody, not on purpose anyhow. Furthermore, The doctor had taken the Hippocratic oath. So hurting another person was not his forte. "This is taking things too far, Elvis. It's against my ethics to go around hurting people."

"Yeah, well take it up with Matthew. But be warned. This folder somebody stole from the briefcase is crucial to him." Then, turning to the older man, he asked, "So what did your friend find out?"

"He's hardly my friend."

"Whatever. So what did the man say?"

"We can narrow it down to three people, discounting the police. A woman air crash investigator, A bloke from Air Express, called Harry Krakow and some reporter from the Clarion. He was seen snooping around."

"So who do we start with?"

"The woman, Lisa Parton lives alone. Let's start with her."

"So where do we find her?"

"She lives in Colchester. Matthew got her address."

Elvis Hall drove his van down Warnock Rd, past the Kendall Road turnoff. "It's just over there, on the right," he said, pointing at the block of six apartments.

Niles checked his doctor's bag. His equipment was prepared and in place. He grabbed his bag, then hesitated. Looking pleadingly at Elvis, he moaned, "I'm a doctor. How the hell am I supposed to do this?"

"I'm just the driver. It's not my problem," Elvis answered, dispassionately.

"It will be if I fuck up. You're in this too, remember."

"Oh for Christ's sake, walk by the place and check it out. If she's there, you have to find a way to get inside. If she's out, case the joint. It's not fucking rocket science."

"That's easy for you to say. I don't want to hurt the woman."

Elvis raised his eyes, "Jesus, you probably won't have to. Just find out if she has it. If so, with a bit of intimidation she'll probably show a bit of sense and fess up."

"I bloody hope so but how will I know if she is telling the truth or not?"

"For fuck sake just get out there and do it."

"But supposing she doesn't have it, what then?"

"Then we go and talk to the reporter."

"I mean what happens if she reports us to the police?"

Elvis, pissed off, stared at the doctor, "It's your job to see that she doesn't."



“And what if she does have it but lies about it?”

Niles stared daggers at Elvis but said nothing. Then he opened his door. He snarled,

“Good luck and if you're not back in 30 minutes, I'm out of here.”

Niles scowled at Elvis. They did not get on at all, and the doctor hated having to rely on somebody he disliked. He climbed out of the vehicle and felt the chill of the evening greet him. Hefting his bag, Niles took the first step on a perilous journey that would irreparably change his life.

The big sharp rap broke Lisa's concentration. Who could be at her door, she wondered nervously. She didn't usually have people calling in the evening. “Who is it?” she asked from behind the locked front door.

“Police. We need to ask you something about the plane crash. Open the door please.”

Lisa froze. She was working on the parchment code, and she didn't have time to stash it. “Just a moment, I have to get dressed.” Bluffing, she grabbed the Parchment, shoved it into the leather folder and quickly hid it under a cushion on the lounge. Satisfied she had concealed it sufficiently, she went back to the door. Upon unlatching and opening the door, a tall man with thick charcoal hair confronted her. “Come in,” she invited. Once they were both indoors, she asked, “So officer, how can I help you?”

Niles looked down at the blond woman. She couldn't have dressed so quickly, which meant she had kept him waiting while she was doing something else. Hiding a folder, perhaps. “We are trying to locate a folder taken from the aircraft wreckage.”

She calmed her breathing. Stalling for time to gather her thoughts, she uttered, “Oh, what folder would that be?”

“It was in a briefcase that was attached to a severed arm. The briefcase was empty when the police found it.”

Lisa thought it a strange turn of phrase for a police officer but paid it no more heed. “And what makes you think I would know anything about it?”

Niles glanced at his watch. He had no time to play around. “The person it belongs to is very rich and has powerful friends. So it would be very wise for anyone who has it to hand it back or they could be in deep trouble.”

“In what way?”

Niles, sweating, running out of time, came straight to the point. “Do you have the folder, Ms Parton?”

“I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name, officer,” Lisa said, becoming suspicious of the man's abrupt change in attitude.

“Inspector Golding. Now, I suggest you give me the folder.”

“Where's your ID, officer?” Lisa asked, cursing herself for letting him in.

“I left it in my car. Now, tell me where the folder is.”

Lisa grabbed her phone. “You won't mind me checking with the police station then.”

This scenario was not the way it was supposed to go. Things were getting out of hand. Niles became very nervy. The play acting was over. He grabbed the phone off Lisa and roughly pushed her onto the lounge.

“Just as I thought. You're not from the police.”

All pretence was gone, Niles, opening his doctor's bag, said, “This is the last time I will ask you nicely. Hand over the folder.”

She stared at him with her small piercing eyes. With tears welling, she said, “I didn't mean any harm. Please don't hurt me.”

“Get me the folder, now.”

She scrambled up and ferreted under the cushion. Withdrawing the leather folder, she handed it to the intruder. “Now, please leave me alone.”

He smelled her fear. He was in command, and she was at his mercy. Her snivelling weakness gave him strength. To his surprise, he was beginning to enjoy it. “I'm afraid it's not that easy, Lisa. I don't want to hurt you,” he said, pushing his face into hers. “But you have seen me, and that puts me in a terrible situation.”

Her ash-grey eyes widened in fear. “I won't say anything. I promise. I stole the folder, and I don't want my boss to find out, so I'm no threat.”

“I have to have time to get away. I know you'll call the police, so I just have to do something to keep you quiet for a while.”

She paled at his words but with her china white skin it was hardly noticeable. Then she stared at the syringe he took from his bag.

Grinning evilly, he said, “Just a little something I prepared earlier.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“It will just knock you out for a while,” he said, grabbing her right arm.

Instinctively she jerked her arm back. “What are you doing?” she asked, although it was entirely obvious.

“Just a small prick and you will be asleep,” he said, grabbing her arm. Lisa, petrified, instinctively struck out at her assailant. But Niles, being physically stronger, soon overpowered her. With one hand over her mouth to stifle her screams, he stuck the hypodermic into her arm. In a reflex action, she bit his hand hard.

“Arrrgh, he screamed and cursed, “You fucking bitch!” As she slumped into a heap, Niles panicked. He grabbed, his bag, the syringe and the file and quickly made his exit.

Elvis had the engine running, as Niles climbed in. “Why did you let her scream?” he asked. “You've probably woken up the whole fucking neighbourhood with that racket.”

Niles said nothing and nursed his injured, bleeding hand, wrapping it in a handkerchief, pulling the knot tight with his mouth. “You're going to have to help me with her.”

“What the fuck are you on about?”

“Help me put her in the back of your van.”

“So you did top her?”

“Just give me a fucking hand.”

“You're a big boy. I'll back up, and you toss her in.”

Niles showed his crudely bandaged hand. “I've only got one good hand.”

Elvis snickered. “Did the big bad lady hurt little diddums?”

“That's very amusing, dick head. Now give me a hand.”

## Chapter 9

The day started off promising for Rodger. The sun was up by 7 am, but the cotton wool clouds greyed over before nine. The reporter rode his Vespa, rugged up, with a muffler tucked into his red anorak. He sat proud astride his metal beast, as traffic flowed past in an almost continual stream. Confident the day would bring forth good things; he whistled as he rode. Feeling exhilarated by the ride from Colchester, he continued onward to Wivenhoe and the mystery that awaited him there.

He slowed his scooter down as he approached the built up area of Wivenhoe. Stopping where Colchester Road morphed into Rectory Rd, he checked the map on his smartphone. Using satellite mode, he looked for Keelar's Lane. He was right on target, right on time and very close to his destination. Lisa was to meet him at 10 am. It was now 9.50. With near perfect timing, Rodger turned into Keelars Lane. Overnight rain had left the lane to the caravan muddy with intermittent puddles. Rodger rode his bike slowly to avoid skidding and any splash-back.

Approaching the small caravan, Rodger became concerned. Nobody appeared to be around, and no vehicles were parked nearby. Pushing his Vespa onto its stand, Rodger approached the trailer and tentatively knocked at the small metal door. There was no answer. The door was unlocked, but he resisted looking inside. Rodger quickly became upset by plans that didn't work out. He tried slowing his rapidly beating heart by deep breathing. The reporter reasoned that there was no problem; she was just running late. It was not unusual for a woman, he grinned.

Ten more minutes elapsed and there was still no sign of her or anybody else for that matter. Rodger decided to give her another ten minutes. Then what? He tried her mobile number, but there was no answer. He wondered what to do. The door 'was' unlocked and she had said she had something to show him. Maybe it was inside. He pulled opening the door. The coast appeared to be clear, so he stepped inside the small caravan and looked around. There was no note, but there was a digital camera on the fold-out table. Rodger looked at it, wondering if it had been left there purposely for him to find. He wanted to see what was on it but was hesitant. Cameras are usually personal items, not for public scrutiny. There again, he reasoned, it could have been left there to give him some clue as to what was going on. Considering this to be the most likely option, Rodger picked it up and checked for any images recorded on the memory card. The pictures of local scenes did not offer much as potential clues. From the caravan door, he scanned his immediate surroundings. The coast still appeared clear. He picked up the memory card. Putting it in his coat pocket, he zipped up his red anorak and left the caravan. He hated loose ends, and this was certainly one of them. Lisa still hadn't shown, and there wasn't any way he could contact her. He sent an SMS and decided to have a look around the small town and drop in to see if she had turned up, later. As he mounted his scooter, a Range Rover stopped a few metres away. An angry man jumped out of the vehicle.

Rodger stood still like a stunned mullet.

The grey haired man eyed the short Black guy. “What are you doing here?”

“I, I was supposed to meet Lisa Parton, but she hasn't turned up.”

“So who are you and how do you know Lisa?”

The situation became awkward. "I don't know Ms Parton, but the woman wanted to see me." Then Rodger asked, "Who are you?"

The man pointed through the trees at a large property. "I live over there." He added, "You are on private property. I let Lisa keep her caravan here."

Rodger forced a nervous smile, "Well, she's not here, so I'll be going then."

The man looked down at Rodger, "Who are you then?"

"Rodger Potter. Why do you want to know?"

"So I can tell Lisa who's been snooping around when I ring her."

"Good luck with that Mr? She's not picking up."

## Chapter 10

### England in the past

Dr Niles Golding found himself in deep trouble. His eyes darted nervously around the room, carefully avoiding those of the constable guarding him. Both the Fraud and Vice squads were interested in him, and that did not bode well. He was jerked from his reverie when the door burst open, and two plainclothes officers entered.

One switched on the tape recorder, announcing, "Detective Inspector Jarvis and Detective Sergeant Lowry have entered the room." Looking at his suspect, Jarvis said, "interview between Dr Niles Golding and D I Jarvis recommencing at," he glanced at his watch, "2.05 pm." He turned to Niles. "So doctor, how do you explain the kilo of cocaine found in your flat?"

He responded, "I have no knowledge of it. Somebody else must have put it there."

"It was found concealed behind a false panel in your bathroom cupboard. Who would have known that such a secret compartment existed?"

Niles knew his story wasn't plausible, and the bastards were playing with him, but he was smart and wouldn't fall into their pathetic trap. "I share the flat with a friend. She must have known about it."

"Are you saying that your friend placed the drugs in your bathroom?" Jarvis pressed.

"We share the same bathroom so she could have stashed them there," Niles quickly answered, hoping his answer made his story sound more credible.

"Is this friend Dr Madeleine Stace?"

"Yes."

Jarvis turned to his offsider. "Bring her in for questioning." He thought he saw Golding's brow crease a little but didn't want to read too much into it. Jarvis recorded, "D S Lowry has left the room." He then scowled at Dr Golding, "You have already admitted to using prohibited class A drugs and we find a large quantity in your gaff. You blame its presence on your flatmate, with whom you have been having a personal as well as professional relationship."

"That's not illegal, is it." Niles retorted, realising they'd done their homework on him.

"Slightly unethical but not illegal." Jarvis then said, "Doctor, while we wait to hear what Dr Stace has to say about your accusation, another officer, this time from the Fraud Squad, will be asking you some questions. Don't worry, though; I will still be here."

'Some cold fucking comfort' Niles thought, churning inside at what the Fraud Squad may have uncovered. He heard Jarvis announce his departure and the entry of the constable sent to guard him.

Niles looked at the long chain of events that had gotten him into this mess. His mind wandered back to a seemingly obscure fact of his childhood. He had liked the colour green for as long as he could remember. And, coming from a farming background, there was usually plenty of green around. As a child, young Niles, a keen learner, realised that everything is made up of electromagnetic energy. He remembered, from his science lessons, about a man called Newton, who split light up into different colours. Of all these colours green resonated with Niles. He discovered the word comes from the old English 'growan', meaning to grow. In some cultures, health or holiness is linked to the colour. It was this association between the colour green and health that steered young Niles towards a medical career.

Jerked from his reverie by voices, he noticed that Jarvis and another officer had entered the room. They went through their mantra on the tape recorder and then, the new one, called Inspector Press, took over.

“Dr Golding do you know of a company called Holst Pharmaceuticals?”

“Yes, our practice deals with them. Why?” Niles queried, both wanting and not wanting to hear the answer.

“Have you had any dealings with a Suzanne Harrison?”

“Yes,”

“In what capacity?”

'Keep calm' Niles urged himself. They are obviously fishing. “She works for Holst Pharmaceuticals.”

Press smiled thinly. He stared at Niles, “She has been fired subject to prosecution.”

Niles, wide-eyed, feigned surprise. He knew the bitch was becoming too greedy. “Oh, what has she done?”

“Apparently she was Holst's most ambitious and successful representative. She was excellent, won the Salesperson of the year award five times consecutively. No one at Holst's had achieved that before. In fact, she was too good at her job, and that raised some suspicions. We began investigations at the behest of her boss and soon we were talking to people, much like yourself, doctor. At first, they were all very tight-lipped, but one GP came forward with a confession and substantial evidence.” Press grinned at Niles, who was visibly squirming in his seat. “But there's no need for me to explain this because you were also part of this little scam, weren't you, doctor?”

Niles, fidgeted, clasping and unclasping his hands. “I don't know what you mean.”

Press opened a folder and produced a bank statement and handed it to Niles. “Is this a copy of your bank statement for the last year, doctor?”

Niles looked at it. He couldn't see anything incriminating. “Yes, why?”

“Look at the credits from Langham Investments; you will notice the same sum has been deposited into your account monthly for at least the last twelve months.”

Niles still bluffing, asked, “So?”

“Did you know that Langham is Suzanne Harrison's maiden name?”

Niles went deathly white. No, he didn't fucking know that. “I want my solicitor present.”

Jarvis passed him his mobile phone. "Make your call Dr Golding."

He was left alone again. It would take the practice's solicitor at least an hour to get to the Nick. He wondered where his life had begun to unravel. It had all progressed so well. After being educated in some private schools, he had gained entrance to the London School of Medicine, where he qualified as a general practitioner. With his first class degree, a firm of doctors in Swansea soon accepted him as a partner. His father warned him that his sarcastic retorts would land him in trouble one day, but he hadn't taken any notice. He gained some notoriety at the University for his pointed remarks which, in an odd way seemed to empower him. By treating others like garbage, he felt better about himself. This problem, his bitter and cynical attitude to life in general, became an uncontrollable habit. When patients complained about his rudeness, the senior partner questioned him about his attitude Niles just laughed it off, asking, "Doesn't anybody have a sense of humour these days."

Reflecting on his behaviour Niles' realised his cavalier attitude had hurt the feelings of others, particularly those of Mary Hughes, the practice receptionist. He enjoyed rubbing her up the wrong way because he couldn't stand her squeaky sweetness and the way she always saw the bright side of dark situations. Knowing she was stuck in a bad marriage, her sugary exudation made Niles feel like vomiting. He would say things like, "It's amazing how you stay so active when you have such a shitty life." Mary was overweight and was always trying different diets. So another one of his favourite jibes was, "Mary, I see the diet is working," when it obviously wasn't.

The fact that his ego was also a problem with one of the other partners, only served to make him exploit the balding, chubby physician further. Niles' slanting green eyes, thick charcoal coloured hair and lithe physique was topped off by a tanned skin, which made him look more like a film heartthrob than a doctor. He remembered being called to task and was told, in no uncertain words, to lay off Mary and to stop prancing around like some ballet prima donna. But Niles just could not help himself, and soon his patient list diminished. He became depressed and, uninspired with his lot, turned to the bottle for solace. The partners told him he had become a liability to the practice and he was asked to leave. This shock made him more self-destructive. But by this time he didn't even care.

When the police officers returned to the interview room, Abigail Prance said, "My client wishes to cooperate fully concerning your fraud allegations but had no knowledge of the drugs found in his flat."

Press looked quizzically at Jarvis, who raised an eyebrow.

Jarvis explained, "It's a separate inquiry, nothing to do with the fraud case."

Press nodded, "Very well, let's stick to the scam. Perhaps your client will tell us what happened."

"I will speak on behalf of my client, inspector. Dr Golding was suffering from stress and depression when Suzanne Harrison approached him and offered him a way to make a little extra cash."

Press interrupted. "Records show that Dr Golding had earned more than 50,000 pounds in the previous tax year. Why would he risk his medical career to make, as you put it 'a little extra cash?'"

"Like I said, my client was in a vulnerable emotional state, partly to do pressures financially."

"What was the nature of these financial pressures?"

"I hardly see where that has any relevance to this case, inspector. Let us just say the extra cash would have been helpful."

"What did Dr Golding have to do to make this extra money?"

“He had to endorse the Holst products and where possible, use them exclusively. Suzanne Harrison cleverly manipulated doctors by offering them financial and other incentives to help her sales bottom line.”

Inspector Press didn't buy the poor doctor routine one bit. “Did the physicians in the practice order their supplies?”

“In my client’s medical practice doctors place their orders for medical supplies through one person. It is his or hers job to take responsibility for these orders. My client wishes to point out that it was his job to stock-take and order supplies.”

“How convenient,” Jarvis interjected.

Abigail Prance shot him a dark look.

Press continued, “So your client, who by his admission, was on the take, also ordered for five other doctors in the practice?”

“That is correct.”

“Did he influence the products used by other doctors in the practice. Before you answer, bear in mind that we are checking the orders put in by other doctors and what they received.”

Niles squirmed about in his seat. Abigail, seeing his discomfort, said, “I need to confer with my client about this.”

Jarvis, having had enough said, “Why don't you cut the bullshit? You said your client would cooperate fully. We know he is guilty of fraud, as do you and your client. We are aware he manipulated the orders to build up his commission from who was it? Oh yes, Langham Investments. So why not save us all some time and trouble?”

Abigail smiled sweetly. “Gentlemen, we won't be long.”

While Abigail Prance conferred with Dr Golding, Press Drew Jarvis aside, “Don't ever do that in an interview again! All your outburst achieved was showing them our frustration. I had the bastard by the balls and was about to reel him in. Now, because of you, I have to play him a bit longer.”

Jarvis responded, “It makes my blood boil. The privileged bastards of this world, they got it all and still they are not satisfied.”

“Don't worry, I've got him. I'll just have to wait a little longer to nail the corrupt bastard.”

“I don't want to lose my licence,” Niles said in confidence.

“Dr Golding, you are being charged with a serious offence, and you may well lose your licence. The police have a very strong case against you. My recommendation to you is that you plead guilty and let the mitigating circumstances work to lessen your sentence.”

Niles gripped the edge of the desk. “Do you mean gaol time?”

“It's a distinct possibility. However, from what you tell me, after being asked to leave the partnership you became deeply depressed and turn to alcohol. You drank a lot. After a particularly heavy night drinking that left you in a gaol cell till morning, you decided to clean up your act.”

“Yes, that's right.”

She eyed him squarely. “That will seal your fate. So we will say you were upset about leaving the partnership and you became depressed. Now the police know you spent one night in a cell for being drunk and disorderly, so we say it was the only occasion. We will mean that you are passionate about helping people, but you couldn't find a position that suited your qualifications.”



Niles liked the spin. She was good. His mind wandered back to when the Swansea doctors severed the partnership. He certainly wanted to put his shingle back on the wall, so he applied for and got a position as GP at a new medical centre, run by Dr Madeleine Stace, a beautiful blonde practitioner a few years his senior. He knew there was chemistry between them and they were soon meeting for a social drink after work. He also joined Maddie in a flutter at the casino. Niles liked Maddie's refreshing openness about all things. She disliked his acidic sarcasm, and after it had elicited wincing looks a couple of times, he had done his best to kerb his mouth and even bit his lip on occasions. Niles could be charming when he wanted, and he laid it on for Maddie at their first dinner date. It went well enough for them to see each other again. Maddie saw beyond his cynical defences and helped him bring out his underlying human qualities; attributes scorned when he was young. His farmer father tried getting Niles interested in shooting wild rabbits, but young Niles never had the temperament for what he saw to be brutal acts. His father whipped him with his belt for spoiling a shot that was about to bring down a rabbit. Niles could still feel the welts when he thought about it. He changed his mind after that and tried to outdo his father. Now, after all, these years, he was able to show his sensitive side, but he only did so in privacy with the beautiful blonde doctor.

Niles and Maddie got to know each other well and Maddie introduced him to her circle of professional friends. Niles liked being part of her social group. They took turns in throwing lush parties, an exciting scene new to him. They all ate and drank too much and had a great time. It was at one of these gigs that he snorted his first line of coke.

He was jerked back to the present when Press and Jarvis entered the room.

Abigail said, "My client admits influencing other doctors in the practice to use Holst products."

Press said, "I think it went further than that. I have testimonies from other doctors in the practice who told me they only used Holst products because your client told them their usual brands weren't available."

"That was true, sometimes," Niles blurted out, noting the withering look from his lawyer.

"Sometimes!" Inspector Press commented. And what about other times, when you deliberately misled your colleagues so you could earn some more commission?"

"Once or twice. That was all."

## **Chapter 11**

### **South Africa in the past**

Matthew Atreides was no man's fool. He had some understanding of the way the powerful ruling elite played the world game. He understood that to be a player this super powerful clique had to accept him into their world. This desire, his primary goal in life, became an obsession but one he cleverly disguised from friends and colleagues. To keep his focus on the main game Matthew used self-discipline, an important attribute he learned at a very young age, in the strict Lutheran religious community in which he grew up. He soon discovered the righteous ones who took the switch to him for his sins, were themselves transgressors of the word of God. Some of them even indulged in criminal activities that involved prohibited substances. On more than one occasion young Matthew, saw senior Johannesburg police receive envelopes from members of the righteous Lutheran Brethren. From this, he learned a lesson. There was a law for the poor and a law for the rich, and he was determined not to be poor.

Matthew had to relocate with his family when Jan, a diamond cutter, was offered a job at the Kimberley mine. He soon settled in and enjoyed life in the Northern Cape capital. There he attended St. Patrick's College in Du Toitspan Rd, where he received his high school education. While there

young Matthew first discovered his desire to become a chemist. He also discovered something else that set him up for his goal in life. He became part of a secret fraternity called 'The Bones Society' white members only group. It blatantly copied the Ivy League 'Skull and Bones Society' even down to the naked confessional. He noted that 'Bonesmen' got away with things non-members did not. In fact, many non-members, especially the coloureds, were blamed and punished for transgressions committed by Bones Society members. It was here that Matthew Atreides got his taste for power and position in society. From his experience at St. Pat's he learned, among other things, that representative democracy was a sham. By allowing people to vote for the politician of their choice maintained the illusion that they have some power over government. He soon learned that real power resides outside of governments; that governments can be relied on to do the right thing for the ruling elite because they are controlled by them. By the time he graduated, Mr worldly wise Atreides was determined to be in with the power lobby of the world.

Matthew became so obsessed with the idea of being one of the big global players that he was determined to get noticed. So when the opportunity came about for him to attend a conference on 'Population and Development' he grasped it with both hands. During the luncheon at the Conrad Hotel in St. James. It cost him five hundred pounds for a seat but if that's what it took for him to be in with the people who mattered, so be it. He listened rapt as the keynote speaker, multi-billionaire oil baron Jim Rockerman Jnr. Outlined his message. "It is imperative," Jim Rockerman stated, "that our globalisation agenda brings all of Earth's inhabitants under one global state, one that is run by those best equipped to govern it. And, gentlemen, that means us."

Matthew, joining in with the rapturous applause, followed his every word. This very powerful and courageous man was saying the things others, like him, may have thought about but dared not voice.

Rockerman continued, "We will be the architects and instigators behind the formation and implementation of this New World Order. We will do so simply because somebody has to take the lead and be resolute and vigorous enough to do what must be done if humanity is to survive." Thumping his fist on the rostrum for emphasis, he said, "You people are here today because I believe you have what it takes to get on board and help us see this master plan unfold."

Matthew saw it very clearly. He had removed his blinkers, and he saw the light. Jotting some notes on his pad, he waited for the great Man's next words.

"In this modern manifestation of Aristotelian governance, we will be the political leaders. We will be the international bankers, the industrial military complex and the corporate CEOs. We will also be, the scientists, the professors, the lawyers, media magnates, and NGO heads. But first we are faced with a mammoth task, and we must not be squeamish. For our grand plan are to be successful, we must find ways to reduce the human population by around five billion."

There was silence in the room. This occasion was the first time Matthew had heard such a bold statement. He noted the bewildered looks of stark surprise on the faces of those around him. Hoping his face showed no shocked expression, Matthew nodded in agreement. He felt driven to comment. Speaking out, he said, "Mr Rockerman, I fully support your stand, and I am with you all the way."

Jim Rockerman scanned the diners, and his eyes came to rest on, a tall, slender gaunt-looking man with hair like a Newtonian wig. He asked, "And who are you?"

"Doctor Matthew Atreides sir."

"Well Matthew Atreides, welcome to the future on earth if we are to have one."

Matthew left the conference with a mixture of elation and frustration, The former because he had found what he saw to be the key to his mission in life; the latter because nobody seemed to be taking action. The way he saw it, most people had no real reason for being. What do people do?

Mainly they eat, shit and make babies – too many babies. And when they can't make them naturally scientists find a way to produce them artificially. Well, all that had to stop! Most people on the planet, to Matthew's way of thinking, were just 'useless eaters', contributing nothing towards the future on Earth. The conservation lobby kept tinkering away at the edges, but they couldn't make any real difference while humans bred like rabbits. Matthew wanted to shout his global message from the rooftops; THIS CANNOT GO ON! But who would listen? He determined to do something about it. After all, somebody had to take affirmative action and if the task fell on his shoulders, so be it. The more he thought about it, the more he became convinced that he was the right man for the job.

In the post-meeting rush for the exit, Matthew had no idea somebody was pursuing him. “Well done you.” he heard the person say. Looking around, he found himself face to face with a man sporting a tweed jacket with elbow patches.

The stranger said, “Let me shake your hand for standing and speaking out as you did.” Then, almost as an afterthought, “The names Arthur Chatsworth. I say would you like to have a drink with me at my hotel so that we can put forward some ideas.”

Matthew smiled thinly, “Matthew Atreides. Yes, why not but I warn you I am a man of action, not beautiful words.”

As they sat at the Conrad bar in the Hilton Hotel, in St James. Small talk soon changed into the subject of saving humanity, “So, how were you planning on helping Jim Rockerman,” Chatsworth asked, sipping his beer.

“I'm not sure he's the one who needs my help,” Matthew taunted.

“I didn't mean it. I said supporting the principle of human population management in general.”

Chatsworth sipped his scotch. “So, do you have any ideas?”

“Some.”

“Such as.”

Matthew swept back his white hair. “If I told you that I would have to kill you,” he said, with a wink.

“Okay. So we're strangers, and I could be anybody. I get that, Mr Atreides. But I'm serious here. Maybe we could work together on this project.”

Matthew nodded sagely. “Perhaps we could, but it needs to be bigger than just us. We need some heavyweights on board.”

“Like a kind of think tank.”

“More than that Mr Chatsworth. We need people can make things happen below the radar.”

So who is Arthur Chatsworth? Matthew mused A quick Google search revealed his listing in Burke's Peerage as the Duke of Somerset. Now Matthew was interested and read on:

He was the son of Richard Rodney Somerton Fitzwilliam Chatsworth and Bethany Rose Malcolm. He got educated at Eton College; commissioned into the Coldstream Guards where he got promoted to Lieutenant. He held the office of Hereditary Keeper of Stirling Castle; was president of British Horse Society; Marlborough Fine Art; and was 652nd in Sunday Times Rich List.

He looked all too squeaky clean to Matthew until he came across a juicy tidbit. In February 2008, a Swansea councillor criticised Arthur Chatsworth for having received 342 thousand pounds for influencing the construction of a 70 ft bridge to be built over the River Tawe. It may have been morally reprehensible but not criminally illegal. Matthew smiled, maybe he could work with Lord Arthur Chatsworth after all.

