



And Death Came a Courtin'

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Life is; how long have you got?

Introduction

Italy 1944, behind British lines, early December.

The sky flashed on and off lighting up the snowbound muddy fields. The barrage had been going on for several hours, ceaseless never ending. The flames of the artillery guns reached into the sky like snakes' tongues tasting the air. The deafening noise popped eardrums and vibrated the buildings nearby although none of this was heard by Private David Liversage. A small, slight insignificant man with a wiry mustache and pointed nose, he lived up to his nickname Weasel, and not just by appearance. He was a loner, brought up in an orphanage, who looked after no one but himself. When faced with the choice of conscription or prison he took the former but it was close. He had decided to supplement his income by taking watches and other personal belongings off the numerous dead German soldiers strewn across the muddy, bloody rat infested fox holes that he had to cross. The market was good because there were plenty of people, like him, with an eye for a quick profit who wanted to make something out of the war. His job as stretcher bearer gave him ample opportunity for a good supply of artifacts eagerly snapped up by a growing number of associates to be shipped back as souvenirs to small back street pawn shops. This was tolerated by other members of his squad because of their hatred for the enemy and besides he used to supply them with German cigarettes. The number of customers grew but supply dwindled as the fighting eased. Greed and pressure made him turn to his own dead comrades to fulfill his obligations. Perhaps he might be regretting this now as he sprawled across the barbed wire fence. Another fist cracked him square on the throat spurting out more blood down his pallid, yet bloodstained chin. "Go on Danny boy give him some more. Let me know when you're tired and I'll carry on," the voice bellowed from Corporal Steve Johnson, barrel-chested, five feet six and afraid of no man. "Ah sure there's plenty more life in me Stevie lad," echoed Sergeant Danny McCormick as his fist hit the underside of Liversage's nose lifting it slightly towards his brain. He was a big man, well over six feet tall and almost as wide. His face showed the scars of war and the tattoos on his arm proudly stated his regiments name and emblems. He, like Johnson lived for the regiment and also, like Johnson, joined before the war was even thought off.

The barbed wire tore flecks of skin and fragments of cloth from Liversage's body but this was the least of his worries as Johnson joined the fray. He felt his ribs crack when a size ten boot hammered into his side. The pain began to numb, he was losing consciousness and prayed that it would soon be over. His uniform was soaking blood up like a sponge, the wire cut deeper into his fast growing limp body, like cheese wire cutting through raw steak. His vision was lost because of his rapidly swelling cheeks and eyebrows. The last voice he heard was from Private Dave Pearce, "Leave him, he's had enough. I think he's dead." This was rather brave of Pearce because he lived in fear of McCormick.

"That should teach the bastard to keep his thieving hands to himself," said Johnson kicking him in the stomach one last time for luck.

Not a word was said by any of them as they wandered back to the bar to drink to the honour of their regiment whose Captain's dead body had been stripped of his belongings earlier that morning. Pearce was not like the other two. He was conscripted into the army and just keeping his head down and waiting for the war to finish so he could get back to his easy life in a small town brewery. The honour of the regiment never appealed to him but the honour of being the other twos friend did and besides deep down inside he wished he was like them.

Chapter.1

The wind whistled down the narrow dirty streets picking up papers and depositing them further down the road. Cars negotiated through tight spaces spitting out exhaust fumes that gushed into the smoke filled sky. The fresh smell of spring was lost in the dreary streets but seemed to return fleetingly as the wind died down. Stuart Emerson dragged himself up and stretched his arms to its fullest extent. His head ached badly from his previous night's drinking bout and his stomach groaned with hunger. Coughing and spluttering he got out of bed and quickly got dressed in the cold morning air. "Another day," he said to himself as he tied his black polished shoes. He looked around his spartan bedroom and wondered when he would ever get around to decorating it. "Leave it to the summer," he thought shutting the door as he went out. The rest of the house was like the bedroom thread bare and untidy. He moved slowly down the stairs with his eyes half closed trying to shut out the pain hammering in his head. He never had breakfast only helped himself to a couple of aspirin from the bottle on the mantle-piece. The front room was untidy but not dirty with music books lying all around the table and chairs. These were memories of his previous job as a music teacher in a small private school in another place and a different world. He had, had a nice house in an up market area of the city, a large four bedroomed mock Tudor detached house with a rolling mature garden. Things had started to go wrong when his wife left him for another woman. Maybe she was always like that or maybe the increasing pressures at work had taken their toll on him.

It had been a messy divorce and he had taken hard to the demon drink for the first time. His financial position had diminished somewhat since his wife (He could not even bring himself to mention her name) and her wages had disappeared. His private lessons had dried up and after the settlement he found that he had to move to a cheaper place. His drink problem got worse and it did not help living next door to a pub. Day after day he was late and often smelling of drink his appearance deteriorated to such an extent that the pupils began mentioning it to their parents. The headmaster took him aside and offered him early retirement (he was only 48) with a small money inducement. He cut his losses and took it. That's how he ended up in a small industrial town in the midlands. He put all his memories aside as he put on his coat and stepped into the cold and windy street.

Tugging his overcoat tightly around him he walked towards his lime green Citron 2CV. The car like him had seen better days but he never really used it often though things had picked up lately as he built up a circle of private pupils to teach the violin to. He was on his way to see one now. He never looked forward to teaching little Timothy. Timothy (not Tim) Cole was a spoilt brat with as much aptitude for music as a carrot had for mountaineering. He was an only child whose mother wanted him to play for the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Her ears were deaf to the loud cat-like screeches omitting from the next room as he practiced. She only saw him sitting in front of the orchestra playing first violin to a packed audience. In her mind's ear she heard the sound of melodious birds singing the dawn chorus. Her thoughts were interrupted by a loud rap on the front door. She got up and walked to the door stopping at the wall mirror to check her hair, and then opening it. In front of her stood Stuart Emerson, he was unshaven and untidy.

"Hello Mrs. Cole how are you this morning?" he said in a husky voice that defied his five feet six skinny frame. He used that tone when talking to all the pupil's mothers because he thought it sounded artistic.

"Fine Mr. Emerson, come on in. Timothy is waiting in the music room," she said taking in the spectacle in front of her and wishing she could be so wild and yet cultivated like him.

He walked through slowly and knowingly squeezing past her looking her straight in the eyes and then at her slightly trembling lips. "God the things I have to put with for £20 an hour," he thought to himself as he put on his false smile.

The hour dragged on and on, his headache growing worse listening to the screeching and scratching of the bow crossing the strings. The sharps were flat and the flats were sharp but the money was good and he would put up with it until something better came along. As the hour came

to an end Mrs. Cole came in with a tray with two cups and saucers (Royal Doulton), a silver teapot, milk jug and sugar bowl and putting it down on the table she looked at him and said, "So how is little Timothy doing Mr. Emerson?"

"Coming on in leaps and bounds Mrs. Cole, leaps and bounds," he said resorting back to his artistically flowing voice. Her face visibly lit up at this remark. "That will give her something to say at her next coffee morning" he thought to himself. After that then came the usual questions about his past they all seemed to ask. Where had he played? Did he know any famous musicians and will the child be any good? By now he had got used to exaggerating a bit and it had become second nature. After the usual 10 minutes he made his excuses and left thankful that there were no more lessons that day. He looked at his watch and sighed. It was only 11.30 in the morning. The early morning coldness had mellowed and it seemed to be getting warmer. He got into his car and drove down the tree lined avenue. The trees were just starting to bud and the daffodils and tulips were sprouting underneath. The large gardens were coming into bloom giving off a sweet soothing smell. Stuart took a deep breath and thought to himself that life was not that bad and wondered what to do next. He did not fancy a drink which was unusual for him but he was stuck for something until the evening. As he drove home he left the wide avenues and made his way out of the outlying village into the hedgerow countryside. The birds were singing sweetly in the trees and the cows were standing like statues grazing on the fresh growing grass. The roads were clear as he went into a slight bend. "Life is good," he said aloud and started humming Beethoven's Hymn of Joy. Looking around at the bushes and flowers he thought to himself that he might make a start on his garden.

He had not lived there long and had not really looked at the garden. As he went over the last hill the start of town came into view. Thoughts of spring and having a good life went as he saw the drab, small smoky houses. Pulling into his street again the idea of having a few drinks seemed to get more appealing but he put it to the back of his mind as he parked his car outside his house. The street was nearly empty now with only a small brown Mini parked in front of him. The off side back tyre was flat and the near side back indicator lens was cracked. The car had never been moved in the time he had been there. He was surprised that it had never drawn the attention of the police because it had not been taxed in ages. The elderly man next door to him owned it but had never used it. Stuart looked disdainfully at the car as he passed on the way to his front door. One day he would mention it to the man but he was a bit wary of him. He always seemed to have a look in his eye that unnerved Stuart slightly. During the few months that Stuart had lived there he had just like his other neighbours, only spoke to him a couple of times. He had thought to himself that when things picked up he would move out of the hovel (as he called it) into a nice three bedroomed semi and try and pick up his life again. That was why he was not too concerned about fraternizing with the neighbours and putting his property in order.

He opened his front door which was tight in the frame because it had swelled up over winter. "Another job," he said aloud. He shut the door and fought his way through the rubbish in the front room, which seemed to grow all the time, into the back part of the house. He looked out of the back window at the small, rotten, ramshackle fence and beyond into the wilderness. "Lucky it's only a small garden," he said aloud as he opened the back door and walked to the bottom of the yard to get a better view. He stumbled on a couple of broken bricks but caught his footing just in time. The garden did not look too bad from close up because although the weeds were fairly big and bulky there were not that many of them.

He looked down the line of other gardens in the terrace. Surprisingly they were all well kept and quite colourful with the spring bulbs flowering and the mature shrubs overhanging them. He looked again at his and thought that he had better make a start and fetched out some dustbin bags. Bending over he pulled the first one which came up very easily out of the damp soil, and put it in a bag. An hour and six bags later the garden was starting to look in some sort of shape. He was just stretching up and admiring his work when he heard a voice behind him. "You're doing a good job there lad." He looked around and saw his elderly neighbour standing by his small outside lavatory. Gone was

the look of evil and in its place the look of a keen gardener. "One of those jobs that need doing," he went on to say.

"It was in quite a good state really once the weeds were pulled," Stuart said trying to sound like one of the boys.

"My names Danny McCormick," he said thrusting out his right hand.

"Stuart Emerson," Stuart said doing the same.

They shook hands, Stuart's nearly crushed in the process. Stuart studied him, but not openly as they exchanged pleasantries. He was about 70 but still quite agile, over 6ft tall and quite stocky. His face was heavily scarred on the forehead and around the eyes and most of his teeth were missing, the ones that were left were black and rotten making his breath smell very badly. His eyes seemed to have sunk quite deeply into his gaunt face and his grey hair, what was left of it, was thin and straggly. His grey mustache seemed spiky like a porcupine and he had the bearings of an old soldier. His brown trousers and white shirt were quite clean and well pressed compared to his wild decrepit face.

"Come in and try some of my home brew it's only just ready," said Danny almost like an order.

"Why not it's cheaper than the shop," Stuart thought to himself following him inside. Once inside the cleanliness and order of the house surprised him although the smell of damp, a dank musky smell, reached out and grabbed his nostrils. This was expected in these old houses as he had noticed it in his own home on many occasions. The kitchen was small and compact with the shelving along the back wall carrying numerous tins and half full bottles all stacked according to size. The smell of hops and yeast started to over power the previous smell as he walked into the living room. It was a fairly spartan room with three frayed chairs sat around a large pine wooden round table. On the table there was a dirty ashtray, a tobacco pouch and a packet of cigarette papers and numerous letters, most of which looked like bills. In one corner there was a small table with an old radio perched on it and next to it was an old bureau with the top drawer shut. The walls were full of old pictures mainly of a woman and two children who Stuart took to be his wife and family. The main picture, over the gas fire set on its lowest setting, was a picture of a group of soldiers dressed in old uniform and standing to attention.

"Sit yourself down," Danny said taking out a demi-john and two pint glasses from the small cupboard under the stairs and putting them on the table that was in the middle of the room.

Stuart sat down and watched him pour out two pints of best bitter and pass one over to him. He took a sip and the taste surprised him. It tasted like beer should and not like the dish water he had been used to drinking. He had been a real ale freak before his drink problem had escalated and he had started hitting the whiskey and gin, and had traveled all over the south looking for the small brewery pubs which offered a wider choice of cask made bitter. Now though, he was at the stage of drink for its own sake and so the taste had not really mattered. Once he had started to sort out his drink problem though he could be a little more discerning again. He took a large gulp and complimented Danny on the taste and strength of his beer.

"Only the best hops and barley go into it, it's not from one of those beer making kits," he replied and they started talking about the different beers they had tried and the pubs around the country. The first pint went down quickly but the strength had started to hit Stuart and after three he was quite merry. As the drink flowed so did the conversation and Stuart started to feel quite settled and quite enjoyed the company of the older man even his conversation about army life. This was unusual because he was a pacifist who could not bring himself to harm a living creature. He started to think that he ought to get out more instead of staying in at night with a few cans and a half bottle of whiskey.

"Is there any decent pubs around here?" he asked.

"Well the Wagoners around the corner does a good pint but I don't think it's your type of pub."

"The Wagoners," Stuart thought, "I've been past that pub many times, it looks a bit rough."

"I don't really mind where I drink as long as the beers good," Stuart answered quite bravely; it must

have been the beer.

"I tell you what, its 2.30 now. I've got a few things to do then I've got to meet a mate there at 8, why don't I see you in there?"

"Yes sure, I don't think I've got anything planned, thanks for the drink, I'll get off...Oh mine is the first round by the way."

"I won't argue with that, see you later then."

Stuart got up quite quickly; a bit too quickly because he was quite light headed and just stopped himself from falling forward. He stumbled slightly and grabbed the door frame to steady himself. "That stuff is stronger than I thought," he said to Danny who was trying to keep a straight face and debating on whether Stuart would be in a fit state to go out that night. As Stuart opened the back door fresh air hit him square in the face like a left jab and nearly knocked him off his feet. He took several deep breaths and tried to summon up the strength because it all seemed to have gone. He went forward, one step at a time wavering but getting there in the end. As he got to the back door he thought to himself that after a couple of hours sleep he should be alright. As he checked his back pocket for his key the thought of sleep got more appealing and his eyes grew heavier and heavier. "I'll just lean on the wall a few minutes to rest my eyes," he thought to himself. He leant there and tried to sleep but the cold wind kept him awake. Remembering that the door was unlocked he opened it and nearly falling through made his way to the living room to lie down on the sofa. "He seems like a nice bloke," was his last thought as he succumbed to sleep. Obviously he knew little about him.

Danial Joseph McCormick was born into a large family of 4 brothers and 2 sisters on the 3rd of August, 1915. His father was away at the time fighting over in France. He was a Corporal who liked to fight on and off the battle field and had got a reputation as a quick tempered hard drinking Irishman who could have rose higher in the ranks but did not like taking orders. He left his home in Sligo, like many before and many after him, to try and make a living abroad and got a job at one of the large breweries in the town. The work was labourious and monotonous but the money was good and there was plenty of drink. He met his wife at the local dance in the town centre and very shortly after they were married in the local Catholic Church. The arrival of their first son Martin Jonathon confirmed a lot of suspicions in the community. The next to arrive were twins Siobhan and Patrick, quickly followed by Mary. Times started to get hard with the wages not covering the outlays and by the time of Timothy's birth things were getting positively desperate. His father's drinking was getting worse and not only was he often found asleep behind some of the barrels but a lot of the time he never turned up at all. Things came to a head when he was called into the manager's office and a big argument developed. The manager was hospitalised and one of the foreman knocked out and his job was advertised in the local paper. With no money coming in and a large family to support he did what came natural to him, he became a prize fighter.

By now he had got well known for his fighting prowess and there were no shortage of backers. He made enough to get by but more of the winnings were taken by the people who backed him. He was starting to think about doing something else when the war came along. Danial did not really know his father for the first 4 years of his life remembering a large man in a uniform coming to see his mother and brothers and sisters occasionally. He also remembered a lot of uncles who used to stay over some nights and always gave him sweets in the morning. When the war ended his father returned to a hero's welcome and got a job on a building site working as a labourer. Money started coming in again but so did the beer. He saw his dad in a drunken state throw his brother Patrick against the fireplace and after that Patrick was never the same. The children were not very close, all of them having separate friends and spent more time away from the house and their father. Martin was the first to get in trouble with the police for stealing cigarettes from the local shop. He was only

12 at the time and expected to get a good hiding from his father. He was surprised to be told that he was being beaten not for stealing but for getting caught. The children started to get a bad name for their law breaking activities but not many people would say anything to their father.

From 10 years onwards Danial started to take a keen interest in army life after hearing many of his father's stories and joined up as soon as he was old enough. By the time he had turned 18 he had took on his father's appearance and temperament but had more of a talent for hurting people and never showed remorse. Unlike his father though he liked the discipline and close knit loyalties of the regiment, maybe because he had neither at home. At 20 he got in a fight in London and left a man for dead in the gutter after a drunken argument over Moseley's Black-shirts and their hatred for the Jews. He was not politically minded he just did not like being preached to. He came back home in August 1936 for the funeral of his brother Patrick who had died by choking himself on a chicken bone but did not stay for the wake. Returning back to the barracks there was talk of Hitler and the possibilities of war in Europe but he tended to disregard it. In November of the year of Patrick's death he met Lucy in a cinema and started courting. She was tall and slim with a smile that would melt any man's heart. They got engaged at the outbreak of the Second World War but never married until the war was over. During the war he lost his brother Martin at sea on a convoy going across the Atlantic Ocean. Siobhan lost her life in an air raid in London where she had moved down to become a nurse. Timothy had been taken prisoner in Singapore by the Japanese and never really got over the ordeal.

Danial made a good name for himself as he rose to Sergeant Major by the end of the war and stayed for another year before leaving the army to marry his beloved Lucy back home. His father and brother Timothy had set up business for themselves running a dance hall with his sister Mary doing the books and he worked there on the door. The first few years of their marriage were a struggle with Lucy miscarrying her first child and money worries always around the corner. Weekends in the dance hall were quite busy and many a time he had to 'chastise' a drunk but he enjoyed that kind of work and besides it gave him a kind of respect. People would come and offer him money to sort out their problems and eventually he raised enough for a decent deposit for a nice little terraced house in a back street where he stayed ever since. July 1953 saw the birth of their first child Linda, a child that did not just look like her mother but had her good nature and brightness for life too. Later that year he got into a large fight in a public house near the dance hall after a man had cracked a bottle over his head. Pulling him outside onto the street Danny picked up a half brick that was lying around amongst the rubble and struck it across the top half of his head. He kept the half brick with the eye brow and lash as a souvenir of the occasion. October 1955 saw the birth of Timothy, his second child who was born a healthy 9lb 4oz at the maternity ward. Although he loved his wife dearly he tended to forsake his children and leave it to Lucy to look after them and discipline them. Money was never much of a problem now. They were not wealthy but they did not starve and as the fifties turned into the sixties nothing much happened only the children started school and grew even further apart from him. Danny's father passed away in 1963, the drinking catching up with him. He died of Cirrhosis of the liver. The dance hall was closed down when someone was stabbed in a fight on the dance floor and finances were tight afterwards. In August 1965 he met an old army friend called Steve Johnson who offered him a job as a security guard where he worked and the years passed by quickly with his daughter leaving home to immigrate to New Zealand in 1970 to work as a nurse. He lost contact with her in 1975. His wife shared with him a keen interest in gardening and kept herself busy with that and keeping the house. His son married and moved down to Devon in 1974 and rarely kept in contact with his parents. Danny retired in 1980 at the age of 65 to an idyllic life with his wife but ill health was to take her away from him in 1983. He left her brown Mini at the front of the house and never sold it. After her death he only ever went out once a week with his old army friends.

Chapter 2

It was 7 o'clock when Stuart opened his eyes. "Oh my head," he said aloud and thought to himself how many times had he used that phrase. He lifted his head only to feel a pain in the back of his neck where he had been sleeping wrongly. Slowly he sat up and rolled his head in a circular motion to try and ease it. The idea of going to the Wagoners did not seem quite as appealing now as he was quite sober. "I could do with a drink," he thought to himself looking around to see if there was anything left. Not finding anything in the drinks cabinet he went into the kitchen and opened the fridge door. The fridge was empty apart from a can of lager which he took out and put against his head. He walked into the living room and opening it sat down on the sofa.

"How ever did I get lumbered into going down that pub?" he thought remembering the numerous occasions he had been past and saw a drunken brawl going on outside. He took a swallow from the can and thought how good it tasted to his dry throat. As he progressed down the can he started to feel better and anyway it was a week day so the pub would probably be quite empty. He looked at himself in a mirror; he looked tired and unshaven and thought that he probably would not stand out like that. He checked his watch, it was 7.30. He had enough time to make himself a quick sandwich or two because he was getting quite hungry now, not having eaten anything since the previous day. In the kitchen he took out the half loaf that was in the bread bin and checked to see how fresh it was. "It'll do," he said taking out four slices of bread and putting them on the table. He made himself two cheese sandwiches which he ate quickly, more from hunger than haste to leave.

The darkness had fully drawn in when he opened the front door and felt the chill of night. He had a look through Danny's front window to see if there was any sign of life but he must have already gone. "Pity," he thought as he walked slowly down the street looking around the gutter still feeling a little queasy from the earlier bout of drinking. A car screeched down the road making him look up from the floor. As the car approached he noticed three teenagers in it and instinctively moved further in towards the houses. A police car followed after them at a fair speed. He turned and watched them fly down the road. "Kids," he thought to himself and then said aloud, "Another quiet night." At the top of the street he turned left and walked past a man huddled up in a shop corner trying to sleep off a drunken afternoon's work. The rain had started to come down slowly at first and then like a torrent, washing the dust off the pavement and houses and pouring into the gutter and then the drain. He did not mind the rain it was the cold he could not put up with. Wrapping his long overcoat around him tightly he proceeded to the next junction. The Wagoners was only around the corner and it was around about then he started to wonder whether he should turn around. He reached the corner and looked at the pub with its dingy paintwork and two front bow windows with three panes of plywood where once there was glass. It was a small pub, looking like the ground floor of two terraced houses knocked into one but by the town's standards it was of average size. He could hear the noise of the jukebox as he approached the door to the bar. He looked through the window and much to his dismay it was quite full. The noise of loud and raucous laughter met his ears as he opened the door. The pub was full of men in their late teens and twenties. The atmosphere seemed friendly but with a menacing undertone. He moved towards the bar and had a look around the establishment. The bar was 'L' shaped with a jukebox in the far corner next to the back window that overlooked a beer garden. A pool table that had seen better days was in the same part of the 'L' as the jukebox. By the pool table a heavily tattooed man with short cropped hair and a toothless grin was playing a small black haired youth. They were both goading each other but only in jest. A large stocky man with bushy brown hair, a beard and thick rimmed glasses was playing the fruit machine and taking no notice of the various noises around him. He was losing quite heavily and frustrated he kicked the bottom part of the machine without looking around. The rest of the bottom part was taken by two tables surrounded by a group of lads between the ages of 16 and 21 who were talking about the previous weekend's escapades and smoking strange smelling cigarettes. Stuart wondered how much of this talk was true and how much just bravado but he did not like to look across for too long. His eyes swept to the other side which had four leather jacketed men

propping up the counter and watching the television behind the bar. He looked around but could not see Danny anywhere.

"Can I help you mate?" a small short haired man behind the bar asked him in a friendly manner.

"Pint of D.B.A. please," he said looking over the bar and seeing the choice they had.

The man poured the pint from the tap and passed it over to him. "That will be £1.30 please," he said with a smile on his face.

Stuart gave him the money and asked if Danny had been in.

"He's in the lounge. Go through that door and follow the corridor you can't miss it."

Stuart could see the lounge through the far end of the bar and saw the regulars propping up the counter. They were on average thirty years older than the clientele in the bar and were probably their parents.

"Thanks," Stuart said picking up his pint and was about to turn and go.

"It's alright mate I'll fetch it over to you," said the barman taking the glass of him. Stuart carried on towards the door which was beside the fruit machine being kicked again. He did not walk too close to the man playing the machine but gave him a wide berth. He carried on down the corridor and through into the lounge. The lounge itself was a lot smaller than the bar and seemed even dirtier. An old piano stood in the corner but looked as if it had not been played in many years. The lounge had only enough room for four round, black tables and a few stools in front. A long padded seat that was fixed to the wall finished off the seating arrangements. The only window in the room was the bow window furthest away from him when he first went in. An old man sat in the corner coughing loudly and straight from the lungs. Another four elderly men sat around a table playing dominoes talking away rapidly like machine gun fire and not really taking much attention in the game. Danny was propping up the bar talking to another man. Stuart could not hear the conversation properly only make out certain words. Danny saw him and beckoned him over, "Mine's a pint Stuart," he said in a friendly manner, "I'm surprised you made it today the state you were in."

The barman put Stuart's drink down on the bar and waited. Stuart ordered Danny a drink and asked if his friend wanted one.

"This is Dave Pearce by the way, we were in the army together years ago," Danny said introducing them.

"Please to meet you Stuart I'll have a pint of lager," Dave said shaking his hand limply. They stood there leaning at the bar for a minute but the bar was only big enough for the three of them and nobody could get in to be served.

"I'll tell you what let's grab a table and get out of everyone's way," Danny said pointing at the table nearest the door to the bar. As they walked to the table Stuart scrutinised Pearce. He was about five feet seven and very thin. He had to walk with the aid of a stick because he limped very badly. His thinning gingery grey hair was combed over from the side to hide his baldness. His face was covered with wrinkles but Stuart thought that he was probably younger than Danny. They sat down and the conversation was patchy like it usually is when people who hardly know each other first meet. "So," Stuart said to Dave, "You were in the army with Mr. McCormick?"

"Call me Danny."

"With Danny,"

"Yes we went through the war together," Dave said taking a drink from his lager and putting it down on the table, "I've known him for years on and off. Tell me Stuart, were you in the army yourself?"

"No it never appealed to me, I suppose I'm a bit of a pacifist really," he said trying to make a joke out of the last sentence not wanting to offend the other two.

"Well in them days you didn't really get the chance. I was just doing my duty really. Mind you Danny's the man to ask really," Dave said in an almost hero worshipping voice.

Stuart looked at Danny waiting for him to speak. "I used to live for the army, I suppose it was the comradeship," Danny said and then finished his drink.

