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THE BLACKSHAW CHORD

Crime Fiction, Literary Fiction: Why the Demarcation?

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

English

Doctor of Philosophy

THE BLACKSHAW CHORD

Crime Fiction, Literary Fiction: Why the

Demarcation?

by Margaret Anne Jones

My thesis is in two parts: Part 1 a novel, Part 2 a critical rationale.

The novel examines abuse in a range of manifestations – parental power; alcohol; the press; corporate power – all of which combine to perpetrate a catalogue of abuse against my protagonist. But it is the completely innocent protagonist who is perceived as the abuser. The novel quite deliberately has the feel of a crime story although the only serious crime is off-the-page and not connected with any of the characters or locations. This is intentional.

The critical rationale seeks to investigate the classification of crime fiction and literary fiction with crime in it, and attempts to examine where the demarcation appears. Much of the critical rationale examines my novel in this regard. Initially I was looking at the debate from the point-of-view of non-whodunnit crime, but my research took me increasingly towards literary authors who have moved into mystery writing, such as, Kate Atkinson, Susan Hill, John Banville (Benjamin Black) and Joanne Harris. I refer to several novels from the crime genre and from novels which occupy a 'hinterland' whereby crime is a major element of the narrative but where they are not regarded as crime fiction. I have researched the shelving policies of the local library and bookshops, and interviewed writers with regard to where they wish their work to be placed. I have also considered briefly what is genre and why hinterland novels are placed somewhere outside the classification of any genre. Where appropriate I have quoted from published authors with regard to their position in this debate, and have used four main novels to discuss the development of my novel - *John Brown's Body*; *Psycho*; *Rebecca* and *Brighton Rock*.

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Prologue

The fresh morning air burned his tired eyes as Bacon noted that little had changed in Wherwent in thirty years. Mallards still swam in the village pond; the primary school, cottages and offices to the *Wherwent Advertiser* appeared unaltered; the eleventh century church where his mother had worshiped, and the thirteenth century pub where he had worshiped, stood in unholy alliance; rickety trellis tables displayed mouldy vegetables outside the shop-cum-post office and an aged 'A' board proclaimed, 'The Fight Goes On'. The fumes from a car smelt alien so close to grazing sheep. Once, when researching an article on national defence, he discovered that central London was built in a bowl. In medieval times, beacons were lit high on the bowl to warn of invasion but London now seemed weighed down by houses whereas Hampshire hills rose high and proud.

His mother lived on the Goodman Estate behind the village shop. It was an amalgam of 1920s modern and old village charm with its own dipped green and stone pavements. Its development had meant that the halt, where the 60s housing estate now stood, was built into a proper station, with its own porter and frequent trains. As he walked to the dipped green, Bacon fancied he smelt the

steam, and heard the whistle blast as the train chuffed away from the station. He could see the old sycamore tree and the red poppies growing outside the tiny ticket office, and old Jack waving his flag, blowing his whistle and tending his flowers. Bacon watched as the smut churned out by the funnel was gently wiped away. Only Jack cried when Bacon left never to return until today. Beecham closed the station in the sixties during his savage slashing of the railways, and if Bacon was honest, Jack was the only thing he actually missed about the village.

Delphinium Cottage, or number 76, as he called it, was on the Sparrow Hawk part of the Estate, facing the green. The Goodman Estate was larger than the original village and when his family moved there from Kent everyone was poor and needy. He looked at the cars cluttering the roadway and felt in his journalist's bones that these belonged to the prosperous and probably used as weekend cottages.

Bacon rubbed his sweaty palms together before pressing the door bell only to hear the same old irritating ding-dong. As the door opened he had to force a smile as he realised how out of date his image of her had become.

'Hello Mum,' he said. 'It's me, Peter.'

She squinted, examining the over-weight, ruddy complexioned man with his watery blue eyes.

'Peter?' she said.

'Yes, Mum. I've come home.'

She smiled and stood aside allowing him to enter.

In the front room the wallpaper had changed but not much else. It was small, cosy, low ceilinged and dominated by the tile surround fireplace. A two-seater settee snuggled between the door and the wall, with matching armchairs under the window. The television was angled towards the settee and a set of coffee tables nestled in the far alcove.

'Would you like a cup of tea?' Mrs Bacon asked.

'Love one, Mum.'