## Chapter 12

“I won't do it!” Niles stated vehemently.

Elvis couldn't care less about what would happen to Niles, but his neck was also on the line if they stuffed up. Matthew Atreides was not a man to cross, and Elvis did not fancy becoming one of his problems. He also knew that he couldn't browbeat the good doctor into doing his bidding. So he tried reverse psychology. “Mr Atreides made it clear that this was of the utmost importance to him.”

“Mr Atreides can get fucked. I'm not doing it.”

“He was desperate, and that is when his at his most dangerous.”

“Then he needs to hire a professional to do the job, not me.”

Elvis wanted to smash the doctor in the face, knock some sense into him. He said, “Well, Dr Atreides, being such an understanding man, might see your point, but I wouldn't bet my shirt on it.”

“I am not a murderer,” Niles protested.

“So what was the little package we deposited in the river – dirty washing?”

Niles hated Elvis' dark sarcasm. “So you think this is fucking funny, do you?”

The pilot knew the doctor was all bluff. “What I'm saying is you've done it once, so you're already a murderer, so what's the difference,” he shrugged.

“How many more times do we have to do that mad man's dirty work?” Niles complained.

“And I thought he was your saviour.”

“So he helped me out once. Do I have to pay for the rest of my life?”

Elvis held the van door open. “Just get in the fucking van and let's get it done with.”

Deep down Niles knew refusal was useless. Matthew had bought and paid for him. He mused over events out of his control that had moulded him like a piece of clay in Matthew's hands.

He had been given three years and had his medical licence suspended for seven years. The news made the front page in the tabloids and came to the attention of Matthew Atreides. He made a practice of employing and surrounding himself with damaged people. Seemingly honest, professional individuals who had dark pasts they would rather hide. Their secrets were safe with him, providing they were loyal to him and carried out his orders without questioning them. For many of these people, Matthew was their only chance at regaining their respectability in society.

To help Dr Golding, Matthew had set up a lunch date at Whites to meet with a famous friend.

As they dined, the government insider said, “Do you know, back in the 1800's there were only a few gentlemen's clubs functioning in London. This one, Boodles, Grahams, Brookes and Cocoa Tree.”

“Fascinating but I have a small favour to ask.”

The insider dreaded this. Matthew's small favours tended to end up as bloody big ones. “What is it, dear boy?”

The chemist handed the insider a folder, “GP, got himself in a bit of a pickle – a bit of piddling fraud. They stuck him in chokey and took away his practising licence.”

The insider put on his spectacles and scanned the document. He then looked up at his guest. “Seems like more than piddling fraud to me. He played favourites with one pharmaceutical company for his personal gain. He also got charged with dealing cocaine.”

“Yes, well I would like to get him an early release and have his licence reinstated.”

The bureaucrat laughed, “Really Matthew, you crack me up sometimes. Even if I was willing to undergo your little mission how on God's earth do you think I could influence the Home Secretary.”

“You are well placed. You have the HS's ear.”

“Yes dear boy, and he will send me off with a flea in mine.”

Matthew fixed his man with his jade green eyes. I think you should consider my request seriously before discarding it, being the loving family man that you are.”

The White's member blanched. “You wouldn't dare. I spoke that in the strictest confidence as a member of the order.”

“Yes, and by refusing to do my bidding you have broken the oath that protects you.”

The bureaucrat becomes a bag of nerves. “It's not that I don't want to help. It's just that you impose upon me an impossible task.”

“Oh, I think you are underestimating your influence at the parliamentary court.”

Matthew was secretly pleased with himself. It was the first time an initiate of the Gaia Guide stones had questioned him and refused to carry out his dictate. He had handled it rather well, reducing his opponent to quivering jelly. The bones-men's initiation confession certainly had its uses.

In due course, Niles Golding got granted early release. He was summoned to go before the review board to have his medical qualifications assessed. It came as a surprise to Niles when the guard took him to the to see the governor, who explained the conditions of his release, one of which was to attend NA meetings. Niles had no idea why he was getting early release or who was behind it, but he was soon to find out. A car was waiting outside the prison. The driver watched as the massive doors open, and Niles Golding walked out into the sunshine – free. Elvis looked at the photo and then at the convict. They matched. He flashed his headlights. Niles walked towards the stationary car.

Niles wondered who the strange looking guy was. He had a feminine air about him. His white hair was tied in a plait, and the lemon yellow pants the dandy wore were outrageous. Niles could see that the man had a commanding presence about him. “So who are you?” he asked.

“The man who got you freed and who is attempting to have your licence restored.”

Bemused, Niles asked, “Why have you done this?”

Matthew smiled, “Your case interested me. Tell me, doctor, what is it that you want most?”

Niles took in the tasteful surrounding, stylish furniture upholstered in lemon-coloured kid hide, precious ornaments and state of the art media centre. Outside was an Olympic size swimming pool, sheltered by a tinted plexiglass roof. “I want this. Well, not your home but I want to live surrounded by such luxuries.”

Matthew held Niles close by his shoulders and looked into his eyes. “Your life has been wasted. You need me to help you up the ladder of fame and fortune. You are a good-looking and intelligent man. Niles Golding I can help you get the things you desire, but you have to give your life up to me for the next four weeks. Are you prepared to do that?”

“What have I got to lose?”

Matthew laughed raucously. “Precisely my friend. Precisely.”

Niles found himself rapidly caught up in the crazy secret world of Matthew Atreides. Matthew took Niles to Cleve Laboratories where he was formally introduced to Elvis Hall, Atreides' private chauffeur and pilot.

Matthew then announced, “Niles, we are flying to Scotland.”

“Why?” Niles asked, warily.

“To visit my country seat.”

“You want me to meet your family?” Niles queried, his face a question mark.

“None of my family live there.”

“Then why?”

“Don't you like surprises?”

“That depends on the surprise.”

Niles looked out of a porthole window of the twin-engined Piper Seneca at Stirling, a smallish town in Scotland's central belt, roughly midway between the sprawling aggressive Glasgow and the urban sprawl of the refined Edinburgh. Matthew pointed out “That's Stirling Castle, built on that huge volcanic rock. Nearby you can see the bell tower, the only part of Clanbuskenneth Abbey left standing.”

“Why are we going there?”

“Because that is my family seat.”

Niles grinned, “Now I know why your family doesn't live there.”

Matthew turned to Niles, a knowing smile playing on his lips. “Something much more important takes place there.”

“What?” the doctor queried, his eyebrows raised.

“It's part of my little surprise Niles.”

Niles looked at the River Forth below, silvery grey, snaking through the valley. “Where's the airstrip?”

Matthew smirked. “Stirling doesn't have one, that's why we have an experienced pilot,” he said, patting Elvis on the shoulder.

The pilot just gritted his teeth and concentrated on his flying.

Niles felt the plane drop and head towards the up rushing rocky landscape. Gripping his seat with white knuckles, his grave concern about the picturesque mountain scape racing up to meet them far outweighed its aesthetic appeal.

However, Elvis had landed there before. He skillfully manoeuvred his Piper to land on the flatter piece of land near the abbey ruins. Niles, relieved to be standing on solid ground, looked at the stark vista. The air was very chilly at that altitude, and Niles was pleased he wore a fur-lined suede jacket. Despite being wrapped up against the weather, the doctor still felt the cold biting into his bones. Niles blew onto his hands to stop them from freezing. Then he noticed a kilted man walking towards them. "Who's the welcome committee?" he asked.

In answer, the man approaching, said, "I'm Angus MacFee, curator of the Abbey."

Matthew shook his hand. "Matthew Atreides. Where's Duncan? I sent him my instructions."

Angus eyed the vulturine man. "Aye Mr Atreides, but ye must realise that the Trust has many properties to oversee."

"So have you received my instructions."

"Aye, you have permission to have sole use of the Abbey over the weekend. But it's going to be verra cold up here. So you're going to need a fire. Do you know how to make torches?"

"No."

"That's what I thought. I'll send Willy Foreman up here. His on the Trust Committee and he knows all about ancient torches." Angus turned to go. Then, as an afterthought, he asked, "Is there anything else you'll be needing?"

"Just make sure the caterers are here tomorrow morning."

"Aye, Mr Atreides."

Niles, already feeling chilled bones, said, "Are we staying up here tonight?"

"Yes, now follow me, I want to show you something."

As they walked around the square-shaped bell tower Niles, feeling increasingly like Matthew's dog, saw a stone circle, on a small plateau.

Matthew became very flamboyant. He ran into the middle of the circle throwing his arms in the air. "Welcome to the Gaia Guidestones."

"What are the Gaia Guidestones?"

"The way of the future Niles and I invite you to be part of it."

Puzzled at Matthew's irrational behaviour, he said, "Part of what, exactly?"

"When we meet with the others here tomorrow the picture will become clearer for you."

"Others! What others?"

"The other members of course. Surely you didn't think I was putting this on just for your benefit."

Niles didn't know what to think. He took in the circle of 12 standing stones. "What do these have to do with it?"

"At the moment not much. But once we finish work on the stones they will become very significant indeed."



“Significant Matthew, in what way?”

“In this Abbey, you will refer to me as Grand Master Atreides,” he corrected.

Niles laughed nervously. “You are kidding.”

Matthew's Jade eyes fixed on Niles “I do not kid about anything concerning the Gaia Guidestones.”

## Chapter 13

Following a sleepless night, owing to the sharp mountain chill and lack of adequate heating, Niles was up very early. He had a magnificent panoramic view and towards the east, saw a reddening in the dawn sky. He wondered what sort of weird club he was joining. It was all probably quite harmless, a club for the boys, a weekend wind-down from the pressure of the week's work. He was dying for a mug of hot coffee, but that would have to wait until the caterers got there. Nile's teeth started chattering, so he headed back to the stone keep. Then he saw the pilot coming towards him. The man had a thick coat a woollen muffler and a beanie covering his ears. Niles ventured, “What do you make of this place then?”

Elvis, having spent a cramped night in his plane, stopped short as another stomach cramp nearly cut him in half. Grimacing, he took a swig of scotch from a small silver flask he had picked up in Toledo. Seeing Niles shivering, offered him a drink.

Niles downed a swig, immediately benefiting from the warm sensation. “Thanks, that's just what I needed. But are you okay?”

Elvis kept quiet about the whisky being medicinal for his pain. He knew, as the pilot, he shouldn't be drinking. “Just one nip in the morning, when I'm flying. But I've grounded myself today so what the hell.” He took another belt and handed the scotch back to Niles. “So, you're one of them, are you?”

“Who's them?”

“One of Atreides crew. Or should I say grand fucking master?”

“You're not very respectful to your boss.”

Elvis glared. “You'll soon find out,”

“What do you mean?”

Elvis kept silent. He's made his point. If the idiot didn't work it out, that was his problem.

As the morning progressed, some men arrived in, helicopters, 4WDs, light aircraft and even one on a motorbike. The catering company was busy setting up a movable feast, and Matthew rushed around keeping a check on how the event was coming together. He set Niles up with a portly gentleman wearing a monocle. Matthew said, “Niles, this is Phericides. He will school you on what will soon take place.”

As they stood in the weak sun, Niles was only half listening as Phericides went on about Gaia Guidestones being an offshoot of the New World Order. “You Niles have been chosen to become initiated into the Brotherhood of the Gaia Guidestones.”

Niles turned on him. “I have been chosen! What is that supposed to mean? Chosen by whom?”

“It is not to be questioned. Just see it as a great honour.”

“A great honour!”

“It is indeed a great honour. The Grand Master must have seen something in you of which you are not aware.”

Niles felt trapped. He couldn't easily get off the mountain by himself. But if he stayed he was at the mercy of whatever lay in store for him. “Surely I have a say in this. Supposing I disagree and don't want to become part of this, what then?”

Phericides bristled. “Then you will miss out on the opportunity of a lifetime. Between us, the members of this brotherhood, we have influence in just about all facets of society. You will represent the Gaia Guidestones in the medical profession.”

“What do you mean, represent? I am merely a GP, not a top level bureaucrat in the Ministry of Health.”

“Once you become one of us you will have tremendous influence at your fingertips.”

Niles thought about at the mysterious ancient bell tower, the enigmatic stone circle and Matthew, the self-acclaimed Grand Master. He asked, “Is this some secret society?”

Ignoring the question, Phericides answered, “Did you know that Adam Weishaupt founded the Bavarian Illuminati on May 1st, 1776, the year of American independence from Britain.”

Ignoring the trivia, Niles said, “So, the answer is yes then?”

Phericides had his agenda and wouldn't let Niles distract him from his task. “He did this with Baron Rothschild funded support. Under their patronage, he was able to be the founder of the German expression of Illumination.”

“Are we something to do with the fucking Illuminati then?” Niles asked, annoyed.

Phericides tutted. “There's no need for obscenities.”

“Then answer my question.”

“No doctor, we are independent.” He said, “Now listen to what I have to say. It will become important to you.”

Niles wondered how but kept silent,

The plump teacher continued, “The Bavarian Illuminati were not the first illuminates. Their origins can be traced back to the sixteenth-Century Muslim cult 'the Roshaniya of Afghanistan'.”

“Who are they?”

“An Afghan secret society barely mentioned these days.”

“That doesn't answer my question.”

The portly gentleman looked at the handsome doctor. “Roshan means 'light' in Dari and Pashto, the Afghan lingos. The only other thing I know of any significance is that in 1907, Habibullah Khan, Amir of Afghanistan at the time, was inducted into Masonry in Calcutta, by the highest-ranking Freemasons in British India. In true Roshaniya tradition, he took the first three ordinary degrees all at once.”

“Why was Afghanistan, a dust bowl of dirt tracks and caves, so important?”

“It had importance to British Masonry as a trade route, but even more importance was its poppy supply,”

“Heroin!”

Phericides laughed, "You seem surprised." Niles didn't respond so he continued, "The Amir knew this, and so did his illustrious sponsors. That's why it remains relevant to this day."

Niles turned to the fat man. "So what's these guide-stones got to do with it?"

"The Grand Master believes they will be a circle of power."

"But you don't. Is that right?"

The big man swung round on Niles. "It's not wise to make presumptions." Then he calmed down a little.

The doctor asked, "Are the Guidestones part of the New World Order?"

"Many of those working for the NWO are not aware they are doing so. This situation is not so with the Brotherhood of the Gaia Guidestones. We are all entirely cognitive of our role in world affairs. However, the conspiracy would not exist if everybody knew what was going on. Certain people became privy to certain knowledge on a need to know basis only. Controlling the controllers is central to the Brotherhood's success. Matthew Atreides, the Worshipful Master, took his tenets from Weishaupt who was behind the Bavarian Illuminati."

"What does he have to do with this?" Niles asked, gesturing with a full sweep of his arms.

Just then a horn was sounded. Phericides said, "We are being summoned. It begins."

The brethren transformed the cold, stark bell tower for the meeting. A scarlet rug covered much of the stone floor, with an elaborately carved rostrum set up in the centre. Behind it stood Matthew Atreides, the Grand Master of the Gaia Guidestones, attired in richly bedecked flowing robes, his hands resting on the rostrum. The Guidestones members filed in and took their seats on the scarlet cushions covering the bench that ran around the inside perimeter of the tower. It was like a scene from an old film or book.

With all members seated, Matthew began, "Brothers of the Gaia Guidestones, chaos is the starting point of all societies. After much bloodshed, from this chaos order will emerge. Order, my brothers, comes at a price. Our world is once more becoming chaotic, and it is now our turn to guide it towards order and balance. To achieve this lofty goal we have to take it upon ourselves to stand firm and resolute in what we have to do. And what we have to do is secure a future on this planet for the worthiest in mind and body."

One of the enclave's members, a corpulent man with a resonant voice said, "Grand Master, can you speak about the practical application of this goal?"

"Gentlemen, our vaccine is almost ready for distribution. You will each be apprised of the role you will play in getting this to the 'useless feeders' plaguing this world." Matthew looked around the group. Now, before we get into the reports, let us recite the oath by speaking our pledge."

In one voice the members recited, "We Guardians of the guide stones pledge that we will dedicate our lives to restoring the balance needed for human survival on Earth. To this end, we will do what it takes to achieve this high and noble goal. We will not shy from our sacred task because it seems impossible. We will not allow our human sensibilities get in the way of the important duty."

Matthew, with his flowing white hair and lanky build, looked more like demonic pallbearer than the master of ceremonies. Looking for Niles in the audience he said, "Niles Golding, step up here."

Niles came forward tentatively, wondering what to expect. He still wasn't sure about hooking up with these strange robed men. But being part of such an influential fraternity could well work to his advantage. Phericides came forward and told Niles to sit on a chair, put in the centre of the floor for the occasion. He whispered close to the doctor's ear, "Just relax and go with it."

Niles wondered what he meant. He soon found out. They shackled his wrists to the arms of the chair, and they put a blindfold hood over his head. To his horror, he could neither move or see. Christ, he could be the victim of some elaborate psychopathic ritual. Maybe they didn't want him – just his blood. Despite the chill, he sweated profusely. Then he heard Matthew's words.

“Do you solemnly declare that you by your honour that unbiased and uninfluenced you freely offer yourself as a candidate for the mysteries of the Gaia Guidestones?”

Niles knew he had to answer yes. To do so meant agreeing to whatever came next. The tower went completely silent. The pressure grew. He had to respond. Haltingly he mouthed, “yes.”

“Do you declare upon your honour that you are prompted to solicit the privileges of the Guidestones your belief in this institution, a desire for knowledge and the sincere wish to be useful to your fellow brethren?”

“Yes.” Niles then felt somebody interfering with his clothes. Then cold air on his naked chest. Shivering, he felt the point of something sharp press against his heart. Rigid with fear, Niles could hardly breathe. Then he heard Matthew's voice again.

“The point of this sharp knife pressed upon your naked left breast is to warn you of your fate should you attempt to reveal the secrets of the Guidestones unlawfully.”

What secrets? His mind was asking. He didn't know any secrets.

“Now, Niles Golding, repeat after me, “Oh, Almighty Father of the Universe, at this time in our present convention, that this Guidestones candidate may henceforth dedicate and devote his life to thy service and become a real brother among us.”

Niles, with a little prompting, repeated the words. In the chorus, the gathered brethren said, “So let it be.”

The Grand Master continued, “Endow him with the competency of thy wisdom that he may be better enabled to display the beauty of brotherly love, truth and justice in thy holy name. Amen.”

“Amen,” the gathered brethren spoke in unison.

Niles, still hooded, confused, scared and yet strangely excited, was led by Phericides out of the tower, and down to the circle of stones, where Niles had his hood removed. Then his arms were stretched out, and they manacled him iron rings attached to the tallest of the menhirs. “What's happening now?” he asked, trembling with fear and the cold.

Phericides answered, “Stay calm and all will be well.”

“What, after I've been frozen to death?”

The other members gathered around the circle of upright stones. Then the Grand Master intoned, “Niles Golding, You have been shackled to the stone as a mark of your newly found dedication to our cause. You will stay there for the period of one hour during which time you can reflect on your pledge to the Guidestones and ask how you can best help this noble cause.”

Niles just prayed the bizarre ritual would soon be over.

## Chapter 14

Angela Madison knew Matthew Atreides found her attractive from the first day she came to work in his laboratory. The feeling was mutual. Although he wasn't the kind of person, she would have usually found attractive. His long white hair, gaunt features and feminine gestures, suggested a

cross between a pallbearer and a hair stylist. He was, in fact, a scientific genius, a man driven to achieving a name for himself. She beguiled him with her deep dark eyes that put him in mind of black marble. Despite her outrageous hairstyles, at the time scarlet silky straight hair, she proved very proficient at her job as a research scientist at Cleve Chemicals. So much so that she now headed a research team looking into bacterial infections and how to combat them.

Dr Madison's team of scientists had produced DteT, a variant of DTaP, an immunogenic strain of anti-tetanus. But she was becoming concerned because it was being targeted at pregnant women when all the medical journals she had read warned against such practices. She had to speak with Dr Atreides about it.

She found him in his office and knocked on his door, entered, and faced him.

He looked up from his work, "Ah, Dr Madison, How is our baby going?"

An unfortunate choice of words, under the circumstances, she thought "It's about DteT. I heard that it's being shipped to Angola once we finish testing."

He stared at her. "I don't see why that should concern you."

"Is it true that it's tested on pregnant women?"

He noted her tone of disapproval. Guidelines on prenatal care in the United States suggested that DTaP vaccinations should, where possible, be delayed until the postpartum period. Matthew smiled, "Dr Madison DteT is different to DTaP. Our test study is for women who haven't had any anti-tetanus jabs. It is not harmful to women in their first trimester."

Madeleine felt some relief. "Thank you, Dr Atreides for clearing that up for me."

"I'm glad you came to me about this little misunderstanding." As she turned to leave, he added, "Our vaccine is given to Angolan women who have never received any tetanus shots. It is recommended by the WHO to be given any time after ten weeks of gestation. It's a huge breakthrough, mostly thanks to you and your team. Well done."

She smiled as she left his office. But her elation was short-lived when she returned to her lab.

Patrick Small, the assistant, wore a frown on his red-bearded face. "Dr Madison, I need a word in private."

"Certainly, Come into my office."

Once inside, Dr Small voiced his worry. "It seems that one of the DteT samples has gone missing."

"Missing! Are you sure?"

"I checked the stock listed. I counted the samples three times. We are one short."

She stared at him. "How many of us have a key to the sample cupboard?"

He looked at her, concern showing on his face. "Just you, me – and of course Dr Atreides."

She was silent for a moment, her brain in turmoil. At length, she said, "Bring up the computer records. We'll go over them together."

Patrick did so. They checked the data together. There was a missing DteT sample in stock. They went over the computer records again, but the result remained the same. This oversight was a major breach of safety and security. By rights, she should report the loss to the GLP. A missing sample could be used unethically by some sick or disgruntled person, out for some weird revenge. But if she reported her findings to the Good Laboratory Practices Department they would be trampling all over Cleve Chemicals, making Matthew Atreides angry, especially as he was close to making a

very lucrative deal with the British and American governments. The missing flask was both puzzling and worrying. If only Matthew, Patrick and she had access to the steel cupboard that held the samples, who else could have opened it and stolen the flask? She looked sideways at young Patrick, then mentally shook her head. No, it couldn't be, could it? She pondered. It wouldn't have been Matthew, and it certainly wasn't her. So who could it be?"

Just outside Rickmansworth, on the A4145m, Matthew Atreides turned his Range Rover into the driveway of Cranwell Farm, once owned by the Cranwell family, now owned by Arthur Chatsworth. The chemist pulled up outside the main house and waited for the farmer to emerge. The porch light went on, and Arthur Chatsworth stepped outside, pausing to find and pull on his gumboots. Matthew knew he was going to regret wearing his trainers.

Chatsworth said, "How are you, Grand Master?"

"Call me Matthew while we're here."

"It seems strange Matthew, especially as we are about Guidestones business."

"We are about survival business, Arthur."

"Did you bring the sample?"

"Let's walk as we talk, away from the house."

Arthur laughed, "Your paranoia is showing, Matthew."

Ignoring the remark, Dr Atreides said, "Have you got the pilot group ready?"

Arthur Chatsworth looked at The gangly genius. "Under control old man. Duchess Chatsworth is on some committee about support for young mothers. They are going on a field visit to St Thomases, where medical staff are carrying out tests out on young pregnant women."

Matthew showed puzzlement. "Are you saying that Lady Chatsworth is going to carry out the test with those women?"

Arthur looked at the tall man. "Don't worry old boy. Abigail is stable. We discuss everything, and she is more than happy to do her bit."

"Are you telling me that she knows about the Guide Stones?"

Arthur winked, "Almost everything."

The evening sky, changing its mind about red, was rolling out the grey. So Arthur produced a torch. He looked up at the heavens. He commented, "Looks like it could even more rain tonight."

"So we'd better get a move on."

Arthur Chatsworth, the current patriarch of the five generation family, had expanded the family business, investing in various rural properties scattered around the Home Counties. He spent lots of time checking on his subjects and resources in his modest empire, which meant he spent a good deal of time away from the bosom of his family. His family accepted the legitimacy of his frequent absence; this gave Arthur chance to pursue his other interest, the Gaia Guidestones, of which he said not a word.

Following Arthur's chance meeting with Matthew, he had been instrumental in putting together some important and influential people, pro global government types, who had put in the hard yards and built respectable enterprises that were very successful in their field. After the inaugural meeting at Cambuskenneth Abbey, Arthur quickly became an advocate of the cause and he adopted the code

name 'Aristotle'. After Arthur had revealed aspects of the Gaia, Guidestones plan to his wife, she offered to help by using her medical connections to carry out the experiments. This avenue suited Matthew Atreides very well, particularly since DteT had to have a proven track record before the Brits and the Yanks would delve into their government coffers for its use in Angola.

As they walked back to the doctor's car, Arthur said. "Remember the first time we met?"

"Of course, I'm not senile yet, Arthur. Why do you mention it?"

"I was just wondering how many other people at that meeting have taken this mission beyond words."

"Well, we certainly have, and that's what counts. Once the sterilisation drug in DteT takes effect, the African population growth will no longer be a problem."

Arthur smiled broadly. "There will be an outbreak of severe proportions and nobody will track it back to us."

Matthew opened his front passenger door, reached in and withdrew a cylindrical steel container the size of a thermos, which he handed to his Lordship.

"Ah, the sample!", Arthur said reaching for it.

"Just how is your good lady going to go about delivering the doses?"

"There will be six in the early stages of gestation. They all understand they will be injected with DteT, which the recipients know of as an anti-tetanus vaccine, They have all signed waivers to this effect."

"What happens when they all have miscarriages. They might think it more than a little strange."

Arthur frowned, "I hadn't considered that."

"You haven't thought this through, have you. We have to come up with another strategy and we don't have much time."

"What do you suggest?"

"The test cases have to remain anonymous and isolated from each other. Can you arrange that, Arthur?"

The Duke of Somerset stared at the scientist, saying nothing. Then he said, "I don't think the memsahib is up to that, old man. But there is an obstetrician who owes me a favour."

"Can you guarantee his discretion?"

"Yes, I think so. What with what I know about Dr Frames."

"It's simply an anti-Tetanus trial – right."

"Right." Arthur took hold of the flask. He knew that once the women were injected, there was no turning back. He also knew the rejected fetuses would be down to him. Killing a healthy embryo was murder. He wondered if he was up to the task. Looking at Matthew, he said, "Tell me we are doing the right thing."

The scientist answered, stone-faced. "It is neither the right nor wrong thing. It is the necessary thing."

Arthur Chatsworth watched the tail lights of Dr Atreides' car, as it drove away. He looked at the metal flask he was holding. His mind went back to the day at the club when Dr Fames asked him



for a huge favour. The man was a drunk and a gambler and brought disgrace to the science of obstetrics. Arthur, being the big-hearted man that he was, came to his rescue. Now the doctor was in recovery, and it was time for him to balance the books.

Arthur was proud to playing an active part in the grand plan. He had to show the Grand Master he was worthy of his trust. Now he had to face the Dutchess and tell her the plans had changed.

## Chapter 15

### Cleve laboratories

Apart from his rather unique appearance, his green eyes and thick, wavy, long white hair, worn like a Newtonian wig from the 1800's, Matthew Atreides seemed quite reasonable. The light shirts, predominantly orange or yellow, he usually wore marked him more like an arty type rather than a research scientist. The brightness and warmth in his attire belied his almost total lack of compassion for his fellow man. To him, compassion was a weakness and one of the causes of what he saw to be, the dire human situation. For these reasons, society could well label him a sociopath. Some would hail him as a scientific genius. He could also be considered a mass murderer while being congratulated as a brilliant problem solver, albeit a cold, calculating one. As for Matthew Atreides, he just wanted to test his limits and see just how detached he could remain in problem-solving. He saw himself as the angel of death, a necessary entity carrying out a job few would even attempt. He couldn't allow himself to think anything else.

As he monitored his infertility vaccine, which he had manufactured in an independent laboratory, his mind wandered back to his childhood years in South Africa and particularly an early mentor, Rusty Hergh. He had gotten to know Rusty, a petty criminal, during his Cape Town days, while he was growing up. Rusty, a wily old dog, knew all the tricks to avoid the cops when engaged in his evening work, a bit of breaking and entering. Even at 65 the old fox could shimmy up a drainpipe, slip in a window, relieve a sleeping couple of their encumbrances and slip out again without them even knowing he had visited them. Dogs could be a problem but not when they were sleeping peacefully after ingesting some laced raw liver. Rusty taught the young Matthew that you don't do time for the crime. You do time for getting caught. Matthew considered this bit of wisdom as he checked the progress of his vaccine. Another two weeks and the test cases should show results. Then, all going well, governments would be using his unique products.