“I'll get these,” Dave said jumping up and picking up the empty glass, “What are you having Stu?”
“Pint of D.B.A please,” Stuart said still with half a pint left in the glass.
“Do you want a fresh glass?” Dave said waiting by the table.
Stuart picked up the glass and finished the drink. “No thanks,” he said passing the glass to him, “It'll save the barman washing up.”
As Dave was being served Stuart took another look around the lounge, “Not bad really in here,” he said to Danny, “It's not what I expected. I thought it would be like a Wild West saloon.”
“That's usually at the weekends,” Danny said with a laugh. By now Dave had come back and putting the glasses on the table sat down.
“We meet here every Wednesday as a kind of mini reunion I suppose,” Dave said to explain why they were there and get back into the conversation, “You're not from around here are you?”
“No I moved up from London about 4 months ago because the cost of livings a lot cheaper and the beers much better,” replied Stuart taking another long gulp from his pint. He still felt a little nervous in the pub and hoped it might settle him down a bit.
“I've been to London when I was younger,” Danny said.
“Tell him about that fellow Danny.”
“Yes, well I was in this pub called the Wheat-Sheaf in Putney, do you know it?”
“I don't think it's standing any more,” Stuart said, “They knocked it down in the sixties to make way for office buildings.”
“Oh well, anyway I went out for a quiet pint, it must have been a couple of years before the war and everyone was talking about Hitler. So there I was in uniform having a drink when some fellows who were fans of Oswald Moseley marched past.”
“You mean Black-shirts?”
“Yes that's right. There was a bloke in the pub at the time who took offence to them marching and started hurling abuse at them. It was not my problem I thought so I carried on drinking and minding my own business. Then this fellow came to me and said, “How can you stand there when these march openly in the street when we will probably soon be at war with the fascists in Germany.” I just told him to go away as he was bothering me but he kept on. I wouldn't mind but I don't think they would have made a soldier out of him in a million years. Anyway I looked him in the eye and told him either to go or step outside. I could not believe it when he took me up on my challenge. I suppose he must have been drunk. So he went outside and started to shout aggressively hoping I'd back down. Anyway I punched him square in the jaw and he dropped like a ton of bricks and started to beg me not to hit him. Well I thought to myself that the landlord had seen the argument so I was probably barred and had had just left a warm pub into a cold night expecting a good fight and this mouthy git was not going to give me one. So I kicked him in the face and he flew backwards, blood started to run from his nose and when I saw that I just went wild kicking him all over his body. I only stopped because I thought that I had already killed him. Pity that it was a good pub.” Dave laughed at the last remark and Stuart though shocked hid it well.
“Yes,” Danny said, “There were some good times in the army.” He finished his drink and went to put his hand in his pocket for his wallet.
“I'll get these,” Stuart said, “I've had enough of your beer this morning.” He finished his drink and took the empty glasses to the bar.
“How do you know him?” Dave asked Danny after he had gone.
“Moved in next door a few months ago, he's a bit naïve really, not a bad fellow though.” came the reply as they both looked at the bar. The conversation was getting louder as the pub was filling up even more. There was not that many people were in it was just that the pub was very small. The clock on the bar read 9.30 and Stuart was getting settled in. He ordered three whiskeys along with the beer. He paid the barman and brought the drinks over to the table.
“I thought these might go down well with the beer,” he said placing the glasses on the table. His gesture was much appreciated and the whiskey disappeared quickly. By now most of the inhibitions

had been drowned by the drink and the conversation was flowing and not as erratic as it had been before. Stuart was talking mostly, telling the other two about himself, his work teaching the violin and about his ex wife which was a common subject when he was drunk. His voice was slurring slightly and sometimes he forgot what he was saying halfway through his sentence but it did not seem to bother the other two who were almost as drunk as he was. Dave was very quiet as if on the sidelines during most of the conversation only speaking occasionally to let them know that he was still there. The conversation drew full circle back to life in the army. Stuart could not understand why anybody would like that kind of life with its arduous, disciplined environment and made the comment to Danny whose face changed abruptly.

"You weren't joking when you said that you were a pacifist," he said looking at Stuart with a look of pure evil which seemed to tear Stuart's stomach open. He went on, "The trouble with pacifism is that it is usually only one sided and doesn't protect your property."

"But if everyone felt like me then there wouldn't be any wars," Stuart said trying to sound jocular but it came out as smarmy.

"I'm afraid that your let's hold hand and tip toe through the daisies attitude doesn't work in the real world," Dave said picking up the gauntlet, "When I was called up I went to protect my property and family from invasion, not to fight for my country."

"There are a lot of people who would cut you up without batting an eyelid and sometimes you can't run away you have to face them." Danny said with a sneer that brought the conversation to a halt. Stuart was the first to speak, "I think we'll have to agree to differ on this one." the chilliness of the atmosphere had started to melt as Danny got up to order another round. A fight had broken out in the bar but the people involved had been quickly put out to carry on with the fray. Dave looked at Stuart and said with a grin, "Danny doesn't like pacifists as you might have gathered."

Stuart said nothing, not wanting to aggravate the situation. Danny brought the drinks back and said to Dave, "Young MacAteer's fighting again, that girlfriend of his, more trouble than she's worth." Stuart wanted to know about the incident but thought better of asking. The night wore on and Stuart knowing that he had an early start in the morning drank his pint rather quickly, said goodbye and left the pub. Once outside he noticed no sign of the trouble that had happened a few minutes before but an empty street with only a few cars driving up and down. He had an uneventful walk home until he came across the man in the doorway who had woke up and had his head in his hands cursing his misfortune. He looked up and seeing Stuart said to him, "Have you got a spare fag mate?"

Stuart told him that he did not smoke which seemed to annoy the man immensely, "Gimme a fag," he said stumbling to his feet like he was crawling out of a fox hole.

"I told you once, I don't smoke," Stuart said getting quite frightened now and taking a step back.

The man came up to him, he was about 40 and starting to go bald. A small, slight man with a heavy Scottish accent, "I want a fag," he said oblivious to anything else. The smell of vomit from his shabby overcoat grabbed Stuart by the nostrils nearly causing him to be sick as well. The man made a lunge for Stuart grabbing him by the throat and pushing him against the glass window of the shop. He fixed Stuart a steely look and not saying anything, held him there for what seemed like hours.

"Have you ever took a life boy?" he said, the stench of his breath along with his spittle spraying all over Stuart's face.

"Leave me alone I'll call the police," Stuart said now starting to panic.

"No police round here. No justice just us," he said with a pronounced slur, "How much money have you got on you?"

Stuart thought that perhaps if he gave him money he would leave him in peace and put his hand in his pocket to fish around trying to find loose change. The man's grip on Stuart's throat loosened slightly and he let Stuart move forward into the light of a street lamp.

"I've only £1.54," Stuart said visibly shaking. The man sensed his fear like a dog would and it seemed to ignite him.

“Not enough boy,” he said drawing back his fist like a bear trap ready to spring.

“Enough for you, you little shit,” came a venomous sound from behind him. Stuart recognised the voice as Danny's but thought what could an old man do? The man swung around and must have thought the same as he said, “Do you want some old man?” and started to walk menacingly towards him. Danny towering above him stood his ground and waited until he came within his reach. With surprising speed he had drew back and let of a thundering right straight onto the drunks jaw. The drunk reeled back, more from surprise, into the shop wall which checked his retreat. Anger rose inside him and he lunged at Danny, who side stepped neatly, and ended up sprawled across the hard unforgiving pavement. His left eye had started to swell from the fall. As he tried to pick himself up he was brought down again by a kick to the right hand side of his face. Blood started to trickle down his nose and from the side of his mouth. This seemed to incense him more and he tried to get up again. Stuart looked at Danny who seemed to be really enjoying it as he kicked the drunk in his kidneys. He wanted to tell him to stop but thought that the drunk deserved it so remained silent. A pool of blood was rapidly growing under the drunks face and he looked as if all the fight had been kicked out of him. Danny put his foot under the drunk's body and turned him over onto his back. “If I ever see you around here again you will be dead, got it,” he said emphasising the last two words menacingly.

“Yes,” the drunk said quietly.

Stuart thanked Danny sheepishly as they walked off down the street.

“I'm getting old,” Danny sighed, “20 years ago he wouldn't have got up after the first punch, anyway,” he said changing the subject, “What did you think of the Wagoners?”

“It's a nice pint, nice place but what was all that trouble about?” he said composing himself after the ordeal.

“Trouble,” Danny said thinking aloud, “Oh you mean Davy MacAteer and Des Callaghan. Well Davy's missus is a bit of a flirt when she's had a few drinks and Davy gets a bit jealous when she does. I think she does it to wind him up really. Des must have fancied his chances with her and one thing led to another.”

The air was still cold as they walked down the final street home. The conversation was becoming erratic as they had run out of things to say. As they walked past the off license Stuart went in and bought himself a bottle of whiskey to calm his nerves and finish the night.

“Do you fancy a few drams?” he said to Danny as they reached the front door.

“Yes okay I'm still quite sober,” the adrenalin from fracas had drowned the alcohol in his body.

Stuart opened the front door he was quite sober himself by now and walked in, switching the light on as he passed. Clearing books from one of the chairs he beckoned Danny to sit down as he fetched a couple of glasses from the cabinet. He poured two healthy measures into the glasses and passed one over to Danny who took a large gulp that put a fire in his stomach. Stuart sat down and thanked him for his help once again. Danny said nothing.

“I'm sorry if I offended you earlier in the pub,” Stuart said.

“Don't worry about it, mind you I must be getting soft, 20 years ago I would have gone crazy.”

“You didn't seem that soft against the drunk.”

“Oh him, he's harmless enough if you stand up to him. Were you really going to give him money?”

“I'll be honest with you he frightened me. I would have given him everything I had.”

Danny looked at him in a mixture of amazement and disgust and was speechless for a minute. “I don't think you will like it around here,” he said when he finally spoke.

“To tell you the truth I don't think I'll be stopping here that long. I'm only living here until work picks up.”

“You got anything planned?”

“I'm trying to get a job as a school teacher probably in Derby or Birmingham. That's why I moved here,” Stuart replied and then went on, “So how long have you lived at your house?”

“Since the fifties I moved in with my wife and we brought up two children there. My daughter

moved away to New Zealand,” he stopped for another drink of whiskey and finished the glass before he carried on, “My son moved down south for work and now I barely hear from them.”

“Was that their pictures on the walls?” Stuart asked as he replenished the glasses.

“Yes my Lucy. God rest her soul,” he said with a genuine sadness that touched Stuart's heart.

“You must still miss her?”

“She was the only thing I ever cared for. She gave my life meaning,” he said as a tear came to his eye

“There now,” Stuart said with real compassion, “Don't upset yourself,” and topped up his rapidly diminishing glass. The bottle was now only half full and Stuart was surprised how quickly it had gone down.

“Don't mind me I get a bit maudlin when I've been on the whiskey. It must be the Irish in me I suppose,” he said the last sentence as an after thought.

“So you must have known Dave a long time then,” Stuart said more as a statement than a question.

“Years, me, him and another fellow Steve Johnson, he should have been in tonight actually. We used to pal about together during the war. Lost contact and met up again on and off through the 60's and 70's. We meet down the Wagoners every Wednesday now.”

“Seems a pleasant enough sort of chap.”

The conversation flowed easily but the whiskey ran out. Danny made his excuses, thanked him for the whiskey and left. Stuart sat in his chair and thought about the eventful night. The glow from the whiskey lit up a smile on his face. His last thoughts before he retired were how much the two men were so different.

David Reginald Pearce was born on 21 May 1924 into a small middle class family in the village of Tutbury. His father was an accountant who worked in a large brewery in the nearby town. His mother had died when he was very young leaving him and his brother Anthony to be brought up by their grandmother. Life was quite easy growing up for the brothers in an idyllic village with its own castle and they often spent their time fishing in the nearby pond. They spent a lot of time hunting in the nearby fields often bringing rabbits and if they were lucky a pheasant or two to grace their dinner table. Their father was very aloof to the young David spending more time with his brother probably because Anthony being the eldest was supposed to be the achiever in the family. David did not really notice this until he was in his early teens and started to resent it. Anthony was very popular at school and tended to be the pupil that won all the prizes, both academically and on the sports field. David on the other hand became withdrawn and the butt of the other pupils jokes.

Leaving school at 14 he worked as a messenger in the same brewery where his father worked. His brother joined the air force and became a fighter pilot, one of the few as they were later called, only to be shot down over in France in 1943. By the outbreak of the Second World War David had risen to working in the offices at the brewery. He was still quite withdrawn and had only made a few friends but was happy with his job and starting to come out of his shell a bit more as he felt his worth at work. He was called up in late 1940 to join the local regiment and fight for his country. He left behind his sweet heart Madeleine with a promise to return again as soon as possible. She was beautiful, with the deepest blue eyes and straight blond hair that swept across her forehead. She came from a similar kind of background as David and they had a lot in common. His first day at the barracks was an eye opener to him. He had lived quite a sheltered life, not mixing with people let alone sleeping in barracks and showering together. He did however settle down quite quickly and kept in touch with Madeleine writing at least three times a week. He met up with McCormick at a local bar when he saw him beat up a large Yorkshire man who had been causing trouble all night. They seemed to get on from the start because of McCormick's surprisingly easy going nature and David lived in awe of him. The third member of the group Stephen Johnson was also in the squad

and all three went through the war and developed a close friendship after watching a lot of their squad lose their lives in Africa, Sicily and Italy. David did not have the same enthusiasm towards the regiment as the other two because in reality he was a bit of a loner. He did like the bonhomie of the other two though who seemed to have no fear in battle and seemed flattered to be in their company.

After the war they lost contact for a time and David went back to his job at the brewery. He married Madeleine and they had three children who grew up and got married themselves. He never progressed further up the ladder being happy where he was and quite stable financially anyway. His marriage had its ups and downs as most generally do but it lasted and he was happy enough not to look at another woman in his life. He renewed his friendship with McCormick in 1957 when he walked into the dance hall with his wife and saw him on the door. McCormick took the rest of the night off and they both got drunk much to the dismay of Madeleine who had come out for a quiet night out. She did however take quite a shine to McCormick and became very friendly with his wife Lucy. They used to take the children out walking quite regularly and McCormick and Pearce started to meet quite regularly in the Wagoners every Wednesday night. They had lived very close together and it was unusual that they had not met before then. Around 1965 Pearce bumped into Johnson who had not long come back to town and arranged to meet him in the Wagoners that Wednesday night much to McCormick's surprise as he had not seen him for 20 years. Much drink flowed that night as they got roaring drunk and Johnson offered McCormick a job where he worked. Around 1980 David took early retirement when he had a car accident that left him walking with a bad limp to this day. He stills lives in the same house with his wife Madeleine.

Chapter 3

“Last orders at the bar,” shouted the barman as most of the customers rushed their drinks to get one last pint in. Dave Pearce took his time as he had, had his fill for the night. Danny had left shortly after Stuart leaving him on his own and he had been talking to the man with the bad cough from then on. Steve Johnson had not turned up that night but that was not unusual because as his health had declined his attendance had become erratic. Finishing his drink and saying his good byes he made his way to the door. The cold outside rushed in to meet the warm cosy atmosphere inside as he opened the door and felt the sting of the night. Once on the street he stood awhile debating whether to take the short cut along by the canal which he only used to do in the warmth of summer. As he was in a hurry to get home he took the short way. The night was dark when he was out of the range of the street lights and his leg started hurting badly again. Mist rose from the canal as he cursed his leg and cursed himself in his declining years. He had to stop for a while to catch his breath and so he looked around. The patchy hedgerow next to the tow path half hid the high bank behind it and had started to succumb to the grasp of spring. He thought to himself with a wry smile that all around him everything was in the spring of its life whilst he was in the autumn of his. A splash in the water brought him out of his day dream and he looked down to where it had come from.

“Only a water rat,” he said aloud and proceeded along the tow path. The quietness of his surroundings and the rising mist gave the place an eerie atmosphere that unnerved him slightly but he was in too much of a hurry to get to the chip shop to bring back his wife some supper.

He carried on, his leg hurting more, the coldness biting into his drunken body. He was near the end of the tow path approaching the old brick bridge that led to the shop and then his warm home. The mist was still rising and blending into the darkness when he stopped. A figure glided across the bank above him, its uncanny quietness mixed with the quietness of its surroundings. He recognised the old uniform that it was clad in and terror gripped him like a vice as he thought about the night mares he had, had about it. The nightmares had subsided in recent years as he had mentally blocked them after all that time. The uniform was similar to the one he used to wear and as it passed above him he recognised the face but then again he knew that he would.

“Liversage,” he said under his breath, “You've come back to haunt me.”

The pain disappeared in his leg as he stood his ground half hidden in the hedgerow and watched the figure glide towards the bridge. The figure had glided out of sight when he came back to his senses. “Jesus I've had more to drink than I thought,” he said trying to placate himself but he knew that the nightmares would be returning. He never went to the chip shop that night but went straight home looking behind him every few steps. His breath was getting shorter whether through the exertion of the walk or the panic that had set in after the sight of Liversage he was not sure. Has he come back, did he see him at all? Maybe it was the drink? Maybe it was the eeriness of the canal that had suggested it to him. Thoughts crowded his mind, torturing him mentally as his leg tortured him physically, pain numbing his senses but not his mind. It was then he saw it again, under a well lit street light looking straight at him. There was no emotion in the figure's face, no movement just a blank stare. Pearce looked away, he was shaking inside.

“No you're not there,” he shouted and looked again but the figure had gone. He felt slightly braver for he thought that he had scared it off but he knew that it would be back. He had sobered up considerably in the last few minutes. The pain in his leg had subsided slightly as he made his way back to the house.

“I'm home Madeleine,” he called as he opened the door. He pondered on whether to tell her about the earlier sightings but thought better of it not wanting to upset her.

“Did you bring any chips back?”

“No the chip shop was full so I thought I wouldn't bother.”

“Oh never mind. The kettle's on, do you want a cup of tea?” she said getting up kissing him on the cheek and going into the kitchen.

“Yes please,” he called out, not thirsty but not in too much hurry to go to bed. He looked around the room and saw the head of a man looking through the window. He knew the face, he knew it well. It was the face of a man who had died over 40 years ago. He was distracted by the voice of Madeleine, only for a fraction of a second but by the time he looked again it was gone. “Was Danny in?”

“Yes, he brought his next door neighbour in with him,” he said getting up and shutting the curtains hoping to shut the ghost of Liversage out. Madeleine came back with two mugs of tea and placing them on the table asked if he was still coping with the death of Lucy.

“You can't tell with Danny he's not one for wearing his heart on his sleeve.”

“Seems a shame especially with his kids not turning up for the funeral,” Madeleine went on, “So what's his new neighbour like?”

“He's not a bad fellow school teacher came up from London about 4 months ago. Can't handle his beer though,” he said laughing and told her about the events in the pub. They talked on for around 10 minutes and finished their drinks. “Ah well morning comes early,” Madeleine said getting up and they both went to bed.

Forked lightning lit up the sky, dark grey clouds spurted out their rain into the water drenched ground. A sodden body lay in a gnat infested mire oozing blood that mixed into the putrid water around it. It was David Liversage. Above him Dave Pearce stood watching. He wanted to turn and run but his legs seemed to be stuck in the ground. The eyes of the body opened and stared blankly at the figure above it. Pearce took all his strength and tried to make a run for it but his legs were like lead and he only managed to take a step backwards. His heart was racing and his breath was short and sharp as the blood splattered body raised its head and pointed at him.

“You next,” it said in a slow monotonous voice.

The body started to rise and free itself from its barbed wire surround. Pearce slowly walked backwards. All around him had gone quite. A mist rose around the ground coming up to his knees. The body stepped forward, slowly, eyes never leaving Pearce. Pearce could not move now, all his

strength had gone.

“You next,” came the voice in the same tone.

“No,” shouted Pearce.

“You next.”

“No.”

“Dave, are you alright?” came the voice of Madeleine shaking him. Sweat was pouring from him. His racing heart started to slow down as he realised it was just another dream. He had not had that dream for years but with the events of the previous night he was half expecting it.

“Just a bad dream,” he said and went on to tell her about it.

“You've not had that dream for years. Has anything happened?”

He said no but he knew that she knew he was lying and eventually he would have to tell her.

The rest of the night was uneventful and he had a deep refreshing sleep that made things seem a lot better in the morning. He was feeling a lot better as he dressed himself and got ready to face the world. His leg, usually throbbing first thing in the morning was pain free and he almost sprang to his feet to rush down to eat his breakfast. He had decided to tell Madeleine what happened but to say it in a jocular fashion and blame it on the drink.

As he sat down with a large smile on his face to a full breakfast he started to make his play, “You never guessed what happened as I was walking home from the pub I thought I bumped into an old army friend, Dave Liversage. I thought I saw him walking along the canal side but he's been dead for nearly 40 years. I must have had more drink than I thought.” he said with a false laugh but Madeleine knew him better than he thought and guessed there was something wrong. “Anyway,” he went on thinking he had sold her the story, “Got any plans for the day?”

“Well I thought I'd get the shopping in and then maybe go over and see how Danny is,” she said looking him straight in the eye. Dave shook slightly inside but hid it well, “Oh I'm not sure if he'll be in today, said something about going to the cemetery,” he replied slyly not wanting Danny to know about his ordeal.

“I've got to go over that way anyway to get the vegetables,” and said no more as the subject was closed. They finished their breakfasts quietly and Dave washed the dishes as Madeleine got ready to go out. She kissed him goodbye and left to do the shopping. Dave finished the dishes and set about thinking what he was going to say to Danny. He wished Madeleine would not say anything but there was not a lot he could do about it, not without telling her the full story, a story which he intended to keep to himself, a story that kept coming back to haunt him over the years.

Suddenly the back door caved in and a small, slim figure stepped forward brandishing a pick axe handle. He recognised the figure, he should have done he had only seen it the night before in his dream. The surprise of the noise and the shock of seeing Liversage so close up made him fall backwards slightly but the kitchen unit checked his retreat.

“What do you want?” he demanded, all fear had gone out of him as the first thought of protecting his property, a basic instinct, had overcome everything else. The figure raised the handle up and poked him sharply in the chest knocking him back again towards the sink. The figure whose eyes had never left Pearce's with a stare that seemed to penetrate right into his soul, opened his mouth and started to speak, “I've come to do you some damage.”

“Who are you, you're not Liversage he died 40 years ago.” His basic instinct succumbed to panic as the full extent of his predicament came to light. There was nobody about and no one within earshot. Standing in front of him was a man that had died 40 years ago unaged and still in his uniform. His train of thought was interrupted by another prod to the chest that knocked him back towards the dining room door. This time though the door frame was too far away to stop him falling on his back. He crashed to the floor shaking every bone in his ancient body and knocking his head on the stone floor. Blood trickled from the back of his head onto the hard surface below.

“I want some addresses from you,” came the harsh voice looking down at him.

“Never,” Dave said, anger overcoming his fear but he could not move and he cursed the weakness

of his frail body.

The figure stamped on Dave's bad leg dispatching mind numbing pain all through his body. The torment tortured his very being but still he would not tell him.

"I've got plenty of time," the figure said putting more pressure on Dave's leg and causing him to scream in agony, but to no avail, "Your wife's back soon isn't she?"

"No, keep her out of it," Dave shouted amongst his screams but he knew it was pointless.

"Addresses?" the figure said once again and kicked Dave in the stomach taking all the breath out of his body. Dave wished he was dead so as to end the pain he wanted to tell for he thought that maybe if he did his wife would be safe. Crack! The pick axe handle smashed against his other leg and he could hear and feel his bone break. More pain, he had passed his endurance level and he knew his life would soon be over. Could he hold onto the end or would he give up McCormick's and Johnson's addresses? What about his wife, would she be safe from this maniac? How he wished he was younger and stronger. Smash! The pick axe handle swung again breaking more bones, this time his ribs. Blood spurted out of his mouth all over his clean white shirt.

"Addresses," came the voice again as the figure picked up a kitchen knife that was lying on the unit. It raised the knife and slashed Dave's face above the mouth and then diagonally across to his ear. Blood streamed out all down his face and intermingling with the copious amount from his mouth enlarged the pool on the floor.

"McCormick lives at 22 Davies Street and Johnson at 40 Devon Road," he said weakly, relieved that the torture was over or so he thought, but it was just beginning.

"I knew that all along," the figure said with a deriding laugh and raising the knife slashed his face again. Pearce had lost a lot of blood by now and weakly said, "What do you want from me?" There was silence the figure above him looked down with a mocking sneer. "What do you want from me?" he repeated.

"You think that you know pain, believe me your pain is just beginning," and slashed Dave's face across the other side sending out more blood. The figure looked around the room and its eyes lit upon a pair of secateurs that were hanging up by the door. Fetching them from their spot he brought them over to Dave who was looking at him helplessly wondering what was going to happen next. Pain poured out from all over his decrepit body, he felt faint through lack of blood.

The figure knelt down beside him and grabbing Dave's limp hand pulled it up towards him.

"Let's play a little game," he said placing the little finger in between the open secateurs. He closed them slightly so they pressed against Dave's little finger causing it to bleed. "This little piggy went to market," he said snapping the secateurs shut and causing the little finger to fly off. Blood spurted out like an open tap and Dave screamed like he had never screamed before.

"You fucking maniac, McCormick will kill you," Dave shouted in panic. A panic he had never known before and he had been through some very frightening moments. The figure moved the secateurs to the next finger and closed it slightly ready for the next line that Dave was dreading would come.

"And this little piggy stayed at home," he snapped the secateurs shut again launching another finger into orbit and spurting blood all over the room, agony took over his rapidly draining body once again. How long would it last? Was there anything within arms reach that could put him out of his misery? He could see nothing, there was no way out, he just lay there and had to take it. The secateurs moved to the third finger and closed slightly again. Dave waited for the third line of the nursery rhyme, waited for the next surge of pain. He tensed his whole body hoping to mask the pain, the pain that would surely come soon. He held his breath and waited, waited for what seemed like hours.

"This little piggy had roast beef." Snap. The secateurs closed tightly again dislodging another finger from his hand. The pain was too much for Dave even though he was expecting it and had tried to mask it. Tears came to his eyes and streamed down his face. He started to cry, to cry like he used to cry when he was a child, when his brother got all the attention from his father, when he used to hide

under the bed to keep out of the way. His childhood memories came back, memories that had long been suppressed, memories that had forced their way to the surface.

"Please," he wept, "Please leave me alone. It was the other two not me. I told them to leave you alone."

"And this little piggy had none." Snap! The secateurs closed again and another finger flew off. The weeping turned into a bawl. More pain came through his body. "Daddy, I want my daddy," Dave screamed not conscious of anything else. The pain was easing, a bright light shone into the room, he saw his father with outstretched arms calling him.

"I am coming," he said in a weak, weak voice. Then there was darkness. He breathed no more.

Chapter 4

Madeleine laden with shopping trundled down Davies Street. The weight of the load seemed to pull her arms out of their sockets. "Nearly there," she thought as she saw the brown Mini parked in front of the green Citroen. She had to stop for a while to catch her breath. She swapped the bags around hoping it might ease the pain and soldiered on towards Danny's house. She reached the door and knocked loudly knowing that he spent most of his time in the room furthest away listening to the radio. She knocked again thinking that her husband might be right but she heard movement and saw a figure approach through the frosted window. She heard the door latch click and the door opened with a jolt.

"Madeleine long time no see, come on in I'll put the kettle on. Here let me take your bags," he said with genuine warmth. He had always had a soft spot of Madeleine as she was a close friend of Lucy's. He put the bags in the corner and they walked through to the back room... He beckoned her sit down and went through to the kitchen to put the kettle on.