'I've nothing stronger. I don't keep drink in the house.'

'I don't want anything stronger. I'm off the bottle.' He rubbed his hands down his trousers.

'For how long?'

'Forever.'

'When did you last have a drink?'

'Weeks, months ago. Yesterday.'

'I'll call the doctor.'

He could only make out the odd word coming in from the hallway as she was almost whispering, then she called out, 'Peter, the doctor wants a word.'

When the call was finished he went to the kitchen where she was pouring tea into two large mugs.

'Well?' she asked.

'He's coming round to give me some tablets and he'll try and find a rehab place.'

‘Good boy,’ she said handing him his tea. ‘I’m very proud of you.’

His hand shook so much tea slopped onto the floor.

‘Don’t worry. I’ll clear it up,’ she said. ‘Go into the front room, and I’ll bring it in.’

Bacon returned to the front room and sank gnome-like into one of the armchairs, his elbows squeezed to his sides, wringing his hands and weeping.

Roger Blackshaw knew Melissa’s earrings weren’t in the cottage. She had never visited it, but he’d promised to look for them, so he shuffled around the grubby living room examining the mantelpiece and pointlessly lifting dust ridden Capo di Monte roses and assorted junk from the cow’s Welsh dresser. In his mind he could hear the earrings ting as the tiny glass balls tapped against the curved pink petals. It was a pretty sound. Not like the twanging Melissa produced on the piano. Lisa Turner had been his only truly talented pupil.

Glass balls – ‘Balls’ Roger thought was such an ugly word, obscene and suggestive. Melissa deserved the proper word. They were stamen, or were they stigma? *A Collins English Dictionary* stood on the dresser and was the only book left from the dozens he’d returned with from London some twenty-five years ago. The others,

the cow threw out as clutter. Her knitting wool clung to the ripped dust cover so he flicked it onto the floor. Stamen, the dictionary said - the male reproductive organ of a flower, and stigma - the terminal part of the ovary. He was none the wiser.

In his pockets he found only his handkerchief and the mint sweet Melissa had given to him. He sucked on the mint and threw the wrapper into the pedal bin in the kitchen, bought only that Saturday, and, he noticed, now with three scratches gouged across it. He removed the carrier bag liner, tied the handles and dumped it in the dustbin outside on top of the bags that the cow had clearly been rifling through.

He returned to the kitchen, put the kettle on to make tea and emptied the bag of groceries bought from the village shop. The quiche was runny, but the tomatoes and coleslaw were ready to eat. He arranged the food on two small plates, - one, cheap crockery, the other, fine bone china, and left the tea brewing while he phoned Mrs Mulcaster, but getting no reply, poured the tea and laid a tatted doily on a wooden tray. The cow insisted that everything for her had to be elegant and dainty. Everything, thought Roger, except the old cow herself.

Her room was the one at the back of the cottage facing the top of the stairs. He knocked loudly, waited a couple of seconds, and getting no reply, entered. A large lump stretched down the centre of the double bed with only the top of a mop of grey curls revealed above the bedclothes.

'Afternoon, mother,' he said. 'Lunch is served.'

The lump didn't stir.

The breakfast things on the bedside table were untouched so he swapped the trays over, returned to the kitchen, threw the porridge into the bin and immediately regretted it. He should have kept it for reheating tomorrow. Last time it took five days before she realised it was the same porridge and now shards of china and bullet hard splatters of porridge lived permanently behind the cooker.

After lunch he returned to the cow's room to find her meal untouched. 'Starve then,' he said. He was about to remove the tray when the phone rang downstairs. 'Perhaps that'll be for you, mother. One of your legion of admirers.'

He'd expected it to be Mrs Mulcaster about the earrings, but it was Mrs Fortune, a weekender, wanting to arrange Saturday piano lessons for her children at Mrs Mulcaster's recommendation. Word of mouth was how he usually got new pupils; advertising was rare. The appointments were booked and when his appointment for the afternoon phoned to cancel he decided to go to Andover and be back in time for the housing meeting that night.