Dr Ivan Kleen walked down the corridor, flanked by two advisors. He was a veteran when it came to dealing with the press, but this was different. It was personal. Jemima had a healthy pregnancy with no complications. So why had she spontaneously aborted ten weeks into her gestation? But it wasn't only her miscarriage that got brought to the attention of the media. There had been a spate of such incidences in the Home Counties, three of which that also resulted in the death of the mother-to-be. Dr Keen faced the barrage of flashing lights and questions fired at him, with his usual calm professionalism. His job was to assure the media that Dr Frames, who had overseen the treatment of the six young pregnant women in question, was in no way to blame for what amounted to some unusual reactions to commonly taken medical procedures.

One of the Media present, a young journalist, trying to make a name for herself, asked, "Did Dr Frames commit suicide because of what happened to his patients or was it for more personal reasons concerning his alleged gambling and drinking?"

Damn! Where had she dug up that? Dr Kleen wondered, thinking about how to field, what amounted to an accusation. "Dr Frame's untimely death is a tragedy for his family and all his medical colleagues. All we know is that he became emotionally distraught over the deaths of the three young women in his care."

Another journalist picked up the baton. "Are you saying that his alleged gambling debts and drinking problem had nothing to do with it, Dr Kleen?"

"There was nothing to suggest that he took his life owing to personal problems."

"Will you be holding an inquiry into the new anti-tetanus vaccine given to see if it had anything to do with the tragic deaths of the three young women who died under Dr Frames' care?" a TV journalist asked.

"A thorough investigation is taking place to see if these incidents could have been avoided. Now, no more questions. The media will be kept apprised of any significant findings. Good day ladies and gentlemen."

"Can you assure me that the deaths of those three women had nothing to do with harmful side-effects of your vaccine?" Lawrence Springton asked, in a secret meeting at Cleve laboratories.

The Frames affair had the potential of wrecking the deal. The American government had put the contract for the vaccine on hold as they monitored how the British would handle the disaster. Matthew, putting on a brave face, said, "Those incidents had nothing to do with DteT. If anyone is to be apportioned blame, it is the medical administration who put a public drunk in charge of obstetrics."

The Health Minister fiddled nervously with his Harrow tie. "I'm afraid your word won't be good enough when my opposition number tables his motion about controversial drugs, in Parliament. All six test cases had miscarriages. That can't be explained away as an unfortunate coincidence."

"Why not, seeing as that is what it is. And nobody can prove any different, can they?"

"No Matthew that's true. But how can I get our government to commit itself to the project unless they have assurances that DteT is safe? I mean, damn it all man, we can't have H M Government being accused of genocide in Africa, can we?"

Matthew handed over a folder marked DteT pilot study. He smiled, "This should allay any fears and get your people behind us."

Lawrence Springton picked up the folder and opened it.

Matthew prayed it would pass scrutiny. The statistician had done a good job but would it be convincing enough for the government steering committee.

Springton looked up at the scientist. "Who exactly is this Precision Consulting Company?"

"The independent body that collated the results of our field tests." Matthew took the folder and pointed to the statistical analyses. "As you can see the number of subjects who suffered some side effect is way below the norm, even including the original six cases."

"Yes, but how do we explain how those cases were concentrated in such a localised area, Dr Atreides?"

"It's an unexplained anomaly. That's all you have to say."

Lawrence picked up the file. "I'll take this with me." As he rose to leave Matthew's office, he waved the document, saying, "This is a help but it has to be thoroughly checked out."

Matthew silently prayed it would stand up to intense scrutiny. He had no idea who PCC was. Arthur had dealt with that side of things. He smiled, "Of course Minister. I wouldn't have it any other way."

Nothing sells the media like baby abuse, and this is the way they sold the story. The media were all over Cleve Industries like a rash. The Sun headline 'Baby Killer Drug' had Matthew contacting his legal people. He employed Garrett Mellman, a professional spin doctor to liaise with all media. Having gotten the press and TV off his back, he arranged to meet with Arthur Chatsworth and James Pemberton, who penned the PCC report.

It was the first time Matthew had been to the New Churchill's Gentlemen's club. One of the longest standing such clubs in London it was The Duke of Somerset's venue choice for the meeting. Fittingly very posh and bubbling with class and polish it was both very elegant and extremely exclusive. Matthew looked across the table at the balding man who put him in mind of the George character in the TV soap 'Seinfeld'. "Tell me about PCC, Mr Pemberton.

James cast a glance to Arthur, mentally willing him offer support. "I am PCC."

Matthew did a double take. "You are PCC!"

"That's right. It's an online company that carries out corporate investigations."

The scientist couldn't believe it. "So you breaches a report on DteT for your self?"

"Dr Atreides I did it for you at Arthur's behest."

Matthew sat staring at the man. "I have given your bogus report to the Health Minister and it is going to be closely scrutinised by a parliamentary committee." He turned to Arthur, "Jesus. What the fuck have you done?"

Arthur, seeing some other diners taking an interest in the conversation said, "Steady on old man. Keep your voice down."

James said, "Relax Dr Atreides, I'm very good at what I do. The Health Ministry have already contacted me and I have sent them my credentials, which are very impressive, if I may say so."

"Completely fabricated, I suppose," Matthew sighed.

Lawrence Springton scrutinised the PCC report. It looked kosher as long as no one delved too deeply. The Cleve Laboratory contract meant it would cost the government millions in damages it pulled out. Besides making him look incompetent for making a disastrous decision the budget blow out would affect foreign aid to Africa. His reverie was interrupted by his intercom. The Deputy Prime Minister was on his way to see him. This didn't bode at all well.

Dennis Bloom was announced by Lawrence's P A. He strode into the Health Minister's domain, "Good morning Lawrence. I hope you're well."

Lawrence had never been friends with whom he referred to as 'the PM wannabe. "Yes thank you. But I'm sure you haven't come all this way to share pleasantries."

"Right. The PM wants to know if you've sorted out this Angolan vaccine business."

"He handed Dennis the report. "100 cases and no nasty side effects."

Dennis placed the report on the desk without looking at it. "Look, the PM is concerned about our interests in Angola. Things are a bit shaky there at the moment. The Chinese are trying to get the diamond concessions before us. We can't let that happen."

"Of course not. We are ready to go ahead with the programme, but we're being held up by the opposition's motion concerning Cleve Industries."

Dennis pointed to the report. "If that holds up the PM wants you to move on the vaccine programme."

Lawrence turned on him. "What, before the opposition has proposed their motion."

"It's just delaying tactics. Besides, our legal people reckon the contract is solid."

Lawrence smiled, "So I have the green light."

"Yes, Lawrence, but I think it is fair to warn you if the motion goes against us the PM will be on the warpath after your scalp."

"So I get thrown to the wolves."

Dennis smiled, "You trust in your report, don't you?"

The media was still demanding answers about the deaths of the pregnant women. Stories about the families who had lost loved ones and their unborn babies filled the front pages. Lawrence Springton knew that, without satisfactory answers, it wasn't going to go away. He entered the media centre and took his place at the podium "On May 10 this year I received a report about the deaths of three young women in the early stages of pregnancy. Another three women had early miscarriages. All these incidents occurred in the EAST Anglian geographic area. We have been diligent in finding out why these events took place. What we have discovered is that all six women received an anti-tetanus jab to protect their unborn babies. Another 1000 tests have proved successful with no deleterious side effects, so we're quite sure the tetanus shot wasn't the cause of those anomalies."

A journalist asked, "Is it true that DteT a new, experimental vaccine was used on these women?"

"Yes, it was DteT, which had already immunised 1000 woman with no side effects."

"Who carried out the statistical study?" another asked.

Lawrence said, "It was conducted by PCC an independent body.

"Is it true that there are plans to use this vaccine in Africa?" a journalist from the Mail asked.

"Yes, as part of our foreign aid programme."

"Are you going to pursue the cause of the three deaths or are you just putting it down as an 'anomaly'?" a reporter from the Guardian asked."

"Could the vaccine used on the six women have been tainted in some way?"

"Could the virus have escaped from a scientific laboratory?" asked a woman journalist from the Sun newspaper.

Lawrence, getting hot under the collar, contested, "First, let me explain something. It is not a virus. E Coli is a bacterium. It is not an airborne disease.

"Could somebody have stolen the vaccine and doctored it?"

Lawrence answered, "There haven't been any reports of missing samples at from any scientific facilities in the country. If there were, it would have been reported."

"What if it was not reported to the GLP?" the Sun reporter persisted.

"Any breaches of strictly set down rules about safety and security concerning potential dangerous substances can have the laboratory in question having its licence removed."

And so the questions droned on. Lawrence tolerated it. It went with his job.

## Chapter 16

Some people who thought they knew Matthew Atreides considered him too good to be true. He often regaled friends with his charitable Oxfam work in Africa. That was after he graduated with honours with a Masters in chemistry. Ironically, it was during his time with Oxfam that Matthew saw the human problem to be one of overpopulation. The more he thought about it, the more it seemed the starving millions in Africa served no use to the world. They were lame ducks, draining the public purse. He initially took such ideas on board from Elizabeth Sams, a woman he came to both admire and desire. She was married to a diamond mine manager, who spent a lot of time away from the marital home. Matthew, taking advantage of the husband's absence, spent a good deal of time in the marital home with her. Beguiled by her sexually, he began to listen to her population management ideas, adopting them as his own. He was disappointed when, after their last sexual bout together, she announced she was moving closer to the mine to be with her husband, Feeling alone and unloved, Matthew left Oxfam and Africa, to settle in England.

Matthew Atreides read people with an uncanny accuracy. So much so he easily massaged their weaknesses. This power helped him to control others to get them to do his bidding, and it was easier when they were unaware of being manipulated. His pretend charm and flattery were very convincing. Tall, with a slim, feminine build, he came over as a gentle soul. Despite not being handsome in the classical sense, Matthew's classic Roman nose got offset by his prominent cheekbones in a face lined with experience. He considered himself a good actor where others may well have seen him as a con man. But nobody had him down as a mass murderer. Yes, his friends knew he had lived and worked in Africa, but nobody knew much about his experiment there. Guests, at a party thrown in his honour, mysteriously suffered food poisoning after he had surreptitiously laced the cock-a-van with a rather nasty but non-lethal bacteria. This poisoning was his first attempt at causing an outbreak of disease to occur. He felt some guilt afterwards and moved away from Johannesburg society to a life of solitude on a boat.

One day he came across a black youth beaten and badly bruised. He got him back to his boat, where he laid him on some sacking. The child was beautiful to Matthew. He was very drawn to the youth's coal black eyes and shiny ebony skin. But he didn't need any further complications to his life. The child was feeble and may well have died if Matthew had not intervened. His first instinct, when he saw the battered youth, was self-preservation. The sensible thing to have done would be to have thrown the handsome kid overboard. But when he looked up at Matthew, and their eyes met for the first time, his deep look quickly caused Matthew's anger to abate. So, instead of destroying the youth, as a worthless encumbrance, something in him stirred, and he nursed the boy back to health.

## Chapter 17

### Germany present day

Claude Sutherland hadn't been to Berlin since his fieldwork days. He emerged with the flowing crowd from Stadmitte Underground Station and walked past the iconic 'Checkpoint Charlie' from the cold war days. The city brought back fond memories, from before, when the east was east and west was west. He saw the Mercure Hotel and Residenz Berlin Checkpoint Charlie and wondered if somebody in the BND did have a sense of humour. Claude booked in and was shown to his suite. Being the director of MI6 could be harrowing, but it did have its compensations. Having dismissed the porter, he took off his shoes and massaged his hot swollen feet.

Having freshened up, Claude dressed in a navy pinstripe suit, donned his ubiquitous bowler, which was at odds with his Nike trainers. He met Adolf Erhmann from the BND in the bar. Erhmann stifled a smile as the penguin like MI6 boss approached him.

“Claude Sutherland. Pleased to meet you.”

Erhmann, standing up ramrod straight, clicked his heels together. “Herr Sutherland, it's nice to meet you.”

Claude looked around the bar. It was nearly empty. “Are we meeting here?”

“Only for a drink. We haff a private room organised. So what would you like to drink?”

“Lager will do nicely.” He looked quizzically at the German. “So why are we here?”

Erhmann ordered the drinks. “Let us find a quiet place to sit.”

Once seated with drinks served, Erhmann said, “In answer to your question, we may have found the party responsible for bombing the aeroplane.”

“Do you mean Air Express flight 67?”

“Ya. Of course, we cannot be certain, but we do have somebody in custody who may well have planted the bomb.”

Claude smiled, “That is great news, Adolf. So when do I get to question your suspect?”

“It is not as simple as that. There are procedures to go through.”

There always were, in Germany, he thought. “Such as?”

“You know, Herr Sutherland. It is what you English call red tape.”

“So will get to speak with him?”

“That all depends on the Israeli Embassy.”

Claude sat wide-eyed, “Are you telling me the suspect is a Jew?”

“An Israeli citizen, yes. Now perhaps you see why we haff to tread carefully.”

Claude rubbed his chin. “I suppose that means somebody from the Israeli Embassy will be present at our meeting.”

Adolf grinned, “Herr Sutherland you haff it wrong. We are the guests at his meeting.”

“And who is our host?”

“His name is Nathan Ludlow. He is the ambassador's chief advisor.”

“So who is this suspect?”

“I will tell you at the meeting.” Glancing at his watch, Adolf said, “Drink up Herr Sutherland, Herr Ludlow vill be waiting.”

“Let me introduce you to Herr Sutherland, the director of MI6,” Adolf said, as the three men met.

Nathan Ludlow, small in stature and impeccably dressed tried not to stare at the apparition before his eyes. The Englishman was wearing Nike trainers with his Saville Row pinstripe suit. Not only

that, he had a ridiculous bowler hat perched on his head. Putting it down to English eccentricity, he said, "Nathan Ludlow," from the Israeli Embassy.

"So what's the story here?" Claude asked as they sat down in the hotel conference room.

Adolf began, "German special forces have arrested a Mossad spy in conjunction with the sabotage of Air Express Flight 67."

Nathan interjected, "There is no proof the man you have arrested has anything to do with Mossad."

Claude quickly realised Nathan's role was to close any doors that may lead to Mossad operations in Germany. "So, who is this man you have arrested?" he asked.

Adolf answered, "A few days ago we interviewed a man using the name Uri Ouspeski. Our surveillance team reported unsavoury characters visiting Ouspeski at his printing business. We suspected he was dealing with false passports, birth certificates, etc. An undercover officer acted as a criminal on the run, who needed papers."

"What does this man have to do with our bomber?" Sutherland asked.

"It turned out that Uri Ouspeski was making up false identity papers for a man going under the name of Solomon Anstein."

"Our alleged bomber. But how did you make the connection?" Claude asked.

Adolf smiled. "That was the clever bit. We were working with the police on this. They did some homework on our Herr Anstein and discovered that he was a baggage handler at Hamburg International Airport. So why would an airport worker need false papers?"

"Because he had another identity," Sutherland suggested.

"Exactly," Erhmann concurred. "A little more digging showed that he worked as a baggage handler on Air Express Flight 67."

"Now, that is interesting," Sutherland said, coming to full attention.

Ludlow, who had been listening intently, said, "He was not the only baggage handler loading that aircraft."

"But he was the only one trying to obtain false documents," Erhmann countered.

"Are you sure you have the correct Solomon Anstein? Both Solomon and Anstein are quite common names," Ludlow argued.

"When we searched Ouspeski's office we found some false passports, one of which had the name, Abel Saxman. It also had a picture of Herr Anstein. So Herr Ludlow we are sure we have the right man."

"So, when can I question him?" Sutherland asked.

Ludlow said firmly, "MI6 has no jurisdiction in this matter."

Sutherland looked at Erhmann for support

Erhmann shrugged, saying, "Tell me what questions you wish to ask and I will put them to him."

"Gentlemen, I am not interested in interfering with your protocols. I simply need to know why somebody placed a bomb on the plane. And from what you say, Solomon Anstein is my best bet for finding out."



“You are assuming his guilt, Mr Sutherland.” Ludlow pointed out.

“Evidence certainly suggests his guilt,” Erhmann countered.

“Gentlemen let us not argue about this. I just need a private word with our Mr Anstein. We do not need to turn this minor set back into a diplomatic incident,” Claude smiled.

“As Mr Anstein has not been charged with the offence you will have to grant him diplomatic immunity for his cooperation,” Ludlow stated.

“That is completely out of the question. If charged Anstein has to stand trial for his crimes,” Erhmann said emphatically.

Back in his suite Claude mused over the problem. He had to question Anstein, but Ludlow wouldn't allow it. Why? Because Israel could not be implicated in a terrorist act on British soil. If Mossad was somehow involved how could he question Anstein without implicating Israel? Then he had it. Claude found and rang Erhmann's private number. When the German answered, he said, “If Ludlow is concerned about what questions I may put to Anstein tell him he can be present at the interview.”

Erhmann said, “It may sway him, but I also have to attend.”

“I may have to offer him something to get him to cooperate.”

“You mean immunity from prosecution don't you?”

“Look, Adolf, He was just the front man. I want whoever was behind this terrible act. If he knows something we need to know what it is, even if it means an amnesty for him.”

“Herr Sutherland I cannot make such decisions. I will speak with my superior and let you know what we decide.”

Strings were pulled, and arrangements were made to Sutherland's satisfaction. They were to meet at the former Berlin Stasi prison where Anstein was on remand. Sutherland knew something about the prison's notorious history from the cold war days. Originally a canteen, the Berlin Stasi site became a detainment camp run by the Soviet secret police. Inmates were incarcerated in small cells and were tortured to obtain confessions to crimes. Most of the massive complex had fallen into disrepair and was uninhabitable. As they tramped down the long empty corridors with their tiny, empty, disused cells, Claude asked, “Why is he being held here, Adolf?”

“Because he has to be isolated, Herr Sutherland.”

“Is Ouspeski here as well?”

“Please save your questions for our guest,” the German said nervously.

A single bored looking guard stood outside Anstein's cell. Adolf presented his ID, and the trio entered the prisoner's small world.

Anstein looked up from his bunk. “What do we have here, the Three Stooges?”

Sutherland wondered how a person arrested and confined to an isolated cell could remain so calm, unless he was trained to endure such deprivations.

“We are here to ask you some questions Herr Anstein. I am the director of the BND. This gentleman is the director of MI6 and this man is from the Israeli Embassy in Berlin.”

Turning to Ludlow Anstein said, "The Germans have wrongly accused me."

"I will be the asking the questions," Sutherland said.

Looking at the podgy, bowler-hatted middle-aged man, Anstein chuckled, "You must be the Brit, right?"

This crime is not a humorous matter Mr Anstein. We know you loaded Air Express flight 67 at Hamburg Airport. We also know you approached a Uri Ouspeski for false identity papers. We have the passport he made, with your photo in it. So, if you are, as you claim, innocent, why do you need a false identity?"

"To stop you people hounding me for something I did not do," he answered in a beat.

Claude smiled thinly, "But you had this organised long before the police and BND were interested in you. So I ask you again, why did you need a new identity?"

"I told you. I was warned that the police were looking for me."

"Warned by whom?"

Anstein was silent.

Sutherland sat on the bunk beside the prisoner. "Supposing I told you I am not interested in you. I want the people who ordered the bombing."

Anstein fidgeted, wondering if this was some trick. He had to be careful not to give anything away. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"You are an expert in the use of explosives from you army days, aren't you."

Surprised at the breadth of MI6 intelligence at such short notice, Ludlow stepped in. "You do not have to answer that question."

Sutherland looked daggers. "What's wrong with that question?"

"This man's history has no bearing on the incident in question. Therefore I advise him to remain silent on such issues."

"No comment," the prisoner responded.

Claude scratched his head. "As we know you have such skills we will move on. Who ordered the bomb?"

Anstein shrugged. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"Mr Anstein we have enough circumstantial evidence against you to put you on trial."

Anstein convinced The Israeli's would protect him, sneered, "You have nothing on me."

The MI6 boss was getting nowhere. He needed an edge. "As the plane crashed on British soil I can have you extradited to England where over 70 million citizens are after your blood. There will be a public trial, and you will become the most well-known person in England." Staring directly into Anstein's eyes, he asked, "How long do you think you will last in a British prison?"

Ludlow glared at Sutherland but kept quiet.

Anstein paled. Turning to Ludlow, he asked, "Can he do that?" Before the Israeli had a chance to answer, Erhmann jumped in. "Only if our government sanctions it."

“It is up to the German government,” Ludlow concurred.

Sutherland, sensing his quarry had taken the bait, said, “I don't want to do that, but as you're not cooperative you leave me with little choice.” Eyeing Anstein, he said, “ You can redeem yourself by telling me this. Why was the bomb put on the plane?”

Anstein said, “I want to speak with Mr Ludlow, alone.”

Claude didn't like it, but he realised it could be a breakthrough. “Only five minutes. Then we will be back.”

“I would like to be a fly on the wall,” Erhmann said, as they stood waiting in the corridor.

“He's obviously trying to make some deal,” Sutherland said.

“Do you think he is our man, Herr Sutherland?”

Without committing himself, Sutherland asked, “How long have you had him here?”

“One week, why?”

“He has had some specialised, intensive training.”

“How do you know that?”

“He would have undergone specialised deprivation training to cope so well. Most people would be climbing the walls by now, but he has a sharp, incisive mind-state.”

“Mr Anstein will cooperate on certain conditions,” Ludlow said, as they all gathered in the suspect's cell.

“What conditions?” Erhmann asked.

“That by cooperating you grant him immunity from any prosecution associated with this case.”

“I have already inferred that,” Sutherland pointed out.

Ludlow added, “Also that any knowledge he may have concerning the bomb and its intended target in no way implicates him in the crime. Let us just say that in the cause of his duty as baggage handler he overheard a co-worker say something suspicious, which in the light of the subsequent air disaster, began to make sense. Are we agreed on these conditions.”

Sutherland looked at Erhmann who nodded. “Okay, we agree to go along with this charade, but the information given by Anstein has to be useful to us, or all bets are off. Do you agree with that.”

Anstein answered “Yes.”

Playing along with Ludlow's charade, Sutherland asked, “All right, so what did you overhear that lead you to believe it had something to do with the bomb on the plane?”

“I overheard one of the other handlers speak about a special surprise for one of the passengers on the flight.”

“Which passenger and what sort of surprise?”

“There was mention of a Hans Holdinger. I assume the surprise was the bomb.”

“Why did you assume that. Couldn't the surprise have been a present? What made you think it was a bomb?” Sutherland asked, still going along with the fantasy.

“I had only been on the job a short while, but even I realised baggage handlers do not know who will be travelling on the planes.”

'Good point.' Sutherland thought. "Okay Mr Anstein, how do you explain your picture on one of Mr Ouspeski's made up passports?"

"Is this relevant?" Ludlow asked. "After all, you already have your answer."

Sutherland turned on the disruptive Israeli diplomat. "I know who the target was, but I don't know why he was the target. I want to know if Mr Anstein was told to visit Uri Ouspeski and, if so, by whom?"

Ludlow, seeing an escape route for his compatriot, offered, "We have discussed this. Mr Anstein was asked by one of his work colleagues, to take a package, in a heavy metal briefcase, to a stationery business in Berlin. The name on the box was..."

"Let me guess. Uri Ouspeski by any chance," Claude interrupted.

"Correct Mr Sutherland," Ludlow smiled. "While he was there somebody must have taken his photo."

"Of course, why didn't I think of that?" Sutherland responded sarcastically. He knew he could ask a lot of dumb questions to point out the gaping holes. Instead, he said, "Mr Anstein, thank you for your help."

Erhmann, surprised at the MI6 director's acceptance, countered, "We may have more questions for you Mr Anstein."

Ludlow interjected, "Under our agreement, you need to organise Mr Anstein's repatriation to Israel. There will be no more questions."

"Now look here Herr Ludlow, he is still in German custody where he will remain until we are satisfied Anstein has told us all he knows about this affair."

"This is outrageous. I will be contacting the Knesset about this."

Sutherland reacted with, "Mr Ludlow let me tell you what is outrageous." Thrusting his forefinger upward into Ludlow's chest, he spat, "The deaths of all those innocent people, the victims of AE flight 67. That is what I call outrageous."

Without Nathan Ludlow's presence to hamper their investigation, the BND and MI6 directors met with Uri Ouspeski. The Germans were holding him in another cell in the ex-Stasi Prison. Not faring anywhere near as well as Anstein, he was open to a deal.

"If I help you, I want protection and to be relocated with a new identity."

"Let's see what you have to offer first," Erhmann stated.

Sutherland said, "so that we are all on the same page here let me tell you what we know. We are aware you made a false passport in the name of Able Saxman for a Solomon Anstein. We know that he planted a bomb on AE flight 67, the result of which being the terrible air disaster in England."

Uri broke out in sweat, "I never had anything to do with that. I knew nothing about it. You have to believe me!"

Ignoring this outburst, Sutherland continued. "We also know who the target on the plane was but what we don't know is who organised the hit. That's where you come in."

"I need a smoke," Ouspeski said his hand shaking. He took one from a pack offered by Erhmann. "I don't know much but what I do know can have me killed. You have no idea who you are dealing with."

“Then give me an idea, and we will see about getting you protection,” Sutherland said, his dried blood coloured eyes piercing into those of Ouspeski

The forger hesitated. “I will only tell you what I know once I have an assurance of a new identity.”

The BND head said, “That can be arranged Mr Ouspeski but only after you tell us everything you know about this affair.”

Ouspeski inhaled deeply. “All I know is that the package Hans Holdinger was carrying in a sealed briefcase was to be met by a charter pilot and taken to a place in Scotland.”

“Somebody did not want that to happen, and they blew up a passenger plane to make sure that it didn't. So what was in that briefcase?”

Ouspeski shrugged. “I have no idea.”

“Do you know the name of the pilot Mr Holdinger was supposed to meet?”

“It was a famous musician's name. Let me see,” Ouspeski said, rubbing his chin.

“Modern or classical?”

“It's on the tip of my tongue.”

Erhmann stepped in. “Do not play with us or your chance of a new identity is finished.”

Ouspeski smiled. “Oh, now I remember. He's name is Elvis. Elvis Hall, I believe.

Sutherland made a note. “And who was the mysterious recipient in Scotland.”

“A Mr Atreides. And that's all I know.”

“Did you say Mossad is involved?” Commander Jacobs asked, thinking there was something wrong with the connection.

“There does appear to be a link Insofar as Anstein is under their protection.”

“He was the the one who placed the bomb in the briefcase?”

“Yes, he was responsible for getting the bomb on the plane,” Sutherland answered, using the phone in his hotel room.”

“I can't hear too clearly, director. There's static on the line.”

“It's probably the scrambler I'm using. Now, the reason I am telling you this is because of Ouspeski, that's the forger, gave us a name at the English end. Apparently, the severed arm belonged to a Hans Holdinger who was acting as a courier for an unknown client.

“I don't suppose you have any idea as to the identity of this English client?”

“As a matter of fact, I do. Holdinger was meant to meet a charter pilot at Stansted, called Elvis Hall, who was supposed to take the package to a Mr Atreides in Scotland. The local police in Colchester will want to be brought up to speed so that I will leave it in your hands.”

## Chapter 18

Rodger couldn't get Lisa Parton out of his mind. Although he had only met her briefly at the crash site, she intrigued him. She said she had found something there that the investigator had wanted to share with him and now she had disappeared. He returned to his typing. His air disaster story lacked a conclusion. He had hoped Lisa's discovery would have provided a suitable ending. Now, it was unlikely that he would find out what it was that she had discovered. His search of the caravan

revealed nothing other than the camera. He had checked the images on the memory card, but they had not offered any clues as to where she may have gone. Rodger needed to find out where she lived.

Just as he settled down to his report, his phone rang. He answered it. "Rodger here."

A female voice asked, "Are you the Rodger who wrote that online article called, 'Vaccines – doses of death'?"

"Yes. Why?"

"If you are still writing about the subject?"

"No. Why?"

I may have some information pertinent to your investigation."

"My investigation is complete. Who am I talking with?"

"You may change your mind once I show you what I have. Look. Can we meet and discuss it?"

"I need a bit more to go on."

"What if I told you I know what happened to those pregnant women who died?"

Rodger, becoming more interested, grabbed a notebook. "How would you know about that?"

"Because I work in the laboratory where they developed the vaccine."

"But the vaccine's been cleared."