"How are you keeping Danny?"

"Oh not too bad I still miss Lucy a lot. I don't think I'll ever get over it."

"It's never easy but time is a great healer, I miss her too."

He brought the tea in and placed it on the table. He sat down and said, "Enough of my problems. Anyway how are things with you?"

"Well not too bad, keeping busy. My youngest daughter wants us to go over and stay for a while. Ever hear from your kids nowadays?"

"I haven't heard from my daughter in 10 years. My son writes occasionally saying he'll come down but he never has," Danny said sadly, age mellowing his nature.

"Maybe one day you never know," she said taking a sip of tea, "Nice cup of tea."

"I saw Dave in the pub last night," he said and then realised that she would already know that.

"Yes I know, actually that was one of the reasons I came over," she said glad that the subject of her husband had come around.

"Oh, why, what's the matter?"

"Well last night he had a nightmare and woke me up. He was shouting no, no. I asked him what it was about but he wouldn't really tell me. I think it was the same nightmare he used to have years ago. The thing is he claims to have seen an old army friend of his, a man who had died 40 years ago and this seemed to have triggered it off again." She stopped a moment and studied his face before she went on, "He said that his name was David Liversage." There was no change in Danny's face as she said the name, "Did you know him?"

"Yes he was in our regiment, died over in Italy though. I don't know why he would think he saw him."

"So there is nothing I should know about?" she asked knowing what he was like in his younger days.

"No, mind you if his leg had been playing him up badly it might have been the pain making him see things," he said hoping to put her off the scent.

She thought about it and agreed with him. The conversation was interrupted by a rap on the back

door. Danny got up to answer it thinking it unusual for someone to go around the back. He opened the door to find Stuart waiting outside. He had changed his clothes and had had a shave, "Hello Danny I'm off into town to do some shopping. Do you want anything fetching back?"

"No, thanks for asking but I've got all mine in. Come on in and meet Dave's wife," he said and opened the door to its fullest extent.

"Okay, I can't stop long though," Stuart said coming in.

"You've got enough time for a cup of tea though? The kettle's not long boiled," Danny said picking up a mug from by the sink.

"Yes, it makes a change from the other stuff," Stuart said with a laugh that sounded put on but it was not.

"Go on through."

Stuart entered the room and saw Madeleine sitting on the chair. He thought to herself how attractive she must have been in her youth. He smiled and said hello.

"Madeleine, Stuart. Stuart, Madeleine," Danny said introducing one to another.

"Oh," Madeleine said, "You were talking to my Dave in the pub."

"Yes that's right, he's a nice man." Stuart said as he could not think of anything to say. By this time Danny had entered the room and passed the mug over to Stuart. "Thanks," Stuart said and took a large swig from it. His mouth was a bit dry from the previous nights drinking, "That's better."

"So," Madeleine said, "You're from London then," herself not really knowing what else to say.

"Yes, that's right. I've been down for about four months."

"Enjoying it?"

"Yes apart from nearly being mugged last night." Danny shot him an evil look and put his finger in front of his mouth as if to say Shh. "No, only joking it's a lot quieter up here than down London," Stuart finished covering his mistake well.

"I've never been to London. Always wanted to see the Queen and all that," Madeleine said and Stuart did not know if she was winding him up.

"Well in all the time I've been there I've never seen her," he said with a laugh that sounded put on again.

They all laughed at this and the conversation lulled again. The tea was nearly finished and Madeleine was first to speak, "I suppose I'd better be off now, get Dave's dinner ready, you know what he's like," she said to Danny.

"Err, whereabouts are you going?" Stuart asked her.

"Nelson Street, do you know it?"

"Yes I've got to go past there. I'm going into town to get the groceries in, do you fancy a lift," Stuart said putting his mug down and standing up ready to go.

"Well if it's not putting you out, to tell you the truth I was not looking forward to carrying all that shopping home," she said with a sigh of relief.

"Are you sure you don't want anything bringing back Danny?" Stuart said looking over in his direction.

"No thanks but pop in when you come back I've got some home brew left."

They all got up and walked to the front door.

"Is this your shopping?" Stuart asked Madeleine picking up the bags by the door.

"Yes but don't trouble yourself I'll take it," Madeleine said but Stuart would have none of it.

Danny opened the door and bid them both goodbye, Stuart and Madeleine walked down the front path towards his car. Stuart opened the door and put the bags in the back seat relieved to have got rid of the weight. He would have to do something to strengthen himself up he thought and then went on thinking that he need not bother as violins were not that heavy.

The traffic was light again after the morning rush and they soon got mobile.

"Did Danny ever mention someone called Dave Liversage?" Madeleine asked Stuart, clutching at straws.

“No I don't think so. Mind you to be honest I think I had a bit too much to drink yesterday and forgot most of the conversation,” Stuart said apologetically.

They turned left at the top of the road and came to a 'T' junction where they had to wait for a few minutes as there was traffic coming from both sides.

“Is he an army friend of theirs?” Stuart asked, albeit with disinterest. They found a gap in the traffic and sneaked into it.

“Well he was why do you ask?” she said believing that Stuart might know more than he was making out.

“Oh no reason, it's just that they seem to spend a lot of time talking about the army and the war,” he said with a grin on his face reminiscing about most of the conversation the previous day.

“I know what you mean,” Madeleine said. She had, had to put up with years of it. As they came to the home stretch Madeleine beckoned Stuart to turn right saying it was a short cut. They pulled up in front of the house and Stuart got out to get the shopping from the back seat.

“Come on in I'll make a cup of tea, it's the least I could do,” Madeleine said getting out of the car.

“Okay I'll just bring these in,” Stuart said taking out the shopping and shutting the car door. Stuart followed her down the path but as he got to the front door he heard a loud piercing scream, followed by another and then another. He quickly went through the front door and saw Madeleine with her hands covering her face screaming continuously unaware of her surroundings. He went past her and then regretted it. “Oh my God,” he said repugnantly and then deposited the contents of his stomach all over the floor. Losing his balance he fell back slightly and steadying himself threw up once more.

Madeleine was still screaming continuously as he pulled her into the front room out of sight of the blood soaked kitchen with the mangled corpse in the middle.

“Have you got a phone?” he shouted trying to get through to the hysterical woman in front of him. She never seemed to have heard him so he looked around the room but there was no sign of one.

The noise from the house attracted the attention of a passer by and Stuart heard a loud knock on the door. Looking around he saw an over weight, middle aged man standing in the doorway taking most of the light.

“Anything wrong mate,” he said in a gruff voice.

“Yes there's been a murder, fetch the police,” Stuart said in a panicking voice.

The man rushed to the phone box and was gone for only a few minutes but by the time he came back the crowds had started to gather around the house. As he fought his way through the murmuring throng he heard the sirens, “Just coming now mate,” he said as two police cars pulled up. The car doors opened and a voice said, “Go home now, there is nothing to see.” Men in police uniforms started to make their way to the front of the crowd and two plain clothes officers walked through the door. On seeing Madeleine screaming hysterically one ordered a W.P.C to calm her down. Stuart was still glued to the spot looking into the kitchen as one walked to him and producing his I.D. said, “Detective Inspector Holland. What's happened here?” Stuart woke out of his trance and looked at the man standing in front of him. He was a tall, slim almost lanky, well dressed, man. He had light blond hair and a mustache and beard that were several shades darker than his hair.

“His name is Dave Pearce, that's his wife over there,” he said nodding over towards Madeleine, “We just came in and found him,” he said in a voice almost incoherent, it was obvious that the situation was too much for him.

“Have you touched anything?” D.I. Holland asked as he walked into the kitchen.

“No, I've not been in the kitchen but that's mine,” Stuart said pointing at the vomit by the door. By now Madeleine had calmed down slightly, she just stood there with the policewoman asking why, over and over again.

“Has she any family she could stay with?” Holland said to Stuart.

“I don't know I only just met her this morning. She's a friend of my next door neighbour. I was just helping her to bring in the shopping.”

“Did you know the deceased?”

“Well sort of I only met him in the pub last night. He's a friend of my next door neighbour.”

“Who is your next door neighbour?”

“Daniel McCormick, he lives at 22 Davies Street.”

Holland turned to the policeman next to him and said, “His name sounds familiar go and check him out.”

“Yes sir,” the policeman said and walked to the car outside.

“Well how long have you known McCormick?”

“Well only since yesterday but he was in all morning, I've only been here for 4 months. Look is all this relevant?”

“Well I'm just getting the background.” As Holland finished the forensic team arrived and started dusting for fingerprints.

“There's a decapitated man lying in the kitchen and you're wasting time asking stupid questions,” Stuart said, his temper starting to get the better of him. Ignoring Stuart Holland asked Madeleine her movements during the morning.

“Well,” a tear stained Madeleine said, her voice shaking, “I left Dave about 9.30, did a bit of shopping and saw Danny at about 10.”

“McCormick?”

“Yes that's right. I left Danny's at about 10.30 and Stuart took me home.”

“So it must have happened between 9.30 and 10.30 this morning. Tell me, is there anything missing?”

“There doesn't look like it but I'll have to check,” Madeleine said looking around, still crying.

“Is there anywhere you can go to for a while?”

“Well my youngest daughter wants me to go over but she lives in Edinburgh,” replied Madeleine but then went on, “But I would rather stay in town. Maybe Danny would put me up. Has Danny been informed yet, he was his best friend.”

“I'll get on to it right away,” Holland said, “Oh and ask him if he can put you up.”

“Is there anything else you need to know or can I get off now?” Stuart said.

“Well leave your address we'll probably get back to you.”

Stuart said goodbye to Madeleine and left. His mind was still tormented by the sight of Pearce's mutilated body and he was fit only to go home and get drunk.

Danny was informed and the policewoman took Madeleine over to stop for a few days while the house was screened for any clues however slight that might lead to the maniac's downfall.

Meanwhile back in Nelson street Holland was talking to the police surgeon.

“Jesus Dermot whoever did this really went to town,” said Andrew Norton, the police surgeon, a 30 year old overweight man going bald prematurely through stress, “In all my years in the force I've never seen anything like it.”

“What's the story then Andrew?”

“Broken fibula, three cracked ribs, four fingers missing from the left hand. Bottom section of the nose severed, left ear slashed in two, three 8 inch gashes to the face. I'm afraid that I won't be able to tell you about any internal injuries until after the autopsy.”

“Okay,” and then talked to Jeff Dungeate, one of the forensic team, “Any thing from you Jeff?”

“Forced entry from the back door, no finger prints but there's a blood stained knife by the body and a set of secateurs splattered with blood. These are probably from the household.”

Holland thought awhile, “A mutilated body, nothing taken or nothing noticeable anyway. He was just an old man. It seems we have a sadist around. Pity McCormick's got an alibi he would have been ideal.”

The police finished their work, meticulously searching for clues but there were not any. The body was sent for autopsy. Holland thought that he would have to talk to Mrs. Pearce again and maybe McCormick would know if Pearce had any enemies. They left a police guard on the door and set up

a mobile incident room but no witnesses came forward.

Chapter 5

Danny was expecting them to arrive at any minute. Standing at the top of his path he looked down the street and waited for the police car that would inevitably come. It turned at the top of the street and in no time was parked outside his house. He had heard Dave had been killed and asked would he put Madeleine up for a few days. The W.P.C got out and opened the door and helped a still distraught, crying Madeleine out. They moved towards Danny, the police woman with her arm around Madeleine who was sobbing wildly.

"It's alright Miss I'll take over," Danny said putting his arm around Madeleine and guiding her into the house. The police woman waited around for a bit but seeing she was of no further use said her goodbyes and left.

"I've made a bed for you, it might be a good idea to try and get some sleep." Madeleine agreed but knew that she would not sleep that day and maybe for many days in the future. She made her way upstairs and into the bedroom and laid fully dressed on the bed and cried loudly. Danny sat downstairs hearing her tears and not knowing how to comfort her cried himself. About 4.30 that afternoon there was a knock on the front door. McCormick opened it to be confronted by D.I. Holland and another man.

"Detective Inspector Holland and this is Detective Constable Evans," he said producing his I.D., "May we come in for a moment?"

"Yes sure but I think that Madeleine is asleep. I don't really want to disturb her," he said moving aside as they walked past.

"Actually it's you we came to see," Holland said as they walked into the living room, "I believe that you were a friend of the deceased."

"His name was David Pearce," Danny said sharply, his hatred for the police showing through slightly, "And he was a very good friend of mine."

"Well what it is," Holland said carrying on. The tone of Danny's voice was like water of a duck's back, knowing that around this area the police were not very popular, "We would like to ask you a few questions about Mr. Pearce."

"Yes?"

"Well you've known him a long time, we were wondering if you knew of any enemies he might have."

"No he was well liked around here. Is there something that you're not telling me? I thought that it was just a burglary that went wrong."

"Didn't Mrs. Pearce say anything to you?" Holland said, the note of surprise was well marked in his voice.

"No, she was in no fit state when she came round. I didn't like to ask her, she will tell me when she's ready."

"Well Mr. Pearce was badly mutilated and he looked like he had been tortured. There didn't look like there had been anything stolen. So without a motive we are looking for a sadistic killer and it looks like he's a very dangerous man."

"Jesus Christ, I never knew that," Danny said visibly shocked.

"Is there anything you can tell us that might help, anything, however small?"

"No, your best bet would be to talk to Madeleine but she's in no fit state to talk."

A voice from behind the door said, "I think it's best if I get it over with, if it will help catch this madman." It was Madeleine. She opened the door came in and sat down. She looked weak and frail and seemed to have aged.

"Are you sure that you are up to it?" Holland said with genuine sympathy that even surprised Danny who had got up to help her to a seat.

"Yes I guess I'll have to be," Madeleine said with a resolute air that impressed all around her.

"Okay, stop me if it gets too much," Holland said and then went on, "Did your husband have any

enemies or did anything unusual happen recently?"

"I don't think that my husband had an enemy in the world," Madeleine said stifling her tears, "But he did say he saw an old army friend who's been dead for 40 years but he put it down to the drink he had earlier. Later that night he had a nightmare but that might have been the drink also."

"This army friend, did you husband tell you his name?"

"Yes it was err...Liversage, that's right David Liversage," Madeleine said and Holland saw that she was not fit for any more questions.

"Thanks, you have been very helpful. I'll afraid that we'll have to get back to you later," he said getting up closely followed by the other man who had not said a word.

"Yes I understand, well goodbye then," Madeleine said as Danny showed them both the door.

"We'll probably be in touch with you also," Holland said to Danny as he went out. Shutting the door Danny went back to Madeleine, "Can I make you a cup of tea?"

"Yes, that would be nice," Madeleine said, her emotions starting to override her once more. Danny made the tea and brought it in. He sat down beside her and said, "Do you want to talk about it? It might make it easier."

"I don't know what to do Danny. I built my life around him and now he's gone. You should have seen him," and with that she broke down again. Danny pulled her close to him, "There that's it, let it out."

"I don't know what to do anymore. My life's not whole now," she wept more and more. Danny kept quiet and let the pain leave her shaking body. After a while he said to her, "These things take time. After a while the pain gets less and less. I'm afraid that's all I can tell you."

She pulled away and looking at him through tear stained eyes, "Who was Liversage? I've got to know. I think that it must have been him."

Danny looked at her and realised that he had to tell her the truth. She had been through too much now. He had never told anyone else not even his wife but as he looked at her he knew it would hurt her even more but it had to be said.

"Dave Liversage was the lowest form of life. He was a liar, a cheat and a thief. No he was more than just a thief he was a ghoul because he robbed possessions of dead bodies. He robbed memories from grieving relatives."

"But what has he got to do with my Dave?" she said puzzled.

"Well originally he only robbed from the Germans which to be honest no one was too bothered about after a while though he started robbing from our dead. He took all the possessions of our captain, Captain Jack Wilson and we found out. Me and Steve beat him to death and Dave was there when it happened."

"But that means that both you and Steve are at risk. Why don't you go to the police?"

"I can't really tell them that a man we killed 40 years ago was after us," Danny said, the thought that he and Steve might be in danger had never crossed his mind.

"How could you live with that all your life?" She said, her eyes filled with tears.

"I've killed a lot of people for wearing the wrong colour uniform. Out of all the people I've killed he was probably the one most deserving of death." Danny knew that he had better change the subject quickly, the thought of death distressed Madeleine immensely, "Look do you want to try and get some sleep?"

"No I don't think I could I would only have nightmares."

"How about if I poured you a whiskey and see if that helps any?"

Madeleine was not a drinker, only Christmas and special occasions but the thought that she might get out of reality for a while appealed to her, "Yes I feel like getting drunk."

Danny fetched the bottle from the cabinet in the front room and took two glasses from the kitchen. He poured two generous measures and passed one over to Madeleine.

"Take a good swallow it might ease the pain. Madeleine opened her mouth and tipped it back in one go surprising Danny. The burn of the whiskey started in her mouth and went down to her stomach.

Then a warm glow seemed to emanate from her body. The whiskey started to work, slightly easing her pain but she knew that it would never go away. Her head seemed to get lighter. She had never had whiskey before and the sensation seemed to make life easier.

"May I have another?" she said passing the glass over to Danny who dutifully refilled it again. At least she will sleep now he thought to himself as he took a small gulp from his half full glass.

"You know," Madeleine said looking at the glass, "I never knew how anyone could drink this stuff, not until now anyway."

"Sometimes you just have to get out of it for a few hours. It helped me to get through the first few days after Lucy."

"What's going to happen to me now?"

Danny did not really know, "Once the police finish I'll go and clean up your house and make the back door safe but after that I don't know. You're welcome to stay as long as you like."

"Thanks Danny you've been good to me and Dave over the years, I don't think I could go back yet."

"If you want I'll contact your kids and help with the funeral arrangements as well. It will make it easier for you." Danny said finishing his glass and pouring himself another drink.

"It might be better if I do it," Madeleine said finishing the rest of the glass, "It will keep me busy and hopefully keep my mind occupied." The whiskey had worked its magic the desire for sleep had come over her so she said "I'm tired. I think I'll try and get some rest now."

She got up and made her way to the door. She was not drunk but you could not say that she was sober either.

She said goodbye to Danny and walked upstairs thanking him once again. She got undressed and went to bed. She slept the sleep of the dead.

Danny remained downstairs he had a lot on his mind. Holland had said that there was nothing taken and Dave had been badly tortured. Why was he tortured? Why was he murdered? What has a man who had been dead 40 years got to do with it? Things did not add up. He sat there mulling things over in his mind but his thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the back door. Instinctively he picked up the half empty bottle and hiding it behind his back went to the door. Standing outside was Stuart but without a smile on his face. "How is she?" he said without his usual greeting.

"She's asleep. I've given her some whiskey hopefully it will calm her down. Come on through."

Stuart entered and said, "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Well the house will want scrubbing completely and the back door wants securing properly. I would appreciate a hand." Danny said and poured some whiskey into Madeleine's empty glass and passed it to Stuart. "Thanks," he said and took a drink, "When do you want to do it?"

"Well we'll have to wait until the coppers have finished but I don't know when that will be."

"How could anyone do something like that," Stuart said but not really as a question.

"I don't know. I've tried to think but I just don't know." Danny finished the drink and it was starting to have an effect on him. He looked at the fast emptying bottle, "Madeleine thinks it had something to do with Dave Liversage but he's been dead for 40 years."

"Funny you should say that she asked me if I knew him when I drove her home. Who is he anyway?"

Danny thought awhile and then decided to tell him. Maybe it was the drink or maybe it was good to talk about it after all this years. "Liversage," he said almost spitting venom "Was a disgrace to the regiment. He used to take the personal effects of dead bodies. One day he robbed the body of his own dead captain between him and John Muir, dragged the name through mud so they did."

"John Muir was a friend of Liversage's?" Stuart asked becoming more intrigued.

"No he hardly knew him. John Muir went AWOL around the same time. Then the word got around that we were all cowards and thieves."

"What happened to them?" he asked with genuine interest.

"Well Muir went back home to Lichfield probably, I never heard if they had caught him or not and Liversage, well me and Steve Johnson battered him to death." Danny said with a coolness that

stopped Stuart in his tracks for a few minutes. Danny finished off his glass and tipped the rest of the whiskey into both their glasses. "Doesn't last long does it," he said with an air of disappointment. "I bought a couple of bottles today to try and blank out the sight of Dave. It keeps appearing in my mind. Want to nip over to ours and have some?"

"No I'd better stay here in case Madeleine gets restless," Danny said shaking his head.

"I'll tell you what," Stuart said not wanting to be on his own, "I'll fetch a bottle over instead."

There was no argument from Danny so Stuart got up and left for home. Returning after a few minutes he took his seat again and they carried on where they had left off.

"I don't think that I could ever take a life," Stuart said almost ashamedly, "I was never brought up like that."

"When you are in the army they teach you differently, they de-humanise it. It just becomes an objective, a target if you like," Danny said by way of explanation.

"Tell me about this Muir fellow," Stuart asked thinking desertion was not a bad thing.

"Well he was a good soldier, God knows why he left, maybe trouble at home or something. It did surprise me when I heard the news I must admit."

The flow of conversation was interrupted by a loud rap on the door. Danny got up automatically saying, "Probably the police again," and made his way to the front of the house.

He opened the door and outside was Steve Johnson, "Jesus Danny I swear your house gets further away." he was holding his chest and breathing heavily.

"Hello Steve come on through."

"I was just passing by so I thought that I would drop in," Steve said but Danny knew what he had come about.

Steve walked on through and seeing Stuart there gave him a curt nod. He had hoped that Danny would be alone because as old age had caught up with him he had become wary of strangers. He had also come to talk about the death of a close friend.

Danny had followed him through into the living room and passed him a glass to help himself to the whiskey. He introduced them to each other but noticed that Steve had a lot on his mind so kept it brief.

"Did you hear about Dave Pearce, the papers say he was burgled and battered to death, what's the country coming to?" Steve said getting straight to the point.

"Yes Stuart found the body," Danny said and at this Steve took more of an interest in Stuart.

"Yes but I don't think that he was burgled because there was nothing taken, and he wasn't just battered he was mutilated."

"Jesus the man was harmless. God help them if they try it with me," Steve said not realising that the years had taken their toll on him more than he knew, "How's Madeleine taking it?"

"Really badly, she's staying here at the moment. I gave her some whiskey to calm her down. Hopefully she'll get some sleep." Danny answered.

"Who do you reckon did it?" Steve said not expecting an answer. Stuart was about to relate the events preceding the incident but Danny said, "Who knows, maybe he surprised a couple of kids. But they really gave him hell...sadistic bastards."

"When is the funeral?" Steve said blanking Stuart again.

"Well we don't know, the police have still got the body."

"Well I'd better get off," Steve said getting up. He had wanted to stay longer but felt uneasy in a stranger's company. He said goodbye to Stuart and Danny saw him to the door.

"If there's anything that I can do let us know," he said as a parting gesture. Danny returned and took another drink.

"Why didn't you tell him about Liversage?" Stuart said on his return.

"What and make myself look an idiot," Danny said sharply so Stuart left it at that.

"Steve," he said changing the subject "Is that Steve Johnson?"

"Yes."

"He's not what I expected."

"No, he's only a shell of his former self. The years have treated him badly. He had a heart attack just recently, his second. I'm afraid he's become quite a bit of a loner."

"Yes I noticed that he didn't seem to like me."

"Oh pay no heed he's like that until you get to know him. Tell you what, are you busy tomorrow?"

"Well I'm supposed to giving a violin lesson but I don't feel up to it."

"Do you fancy taking us over to Lichfield, I'll drop you some petrol money. We'll see if we can bump into John Muir."

"Do you think that he has something to do with it?"

"Oh no, just got me thinking about it that's all. I want to find out why he deserted."

"Well sure. I'll be around about 9 I'd better get off and get some sleep then." Stuart got up and forgetting to take the bottle of whiskey, left. Danny would have to make sure that Madeleine would be alright on her own first though. He might ask Steve Johnson to keep an eye on her if he was not busy.

Stephen Reginald Johnson was born in a small working class family in 15th September 1918. His father was a drunkard who used to work on the railway and regularly beat his wife whenever the mood took him. He was not averse to hitting Stephen or his elder brother Michael for no apparent reason either. Michael jumped in front of a train when he was only seven and this had a dramatic effect on Stephen especially as he saw it happen but was powerless to do anything about it. The death of Michael had an effect on his father as well, he got worse. He lost his job and would disappear for days on end on long drinking sprees. A lot of people speculated on where the money had come from but his father was a tight lipped man. The police used to visit him a lot but he was never charged with anything. Stephen's mother Anne brought him up strictly well tried to anyway but he was a wild child. He could fight like a lion and would use every opportunity to practice. He got a reputation from an early age and would think nothing of fighting people older and bigger than himself. By the time he was 12 even his father could not control him and it got to the stage that on the frequent visits from the police they might be coming for either of them. Stephen got to notice that people would give him money if he would leave them alone and made quite a lot of money that way. His mother died when he was only 14, the constant stress and beatings catching up on her. His father went on indifferently but the drink was catching up on him. His temper was still as bad but he had slowed down enough for Stephen to fancy his chances against him.

It all came to a head on his 16 birthday. He had started to drink himself and plenty of people would buy him his beer. He got home, half drunk, only to be confronted by his irate father. His father, probably not wanting his son to end up like him, castigated him for drinking and Stephen told him to keep his nose out of his business or he would break it. What followed then was a violent fracas that left Stephen carrying a long scar on his cheek for the rest of his life as a reminder.

Between the ages of 16 and 18 Stephen drifted around the country doing this and that and not stopping too long in the one place. He became a bit of a loner who kept himself to himself. He distrusted anyone and everyone thinking that they only wanted to know him out of fear. Around the age of 18 he decided he would give the army a try. It was 1936 and he got an inkling there might be a war on and liked a good fight. He could do with a regular income as well as his work options were running out. Surprisingly he settled in right away and met his match in Danial McCormick. He got involved in a fight with him in a pub. It was not against him but against all comers. They got on like a house on fire and drank and brawled their way out of many a public house. The war started and they both went off together, it was hell but they survived. Around 1940 Pearce made the duo a threesome. He was not like Johnson or McCormick but probably because he was a loner like themselves they got on well. After the war he hung around for a couple of years but the excitement of the previous 6 was missing. He had got a taste for living on the knife's edge so he moved on and

did a bit of gun running here and there to keep his adrenalin up. Around 1950 he met Michelle in a bar in London. His job by then was taking money out of banks and he was doing quite well. He had a taste for the good life by then, wearing sharp suits, driving fast cars and drinking black market champagne. He was spending it quicker than he was robbing it so he took on the more lucrative work of contract killing. His first was a gangland boss who was encroaching on a rival's patch. A straight forward killing, one bullet through the head, but the coolness of the act, getting passed the gangster's bodyguards, was to stand him in good stead amongst the growing underworld. He married Michelle in 1951 but the marriage was doomed from the start with Stephen's work taking him away from her for weeks on end. Things came to a head when he came home drunk after 5 days absence to be confronted by an angry wife, all his life, after watching his mother being battered by his father he had vowed never to raise a hand in anger to any woman. Maybe it was all the stress that had started to devour him or maybe it was the drink but he raised his hand and struck Michelle across the face sending her sprawling to the floor. Afterwards he was very sorry and genuinely regretted his actions but he knew that it was the start of their decline. His temper drove him to hit here again and again as it became easier for him to do so. He came back after another 5 days work to find her and her clothes gone from the house. He never traced her or heard from her again. His drinking steadied slightly but his taste for rich food and cigars kept him in mouth ulcers. Around about 1955 he had a nervous breakdown. This led him to dramatically change his outlook on life and he turned his back on crime for good. In 1957 he got a job working over in Ireland where the pace of life was a lot slower and the people friendlier. It was there that he got a taste for Guinness and more simpler food. He took to smoking cigarettes instead of cigars and he lost a lot of weight with his diet. He came back over in 1960 and went back to his place of birth to see his father and hopefully get reconciliation. He was just in time because 2 months later his father died at the grand old age of 84. Until his death there remained an air of indifference between them even though he looked after him because by that time his father's health had deteriorated enough to make him house bound and incontinent.