The bus wasn't for an hour so he went to his bedroom. It was bleak and unfriendly with only a stained chest of drawers, rickety dining chair, wardrobe and a war surplus bed. The untreated floorboards extended beyond mismatched strips of lino, and a rag-rug, given to him apparently by some woman called Auntie Jean, was

the only thing of comfort. Faded pink roses patterned the wallpaper. When he was fifteen he got a Saturday job to earn the money to buy blue paint and some books, but the paint was thrown over his flowerbed next to the old shed and his books were burned. The next day, 'That common boy from Kent,' or 'lovely Porky' as he had suddenly become, was invited to tea, and as a very special treat, shown Roger's lovely wallpaper.

The wardrobe was tucked into the dark corner by the window. Inside, hidden under a pile of clothes was a thick cardboard box which he carried lovingly over to his bed. The box contained a jumble of trinkets, bangles, toys and photographs. Roger closed his eyes and ran his hands through the contents, lifting them up then letting them trickle through his fingers like a waterfall. He foraged around seeking something, anything, pulled it out, examined it in his fingers, feeling the shape and raising it to his nose, absorbed the smell and whispered, 'Yvonne Handiford. Good little pianist. Got grade B at 'O' level, then left.' He confirmed his find, dropped it back into the box and rooted around again. This time - plastic. He knew this piece. It was the first in his collection. A faint smile flickered across his face which fell to sadness. 'Dolores,' he whispered. 'I'm sorry, Dolores. I didn't mean it. I'm so sorry.' He opened his eyes, and tenderly stroked the yellow daisy petals. The edges of the petals were rough from where the machine hadn't cut them cleanly. The white centres acted as stigma, or stamen, but were really the poppers that held the florets together. The chain was short, the

length that might be worn by a six-year old. He held it tight to his throat, pulling it, letting the edges cut into the orange peel skin on his neck. It was like the skin on the old cow's belly. Hers were the marks of childbirth – 'the branding that's my shame for giving birth to you.'

He returned the necklace to the box, put the box back in the wardrobe, locked the door and hooked the key to the ring attached to his trouser waistband.

The door to the cow's bedroom was slightly ajar. He pushed it open.

'Been spying on me again, have you? Nosy cow.'

The lump didn't stir so Roger slammed the door behind him.

That evening the church hall was packed, mainly with weekenders whose wives increasingly stayed all week as the closure date approached. Roger slipped into the aisle seat next to Mrs Cranshall.

'I was worried you weren't coming' she said. 'This could still go either way, you know. How is your mother, by the way?'

'Same as ever.'

'Never mind, deary. She's bound to die soon.'

Roger smiled. Although only ten years older than him, he viewed her as the mother he'd always wanted. She had once stood

up to the cow when she was kicking him and that had cemented his affection for her forever.

‘Here’s Melissa,’ she said.

Melissa skipped along the aisle grinning broadly at Roger. ‘I found my earrings, Mr Blackshaw,’ she said slightly breathless.

‘They were in the bathroom all the time. And Mummy says not to worry about your cottage. We will keep you and your mother together.’

‘Thank you,’ Roger said.

Melissa skipped back to her seat as Mrs Cranshall said, ‘When are you taking your driving test?’

‘Three weeks.’

‘With the money from the cottage you can buy a car and escape.’

‘That’s the idea’.

‘Good for you’.

Ernest Harrodyne, who was chairing the meeting as always, banged his gavel on the wooden block and shouted, ‘Order, order.’

‘Mild and bitter,’ someone yelled.

There was small laughter and Harrodyne affected a smile before saying, ‘We have called this meeting to discuss the disgusting housing plans of this council regarding the building of five hundred houses on the green fields at the back of Cornfield Cottage.’

‘That’s your cottage Roger. It’s Cornfield Cottage now,’ Mrs Cranshall said.

'It's surrounded by cow fields.'

'Cowfields Cottage doesn't quite hack it.'

Harrodyne's plump red face shone with sweat as he continued.

'We must fight these bureaucrats. This is our countryside, our county, our village. We shall fight them in the fields, the streets, the town halls and the courts if necessary. We will never surrender.'

'He thinks he's bloody Churchill.' It was Allan Allenby who was seated immediately behind Roger. 'I'd like to speak to you afterwards, Rog. Get your angle for the *Advertiser*'. His breath was slightly beery and moistened Roger's neck. 'You're the only truly interested party.'