"Can we meet? I don't feel comfortable saying too much over the phone."

This invitation was the second time in as many days a woman wanted to show him something. Rodger hoped this source wasn't going to disappear like the first. He followed her directions and rode along the B1026, past the Birch Grove Golf Club, to a weathered timber sign on the left, with the name Madison on it. Rodger parked his scooter outside a cottage, almost entirely concealed by elms and poplars. Upon his knock the front door opened to reveal an attractive slightly built young woman with striking straight scarlet hair.

"Yes, can I help you?" she asked, looking at the Negro in the red anorak.

"Oh, er, I'm Rodger, from the Clarion. You said you have some information for me about those women."

Angela flashed a beautiful smile. "Oh, of course. Please come in."

They sat, making small talk, drinking coffee at her rustic kitchen table. Rodger was very impressed by her. Angela was not one of his usual sources which only pass on second-hand information. He quickly became besotted by this beautiful, intelligent woman who had first-hand knowledge of the anti-tetanus vaccine. Being a reporter from a local rag was humiliating enough for an ambitious journalist, but Rodger was also on one of the lowest rungs of the promotion ladder. And, as he didn't get on well with Bernice, it looked like he might be staying there. A big story might get him noticed by one of the nationals. So, seeing this potential scoop as a way to get his byline in one of the 'biggies' he took a deep breath. "So tell me about this vaccine."

Angela sighed, knowing there was no going back once this odd but endearing character heard what she had to say. "I work at Cleve Chemical laboratories. One of my jobs is to make sure we keep all bacterial based samples in a secure environment. One day I discovered a phial of the eColi bacteria had gone missing."

“So what did you do?” Rodger asked, turning up the volume of his smart phone recorder.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing!”

“At the time, no. I had nothing substantial to go on.”

“But shouldn't things like missing samples be reported to some authority?”

“Yes, but I was in an awkward situation. Only three of us had access to the samples cupboard. My boss was one of them. I knew that I hadn't taken it and I was pretty sure my assistant hadn't removed any. Logically, that only left the director.

“Your boss is?”

“Matthew Atreides. He owns and runs the Cleve Laboratory.”

“Couldn't someone have broken in and stolen it?”

“I'd hoped so. But the lock to the samples cupboard hadn't been forced.”

“Did you report the incident to the police?”

“No. I was in an awkward situation.”

“In what way?”

She sighed heavily. “Okay. Matthew and I were a sort of in a personal relationship at the time. I didn't want to spoil it.”

“What about your professional responsibility?”

“Rodger, I feel terrible about it now.”

The reporter looked straight at Angela. “By telling me this you implicate yourself in covering up a crime. So, why tell me now?”

“Once I heard about the eColi outbreak I couldn't remain silent any longer.”

“So you think there is a connection between the missing sample and the people who died in London?”

“I don't know. But it seems too much of a coincidence.”

He could see tears glistening in Angela's eyes. “What about your relationship with Mr Atreides?”

“It's over now.”

“Who initiated the breakup?”

“Why is that important?” Angela asked, surprised.

“Credibility. Your disclosure about the relationship changes things. Angela, you are no longer just a work colleague. The cops won't treat this so seriously if they think you have an ulterior motive.”

She smiled nervously. “Which is why I haven't reported it and why I need you to investigate it. See if you can shed any light on this without involving the cops.”

His eyes widened. “So, you still didn't report him.”

“By then it was too late. And I would have been incriminated.”



Rodger thought about what she was saying. It made sense from her point of view. Rubbing his chin, he said, "So you think the eColi deaths were attributed to your missing sample?"

"I was confused. I couldn't see any motive for Matthew to do such a thing." She fixed Rodger with her gaze. "Recently I discovered something else."

"What?"

"I found out that another laboratory was being paid to doctor our HdeT anti-tetanus vaccine."

Rodger became animated. "Doctor it! In what way?"

I carried out some research and tracked our Vaccine to a German firm called Boetsch. I found out from one of their scientists they had been working on a pregnancy termination drug. Our HdeT was to be the carrier." She stared at him, her eyes beseeching. "Now you know why I cannot shirk my responsibility any longer."

"Even if it means facing conspiracy and possibly terrorism charges?"

She paled. "So, what else can I do?"

"You're a smart young woman, Angela. Whatever version of events you come up with I will run with it. Okay?"

She beamed. "Then you'll investigate it?"

Rodger sat back and looked Angela in the eye. "If I run with this I have to be completely sure it is not going to backfire on me."

"Rodger, the reason I am giving you this information is that I have to face him with this and I need some insurance."

"What do you mean – insurance?"

"If he knows you know about this I feel much safer confronting him with my accusation."

Then it hit Rodger, and internal survival alarm bells began ringing. "You want to tell him about me!"

She sat back in her seat. "Is that a problem for you?"

"It seems a bit risky; that's all," he said, trying to play down his outburst.

"It's risky for both of us, Rodger, but I have to do it. And think of the exclusive story you will get from this."

Rodger was in risk mode. "Is this guy dangerous?"

"What, Matthew? No"

"But if he has done what you suspect, he's a mass murderer. That makes him pretty dangerous in my book!"

"He is brilliant very smart but sometimes ruthless." Seeing the doubt on the young black guy's face, she added, "Rodger, if you want the story you have to accept the risk. So do you want it or do I take it to someone else?"

He couldn't afford to miss his big chance. "Okay, I'll take it."

Angela's impish face burst into a beautiful smile, "Great."

"Now, you contact me as soon as you have spoken with your boss, okay?"

“I'll keep in touch.”

During his ride home, Rodger wondered what can of worms he was helping to open up. It was a big scoop, but it could well be risky, and personally costly, two things the diminutive journalist tried to avoid like the plague. But, of all the writers she could have turned to Angela had given him the scoop, an exclusive inside angle for which the media would cream themselves. And here it was, being laid on a platter for only him. He didn't know Angela from Adam, or was that Eve? He was a sucker for sexy, attractive women and sometimes stuck his neck out to help them. This impish sexy woman with the scarlet hair stuck in his mind. She seemed both vulnerable and determined yet with a suggested frailty that only added to her allure. He couldn't wait to see her again.

As his car crossed Vauxhall Bridge, Claude always thought the iconic building that housed MI6 seemed to be a cross between a medieval castle and the front of a battleship. Having entered the MI6 headquarters, his driver parked the Bentley in the space reserved for the director. Amazed by his elevation in life, Claude wondered how he had ever reached such an important position in society. He pondered the saying 'Some men rise to fame; others have it thrust upon them. He fitted into the second category. His driver handed him a freshly brushed bowler hat. Claude donned the perfectly groomed tifter, rubbed his large feet, put on his Nike Trainers and stepped out of the limousine. He breathed in the chilly morning air and silently greeted yet another day of cat and mouse national security.

Claude Sutherland was no man's fool. He knew a cover up when he saw it. Mossad could not be seen to have any involvement, deliberate or otherwise. Relations with the UK's Hebrew brethren was difficult at the best of times so it would do no good to rock the boat. Whether Anstein was recalled to Israel to be hailed a hero or to face charges of mass murder was anybody's guess and nothing to do with 6. Such international diplomatic games tended to operate according to their rules. Anstein would probably be discreetly shipped back to his homeland, as damaged goods.

Claude had gotten what he wanted, and Special Branch was already investigating the chemist and his private pilot. He still wanted to know why Mossad was possibly involved in the bombing of a British passenger jet but it was best to focus on the day's agenda. He looked up at the old portrait of Captain Mansfield Cumming, the first head of SIS, the forerunner of MI6, thinking, I wonder what you would make of all this.

Claude often contemplated the rocky road that got him ensconced at the helm of 6. Who would have thought an ex-race car driver and white collar crime consultant would end up directing the biggest spook operation in the UK. Over the years Claude had tried not to get personally involved in the worrying business of national security and treat it like any other job. But sometimes black moods engulfed him, and he had to take chemicals to drag him back from the edge. On two occasions Claude had stood on Vauxhall Bridge contemplating the fatal dive into the Thames. If it were not for Albert Atreides, the footwear guru, introducing him to commander Wadderson at Whites, a private gentlemen's club, he may never have gotten his foot in the British intelligence door. Then it clicked. Atreides was the name of the client receiving the briefcase. Could they be related, he wondered? He made a note to contact Albert. Sighing heavily, he told his secretary to organise a meeting with the Home Secretary.

## **Chapter 19**

### **America in the past**

Aaron Kruiz was livid. He stormed into Jim Rockerman's Office, at the top of the eighty-four storey Rockerman Tower. “Jim. I have to talk you.”

Aaron Kruiz only ever dealt with him direct if there was some emergency. “So what's up?”

“Have you heard of some weird fraternity that calls themselves the Gaia Guidestones?”

“Yes. Isn't there some weird scientist leading the group?”

“So you have heard of them. Well, you know about that those pregnant women who died in hospital, in London recently?”

“Yes, I saw it on the news. Why?”

“I have it on very authority that the Gaia Guidestones were behind it.”

Jim sat unmoved. “Assuming this is true why would they do it?”

“Population control, my source tells me. So what are we going to do about it?”

“Do about it Aaron! It seems to me that the Brits are doing their bit.”

“Ordinarily I would agree on this point sir, but things could get out of hand.”

“What do you mean?”

“The UN's depopulation program has to work like a well-oiled machine, Sir. We can't have the likes of the Gaia Guidestones spoiling our carefully worked out plans. These people are amateurs playing in the most important pursuit on Earth.”

Jim nodded sagely. “I take your point. We had better send them a warning.”

“Their Grand Master is a Dr Matthew Atreides. He's an arrogant man full of self-importance. It would have to be a strong message for us to get his attention,” Aaron stated, handing Jim Rockerman a dossier. “There's some background on him.

Ouspeski lined up his eye ready to send the small ball flying high off his tee at the third hole when Aaron KruiZ interrupted. “Have you gotten any ideas yet?”

Fed up with being asked this at the previous two holes, Ouspeski said, “You're like a broken record my friend. I will let you know as soon as I have a plan.”

KruiZ eye-balled him. “Time is of the essence here. This splinter group called The Gaia Guidestones is stepping out of line and initiating their policies on population control without our sanction. Matthew Atreides who appears to be their Grand Master seems a law unto himself. You must show him that he needs to keep in step with us, Mr Ouspeski.”

Ouspeski glared. “I told you I'd deal with it. Now please be quiet.” He took his golf shot.

“What do we know about this Atreides fellow?” the fixer asked, as the Rockerman Foundation man was about to take his shot.

Hiding his annoyance, KruiZ answered, “Lutheran background in South Africa; he worked for Oxfam in Africa. While there some woman got him interested in a new global order and population control. He is a chemistry graduate with an honours degree and doctorate; came to England and set up lucrative Cleve Chemical Laboratories.”

“What about this Guidestones thing?”

KruiZ sighted his ball, which was about 20 yards from the fourth hole. “Calls himself the Grand Master of a group of heavyweight corporate and academic types. Seems that he borrowed his group's protocols and rites from some other secret societies. He set up a circle of stones at some disused Abbey he inherited, in Scotland.”

Ouspeski took his putter and nudged his ball into the fourth hole; one shot ahead of Kruijz. Retrieving his ball he said, "So, what do we know about Dr Atreides' covert activities?"

"He meets with some noble, the Duke of Somerset, name Chatsworth. This Chatsworth guy gets a doctor to administer the drugs from a sample given to him by Atreides." As they approached the next tee-off, Kruijz said, "Angela Madison, Atreides' chief scientist, found out about the missing sample."

"How did Atreides take that?"

"She didn't accuse him directly."

"What do you mean?" the fixer said, his face a question mark.

"Ironically, she spoke to our man about it. Of course, she didn't know he was spying on Atreides for us. He was her assistant, so she confided in him."

Ouspeski hesitated to line up his ball. "Is the evidence reliable enough for us to take action against him?"

"Our man recorded their conversation. I have it on my phone. Listen to this," the golfer said, handing over his smartphone.

Ouspeski listened to a conversation between Dr Martin Ruis and Dr Angela Madison:

"Did he have anything to do with the missing phial, Martin."

"What lost phial?"

"The HdeT sample that disappeared from the sample cupboard ten months ago."

"Did you report it missing?"

"Not at the time. No."

"Why not, Angela?"

"Because Matthew must have taken it."

"Has he admitted it?"

"No, but he has the only other key to the cabinet, apart from you and me."

"Why would he do such a thing?"

"I don't know, but things are beginning to add up."

"Such as?"

"Once, when he was drunk he spoke about this planet choked with humans. He called them oxygen thieves, a waste of space, useless eaters, that sort of thing. He said that intelligent people realise the world cannot go on with humans breeding at such an alarming rate. I asked what we could do about it?"

"What did he say?"

"That either we take steps to preserve the elite of humanity and an adequate social support system, or we all become extinct. I asked Matthew what he meant. He said The elite would have to cull the human population drastically. I asked him what gave people the right to play God? He said it was our instinct to survive. I thought it was just the drink talking but what with the phial going missing and this tragedy of the six mothers-to-be I believe it was more than just drunken talk. It was him,

and he was planning to commit mass murder by having the harmless anti-tetanus vaccine laced with a drug to bring on miscarriages.”

Ouspeski handed back the phone. “It still doesn't prove he did it.”

“I obtained a psyche report on him. It says Matthew Atreides has sociopath tendencies coupled with illusions of grandeur and a superiority Saviour complex.”

“That's a dangerous cocktail, especially for somebody who thinks they are on some global mission to preserve the elite of humanity,” his partner stated, before teeing off on the fifth.

“So, Mr Ouspeski, the question is how are you going to stop him from fucking things up for us?”

The fixer took his swing. “I need to hit him where it will hurt most.”

Kruiz prepared his club. “I might be able to help there. Our man tells me he has purchased a rare manuscript he wants to have engraved on the circle of stones. Ten secrets to obtaining and maintaining absolute power.”

“I thought this guy was intelligent.”

“I agree he would have to be gullible, but all that matters is that it is of great importance to him.”

“And you want me to intercept it en-route.”

“He's having it flown from Germany. I will furnish you with more details as they come to light.”

Ouspeski smiled, “Excellent Aaron. Now let us concentrate on the game.”

## **Chapter 20**

Angela knew she couldn't put it off any longer. She approached Matthew at work and handed him a letter. He took it and looked at her, hesitated, then opened the envelope. After reading the contents, he asked, “Why do you want to resign?”

“Let's speak in your office where it is private.”

Matthew said, “Okay but I have to be at an appointment very soon.”

“Oh, this won't take very long.”

In his office, he said, “I thought you were happy here and we get along okay, so why on Earth do you want to leave?”

“Because, Matthew, nearly a year ago I discovered an HdeT sample was missing. I didn't report it at the time, and that was an error on my part. Do you want to know why I didn't report it?”

Matthew, who was always good at joining the dots, said, “Because you thought I had taken it.”

At least he was making it easier to come to the point. “Yes Matthew, I knew it had to be you, but I was willing to give you the benefit of the doubt. That was until those women died.”

He smiled, “What makes you think that unfortunate incident had anything to do with this laboratory?”

“Because I found out what Hoelsch is doing with it.”

Matthew rose from his seat, “Very good Miss Marple. Okay, it's a fair cop, as they say in B grade movies.”

Angela knew it but couldn't believe it. “But why Matthew?”

“Angela, do you know how many people there are in the world?”

“Getting close to seven billion and rising. Why?”

“Population growth is out of control and our governments refuse to do anything about it.”

“What? You think there are too many, so you decided to knock off a few million in Africa?”

“Mass abortions is the kindest way to cut back population growth.”

“I don't think the mothers who lose their unborn babies would agree.”

He turned on her. “Wake up Angela! The simple fact is that those foetuses will just add to the starving millions in Africa for whom the world has to keep providing aid. This world cannot support the human population at the rate it is growing. If we don't take the lead, we'll all end up extinct.”

She glared at him. “So you decide to play God and smite those unworthy souls?”

He turned away. “I didn't expect you to have the maturity to understand my motives which is why I didn't tell you.”

“This is not the Matthew I know!”

He turned back to her, a thin smile playing on his lips. “You don't know me. I only allow people to see the part of me I am willing to reveal.”

Angela stood up. “I should have gone to the police in the first place and told them of my suspicions.”

“But you didn't, did you?”

Angel stared at him. She didn't know him at all. “It's not too late.”

“Do your worst. Go to the police, and I shall simply deny this conversation ever took place. And they will believe me.”

“It's too late Matthew. I have been speaking to a journalist who is going to splash you all over the front page.”

Matthew went silent and just stared at her. Then said slowly and deliberately, “That was not a wise thing to do.”

“Why? Am I to become the next victim of your human culling programme?”

“Who's this journalist or is all this just made up by your woolly mind?”

“He works for the Clarion. That's all I will say.”

Matthew knew Angela couldn't prove anything, but she could alert the police to what she knew. He had to act quickly. Atreides wondered why she had left it so long to bring the missing sample to his attention. By doing so, she had caught him off guard, and he had told her more than she needed to know. The smart bitch had got him to reveal his true self in ways he had not intended. He reached for the phone. He contacted Elvis and told him to get Niles. He needed a job done urgently.

Matthew phoned the Clarion. A female picked up and asked him what he wanted. He said, “Hello, I was talking to the journalist who wrote an article about the pregnant women who died. He asked me to call him if new evidence came to light.”

“So how can I help you?”

“I seem to have lost his card so can you give me his details?”

“Sorry, sir but we don't give out our staff personal data.”

“But I'm already working with him on his assignment.”

“I'm sorry sir, rules are rules.”

Matthew had to break through the bitch's icy indifference. “It is important that I reach him. I have pertinent information about the cause of the outbreak.”

“Sir, give me your contact details, and I will get him to ring you.”

It was time to apply pressure. “Who am I speaking to?”

“Pat sir. Why do you want to know?”

“So I can tell him who is holding up his work.”

“Sir, I don't make the rules.”

“Sometimes they have to be bent a little, Pat. The journalist would want you to give me his details.”

Pat hesitated, then she said, “Well if he has already given you his personal data I guess it will be alright.”

Rodger was parking his scooter outside 216 Ryegate Road when he heard his phone ringing. Rushing inside, he grabbed the handset just as the phone rang off. It was almost as if the device was taunting him. Ha, ha, you nearly made it, he imagined it saying. He thought it might be Angela so he waited to see if it would ring again. It didn't but when he checked there was a message. It was from a Matthew Atreides who had information about the HteT vaccine. He checked his note-taker. It was Angela's boss, the person she accused of causing the deaths. Rodger listened to the message again. Then he pressed the appropriate digits to return the call. When the response came from Cleve Laboratories, he said, “I want to speak with Matthew Atreides.”

“Who's speaking?”

“Rodger Potter. I missed his call so put me through please.” In the assertiveness workshop, he was told, be simple, direct and authoritative, especially over the phone. After a moment he heard an effeminate male voice. “Who's speaking?”

“Roger Potter. You were trying to reach me.”

“Ah yes, Mr Potter. I believe you are writing a follow up to your 'Doses of Death' article.”

Rodger froze on the spot. “Maybe, why?”

“Because I know something that will be of great importance to your assignment.”

“Really!” he uttered, his heart thumping like a bass drum.

“Yes, I shall be here until about 7. Call anytime before then.”

“What, at the laboratory?”

“Yes, that is where I am.”



“Right.”

As soon as Rodger hung up, Matthew dialled another number.

A voice said, “Good afternoon, Dr Golding's rooms.

“Get me Dr Golding.”

“I'm afraid he is with a patient. Please leave your number, and I will see he gets it.”

“Tell him Dr Matthew Atreides needs to speak with him immediately.”

“He left instructions not to be disturbed.”

“Well of course he did. He made sure he wouldn't miss my call. So get him for me.”

Confused, the receptionist took a deep breath and interrupted Niles. “Sorry doctor but there is a very persistent Dr Atreides on the line.”

Excusing himself, Niles lifted up his receiver. “This is not the time to call.”

“Niles, good to hear from you. Be in the laboratory by 5 pm.”

“My surgery goes on till 6.”

“That's not my problem, Niles. I'm sure you can make it if you try.”

“Niles recognised the veiled threat. Fuck you, he thought, but he knew he would be there.”

Many thoughts went through Roger's mind as he rode his trusty Vespa to see Matthew Atreides. Why did the man want to see him if he was guilty? Was he going to lay on the bull shit or was he legit? Was he going to confess or blame somebody else? But perhaps the biggest question in Rodger's mind was, was he doing the right thing or was he falling into a carefully laid trap? His personal riskometer was registering in the orange zone – orange for caution, the same colour as the traffic lights he nearly overshot. It was the Colchester evening rush hour, during which time not much rushing took place. The city streets were chocka with the home going commuters nose to tail. This traffic obstruction is where Rodger won out. His Vespa could zip in and out of narrow spaces out of bounds to larger vehicles. With a bit of squeezing and weaving, he reached Cleve Laboratories at ten past six in the evening.

Following Matthew's directions, he found and entered the side door. Nobody was working in reception, and it seemed the staff had left. Rodger heard a polisher motor and following the direction of the sound he soon found the office cleaner, who directed him to Matthew's room. He gingerly made his way along a corridor, his senses on full alert. The reporter came to a door with Atreides name on it, but the office was empty. Fuck, he thought, the bastard's not here. It didn't make sense. Why would Dr Atreides ask him to come to his office if he wasn't going to be there? Perhaps he had to leave the room for a while, Rodger thought. The room was locked so he couldn't wait inside.

Ten minutes ticked by and DR Atreides hadn't returned. “Fuck,” Rodger said to the empty corridor. Well, he wasn't going to wait any longer. In a black mood, he found his way back to his scooter. Sure he'd been stood up by sources before but not if they made initiated the meeting. Dr Atreides was apparently playing some power game to intimidate him, and Rodger didn't like it one bit. He felt a light drizzle as he donned his helmet and pushed the Vespa off its stand. It was raining heavier as he kick started the bike into life.

Rodger was so intent on driving safely in the rain that he never noticed the golden Porsche following him down Museum Street. After turning left into Ryegate Road, the Porsche overtook the Vespa and pulled up in front. Rodger didn't know what to do. Then he saw the driver, a mere shadow in the wet unlit stretch of street, move towards him. Rodger didn't know whether to dismount or stay on the bike. He just sat astride the scooter, his shoes just touching the wet road. The man approaching him was tall with a hood concealing his face. "Can I help you," Rodger muttered feebly.

Niles Golding came closer and said, "Mr Potter, it appears you are meddling in things that don't concern you."

"What things?" Rodger asked.

"Anything concerning Cleve Laboratories. Now get off the bike."

"W, why?" Roger asked, thinking it wasn't a good idea. Mustering all the bravery he could, the journalist responded, "If you're working for Dr Atreides tell him I don't like being mucked around."

Niles hated playing the bully. Such a role went totally against his sense of ethics. Still, he had to do it for his survival. Knowing Matthew pulled his strings and being a member of the Gaia Guidestones, he had no choice. "Dismount now Mr Potter!" he snarled pointing a pistol in Rodger's direction.

Staring at the gun, Rodger slowly dismounted. He stammered, "There's no need for weapons. I'll forget all about the story."

"You shouldn't have gotten involved. Now I have to teach you a lesson," Dr Golding stated with as much menace as he could muster.

Rodger's mind was racing. Did he have time to start the scooter and get away? If he did would the stranger shoot him? Any sudden movement could spell the end of Rodger Potter.

Niles soaking wet grabbed Rodger by his collar and dragged him away from the scooter."

"W, what the fuck?" was all Rodger could manage. Niles pushed him up against a fence and punched him in the stomach. Rodger, wheezing, collapsed slowly to the ground but not before his assailant got one to the reporter's jaw. Rodger's mind was foggy, but he thought he heard the bully say, "That's just a taste of what you will get if you go snooping into Matthew's affairs. Then, with a parting kick to the ribs. He walked back to his car and drove off into the wet night.

Dazed, soaked and aching, Roger raised himself off the wet pavement. Wobbly on his feet at first, he tried to make sense of what had happened. Then he saw his pride and joy laying on its side. Quickly forgetting his pain, Rodger scrambled over to where the Vespa seemed to be having a nap. He winced with pain as he lifted his scooter onto its stand. A cursory inspection told him that apart from a few scratches and a bent luggage rack the bike seemed to be intact. The engine kicked over, and the lights were working, so Rodger nursed himself back home. He vowed he would stick to doing stories on flower and vegetable shows in future.

Once home, Rodger phoned the Colchester constabulary and asked for Inspector DCI Martin.

"He's gone home for the night. What's it about sir?"

"I've just been attacked."

"I see, and where did this incident take place?"

"Ryegate Road."

"Do you know the name of the attacker?"

“He didn't exactly introduce himself.”

“Can you describe him?”

“No, but I can describe his car. It was a metallic coloured Porsche Carrera.”

“He hardly sounds like your common mugger. Did you get his licence plate number?”

“No, I was busy fending off kicks and punches at the time.”

“Have you got any idea why he attacked you?”

“I'm a reporter. Somebody didn't like what I was looking into.”

“What were you looking into?”

“That is something I will only divulge to Frank. Make sure he gets this message.”

## Chapter 21

Elvis breathed the smoke in deeply, then exhaled with a rush. It was his second joint of the day, and it was only 10.23 am. He had to be ready to fly at noon, and it was a toss up between flying in pain or flying stoned. Elvis Hall chose the second option. He didn't know what stage his cancer was in, but he was aware that it was getting worse. “Fuck, life is shitty sometimes,” Elvis complained to his empty office. He didn't know how long he could keep flying, but he couldn't bear being grounded. The pilot had first learned about his cancer after leaving Spain. Just when he was free from an intolerable marriage and had started to live again, the big C had shat on him from a great height.

Elvis kept his cancer secret from anybody who did not need to know. When his doctor gave him the chilling news, he was thankful he had no immediate family to consider. His life in Spain was over. Elvis was finally free of his alcoholic wife and his tearaway son. He was his person. The pilot had his Piper Seneca, and the sky was the limit. That was until the pain increased. He steered clear of hospitals, which were far too nosey, and found ways to manage the pain himself. Marijuana proved a great help.

As the pain and nausea increased, along with severe headaches, Elvis decided to tell his sister, Lois. The thought of her brought back long forgotten memories. Memories of religious images around the home, Statues of Jesus standing on shelves and in various alcoves; the Virgin Mary in the hall; prints of mutilated saints and the cross-bearing Jesus all around the house. They instilled in the young Elvis the sense the God was watching everything he did. If it weren't for his older sister, Lois, he would have felt completely lost and alienated. But even she was overbearing in some ways, always fussing over him and being more mothering than their mother.

It was all a bit creepy when he looked back on those days. When his father preached at him, he had a demonic look in his eyes. His mother played the long-suffering dutiful God fearing wife. For Elvis, it was all a bit freaky. His parents saw themselves as true believers, and that gave them a sense of righteous crusaders trying to save their son from the perceived evils of the sinful world. His stint as St Joseph's Catholic school imprinted these macabre religious images even more firmly in his mind. A combination of biblical berating, compulsory church attendances every week and Lois' over-protectiveness made Elvis hate his life at home to the point where, not being able to stand it any longer, he ran away from home and joined the RAF ground staff as a mechanic.

Now he needed Lois's help again. It was as though his life had gone full circle. With him setting up home in Spain and her firmly entrenched, in the nursing profession in Essex, Their paths hadn't crossed for many years. Apart from the usual special events greetings and the occasional catch-up

eMails, communication between the siblings was relatively rare. Not wanting to burden his sister and feeling embarrassed to seek her help Elvis had put off telling her about his condition. After his

divorce from Consuela, he felt that Spain no longer had anything to offer him, other than sad and torturous memories. For the first time in many years, he yearned for mother England. Following a harrowing divorce settlement, Elvis was left with his cherished Piper Seneca and a few personal bits and pieces. The letter he received from his sister was at least encouraging. She would love to see him and have him stay for a while. She had a spare room he could use.

“So the old warhorse has returned home to lick his wounds,” Lois said, as she and her younger brother sipped glasses of scotch.

“These wounds don't heal by licking.” he replied.

“I'm sure you'll get over Carmen, or whatever her name is.”

“Consuela, and I am over her already.”

“What's the problem then?”

He took a swig of his scotch. There was no easy way to say it. “I've got the big 'C”

Stunned into silence, Lois sat and stared at her brother. At length, she asked, “How long have you known?”

“What difference does that make?”

“How advanced is it?”

“What sort of the question is that?”

“The kind of question a caring sister would ask when confronted with such shocking information,” she said angrily

Elvis got up. “I knew this was a fucking mistake. Can't you just accept the fact that I have cancer and that I just need a roof while I get myself together.”