What really surprised him was that his father had left him everything in his will. He would have inherited it anyway but it was nice to know his father had remembered him in that way. It was a quiet funeral with only about 10 people turning up for the service because his father was not a well liked man. With the security of having his own house behind him he felt the urge to settle down and got a job as a security officer at a large factory on the other side of town. Around 1965 he met McCormick again and as luck would have it there was a position going at the place and he got McCormick a job. In 1968 he was at home watching the television when a pain came over him. It was like a giant bear hug that sucked the very air out of his lungs. The pain only lasted seconds before he blacked out but it seemed like hours. Luckily for him there was one of his work mates with him who called an ambulance and administered first aid. It was very lucky for him as it was his first heart attack. The doctors told him to give up smoking and drinking but he thought to himself that without them there would be no point to life anyway. He still met McCormick and Pearce in the Wagoners every Wednesday; it had become a kind of institution. The years went by and his health deteriorated even more. The years of smoking gave him a hoarse cough and clogged his arteries. In 1980 he had a second heart attack but it never changed his lifestyle, though his attendance rate at the pub dropped dramatically. He only really went out on a Wednesday and even that had become erratic.

Chapter 6

Steve stepped out of Danny's house into the cold night air. He checked his watch and saw that it was only 7 o'clock. He thought to himself that it was too early to go back to his cold, empty house. He had been disappointed to find out that Danny had company and especially some middle class southerner with as much personality as a tooth brush. "What's he doing with someone like that?" he said aloud. He was very jealous of anyone who had become Danny's friend. Even Pearce but over

the years he had come to accept him as a friend. The death of Pearce had brought forward thoughts of his own mortality and especially such a brutal death to a man whose body had deteriorated so much as to make him defenseless to any attacker. He shrugged these thoughts aside as the sound of a barking dog awoke his senses again. He looked across to see where the sound was coming from but drew a blank. "Well," he thought, "I may as go to the pub." Steve was not an alcoholic or in his mind he was not anyway. He could go without a drink for days but if he did have one he would have to get drunk. He liked to call it being a drunkard.

The misty night with its fine drizzly rain seemed to get everywhere so he buttoned his long grey trench coat and headed for the nearest pub. Around that area you did not have to go too far in fact they used to say that if you spat you would hit a pub. The nearest pub was another back street affair called the Man in the Moon. Like most of the pubs in the area it was frequented by a close group of regulars that did not like strangers. Steve was luckier than most though as he was well known in the area and could drink where he liked without much trouble. As he entered the dark, dreary pub with its outside toilet he ordered a drink.

"I'll get these Steve," a large heavily tattooed man with a broken nose and a large beer belly said. "Oh cheers Jim," Steve said and looked around the pub. It was a small rectangular bar sparsely furnished, most of the chairs were ripped and the carpet threadbare and stained with beer and probably quite a lot of blood. In the bar two heavily tattooed youths (they looked about 20) were sitting down drinking heavily and playing 3 card brag for money. The landlord turned a blind eye to gambling as long as there was no trouble. Apart from the four of them the pub was empty but at 7 o'clock it had not long opened.

"I'm sorry to hear about Dave. He was a good friend of yours wasn't he?" Jim said offering him a cigarette. Steve took it thinking what the hell I don't want to live forever.

"Thanks, yes he was a good friend we went through the war together. They reckon it was kids trying to rob the house and he surprised them."

"I've done some bad things in my time but never that. Youngsters today have no morals," and looked at the two playing brag.

The outside door opened and another group of youths walked in looking around with a sneer. They saw the other two playing cards and asked if they could join them. The other two did not mind as long as they could cover the bet. The group of youths ordered the drinks and joined the other two.

"I bet there will be trouble there later," Jim said giving Steve the run down of the people in the pub. Steve was enjoying his company and the first pint went down quickly, "What are you having Jim?"

"Pint of D.B.A. please Steve."

"Want a whiskey with it?"

"Yes okay, I'm not driving today."

Steve ordered the drinks and the whiskey went down first followed by a large gulp from his pint. The pub was filling up quite quickly now and somebody put the jukebox on. Along with the noise and chatter of the other customers they had to speak louder.

A 65 year old man walked in with a well dressed, well spoken young lady on his arm. She sat down and he after getting them both a drink sat down next to her.

"What's a good looking woman like that doing with a fellow like him is he rich or something?"

Steve asked Jim in surprise.

Jim laughed and said, "Watch her I don't think that she's all there. She's a solicitor who seems to like drinking in pubs like this. They say that if you pay her taxi fare home you can have her."

Steve laughed and said, "You never tried it then?"

"No my wife would kill me. Why don't you give it a go?"

"What with my heart I wouldn't last." They both laughed loudly drawing attention to themselves but that never bothered them. The young woman and old man were laughing too but not for the same reason.

"So how long has your eldest got left in Leicester?" Steve asked and Jim changing the subject.

“Oh he should be out next month with good behaviour.”

“Did he ever find out who grassed him up?”

“Oh yes but he wants to sort that out himself, after all the other fellows going nowhere. I don't think that he knows that our Jason knows he did it.”

“Do you fancy going over to the Britannia for one?” Steve said after he had finished his drink, “It's getting a bit loud in here.”

“Yes okay,” Jim said finishing his drink and getting his coat.

They both left the pub just as the argument at the card table got started. “Lucky we're getting out now there'll be tables flying soon,” Jim said as he shut the door on the way out.

The rain outside had turned a faster pace. Steve would have run to the next pub if his legs were younger but he had to go at his own pace and when he got there he was quite wet. Jim was in before him and was ordering the next round as Steve took his coat off and put it by his feet at the bar.

The Britannia was a large pub that had been done out recently, the carpets were new and the chairs were clean and free from cuts. The beer was not as good as the last pub and so it was quite empty.

Steve took his first gulp and said, “Have you tasted this beer?”

“Yes it's not up to much. I'll tell you what, let's drink up and go to The Crown down the road.” Jim answered and there was no disagreement from Steve. They quickly finished the drinks and went down the Crown which was quite a large pub because the lounge and bar had been knocked together. Pictures of race horses were dotted around the walls. It was quite empty but by this time they were staying because of the heavy rain outside. A friendly barmaid asked them what they wanted. “Two Bush mills, a pint of Guinness and a pint of D.B.A please,” Steve said with a smile and looking at Jim said, “I wouldn't kick her out of bed.”

“What with your heart,” Jim said laughing and this set Steve laughing again. The barmaid returned with their drinks and took their money wondering what the joke was and looked at them with a bemused expression. This set them off laughing again and she retreated quickly wondering if they had escaped from a mental institution.

When they had composed themselves Steve said, “Not a bad pint here I could get used to it.”

The whiskey went down again, followed by another good swallow from the beer and then they decided on a game of darts as the board was empty. The drink flowed quickly and the night passed by the same. Before they knew it the bell had rung for last orders.

“One for the road,” Steve said ordering another round and Jim asked if he ought to get one as well. Steve declined as he had had his fill.

“Where do you drink nowadays?” Jim asked.

“I'm usually down the Wagoners every Wednesday with a fellow called Danny McCormick.”

“I haven't seen Danny in years. I'll be in next Wednesday then if you don't mind,” Jim said and took a drink from his beer.

“Yes, why not they do a nice pint there, you'll enjoy it.”

Most people had drunk up and left by the time they had finished their drinks. They stepped into the cold night air once more but luckily for them the rain had stopped. They said goodbye and Steve told him not to forget next Wednesday.

Steve thought to himself that he had, had a good night and Jim was not a bad man. As he stood there wondering which was the best way home he was blissfully unaware that he was being watched by a small thin, man in an army uniform.

Chapter 7

Steve had decided the best way home and set off slowly, stopping to catch his breath but by the time he had got to the top of the street he had a feeling that he was not alone. He turned around but the street was completely empty which was unusual because all the pubs were tipping out at that time. The feeling inside him grew stronger so he looked around again. Maybe because of the work he had done or maybe because of the death of Pearce he had become paranoid. Still no sign of life so he

walked on... The sound of footsteps behind him made him look again but it was only a couple back from a night out. They overtook him quickly and carried on down the street laughing and joking. That was probably it he thought and carried on slowly but the feeling never left him. Halfway down the next street he looked again and thought he saw a figure disappear down an alleyway. Taking no notice he carried on at his own pace. At the top of the next street he had to stop and lean against a wall to catch his breath, his heart was racing through the exertion. As he leant there a small drunk with a battered face and a heavily slurred Scottish accent approached him and asked sheepishly, "Have you got a spare fag mate?"

"No, fuck off," Steve answered sharply.

The small Scotsman walked off quickly, muttering under his breath, "Bleeding friendly around here."

Steve watched him walk down the street and out of the corner of his eye he saw a figure move but by the time he had turned around fully the figure had gone. "What's the matter with me," he thought to himself, "It's getting to the stage that I'm afraid of my own shadow. Well I may as well have a fag whilst I'm here," and took out a packet from his pocket. As he lit one he said aloud, "Bleeding doctors don't know what they're talking about." He took a large drag from it and let the smoke sooth his nerves. He had cut his smoking down to 15 a day which was not bad as at one time he used to smoke 60. He took another drag and looked around the street. He knew it well; he had played around there when he was a lad. The street had not changed much except that there were a lot more cars around. "They should have knocked these down years ago," he thought to himself, he had never been nostalgic. He finished his cigarette and threw it down on the floor putting his foot on it before carrying on his way. The feeling of being watched crept back and started to anger him. He looked around and seeing no one there said aloud, "If there's anyone there come out and stop playing silly buggers." Nothing moved and Steve cursed himself for letting his emotions get the better of him. He carried on his way, the feeling never leaving him and a couple of times he nearly saw a figure dart out of sight. He was short of breath now, his heart was pounding, and he thought he had better rest again when suddenly he saw it. A figure stood across the road and looked over at him. The first thing he noticed was the uniform. Nothing unusual he thought, probably some one home on leave who left it on trying to impress the women. Looking at the uniform again he saw that it was not a modern one but one similar to what he used to wear. Something inside him told him all was not well. There was something amiss but he could not put his finger on it. Looking again at the figure he knew that he knew him but he did not know from where. For some reason he looked at the floor, it was only for a second but when he looked up again the figure had gone.

"Liversage," Steve said loudly as recognition finally came home, "He's come back to haunt me after all these years." His heart pounded loudly, he was gasping for breath but something told him to get back to the safety of his own home. He set off as quickly as he could. Thoughts came flooding back to him, thoughts of Liversage's body lying there heavily blood stained, the look of hatred in his eyes. He never called for mercy he never said a word and now he was back after revenge but what could a ghost do? He thought of Pearce's death maybe that was down to Liversage, maybe he had imagined the figure but something inside him told him it was there, it was real. As he approached the last street to his house the feeling of being watched was now so strong that he was turning around and looking every four or five steps. His heart slowed down slightly as he saw his house. He felt safer; the kind of safety a child feels when they are at home. He opened the door and walked in but still did not feel truly safe. The house was still the same, the living and front rooms had been knocked into one and there was an open plan staircase in the middle. A thin green carpet covered both rooms; the T.V was still there, the clock on the wall said 11.30, newspapers placed around the chairs. Nothing unusual but still the thought of something lurking around played on his mind. He switched the light on and went to shut the curtains. It was then, across the road, he thought he saw the figure again. It seemed to be gliding down the street, the insecure feeling came across him again and he wished that he had had a bolt to put on the back door. "I'll get one tomorrow," he thought as

he shut the curtains. He sat down on his brown worn settee and picked up the paper to see if there was anything on the television. There was nothing worth watching so he tossed the paper to the other end of the sofa.

“Now I know why I don't pay my license fee,” he laughed loudly probably to calm himself. He had a feeling that somebody was around him so he looked around quickly but there was nobody there. “God what's the matter with me. I used to be afraid of no one but now I'm even afraid of my own shadow.”

He did not want to go to bed, not straight away so he went into the kitchen to put the kettle on. A cup of tea might relax him. In the kitchen the thought of being watched came back to haunt him again. He looked back into the main room, there was no one there but he still sensed that eyes were upon him. He quickly made the tea and came back into the room. He picked up a book and started to read it but there was no point he was not digesting it. Tiredness drove him to bed so leaving his tea half finished he switched on the upstairs light and climbed the stairs.

He switched the bedroom light on and had a quick check, there was nobody there. He knew that there would not be but he just could not get rid of the uneasy feeling he had. He got undressed quickly, it was cold, and switching the light off he went to bed. He covered the sheets over his head and waited for his body heat to warm the bed.

“Not again,” he thought as the feeling he had company returned once again. He quickly stuck his head out to see if there was anybody in the room but it was empty. His heart was beating faster again as he closed his eyes to try and get some sleep but still the feeling never left him. He opened his eyes again but there was no one there. He laughed at himself for being scared and started to calm down again. He looked up once more, reassured. He froze. He saw a pair of legs coming towards him, looking up his heart beat faster than ever. He saw Liversage standing over him. He had a thick linked chain raised above him. Then a pain came across Steve, a pain he had not had for years, a pain that blacked him out. He died of a heart attack before the first blow was struck.

Chapter 8

“Do you fancy some breakfast Madeleine?” Danny shouted from the bottom of the stairs.

“Yes please I'll be down in a few minutes,” Madeleine called back, she sounded a lot more cheerful, maybe the sleep did her good, Danny thought to himself as he switched the cooker on. He put a frying pan on the stove and put a couple of rashers of bacon on the pan. He went into the living room and put a couple of knives and forks on the table. By the time he had come back and put the kettle on the bacon was ready to be turned over so he turned them over and took out a couple of eggs from the fridge. He opened a tin of beans and put them on to cook as well. Everything was just about ready when Madeleine came down the stairs. She sat down and Danny brought in the food and joined her.

“How are you feeling Madeleine?”

“I'm feeling a lot better since I've had some sleep but these things take time I suppose.”

“You're very brave,” he said sincerely.

She smiled and said, “I don't feel brave.”

“I'm sorry but I've got to go out this morning. I should only be a couple of hours. Will you be alright?”

“Yes, I had better stay here in case the police come back. Do you mind if I give the place a clean, it will give me something to do?”

Danny preferred to do the housework himself but agreed because he thought it was probably better that she kept herself busy.

“Did you have any visitors yesterday?”

“Well Steve came around and Stuart was here. We didn't wake you did we?”

“Oh no, I was just wondering if the police came back.”

“These things take time, they'll get them in the end though,” Danny said not really believing it.

The sun was shining through the window and the day looked a lot brighter than it had for a long time. It seemed to recharge both their batteries and Madeleine looked visibly brighter than she had before.

"It's a nice day for going out anyway," she said, "Are you going anywhere special?"

"No, not really, me and Stuart thought we'd take a ride over to Lichfield."

"You're getting a bit thick with him lately."

"Yes he's not a bad fellow really. He's a bit naïve but that was probably his upbringing. He'll do anything for you though."

Madeleine agreed remembering how he had helped her with the shopping. As if on cue the back door rapt and Stuart was standing there. Danny greeted him and invited him in. Stuart saw that he had interrupted their breakfast.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I did not realise that you were eating. Do you want me to come back later?"

"Oh no don't be soft. Sit down, the kettle's just boiled." Stuart sat down and Danny brought him in a cup of tea.

"How are you feeling?" Stuart asked Madeleine.

"Oh a bit calmer now I had a good sleep yesterday and things don't look as bleak."

They drank their tea quietly neither Stuart nor Danny noticing Madeleine looking at the whiskey bottle.

"Oh well I suppose we had better get off then if you're ready," Stuart said finishing his tea and looking at his watch, "We've just beat the rush hour traffic."

"Yes I suppose you are right," Danny answered and looking at Madeleine said, "Are you sure you are going to be alright?"

"Yes, I'll be fine," she said wishing they would hurry as the thoughts of her dead husband came flooding back to her. Danny got up and locked the back door. He came back and started clearing the plates from the table.

"It's alright I'll finish these off myself."

"Okay then we'll get off," Danny said as he put on his coat and walked out, "We'll see you later then."

"Goodbye," Madeleine said and both Stuart and Danny answered as they went out the front door. Sitting there on her own she decided to make a start on the cleaning. She took the dishes to the sink and started filling it with water from the geyser next to it. After the dishes were done she went back to her seat and quietly sat down collecting her thoughts. She remembered her and Dave's first meeting. It was a hot summer's day and she was out walking her dog. They met by the River Dove and she was taken in by his shy nature. She had seen him around of course but they had never spoken. He had been fishing and caught a large fine trout which he offered her. She took it and they both walked back to the village together talking all the time, well she was mostly. They had a lot in common and arranged to meet at the local dance. She remembered the heart ache when he was called to war but he used to write regularly. She thought of the heart ache now as she had to live her life without him and started to cry loudly. She reached over and took the whiskey bottle from the bureau and poured a healthy measure into a glass. Taking large gulps that seemed to flow over her anguish she carried on with her thoughts. She remembered his constant letters, she knew about Danny long before she had ever met him. She remembered her joy at seeing Dave again after the war and knowing that his life was no longer in danger. This caused her to take another large swallow of whiskey to steady her nerves. She remembered the birth of their first child John, then Mary and finally Emma. Watching them grow up brought constant happiness to both her and David. She took another drink and finished the glass. She then poured another from the now empty bottle and drank herself into oblivion.

Chapter 9a

“Do you think she'll be alright?” Stuart said as he unlocked the door for Danny to get in.

“I think she'll have to get over it in her own way,” Danny said getting into the car and shutting it behind him. They put the windows down slightly as the morning was getting to be quite hot. Stuart started the car and after waiting for an old Cortina to pass pulled out into the thin, dirty street. The road out of town was heavily saturated with traffic and their journey through was long and arduous. The conversation was sparse and minimalist until they got onto the subject of John Muir.

“I doubt if he would still be around now,” Stuart said debating to see if Danny wanted to turn back. “Well it's a day out anyway,” Danny said, his eyes fixed firmly on the road ahead.

“Do you know how to trace him when we get there?” Stuart said starting to have doubts about the whole thing. He did not know how Danny would react when he saw Muir and he had had his fill of violence over the last few days.

“Well there's only two Muirs listed in the phone book for the area so I thought that I would give them a try.” Danny said and as if he was telepathic went on, “Don't worry, there won't be any trouble, I'm not after confrontation.”

This settled Stuart a little and when he got to the near empty A38 he began to enjoy the day out. Stuart put his foot down and the car began to eat up the road. In no time at all they were taking the Lichfield turn off. “Pull up a minute,” Danny said opening the phone directory at the place already marked, “Let's try the one in Westfield Road it's only around the corner. Take the first left and then second right.”

Stuart obeyed and they pulled up outside a nice 3 bedroomed house whose garden was just about to bloom.

“You may as well wait here I shouldn't be too long.” Danny said getting out of the car and walking up the path to the front door. Stuart watched as he knocked on the door and a smartly dressed man answered it.

“Excuse me. Sorry to bother you but would you happen to know a fellow called John Muir. He's about 70 now. I'm an old friend of his,” he finished by way of explanation.

“I'm sorry, I'm afraid that I can't help you. I've only lived here myself for a couple of years,” the man said looking down his nose at Danny.

“Thank you, sorry to have bothered you,” Danny said turning around and walking back to his car.

“Bleeding snob,” he said to Stuart, “He's never heard of him. Oh well let's try the other name on the list then.” Stuart looked at the address. It was Flat 3, 42 Shakespeare Street and checked in on the A to Z. “It's over the other side of the city,” he told Danny as he got into the car. Slowly they made their way across until they arrived at their destination. The street had seen lot better days and most of the houses had been turned into flats. A smashed up car had been left on the road side and children who should have been at school were playing around it. A couple of drunks were sitting on the wall half asleep and the litter and general filth of the area seemed to drift up their noses.

“I'll come with you this time,” Stuart said feeling uneasy about being left alone in the car. Danny did not disagree so they both got out and walked up the steps to the front door. A strong smell of urine rose all around them as they looked at the name listings on the door.

“Here it is flat 3. It says Sheila Muir. We may as well give it a try now we are here.” Danny said sounding quite despondent. They rang the bell and waited. They waited quite a long time and were about to go when they heard footsteps coming down the stairs. The door opened and in front of them stood a lady in her seventies hobbling on a walking stick. She was poorly dressed and spoke in a very quiet voice, “Can I help you?”

“Yes, I wonder if you know a John Muir.” Danny said.

“My husband was called John.”

“Did he serve with the Staffords during the war?”

“Yes, look what do you want? You're not with the military police are you?”

“No, my name is Danny McCormick. I used to serve with him during the war.”

"I think that you had better come in," she said opening the door fully. Danny and Stuart followed her up the stairs. She had to stop half way to catch her breath. "These stairs will be the death of me," she said with a sigh and Danny looked at Stuart and smiled. At the top of the stairs she led them into her flat which was small and very untidy. Danny noticed that most of the things that people take for granted were not there. There was no washing machine; no T.V. and only two chairs that forty years ago would have seen better days. The floor was not carpeted and with the little fire that she had she must have got quite cold in winter. "Is this how they treat the old soldier's families," he thought to himself in disgust, "I wonder if it would have been better under German rule, at least they had a lot better pensions than this country."

She offered them a seat but they declined seeing that it would have left her standing. She sat herself down and looking at Danny said, "John mentioned you in his letters. I'm sorry that I thought you were the police, they still come around looking for him even after all these years."

"Could you tell me why he went AWOL and where he is now?"

"I'm afraid the answer is that I don't know to both those questions," she said and Danny looking at her saw that she was not lying, "There was no reason for him to go; he really enjoyed life in the army. He didn't mind the danger either. The first thing I heard was that he just disappeared, the M.P.'s came looking for him and I didn't even know that he was missing. I never saw nor heard from him again, only that he boarded a ship for England in 1947 and the M.P.'s came back to see me and told me that."

"I knew that it was unusual as he never struck me as a coward. I've been meaning to come over for years but with one thing and another I'm afraid that I never got around to it," Danny said lying to make her feel better.

"All I know is that he left me in a bad way financially and I've never got out of the predicament," she said almost tearfully. Danny took out a £20 and left it hidden on the table. They got up and said their goodbyes. They went down the stairs and Stuart said, "I never realised that people still lived like that."

"It says a lot about the country that they could leave their people to live in squalor. I know I go on about the war a lot but I look around me and wonder why we all bothered. We were shit on then and we're shit on now." Danny said seething with anger.

"Well where does that leave us now? We'd better get back and see if the police have uncovered anything new."

They got in the car and Danny said, "Well I thought Muir had something to do with it. He might have been a closer friend of Liversage's than I thought. That leaves us back to square one."

"Let the police sort it out. They know what they're doing after all."

"The police," Danny said laughing, "They haven't a clue. We'd be better off sorting it out ourselves."

The journey home was quiet and uneventful. Danny was thinking all the time but he could not come up with anything. Stuart was just glad that it was all over. As they pulled in front of Danny's house he asked Stuart how much he wanted for petrol. Stuart refused saying that he had enjoyed the day out so Danny invited him in for a cup of tea.

"I tell you what," Danny said after they had entered, "There's some whiskey left from last night. Do you fancy some of that.....Jesus Christ!"

"What's the matter," Stuart said following him in quickly only to be confronted by the sight of Madeleine asleep on the chair with an empty bottle of whiskey beside her and a pool of vomit around her front.

"I'll give you a hand to clean up," Stuart said looking around the kitchen for a cloth and mop bucket to clean the carpet. "I think that we'd better get her to bed. She's going to have a blinding headache," Danny said and Stuart helped him take her up the stairs. Danny took the vomit stained cloths downstairs and put them in the washing machine. "We should have fetched some more clothes from her house really," Stuart said as Danny switched it on.

“These will be clean and dry in no time. I thought that it would be safe to leave her on her own.”

“Death affects different people in different ways. If we are not careful she might end up an alcoholic.”

“Just give her a few days to get most of the pain out of her system then we'll take away the crutch before it gets too much for her.”

“I'm afraid that I've got to get off, I've got a violin lesson later on,” Stuart said. He was not going to bother with the lesson but he had got back from Lichfield a lot earlier than he thought.

“Well thanks for the lift and giving me a hand with Madeleine,” Danny said sincerely.

“Oh don't mention it,” Stuart said opening the back door, “I'll be back about 5 if you need me for anything.”

“Thanks see you,” Danny said as the door shut.

Chapter 9b

Around 9 o'clock the same morning as Danny and Stuart took their trip to Lichfield Steve Johnson's next door neighbour was in the garden hanging out the washing when she noticed that his back door was wide open. Natalie Davidson was an overweight divorcee of 35 of age. She had always had a soft spot for her next door neighbour, the elderly man with the heart trouble she would call him, and spend many an afternoon with him drinking tea and talking about all the subjects under the sun. There was no doubt about it he was well traveled but if she would have known the full story she would have seen him in a different light.

She went to the back door and called him but there was no answer. She went inside and looked around downstairs. The lights were switched off and the curtains drawn so she went and opened them. She noticed the half full cup of tea and thought it strange. Feeling that he might have had another heart attack she went upstairs and knocked on what she thought was his bedroom door. Hearing no answer she opened the door and looked inside. The room was empty; completely empty it was the wrong room. She went to the other room and knocked again but this time called his name. Hearing no answer she opened the door and froze in her tracks. Blood had stained everywhere, the walls and bed clothes were covered, the carpet as well. It was then that she saw it, a caved in head, battered to a pulp with the brain oozing out. She stepped back onto the landing and threw up. Quickly she ran out of the house and down to the call box on the corner. She dialed the police and told them of her find. Within minutes a nearby squad car was outside the house. Natalie was standing outside shaking violently but composed herself enough to let the police in. She gave a statement, albeit erratically as her mind was trying to blank out the events and then went back to her house.