She stared at him. “No Elvis, I cannot just accept that. And seeing as you saw fit to keep this from me until now, you have to give me time to accept that.”

Elvis, not wanting to upset his sister, said, “Okay sis, we both need time to figure out how to relate to this situation. I don't want to impact on your life any-more than I have to.”

“I understand that El, but I need to be involved in your therapeutic program.”

What therapeutic program,' he mused to himself, 'pills, booze and dope, that's about it. He said, “I'm not registered with any doctors and I refuse to have radiation treatment.”

“As a nurse I know some brilliant specialists. I can make you an appointment if you like.”

“Jesus woman, didn't you listen to what I just said? It's my cancer and I will decide how I want to deal with it.”

“No Elvis, it's not as simple as that. As a sister and a nurse I have a better idea of what you need than you do.”

Elvis got up. “What I need now is a rest.”

“Okay, we'll talk about it later.”

As soon as he left the room she was on the phone. “Hullo, I want to speak to Mr Henderson.” After a slight pause, “It's about my brother. He is having a hard time coming to grips with his cancer.”

Their reunion meeting more or less set the pattern for Elvis' stay with his sister. She tried to get him booked in at the hospital. He refused to go to any appointments. She asked him why he wouldn't take advantage of medical science and expert medical advice. He wouldn't say. So their relationship took on the form of a Mexican stand-off and he kept out of her way as much as possible. Lois still sought advice on behalf of her stubborn brother but had to keep it to herself. She joined a group of cancer carers to learn more about dealing with a patient's denial, her reasoning for Elvis' intransigence.

Elvis didn't want to be difficult but he needed to keep flying. He kept this part of his life a secret from his sister. He couldn't risk having his medical condition reported to the aviation and medical authorities. He had to keep his flying away from her as well.

It was, as he feared, like his childhood days when Lois tried to mother him. Nothing had changed and she wanted to be his nurse, his career. Fuck it, he was not an invalid and he didn't need to be smothered by kindness. He inhaled the last part of the joint. He was treading a tricky path. He had to balance his cherished independence with his sister's feelings. He didn't want to hurt her. He was living under her roof after all so he couldn't make her not care for him. He felt stifled in her world and he had to escape, first to the local airstrip, and then to the skies. He set up a small flying school at the Earles Colne airfield, just a short way from Colchester. So far the mixture of painkillers, booze and dope had stopped him from going over the edge. Sometimes, when the pain became almost too much to bear, he very nearly swallowed all his pills. After all what was there to live for. But somehow he always managed to slip back from the brink. If it was his guardian angel rescuing him it had its work cut out.

In Spain he had been under a medical regimen for his cancer. He had to undergo intensive radiotherapy. He lost his hair and some teeth and felt sick a lot of the time. He didn't mention his flying school at the hospital and he put his work down as an airport cleaner. He was determined not to have to go through all that again. Sighing, he went outside to where his Piper Seneca stood glistening in the sun. Donning his shades he walked out to his plane. It was then that he noticed the woman walking towards him. She had thick black straight hair and wore an orange and grey tracksuit of parachute silk.

Introducing herself, she said, "Hullo I'm Liz Gregory." Noting the blank look on his face, she added, "Your 1 pm student."

"Of course, Mrs Gregory," he grinned. "Come to my office so we can go over a few basics and deal with the paperwork."

She followed him in and he talked her through the start up, taxiing and take-off. He said, "Okay, well go out to the aircraft. The flight will last approximately 30 minutes. You'll get a chance to fly her once we reach about 3000 ft."

"I cant wait," she said excitedly.

Lois walked into Mr Henderson's consulting room and took a seat.

The cancer specialist looked at the middle-aged woman and asked, "How can I help you, Mrs Hall?" he asked, looking at her appointment details.

"It's Ms Hall," She corrected. "It's not me. It's my brother. I'm worried because he won't seek medical treatment for his cancer."

"So, you're here on his behalf." James said.

“He doesn't know I am here. But I need to know what to do and I was hoping you could give me some advice.”

He looked at her with kindly eyes. “I sympathise with your concern but nobody can force your brother to accept treatment. If he refuses medical help there really is nothing anybody can do.”

Lois slumped in her chair. “I know he is in a lot of pain but he won't even discuss it with me. Can you at least prescribe some strong painkillers for him?”

He shook his head. “I'm afraid not, Ms Hall. It's up to the patient as to how they decide to deal with their pain.” He smiled, “I understand that cancer that cancer does not just affect the patient. Cancer patients go through a gamut of emotions, sometimes feeling isolated, which tends to make them become very self centred.”

“So what can I do as he wastes away?”

“At some stage, he will accept treatment. Until then just support him in his decisions.”

With the first lesson over Elvis took Liz's into his office for a debriefing. As they sat down he asked, “Why do you want to fly?”

She crossed her legs demurely. “My ex is a crop duster but he would never teach me to fly. For many years I've wanted to become a pilot. Now he's out of the picture I thought, what the hell, go for it girl.”

Elvis grinned. “You did well for your first go. Would you like me to book you in for the next lesson?”

“You bet. Elvis, you're a good trainer and I enjoy your humour.”

“Yes, it's been fun,” he said, stifling a stomach cramp.

As she left, she took his card. Turning, she said, “Maybe we could get together for a coffee.”

He grinned, “Liz, I'd like that.”

“Where do you go to during the day?” Lois asked as she and Elvis ate her beef stew.

Things had become a little easier for them so he didn't want to spoil it. “Oh, I've been looking for a job in Colchester.”

“Oh. Don't you think you should be taking it easy?”

“No,” he said, putting a cap on that particular situation.

“You will tell me if things get worse, won't you?”

He nodded and went back to his food.

“At least you've still got a healthy appetite. That's a good sign.”

Good sign for what? He thought. The cancer wasn't going to get better because he could still eat.

Following the second training flight Liz and Elvis had their first coffee together. After the third one, their first kiss. They rapidly became good friends, then lovers. Despite his medical condition, which he kept from Liz, he could still manage the sex, although her appetite for bedroom gymnastics was

much greater than his. He had to mask the pain and occasionally pop a viagra but he felt a new lease and didn't want to spoil it for however long it lasted. Another reason he didn't let on about his cancer was because he didn't want her feeling sorry for him and treating him like an invalid. He knew he was treading a dangerous path by not being open but he didn't want anything to change between them.

Lois tried backing off, as Jim Henderson suggested, and let Elvis live his life. He seemed happy at least some of the time. He was away most nights so she figured another woman must be involved. Still, she restrained her curiosity and didn't interfere. Then, one day the phone rang, A woman called Liz asked after Elvis, saying she hadn't seen him for three days. Lois said, "Are you the person he stays with when he doesn't sleep here?"

Thinking Elvis had a wife or another girlfriend, she missed a breath. "Who am I speaking to?"

"Lois Hall. Why?"

Liz took a deep breath, "Are you his wife?"

"No. Elvis' sister. Who are you."

Wondering how to answer, she said, "I'm his student. He's teaching me to fly."

Lois, confused, said, "He doesn't fly any more. Not with his condition."

Condition! What condition? Liz's mind screamed. "Is there something wrong with him?"

Realising that she had perhaps said too much, Lois mentally backtracked, "You will have to ask him about that."

"When I find him. Do you think he could be at the airstrip working on his plane?"

"I told you, he gave all that up when he left Spain."

Realising Elvis didn't tell his sister everything; Liz decided to leave it at that."

## Chapter 22

Elvis slumped into his seat sweating profusely. He reached for the Johnny Walker bottle. It was his sixth shot that day, but it was the only thing that numbed the pain enough for him to function. He couldn't go to Liz's, and he couldn't even contact her because he didn't know what to say, The stomach cramps and backache had become much worse and pretty well constant over the previous few days. They seemed to be easing a little and he desperately needed rest. The office couch, which had served as a bed for the last three nights was adequate but uncomfortable. He would have to go back to Lois' to get a good nights sleep. He would contact Liz in the morning and square things up.

During dinner, that night Lois said, "Your friend Liz phoned here today asking after you."

His mind flipped. "Why did Liz phone here?"

"She wanted to know where you have been."

"What did she say?" he asked tentatively.

She stared at him. She told me she was your flying student."

A knife could have cut the atmosphere. Then Lois said, "Are you still flying, Elvis?"

He had to think quickly. "Me. No. I just help this guy with some maintenance."



“So why did she say you were teaching her to fly.”

“On a simulator. I'm not fit to fly.”

“That's what I thought,” she said, relieved.

The next day Lois follows Elvis and ends up in Earles Colne. Wondering what reason would take him to such a small hamlet, she hung back but followed him through the village. Then Lois saw the directions to the airfield. She followed and watched him unlock a gate and drive onto the taxiway, and onward to a large metal shed. She knew he would be very mad if he knew she was following him but she had to know if he was telling her the truth. She left her car and walked through the gateway leading to a hangar. Next to it was a small office with a sign that read: Elvis Hall Charter Flights written on it. Lois couldn't believe it. Her brother was still flying. It wouldn't be any use confronting him with his lie. She needed to speak with the consultant again.

When Mr Henderson heard about Lois' detection work he agreed that flying was probably not a good idea for a person with advanced cancer. But unless he was able to give a current prognosis he was unable to provide a report on Elvis' condition. He asked, “Do you know where he was diagnosed?”

“Spain I guess. That's where he's been living for the last few years.”

James Henderson made a note. Then he said, “We need to get his health records before we do anything.”

“How do we do that?”

“There are certain procedures to go through, but I may be able to do something. Leave it with me. I'll let you know if I have any luck.”

“Thank you,” Lois smiled, a little relieved.

He added, “If your brother's condition precludes him from flying I will have to report him to the Aviation Licensing Board.”

She just nodded, then left.

## Chapter 23

Now that Angela knew what Matthew was capable of she feared he would try and shut her up. What shocked her most of all was his cavalier attitude to the people he had killed. Matthew saw his intervention as a partial solution to a too hard problem. He saw it as just another scientific experiment. Angela couldn't see it as science, no matter how the Chemist tried to package it. He was committing mass murder of the most insidious kind. She found it hard to believe that anybody other than a sociopath would be proud of doing such a terrible thing. But she had heard it from his lips. She knew she had to find a way to stop him before he stopped her.

Angela phoned Rodger. She told him she had confronted Matthew and he had admitted causing the outbreak. She asked him to come over because she was scared. Rodger mouthed a silent thank you, God. He was trying to figure out how he could see the beautiful and alluring Angela again. But the reporter did not see himself as a dragon-slaying Sir Galahad. If some psycho nut was threatening her common sense said it was best if he stayed well away. But then there was the story and the kudos it would bring for him. In the end, he agreed to go over to her place. Then his Vespa wouldn't start. He eventually got it started, cursing himself for not having a service done recently.

Angela was afraid that she knew too much. Matthews openness had surprised her. He saw nothing wrong in his actions. She looked at her elegant gold watch. The weird reporter would be there soon. Once she shared the latest information about the outbreak with him, it would make her position stronger. Feeling dirty she walked to the bathroom and bent down to insert the plug. Instinct made her jerk upright. A hand was around her neck, and she was being dragged backwards, towards her bedroom. Her scream was cut off by the arm restricting her windpipe. Angela was slight in build, and her assailant was much stronger than her. Being small in stature and having been brought up in a rough neighbourhood she had learned a few survival techniques on the street. In one smooth move, she jerked her elbow back as hard as she could while stamping back on her assailant's foot. Her elbow rammed his solar plexus with such force that his scream came out in an exhalation of air. Angela broke free and looked for some weapon with which to defend herself. The intruder, hopping and groaning, grabbed his medical bag to get a syringe. Angela frantically pulled open drawers to look for her canister of mace. The assailant grabbed her arm and tried to stab her with the syringe. Angela's reflex was much quicker, and she brought her left foot up hard, kicking him in the testicles. He dropped the needle, groaning in pain. With tears in his eyes, grabbed his injured testicles. "YOU FUCKING BITCH," he yelled, grabbing his bag while cupping his damaged parts. With hairbrushes, shoes and other domestic missiles bombarding him, he beat a hasty retreat.

Angela collapsed on her bed, shaking and sobbing. She reached, shakily for a cigarette and took a deep puff. Angela thought that Matthew might send some scum after her, but the scientist didn't expect it that quickly. Gathering her wits, Angela went to ring the police but decided against it. She needed to get away somewhere Matthew couldn't find her. She looked at her watch. The journo should have been there by now. She wondered what was holding him up. He was a bit of a wimp, so perhaps she couldn't rely on him. Angela phoned her sister in Clacton-on-Sea. She made Arrangements to stay with her. The scientist rushed around picking up scattered brushes and things needed for her trip. After hurriedly cramming clothes into two suitcases, she locked her apartment and headed for her car.

Frank Martin was not what could be called a career copper. In fact, his progress up the promotion ladder was mostly instigated and encouraged by colleagues, not by his personal ambition. He resented the new guard who turned up with degrees in policing and with no street experience. How could people like that understand what it is like to be out on the beat on cold, dark and lonely nights? Having achieved the level of chief inspector after 30 years of mixing it with the scum of criminal society, Frank felt justified in his assessment of university coppers. He got his street savvy as a kid in the back alleys of East London and in particular his manor, Mile End. Frank remembered, with a mixture of joy and sadness, his exploits at the old fairground on Canal Road. He used to help out on the dodgems and very nearly hooked up with them when they next went on the road, like migrating birds, to seek warmer climes. Instead, Frank went to uni and studied sociology a soft science, one often scorned by the less humanitarian elements of academia. After graduating, Frank found it difficult to get a job. One day, at the Mile End labour exchange, he saw an ad for volunteers needed to help poor people in Brazil. He thought why not? Nothing was holding him back in England. So young Frank Martin embarked upon his new adventure.

While in Brazil, he and other explorers took it upon themselves to trek in the vast Amazon forests. He was devastated by the extent of destruction and defoliation so that companies like MacDonalds could ply millions of people with unhealthy hamburgers each and every day. The increasing desecration of these vast rainforests became too much for Frank, and he decided to return to England. Young and idealistic he wanted to make a positive difference in his life, but he didn't know where to go or what to do. Then he saw a police recruitment ad and set out on his career path.

He was jerked from his reverie when his phone rang, and a voice informed him that Commander Jacobs of Special Branch was there to see him. What national security police might want with him he had no idea.

“Inspector, my name is Jacobs, Special Branch,” the officer said, taking in Martin's unusual hairstyle. There was not much on top, and it was bunched up at the back., putting Jacobs in mind of a cobra's hood.

Martin eyed his visitor with suspicion. On the rare occasions, SB made an appearance it was to interfere with an ongoing investigation. “So what brings SB to the Colchester nick?”

Jacobs handed over a copy of a file. Many words and some sentences were blacked out. “It's about your plane crash. It seems that the target was a man called Hans Holdinger.”

Frank stayed silent, wondering when Jacobs was going to drop his bombshell and tell him to drop the case.

Jacobs continued. “We believe the severed arm and briefcase belonged to Holdinger. We don't know much more about him, except he was Australian and he was of mixed parentage – a German father and Australian mother. His father had links with the Central African Republic. Hans' parents got divorced, and young Hans went back to Africa with his father. He worked for a bank in the CAR. His banking career ended in March 2003, when the then prime minister Andre Felix was deposed in a military coup headed by Francois Bozize.”

“And this is your idea of knowing little about him?” Frank said, amazed at the detail.

“Yes, well after that our man changes his name to Hans Hahn.”

“Why? What did he have to hide?”

“A small fortune in diamonds, by all accounts. It is alleged that Hahn helped himself before the banks became nationalised.”

“Did he steal them?”

“It doesn't matter chief inspector. Powerful, ruthless people were after him, and he had to disappear.”

“So what does this have to do with the bomb on the plane?”

“We have a source who claims he was targeted because of the missing contents in the briefcase.”

“Who is this source?”

“Sorry, can't tell you that - MI6 stuff.”

Frank hated secretive stuff. “That's bullshit! I have an investigation to run, and I need all relevant information.”

Jacobs smiled. “International Boundaries I'm afraid. The source is in prison in Germany.”

“Fuck! So how am I supposed to run this case?”

“You will liaise through me, Commander Jacobs,” the SB officer said handing Frank his card.

“I don't suppose your source happened to say who was behind the bombing,” Frank ventured.

“Actually yes but I cannot say. That's now our stuff, so don't touch it, okay?”

“Yes, of course.” Then Frank added, “Just one thing, though. Has the bomber been caught?”

“Yes, in Germany.”

“Will he be extradited for trial in England?”

“No, he will not. Now that's all I'm prepared to say.”

As Frank watched the commander leave, he wondered what it was that Special Branch was not telling him.

“He's as guilty as bloody sin,” DS Clements stated as he and Frank Martin got coffee from the machine. “wonder what sort of story his bloody brief is going to spin.”

Frank smiled, secretly admiring his sergeant's passion for the job. “Don't take it so personally Ray. If he gets off this time, we'll catch him at it. We always do with serial offenders.”

“I want the bastard this time.”

“Yes well, there are other more important cases to claim my attention. That missing woman air crash investigator for instance. How are we progressing on that?”

“She hasn't been back to work. Now her boss is becoming concerned. She was a bit of a loner, didn't have many friends and most of those were work acquaintances.”

“Not much to go on Ray. So who was the last known person to have seen her?”

“As far as we are aware, Harry Krakow. They were working together at the crash site.”

“Have you questioned him?”

“Yes, Guv. Krakow left Lisa Parton when it started to rain. She was alone at that point.” Clements looked at his guvnor, a cheeky grin playing on his lips.

“Didn't you speak to her before she left the crash site, guv?”

“Just passing pleasantries.”

“That makes you the last known person to have seen her.”

Frank frowned, “Is that supposed to be funny, sergeant?”

Stifling a chuckle, Clements said, “Not at all guv. Just being thorough as you instructed.”

“Yes, well I want to know what happened to ...”

“... Lisa Parton, guv.

“Yes well get your team to pull their finger out. I want results on this very soon.”

“Yes, Guv. Now I guess we see what bullshit number Ms Clarice Fullfit has worked out for her client.”

Niles Golding MD grimaced as he climbed into the van. He plumped down into the passenger seat, exhausted from his ordeal.

“So, where is she then?” Elvis asked

“Well, she's obviously not here.” Niles retorted.

“That's not good enough answer. I'm sure Matthew will want a little more detail.”

He turned to Elvis. “Look, I fucked up, okay.”

“You know I figured that when you came back empty-handed. So how exactly did you fuck up?”

“It's complicated, and I don't want to go into it right now.”

“Oh, and when do you want to go into it? When you're facing Matthew Atreides, perhaps.”

“I can't tell him what happened.”

“Being the reasonable sort of person his is I'm sure he'll go along with that.”

Niles glared at his insufferable driver. “This screw up is no fucking joke, Elvis. I'm in trouble if I can't come up with a plausible story.”

“Well, two heads are better than one. Tell me what happened, and I see if I can help.”

Niles winced and crossed his legs. “Why would you bother? We don't even like each other.”

“I know, but we've got one thing in common that binds us together.”

Niles turned to Elvis. “And what would that be?”

“Matthew. We're both his puppets.”

“I don't know about that. He's done me a huge favour, so I'm paying Atreides back.”

“Yes, that's what he does to get us to dance to his tune. The difference between you and me is that I don't fool myself about the way our lord and master works.”

Niles looked outside the van. Are we going to debate this all night or are we going to get away from here?”

“What's the problem? There're no bodies in the van this time.”

“Is that supposed to be some sick fucking joke?”

“No. If you hadn't fucked up, we would have one wouldn't we?”

## Chapter 24

It had been four days since Elvis had stayed at Liz's place and she had become increasingly worried. So, when she heard someone coming in through the back door, she called out. “Is that you El?”

“Yes love, where are you?”

“In the kitchen. I expected you home four nights ago. Where have you been?”

He walked into the kitchen and gave her a big hug. I have a major job to do on a plane,” he lied. “I thought it best if I slept on the job.

She pulled away, “And you didn't even think to phone me to let me know.”

He wanted to say he was too crippled with pain to think clearly, but couldn't. Instead, he said, “I sorry Liz.”

She stood, hands on hips, “Not good enough! You'll have to do a lot better than that.” Then she asked, “Has it got anything to do with your – how did your sister put it – 'condition'?”

He stared at her. “What do you know about that?”

“Only that she said you had one. So what is it about, Elvis? I think I have a right to know if you have health problems.”

He thought, you have no fucking rights. I will decide who knows or not. “He said, Liz, I didn't want it to spoil our happiness together.”

“Elvis, what's wrong with you.”

He looked at her. “I just wanted one more chance to have a meaningful relationship.”

“Is your health problem severe?” she asked frowning.

He sighed, “Stomach cancer.”

She stood still, open mouthed. She said, “And just how long did you think you could hide it from me.”

“Liz, I don't want it to be part of who we are together. I had a nasty spell. That's why I stayed away.” He slumped against the bench, exhausted. “Now it's all spoilt. I'm your lover, not a fucking invalid.”

She took a deep breath. “This is too much for me at present, Elvis. I just don't know what to think.”

“Me too. I think it best if I go back to Lois' tonight.”

“Yes, you're probably right.”

He turned to leave, “I'll ring tomorrow. Maybe we can have a chat.”

“Okay,” was all she said, hiding the tears welling in her eyes.

Elvis couldn't get Liz out of his mind. He couldn't wait till morning to phone her. Lois didn't make it any easier for him, with the questions she kept firing at him. He pushed his dinner plate to one side.

Lois, eyeing his virtually untouched food, said, “Have you lost your appetite?”

He looked at her. “I don't feel hungry.”

“Too much guilt, I expect.”

“Guilt! About what?” he said, defensively.

“The lies you have told me for starters.”

“What lies?”

“You told me you had given up flying.”

He stared at her, his eyes wide. “Have you been checking up on me?”

“I followed you to East Colne.” She paused then said, “You shouldn't be flying in your condition.”

He glared at her. “Is that the condition you told Liz about?”

“Oh no, you don't get away with that. You are not turning this back on me. You have to stop flying.”

He got up from the table. “It's not as easy as that, Lois. I can't give it up right now.”

“Why not?”

He backed away. “For Christ sake, Lois, am I supposed to report my every movement.”

She folded her arms. "Yes, well your dinner is ruined." She then stormed off into the kitchen, slamming the door behind her.

He followed her. "Lois, I appreciate you taking me in, but I have to have my space. So please stop interfering in my business."

She turned on him, her eyes blazing. "Your business! What you are doing is criminally negligible. If you have a nasty turn up there and kill yourself and possibly others as well, it becomes my business."

"That's not going to happen. I have it under control."

"That's just macho bullshit. If you had any sense, you would go and see, a specialist."

"Just back off Lois."

She walked to him, tears welling in her eyes. "If you won't let me help I want you out of my house. You want to do it on your own then be on your own."

He stood silently. Then without a further word, Elvis packed his things into an overnight bag and left. He sat in his car trying to get his breath. A stabbing pain in his gut made him wince, and his head was throbbing. This sort of stress aggravated his medical condition. He figured he'd be much better off by himself.

Liz lay in bed wishing El was snuggled up to her but she wasn't about to forgive him. She wondered if she was unreasonable. Putting herself in his place, she could understand why he wanted to keep his cancer a secret from her. But she couldn't be with someone who was not completely open with her. Ever since the stuff with her father Liz had found it difficult to trust anybody fully. That was incredible how he hid it for so long. Nobody suspected anything. Not even her mum. He had been living a double life for years and then, out of the blue, declared he was gay. How does anybody get over a shock like that? Perhaps that was the reason she came over bossy and demanding, one of the main causes for her break up with Justin. That and the fact that he admitted to being bisexual. Elvis wasn't bisexual, and she enjoyed it when they had sex. Now they were over the first flushes of their cohabitation he had slowed down in the bedroom department, but she could handle that. Now she knew his ill health had something to do with his waning performance.

Elvis couldn't get comfortable on the old office couch. The pain was excruciating. Just managing to stifle a scream he fumbled for a ready rolled joint. The codeine tablets washed down with whisky hadn't kicked in yet. As the pain began to subside, Elvis began thinking of his relationship with Liz. It was the first time since they started sleeping together they had argued about anything. Still, maybe it is just as well. He wasn't up to any physical gymnastics that night. He laid down again and thought about the evening's events. She shouldn't have pushed him into a corner, forcing him to reveal his hand, albeit it a shitty one from his viewpoint. In his book, she had no right to question him about his personal business. They weren't married so why did she think she could boss him? Another spasm of pain hit him. "Fuck it," he mouthed closing his eyes.

## Chapter 25

After weighing up the pros and cons, Rodger Potter took the plunge and drove over to Angela Morrison's place. He followed the B1026, past the Birchwood Golf Club, to her cottage but she wasn't there. Rodger cursed himself for forgetting his mobile phone, a regular occurrence with him. The front door was locked, and the cottage appeared to be in total darkness. The journalist grumbled to himself as he looked around. He had better things to do with his time. Deciding she may be out of hearing range, he walked around to the back of the house. He knocked at the back door, which to his surprise, swung open. Standing on the threshold of Angela's home, he hesitated. Technically, he wasn't breaking in, after all, she had invited him to visit her. The house was in darkness, so he



switched on the penlight torch he always carried at night. As he entered Angela's lounge room, the light beam picked up something shiny on the ground. It was a broken syringe that had leaked its contents into the carpet. It didn't necessarily mean any but one thing Rodger had learned in his assignments is that even the most flimsy of clues is relevant until proven otherwise. With this in mind, he scooped the broken syringe in his handkerchief. Pocketing the pieces, in his red anorak, he looked around in the dark for anything else that might be useful. Finding nothing, he went back to his scooter. Why were women always disappearing on him, he wondered, as he tried kick started the classic machine. After some attempts, the Vespa coughed into life, which was just a swell as it had begun to rain. "That'd be fucking right," he cursed. So, instead of a cosy evening getting to know the delightful Angela, and who knows what else, Rodger found himself soaked to the skin, as he nursed his sick scooter back to his flat in Colchester.

Rodger was worried about Angela. She was the second woman to disappear in him in a matter of days. She said she worked for Cleve Laboratories, so that was a good place to start. Rodger found the number and rang the company. "I need to speak with Dr Madison," Rodger stated.

"May I ask what it is in connection with?"

You can ask anything you like, Rodger thought. "It's personal, so please put me through to her.

"I can't, sir. She hasn't come in today."

"Isn't that a bit unusual?"

"I wouldn't know sir. I just know she is not here at the moment."

"Right, I'll try again later."

"May I say who is calling?"

"No."

Rodger slipped his phone in his pocket. Something wasn't right. She lived for her job, and she said she was involved in some scientific breakthrough so why would she just not turn up for work? A chill ran up his spine. "Had somebody got to her? Perhaps he should ring Inspector Martin. Then he focused in on himself. If anyone had got to her, did they know she was talking to him? He might also be needing protection. He called Colchester police and asked to speak to Frank Martin. Inspector Martin was busy, so he had to speak to somebody else."

A voice said, "Can I help you?"

"Yes, I need to speak with Frank Martin."

"He's not here. Who's speaking?"

"Rodger Potter from the Clarion."

"And what is it about?"

"A missing person."

"And this MP's name"

"MP! Oh, Angela Madison

"And how long has she been missing."

"At least two days."

“That's not long sir. She probably went away for a while. I'm sure you have nothing to worry about.”

“Look, will please leave a message for Frank Martin?”

“I will, but I don't think it will do you much good.”

“Why not?”

“Because, sir, we have real crimes to attend to.”

'The cheeky bastard,' Rodger thought. He hoped Angela's disappearance didn't turn out to be a real crime. Women were wanting to show him something then disappearing before he had a chance to see it was in danger of becoming a habit.

Frank Martin left his car about 100yards from the crime scene. It had been raining hard, and the ground was boggy. He always kept a pair of grey gumboots in the boot for such occasions. Being solidly built his feet pressed deeper into the mud than those of somebody much lighter. He then trudged to the crime scene which was hi-lighted by the white plastic tent containing the body dragged from the murky waters of the Brightlingsea estuary. Frank loathed having to deal with corpses, especially those that resulted from violent crimes. Even worse cases were those grossly disfigured by injuries and the forces of nature. This corpse was one such body. Even Frank, a hardened copper over many years nearly vomited when he entered the tent. She was almost unrecognisable, having spent some days floating down the Thames.

“Ah, good morning inspector,” Dr Hawkin the pathologist greeted.”

“Do we know who she is?”

“Not yet Frank. The eels and crabs had had quite a feast,” he answered, indicating the mutilated corpse.

“How was she killed, Doc?”

Removing his green rubber gloves, Dr Hawkin pushed his glasses up his nose. “I'll have to get her onto the slab before we deduce that. It does look as though all the injuries were post mortem, caused by the ravishes of old mother nature, as it were.”

Frank was hoping it was the missing air crash investigator so that he could get on with the case. So far he had nothing to go on. However, if the dead woman was Lisa Parton, the likelihood of finding any DNA or other useful clues were negligible. “Okay doc, do your stuff. I need to know ASAP if this is our missing Lisa Parton.”

Dr Hawkin grinned, “I'll be in touch inspector. Now it's back to work.”

Having decided to report yet another disappearing woman incidence, Rodger approached the desk tentatively.

Eyeing the Negro suspiciously, The desk sergeant asked, “Yes, what can I do for you?”

“I'm here to see Frank Martin,” Rodger said practising his assertiveness skill.

“Chief Inspector Martin is not available sir. Why do you want to see him?”

“I wish to report a missing person.”

“Oh, and who's gone missing?”

“I would rather discuss the matter with DCI Martin. When are you expecting him?”

The sergeant said, sarcastically “Shall I check his diary for you, sir?”

Rodger, missing the sarcastic inference, said, “That would be good, yes.”

The sergeant stared at the hapless reporter. “Do you think he's a fucking office executive? If you're not going to tell me who is missing, you'll have to sit there and wait for a detective to become available to see you.”

Realising he wasn't going to get access to Frank Martin, Rodger acquiesced and waited to see a DS Clements. Fed up with sitting in the drab interview room waiting for the sergeant to turn up, he was about to get up and walk out when the door burst open and in strode detective sergeant Clements. He was over six feet tall and going to fat.

Rodger felt overshadowed by the man towering over him. “So you want to see my guv'nor.”

“That is my intention, yes.”

“Well he's not available, so what is that you have to tell us?”

“We're working on the Lisa Parton case.”

“So you're a cop, are you?” Clements sniggered.

“No, but...”

“...Then you are working on fuck all sunshine. So what's your angle?”

“I'm a journalist with the Clarion.”

Clements stared at the reporter, his eyes nearly bursting out of his head. “I don't give a flying fuck who you are with; I want to know why I am staring at you right now.”

Rodger hated this ignorant pig. He got up to leave. “Thank you, but I think I ought to go.”

Clements put a big paw on Potter's shoulder, “You will leave when I tell you to. Now why are you here.”

“I have information about a crime.”

“What crime would that be?”

“A missing person.”

“And what missing person would that be?”

“You are not taking me at all seriously, are you sergeant?” Rodger said, rising to his five foot one height.

“Taking you seriously! Don't make me laugh. You are just the court jester, bringing a bit of fucking light relief to my dull day.”

“Then I shall leave. And unless you are charging me with something you cannot stop me.”

Just then, Frank Martin returned. Hearing the hullabaloo from the interview room, he went to investigate. Sergeant Clements backed off as soon as he saw his guv'nor.

Turning to his sergeant, Frank said, “Sergeant can I have a word?”

“Sure Guv,” Clements replied, leaving Rodger alone.

“What's he doing here?” Frank asked.

“Wasting our bloody time, if you ask me.”

“I am asking you Clements, and I would like a bit more than your opinion.”

“He's going on about some missing person.”

“What missing person?”

“That is what I was trying to find out.”

“Very well sergeant I will take over from here.”

Frank walked into the interview room with two mugs of tea. Handing one to Rodger, he said, “The body we found is Lisa Parton. So she is no longer a missing person.”

Rodger looked up. “That's good news. Well, not good that she's dead but good that we know what happened to her.”

“So this missing person thing you were talking about to my sergeant is no longer relevant.”

“Oh, this is another missing person.”

Frank sat down. “What do you mean?”

Her name is Angela Madison, and she works at Cleve Chemicals.”

“And how do you know she is missing?”

“I was supposed to meet her last night. When I arrived at her place, there was no one home.”

Frank rubbed his chin. “Maybe she went out.”

“She probably did but maybe not willingly.”

Frank stood up, his patience at its limit. “Rodger, I know you mean well but...”

“... She came to see me about the deaths of those pregnant women.”

“Why did she do that?”

“Because she suspects her boss of having had the anti-tetanus vaccine laced with a drug that induces termination and wanted to give me the story.”

“Why you?” Frank asked, looking at the little Black person.

“You'll have to ask her that. Look, she thought her boss was after her. Maybe she thought of confiding in me as some insurance policy.”

“Who's her boss and why would he be after her?”

“All I know is that he heads up some scientific laboratory and she accused him of being responsible for the deaths of those women.”

“Do you know his name?”

He checked a small notebook he always carried. “Atreides, Dr Matthew Atreides.”

Frank nodded. He had heard that name somewhere before but couldn't extract it from wherever it lurked in his brain. “So what do you expect the police to do?”

“You could question her boss. He may well know where she is.”

Frank stood up, exasperated. "So you get a call from a woman who claims her boss, a Dr Matthew Atreides, is a murderer. You call on her, but she is not home, and you come running to us with some cock and bull conjecture about what might have happened."

"Yes but..."

"But nothing, Mr Potter. As far as I know, the coroner ruled death by accident as the reason those poor women died. So, unless you have any solid proof of Mr Ateides' wrong doings stop wasting police time."

"That's what she was going to show me last night."

"Have you tried to contact her today?"

"Of course, inspector. I rang Cleve Chemicals, and she hadn't turned up for work."

The officer rubbed his chin "Are you seriously telling me that this disease outbreak that has now killed all those people was deliberate?"

"I am just reporting what she told me."

"And you believed her?"

"She seemed sincere."

"Listen, Rodger, I've seen a lot of sincere thieves and killers in my time. I'm sorry, but I need more than this to go on."

Rodger got up to leave. "Sorry if I've wasted your time."

Frank, feeling sorry for the poor little sod, offered, "If you come across any reliable evidence, let me know."

As Rodger reached the door, he turned in perfect 'Columbo' style. "It probably doesn't mean anything, but I found this in Angela's home." He handed Frank the handkerchief containing the broken syringe.

Frank said, "I think you'd better sit down again."

As Rodger took his seat, the officer asked, "What were you doing in her home?"

Nervously, he said, "I didn't break in. The back door was unlocked, and Angela invited me so..."

"Technically you did break in. So whatever this syringe might represent it is now, thanks to your meddling, inadmissible as evidence in court."

"I, I didn't mean to break in. I was concerned about Angela; that's all."

Frank raised an eyebrow. "Didn't you say she is a medical scientist?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Then her having syringes would be normal. Besides it could have been in her home for any number of reasons."

"Don't you think she would have cleared up the mess?"

Frank thought about it for a moment. "Leave it with me. I'll see what I can find out."

Rodger stood to leave again, "You're the expert. Can you let me know what you find?"

## Chapter 26

Rodger's story was dead in the water with any visions of being awarded the cherished Pulitzer Prize fading in his mind. Well, it wasn't even a story as such. All he had was the disappearance of an air crash investigator after she had removed evidence from the accident scene. She had later been washed up in the Thames estuary near Brightlingsea, and that was it – no motive, no killer. Rodger needed to know what it was she had stolen from the wreckage. In desperation, he decided to drive back to the caravan and see if he had missed anything. Rodger wondered if the police had found something and either discarded it or bagged it as evidence? It was a very long shot, but he decided to look for himself.

As he rode up the track to the caravan, he saw somebody hooking the trailer up to a pick-up truck. He parked his scooter and trudged the rest of the way on foot. The track, a muddy path, was somewhat slippery and it took Rodger a while to reach the site. A couple of men stared at him as he approached them

One of them, the taller of the two, asked, “Who the hell are you?”

The other man, somewhat bemused by the Negro approaching them said, “I don't remember ordering a short black.”

His mate laughed saying, “Good one, Mike.”

“Yes. Amusing,” Rodger said. Then he asked, “What are you doing with Lisa's caravan?”

“The taller one asked, “What the fuck does it look like we're doing.” Then he added, “So, did you know my sister?”

Rodger gulped. “Look, I'm sorry guys. I didn't mean to intrude.”

“What the fuck are you here for then?” the joker called Mike, asked.

“Rodger answered, “I was supposed to meet Lisa here, but she didn't turn up.”

“Yeah, well it's difficult to keep appointments when you're dead,” Mike said,

Robert glared at his mate. “You can be an insensitive prick sometimes, Mike.”

“Sorry mate, I was just stating a fact.”

“You do know my sister got murdered, don't you?” Robert asked Rodger.

“Yes. I'm sorry for your loss. Lisa was a wonderful person.”

“You knew her well then.”

Rodger realised he had gone too far. “Not really. I haven't met her.”

With pent-up anger and frustration over his sister's cruel death, he grabbed by the lapels of Rodger's red bomber jacket and thrust the hapless reporter up against the caravan. “Who the fuck are you and what do you want?” he demanded, with menace in his voice.

Rodger, shaking, said, “There's no need for violence. Your sister asked me to meet her here to show me something she had taken from the crashed plane.”

Relaxing a little, he asked, “Do you know what it was?”

“She mentioned something about it was some puzzle she took from the crash site.”

he wondered if it was the puzzle she had eMailed him. “Why the fuck would she confide in you?”

"I don't know. Your sister just eMailed me and said she had something to show me."

"What are you to her then?" Mike asked.

Robert loosened his grip. "So how did she find out who you were?"

Rodger replied, "I work as a reporter for the Colchester Clarion. We were both at the air crash scene."

"So you did meet her," Robert said,

"Not as such. I took her photograph for the paper. We spoke very briefly, but that was all. Then later she phoned me and said she had something to show me. She told me to come to the caravan, but when I got here, there was no sign of her. Of course, now I know why she couldn't make it."

"So what is it with this weird puzzle that she found?"

"I don't know, but it could be the reason the murderer killed her."

"If she some bastard killed because of what she found at the crash site it must be worth a fucking fortune," Mike commented.

"She was supposed to bring it here," Rodger said, half to himself.

"But she didn't, did she?" Robert said.

"So why did you come back if it isn't here?" Mike asked.

Rodger, nervous, confused and annoyed, said, "I thought maybe I'd missed something." Then he added, "She probably hid it at her home. What's the address?"

Robert turned back on Rodger. "You stay away from her place and her things, or you'll be sorry. Got it?" he said prodding the reporter in his chest, with a forefinger.

"L, loud and clear. I'll leave you to do what you were doing then." Rodger said, turning to leave.

"Yeah, fuck off you little shit!" was Mike's parting shot.

Frank Martin washed the pill down with a shot of scotch. It helped calm him down. He looked up to see D S Clements filling the frame of his office doorway.

"Come in sergeant," Frank said.

"You asked to see me, guv."

"Of course, or you wouldn't be here." There was a slight pause, then he said, "I've had some complaints about you,"

"Do you mean from the little black twerp?"

"Rodger Potter is one complainant, but he is not the only one."

"I might get a little bit rough at times guv', but I do get results," Clements justified.

"Yes sergeant and so do defence lawyers when our cases get thrown out of court."

"A fair few of my cases stick!"

Frank hawk-eyed Clements with a stare that had an unnerving effect on most people. "I know you come over as a bit of a hard man Clements, but I am not putting up with it in my squad. I've been



doing some checking on you. It seems that you have served in four nicks in the last ten years. That's a bit above the average. How do you account for that?"

"Personality clashes guv'. A bloke can't be expected to get along with all his colleagues."

Frank scanned the report. "Why did you leave Campden Town?"

My sergeant was hard to work with. He made my life hell."

"That would be D S Ranford."

"Yes, that right. Do you know Ranford, guv'nor?"

"We served together in Lewiston. Not only was he an excellent colleague he was a good friend. So what do you mean about him being difficult?"

"Like I said guv, it was a personality clash."

Frank sighed, got up and stretched his legs. "Clements, I need professionals on my team that I can trust to do the job right. I don't want self-serving vigilantes. Do you understand?"

"Guv', think vigilante is a bit..."

"Frankly, Clements I don't care what you think about this. If you are to remain on my team, you will stick to the rule book. So you had better learn it word for word. Any more heavy-handedness with suspects and you are out. Is that clear, sergeant?"

Clements, with veins protruding from his forehead, fists tightly clenched almost cutting off blood to his hands, uttered, "Yes sir. Loud and clear sir." With a beetroot like skin parlour sergeant Clements stood up and marched out of the office.

Frank always hated having to roast his people for their misconduct and other such misdemeanour's, but he had to steer his ship with a firm hand. A knock at his door shook him from his reverie.

"Beverley, what do you want?"

DC Armstrong said, 'I have a report on one Niles Golding. Apparently, he spent time in the nick for fraud.'

With raised eyebrows, Frank said. And how exactly was he a naughty boy?"

"Our Mr Golding is a G P, with a practice in Harley St. Some years ago he got kickbacks from some pharmaceutical company for pushing their products."

Frank sighed, "I was hoping for something like violent robbery or kidnapping."

"Sorry guv, it's the best I can do."

"Maybe we ought to have a chat with Dr Golding."

"Yes, sir."

Frank glanced at the wall clock. "With a bit of luck, he will still be in his surgery." Getting up, grabbing his jacket Frank strode to the door. "Come on constable; let's get going."

"What, to London?"

Frank didn't respond. He grabbed his mobile and keyed in a number. Getting a response, he said, "DCI Martin, Colchester police here. Patch me through to DI Carter." Frank waited a couple of minutes, then, "Hello Johnny. How the big smoke mate?"

"Frank Bloody Martin. How the hell are you?"

“Good mate. Look I need to feel a collar on your manor. I'm on my way up there to question a Harley, Street doctor. I need an interview room. Can you fix it?”

“You'll owe me a neat single malt, mate.”

“My pleasure. Can you spare a couple of bodies.”

“I'll fix it. We can't have outsiders making arrests on our patch.”

Frank turned to DC Armstrong. “Is that car ready?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What are we waiting for then?”

Owing to some heavy traffic it was early evening before Frank arrived at the surgery. Two members of the Met were waiting as arranged. Introductions were made, and Frank led his small force into the building. Having located Dr N Golding's suite. Frank and the other officers opened the glass doors leading to their quarry. The tasteful waiting room, reception in Harley Street speak, had half a dozen patients sitting in comfy chairs and one busy receptionist. They looked up when DCI Martin And DC Beverley Armstrong and two uniformed PCs strode in.

“Do you have your appointment card sir?” she asked as Frank Martin approached her.

Flashing his warrant card, he said, “I think this ought to do.” Noticing her name tag, he said, “ Now tell me Wendy, is Dr Golding here?”

“Yes, and he is very busy,” Wendy replied, going into her protect the boss from intruder role.

Frank leant in close and almost in a whisper, said, “So are we. So I strongly suggest you tell him we are here.”

Giving him a killing look, she pressed the intercom button for Nile's surgery, knowing she was going to get a roasting.

Dr Niles Golding emerged, his handsome countenance marred by the angry twitch at the corner of his mouth. “This had better be good and quick. I have important patients to get back to!”

“I have a couple of questions to ask you, doctor. The sooner you answer them, the sooner we can wrap this up.” Frank smiled, like a grinning hawk

“Very well, what questions?”

“Where were you on the evening of April 9th?”

“I will have to check my diary.”

“Perhaps I can help you, doctor. Were you at Angela Madison's, next to the Birchwood Sports Club, maybe?”

Caught off guard, Niles spluttered, “N, No Of course not!”

Both police officers caught the slight downward glance. Frank said, “Dr Golding I think you can help us with our enquiries.”

“Enquiries about what?” he tried bluffing.”

“A break-n and assault.”

“Look, this is preposterous. I'm a Harley Street specialist, for God's sake!”

“You can either willing help us or get dragged away in handcuffs, doctor. It's up to you.”

“But my practice, my patients. You can't do this. I'll have you sued for every...”

“Cuff him, constable,” Frank ordered, having no nonsense.

Rodger Potter was hardly a skilled cat burglar, but even he knew that blending with the scenery as much as possible helped him keep a low profile. So, reluctantly, he traded his bright red anorak for a drab grey raincoat. Having arrived at his destination, he parked his classic Vespa scooter down from Lisa's home and walked the rest of the way to where she had lived. No lights were on, suggesting the place was empty. Of course, her brother could be there, asleep but that was unlikely. To be on the safe side Rodger decided to check around the back of the house. There was a side-gate and, luckily for the reporter, it was unlocked, and he was able to slip around the back. His watch indicated 11.23 pm, so any neighbours would probably be asleep. As he approached the back door, Rodger thought he heard a scraping sound. He froze and looked around. There was a metal garden shed. The light breeze that had blown up was causing a low tree branch to rub on its roof. Rodger breathed a sigh of relief. Once his heart slowed down, he tested the back door. It was locked. He tentatively moved around the house, looking for an open window. There appeared to be one, the top part of which was held open. Being short, he needed a ladder to gain access. A quick inspection ascertained there was no ladder in the shed, or anywhere else in the vicinity. He didn't want to break any glass, but he had little option. “I hope this is all worth it,” he complained to himself as he removed his raincoat and wrapped it around his arm. They often used their elbows to break glass in movies so Rodger thought it would be simple enough but nothing ever went that smoothly for Rodger. His first attempt only resulted in a sore elbow. Realising he needs to use more force, Rodger jerked his elbow back really hard. This time the sound of shattering glass could probably have been heard for miles. A cacophony of barking followed by lights going on around the neighbourhood prompted Rodger to duck, a useful attribute of being short in height.

Five minutes had elapsed before all quietened down. Assuming no well-meaning, panicky neighbour had phoned the police, Rodger continued with his illegal nocturnal activities. He felt a kind of scary adrenalin rush as he entered the forbidden premises. Switching on his flash light, he looked for some office space. There was a small room with a computer, filing cabinet, desk, office chair, etc. He scanned the room for evidence of some file. Finding nothing in accessible storage spaces, Rodger looked for a less conspicuous hiding place. He went into her bedroom and checked under her pillows, finding nothing. Her bedside table looked more promising, as there were scraps of paper with geometrical symbols and notes inscribed on them. He figured that if she took her homework to bed the file if it were in her home, would not be far from where she slept. There was nothing of any interest in her wardrobe, so Rodger climbed on a chair to see what was on top. Among empty appliance boxes, some bedding and a couple of suitcases, he espied a concertina folder. With his heartbeat quickening Rodger flicked through the labelled sections and filed under miscellaneous he came across a photocopy of a parchment document, entitled the Ten Secrets.

Armed with his prize, Rodger felt much happier. He took out a handkerchief and wiped all surfaces he thought he might have touched. Rodger cursed himself for not wearing gloves and hoped all evidence of his visit had been eradicated. He looked at the folder containing the parchment document. He reasoned that Lisa would have wanted him to have it. Having justified his questionable action, Rodger left as quietly as possible and walked back to his scooter.

## Chapter 27

Niles Golding blasted his horn at the dodderer in front of him. The lights had already turned red three times, and now he was near the head of the queue some idiot in a clapped out Ford couldn't get their car started. The day had started off well. After an uncomfortable night in a police cell, he

got released without charge. He was running late, and he had a full appointment list for the day. Then, to make things much worse, he got Matthew's call telling him to drop everything and come to Cleve Laboratories. "Fuck!" he almost mouthed out loud. To not attend would be courting misfortune of the most extreme kind. For him to accede to his master's demands meant he had to let his patients down and that went right against the grain. On top of these woes, Niles was still sore from the previous night's cock up. He hated anybody having control over him, and Matthew had just that. He would need a good story to come out of that one unscathed.

Matthew did not like to be kept waiting. He looked at his watch for the umpteenth time. Then The Chemist saw the doctor's gold Porsche drive into the company car park. He met Niles at the entrance and told him to come to his office.

Once settled in his room, Matthew started with small talk. "So, how are you, Niles?"

"Fine thank you."

Matthew looked at Niles and detected a twitch in the corner of his slanted right slate grey eye. "Do you want to stay that way?"

"What way?"

"Feeling fine. Because if you do you had better tell me a very good story about the night before last."

Niles felt his gut churning. "I'm sorry things didn't work out, but ..."

"But nothing! Remember the oath you took?"

"Yes but that was to do with the society – not this stuff."

Matthew glared at the doctor. "It has everything to do with all aspects of your miserable life. Have you got that?"

"Yes, loud and clear."

"Good. Now, what happened last night?"

"It didn't work out as I had planned."

"That much is painfully obvious, and I am running out of patience."

"Well, I was laying in wait. I heard Madison arrive home, but then I listened to another voice, a man's voice. They seemed pretty friendly, he lied. He said he was going to decant the wine, while she prepared dinner. What was I supposed to do?"

"Did you get to see this man?"

"No, I was in a wardrobe, waiting for her to come into the bedroom." "Why didn't you ring Elvis for back-up?"

"I never thought of it. Besides, we had no time to plan it. I was flying by the seat of my pants."

Matthew eyed Niles, "And you think that is an excuse for failure."

"No, but ..."

"You have no idea what is at stake here."

"That's right. So what is at stake?"

"Your life if you don't find her before she does some damage to us."

“The man's the fucking devil,” Niles complained to himself, wishing he'd never set eyes on Atreides. Niles considered himself strong willed, but this insidious creep had made him commit murder because he had taken some weird oath in a fucking Scottish ruin. On the up side, he was no longer in prison; his medical licence was reinstated, and he shared a practice in Harley. All three plusses were at the behest of Matthews seemingly great influence. Yes, Matthew had been very helpful but at what price. No matter what unsavoury act he is told to carry out, he has no choice but to comply, if he wished to remain at liberty with a lucrative income. But being enslaved to Matthew Atreides was hardly freedom.

Having made his exit from Lisa's, surprisingly without a hitch, Rodger, with adrenalin still, pumping, couldn't believe he had broken into another person's home, even if they were deceased. The 'fear it and do it anyhow' night classes he was taking, seemed to be paying off, although he was hardly going to broadcast his actions to the class.

Once settled at home, with a shot of whisky and a smoke Rodger booted his laptop and began his search. With the inscribed parchment beside his computer, he began to search for examples of the strange geometrical shapes. Google images churned out hundreds of websites depicting geometrical designs but nothing like some of the shapes on the parchment. Rodger sighed as he opened up the eleventh site on the subject of geometry, to find that, as with the others, it depicted aspects of the geometry but no reliable information on the icons on the stolen document. There was one page that linked various symbols to different secret societies, and this got Rodger wondering. Was the 'Ten Secrets' connected with a secret organisation? If so, what were they doing in the briefcase of Hans Holdinger? And, even more important, did this have anything to do with the sabotage of the plane? Rodger knew he was drawing a long bow but it might be worth investigating.

After three strong coffees, intermittent stretches, and a lot of cursing, Rodger hit pay dirt. He came across a website about an ancient branch of the Freemasons that showed some of the symbols. There was also mention of an abandoned abbey in Scotland used by The Purple Order of the Thistle, an offshoot of an ancient Freemason lodge. Rodger wondered if the abbey still held such meetings. If so there could be a clue. He yawned, sucking in air. The answer would have to wait. Now the adrenalin had gone he desperately needed sleep.

Rodger, not often seen as the knight in shining armour, experienced hero worship, in his dream. He had beaten the dangerous dragon, Matthew Atreides and had swept the beautiful damsel up in his masculine arms. The evil beast that had infected so many people was dead. But what was that loud banging noise?

“OPEN UP, POLICE” a voice demanded.

Did they have police back in medieval times? It was all very confusing. Then Rodger woke up. The knocking became more insistent. “HANG ON, I'M COMING!” Rodger responded, fearing his front door shattering. Grabbing some sweat pants he staggered to the door, pulling it open seconds before the ram was about to hit home.

Looking down at him a uniformed cop asked, “Are you Rodger Potter?” knowing full well by the description given, it had to be him.

“What are you lot doing trying to beat down my door?”

“Rodger Potter, you are under arrest for burglary.” The officer then read him his rights.

“Can I at least get dressed first?”

“No, we'll find you something at the station.”

As Rodger waited in the interview room, his mind filled with questions? How much did they know? Had anybody reported him? If so, who? He felt distinctly uncomfortable. The old sweatshirt aptly named, owing to its odour, swamped his diminutive frame. Rudely awakened from a beautiful dream and dragged into this nightmare was not a good start to his day. Just when he thought things could not get any worse, they did, in the rather large shape of DS Clements.

“Well, well, so we meet again. And you have been a naughty boy this time.”

Ignoring what passed for a weak Bond villain line, Rodger said, “Sergeant I have valuable information for Chief Inspector Martin.”

Clements glared down at him. “I don't give a flying fuck what information you think you have. You are here for breaking into a dead woman's house.”

“That's what I need to talk to Frank about.”

Clements poked at Rodger, fuming, “Listen to you little shit! You will speak to me about it right, fucking now. Got it?”

“Load and clear but I need to show Frank what she took from the plane. Well, at least a copy of it.”

Clements' face took on a lovely shade of beetroot. “DID YOU BREAK INTO LISA PARTON'S HOUSE LAST NIGHT?”

“Yes but ...”

“But nothing. What did you take?”

“Nothing really, only some papers she stole from the plane crash.”

“Then you stole something, didn't you?”

“Yes but...”

“No fucking buts.” Clements thrust a piece of paper in front of Rodger. “Read and sign this.”

“What is it?”

“Your statement. So sign it.”

“But I didn't write it, so It can't be my statement.”

Clements got right in his face. “Sign it you little prick, or I'll ram it down your fucking throat.”

Rodger, despite his heart beating out a drum tattoo in his chest, knew he had to stand his ground. Rising to his full five feet one, he said, “I will sign it once I've spoken to Frank Martin.”

Clements couldn't believe it. The little weasel was standing up to him. Grabbing Rodger by the scruff of his neck, sergeant Clements manoeuvred the hapless reporter towards the cells. “A spell in the cells might make you more cooperative.”

Just then Frank Martin came around the corner.

Seeing him, Rodger gained some courage, “Get this Neanderthal off me, Frank. I have important information!”

“What's he doing here?”

“Guv, he's under arrest.”

“For what, sergeant?”

Burglary. Ms Lisa Parton's place to be precise.”

The inspector said, “Carry on then, sergeant.”

“But, but...” Rodger spluttered.

Clements opened the cage and pushed the reporter inside.

“All right, I'll sign the statement! The door banged shut, and Rodger was all alone, powerless and scared. “What about my phone call?” he sang out,

Bernice Brigham wasn't happy to get Rodger's call but took it anyhow. “What do you want, Mr Potter?”

“I've been following up on the Lisa Parton assignment.”

“And what assignment is that?”

“She took something from the crash site, for which somebody killed her. I went to her place and found what it was she had taken.”

“Oh! And what is that?”

“I can't tell you that at the moment,”

She sighed heavily, “And why is that,”

“Because I'm in Gaol.”

“In gaol! What for?”

“Entering Lisa's home and taking evidence.”

“And what do you expect me to do about it.”

“Protect the freedom of the press. We can have the exclusive story. The Nationals will be creaming themselves to get hold of it. Just get me out of here.”

She gritted her teeth, “Potter this better be good.”

## Chapter 28

Rodger shuddered when he heard the voice on his answering machine. He sensed he was getting in too deep and he wondered whatever possessed him to phone Cleve laboratories it being owned and run by the very man Angela had accused of committing mass murder. Although he hadn't left any contact details with them, he guessed they had a record of his phone number. Worried for his safety, Rodger grabbed his mobile and called the police. DCI Martin was not available, and he declined to speak with anyone else. As his anxiety grew, Rodger chided himself for being silly. He was probably reading too much into something that had a reasonable explanation. But then why had Angela disappeared just after confronting her boss with what she knew about the missing sample? She had asked him for his protection so why would she have gone out before he got to her place? He tried to contact Frank Martin again but to no avail. To his horror, he realised he was on his own. He fervently wished he's had the foresight to make the called to Cleve laboratories from a public phonebox. But without thinking, he used his own mobile. Normally this would not have been a problem, but now Cleve Chemicals, and probably Matthew Atreides knew he was interested in Angela's abduction.



The ominous and subtly threatening message certainly suggested as much. He played it again. A man with a South African accent said, "Thank you for your concern about Angela Madison, but you are advised to pursue this matter no further. Although it was not the first time, he played it he still broke out in a cold sweat. This brought to mind all the bullying he had to put up with in school. Fear then turned to anger. Matthew Atreides was just another bully. How dare he think he can get away with his crimes. But get away with what? Mass murder? Where was the evidence? Apart from the word of a beautiful woman, with a grudge to bear against her boss.