D. I. Holland sat behind his desk in the smoke filled office and looked through his papers. He had a lot on his mind. His boss was giving him a hard time because of Pearce's murder. It was only a small town and the last murder was 3 years ago when a wife stabbed her husband to death whilst he slept. It had attracted coverage from both the national newspapers and television and he had come under a lot of pressure to get it sorted out quickly. He was getting nowhere fast; the murder weapons were left at the scene of the crime and neither of them had finger prints on. The assailant or assailants must have been covered in blood but no fragments of cloth were found near the area, nobody had seen anything. There was nothing taken and he was very lucky that he had kept most of the story out of the papers. Pearce must have an enemy because this was not a burglary that went wrong. He had checked around the rapidly diminishing mental institutions to see if any violently insane inmates had escaped. He cursed the government for their care in the community plan because it was going to make his job even harder. He had checked into Liversage's background and found that he had been shot at the front line in Italy in 1944. What he uncovered about him made his blood boil. What were the likes of McCormick and Pearce doing around the likes of Liversage? Okay McCormick was quick with his fists but he would not steal from dead bodies and by the sound of it Liversage was lucky to be killed when he was. He had also uncovered another name during his

investigations, the name of Stephen Johnson who was good friends with them both. His thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Come in."

A tall policeman entered the spartan room, a room with only two chairs, a desk and filing cabinet.

"There's been another one gov'ner," he piped up he must have been a fan of the Sweeney.

"Oh Jesus, I think my jobs going to be up for grabs soon." Holland said getting up from behind the desk and following the constable out to the car.

"Has the victim got a name," Holland said as they drove to the scene.

"Yes, the man was called Johnson sir."

"Not Stephen by any chance?" Thinking that the way things were going it was a forgone conclusion.

"Yes that's right. Did you know him sir?"

"No, just call it a premonition Baker, just a premonition."

Soon they were pulling up in Devon Road and seeing another crowd gather outside of the house. Holland said, "Haven't these people anything better to do than watch over other people's misery. It must be the worst kind of voyeurism out." He had got very cynical over the years. "I suppose it was part of the job," he would say to himself when he had had a particular bad day and by the time he had got home the pub was shut. Not that he liked drinking in pubs because being a small town he would frequently bump into people he had put in prison and they had long memories.

They barged their way to the front of the crowd and the policeman standing at the front door let them in. At the bottom of the stairs they saw the police surgeon.

"What's the story then Andrew?" Holland said and suffered a mild case of Deja vu.

"Severely battered cranium, looks like cardiac arrest as well but I won't be sure till we get him down for an autopsy."

"Jeff?" Holland went on to the forensic man.

"Nothing stolen, no weapon traced. No fragments of cloth found, found by a Mrs. Natalie Davidson his next door neighbour."

"Has she made a statement?"

"Yes but she's still a bit shaken. We'd thought we'd leave it a day or two to see if there was anything she might have forgotten. Anyway she found the body the morning after; we estimate that Johnson died around 12.30."

"Oh well it looks like another blind alley murder. I'll get back to base and see what I can dig up," Holland said leaving the scene. "I think I had better have another word with McCormick," he thought as he got into the car, "But first I had better see the chief," he sighed not looking forward to another carpeting.

He drove back to the station and on arrival was greeted by the desk sergeant, "The chief wants to see you Dermot."

"Somehow I thought he might," Holland said with a false laugh as he made his way to the office.

"Come in," a voice said from behind the door after Holland had knocked.

"Ah Holland," Superintendent Stuart Martin said as Holland came in, "I've been expecting you."

"Sir," Holland said standing to attention.

"Well get on with it I'm a busy man."

"Yes, well err, I am afraid with the murder of Mr. Pearce there's no clues and this morning we found the body of a Mr. Stephen Johnson, the only connection I've come up with is a man called Danial McCormick," Martin interrupted him at that moment, "Danial McCormick, well bring him in what are you waiting for?"

"Well at the time of Pearce's death he was at his house."

"Any witnesses?"

"Yes Pearce's wife Madeleine. Actually they are good friends of McCormick's and he himself is probably in danger."

“What does McCormick have to say about it?”

“Well he says nothing. The name of a David Liversage came up but that was from Pearce's wife Madeleine. It turns out that Pearce thought he saw him the night before his murder and this led him to having a nightmare.”

“Well,” Martin said interrupting again, “Bring in Liversage then.”

“I'm afraid he was killed in action in Italy in 1944.”

“What don't waste my time with ghost stories,” Martin said, his face red with anger, “Get out and find the maniac that's doing this.”

“Yes sir,” Holland answered with a sneer and shut the door behind him. On the other side of the door he laughed to himself, he was quite partial to winding Martin up.

They had never got on well. Martin was a university graduate without an ounce of common sense who got the job over Holland's head. Holland himself could not tolerate incompetence and made it clear to all and everyone who would listen. He knew that Martin was trying to get him transferred and if he could not sort these murders out his job was on the line and the way it was going with only McCormick as a link he could soon be directing traffic.

He left the station and made his way over to McCormick's house in Davies Street. He knew that he would be late home that night. He and his wife Sylvia would probably have a blazing row about him never being home. His marriage was on the way out he thought to himself as he got into the car. In fact maybe directing traffic would be a good idea. After all it would be a lot less hours and he would meet a better class of people. He laughed loudly again remembering the look on Martin's face.

Chapter 10

Madeleine woke up with a blinding head ache. How did she get to bed? Who undressed her? Thoughts in her mind were blinded by the pain. “Jesus,” she said, “I wish I was dead,” and then chastised herself for saying it especially after the death of Dave. Danny was downstairs and heard her moving about. Her clothes were clean and dry and all the mess had been cleared up. He grabbed her clothes and took them upstairs, leaving them outside he knocked on the door. “Are you up Madeleine?” he said softly because he guessed that she might be feeling pretty fragile.

“Yes,” she said quite softly herself, “Have you got any aspirin?”

“I've left your clothes outside, there's aspirin downstairs,” he said with a knowing smile, after all he had been in that condition many times himself. He went downstairs and looked for the aspirin. He heard the door open and shut again as he put the kettle on and waited for her to come down.

“How are you feeling you look a bit fragile,” he said sympathetically.

“Oh my head I'm sorry I drank your whiskey. Did I do anything stupid earlier this morning?”

“Here,” Danny said passing over the aspirin and a cup of tea, “Don't worry about the whiskey and no, you didn't do anything wrong. Have you been in touch with any of your family yet?” he said changing the subject thinking that she might be feeling uneasy with the subject of her being drunk.

“No, I haven't felt up to it yet.”

“You can use my phone when you feel ready.”

“Thanks. What happened earlier, I only remember waking up in a night gown in my bed,” she said sheepishly.

“I'm afraid that you had a bit too much to drink so me and Stuart put you to bed.” He did not mention the vomit not wanting to embarrass her further.

“What happened to my clothes?”

“I thought that I had better wash them whilst you were asleep. I haven't been over to pick up any of your clothes yet. I'll ask Stuart if he will take a ride over.”

“We seem to be putting on him a lot recently.”

“Yes, well I think he enjoys it he's quite a lonely person really.” Danny said. He still had a lot on his mind. He was wondering why a man like Muir would desert and why he did not get back to his wife

or get in touch with her when he came back to England in 1947. Things did not add up and he could not put his finger on it and that made him angry.

"You look as if you've got a lot on your mind," Madeleine said noticing his quietness.

"Oh sorry I was miles away thinking of nothing in particular."

"You've had it bad yourself recently, what with Lucy and then Dave."

"Yes I must admit I've shed a tear or two recently but the pain gets less and less every day."

"How did you cope?"

"Well I cut my drinking down and just kept busy to try and keep my mind occupied."

"You cut down drinking?" Madeleine said in surprise.

"Yes it's a dangerous road to go down because if you get too dependent on it, it gets harder to come off it. It's a downward spiral."

"Yes I guess you're right," Madeleine said not really believing him.

"Believe me it does get better," Danny said picking up on her doubts.

They were interrupted by a loud knock on the door. "I wonder who that is," Danny said getting up and going to see.

"Detective Inspector Holland," Danny called back to Madeleine as he opened the door to let him in. Holland walked in and said hello to Madeleine. Danny followed him and they both sat down.

"Any news about Dave's killers?" Madeleine said straight out without the normal pleasantries.

"No, I'm afraid that that's not what I've come about."

"Oh," Danny said.

"No I'm afraid that I've got some very bad news, it's about a friend of yours," he said looking at Danny, "Stephen Johnson was found dead this morning."

Danny was visibly shocked and Madeleine started to cry.

"Heart attack?" Danny said.

"No he was badly beaten to death," Holland answered, at that Madeleine cried even louder. Danny comforted her, he was getting used to it now and she eventually calmed down.

"The thing is Mr. McCormick we believe that the killings of both men were done by the same person or people and your life might be in danger. I'm here to offer you police protection," Danny interrupted him there and said that he did not need it.

"Fair enough, that's your choice but I'm also here on another matter," Holland said and waited awhile for Danny's reaction.

"Well, what is it?"

"I wonder if you could tell me about David Liversage, his name seems to crop up a bit too much for my liking," Holland went on, trying to sound friendly.

"He was just someone that I used to serve with," Danny said reticently. At that moment Madeleine interrupted saying, "Tell him the full story Danny. It's gone too far now."

Danny thought awhile and seeing how upset she was decided he had better come clean and tell the full story and face the consequences, "Well okay Liversage was a low life, don't get me wrong I've done a few bad things in my life but I would never stoop that low. He was a coward and a thief and he made a lot of enemies when he started to steal from dead bodies. It was only a matter of time before somebody killed him. It just happened to be me Steve and Dave that's all. We beat him to death."

"Just a minute," Holland said thinking that he was lying, "Which one of you shot him?"

"Shot him, none of us. We kicked him to death."

"Don't lie to me he was found shot on the front line," Holland said accusingly.

"I don't know who you found but we left Liversage about a mile behind the front and he wasn't shot."

Holland had a lot on his mind. The jigsaw was coming together but he still had to find the final piece. He had a funny feeling that Danny knew how to find it. Danny had guessed the same as Holland but he had more pieces and as a matter of personal pride was going to sort it out himself.

“So do you have any idea of who could be doing this?” Holland said almost in desperation.

“Has he any relations or anything like that?” Danny said trying to throw him off the scent but Holland would not let it go, “Did anyone disappear around that time?”

“There was a war on, people were dying everyday. Life was cheap around that time we just got on with our jobs and kept our heads down.”

Holland knew that he was getting nowhere so he said his goodbyes, told Danny to be careful and left. He went back to check the records for anyone who had gone AWOL mysteriously.

After he had left Madeleine said, “When will it ever end Danny?”

“Soon, very soon, do you think that you would be up to going back to your house to fetch some clothes?”

“Well I suppose I'd better go back there sometime. You're not trying to get rid of me are you?”

“Oh no you can stay here as long as you like, it's just that I know what you women are about wearing the same clothes everyday.” Madeleine laughed but clothes were not on her mind.

“Okay,” she said not really sure if she was ready to go back yet.

“Well I've got to see a few people later so I'll be gone. I'll get Stuart to keep an eye on you.”

“I'm not a child,” she said sharply.

“I know, it's just that with things going the way they are, it might be safer if someone was with you,” Danny said soothingly.

“I'm sorry but I'm a bit on edge at the moment.”

Just then Danny heard Stuart's car pulling up and went to the door to call him over. “Alright Stuart I was wondering if you weren't busy would you drop Madeleine back to pick up some clothes?”

“Yes okay, how is she today?”

“Well she's got a blinding head ache and can't remember how she got undressed and went to bed,”

Danny said laughing, “Oh don't mention the sick she doesn't know about it, it will only embarrass her.”

“Okay,” Stuart said laughing, “Does she want to go straight away?”

“Well if you could. I've got to go out a bit, I was wondering if you could keep an eye on her whilst I'm gone.”

“Yes sure, it would be a pleasure,” Stuart said walking in. He must have spent more time around Danny's in the last couple of days than he had in his own home.

Chapter 11

“Madeleine,” Danny shouted from the front door, “Stuart said it would be alright.”

“Oh thanks Stuart,” she said as he walked into the room.

“That's alright don't mention it,” he said with a comforting smile, “But are you sure you'll be up to it?”

“I guess I'll have to be,” Madeleine said with an air of resignation.

“I've got to get off now,” Danny said putting on his coat, “I shouldn't be too long.”

After he had left Stuart turned to Madeleine and asked if she had contacted her children yet.

“I'll go and do it right away,” she said getting up to go to the phone, “Don't worry,” she said,

“Danny said it would be alright.”

She dialed the first number and waited for the voice on the other end. “Hello,” she said, “Is that you John it's your mother here. I'm sorry I haven't been in touch with you but...I suppose you heard the news about your dad, well the funeral's at St. David's next Tuesday. I'm sorry, I'm very sorry,” she said breaking down in tears once more as she put down the receiver.

The next two conversations on the phone were just as emotionally charged but after she had made them it was like a great weight was lifted off her. She turned to Stuart and said, “I'm glad that's over, it took a lot out of me.”

“You've got a very busy day ahead; if it gets too much just tell me.”

“Okay, let's have a cup of tea before we set off,” Madeleine said going into the kitchen. Stuart

remained in his seat, all the time thinking of the lousy violin lesson he had to put up with earlier. With all the events of the previous days the lessons seemed even less significant than usual. One day his luck would change and he could see himself standing in a big house.

"There you are," Madeleine said passing him a mug of tea and interrupting his thoughts. Stuart took the mug and thanked her and they sat and drank their teas in silence.

"Well," Stuart said after he had finished, "I suppose we'd better get started then."

"Yes," Madeleine said getting up, "Sooner we start the sooner we finish."

They left the house and went into the warm sunny street. There was no traffic about so they got to Nelson Street quite quickly. Madeleine had to sit in the car awhile to compose herself. It was the first time that she had seen the house since the murder of her husband and it had overwhelmed her emotions again. Forcing herself to face her torment she opened the door of the car and slowly walked down the path. Every step seemed to get harder and it took most of her self control just to get to the door. She looked through the front door and saw that nothing was out of place and this seemed to reassure her considerably. The step over the thresh-hold was probably the hardest step that she had taken in her life and once she had overcome it, it gave her a sense of great relief.

Stuart's voice came from the kitchen, "They've cleared it up very well." He was surprised to see her enter the room so soon. He looked at her as she looked around the room with a blank expression. All the blood had been cleaned and nothing looked out of place except the large kitchen knife and secateurs had been removed. Even the door had been repaired and it came as quite a relief to Stuart as he was never very adept in the DIY department. Looking at Madeleine he was surprised at how calm and collected she was. He was even more surprised when she offered to make him a cup of tea. He declined thinking it would be unwise for her to stay too long on her first visit. It might be a time bomb in her mind and besides he felt uncomfortable himself in the house.

"Do you need a hand fetching anything down from the bed room?"

"No, I'm only taking a little, I think I might be moving back in a couple of days," she shouted down from upstairs and in no time at all she had come down with a bag of clothes. "This should do," she said putting it down on one of the chairs. Stuart was getting hungry by now what with all the goings on he had not had much to eat over the previous days. He said, "Are you hungry?"

"Yes I'm starving I haven't ate much recently," she replied giving the place a look over once again.

"Look why don't we go down to the cafe on Richmond Road. I couldn't be bothered making anything myself." He said looking at his watch to make sure that it would still be open.

"Yes I haven't been out for a meal in years," and this brought back memories of her and Dave. The pain was slightly less now, though still unbearable. Stuart checked the back door to make sure that it was locked and gave the place one last look over. Madeleine picked up the bag of clothes and following him out locked the door. "We'll walk if you like, it's only around the corner," Madeleine said as Stuart was opening the car door.

"Okay but leave the clothes in the back," Stuart said taking the clothes off her and putting them on the back seat. It was still warm but the day was turning into night as they set off down Nelson Street to their destination. Cars were pulling up as people were returning from work, coming back to a warm home and expecting their teas on the table. The journey was over almost as quickly as it had begun and they were standing in front of Dave's Cafe in no time at all. The smell of food wafted out into the street activating their taste buds. The cafe itself was just a converted terraced house whose outside paintwork had seen better days. This did not bother Stuart though as he had used the place before. The food was good and cheap, two words that did not usually go together.

They opened the door and walked in, the place was empty. They were lucky because they had only just beaten the rush hour. Walking towards the counter Stuart ordered two teas and asked Madeleine what she would like to eat. She ordered a normal dinner with no dessert and Stuart had the same. They took their seats and waited for the man behind the counter to bring it over when it was ready. The cafe itself was pretty clean compared to some that Stuart had been to in his time. The chairs were neatly stacked under the table and the floor was shining. They must not have expected any

more customers and had started to clean up, Stuart thought to himself.

"You've been very brave today," Stuart said almost patronising although he did not mean it that way.

"To tell you the truth I'm glad it's all over," Madeleine answered and then went on, "Tell me Stuart, have you ever been married?"

"Oh yes, to Helen," he stopped awhile, "You know that's the first time I have ever mentioned her name since the split."

"Divorced?"

"Yes, she was a social worker who got involved in a lot of protests and stuff, you know save the whale, women's rights and all that. Well I suppose I should have realised that she did not have much of a home life when she started going away for weekends. Well maybe because she could not have children or maybe because the pressures of work became too tiring she took solace in another's company."

"Did you know him?" Madeleine asked although it was an irrelevant question.

"Her."

"What?" Madeleine looked at him with a mixture of horror, shock and disgust and she was not the only one. The man behind the counter, a rather fat, hairy man in a vest, had been bringing their dinners over to them and had caught most of the conversation.

"Yes, that's why I could not bring myself to mention her name; it's something that's hard to live down. The reactions of you and that fellow behind the counter are about average. I turned to drink to help me through. It cost my house, my job and my self respect before I got over that little problem. Mind you I did not have that much self respect before I started drinking. That's why I don't like to see you turn to drink. It might comfort you short term but its long term effects outweighs its benefits a hundred times."

Madeleine said nothing. The shock of Stuart's last statement and what McCormick himself had told her threatened to take away the solace that she would need until after the funeral. She had a lot on her mind, weighing up the odds of alcoholism against the torment that was tearing against her. She thought back to how she had been for the first few hours after Dave's death and did not think that she could cope any more. At least with the whiskey she could sleep soundly at night. Maybe it would not affect her as it had affected Stuart because Danny seemed to cope with it. They both sat quietly eating their meals, not a word passed between them. Madeleine had a lot on her mind but Stuart thought the silence was down to the fact that his wife had left him for another woman. Feelings of inadequacy returned to him once more.

Chapter 12.

Danny shut the door behind him and briskly walked down the path. The hot sun shone all around him bringing life to all around it but he had too much on his mind to ponder on the workings of nature. He turned left at the top of the path and carried on to the top of the street. He turned left and went down an alleyway to sit down for a while. He took out his tobacco and papers and made himself a cigarette. He was not a heavy smoker in fact he had not had one all day it was just that it helped him to think. D.I Holland's remarks had sent his mind into turmoil. He was sure that he and Johnson had killed Liversage but his body was found a mile away from where it had happened and with a bullet in it. He lit his cigarette and settled back a while to enjoy its taste. It seemed to send a glow across him as he emptied his mind ready to start putting the jigsaw into it.

"Are you alright Mr. McCormick? "A young child asked as she and her friend came running down the alleyway.

"Yes fine kids. I'm just getting old that's all."

He carried on smoking, waiting for Stuart and Madeleine to vacate the house. He had a lot on his mind and he wanted to be alone to think. As soon as they had left he would sneak back to the house for that was where he did most of his serious thinking. He finished his cigarette and threw the butt

onto the floor. He extinguished it with his foot as he got up to go back and see if the car was still there. Luckily they had gone. He went back into the house, made himself a cup of tea and settled back to get his thought chain running. Liversage's body was found on the front-line with a bullet in him. True a lot of people would have shot him but they would not have moved the body and anyway why shoot a dead body? He must have been alive when they left him. Maybe someone found him alive and took him to the front and shot him there? That did not add up either and besides there had been no mention of the broken bones with would have aroused suspicion. The body found was not Liversage's so it must have been John Muir's as he was the only person to disappear without reason around the same time. If Liversage had taken another identity he might be still using it. Danny knew that he had come back in 1947 but where did he go to? He could not go back to Lichfield and use that name in case he bumped into someone who knew Muir. No he must be close until he was ready to seek his revenge, but why this long? "Enough," Danny said aloud, "It doesn't matter why."

He went onto the next logical step and that was to find out where he lived, if he lived here at all. He picked up the directory and looked through the list to find the surname Muir that was when he became disappointed. There were no listings. This would make it a lot harder and it would take Danny a lot longer. Time he did not really have because it sounded like Liversage was looking for him. "Well," he said aloud as he got out of the chair, "I suppose that I had better get started then." "Hang on a minute" he thought to himself, "Let's do this logically. There are four main areas in the town and they are all quite close knit. If Liversage lived in one he could quite easily be found just by asking around. Naturally he went to his own area first though he was doubtful reasoning that he would have come across him before. He put on his coat and decided that he would try The Man in the Moon first probably because it was the nearest. He left the house and walked briskly to the pub and was there in no time at all. He entered the pub and it was nearly empty with only one person standing by the bar. Things were not that bad though because that was the one person he had come to see. He nodded to the barman who said, "Alright Danny long time no see what can I get you?" "Just a whiskey Dave alright Jim?"

"Okay Danny sorry to hear about Dave Johnson. I was only drinking with him last night."

Danny picked up his whiskey and beckoned Jim to sit down in the corner with him.

"What's up Danny?"

"Well Jim you know a lot of people around here, more than me probably. Well what it is, is I'm after a name."

"Yes sure Danny, who is it and does he definitely live around here?"

"I think he lives in the town somewhere but I'm not sure. Anyway his name is John Muir."

Jim thought a while but came up with nothing, "I tell you what, leave it with me. I'll ask around but I don't think he's from around here."

"Yes Okay Jim," Danny said but knew that by the time he got back to him it would be too late. He drank his whiskey and said his goodbye leaving Jim wondering what all the fuss was about. Danny knew that if Jim had never heard of him then he must not live in the area. That left three, Stanhill, Sidcup and Brassington. Stanhill was the nearest area to him and the main pub for people of his age was the Green Dragon. He walked to the bus stop and only had to wait a few minutes before the No. 10 turned up. He got on the bus and paid his fare. The bus dropped him straight outside the pub's door so he got off and walked towards it. It was just the same as most pubs around the town. Small and shabby but it served a good pint even though he was not out for a drink. He entered the pub and had a look around, it was a long time since he had set foot in the place and even then he had, had to fight his way out. The place had not changed, the carpets were still the same, the pictures and ornaments around the bar were still the same and it must have been at least twenty years since he had been there. The landlord who had banned him for life had probably lost his own by now. He looked around the locals and remembered a few of them. They looked back and some of them even remembered him. One of them called him over.

"It's Danny McCormick isn't it?" a tall thin man with graying hair and a battered walking stick asked. Danny recognised him but could not put a name to his face.

"Yes that's right. I'm afraid your face looks familiar but I can't remember your name," Danny answered. He did not mean it as an insult but it was not very diplomatic.

"Harry Smith, it's been a long time. What are you having?" the man said putting out his hand which Danny took and shook saying, "A pint of D.B.A please."

"It was here the last time that we met, it must have been 20 years ago you knocked me out and put a couple of my mates in hospital. They were wild days."

Danny did not detect a note of malice or revenge in his voice and took it as an old man being nostalgic. "Yes they certainly were. I got banned for life that night but I suppose the landlord's dead and buried now."

"Oh yes, it's changed hands about four times since him. Anyway what brings you down this area it's not your usual patch."

"To tell you the truth Harry I'm looking for a man called John Muir and this is the main pub in the area so I thought that I would give it a go."

"I'll be honest with you Danny I don't know too many people around here. I tell you what, see that man over there," and nodded towards a man in his seventies sitting on a chair with a border collie at his feet. "He seems to know everyone around here. I'll go and ask him."

Smith returned after a while, "Sorry Danny no joy, he must not live around here."

"Never mind Harry it was worth a try."

They sat and drinking and talking, reminisced on old times. After they finished their drink Danny bought them another which went down just as well. After that Harry asked if he wanted another but Danny regretfully declined, he still had people to see and not much time to spare. "No thanks Harry I've got to get off. Do you know the main pub in Sidcup?"

"Well I suppose it's the Rose and Crown, do you want a hand?"

"No I'm alright. I drink in the Wagoners every Wednesday night if you are over that way. See you around and thanks for your help."

"Anytime Danny I'll see you around," he said as Danny walked out.

Once outside he thought to himself, "Seems like a good bloke I wonder what all the trouble was about?" It had happened so often he had lost track but as he got older he got a lot less quick tempered. He arrived at the bus stop and waited. The cool night air breezed across his face and he felt happy. Whether it was because he had had a good time in the Green Dragon or he was on the hunt he was not sure. He looked at the time table. The bus was due shortly and would stop near the pub. He had been banned from the Rose and Crown as well as the Dragon but that was a long time ago and a lot of beer had flowed under the bridge since then.

The No.2 bus pulled up and Danny got on and paid his fare. He sat at the front and watched the houses pass by. He had traveled all over the country, in fact he had traveled all over the world but he always came home. He liked it here, the small houses, the small pubs, it was where he was brought up and had most of his memories. He sat there thinking of the old times and before he knew it the bus was pulling up at his stop. He thanked the driver, got up and walked the short distance wondering if he would bump into any more old enemies. Hopefully they would have the same attitude as Harry Smith but you never could tell. The pub had changed on the outside from how he had remembered it. The old sash windows had been replaced by storm proof ones. The walls had been rendered and painted white. In fact he nearly did not recognise it only remembering the sign that stood out on the pavement.

The music was loud as he walked into the pub; it was a Foster and Allen record that Danny had not heard in ages. He walked to the bar and ordered himself a pint. He looked around but saw no familiar faces so decided to wait awhile and see if anyone turned up. He took his time with his pint; it was still as bad as he remembered it to be. The jukebox had stopped and the only noise was the noise of customers talking quietly amongst themselves. The beer caught up with him and he had to

go to the toilet. He looked around but the inside of the pub was completely different to what he had remembered so he asked the barman who pointed the way to him. Upon his return he noticed some more customers had come in and he looked over. Recognising one of them as an old workmate he walked over. "Hello Jack, how's it going?" he said to a short fat balding man who was with a woman that Danny took to be his wife.

"Hello Danny long time no see. How have you been? This is my wife Stella by the way."

"Hello Stella, would you both like a drink?"

"Yes thanks Danny; I'll have a pint of bitter and Stella a half of cider."

Danny ordered and paid for the drinks and set about talking to Jack, "So are you still at the old place Jack?"

"No, they made me redundant but it's lucky because the company's going bust soon," Jack answered and Danny noticed an air of satisfaction in his voice.

"Oh well you should be due for retirement soon."

"Yes a couple of months, the redundancy money came in very handy though."

"You ought to be buying me the beer in then," Danny said as a joke.

"Anyway Danny so what are you doing here?"

"Oh I'm looking for someone called John Muir, do you know him?"

"No the name doesn't ring a bell, what about you Stella?" Jack asked and Stella shook her head,

"No, sorry Danny."

"Oh never mind. Do the Emeries still drink around here?"

"Well Pete and Joey are dead and Martin's in an old people's home."

"God I'm getting old," Danny said as he suddenly remembered how many of his friends were no longer about. "Is there anybody here that you know who would be likely to know?" Danny said clutching at straws.