Getting things into some perspective helped. Grabbing a coffee, he booted his laptop and attempted to breathe some life into the dull Rotary Club article. But could not stop thinking about Angela and what might have happened to her. He needed to clear his head. A ride on his trusty Vespa might get rid of the mental cobwebs.

Just as he was about to head out the door, his phone rang. He froze. Could it be Matthew Atreides? There again it could be Frank Martin returning his call. Overcoming his first instinct and ignore it, Roger grabbed the receiver. A huge smile played on his face when he realised the caller was Angela. Greatly relieved and pleasantly surprised, he said, "Angela, where are you? When I got to your place, and you weren't there, I was anxious."

"So you did call. It's just that you were so late I didn't think you were coming."

"In the light of what you were telling me about Cleve chemicals, I figured he'd kidnapped you."

"I may well have been, or worse, if I hadn't have scared off my attacker."

"What attacker?"

"Somebody was laying in wait for me when I got home."

"Did you get a look at him?"

"Yes, a glimpse, and I think I've seen him somewhere before."

"Where?"

"I can't remember. If it comes back, I'll call."

"Where are you now?"

"I'd rather not say. I'm scared that Matthew will get to me."

Rodger thought for a moment, then he said, "I got a threatening message from Cleve chemicals telling me to back off."

There was silence on the line. Then, "Oh, I'm sorry to have involved you in all this."

"Yeah, well it's too late now."

Angela was not expecting such a response. "Look I'd better be going."

"I'd like to talk with you about what you were going to show me."

"Mr Potter, if you fear for your safety you had better forget we ever spoke."

"If I let this go I could miss out on the story of a lifetime."

"Spoken like a true reporter. I'll be in touch."

"So what's your contact number."

"If necessary I'll phone you."

“Yes, and try to remember who your attacker was.” The phone went dead. Oh well, Rodger thought, at least she was safe. She wasn't going to be fished out of the estuary at Brightlingsea, like poor Lisa.

Niles Golding finished with his last private patient of the day and headed to the private underground car park where his metallic gold Porsche Carrera awaited. The private practice had indeed made him a wealthy man, and it was all down to Matthew Atreides. He had a knack of manipulating people to do his bidding, even if it meant bending the rules to suit his agenda. Niles respected him for that. Matthew had told him that if you shake anybody's cupboard, you will hear some bones rattling. He said that his biggest skill was discovering the rattles. Yes, Niles was living the good life, but it was at Matthew's pleasure. If he was of no more use to the Grand Master, he knew he would be cast aside and once again become a ragged Cinderella. Niles was determined to deal with Angela. He had a personal score to settle when he did. He checked her home, and there was no sign of her. Her car was missing, and she hadn't been to work. Her personal file at Cleve Chemicals was a help. It listed a sister as the next of kin, to be contacted in case of an emergency. He smiled thinly. That's where the bitch was probably hiding.

Niles drove along Queen's Rd and turned left in Castle St. he hadn't been able to contact Elvis, so he had to use his Porsche, which stood out like proverbial dogs balls. He was tired and hungry, but Matthew was relying on him to get it right. He parked near Queen's Rd and walked, carrying his medical bag, to number 11, where Clare Ramsey, Angela's sister lived. There was a car parked in the driveway. Niles checked it against Angela's licence details. They matched! He tried Elvis' number again, but there was no answer. “Fuck”, he mouthed, as he walked back to his car and a long uncomfortable night

What is it with the little twerp? Frank asked himself, making his way to where Rodger's waited in reception. From what he knew of the man he was afraid to take any unnecessary risks. So how come the reporter was playing at being a cat burglar, and, what with the personal evidence Rodger left behind, not an excellent one. Why on Earth had he gone to Lisa Parton's home? What was so important at Lisa's that he would risk his freedom to obtain it? Hopefully, the silly little bugger would supply the answers.

“You must like it here, Mr Potter,” Frank said, beckoning the Negro to follow him to the interview room.”

Once inside, Rodger complained, “You could have stopped Sergeant cave man, and yet you let him shove me in a cell.”

“As I heard it you wouldn't cooperate,” Frank said, sitting down.

“Non-cooperation! You mean I wouldn't sign a statement not written by me!”

“Don't be a smartarse Mr Potter. You are in serious trouble so I wouldn't make light of it if I were you.”

“Clements wouldn't even give me time to read it first.”

Frank knew Clement's style. He didn't like it, but so far he hadn't caught the detective crossing the line. “You said you have something important to tell me, and believe me if you don't want more cell time it had better be solid.”

“I went to Lisa's place to look for the thing she took from the crash.”

“and?”

“It was there. And a copy of Lisa's notes. I took it home and did some research on it and guess what?”

“Surprise me?”

“It's a file with writing and symbols all over it.”

“Why would a senior ASC officer jeopardise her career over something as trivial as that?”

“It may seem trivial to you and me, but it was obviously important to somebody.”

“Obviously, but who?”

“The symbols were used by an ancient branch of the Freemasons.”

Frank Groaned, “You're not going to get into some fucking conspiracy theory, are you?”

“No, but it does raise some questions, like why was this information concealed in a chained locked metal case? And why it was attached to the wrist of Hans Holdinger?”

“That's the spook's concern, not ours. And certainly not yours.”

“If the plane was blown up to stop somebody getting hold of those symbols they must have been critical to someone.”

“Remembering his conversation with Commander Jacobs, Frank muttered, “That someone is called Atreides. Apparently, the package was for him.”

Rodger froze at the mention of the doctor's name. Then he uttered, “What did you say?”

“Just thinking out loud.” The officer said.

“You said his name is Atreides.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Angela's boss is called Atreides, and he is the one she threatened to expose over the deaths.”

Frank stopped short. “Do you think they are the same person?”

“It's not a common name.”

“It's not enough to go on.”

“Not on its own. But as I was saying those Freemason symbols are engraved on a bunch of standing stones.”

“What are you on about, Rodger?”

“In her notes, Angela had a photo of a circle of stones.”

Frank's eyes raised upwards. “Will you get to the point?”

“The stones have the same symbols that are in the file.”

Frank stopped short. “That's interesting, but the same symbols crop up in all sorts of places.”

Rodger grinned widely. “Not these. They are different to anything I have seen.”

Frank frowned, “What do you mean – different?”

Rodger shrugged. “That what Lisa put in her notes.”

"It's all a bit flimsy. All we really know is that a Hans Holdinger carried a locked, chained case containing some weird code. Now you say this code is inscribed on some rocks, somewhere. It doesn't give us much to go on."

The reporter beamed, "The stones are in Scotland. So that gives us something."

Frank stared at the Negro. "In Scotland! How do you know that little gem?"

"Lisa wrote it down. So I googled it and found something interesting. The stone circle is near an abandoned abbey."

Frank stared at him. Maybe so but it still doesn't get us very far. I suppose the Scottish National Trust might know where it is but..."

Rodger stopped him short. "... It's called 'Clanbuskenny Abbey. It's in Stirling-shire."

Frank made a note. "I'll check it out."

"The Website's called 'Highland Tours'."

Frank stood up. "Leave it with me and I'll look into it."

As The detective got to the door, Rodger said, "Angela phoned me. She saw the person who attacked her."

Frank stopped and looked at Rodger. "She was attacked! By whom?"

"She had seen him somewhere. She is going to ring me when she remembers."

"Where is she?"

"She's not letting on. She thinks her boss set up the attack."

"I need to speak with her. Can you set it up?"

"Possibly, but she's scared. If I set this meeting up, I want to go with you."

"Out of the question. This operation is a police matter."

"She trusts me. It'll make it easier for you if I'm there."

Frank sighed, "Very well but only to observe. You don't say a bloody word."

"And I want the charges against me dropped."

Frank exasperated said, "Good god man, you committed a crime for which you have to pay the penalty but any real help you give us will go in your favour."

"I couldn't stand working in a place like this," Frank stated to the young female assistant as they walked down the corridor to where Dr Hawkin was working on a body.

Dr Hawkin says it's just another hospital ward. My patients are tended to as in any other part of a hospital. The main difference is my patients don't complain."

"Well there is that to it," Frank chuckled.

"Chatting up my assistants is not allowed, Inspector," Dr Hawkin said, looking up from the victim on the examining table.

"So, what have you got for me?"

The chief pathologist picked up his clipboard. "We have Lisa Parton. Well, what's left of her? The ravishes of marine life rather marred her beauty, Frank."

"So you have confirmed that is her,"

The Dr turned on the police officer. "Inspector, we will get this done much quicker if you didn't have the annoying habit of asking me the same thing umpteen times."

"Just being thorough, Doc. So how did she die.?"

"Cardiac arrest,"

"So it was natural?"

"With a little help of potassium chloride."

"So she was murdered."

"unless she injected herself."

Frank scratched his head. "Okay doc, somebody injected her with this potassium chloride and dumped the body in the river. So is it easy to get hold of this stuff?"

"Not that difficult, unfortunately. All pharmacies have the stuff, as do most doctors." But this is interesting". Going over to the human remains of Lisa Parton, Dr Hawkin said. "Now look at this, " pointing to a discoloured patch of skin."

"What exactly am I supposed to be looking that?"

Pointing at a small puckered hole, he answered, "This is where the needle punctured the flesh. Now, presuming the deceased was conscious when he jabbed her unless the woman was tied down, she would have put up a struggle. To be that accurate with a needle the killer certainly knew what he was doing."

Frank rubbed his chin. "And if she was unconscious when he injected her?"

"A PC overdose works much more efficiently on conscious beings. To bring about cardiac arrest quickly, she would have to have been conscious."

"So, we're looking at a person with medical knowledge."

"Possibly, inspector, but we are certainly looking at somebody who is not a stranger to syringes."

"A doctor or a nurse, perhaps?"

"I didn't bring my crystal ball with me today." with such skills

"And then there is any numbers of junkies ."

"It takes a bit more skill than that of your average heroin addict."

"Is there anything else I should know?"

Dr Hawkin gave Frank a withering look. "If there were, inspector, I would have told you."

Outside the mortuary, in the fresh air, Frank Martin cringed. Mortuaries always gave him the creeps. Now came the task he hated. The next of kin had to be informed. He phoned Colchester Central and passed the job onto a WPC. Women were so much better at that sort of thing. Besides, he had a couple of leads to follow up. He decided to start with Harry Krakow.

Frank arrived at Stansted airport, passed security and got directed to the Air Express office. Harry's secretary, with rude efficiency, informed him that,

Mr Krackow was very busy and that she could make an appointment for him if he liked."

Harry gave the abrupt woman a hawkish look. Producing his warrant card, he responded, "This is my appointment card, miss. I'm sure Mr Krackow can spare the police a few minutes."

Realising he was a cop changed everything. She immediately phoned her boss's intercom and told him the police were outside and needed to talk to him.

"Inspector, this is the wrong time. We're in a meeting with the CAA. Can't this wait?" Harry said."

"Murder cannot wait, Mr Krackow."

"Murder! What are you on about?"

"Lisa Parton's body has been found. It looks like murder. As you were one of the last people to see her alive, I need to ask a couple of questions. We can either do it here or down at the nick in Colchester."

"Sorry inspector, I didn't realise."

"No, of course not. Is anymore somewhere we can get a coffee around here," Frank asked.

The CAA investigator emerged sheepishly from Harry's office. "Mr Krackow, we still have some points to go over."

Frank turned on him. Flashing his card, he said, "So do I and yours will have to wait, I'm afraid."

As they sat drinking coffee, Frank asked, "When you saw her at the ACC meeting did you notice anything unusual about her behaviour."

I only met here once before, and that was at the crash site. The accident investigator was a bit stressed, though, but that could be because she was late for the meeting."

"And that was the last time you saw her?"

"Yes, I've already told you that." Harry said, abruptly. Now, if you have don't mind I have to get back."

Frank said, "I know it seems tedious Mr Krackow, but I'm now looking for a murderer and any thing you can think of, even the slightest seemingly insignificant detail, can be helpful to our investigation."

Harry got up. "Well, I can't help you anymore, inspector."

As the flight director left, Frank looked up Rodger's number. He was working at the Clarion. The Police officer made an arrangement to see him there after lunch. Now he had to drive back to Colchester.

## Chapter 29

Angela pulled the curtains back. The car was still there, a metallic coloured Porsche. The Carrera's sleek shape was unmistakable, even in the moonlight. Her sister was out, attending some evening class. Feeling scared and alone, Angela needed help. Rodger seemed like a decent, caring sort of person if a little on the wimpy side. She decided to give him a call. There was no answer. She left him a message praying that he would soon respond.

Rodger just got home from his assertiveness class and was about to heat up yesterday's spaghetti bolognese for supper, when he heard a noise outside. Jumpy since the assault, he grabbed a well-worn cricket bat that he kept for self-defence. He gingerly looked out of a window facing the road. There was no one to be seen. He then keyed the message bank number into his land line phone. While the recorded messages repeated themselves, Rodger popped his meal in the microwave. Just then he heard Angela's voice. Dropping what he was doing, he replayed the message. Someone in a Porsche sports car was spying on her. She was alone and didn't know who to call for help. He wondered what to do. If it was the same Porsche like the one driven by his assailant, then Angela could be in real danger. The gallant thing to do would be to ride over to Clacton-on-Sea and protect her. The sensible thing to do would be to stay home and not get involved. He could make out he never got the message, but if something bad happened to her, he could never forgive himself. "Fuck it!" he said to the empty room, grabbing his helmet. Then he remembered the nuked spag bog. "Fuck it!" he said again, leaving it in the microwave to congeal.

Niles was trying to get comfortable in the cramped sports car. He was thoroughly pissed off. Elvis was not answering his phone. Niles reasoned that if he had to kill the girl, there was no room to stash her body in a Porsche. The Doctor needed Elvis there with his van, but the pilot seemed to have gone right off the radar. Niles had to do it because his life was on the line. If he stuffed up again, Matthew would not be so lenient. Atreides would see him as just another useless eater wiped from the face of the earth. Niles checked his medical bag and took out the syringe and checked the potassium chloride inside. Then he heard a noise and saw a rider on a bright red motor scooter slowing down and stopping outside number 11. He couldn't believe. What the fuck is he doing here?" Niles asked nobody. Oh well, he would just have to deal with that little black shit as well. With two of them to deal with Niles needed more than a syringe loaded with potassium chloride. He reached under his coat on the tiny back seat and withdrew an automatic pistol. They wouldn't know it was a Glock replica.

Rodger Potter satisfied he was at the right number, cut his engine and walked his scooter onto the front lawn. As he pushed it onto its stand, he noted the golden Porsche parked opposite. The reporter wondered if it was a smart move, exposing himself to the thug. He hoped such a blatant manoeuvre would make the stalker think twice about doing them harm. He also realised his plan could go terribly wrong and the intruder, knowing the two of them were alone in the house, would get both of them. Rodger took a deep breath and knocked on the front door. The beautiful bottle redhead ushered him inside and abruptly closed the door. Then she gave him a huge hug. "Thank you for coming, I'm sorry to drag you into this, but I didn't know who else to turn to."

Rodger said, "I believe he is the one who beat me up." Then he asked, "Angela, have you called the police?"

"Yes, but they can't do anything unless somebody commits a crime."

"Don't worry, I contact them." he took out his phone and keyed in Frank Martin's number. He heard a mumbled "Yes," at the other end of the line. Hey, this is Rodger Potter here."

"Oh no, Frank thought. "What the fuck do you want this time of night?"

"I'm with Angela Madison."

"Good, that means she's okay, Rodger. Now good night."

"Wait Frank. There's something else?"

"WHAT?"



“The guy who attacked me is sitting in a car across the road. I think he intends to come after Angela.”

“Are you sure it's the same person. As I recall, you couldn't recognise him from any mugshots.”

“It's the same car, a golden Porsche Carrera,”

“Is it the same number plate?”

“I don't know. I was too busy rolling around in agony to notice.”

“Then it may not be the same driver.”

Angela spoke up, “I know his name. He came to see Matthew at work one day.”

“Angela knows his name.”

“Okay, give it to me.”

She took the phone, “Dr Niles Golding.”

“Alright Luv, we'll do a check on him, but there's nothing we can do about him as long as he does not threaten you in any way.”

“Did you say he is a doctor, Angela?” Rodger asked when the call ended.

“That's what Matthew addressed him as.”

“Well, I don't care much for his bedside manner.”

The knock at the front door completely killed their conversation. “Who is it? Angela asked.

“Police,” came the answer. “A call was logged from this address concerning a suspicious person lurking outside.”

“You said you couldn't help me.” she said, through the door.

“Well we may be able to, but I need to come in and show you something.”

“Well, I don't need your help now. I have a man friend with me.” She waited for a response but was only met by silence.

“He must have gone away,” Rodger suggested.

“I hope so, Rodger but he might come back in the night.

A loud noise stopped the reporter from replying. “That's glass breaking!” Rodger stated, froze to the spot.

Before they had the chance to leave the kitchen door opened.

“Stay exactly where you are,” the doctor ordered, pointing his gun at them for emphasis.

The pair stood still, frozen in fear. “What do you want with us?” Rodger asked

Niles, unsure what to do next, said: “Sit on the sofa.”

The pair quickly complied. Then Rodger said, Jesus man, you're a doctor. You took the Hippocratic oath.”

“And you are a Snoopy fucking reporter whom I have to silence.”

Rodger's insides turned to water. “We're no threat to you.”

With his gun trained on them, Niles opened his medical bag and withdrew the loaded syringe. "Here's what's going to happen. You will do what I say. If you resist in any way, I will kill you."

Angela, desperate, clutched at the only straw within her grasp. "My sister and her boyfriend will be home any minute."

Niles yanked Rodger to his feet and thrust the gun into his side. "Take this syringe and inject your girlfriend with it," he snarled, handing it to Rodger, before pushing him back on the coach.

The reporter stared at the thing in his hand. "You've got to be fucking joking mate,"

"Then I will shoot you." Niles bluffed. He was out of his league, and he knew it, what with only had one syringe and a fake firearm. Then, to make matters worse for him, he heard a car pulling up in the driveway.

"That'll be my sister and her boyfriend."

"Fuck it!" Niles said, grabbing his bag and scampering out of the back door.

Rodger and Angela just stared at each other. Then she shuddered and fell into his arms.

Linda entered the room. She took one look at her sister and the Black guy hanging onto each other as though their lives depended on it. "What's going on?" she asked.

Rodger jerked back to reality, sat and stared at the sister, unable to be coherent. "Hi, I'm... We just....thank God you're..."

Angela got up and hugged her sister. "You don't know it, but you just saved our lives."

Linda held her sibling at arm's length. "What happened?"

"A doctor broke in and tried to kill us," Rodger explained briefly.

"You'd better call the police," Linda stated.

"Good idea," Roger agreed, going on his mobile phone.

A knock at the front door startled the trio. Then a voice, "Rodger, are you there?"

"Who is it?" the reporter asked, nervously, as he sidled to the door.

"DCI Martin. Open up and let me in."

"The police were quick," Linda observed, as Frank Martin entered the room.

"What are you doing here?" Rodger asked.

"Just checking up to see if everything is okay."

"Well, it's not!" Angela said emphatically. A doctor threatened us with a gun. If Linda hadn't arrived home when she did, we could both be dead.!"

"Well, you're not. That's the main thing," Frank commented. Now tell me what you know about your intruder."

## Chapter 30

Niles snorted up the third line of snow. He needed the rush, the euphoria to cope. But the agitation and panic were just around the corner. He has to get rid of his Porsche. He desperately needed Matthew's calm guidance but, having stuffed up again he was also loathed to face him. He had left behind witnesses who could identify him. There was only one thing for it. He had to get away.

“Damn you Matthew Atreides!” he shouted to his empty apartment. The bastard had dragged him into this mess and had to pay. His cocaine addled brain made him feel strong and invincible. He knew things about Matthew and the Guide Stones that could have him killed so he would have to deal with the man before he made his escape. Niles urged on by his drug induced bravado, determines to confront Dr Atreides from a position of strength. But he needed some leverage. But first, the Doctor needed Elvis' help. He phoned his number.

Since Liz had broken up with him, Elvis lived most of the time at the airfield. The pain was becoming more regular and increasingly intense. It took greater quantities of dope and booze to make life bearable if not functional. Elvis had just dropped off in a drunken stupor when his phone rang. The time said 2.30 am. Thinking it might be Liz, he answered it, Nile's voice cause another spasm of pain. “Do you know what the fucking time is?”

“Sorry, but I need to talk to you.”

“Couldn't it wait till the fucking morning, you moron?”

“I couldn't contact you to help deal with Angela Madison tonight, so I had to do the job by myself. And I stuffed it up. Now the cops know I was involved.”

“What the fuck are you rambling on about, Niles? Are you fucking stoned or something?”

“Yes, but that's beside the point. I need to disappear. So I need you to fly me somewhere.”

Grimacing with pain and having to deal with Niles, Elvis exploded, “FUCK OFF, YOU CRETIN AND LET ME GET SOME SLEEP!”

Niles, desperate and paranoid, responded. “If the cops arrest me you're in the fucking frame as well. Don't forget that.”

Elvis broke out in a cold sweat. The little prick was going to dob him in. “Be at the Earles Colne air strip at 9 am. It'll be good to get you out of my fucking hair you stupid prick.”

Niles felt the tremors and muscle twitches, as he sat in his car, across from 5 Sorrel Close. This suburb was where big end of town people lived, so his Carrera fitted in nicely with most of the other parked autos. The tightness in his chest gave him pain. In a few hours Elvis would fly him to France. Once in Europe, he could disappear until the heat was off. But he had something important to do first. Niles reached into his glove box and retrieved the fake Glock. It looked real enough, and he didn't want to shoot anyone. He checked his medical bag for the loaded syringe.

He hesitated outside the front door. The feeling of invincibility was wearing off, but it was too late to back down. Taking a deep breath, Niles rang the door bell. He heard heavy footsteps. The door swung open and a handsome man of colour attired in a dressing gown over his pyjamas, with short meticulously styled hair filled the doorway.

“Who are you and what do you want at this ungodly hour?” William Mako demanded, in a clipped English accent.

Niles couldn't back down. “I wish to speak with Dr Atriedes.”

“Who are you?” William asked, repeating his question.

Niles had it worked out. “I work for him, and It's urgent that I see him now.”

“I'm afraid he is not to be disturbed. Tell what this is about, and I will inform...” The sentence remained incomplete as he found himself staring down the barrel of a gun.

“Now get me Dr Atreides,” Niles demanded with all the menace he could muster.

William backed off and reached for the phone. “Sir, there’s a very insistent man here demanding to see you. He is also pointing a gun at me.”

Niles listened, horrified. Matthew could easily have alerted the police.

With the visitor momentarily caught off guard, William makes his move. Side-stepping he made a grab for the gun. Niles tries to gain control but William’s superior strength overpowered him, and the specialist found himself at the wrong end of the weapon. Knowing it was a replica, he launched himself at Matthew’s servant – a move that took William completely by surprise. Once he figured the gun was useless, he dropped it and counter-attacked, leaving Niles in a heap on the floor.

Realising that the servant probably didn’t know what was going on, Niles tried a different ploy. “Your boss caused the death of those pregnant women on the news.”

William stared at him. “Just stay where you are. The police are on their way so don’t make things worse for yourself.”

Niles staggered to his feet. He couldn't hang around. Turning to Mako, he said. “It all been a huge mistake.” He went to grab his bag, but William blocked him.”

“Yes, it's your mistake, and you will pay for it.” He grabbed Niles around the neck and frogmarched him into the garage, where he pushed him down on a plastic chair. Grabbing gaffer tape off a shelf he taped Niles's to a chair.

“I'll have you charged with kidnapping. You won't get away with this. Just mark my words.”

Unsure of his position, William hesitated. Then hearing footsteps behind him, he pivoted around and faced Matthew Atreides, his long tangled hair framing his scowling face. “What the hell do you think you are playing at, Niles. You're a total bloody failure and a disgrace. I don't know why I bother with you.”

Niles looked up at the tall man. “Release me, Matthew. And keep him on a short leash,” he said, indicating the servant.

Matthew turned to William. “Take the tape off. I don't need that to control this idiot.”

Once he was free, Niles said, “I think it best if I take my leave.”

Matthew turned on him, “You come here in the dead of night and threaten William with a gun and now you think you can just walk away as though nothing happened. Have you completely taken leave of your senses?”

Niles' befuddled brain had him standing there, his mouth miming a fish out of the water.

Matthew got close to his face. "Well, you are sadly mistaken." Whipping out a pistol, Matthew said, “And this one is real.”

Just then there was a knock at the door and the words 'OPEN UP! POLICE' rang out.

Niles grinned, “God, now we can talk about your death dealing vaccine.”

Matthew, not wanting to air his very dirty washing in public, glared at the Doctor. Then he pressed a button on a remote control. The garage door quietly rolled up, allowing Niles to escape before the police entered. Matthew then hit The Black man on the head with his gun. The surprised look on Joseph's face said it all, as he staggered under the blow. Matthew told the police that the gunman had escaped with no harm done, except William's skull laceration, which he received trying to stop the gunman from escaping.

Elvis looked at the envelope for the umpteenth time but needed another shot of scotch to give him the Dutch courage to open the letter. He knew from the envelope it was from the 'Aviation Licensing Authority', and he had more than an inkling about the message's content. Taking a deep breath, the pilot ripped open the envelope and read the one-page document. He stared at the damning words and reached for another scotch. The Board had revoked his flying license. Until he underwent a thorough medical, he would be never able to fly again. The ALA had suspended his licence forthwith. Elvis rolled and lit another joint. How did they get to know? Who had ratted on him? What was he going to do? Those pen pushing bastards had taken away his main reason for living. Then he remembered he was supposed to be flying Niles over to the continent this very day. He took a big swig of whisky. "Who gives a fuck," he said to his empty office. He heard a car pull up. Looking through the shed window, he saw Niles Golding walking towards the room. Elvis met him, saying "Sorry but I won't be able to fly you."

Niles stopped still. "What do you mean?"

"Something has come up, so I won't be able to fly you to France."

"What do you mean? I have to get there today. The cops are after me, and they'll force me to talk about you. So you have to fly me."

Elvis shrugged, "Okay, if that's the way you want it."

The Piper Seneca purred like a contented cat as Elvis flew it 15,000 ft above the North Sea. His plane had never sounded better, perfectly tuned as it was. Elvis had made sure his pride and joy looked it's best for the flight. After all, everybody gets spruced up for their funeral. He could hardly wear his best paisley suit while flying his plane but he had showered and shaved his head. All he needed was the white headband sporting the blood Red rising sun and he would be complete. He checked his airspeed, then his chart. He would soon be half way, and that would do fine. Speaking to his lone passenger, he said, "I know a way we can both be free of that evil, manipulative bastard, Atreides."

Niles looked up. "Oh, what way is that?"

"A way he can no longer control us."

"Are you going to tell me your 'master plan' or not?"

"Better than that, Niles. I'm going to show you." you arrogant prick.

"Show me! What do you mean?"

"I've had my pilot's license revoked."

"What for?"

"Because, I'm not fit to fly."

"Jesus! What do you mean?" Niles asked as the jigsaw pieces of the strange conversation came together."

Elvis said, "Some sick fuck doxed me into the ALA. The bastards have pulled my license." He tried in vain to hide the severe stomach cramp that cut him like a sharp knife.

"Elvis, are you Okay?"

"I will be in a minute,"

“What do you mean?” the doctor asked, he panic growing.

The pilot grimaced, saying, “Fuck you Atreides. Someone has to put a stop to your evil ways.”

Niles asked, Who is that going to be?

Elvis took a deep agonising breath, then thrust the stick forward throwing the small craft into a steep dive. The last thing he heard was Niles screaming “NOOOO!”

## Chapter 31

Rodger took the phone call at 3.42 am. The caller's voice was slurred, but the reporter got the gist of the message. It concerned the murder of Lisa Parton. Becoming instantly alert he looked for DCI Martin's private number.

Frank's wife heard the ring tone first and jabbed her snoring husband in the ribs, “Wake up Frank. The bloody phone's ringing.”

Jerked roughly into a semblance of consciousness he blindly grabbed his mobile. “Who's this?” he groaned.

“Rodger Potter. I have some news about Lisa Parton.”

“Jesus Potter. Couldn't it wait till morning?”

“The caller said if we are to catch Dr Atreides we have to act now.”

“Dr Atreides. What's he got to do with...”

“...We have to meet right now. Where and when.”

“If you're pissing me around you'll fucking rock breaking on Dartmoor.”

“We have to go to Earles Colne, to the airstrip.”

“Why?”

“He said the van is there. The one they transported Lisa's body in.”

Frank did some quick thinking. “Stay at home. I'll pick you up.”

It was 5.20am when the police arrived at the airstrip. A quick search showed the building to be empty. The white Ford Transit stood outside an office that advertised private charters. A twin-engine Piper Seneca occupied the hangar. Turning to DS Clements Frank said, “Looks like we may have something here so get forensics over here pronto.”

Rodger was making notes when The DCI approached. “Why did he phone you and not us?”

The reporter shrugged. “He's not here, so I guess he was involved. He said he had left an explanation in his van.”

“And you only just now decided to tell that little gem of information?”

“Look, he woke me up. I wasn't thinking clearly. “

The chief detective walked over to the officer guarding the van. “Search the van for some message that was left for us.”

Close behind him, Rodger corrected, "Actually he left it for me."

Frank glared at him. "Just because you tipped me off doesn't give you any special privileges. You will have to stand in line with the rest of the media wolf pack."

"But this is my big story!"

Frank sighed, "Potter, you are here on sufferance. Don't push it."

One of the uniforms handed the DCI a tape. It was unlabeled. Frank said, "Well it's no bloody good to me like that. Get me something to play it on."

Rodger said, "If I get a copy you can use my small tape recorder."

Frank put his hand out. "Give it here."

The message gave the date and time the driver and a Dr Niles Golding carried Lisa Parton's body in the back of the van; it also implicated Dr Matthew Atreides as the person who ordered Golding to retrieve the documents she stole from the aeroplane crash site. Frank smiled, "Well, well, This Atreides character does keep turning up like a bad smell."

DS Clements said, "We need to pick up Elvis Hall."

"And how do you propose to do that, Einstein. He's not here, is he?"

"What about this Niles Golding then. There can't be two like him." Clements stated.

Frank Brightened. "You're right. We had him in for questioning. Get his details and follow it up."

As William approached Cleve Chemicals, Matthew saw the police cars. What the hell was happening, he wondered? "Get me away from here," he ordered.

"Where do you want to go?"

"Back to my place, I have to collect some things."

William, confused, said, "Are we going away somewhere?"

"Just drive me home."

DCI Martin had the same idea and arrived at the Atreides premises, only to find it apparently empty. There hadn't been time to organise a warrant, but he needed to search the place. Martin turned to Clements, Go round the back. If you see anything suspicious, say like a broken window – he winked – a crime could be in progress.

DS Clements grinned, "Righto Guv,"

Shortly afterwards, the front door opened, and Clements let Frank and his team inside. The initial downstairs search didn't provide anything useful. Then, while the DCI had his tech person try to get into the laptop in the scientist's study, he heard a yell from upstairs.

"GUV, I THINK YOU SHOULD COME UP HERE."

As Frank entered the master bedroom, he saw the body laying there, in a pool of blood that had soaked into the lambs wool rug near the luxurious king-sized water bed. While Clements organised a forensic team, Frank took in the situation. The giant African had taken a bullet in the chest.

"Clements said, "What do you reckon, guv – a lovers tiff?"



“Could be. See if the Black guy has any ID on him.”

The crime of passion scenario didn't quite fit for Frank. The deceased was wearing what looked like a chauffeur's uniform. So he was probably a servant, not a lover unless Dr Atreides was into kinky sexual role plays. Turning to his sergeant, he said, “My guess is that the doctor has flown the coup. If Elvis Hall is his pilot, as the tape suggests, my guess is that he is flying out of the country.”

Clements responded, “I get some uniforms down to the airfield now.”

Frank agreed. Then he said, “Wait a minute! Wasn't it an Elvis hall who was supposed to pick up Holdinger's briefcase from flight 67?”

“Surely they would have to be the same man,” Clements said.

“The chances of two charter pilots called Elvis Hall does seem too much of a stretch to be a coincidence,” The DCI agreed.

A further search of the premises turned up intimate details in writing and photographs, concerned Matthew's relationship with the deceased.

Leaving the crime scene in the capable hands of the forensic people Frank had his driver take him back to the airfield, where which, apart from a couple of constables, was deserted. And the Piper Seneca had gone from its hangar. Frank Martin thumped the roof of his car. “Fuck! We've missed them. Then he noticed that Elvis' van was still there and parked beside it was a metallic gold Porsche Carrera 911s. A check with Swansea Motor Registry revealed it belonged to a Dr Niles Golding. So what was he doing there? Frank wondered.

Rodger contacted Frank Martin for a story. They met for a drink at the Lords Tavern, which was close to the famous cricket ground. As they sat quietly in the corner, Rodger said, “So This Niles Golding was somehow involved with Atreides.”

“We believe he is responsible for the two attacks on Angela Madison and the assault on you. We've also found his prints at the crime scene.”

Rodger sipped his beer. “So is he a suspect in the suspicious death of William Mako, Atreides' live-in lover.”

Frank said, “His fingerprints tell us he was at Atreides, but he's not our number one suspect.”

“Why not?”

“He wasn't in the bedroom for one thing.”

“How do you know?”

“No fingerprints found in there belong to him.”

Rodger scratched his head. “I don't get it. If he was flying out of the country why kill his servant/lover and bring all this attention to himself?”

“Crimes of passion are seldom logical. Besides, the shooting may well have been the reason for him doing a runner.”

“Good point,” the reporter agreed.

Two major news items grabbed Rodger's attention that afternoon. The suspicious death at 'Guidestones' the Sorrel place property of a Dr Matthew Atreides and a plane crash over the English Channel. Both the pilot and a Dr Atreides, the occupants of the Piper Seneca, were missing,

presumed dead. Rodger wondered if both incidents were connected. He contacted and met with Angela, who was shaken when she heard the news.

“What a terrible way to die,” she sympathised.

“Yes and on top of all that, your attacker, who, it turns out, is a Harley Street doctor, is also missing. They found his car at the airstrip but no sign of him.”

“What was his car doing there?”

“I don't know, Angela. Maybe he went with them?”

“But if he wasn't involved in the shooting why would he fly off with the murderer?”

“I don't know, Rodger. It all seems a bit odd, though.”

“Did you know Matthew was gay?”

“Bi, not gay. But I didn't know he liked men sexually as well.”

After the call, Rodger googled Clanbuskenneth Abbey and found the Scottish Trust managed it. He contacted them and, making out he was writing a book on secret societies asked if the Order of the Purple Thistle still used it for their meetings? He was told no, but another group sometimes met there. Rodger asked which group and the Trust said it was the Gaia Guidestones. He'd heard of the name before but couldn't remember where. He phoned Frank Martin and explained his findings

When Frank heard the name, he exhaled, “Gaia Guidestones. That's the name of Atreides' property in Sorrel Place,”

“I knew I had seen it somewhere.”

“Anyhow, it's all pretty academic now, what with him and the pilot dying in that crash.”

“If he was on the plane,” Rodger blurted.

“Of course he was, Potter. That's how he escaped.”

“Then why was Golding's car parked there?”

“There is the possibility that he went with them.”

“No, it doesn't make sense.”

Frank sighed, “There's a lot that doesn't add up about this case. But we have to draw a line under it.”

That evening, as Rodger drafted his article for the papers, something occurred to him he thought that could have a significant bearing on the case. Supposing Niles Golding killed Lisa Parton to get the ten secrets, which he knew she took from the plane crash. He decided to run it by DCI Martin.

Interrupted in the middle of his fish and chip dinner, he groaned when he heard Rodger's passionate voice. “I told you the case is closed so what do you want now?”

“You sound in pain, Frank. Are you Okay?”

“I was all right. Now why are you phoning me?”

From my research, it seems likely the Niles Golding killed Lisa Parton to get the 'Ten Secrets' for Matthew Atreides.”

“Wow! Rein in a bit. “Elvis Hall's message never said anything about that. Plus there is no known of connection between Lisa Parton's murder and the attacks on Angela. Firstly Angela and Lisa were not connected, and Angela had nothing to do with anything about the plane crash.”

“There is a connection – Matthew Atreides.”

“Elvis said nothing about that in the pilot's confession.”

“Well, he wouldn't, would he? He's hardly going to admit his part in her murder.”

“Rodger, it doesn't matter a fig what we think might have happened until we can question him.”

“I reckon you'll need a medium.”

“Why? What do you know?”

“It puzzled me why Golding left his car at the airfield. Then I got to wondering. What if it was Golding on the plane with Elvis when it crashed into the ocean. What if Matthew Atreides wasn't on the aircraft?”

Frank, taken aback, thought about it. “Are you saying Dr Atreides is still at large?”

“I'm suggesting it's a strong possibility.”

“If you're right where would he go?”

“I reckon he's headed for the High-Lands of Scotland.”

“Why?”

“Because he owns an abbey up there.”

Now, with fish and chips forgotten, Frank saw a connection that may have linked the Madison and Parton cases together. “So we have to find Dr Atreides.”

“Yes, Frank and the abbey near Stirling would make the perfect hideout.”

“I'll phone the locals and get them to send someone up there to see if he is hiding out at the monastery.”

## Chapter 30

Matthew wished he'd stuck with his Bentley instead of William's sluggish Vauxhall. But it was a choice between speed and anonymity and the latter won out. Reaching the end of the M6 motorway, Matthew stopped at Carlisle for refreshment. After refuelling the car and purchasing a baseball cap to hide his long hair, at the last M6 truck stop, he grabbed a bite to eat at the Little Chef. Buying a newspaper, the chemist scanned it for any news about him. Bloody hell he quietly mouthed. He couldn't believe it. The page two article read Elvis Hall, a charter pilot and Dr Matthew Atreides were flying across the English Channel when the Piper Seneca aircraft in which they were flying crashed into the ocean with no survivors. Immediately a huge weight lifted, leaving Matthew feeling euphoric. He couldn't believe his luck. He was dead so that nobody would be looking for him. As the dark mood lifted, he felt reborn. He would gain power and wisdom from the stones. They would show him how to fulfil his divine destiny.

He'd killed his lover. That's what he wanted the police to think. He'd shot William in the heart, not because of a lovers tiff but because the big African was a liability to leave behind. He couldn't take the man with him because he had to keep a low profile until his new life was sorted out.

Was it at all possible that the coloured reporter was right? Frank Martin asked himself. The gold Porsche left at the airfield was one piece of the jigsaw that didn't fit. As the case was over, he hadn't paid it much heed. But if Niles Golding were on the plane that crashed, it would make logical sense. There again maybe Matthew borrowed Nile's car, after all, they were colleagues of sorts. He tapped his pen on the desk as he waited for a call from the Stirling police.

Just then DS Clements burst in. "Guv we're going to the Crown and Anchor for a celebratory drink. Are you coming?"

The DCI turned to him. "What if the news got it wrong. What if Matthew Atreides wasn't on the plane."

Clements shrugged, "Who cares. They're dead, and it saves us a shit load of paperwork."

"Yes, you're probably right. As it turns out, the pilot was a drunk and was in the late stage of terminal stomach cancer. Maybe he was looking for a way out."

"Yeah, he might have topped himself and Atreides, if he was with him. Now, how about that drink?"

Frank sighed, "Might as well." He didn't think there was much chance of him getting a call from Stirling nick.

Derek McCoy had always enjoyed working in the Stirling community. The combination of history and modern 21st-Century life was a fascination for him as he went about his work. As chief inspector of the Stirling Police Sub Area Command, he had a degree autonomy prioritising when it came to his crime caseload. Stirling, a diverse police beat with its mainline railway station, professional football team, an army base and key shopping malls, was challenging for McCoy and his team at the best of times. And this was not the best of times. With what he already had to deal with – a murder in St Ninian, multiple rapes in Craigforth, bank robbery in Braehead, the last thing he needed to use his resources on was a request from some sasanach copper in Colchester. He passed DCI Martin's request over to uniform, where a sergeant MacTavish, grudgingly sent a patrol car to Cambuskenneth Abbey. Armed with a description of the fugitive, senior constable Burke approached the bell tower. A car was parked nearby. It matched the description of Mako's Vauxhall. Returning to his car, he radioed in that he needed backup.

Matthew heard a vehicle and looked out of one the towers slit windows. He couldn't see any car. Wondering if someone was tampering with his vehicle, the fugitive peered through another window that had a view of the car park. He couldn't believe it. A uniformed police officer was checking over the Vauxhall. Were they looking for him? If so, why? He was dead, the victim of an air accident. The media had said so. So what was the cop doing there? He saw the policeman talk into his radio. It didn't bode well. Soon the place would be swarming with cops. He had to get away. Grabbing his backpack full of emergency essentials, Matthew left the tower and walked around it to see if the cop was still there. By the time he reached his car, the patrol car was heading back down the mountain. Dr Atreides grabbed his backpack and walked back into the bell tower – his bell tower. So he had every right to be there.

Health Minister Lawrence Springton scrutinised the press release. The spinners had been busy. It seemed feasible enough. The pilot of the Piper Seneca that crashed into the English Channel 10 miles off France reported engine failure to the Coast Guard shortly before the tragedy occurred. It

looked genuine enough as long the Coast Guard report panned out. It would kill any speculation that terrorism was involved.

Looking at Arthur Chatsworth, as they held a private meeting in the House of Lords, Springton said, "We need to get this sorted as soon as possible. It Will take a steady hand at the tiller to keep the HteT contract on target."

"Yes, Lawrence, it is all rather troubling."

"The PM and I think you are the man for the job."

Arthur looked at the minister, eyes wide. "You want me to take over the company!"

"Only until we complete the African contracts."

"Contracts? I thought we had only negotiated one."

"Oh, Angola is just a start." Springton then said, "So will you rise to the challenge, Arthur?"

"Do I have any choice?"

Springton smiled thinly. "Do I need to answer that?"

"I would prefer it if you did." The Duke of Somerset replied.

"Presently, Dr Frames is in the frame, so to speak, in the pregnancy deaths case. If the case goes against him, he will have to implicate you." Lawrence looked straight at the Duke. "I'm sure neither of us wants to see that happen."

"No, of course not," Arthur said.

Springton gave a weak smile. "Then we have a deal."

Frank Martin was surprised to receive the call. It was from Chief Inspector Derek McCoy.

In a strong Scottish brogue, he said, "Your man is camping out in the bell tower at the Abbey. We have him under surveillance. Are you coming up here to get him?"

Frank hadn't thought that far ahead. "Yes, we'll organise it today. It would be good if you can detain him for when we arrive."

"On what charges Inspector? He hasn't committed any crimes."

"What about trespassing?"

"Trespassing! He owns the place."

"Can you keep an eye on him till we get there?"

"Why is he so important to you?"

"He's our prime suspect for at least two murders."

Derek went silent. Then he responded, "I'll have him kept under surveillance but only for 48 hours. Then he's all yours Inspector Martin."

"Thanks. We'll be there."

While they waited, Frank and DS Clements sat in the canteen drinking coffee. "What do you reckon, guv?"

"I think he's our man, but we can't prove it."

"But we're still going to Scotland to pick him up."

They'll give us the use of an interview room."

"That's big of them, guv."

"They still haven't forgiven us for Culloden."

"What's that?" Clements asked, puzzled."

"Never mind. Get a decent car from the pool and pick me up around six."

## Chapter 33

"Mr Atreides. It seems as though the media got it wrong. Here you are alive and well," DCI Martin said, facing his fugitive across the table in the Stirling police station interview room."

Matthew looked at him, defiantly. "I'm not saying a word until my lawyer arrives."

"But we haven't charged you with anything yet. You're just here to help us with some questions," Frank said.

"Then I can leave if I want to."

Frank looked at Clements. "Has he got it right, serjeant?"

The DS smirked. "We've got him on leaving the scene of the murder."

"And then there's the business of Elvis Hall's confession," Frank added.

"What confession?" Matthew said,

"For a man who wasn't going to say anything he didn't take long to comment, did he, Sergeant?"

"No Guv. Shall we show Mr Atreides the confession? It makes fascinating reading."

"Especially the bit about ordering the murder of Lisa Parton."

Matthew exploded, "I NEVER HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH THAT!"

"Did you hear him say something, serjeant?"

Clements grinned, "I particularly liked the bit about the tests on those three pregnant women who died after receiving Cleve Laboratory's doctored vaccination."

Matthew loosened his neck tie and mopped his brow. It was a cold Scottish day, but it didn't stop him from sweating.

There was a knock at the door. A WPC entered, saying, "Mr Atreides legal representative has arrived in reception."

Frank suspended the interview while he went to meet the lawyer, a Guybrush King. He and Clements got themselves coffee while the attorney conferred with his client. "Clements said, "Have we got enough concrete linking him to the crime scene at his home?"

Frank grabbed his phone. "Have we got the forensics report on the Sorrell Place crime scene yet?" After a pause, he said, "Damn it! I need them now. Get onto them and tell them. No, ask them if

they have anything on the ballistics linking Atreides to the crime. Another short pause then, "Just get them to fax the report straight away to Stirling Nick and don't take no for an answer."

Back in the interview room, the interrogation recommenced. Clements asked, "Why to take the Vauxhall when your Bentley was parked outside?"

"Surely my client can drive any of his cars he wants."

The Sergeant pressed, "Was it because you were running from a crime and you thought the Bentley would be much easier for us to spot?"

"And what crime would that be?" Guybrush said.

Frank answered, "The murder of his manservant, a Mr William Mako, who owned the Vauxhall car."

"My client didn't know anything about the murder."

Frank said, "Then why did he escape up here when he was supposed to be having an important meeting with the Health Minister that day?"

"He came here to check-up on his property and, as far as I know, he has the right to come up here any time he likes."

"The Health Minister was very annoyed. He was also surprised, commenting that Dr Atreides had never let him down before. So what made your journey so urgent, Dr Atreides?" Frank pressed.

There was another knock at the door, This time it was to give the police officers a fax sheet. Frank scrutinised it, saying, "Well now, this is interesting. This fax is a ballistics report that shows the bullet retrieved from Mr Mako's body came from a pistol registered to Dr Atreides."

"Let me see that," Guybrush King said, reaching across for the document." He frowned, then asked, "Are my client's fingerprints on the weapon?"

"We don't have the weapon yet," Frank said, falling into the lawyer's trap.

"Then you have no proof that my client fired the gun," he said, smugly.

Then Frank said, "Why did you get William to drive you to Cleve Laboratories that morning when you had such an important appointment in Scotland?"

Feeling very uncomfortable, Guybrush said, "And you have proof of this."

"CCTV from Cleve Laboratories and eye-witness statements from police officers who were carrying out an investigation there."

"I had to pick something up from my office," Matthew substantial weakly.

Clements jumped in, "So why didn't you get out of your car?"

Before the suspect had a chance to answer, Frank asked a more relevant question. "Did you shoot William Mako?"

Matthew said, "Of course not. He was a loyal worker and friend."

Frank nodded, "So your version of events is that you got William to take you home so you could pack some gear for your big trip to Scotland. While you're packing somebody broke into your heavily secured home and murders your driver with your gun. And you had no idea this was happening,"

"That's correct."



Frank sneered, "The only thing missing is the tooth fairy. You don't think the jury is going to believe that old bollocks, do you?"

Guybrush, looking very uneasy, said, "I wish to confer with my client."

Outside the interview room, Martin and Clements did a high five. Clements said, "I reckon we've got him this time."

"I don't know. King is as slippery as a snake. If there's a loophole that bastard find it."

Once the interview recommenced King said, "My client admits to not reporting the crime but not to committing the offence itself."

Frank nodded, "We have a witness who saw your client and the deceased enter his house around 8.15 am. They then saw your client leave the premises no more than ten minutes later. During that time, according to your client, somebody shot and killed his manservant. Are you seriously telling your client wasn't aware of this."

King said, "My client was busy packing some things he needed in Scotland."

"Oh yes, the imminent journey in the dead man's car," Clements said, cynically.

"When did your client have this sudden urge to visit the Highlands?" Frank asked

Atreides said, "I received a report that somebody had vandalised my stone circle."

"From whom?" Frank pressed

"The Scottish National Trust. They kept an eye on the place."

Frank said, "So, despite this emergency up north you decide to go to your office to get something that you don't get. Did the fact that we were there deter you from entering the building?"

Matthew stared at the inspector. "No! Of course not."

"Then why did you go back home without retrieving this important item?" Before Matthew answered, Frank said, "Here's what I think happened. You got William to drive you to work as usual. When you saw the police cars there, you panicked, for whatever reason, and got your driver to take you home. It was then that you made your decision to run for Scotland. You must have been feeling guilty about something. But then things went terribly wrong, and you shot William, leading us to believe it was a lover's tiff."

King smiled, "What you may or may not think, Inspector is of no consequence in a court of law. My client has patiently given his account of events so either charge him or let him go."

It was crunch time, and Frank had no substantial evidence. There was some pretty convincing circumstantial evidence. That and a gut feeling told him Atreides had committed the crime. "He said, "Matthew Atreides you are at this moment charged with the murder of William Mako."

King stared, amazed. He said, "Inspector you are standing on fragile ice. I look forward to seeing you fall on your sword in court."

## Chapter 34

The evidence against Atreides was piling up and DCI Martin, back at Colchester police station, set about strengthening his case. Angela Madison had given an account of the attack upon her person by Niles Golding. The same person that she had seen with Matthew Atreides at Cleve Chemicals. Forensics from her apartment. DNA and fingerprint evidence showed Niles Golding had been there. The fact that the attack on Ms Madison occurred after she had confronted Matthew about the

pregnancy termination drug in the vaccine seemed no mere coincidence. But Frank knew the evidence was still circumstantial. It did more to prove the contaminated vaccine than it did the murder.

In frustration, Frank took out his mobile phone and rang Rodger's number. There was no answer. "Fuck! Of all the times to be not answering his phone." "Who are you calling?"

"Rodger Potter. Keep trying him until you get him."

"What's that little twerp got to do with this?" Clements asked.

"That little 'twerp', sergeant, may just have the evidence we need to charge Matthew Atreides successfully."

Rodger was tucking into a bowl of chilli con carni when an item on the news caught his attention. "The search for Matthew Atreides and Elvis Hall who perished when the Piper Seneca Hall was flying, crashed into the North Sea, has been called off. The pilot and his only passenger, Dr Matthew Atreide, have now officially perished in the accident. Dr Altreise was the founder of Cleve Chemicals, which has been a forerunner in developing an antidote to tetanus infection during pregnancy. Just then his phone rang. It was Inspector Martin,

"Hi, Frank, did you hear they've called off the search in the North Sea. Dr Atreides and Elvis are now officially dead?"

"Never mind about that, Rodger, I've been trying to contact you for hours."

"Sorry about that the damn phone was on mute."

"Do you still have the syringe you found outside Angela Madison's place?"

"Yes, I keep anything that could have a bearing on my assignment."

"Good. Now bring it to the police station ASAP and ask for me."

Rodger beamed. "Then it is useful after all."

"It could well be. Now be quick."

"It's a clue then."

"Yes, now bloody well hurry."

Guybrush King looked at his gold Rolex. You have 23 minutes Inspector. When that time has elapsed, I will be instructing my client to sue you for wrongful imprisonment. Frank turned to DS Clements. "Go and gee those boffins up. Tell them we need the results now."

The lawyer was enjoying this. He had Frank Martin on the ropes, and they both knew it. "Becoming panicky, are we inspector?"

Frank ignored his barb.

"You are desperate, aren't you?" Guybrush said.

Frank looked at the lawyer, his hawk eyes piercing into those of King. "Your client seems very much alive for someone killed in an air crash."

"Inspector, are you suggesting my client staged his death. You should know better than going there."

"It's just that someone else died in a plane crash. My best bet is that it was Niles Golding. But then you probably knew that, didn't you?"

"Inspector I do not have time for small talk."

Frank, noting the flicker of surprise on the solicitor's face, knew he had hit a nerve.

Sergeant Clements returned. He took Frank aside, his face beaming. "We've got the bastard. There's Godlings DNA on the thermometer. And Atreides DNA on Williams' shirt."

Frank smiled. "We'd better get Dr Atreides from the cells to give him the good news."

"My pleasure guv."

"Don't give anything away. I want to build the atmosphere before hitting the smug bastard King with it."

"Got it. Guv."

"And one more thing. Make sure Rodger Potter knows. He deserves a good story out of this."

"I don't see why. Potter was tampering with evidence at a crime scene." Noticing Frank's scowl, he backtracked, "I guess he was smart enough to find the evidence."

Having announced their presence back in the interview room, Frank addressed Matthew. "You probably consider yourself fortunate that Elvis Hall and Niles Golding can't give evidence against you. Even Elvis' detailed confession doesn't prove anything."

King, back to defend his client, smiled, "I'm somewhat puzzled Inspector. Why are you doing my job?"

Matthew said, "I suppose you're going to try and pin their deaths on me as well."

Frank looked Matthew in the face. "Oh no, Mr Atreides. But I'm saving the best bit for last."

They both stared at him, waiting for the next bit.

"Elvis Hall and Niles Golding did jobs for you, didn't they, Dr Atreides?"

"My client knew of them, but then he had a lot of people working for him."

"Yes, but they didn't all murder Lisa Parton and terrorised Angela Madison. Niles Golding dropped a syringe loaded with potassium chloride that had his fingerprints on it. This assault on Angela occurred on the day Dr Madison confronted you about your killer vaccine."

King jumped up. "I hope for your sake that you can prove this allegation, Inspector."

Frank responded, "Around the time that William Mako was murdered did you have any physical contact with him?"

"No. Why?"

Because he has your DNA on his shirt, Dr Atreides."

King said, "That's easily explained, Inspector, William Mako had just driven my client to work and back he could easily have left his DNA by tapping his driver on the shoulder to get his attention."

Expecting King to counter with something like that, Frank said, "Doesn't your Bentley have a glass partition between you and your driver. And, before you, Mr King jump in saying it slid aside, I am asking you, Dr Atreides, is that possible?"

Matthew mopped his brow. Wishing he'd got the damn thing fixed, he said, "It sometimes gets stuck."

"Our people have given your Bentley a thorough going over and discovered the glass partition is permanently stuck. So you couldn't have tapped your driver on the shoulder. Let's stop the fairy tales, Mr Atreides, because you had contact with your driver's shirt but not in your car. Maybe it all started off as a push and shove match, but it ended up as murder."

King said, "I need to speak with my client."

Frank said, "I bet you do and don't waste any more of my time."

Frank Martin, DS Clements and Rodger Potter clinked glasses, as they drank at the Queens Arms that night. Frank toasted, "Here's to a job well getting the dangerous bastard behind bars."

"Yes, but he'd only cop to manslaughter," Clements moaned

"We'd have a hell of a job proving otherwise. Besides he wanted to admit to accidental death," Frank said, Then turning to his DS, he said, "I think you have something to say to Rodger,"

Clements fidgeted in the seat. "I may have misjudged you, Rodger. Well done ."

"Yes," Frank included, "I don't think we would have nabbed him if it wasn't for your detective work."

Rodger said, "Yes, but we haven't nailed him for the Parton murder."

Frank took a sip of beer. Laughing he said, "One step at a time, Rog."

Rodger got up.

"Do one for me while you're there," Clements joked.

Rodger said, "No, I'm going to phone a girl about a doctor.

Clements said, "Never heard it called that before."

They all laughed.

**The End**

## **About Chris Deggs**

Chris Deggs was born in 1948 in Bury St. Edmunds, England. 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 has written many works of fiction as well as reference books for the betterment of the human condition. He has published a number of articles on the Academia Website reflecting this. Writing and painting are Chris' two main passions in life in which he is always looking for new ways to express himself.

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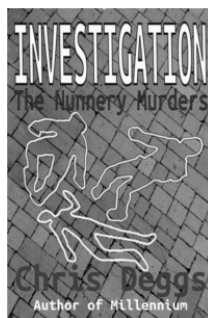
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## Here is a sample for your enjoyment

1

As a coastal area of outstanding natural beauty, Ilfracombe boasted great cliffs and impressive landscapes, all destined to be explored. Little did Alan Dymond 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 macabre 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; I'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 cantankerous, but she put up with it because he was a good detective - an 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. An eight foot stone wall that ran around three sides of the building confined the convent, cutting it off from the wooded landscape at the back. 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'm 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.”

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 skill, 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. Jimbo's concern was with the latter type.

“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. It seems 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'm already in Exeter so Oi'll pop over and see 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 dedicated team leader, much respected by his team members. His angelic looking visage, neatly trimmed Van Dyke beard and designer glasses suggested, to newbies he was a soft touch, but his easygoing demeanour didn't fool the staff who knew him.

Alan knew the man was for who he was and treated him with the respect he deserved. Entering the lab, Alan 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?"

"Glock 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 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 uniformed women, 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. 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 sex 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 draw 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 the deceased 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.”