"Well your mate Sammy Stephenson over there might know."

"Sammy, how long has he been in?" Danny asked in surprise.

"Well he was in when I came in. You must have seen him he's sitting by the fruit machine over there," and pointed towards the fruit machine.

Danny looked over and saw the figure of a very thin man with an almost yellowy complexion sitting deeply in the chair. He must have been helped in as he looked too weak to walk. He was coughing loudly, a deep raspy cough that seemed to take over the pub. Danny had heard the cough earlier but had not taken any notice of it. Many people his generation suffered that way whether through heavy smoking or working down the local mines. He turned to Jack and said, "He's only a shell of his former self, what happened?"

"Don't know Danny. It gets us all in the end...age" Jack said somberly.

"I'll nip over and see him," Danny said but first got him a pint from the bar. As Danny walked over to him the gaunt scabby face turned to him and watched him uncomprehendingly. Danny approached and putting the drinks on the table sat beside him. The man's sunken eyes never left him. "Sammy it's been a long time," Danny said trying to sound cheerful but burning up with pity inside.

"Danny," the man said softly, so softly Danny could hardly hear him, "Danny, is that you?"

"Yes Sammy, what's happened to you?"

The man put one of his hands behind his ear beckoning Danny to speak up, "I'm sorry Danny I can't hear you," and Danny had to get closer to hear him. Danny spoke louder, "What happened?"

"I'm not long for this world. It's my kidneys amongst other things," he answered almost as a whisper.

Danny held back a tear as he saw a good friend turn from a large strapping brute of a man into a fragile skeleton and had to suppress it by remembering the anger he had for Liversage.

"Sammy do you know a man called John Muir," he said loudly taking deep breaths to engulf his emotions.

"I've never heard of him Danny," Sammy said weakly, looking at Danny with a deep motionless stare. It was then that it struck him. Sammy was blind. It took more deep breaths to control him from breaking down in the pub.

"Look I've got to go Sammy, I'll see you around." But knew that the next time he saw him it would be when they buried him and Danny thought that that would be quite soon.

He walked back to Jack and said, "Jesus he's in a bad way. I'm afraid he's not long left. Look I've got to get off over to Brassington, is the Red Lion still the main pub around there?"

"Yes I believe so Danny, I'll see you around then," Jack said putting out his hand.

Danny shook it and saying goodbye to Stella went outside. He stopped by the bus stop taking deep breaths. He thought that he was going to break down in tears but anger overcame it. He looked around for someone to hit but there was nobody around.

"Fuck it," he said as he looked at the timetable for the next bus. It was not due for another ten minutes so he thought that he would roll up another cigarette. He was halfway through the operation when he heard singing.

"I belong to Glasgow

Dear old Glasgow town

But what's the matter with Glasgow

For its going round and round."

Recognising him immediately and with anger still inside him he thought to himself, "He'll do."

"Oi come here," Danny spat venomously.

The Scotsman looked across defiantly and walked towards him. It was only when he got quite close did he recognise him, "Oh shit," he said under his breath and walked meekly towards him. Danny looked angrily at him but suddenly pity came over him. He did not know why probably one of the psychiatrists he used to have to see might have been able to explain it to him. "Do you want a fag?" Danny said finishing rolling one up and passing it to him.

"Err thanks," the man said gently taking it off him. Danny started to roll another one and the man started to walk off. "Do you know a man called Muir?" Danny said out of desperation more than anything else.

"Do you mean John Muir?"

"Yes," Danny said in surprise, "Do you know where he lives?"

"Err Westmear Road, No.44."

"Thanks, here have these," Danny said giving him the tobacco and papers, "Don't tell anyone that I asked."

"Okay, thanks and I've never seen you."

Danny was delighted; he could now taste the thrill of the chase. He knew who he was after and where he lived. He did not feel so vulnerable.

David Arthur Liversage was found in a basket outside the local Church of England church hall. A cleaner found him when she had finished her duty and was getting ready to go home. The year was 1917 and it was summer which was lucky for David because he was not very well wrapped. Babies born and abandoned were scorned upon, even more so during the war because people thought that the mother had been unfaithful whilst her husband was away fighting for his country. This is all speculation though because his mother never tried to get in touch with him. As he grew up they called him the devil's child and beat him mercilessly and when he never cried but stood there with a defiant look they beat him even more. He learned to lie from quite an early age and to him it came quite easily, in fact he got that good that he even started to believe some of the statements himself. He was a loner, he had no friends nor wanted any but used to run off on his own and come back days later only to be beaten again. The first time he stole he was 7 years old. It was only an apple

but it was the start of a downward spiral. When he was caught he was beaten again. The beatings got worse as he got older and by the time he had turned 11 he had, had his fill and ran away from the orphanage. He lived the life of a vagrant, stealing where he could and begging when he could not steal. He grew up quickly, mentally if not physically only ever reaching the height of 5ft 4 when he was older. He started to steal more and more and then tried his luck at burglary. His first robbery was a pawnshop owned by an old woman. Rumours were going around that she was wealthy and had her money hid in her bedroom. It was true that she lived frugally, neglecting her health by eating insufficiently to sustain her properly. This was more to do with the fact that she had no money than she was a miser but Liversage was not to know that. He smashed the window of the back door and let himself in. Armed with a hammer he crept upstairs to have a look around the bedroom. He never expected her to be there and was probably more surprised than she was. He raised the hammer and struck her across the head knocking her down and then fled the city. He might have killed her, he did not know, he did not care. He worked or more often than not stole his way up to the midlands. When he was 15 he got involved with a drunken prostitute in a noted red light area of Birmingham. They lived together for about a year until she fell pregnant. It was probably not his but he did not stop to find out. His girlfriend got rid of the child in a back street abortion clinic but the operation went wrong and she died not long after.

He moved over to a small town and got a job at the brewery. This went against his principles but he drank a lot of fringe benefits. He stayed there until the outbreak of the Second World War. During his time there a lot of money went missing from the people working along side him. He was conscripted in the local regiment and was very unpopular because he preferred his own company to that of the soldiers and he never seemed to be about when there was shooting. He became greedy though so he had to start taking risks and would often be on the front line rummaging through the dead bodies of the enemy to make a profit out of selling their possessions. This meant that he had to deal with other people but as most of these were low lives like himself he did not mind. Demand had outstripped supply and he turned to his own dead comrades for artifacts. This led him to receive a severe beating that broke his ribs and left him battered. Luckily for him he was found by one of his clandestine associates coming back from guard duty. He patched him up and swapped his identity when the next suitable dead body was found. He nursed him back to health and kept him in food and lodgings. This was not out of charity though because the soldier made him give him all his money that he had stole as payment. Liversage was left in a foreign country with no money and no hope of getting back but he was a survivor so he started stealing again.

The army had moved out by the time he had recuperated enough to become mobile again and this left rich pickings from the empty houses left speedily behind by fleeing refugees. By 1947 he had earned enough for his passage home and got back quite easily because of the turmoil the world was in.

He met Lisa around 1948 and they had their first and only child David Stuart Muir (because he still used his new identity) the following year. Lisa left in 1950 and he brought up the child on his own. He worked sporadically and stole more often than not to bring up the child. David Stuart was a disappointment to him from the start. He was a sickly child who cried more often than not. He tried his best, he beat him regularly in the hope that it would toughen up but it only made him nervous and timid. He did survive his childhood and in his teens he met Sue, she was an ugly overweight child (that was how her mother described her) of very low intelligence. Between them they had a child called Anthony. David Stuart died not long after from a bad case of flu. His father decided that she was not fit enough to bring his grandchild up so he took him and left London again. He ended up back in Birmingham around 1969 when his grandson was only 3 and stayed there for 5 years. The grandson was brought up on food stolen by Liversage and on Liversage's hatred for the three men that had nearly cost him his life. The grandson was not like his father. In fact he was just the opposite. Although he was small and looked like his father you would not call him timid. In fact he was a sadist who was actively encouraged by his grandfather. He would go out with him and grab a

child of about Anthony's age and make Anthony beat him up Anthony did not like doing it at first but when he got used to it he quite enjoyed it. He decided to move back to the brewery town in 1974 when he got news that David Pearce lived there and the next few years he found out that both McCormick and Johnson also lived there and so got their addresses. He watched his grandson grow up and get worse. He kept the trouble down to a minimum though because he did not want Anthony to get a reputation and draw attention to himself. Anthony grew up wilder and wilder and Liversage's health started to deteriorate slightly. Around 1984 on Anthony's 18th birthday he started to formulate his plan of revenge.

Chapter 13

The little Scotsman staggered off leaving Danny alone with his thoughts. He had thought Westmear Road had been pulled down years ago. He looked at his watch and read 10 o'clock. The pubs would be shutting soon and he made up his mind that tonight was going to be the night. He would need an alibi and it would be pointless going over to see Liversage before 11 because more than likely he would be in the pub. He did not need to catch the bus to Brassington now as Westmear Road was in Stanhill so he crossed the road just as the No.2 was pulling up. He jumped on the bus, paid his fare and then looked around. The bus was empty downstairs so he took his usual seat and enjoyed the ride back to the Green Dragon. He wondered if Harry Smith would still be in there as he would make a perfect alibi and besides he had enjoyed their last conversation. He thanked the driver when he got off at his stop and crossed over towards the Dragon. Once inside he bumped into Harry again and they renewed their conversation.

"Alright Danny, back again so soon," Harry said as he got him a drink.

"Yes Harry I just had to see a fellow over in Sidcup."

"Did you come across that man you were looking for?" Harry said more out of conversation than anything else.

"Oh no I've given up on that. He was just some man I used to know," and then thinking that if he had told him about the real Muir it might come in handy if the police started asking questions, "He used to be in the army until he went AWOL. I just thought I'd check up on him and try and find him but he left years ago. I don't suppose he even lives round here. I'm probably getting silly in my old age."

"Yes I was going to say that it must have been 40 years ago."

"Jesus how time flies, it just catches up on you. Same again?"

"Yes cheers Danny," and then went on, "Tell me something, what was all that trouble about all those years ago."

"You know what Harry I'm blowed if I can remember. I was thinking that after I left you earlier."

"Ah well it's a long time ago," and took a drink from the full pint on the bar.

The conversation went on and the time passed quickly with the bell for last orders sounding to finish the night.

"Guess I'll get off now," Danny said shaking Harry's hand and saying his goodbyes. He went into the night and briskly walked towards Westmear Road. He had a lot on his mind, it was more than revenge it was self protection as well. He got to Westmear Road and put his gloves on. He had a look around. Most of the houses were boarded up as if waiting demolition. Litter and scrap metal were strewn around all the front gardens if you could call them that. They were small rectangular boxes about 7ft by 10. He looked down the road, saw No.44 and walked slowly towards it. Seeing there were no lights on or no sign of life he took a walk down the entry next to it. It was very dark and he had to feel his way down by holding onto the walls. He nearly tripped on some rubble that was lying on the floor but caught himself just in time. As he got out of the dark entry the back of the house was a lot lighter because of the moonlight and he could make out all the gardens. Old house doors and undressed bricks were piled up everywhere and it looked like a bomb site. How could anyone live in a place like this he thought, and then laughed to himself because he knew that it

would not be Liversage's problem soon. He got to the back door and kicked it in. The door flew open and crashed against the kitchen unit. The stench of bad drains overpowered him and made him hold his breath for a few seconds. "Jesus Christ," he said to himself and looked around. Rising damp climbed the walls and mould flourished on the ceilings. The wall paper hung of the wall in jagged splints, most of the units had no doors and the floor was covered in old newspapers. He made his way from the kitchen into the main rooms, which were just as bad as the kitchen, and stood and waited. He was going to sit down on one of the chairs but did not want to get his trousers dirty. He waited for around a minute and then he thought that he had better have a look around to see if Liversage had any weapons lying around.

The living room was a mess, old clothes and newspapers were piled up everywhere. Empty cans of bitter and empty whiskey bottles were mixed liberally with the other litter. "No sign of anything here," he said to himself as he moved to another room and found nothing there either. He found a hammer upstairs and thought that it might come in useful later. He made his way downstairs once again and took his position and waited. The room was dark but he did not want to put the light on as it might warn Liversage.

His ears picked up as he heard a key go into a lock and then the click as the key turned. The door opened and a figure moved inside. Danny was hiding behind a battered sofa at the time but he could see everything. The light switch was clicked on and the light flooded into the room. Danny let Liversage get inside and shut the door behind him. He recognised him immediately although Liversage was a lot older and had to walk with the aid of a stick. It was then that Danny showed himself and Liversage's face was took by surprise, but only for a few seconds.

"Well, well well, your time has come Weasel," Danny said

Liversage looked at Danny and said, "You can't hurt me McCormick, I've been beaten all my life and never screamed. Not like your mate Pearce, God how he begged and then cried like a little baby."

Danny mind was sent into turmoil. Originally he had only come to kill Liversage but now, how could he after what Liversage had said. Danny did not know about Pearce begging and it sickened him in the stomach. He was going to have to do the same to Liversage to wipe the arrogant sneer off his face. Jumping towards Liversage he grabbed him by the throat and pushed him up against the wall. He pounded his fist into Liversage's stomach. Liversage's expression never changed. Again and again he pummeled his stomach but the defiant expression remained in his face. His grasp on Liversage's throat tightened and he could feel Liversage gasping for breath. He could have killed him there and then but it was too soon. Liversage had not begged, he had not cried. He just looked at him; the look of defiance never left his eyes. Danny loosened his grasp and Liversage caught his breath, "I'll never beg, not like Pearce he was a cry baby."

With that Danny struck him with a right hook that sent him sprawling to the ground. His body lay motionless on the floor while Danny had a look around the lit room. Now that is was lit up the room looked even more untidy than when it was dark. His eyes scanned across and fell upon a tool box that was in one of the corners. He looked back at Liversage but he was going nowhere so he walked over to the tool box and opened it.

"Ah ha," he said looking inside, "You're going to scream now you little shit. You're going to scream louder than Pearce, a lot louder."

He took the heavy duty electric drill and a large drill bit. "Nicked these did you?" he said but Liversage could not see what he was doing. Danny knew what he was going to do and when his eyes lit upon a large bolt with a nut on it he took it out and got a large spanner to fit it.

He put the bit into the chuck of the drill and plugged it into the extension lead and brought it over to Liversage. He kicked him in the stomach to rouse him and Liversage turned and looked up at him still with a defiant glare. His eyes saw the drill and his face dropped but not for long, "You ain't got the bottle."

Danny pressed the start button on and the drill whirred to life. He flipped the switch off and stood

there looking at Liversage with a smile. Liversage became slightly uneasy but never had the sense to be scared. Danny stood there looking down at him, savouring the moment and wanting to make him sweat. As he saw Liversage's face he thought that he might not break. "Oh well," Danny said, "Let's get it over with." Liversage looked up. He did not know what Danny was thinking but he knew that it would not be pretty. "I'm going to bolt your knee caps together,"

"You haven't got the bottle," Liversage again though Danny detected an uneasiness in his voice.

Danny went over and kicked Liversage in the stomach make him curl up on the floor. He switched the drill back on and slowly brought it down towards the side of Liversage's knee cap. Liversage looked, his eyes were panic stricken, and then he waited. He closed his eyes to try and black out the pain he knew was coming, and then it came. The drill bit tore into his trousers shredding fragments of clothing and spurting it into the air around him. Then came the skin mixed with blood. Liversage screamed out and Danny was happier but he still carried on. The drill's voice changed as it tore into the bone sending more fragments into the air. Liversage's screams grew louder and more panic stricken as the bit made its way through the bone and out of the other side. The pain lulled for a few seconds but Liversage knew it would be returning soon. His screams never stopped and then it came. "Please spare me. Don't kill me, I've got money."

"Like you spared Pearce and Johnson, I've hardly started yet," Danny answered with a scowl and put his foot on Liversage's other leg clamping it down to the floor. The sound that Liversage dreaded, the sound of the drill started and soon it had penetrated the trousers again. As it went through the skin again it was barely audible above the sounds of Liversage's screams. The pain grew inside Liversage, the pain of his childhood, the pain of his lonely friendless life. The pain of the drill bit entering the bone, the pain of the drill bit going through the bone everything together, all at once. He could feel himself about to cry but he suppressed it like he had all his life. He would not give McCormick the satisfaction of seeing him cry, he had not given anyone the satisfaction of seeing him cry. Danny pulled the drill bit out and tossed the drill aside. Blood stained everywhere around the area. A nasty smell of burning flesh and material covered the air. He reached out and picked up the bolt. He hammered it into one of the knee caps causing Liversage to scream as the metal tore at the remnant of bone and skin. Danny lifted up Liversage's other leg, lined up the two holes and hammered the rest of the bolt through... Liversage screamed, the tears were trying to come out but he held them back.

"You'll never break me McCormick," he shouted, defiance back in his eyes. Danny was impressed but he had a job to do. He was in a hurry because the screams might have woken up any nearby neighbours. He put the nut on the bolt and tightened it up drawing the two knee caps together. Every time the knees moved they sent shooting pains all through Liversage's body. The bolt and nut started to sink into Liversage's legs ripping through the skin and only stopping at the bone. Danny stood back and admired his work. Liversage's body lay there motionless but he was still breathing. Danny checked for that as he never made the same mistake twice. He decided although not from pity to quickly put him out of his misery.

He lifted the hammer and cracked it against Liversage's skull. Again and again in a frenzy until Liversage gasped his last breath. Danny switched off the light, made his way through to the back door and checking to see that there was no one about, went out onto the street. As he walked down the street towards the canal he took off his gloves and put them in his pocket. He made sure that nobody was about because his trousers were heavily blood stained. He got rid of the gloves well away from the scene of the crime and made his way home. Luckily Madeleine had gone to bed by then so he got inside and changed his trousers. He put them into one of his neighbours' bin to be hopefully taken away by the following morning's refuse collectors.

He sat down and rolled himself a cigarette. As he smoked it he relaxed. His friends had been revenged and he felt safe once more. He would sleep well that night.

Chapter 14

Holland sat behind his desk shuffling papers; he had a lot on his mind. Since his interview with McCormick earlier his mind had been in total confusion. Martin, his boss was giving him trouble. He was under pressure to solve the murders quickly because of the unwanted media attention it was attracting. His marriage was going through a rocky patch, his wife always complaining that he was never there. He looked at his watch, it was 5.00 and he still had a lot to get through. Pearce was mutilated and it looked like he was tortured. There was nothing taken so that ruled out burglary. Why was he tortured? The only reason would be that he was after information and what with Johnson being killed the following day it was too much of a coincidence. Johnson, like McCormick was well known to the police and also they were both friends of Pearce's. Chances are that McCormick was involved in there but not as a suspect. During the interview McCormick was surprised to hear that Liversage had been shot. He was also surprised about the body's location. The body found and buried as Liversage could not have been him. All he had to do was to find out who went missing during that time. Inspiration caught him and he decided to call one of his friends, Colin English, who was in the same regiment as McCormick and knew him well. He picked up the phone and dialed. "Hello," a voice said on the other end.

"Hello Colin, its Dermot Holland here."

"Hello Dermot, how are you?"

"Not bad. I'm after a favour. You were fighting in Italy with Danial McCormick weren't you?"

"Yes, why do you ask?"

"I'm looking for a name. Do you know if anyone disappeared during the time of David Liversage's death?"

"That bastard I haven't heard his name in years. Err. Well yes, a fellow called Muir, John Muir, that's it. He went AWOL but I don't know why. It was a surprise to me, he was a good friend and I never took him as a coward."

"Do you know where he came from originally?"

"Oh yes, he lived in Lichfield. Married to a woman called Sheila but I'm afraid that I don't have their address."

Holland thought to himself that they would have probably moved by now anyway.

"Well Col thanks for you help I'll see you sometime," Holland said and put the phone down. His instincts told him that Muir had something to do with it but what now? He looked at his watch again, it was 5.10. He did want to go through the proper channels because Martin would get the credit so he decided to phone another friend in Lichfield and see what he could do. He picked up the phone once more and dialed.

"Hello D.I. Warley, how may I help you?" a voice said on the other end.

"Hello Andy its Dermot, Dermot Holland."

"How have you been Dermot?"

"Fine Andy look I want you to do me a favour but do it on the Q.T."

"Yes sure Dermot what do you want?"

"I want you to trace a John Muir. I don't know his address but he has a wife called Sheila. Just find out if he's still in Lichfield."

"Okay Dermot I'll see what I can do."

"I'm in a hurry so phone as soon as you can. I'll be in the office."

"Jesus you're keen. Okay leave it with me. I'll get back to you," and put the phone down. He looked through the papers again but his mind was waiting for the phone to ring. He was interrupted by a knock on the door and a uniformed officer walking in, "Martin wants to see you Dermot," he said cheerfully.

"Okay. I wonder what the dick head wants," he said getting out of his chair.

"I think he's on the war path."

Holland walked to the door of Martin's office and knocked. "Come in," a voice said from the other

side.

"You wanted to see me Sir," Holland said walking in.

"Yes Holland, what's the progress," he said in an officious way.

"I'm afraid not much sir. We're asking all the neighbours and have set up a mobile but nothings come up. No finger prints but there is a connection, they were both friends with Danial McCormick."

"You've told me that before," Martin said, his anger rising.

"I'm afraid that's all we've got to go on."

"I've got my superiors breathing down my neck and all you're telling me is that they were killed by a ghost, "He said getting desperate "If I go down I'm taking you with me."

"That's all I've got. The man or men were professionals. I've checked the local nut houses but no ones escaped."

"Okay, get out and see what you can come up with."

Holland left the room, he was in bad humour. He walked back to the office checking his watch. It was 5.30; he had been waiting for 20 minutes. What was keeping Warley, he thought as he put the kettle on. He made himself a cup of coffee and sat down and waited. About 10 minutes later the phone rang. He quickly picked it up and listened.

"Hello Dermot Andy here."

"Hello Andy, what's the news?"

"We located his wife at Flat 3, 42 Shakespeare Street but there was no sign of John Muir. His wife had not seen him since 1944."

"Oh," Holland said as if he had expected it.

"Oh and another thing a bloke called McCormick, Danial McCormick went to see her earlier, he was asking after her husband she said."

"Okay Andy I'll get you a drink sometime. Bye."

Holland put the phone down and sat back in his chair. Then suddenly it came to him in a flash. If Liversage had taken his identity he would not go back to Lichfield, he must be here. Holland knew that he was closing in but finding Muir without Martin knowing would be next to impossible so he decided on telling him all that he knew. He got up, went to his office and knocked on his door.

Upon being told to enter he walked in.

"Yes what is it Holland," Martin said sharply.

"Some new developments concerning Liversage Sir."

"What not more ghost stories don't waste my time."

"This is important sir. We always thought that Liversage was killed in Italy in 1944 but it turns out he wasn't."

"Go on," Martin said, his interest aroused.

"Well it turns out that he was badly beaten and left for dead. In fact they thought he was. Somehow he swapped I.D.'s and made his way back to England. We've checked Muir's address in Lichfield but his wife hasn't seen him since 1944. We think he must be living here now."

"Ah now we are getting somewhere. The ghost has got an identity. Do you know his address?"

"No Sir we have only just found his identity."

"Oh don't worry about it; I'll get it sorted from here. Look why don't you go home. You've been here long enough, surprise you wife."

Holland thought that it was a good idea although he did not want to see Martin get all the credit he ought to get back. Besides it would be unusual to see his wife with a smile on her face.

"Very good Sir I'll get off," he said turning to go.

Chapter 15

Holland left Martin's office and went to fetch his coat. He thought that he had done enough for one day and was looking forward to a quiet night in. He felt bad about letting Martin get all the credit but if it would get a sadistic killer of the streets he would be happy. McCormick's life was still in danger but he would not lose sleep over it. 'Ah sleep,' he thought, 'I wonder what that is,' and laughed loudly attracting looks from people standing around him. He walked out and got into his car just in time for the rush hour traffic and slowly crawled home. He got back at around 6.30 and unlocking the door walked in, "I'm back," he shouted, looking around for Sylvia, his wife. "You're early, I wasn't expecting you. There's no dinner on." she said without the smile he had been expecting.

"Oh don't worry. I'll tell you what I'll call out for a pizza," he said pouring himself a drink from the cabinet.

"Do what you want I'm going out," she answered and put her coat on.

"What do you mean going out?" he demanded sharply.

"Look you live your life and I'll live mine, okay," she answered just as sharply and walked out the door leaving him alone with the bottle.

"I'm not hungry anyway," he shouted after her.

He poured himself another drink and sat down in front of the television for a couple of hours, not watching anything in particular. Around about 9 o'clock the front door unlocked and his wife came back in. She walked through to where he was sitting and sat close but not too close to him. By this time he was quite drunk and falling asleep.

"Dermot I've got something to tell you." he sat there quietly and waited for her to go on. "I've met some one else and I'm leaving."

"Who?" he said taken by surprise, he knew things were bad but he had not realised how bad.

"It doesn't matter who."

"But I want to know. I've got to know."

"Look okay its Miles Rossington," she said hesitantly.

"Miles Rossington, I thought he was gay."

"No he's just sensitive. He doesn't come in all hours drunk to the eyeballs."

"And how do you know about his comings and goings. Have you slept with him, you bitch."

"Yes and at least he can get it up."

At this remark Holland blanked and slapped her across the face sending her flying into the settee.

"Yes hit me that's all you are good for you inadequate little bastard," she said getting up, "I'm leaving. Get that through your thick head."

She left leaving Holland alone with the bottle which he made short work off. He fell asleep on the settee without switching the television off. He awoke next morning with an enormous head ache and a dry taste in his mouth. He looked at the watch; it was only 4 in the morning. The ringing phone gave him a fright. He picked it up and said, "Yes."

"Hello Holland its Martin here," the voice said excitedly, "We've got the address its 44 Westmear Road. We're going in. do you want to come along?"

"Too right," Holland said, "I'll meet you down the station." his headache had disappeared and he felt a lot better. The thought of putting a maniac behind bars made life seem a lot more pleasant.

After all he was a policeman at heart and his job came before his marriage. He thought that his days of directing traffic would never come. He put his coat on and rushed to the car. There was no traffic about and he got to the station just after the briefing. Martin called him over, the look of excitement evident on his face, "You fit?"

"Yes Sir. What's happening?"

"Well we'll cover the back first to stop his escape and go through the front."

They set off and arrived at their destination. They took positions and waited for Martin's signal but it never came. The front door opened and a small, stocky policeman walked out. "I think that you

had better come and see this sir," he said with a look of horror. Martin and Holland walked forward towards the door. "The back door was wide open," the constable said by way of explanation for leaving his post. They entered the room and to Holland's joy Martin threw up. The sight of Liversage lying there with his head caved in and his knee caps bolted together was enough to do it. "What a day," Holland said as he remembered his wife walking out earlier.

Martin recovered slightly and aware that he had lost a lot of face in front of his subordinate said angrily, "Well that knackered your theory," with the emphasis on your. "What am I going to say to the media, they were expecting results?"

Holland realised that he must have contacted the papers to tell them which was unorthodox at the very least. 'The things that man will do to get publicity,' he thought to himself. They checked around the house and finding the drill and hammer they sent it off to the forensic lab but they were clean.

"There must have been a lot of blood on whoever did this," Martin said but he was still nowhere nearer with the man hunt. Holland never answered; he had a lot on his mind. He thought that he had cracked it but now it seemed more mysterious. Pearce and Johnson were dead and now the prime suspect Liversage, if it was because it might have been Muir, lay dead in front of him. McCormick's name kept cropping up and Holland did not like it. It was 8 o'clock by the time they were finished and ready to move the body. A small crowd had gathered to watch. Further back a lone figure watched as the body was brought out, it had revenge on its mind.

Chapter 16

McCormick stood looking out of the window as the refuge collection vehicle pulled off. He had a smile on his face, a wide toothless grin. He had slept well the night before. Madeleine was asleep by the time he had got home and he had time to work out his story. He was expecting the police sometime that day, depending on when they had found the body and how long before they thought it was him. "Ah well," he said aloud, "A cup of tea would go down well," and went into the kitchen. He heard a noise upstairs and wondered if he ought to make her one as well. He heard footsteps and watched the door open. "Morning Danny, I slept well last night."

"So did I. Do you fancy a brew?"

"Yes please I could do with one," she said sitting down.

McCormick brought the tea and said, "Busy day?" and passed her the mug.

"Yes. I phoned the kids and went back to the house. Oh and then I went down to Dave's cafe."

"You were busy. Do you feel any better?"

"Oh yes but I'm not looking forward to the funeral," she answered and took a quick drink to try and soothe herself.

"So," he said changing the subject, "Did Stuart take to the cafe then?"

"Yes," she said with a smile, "First time I've been out in ages."

A loud knock on the door interrupted the conversation. 'They're early,' he thought to himself getting up out of his chair to answer it. He opened the door and D.I Holland and his quiet friend stood there. "Like a few words Danny," Holland said.

"You'd better come in I suppose then," Danny said opening the door. They walked through to the back and greeted Madeleine in a friendly manner. "Well," Holland said to start the conversation,

"We've found another body. A man called Muir. John Muir. I believe that you know him."

"Yes I was in the army with him. What's this all about?"

"Well in a previous question last time I asked if anything unusual happened around the time of Liversage's death. You wouldn't call going AWOL unusual?"

"It happened quite often, there was a war on."

"Yes but not in your regiment he was the first one in years so I thought that would have been unusual wouldn't you," Holland said with a decisive smile.

"Oh I don't know it was a long time ago after all," Danny said flippantly.

“And tell me Danny,” Holland said playing another card, “Why did you visit his wife recently?” This caught Danny by surprise as he had not expected it.

“Well er..,” he said hesitantly, “I haven't seen him in years. I had nothing better to do so I thought that I would have a ride over.”

“Nothing better to do your two best friends had been murdered and you had nothing better to do. I think that you know a lot more than you are letting on.”

“What's that supposed to mean?” Danny said tensing up inside and out.

“I believe that you suspect a man called Liversage of the murders and thinking that Muir was him killed him.”

“Liversage died in Italy in 1944.”

“You admitted earlier that you killed Liversage yourself. When I told you where and how he died you said that it couldn't have been him and you like me found out that it must have been Muir. That's why you went to see his wife.”

“This is all hear say,” Danny said getting desperate.

“I think that you had better come down to the station,” Holland said getting out of the chair.

Chapter 17

McCormick leaving Madeleine alone got into the car and was drove to the station. Inside the car it was quiet nobody said a word during the journey. It seemed to take ages to get there. Danny had been to the station once or twice but not for murder before. He was wondering how they knew about Muir. Holland must have been cleverer than he thought but that did not take much. He was put in a cell for a few hours to let him think about his predicament. There he sat looking around for a while in a small room with a single bed and toilet.

'Hasn't changed much,' he thought to himself, 'I may as well get some kip.’”

He put his feet up and went to sleep. Almost immediately, or so he thought, he was awoken and took down to the interview room. There sitting in front of him was D.I Holland accompanied by D.C Evans who was quiet again.

“Now McCormick,” Holland said in an official voice, “Where were you yesterday evening between the hours of 11 and 12.30.?”

“I was in the Green Dragon talking to a friend.”

“And does this friend have a name?” Holland said not believing him.

“Yes Harry Smith.”

“Well if that's the case the pub shut at 11, what happened afterwards?”

“I didn't leave the pub until 11.30 and then walked down by the canal side.”

“Did anyone see you between the time of 11.30 and 12.30?”

“No,”

“So between 11.30 and 12.30 you walked home.”

“Yes the buses had stopped running and taxis are too expensive. I'm only a pensioner you know.”

“So between 11.30 and 12.30 you have no witnesses to your whereabouts?”

“Yes that's right,” Danny said unperturbed which seemed to infuriate Holland.

“I believe that between those times you killed a man called John Muir.”

“No I walked home during that time. Anyway what motive would I have?”

“You killed Muir thinking he was another man. A man called David Arthur Liversage.”

“And why would I want to kill this Liversage?” Danny mocking attitude was starting to rile Holland.

“I don't think you realise the seriousness of the situation you are in. Maybe a few more hours in the cells would help.” Holland said motioning the constable on the door to take Danny away. Danny was taken back to the cells and brought out every hour or so and asked the same questions to which he gave the same answers. He was getting bored with the game and wanted it to finish soon. He knocked on the door and shouted to the officer behind it, “I want to see Holland and I want to see

him now.”

D.C Evans approached and said, “What's the problem McCormick?”

Danny looked at him with a hint of malice in his eyes, “Oh it speaks does it. Like I said to the other man I want to see Holland and I want to see him now.”

Evans looked at him hard and said, “I'll see what I can do.”

“And don't be too long,” he shouted after him, “Some of us have got homes to go to.”

Evans disappeared for a while and Danny settled himself down with a smile on his face. After all they had nothing on him and he knew that they knew it. He hoped that Madeleine would be alright without him and he was worried that she might have been drinking again. He did not like to see her like that, she had too much class. Thoughts of Lucy came flooding back but no tears. He had come to terms with his grief and only fond memories remained. He had decided to try and get his son to come over and spend some time with him to make up for when he was not there during the lad's childhood. He knew that he would never see his daughter again and regretted this deeply. With his son it was only the other end of the country though and not the world. In fact once the mess was over he thought he might visit him instead.

The door opened and a uniformed officer stood before him, “You wanted to see D.I. Holland?”

“Yes that's right I'm getting pissed off here and I wondered if he knew where there was a good party.”

The officer smiled and said, “You'd better follow me then, I'll start blowing up the balloons.”

Danny followed him, liking his humour and as he walked past the cells he looked at the names on the doors. They seemed familiar to him but he thought that they must be the grandsons of people he used to know. He followed the officer to the interview room and stopped whilst he knocked on the door.

“Come in,” Holland's voice said from the other side.

The officer opened the door and showed Danny in. Holland was sitting on the chair smoking with deep breaths that seemed to take up all his lungs. He looked like he had a lot on his mind, “Yes McCormick, are you ready to talk?” he said half heartedly.

“Right, I'm starting to get pissed off here. Are you going to charge me?”

“Well at present you are helping us with our inquiries.”

“Are you going to charge me?”

“No not at present as I said before you are only helping us with our inquiries.”

“Well if you are not going to charge me then I can walk out when I want. So either charge me or let me go.” Danny said getting up. He looked down at Holland who said nothing which Danny took as a sign that he could go. He made his way to the door which was being blocked by the policeman with the sense of humour.

“Move it or lose it,” Danny said looking him in the eye. The officer looked at him and then at Holland who nodded for him to get out of the way. Danny walked past him and turning at the door said, “If you need me you know where I live but don't waste my time with your silly games.” he walked out the station with a broad smile on his face.

Chapter 18.

Madeleine watched helplessly as they took McCormick away. Could it be that she had been living with a murderer for the past couple of days? She knew that he had done bad things in his time and had killed people but that was war she thought not seeing the irony. She had a lot on her mind. She had enjoyed talking to Stuart and felt pangs of guilt. How could she be happy with her husband only dying a few days ago it did not seem right. She sat wondering whether to go around and see Stuart, more for company and to tell him about Danny than anything else. She felt lonely and looked around to see if there was any alcohol about. Finding none she went to the front window and looked out but Stuart's car was not there. “He must be working,” she said aloud and decided to walk down to the off license to replenish the stock. She opened the front door and stepped into the warmth of

the day. As she walked towards the shop she felt like a school child doing wrong. She had never been brought up to drink on her own. She walked through the open shop door and guiltily asked for a large bottle of whiskey. She put it in a plastic bag to hide it and paid for it. As she walked home she thought that everyone was watching her but it was only in her mind.

She got home and poured herself a large drink. Her children were coming over the next day and she did not know how she would react. Her phone call had been brief and impersonal but that was the only way she could have coped with the situation. She was not looking forward to watching her husband put in the ground and buried. To her it was the end; she would never see him again. Life without him did not seem possible. She took a large drink and let the whiskey do its magic work. It soothed her slightly but still left her tense inside. People had been good to her she thought, especially Danny and Stuart. It's a pity he was not in. How could his wife want to go with another woman? And what about Danny, did he kill that man? She had seen enough of death in the last few days, her husband Dave, Steve Johnson and now some man called Muir or was it Liversage, the man who had given her husband nightmares. Even if Danny had killed him was that a bad thing after all was it not him who had taken her husband's life? She took another drink and settled back with her thoughts. She kept thinking about Dave, her Dave, and how he looked in the kitchen. She shuddered but it was not cold, and took another drink, finishing the glass. Maybe she should not be drinking too much? Maybe she was turning into an alcoholic? No, she was stronger than that she could take it or leave it. After all what's wrong with having a drink anyway? She poured another drink and took another swallow. Her head was getting lighter and the things around her did not matter so much. She thought of Stuart again and laughed. He must have got the wrong idea in the Cafe when she had gone quiet. How his face had changed when the man had looked at him in disgust. This caused her to laugh again. Her thoughts went back to Dave again. What would he say if he saw her now, getting drunk and laughing? How would he react? She took another drink and laughed again but for no apparent reason. How long would they keep Danny, what was going to happen to him, what was going to happen to her now? She cried a little but only to herself. "Snap out of it," she said aloud angrily and took another long drink and settled down once more. She looked around the small room once again and thought to herself, 'Why did I make Danny tell Holland, would that be his downfall? He would not be at the police station now but how was I to know that he would go out and kill the man, whoever he was.' Her thoughts were becoming erratic and short lived. She never stayed on a topic for too long it seemed to drain her. She had too much on her mind to devote it to one subject wholly. She drank more and her head started to spin. She lay back and enjoyed the sensation. Her stomach started to tighten and she could feel it rising. She leant over the side of the chair and started to vomit. It flooded out of her mouth covering the carpet around her. Her stomach wanted to churn out more but there was nothing left inside her. She lay back and caught her breath, "God I feel bad," she said aloud and looked around the room, it had stopped spinning. Her eyes were streaming as she took another drink. What had become of her was this all she was fit for? She looked up at the door, a figure was standing there with haze all around it. A blood stained uniform that she knew from long ago. It was Dave he had come back from the war. He had not deserted her she had known that he would not. "Davy," she said with outstretched arms, "Come to me."

The figure approached slowly uneasily was this a trap? It had come for McCormick unknowing that he was at the police station. Who was the woman and who was Davy. He looked at her and he wanted her. Walking towards her he pulled her down to the floor. She hesitated unsure Davy had never treated her like that. Through the haze she saw his face. It was not the face of her husband but the face of a stranger, an evil looking man.

"No, don't hurt me," she pleaded but knew it was in vain.

His hands were all over her, pulling at her and loosening her clothes. She screamed but there was no one there to hear her. She felt around the carpet with her hands and found the half empty whiskey bottle. She lifted it and crashed it against the figure's head. The head shook with the impact but still

it remained. A hand grabbed her arm and pushed it to the ground making her drop the bottle. "Like it rough do you?" he said with a menace that made her freeze for a moment and then her struggling intensified but to no avail. His hand drew back and slapped her across the face knocking it to the side and this seemed to excite him, "How's that, do you want some more?" He hit her again and blood trickled from the side of her mouth. This seemed to excite him even more. His hands worked their way down her body his breath was deep and fast. She screamed again and again. His other hand covered her mouth to block the noise but by then fear had dried it up. She felt her underwear being pulled down but by then she was too weak to move. The pain came as he penetrated her again and again. She tried to blank it out by thinking of her dead husband but all she saw was the figure in front of her. The smell of vomit around her head and the stench from the man above her overpowered her. She felt faint but the pain kept her conscious.

"No," she cried weakly, "No, leave me," she pleaded like a child but this only excited him more. The pain was coming faster and faster. She closed her eyes to shut it out but it did not go away. Where was Danny she thought, he would have stopped this evil man.

At last he had finished. He got off and looked down at her. She was sobbing like a child. He was still breathing heavily but he was satisfied, for the time being anyway. He looked at his watch. He had been there longer than he thought and would have to get a move on. He was going to have to kill her. She could identify him.

"What do you want from me," she said hysterically, "Why don't you leave me alone," and then it dawned on her. She said slowly, "You're going to kill me aren't you?"

He looked at her without saying a word but she could tell his intentions just by the expression on his face. He picked up a kitchen knife and slowly approached her again. She was on her knees and started to back away from him. She got to the wall and had to stop.

"No, please, no," she begged as he moved his knife in front of her. "No, please, no," she begged as it made its way, guided by his hand, towards her. He plunged it into her stomach, splitting her clothes and skin and spraying blood all over him. She screamed as he twisted it inside her. She felt her precious blood draining away. She felt the knife withdraw and enter again, more pain. She screamed louder, she could feel herself weakening. Her life was draining away along with her blood. She seemed at peace now; she would soon be with her beloved Dave. "Again," she cried, "Again."

This surprised the figure but he carried on in his frenzy, tearing into her flesh. The blood trickled down and mixed with the vomit sending out a nauseous smell but still he carried on. Madeleine could hear Dave calling her, her life was running out. She got weaker and weaker. Soon she would be dead.

Chapter 19

Stuart pulled up outside his house. He was in a bad mood. He wished that he had not opened up to Madeleine like that. He had always kept his feelings to himself but something about her had brought it out of him. He had had a bad morning with Timothy Cole. He could not tolerate him any more and when his mother had started fawning over him again he had just let out a tirade of abuse. His days there were finished and he did not know at how many other houses besides once the word had got around. He did not see the point anymore. He had to get out of town as the pace of life was too much for him. He had heard on the radio that Stephen Johnson had died on the first day that he had met him. What was happening, everyone he had met recently was dead. What was he doing there? Should he go and see McCormick, he had spent a lot of time around there and did not want to seem too pushy. He would have like to see Madeleine again as there was something about her that brought out the best in him. He decided against it and so opening his front door went in. He looked around the front room and decided that it was about time that he cleaned up.

Gathering together all the loose music scores he stacked them in the corner. The place seemed cleaner already as he scanned around the room. He picked up the dirty plates and mugs and brought

them into the kitchen. Putting them in the sink he washed them and put them up to dry. He went back to the front room and picked up all the coats that were casually left around. He was debating on going down to the pub but as he would not know anyone he decided against it. He remembered that he still had some whiskey left and so fetched the full bottle and settling in his chair put some music on. He loved classical music and as he listened to the William Tell overture he poured himself a drink and lay back in the chair letting the music take him. His head moved around to the beat and he was settling in well as he took his first swallow. The whiskey and the music mixed together to give him an easiness of mind that he had not had for ages. He had been living close to the edge since he had befriended Danny. He thought awhile. How was Danny facing the death of another one of his friends? Maybe Danny was next on the list.

“Ah well, tomorrow's another day,” he said aloud as if to forget his thoughts. He took another drink and thought that he ought to go around and see Danny. Maybe Madeleine would be there; this brought a smile to his face. The whiskey was dulling his senses. Had she told Danny about his estranged wife? No he thought, she did not look like a gossip, she did not seem that kind of girl. He decided to take the whiskey around and see if they wanted a drink so he got up and went around the back as it was quicker. He walked to the back door and locked it after he had gone out. He made his way around the back and noticing that the door was open popped his head around and called, “Are you in Danny?”

It was then that it happened. A hand grabbed him by the collar and pulled him inside. “Who are you, what do you want,” a voice hissed spraying saliva all over Stuart's face.

“I'm...I'm just a neighbour, what do you want from me?” Stuart said as he was pushed up tightly against the wall. The hand had moved to Stuart's throat and was squeezing it tightly. Stuart was gasping for breath but the grip never loosened.

“So you are just a neighbour are you? Poking your nose in are you,” the voice hissed, the grip getting tighter and blocking Stuart's air supply.

Stuart coughed and spluttered, the grip loosened slightly letting him speak, “I was just seeing if he was alright. I don't mean any harm, who are you what do you want?”

“You should have got yourself a life instead of poking your nose in other peoples and now you are going to lose it.” It was then that it struck Stuart that the man was not just a burglar and he got very worried, “Look I don't know anything. I won't tell anyone about Pearce and Johnson,” and then he stopped as he had realised that he had said too much.

The figure looked at him with an intense stare that made Stuart cringe, “You've just signed your death warrant.”

It was then that Stuart saw her, blood stained and motionless. He knew that she was dead and something inside him snapped. For the first time in his life he got very angry. Anger seethed through his body suppressing his fear. He looked at the figure in front of him and spat in his face. The figure loosened his grip and reeled back in shock. Stuart hit him. It was a messy right hook to the jaw that bounced off without inflicting too much pain.

“Is that the best you can do?” the figure mocked and Stuart wished that he had learned to fight. Stuart threw another right but the figure was expecting it and blocked it, pushing it aside as if it had come from a child. Now it was the figure's turn. The right hand drew back and landed an almighty punch to Stuart's throat, bouncing his head on the wall and causing him to spurt blood from his mouth.

“Well hard man,” the figure said, “Make your play.”

The anger inside him was still boiling. He swung again only to be blocked and receive another blow, this time to the jaw. The jaw cracked and dropped. He looked at the figure with its mocking eyes and realised that he was playing with him. This made him even angrier but he was helpless to do anything about it. He felt around with his hand looking for something on the kitchen table but there was nothing. He raised his knee catching the figure in his groin. The figure reeled back slightly. It was in pain. This seemed to give Stuart an incentive, it could be hurt. Stuart hit him

again. It connected the side of the head knocking it slightly. Stuart punched again and again but it seemed ineffectual. He started to back off towards the door getting ready to make a run for it but the figure predicted it and lunged into the door knocking it shut. The force of the lunge knocked Stuart to the wall hitting the side of his head in the process.

“Going so soon I haven't started yet.” the figure let off a left jab that bounced Stuart's head off the wall again. This was followed by another doing the same. Blood trickled down Stuart's face predominantly from around the eyes. Still he stood; the pain did not seem to hurt him anymore. He had a job to do. He knew that he would have to kill the maniac before he killed him. He squared up to the figure and said, “Okay, let's start then.” and struck the figure on the nose causing blood to flow and his eyes to water. Stuart struck again and again, the figure's face reddening slightly from the impact. Stuart was not doing much damage though and the anger inside was also lulling through tiredness. Now it was the figure's turn to come back. He sent a left uppercut that broke through Stuart's weak arms and landed on his head sending it back against the wall. Another blow, this time to the throat followed by one to the chest that seemed to cave it in. Stuart fell to the ground in pain. How he wished he was stronger, how he wished he was sober. A boot connected to his stomach pushing out the very breath in his body. Again the boot went in, this time breaking a rib. 'Where's McCormick?' Stuart thought as he lay there with all the fight kicked out of him.

“Where's your friend McCormick?” the figure said as if reading his mind, “Why isn't he here to help you. Doesn't he want to know you anymore?”

The mocking tone in his voice put life in Stuart's body. He tried to scramble up on his feet once more. He was put in check by a kick to the stomach that made him crash down again.

“You won't mock when McCormick gets you,” Stuart said defiantly and tried to spit at him again.

“I don't see him around. All I see is an interfering do gooder near the end of his life,” the figure said kicking Stuart in the stomach once again. Again and again the kicking continued taking each breath away from Stuart. Blood poured from all over his body. The figure looked around for something to increase the suffering. He found nothing except the kitchen knife. He picked it up and walked over to Stuart's cringing body. “The games over I'm getting bored. I'm going to finish you now,” he said holding the knife in front of Stuart's eyes.

Stuart looked around in desperation and saw the whiskey bottle broken on impact with the stone floor. He made a grab for it but the figure was too quick. He slashed out with the knife cutting Stuart's throat and sending blood all over his rapidly reddening shirt. It was over, Stuart thought. The pain had come back again. He felt that every bone in his body was broke. He felt his blood running out and taking his life with it. He was still defiant. He spat blood over the figure's trousers. “Come on,” he gurgled, “what's keeping you? I'm not afraid,” and for the first time in his life he was not.

The figure stopped for a minute taking in the sight below him. 'He had more spirit than Pearce' he thought 'And he was an army man.' He lifted the knife and plunged it into the heart. Stuart's body squirmed like it had been electrocuted. Stuart was no more.

Chapter 20

Danny's smile left him as soon as he got on the street. He should have got them to give him a lift home after all the trouble they put him through. He looked at his watch. It read 7 o'clock, he had been there for 11 hours and now he had to walk home. “Ah well,” he said to himself and started his journey, “I like walking anyway.”

He got to the top of the street and carried on as a police car pulled by with some teenager in the back. That was John's grandson he thought but could not be too sure as he had not seen him in years. He set off on his way. The night had drawn in by now and the cold air hit him. “I should have brought my coat,” he said shivering slightly with the cold. He looked down the street to see if there was anyone he knew passing by but there was not. 'I could do with a smoke,' he thought to himself when he got about halfway. He checked his pockets but found no tobacco. Remembering that he had

given them to the drunk he cursed himself for his generosity. He had left his money at home as well. He had not expected to be kept that long at the station. As he arrived at one of his friend's shops he decided to try his luck. He opened the door and felt the warmth of the shop as he walked in. He greeted his friend Pete and chatted awhile. Pete was always talkative and enjoyed a good gossip. The subject soon got onto the deaths because the whole town was talking about them.

"You were big mates with Dave Pearce and Steve Johnson weren't you Danny?"

"Yes I knew them for years. In fact Dave's wife Madeleine is stopping at ours for a bit."

"Is she still a looker?" Pete said giving Danny a knowing smile, causing him to laugh.

"Jesus Christ Pete, his body's still warm," he said in mock offense.

"Well I was only asking. Anyway, did you know the other man?"

"Who Liversage?" Danny said unaware that it had been in the papers.

"No I think his name was Muir. Well that's what I read anyway."

"Well yes. Actually I've just been down the cells over it."

"Oh, what and they've just let you out?"

"Well no choice really. They couldn't charge me. Anyway whilst I'm here could I have an ounce of York and a packet of Rizzlas but I'll have to sort you out tomorrow."

"Yes sure Danny," Pete said passing them to him, "I know where you live."

Danny stayed awhile talking as he rolled himself a cigarette and took a box of matches with him. He said goodbye to Pete and lit it just as he was going through the door. It did not seem so cold now and this cheered him up slightly. As he walked he whistled 'The Rakes of Mallow' and almost had a spring in his step. The journey was soon over and in no time at all he was back on his own street. Seeing Stuart's car parked outside he went to give it him a knock. He wanted to thank him for helping Madeleine that day. There was no answer and thinking that he was out, probably down the pub, he went back to his own house. Seeing no light on he thought that Madeleine must be out also so he opened the door and switched the light on. He went over and drew the curtains as he did not like the idea of someone looking into his house. He made his way to the living room and it was there that he saw her. She was resting motionless against the wall. Her clothes had been ripped and he saw what had happened to her. Her face was heavily bruised and the blood that had seeped was now dry. "Where was Stuart?" he said, anger now taken over the compassion. He looked into the kitchen and found his answer. Stuart lay there heavily bloodstained and hardly recognisable. He saw that he had had his throat cut and looked away. Anything like that he could not stomach, that was his Achilles Heel. Should he call the police straight away? He had a lot on his mind. He had killed Liversage the night before, it was Liversage because he recognised his face and yet the murders carried on. Something had gone wrong, it did not add up. He walked over to the telephone and dialed 999.

"Which service do you require please?"

"Police," Danny answered quickly.

He was put through and a voice said, "Police, how may I help you?"

"There's been two murders at 22 Davies Street could you please inform D.I. Holland at once."

"Is this some sort of joke?"

"Do I sound like I am laughing," Danny said and then hung up. He turned around and surveyed the area. He looked at Stuart's body, it looked like he had put up quite a fight, he thought to himself as he looked over all the carnage. He remembered not to touch anything but he had a few words to say to Holland when he came around. A knock on the door made him turn around. He walked towards the door and then opened it. In front of him stood a group of police officers and he heard another car pull up and saw Holland get out and make his way to the front.

"I think that you had better look at this Holland," Danny said letting him through. Holland followed him into the living room and scanned the area. Seeing the vomit he looked at Danny.

"Nought to do with me it was there already."

He looked around once more and Danny opened the door to the kitchen. "One more in here," he

said coolly and Holland followed him over. He looked down quietly at the dead body of Stuart Emerson.

“Want to ask me where I was when this happened? I was playing silly buggers and now look,” Danny said to Holland who was still looking at the floor, “Look,” Danny shouted.

Holland flinched. He had, had a bad day as well after all. His wife had left him. The person he thought responsible for the murders lay dead but still the murders continued. He had seen a chance of promotion fly out of the window in fact it looked like his job was on the line and to top it all he had an irate pensioner standing in front of him dictating the odds.

“I'm only doing my job. This isn't down to me I didn't kill them.”

“You never killed them, what do you mean you never killed them? You dragged me down the station leaving Madeleine unprotected and then you tell me that you never killed them your job is to protect the public...”

At this it was Holland's turn to lose his temper, “Don't you dare tell me what my job is.”

“Well some body had better tell you because you don't fucking know.”

During this time the police surgeon and forensics were doing their work. The police surgeon came over and interrupted the conversation, “Dermot, the woman first. Severe bruising to the right cheek, nine stab wounds predominately in the stomach and she was sexually assaulted.”

“Okay Andy, what about the other body?”

“His throat was cut and it looked like it had been punched in first, two broken ribs, internal bleeding, bruising to the cheeks and a broken nose. Stabbed through the heart it looks like he put up quite a struggle.”

Holland thanked him and turning to Danny said, “Anything missing?”

“Nothing noticeable,” Danny said looking around, “I'll give it the once over when you've finished.” One of the forensic came over and said, “No finger prints. The murder weapon was a kitchen knife on the floor by the body.”

Holland looked at Danny and said, “Okay I want the full story now. Too many people have died.”

“Look alright. I think you've guessed as much as I have anyway. We thought he was dead to be honest and when you told me he had been shot I guessed that he must have lived on and somehow swapped his identity with John Muir. After he was killed I thought that it would be all over and now this.”

“It's getting too complicated now. There are five dead bodies. I offered you police protection once but now I must insist.”

“No. if it comes to the crunch I can look after myself. I don't want to hide behind anybody but thanks anyway.”

Holland let the subject drop and said, “Look we're going to be a few hours. Why don't you go out, get a drink and calm your nerves.”

Normally Danny would not take too kindly to being put out of his house but he had a lot to think about and wanted to be alone. “Okay that sounds a good idea. I'll be in the Wagoners if you need me.” and putting on his coat left them to their work. As he walked slowly down the street his mind was heavy with thought. He needed to be alone and hoped the pub would be empty. The street was full of cars but there was nobody about. They were all inside having their teas and probably getting ready to go to the pub later. He reached the pub and never heard the juke box which was a good sign. He walked in and was greeted by the barman who was pouring him a drink. He passed it to Danny who took a large swallow.

“You look like you've got a lot on your mind,” he said after Danny had finished.

“Yes I've had a very bad day, what with Dave and Steve going like they did.”

“Oh did you hear about that man called Muir, I think his name was, that makes three.”

“Five.”

“Five?”

“Yes I got out the cells earlier and went home to find Dave's wife Madeleine and the fellow who

was with me last Wednesday both dead.”

“Jesus, you'd better have this,” the barman said pouring him a large whiskey which he gladly took. He drained the whiskey down in one and the barman carried on, “What's the world coming too?” Danny agreed with him but could not tell him too much. He needed to be alone and was pleased when the barman went over to the other side to serve a group of young men who had just walked in. Danny took a seat in the far corner and became immersed in his own thoughts. He had killed the man who had killed his two friends and yet he came home to two more dead bodies. It was something stupid that he had overlooked but he could not put his finger on it. The lounge was filling up now. People came up to him asking about news of the investigations. He said he knew nothing and they soon got bored and left him in peace. He drank another pint, still none the wiser but he knew he would be sleeping with one eye open that night. It was not fear it was self protection. He knew that he would have to bury another ghost. An elderly man came up to him and said, “Danny how are you feeling? Do you mind if I join you?”

Danny looked up and saw a slight, frail man with a walking stick standing in front of him. He had weighed up all the possibilities over Liversage and came up with nothing so he said, “Yeah sure Dan as long as you don't talk about the murders.”

Dan sat down and had to change the opening line of his conversation because that was what he wanted to talk about. “I hear that Jim was fighting last night, not long after he saw you he said. This kid who grassed his son up came in the pub shouting his mouth off and Jim went for him.”

“I thought that his son wanted him himself when he came out. It can't be that long,” Danny said not really paying attention.

“Yes but you know what families are like,” Dan answered and it stopped Danny in his tracks. That's the answer, he thought. Even a low life like Liversage must have a family. It was so simple and yet he had missed it. He must be going senile in his old age.

“What are you having Dan?” Danny said getting up.

“Pint of D.B.A please Danny.”

When Danny got back he sat down and said, “No I can't go home yet I've got the police around. I found Dave Pearce's wife and Stuart my next door neighbour's dead bodies round my house when I got home.”

“When will it ever end? Has this bloke got something against the elderly or something? Your neighbour, is that the fellow from down south who was in last Wednesday?”

“Yes that's right. Stuart Emerson.”

They talked on and Danny started to get tired. His day in the cells had taken its toll. He thought that the police would be finished by now but something told him not to go home that night. “Is it alright if I stop at yours tonight Dan? I don't know how long the coppers will be at ours.”

“Oh sure Danny you're not in a hurry are you it's only 10 o'clock.”

Danny was but it was bad manners to say so, so he said, “Oh no, all the time in the world.”

They sat there drinking and talking and the time flew by, the bell for last orders signaling the end of the night's drinking.

“Well,” Dan said, “I suppose we had better get going,” and stood up, “Do you fancy some chips?”

“Yes okay. I haven't eaten all day. They didn't give me anything down the station, well only abuse.”

They got outside the cold air and walked towards the chip shop. Once inside they queued along with the others who had come out of the pubs with the same idea. When they got to the front Danny said, “Two lots of chips please,” and paid the money. They took the chips outside with them and ate them as they walked along the pathway. As luck would have it Danny chanced upon the drunken Scotsman who was sitting on a wall smoking a roll up.

“Won't be a minute Dan, I want a word with him.” Danny said walking across to the wall. The Scotsman saw him and got a little worried because Danny had told him not to come back into the area. He was unsure though because Danny had been alright with him the last time he saw him and had even gave him some tobacco.

“Alright Jock, like a word,” Danny said.

“Err yes, what's up mate?”

“Oh no I'm not after trouble,” Danny said making sure that he was out of Dan's earshot, “It's about our earlier conversation. I was wondering if you knew much about this John Muir character.”

“Yes I used to pal about with him but he was a low life. I swear he'd cheat you blind.”

“Did he have a family that you know of?”

“Well he had a son,” at this Danny's ears pricked up, “But he died before I knew him leaving a grandson.”

“A grandson, how old do you think he would be.”

“About 23, 24 maybe I couldn't be sure.”

Danny took out a £5 from his pocket and gave it him, “Get yourself a drink and don't forget this conversation never happened.”

“Thanks, you're a diamond.”

Danny went back to Dan who said, “I didn't know that you knew Jimmy.”

“Jimmy, oh is that his name?”

“Well that's what everyone calls him but it might be a nickname.”

“How do you know him,” Danny said before Dan could ask him what the conversation was about.

“Oh he used to knock around with some one I used to play darts with, a John Muir that bloke who was murdered yesterday in fact.”

'Jesus,' thought Danny, 'I've just wasted a fiver on that drunk.'

“I bet his family wasn't too pleased,” Danny said trying to cross check his information.

“His grandson wouldn't be. He's a bit of a tear away but they were very close.”

“So what does he look like?”

“Like a younger version of his grandfather, about the same height and build. He lives in Trafalgar Street not far from his grandfather.

“Oh I've got a friend who lives there he probably knows him. I'll ask him next time I see him, what number does he live at?”

“No.32 I think, yes that's right 32.”

Danny had got his information and so he changed the subject. “Looks like the Wagoner's needs a lick of paint doesn't it?”

“It needed one 10 years ago mind you with beer as good as that the surrounding does not bother me.”

They arrived at Dan's house and sat talking and drinking until mid night.

Chapter 21.

The clock struck midnight and Danny thought to himself that he may as well get it over with. “Look Dan I've got to get off. Anyone asks I've been here all night.”

“Sure okay Danny, want to tell me what it's all about?”

“No can do, maybe later,” Danny said as he put his coat on and left into the cold night air. He

looked around and saw nothing stir. He thought that if he went along the canal he should be safe.

He got to the end of the road and recognising a figure across the road he dipped into an alleyway.

The figure passed without seeing him and Danny waited until it was out of sight before carrying on his way. He crossed over the bridge without seeing anyone and went down towards the tow path.

The stillness of the night around the unlit canal made him feel at peace. He had spent many a night there when he was younger and needed time to himself and had got to know every stretch of the canal around the town. He waited for a while and looked down the tow path for signs of life. When

he was sure that there was no one he moved on. He could hear the odd water rat splashing into the canal as he disturbed them on his approach. He walked past the turn off that Pearce had took and

proceeded under the bridge. It was there he saw a figure lying asleep underneath. Danny walked softly passed. Looking around the figure he saw a polythene bag with a white substance by its head.

“Ah,” he said softly to himself, “A glue sniffer, he's out till morning at least.” he walked on his way paying the figure no more attention. As he got about 10 yards away a voice stopped him in his tracks, “Oi.”

He turned around thinking to himself, 'I don't need this, I can't draw attention to myself,' and looked at the figure that had shouted him. It was a scruffily dressed teenager who was very unsteady on his feet. His jeans were more rips than jeans and his jacket was covered in mud.

“Yes,” Danny said keeping his distance.

The figure walked towards him, wobbling from side to side, and got close enough for Danny to smell his breath. It reeked of stale glue and Danny had to turn his head to catch his breath, “Hey old man, got any money on yer, must be pension day int it,” he said mockingly.

“Go home little boy, does your mother know you're out,” Danny said fixing him an evil stare. He did not want to draw attention to himself but he could not get out of the confrontation. The youth was stunned for a few seconds; he was not used to old people answering him back. He looked at Danny and knew that he would not back down. “Just cut the crap and give me your money,” the lad said raising his fists. Although he was feeling unsure the glue was giving him courage.

Danny squared up to him and said, “Go home little boy mummies worried.”

The mocking nature of Danny's voice sent anger through the lad's body. “No one talks to me like that, I'm not a child,” he shouted, dropping his guard for a fraction of a second. This was long enough for Danny. He let off a right jab that bounced off the lad's jaw and made his head jolt back. The jab came back like a spring only to be released again. It landed on the jaw again, this time making the head nod violently. The lad's guard had dropped completely and his hands fell down to his waist.

'Like splitting peas,' Danny thought as he hit him a right hook that launched the youth into the canal. Danny walked on his way with the sound of the youth trying to scramble out behind him.

“Jesus,” Danny said aloud, “Kid's today, not like their dads were.” He carried down the canal thinking the youth was that far out of reality he probably would not remember what happened anyway. As he got to the spot where he had hid the gloves he thought that he had better look to see if they were still there. He searched around and on finding them put them in his pocket and carried on again. As he approached his turn off he heard voices so hid himself in the bushes. It was a couple arguing and he recognised one of the voices. 'That's Davy MacAteer,' he thought to himself and he could guess that the other one was his girlfriend.

“Look if you want Callaghan go on but don't mess me about,” Davy said angrily.

“But it's you I want. Des is only a friend.”

“You want to sort yourself out, a couple of drinks and you're anyone's.”

“No Davy, I'm only yours.”

“Don't waste my time. You're more trouble than you're worth. The amount of times I've ended up in the cells because of you, ah fuck it I'm going,” he said walking off and leaving his girlfriend crying madly.

'She'll get over it,' Danny thought to himself and waited for her to move off. She hung around for about five minutes and left unaware that Danny had been listening. Danny left the dark bushes and made his way to the brightly lit street. He looked around, still lurking in the shadows, and saw no one. He was only two streets away and he soon covered that distance. He had to dip into entries twice, once when a police car drove past and then again when a couple came walking past, arm in arm. As he got to Trafalgar Street he stopped for a while and slipped into the shadows to roll himself a cigarette. He surveyed the street looking for signs of life and was content that there was no one around. Trafalgar Street was just a normal back street with terraced houses in various states of disrepair. It was well lit which was a distinct disadvantage to Danny who preferred the dark because it was unseeing. He scanned the houses opposite him to find out which side no. 32 was on. Finding it on the opposite side of the road did not help either plus the entry to the back was 3 doors from the house that he wanted. That would mean crossing behind two houses to get to his

destination and his movements might disturb any sleeping dogs. He got halfway down his cigarette and let it go out. He put it back in his pouch not wanting to leave any silly clues around. He put on his gloves and looked around for any sign of life once more. Seeing none he quietly walked across the road and got to the entry. No lights were on in any of the houses so he tip toed down the entry. No sign of life as he passed the first house and he got to Muir's without hearing a dog bark. He searched around the outside toilet for a key which he found on the corner of one of the walls. He quietly unlocked the back door and had a look around. The kitchen or what he could see of it through the dark seemed similar to his. He quietly went through the house checking for any sign of life but found none so he thought he would risk switching a light on. The first room illuminated was the back bedroom. It was a small squarish room about 11 by 10 and it was stacked full of brown cardboard boxes. Danny opened the first one and saw that it was full of paint tins.

"Ah," he said, "That's who did that warehouse last week; it looks like an Aladdin's cave in here." He looked through a few more boxes and found the same. He switched the back bedroom light off and made his way to the front. Checking that the curtains were shut he put the light on. The bedroom was larger and immaculately clean. The double bed in the middle was made of brass and its sheets were clean and crease-less.

"Very house proud," Danny said going to the wardrobe. He opened it and was confronted by rows of suits, most of them in plastic wrappers. He stopped when his eyes lit up on a familiar sight. It was an old world war two army uniform with blood stained trousers.

"Ah gotcha," he said to himself taking the uniform of the peg and putting it on the bed., "At least if you haven't come back by the time I've gone you'll know I've been here." he said loudly, going out of the room after switching the light off. He made his way downstairs and had a look around the front room. This was as clean as the bedroom. An expensive music system stood next to a colour television with a video underneath. A leather three piece suite finished the ensemble.

"Who said crime doesn't pay," Danny said and thought of John Muir's widow stuck in her little flat in Lichfield. He went through the dining room which was quite bare with only a pine table, bench, two chairs and a Welsh Dresser into the kitchen. Once he had finished his look around he went back to the front room and sitting in the plush leather chair he waited.

Chapter 22.

Holland scanned the house for the last time. He had found nothing, not a clue. He had a lot of explaining to do to Martin. The bodies had been removed and the place had been cleaned but the smell of death still lingered. He had got used to it by now but the papers would not have. He got into his car and drove back to the station. It was 9 o'clock and the streets were fairly clear. Although he was in no hurry he made good time. He was not looking forward to seeing Martin and he knew that he would have to. He arrived at the station and getting out of his car he was greeted by a uniformed officer going out on patrol, "The boss wants to see you Sir," he said cheerfully and went on his way. He walked straight in, ignoring the greeting of a couple of constables at the door and made his way to Martin's office. Knocking on the door he waited for the customary 'enter' and proceeded in "I hear you want a word Sir," he said and waited.

"Yes Holland," Martin said beckoning him to sit down, "They tell me that you pulled in a man called McCormick for the murders of John Muir, David Pearce and Stephen Johnson."

"No Sir," Holland said interrupting, "I brought in McCormick for the murder of a man called John Muir who I believe was an alias for David Arthur Liversage."

"Oh the ghost you mean," He said mockingly, "Well anyway whatever. You brought this man in and released him without charge and he went home to find the bodies of Madeleine Pearce and Stuart Emerson."

"Err yes, that's right Sir."

"Well I'm afraid that this doesn't look too good for you does it? You deny a man the right to protect his own property and whilst he was away his house is broken into and two of his friends are

murdered. The papers are going to love you. You've got the crime rate going through the roof, people defending their own property because of lack of confidence in the police force and you stop a man from wanting to do that and look what happens.” Martin said with a smug grin.

“It's not as simple as that,” Holland answered, his voice was flustered.

“Well tell me Holland,” Martin said and waited.

“Well Sir Pearce and Johnson were killed by David Arthur Liversage, under the name of John Muir. McCormick killed Liversage for revenge and probably self protection but I don't know who killed Mrs. Pearce or Emerson. Maybe they came back looking for McCormick and was surprised by the killer who was lying in wait for McCormick.”

“But I thought you said that Muir was the killer,” Martin said and sat back as if he had scored a decisive point. Holland went quiet. Satisfied with that Martin went on, “Of course you know that it's going to look funny in my report.”

'That's it,' thought Holland, 'The bastard's going to drop me in it.'

“You can go,” Martin said as if dismissing a child.

“Sir,” Holland said and obediently went out. He made his way to his office and sat down. He had a lot on his mind. He knew that if he could not get this sorted out his job was up for grabs and Martin had already started to bury him. He poured himself a coffee and sat there deep in thought. Maybe McCormick did not kill Muir? Maybe they were all killed by the same maniac? Maybe when he took him away he should have given Madeleine police protection. He put all thoughts of remorse behind him and concentrated on the evidence he had. It was not tangible but it was all that he had. McCormick and Johnson with the help of Pearce had left Liversage for dead during the war. Liversage had taken Muir's identity and came back for revenge killing Pearce and Johnson. McCormick had found out and killed Liversage but who killed Emerson and Mrs. Pearce? He remembered back to the conversation with McCormick when he said that Liversage was a coward, it probably was not Liversage anyway. Why wait all this time as well, it must have been over forty years ago after all. Something did not add up. Holland sat back and thought awhile, “I think that I had better have a look around Westmear Road and see if I can come up with any clues about a family.” He had checked the computer for names but had not come up with anything. That did not necessarily mean that he did not have a family because he did not know what name he would be using. He decided that if he solved the crime he would make sure that the credit came to him after all Martin would make sure he would get the blame if he could not. He looked at his watch, it was 10 o'clock. He debated on whether to go home but the idea never appealed to him especially now his wife would not be there. He did not take too long to decide to go down to Westmear Road that night so he went down the lab to collect the keys that nobody had claimed. He got into the car and drove off, the traffic was very light and he got there quickly. He parked up, got out and walked to the front door. He opened the door and switching the light on went into the front room. Looking around he saw the state of the place and said, “This will take hours,” but knew that he had plenty of time. He started methodically checking through all the clothes and rubbish thinking that it must have taken years to accumulate. He searched though every pocket and every scrap of paper looking for clues. He looked through all the old letters for family names but to no avail. After about an hour he had finished in the front so he moved to the living room and did the same but there were no traces. He was thinking that he must be wasting his time when he heard the door open.

'I've got the only key,' he thought to himself as he went to the front of the house. A small, slight man in an immaculate suit stood before him looking at him with no recognition. It took Holland a few moments to realise who he was. He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out his identity card.

“Police,” he said flipping it back in his pocket.

The figure looked at him and putting his hand in the inside of his suit jacket pulled out a large brown handled knife and held it in front of Holland's face.

“Put the knife down,” Holland said backing off, “You can't get away with it.”

The figure laughed and proceeded towards Holland who was getting quite frightened. The figure

took in his fear, remained motionless, his eyes burning into Holland's and then he made his play. As quick as lightning he swung his right arm across Holland's body, slashing his jacket. Holland reeled back in time so the knife did not reach the flesh but it made a mess of his jacket. Holland backed off quickly and seeing a towel lying on the settee picked it up and wrapped it tightly around his left arm. Holland then stood his ground with his left arm in front of him to ward off any attacks, "You'd better put it down you're in enough trouble," he said getting his courage back.

The figure stopped a moment and decided to change his attack. He waved the knife around distracting Holland's attention and then kicked him in the groin. Holland dropped to his knees in agony and was slashed across the face spurting blood all over his white shirt and tattered jacket. Holland backed off quickly and tried to get up but was kicked in the face launching him backwards over his legs. The figure followed with a swift kick to the groin that almost took all of Holland's breath away. Holland lay awhile getting his breath back and feigning pain to give him more time until he was ready to make his move. And then it came. Holland kicked out and caught the figure on his right knee cap making him crouch forward in pain. He quickly followed with a kick to the other knee cap making him drop the knife. The figure squirmed in pain and Holland thought his chances were improving enough for him to make a lunge for the knife. He tried to spring up but only got halfway. The figure had recovered and connected a right jab to Holland's jaw. Holland fell back once again and the figure grabbing the knife slashed him down the leg. It cut straight through the trousers and parted the skin sending out pain all through Holland's body. He tried to get up again but only managed to go back slightly before the wall stopped his retreat. He was scared and felt alone, why he had not brought any back up he thought.

The figure seemed relentless in the pursuit of Holland's death and slashed him again, this time across the chest. Holland tried to block it but to no avail, it cut long and it cut deep. His tattered jacket started to soak up all the blood. Holland's anger rose when he realised that he was only being played with, like a cat plays with a mouse before it kills it. Holland sprang up and lunged forward leaving his head unprotected but luckily he caught the figure in the stomach. The figure fell back in surprise and tripped over some rubbish that was behind him. Holland was on him immediately, hitting his face with his left fist, bouncing the figure's head on the floor. Holland had lost a lot of blood and was feeling weaker though so was quite easily thrown off. He landed on his back which shook the air out of his body.

The figure was getting bored so said, "Well copper the fun's over. This little piggy's going to the slaughter."

Holland looked at him with contempt; he knew that his life was almost over. As the blood drained his life away he tried one last time. The knife held by the figure was in his grasp and he made for it. Grabbing the figure's hand he pulled it to the floor. With the little strength he had left he tried to wrestle it off him. They struggled for the possession of the knife but only for a few seconds. The figure's strength overwhelmed Holland's weakened body. He lay breathless on the floor and then the attack came. He could feel his stomach open as the knife entered his body. He had never had that kind of pain before. It was a sharp pain initially but leaving a dull ache behind it. His stomach opened again and again, the blood flow was almost torrential. He could feel it drain as he lay there helpless. He could not remember how many times he had been stabbed; it did not matter any more. His thoughts drifted off into oblivion and he then followed them. His breath left him never to return. His heart stopped, he was no more.

The figure stood up and looked at the motionless body. It scowled and spat at Holland and kicked him in the head. He turned to the door and fishing in his jacket pocket brought out a packet of cigarettes. He opened it and taking one out lit it up. He had a lot on his mind. Where was McCormick, he was not at home. Maybe the police had him? Killing was getting easier but after the death of his grandfather he could not see the point of going on. The first drag went down well and settled his nerves a little, "Ah well," he said walking casually out the front door, "I may as well go home."

Chapter 23

Danny settled back in the leather chair and admired the quality. "May as well have a fag whilst I'm here." and took out his half finished one. He lit it and relaxed further back into the chair. "Yes," he said, "This is the life I could get used to it."

He took another drag deeply into his lungs and exhaled slowly. He was more relaxed than ever. Maybe it was the drink or the thought it would soon be over he was not sure. He checked the time, it was 1.30 in the morning he wondered where the grandson had got to. 'I'm in no hurry,' he thought, 'He's got to come back sometime.' He finished the cigarette and stubbed it out on the leather arm of the settee, "Scum like that don't deserve quality," he said aloud thinking of Muir's widow again. He got up out of the chair and had another look around. He was looking for a tool box. He was looking for something special, he did not know what but he knew he would know when he found it. Unable to find a tool box he went into the kitchen. He was looking for something long and sharp. His eyes lit upon a large double bladed knife. It was a hunter's knife. It looked out of place amongst all the kitchen knives.

"This will do nicely," he said picking it up and carrying it with him into the front room. He took his seat and waited. How he hated waiting. He wanted to go out and look for the maniac himself but he knew that that would lose him the advantage. His thoughts drifted off, he thought of Lucy, he thought of Madeleine's dead violated body. He thought of Stuart's battered corpse. He never felt hatred to the man that did this and this surprised him. It was just another job to Danny. He had enjoyed killing Liversage because he deserved it but his grandson was doing it out of family loyalty, albeit misguided, Danny could appreciate that. Although his family was not close it was close enough for him to understand it.

He checked his watch again, 2.00. He must be night clubbing Danny thought as he put his feet on the adjacent settee and waited. Although he did not like waiting he was a patient man. He had done so on many occasions and was quite used to it. His wait was coming to an end. He heard the front door lock open and instinctively sprang up and backed into the other room. He heard the front door open and saw the room light up. 'I hope he doesn't check the chair,' Danny thought and cursed himself for stubbing the cigarette out on it. The front door shut and the man sat down and Danny made his move. Tucking his knife between the belt and trousers behind his back he slowly walked in, "Well you're certainly the spit of your grandfather. You're going to end up like him as well," Danny said by way of introduction.

"You must be McCormick; you've saved me a journey."

"And you must be Muir or is it Liversage?"

"My name is Liversage," he said squaring up to Danny, "Like my grand dad who you left for dead during the war."

"And you take after him; he was a thief as well. Tell me, do you rob dead bodies as well?"

"What. You are lying he would never do that," He screamed and went to put his hand inside his jacket.

Danny saw this and realised that he must be carrying a weapon of some kind. Quickly he drew back and let off a thundering right that sent Liversage back into his expensive music system. The noise was deafening but no one seemed to hear it. Liversage picked himself up and took his stance.

"I like a good fight," he said wiping the blood from around his mouth, "But you won't get lucky again." He sent a left jab towards Danny's nose but he blocked it with his left and countered with another right. Liversage saw it coming but did not have time to get out of the way. The punch landed on his left cheek causing it to swell slightly under the eye. Now it was his turn, he launched a left which Danny blocked but followed through with a right that landed before Danny could counter punch. Danny fell back slightly. 'The boy can punch I'll give him that,' he thought to himself as he grabbed the settee for support. Liversage swung a right catching Danny on the side of his face and sending his head to the left with a sudden jolt. He followed through with a left uppercut that lifted Danny's head upwards leaving his throat exposed. Liversage saw an open throat but

before he could capitalise on it Danny countered with a devastating head butt that sent Liversage sprawling back. Catching himself Liversage lunged forward at Danny who side stepped and hit him on the back of the head as he flew by. Liversage's head hit the wall, sprinkling blood over the striped wall paper. Putting his hand in his pocket he pulled out the knife he had used against Holland and turned and faced Danny. "The game's over McCormick," he said spitting blood. "Not for me boy," Danny said pulling out the hunter's knife that was hiding behind his back, "Not for me."

They stood there like two tigers waiting to attack. Neither wanting to make the first move for fear of leaving themselves open. But the move had to come and it came from Liversage. He lunged at Danny with a slashing motion that Danny stepping back only just missed. Again he lunged catching Danny's right shirt just below the collar. The shirt tore but no blood was spilt. Danny kicked to try and knock the knife out of Liversage's hand but his grasp was too tight and his arm just flew into the air. Now it was Danny's turn, he plunged with a stab. Liversage tried to avoid it but it caught his other arm spurting blood over his jacket and onto the floor below. Liversage was like a wounded animal, he lunged with a stab to Danny's stomach. Danny was too quick for him though. Again he lunged this time to the chest. Danny side stepped but he was not quick enough. It caught him on the shoulder and this time drew blood. Danny felt the pain but luckily it was not on the side he was holding the knife. His shoulder seemed to go limp as blood poured down his arm. Now it was Danny's turn to get angry. He slashed wildly, catching Liversage on the cheek and spurting blood over everything nearby, he slashed again and missed. His third slash caught Liversage's chest and shredded straight through his jacket but not deep enough to draw blood. Liversage backed off quickly to keep himself from over balancing but Danny was still onto him like a tiger closing in for the kill. He lunged at Liversage catching him in the leg. Instinctively Liversage's arm fell to cover the wound and he limped back further. He made a feeble lunge forward and more out of luck than judgment connected with Danny's cheek, slashing it and cutting an earlobe off. Danny fell back and took his position again. Seeing a heavy ashtray on the table by the chair he picked it up and threw it. It missed Liversage's head by only an inch and shattered on the wall behind him. Liversage moved forward slashing wildly and missing Danny by inches. Seeing his chance Danny grabbed Liversage's knife arm and thrust it back. Liversage struggled to try and wrest it from Danny's grasp but to no avail Danny was a lot stronger.

Danny's other hand plunged his knife into Liversage's stomach and twisted and twisted opening the wound considerably. His shirt had shredded to nothing and as blood drained out Danny could feel the strength in Liversage's arms weakening. Soon he would be no more. Danny dropped Liversage's dead body, the knife still sticking in it and stepped back. His shoulder was starting to go numb again and he saw that he had lost a lot more blood than he thought. The blood was still flowing and he tried in vain to keep it in check. Now that the excitement was over he could feel himself getting weaker. He staggered backwards and fell against the door. Opening the door he fell onto the path and crawled onto the pavement. "Help," he called weakly but no one could hear him. He took all his strength to prop his back up against the wall. There he waited, and death came a courtin'.

Look out for Mary of the seven veils