Harrodyne was saying, 'We shall now hear from the voice of reason, or an accountant, as he calls himself.' Slight laughter. 'As you probably know, Giles Snelly and his lovely wife, Louisa, moved to Wherwent some five years ago, and in that time have so fully integrated themselves into village life as to be locals.'

Snelly stood, acknowledged the applause then began, 'I have driven down here tonight from Solihull, as a mark of how strongly I feel about this development...'

'Five years,' Allenby said. 'Every Saturday and part of Sunday unless they're on holiday, visiting relatives, have a better offer. That's what? Hundred, hundred and fifty days. You can positively smell the village pond in his piss.'

Snelly had done his homework. Phrases like 'historic significance', 'our heritage', 'disastrous effects of newcomers' just poured from his lips like passion from a bottle.

'Disastrous effects of newcomers,' Allenby said. 'What the hell does he think he is?'

'A pillar of the community,' Mrs Cranshall said.

'Pillock more like.'

'I think he means it,' Roger said.

'I'm sure he does. But to hear him talk anyone would think he was a well-established much loved convolvulus, instead of a bloody parasitic bindweed.'

Snelly was saying, 'I look at the beautiful gardens we have established...'

'Jack Barnstow's his gardener,' Mrs Cranshall said.

'...And I look at the expense in terms of time, effort and money...'

'Expense,' Allenby said. 'That was your Tom supplied those plants, Eady, wasn't it? Surplus from the Manor. Perk for the gardeners.'

'He taught me everything I know about gardening,' Roger said.

'Now don't go blaming him,' Allenby said. 'Oh, let's get out of here. Get a pint.'

The pub was next to the church hall and busy with regulars. It was old with a beamed ceiling and uneven flagstone flooring. Roger found a table next to the unlit grate and Allenby brought over two

pints of best bitter. Allenby supped several inches off the top, while Roger's sip barely broke the head.

'Now, your cottage,' Allenby said.

'It's Mother's.'

'Yes, but she'll be dead soon. Look Roger, what I need is the personal angle. I can churn out the political - just update the articles from the Oak Tree Farm protests. But it's the human interest bit. Something to give the troops.'

'It's not a military campaign.'

'It is to hear them talk. I know it's Mainwaring in *Dad's Army*, but it's all good fun.'

'The Oak Tree was still built.'

'The war, desperate housing shortage, good reasons. But now it's ingrates stopping it.'

'Ingrates?' Roger said.

'Ungrateful bastards. We need new blood, new residents, not more weekenders. The village is dying.'

A roar rose from the darts match. 'Twenty plays thirty-seven.'

'I thought you were against this development,' Roger said.

'My newspaper is. I'm not.'

'You're the editor. Your newspaper should reflect your views.'

'My newspaper reflects the views that sell.' Voices broke the silence outside. 'The meeting must be over. Better get working. Doesn't pay to look as if I'm just making it up.'

Allenby swilled his pint before sidling to the back of the group of ingrates. 'Great meeting,' he said heartily. 'How do you think it'll pan out?'

By the time Roger left the pub, most of the gathering had dispersed, except for a small group chatting loudly outside the hall.

In his haste to get to the meeting he'd forgotten his torch, and although the village green was sufficiently illuminated to enable him to negotiate the pond, the lane to his cottage was long and dark. From the brow of the first hill in the lane he glanced back at the village. An orange beam of light glowed into the darkness from the hall's doorway and in the still air indistinct voices drifted over the open fields. White lights from torches bobbed towards the Goodman Estate and the church spire poked into the night sky.

Few from the Oak Tree development had gone to the meeting. That development was accused of bringing urban sprawl but actually brought fewer houses than the Goodman and a curious myth about the felling of a six hundred-year old oak. The oak was actually a rotting sycamore that had already blown down.

Roger felt a tinge of sadness standing between the affected fields. He loved the view from his bedroom window, but on hot days the reek of cow pats wafted into the house. The cottage was silhouetted against the grey sky with its over tall chimneys seemingly pushing into the clouds giving the impression of smoke and a few stars pushed their laser rays through the clouds.

The air smelt of wet grass and animal musk. Crickets tweeted in the fields and something rustled the long grass. The sounds and smells made him ambivalent about the new development. The countryside was a fresh clean earthy presence he loved. The unattractive badly proportioned cottage, he liked. The demanding overbearing unpredictable cow, he hated. If she weren't there he would fight the development. But she was there. She was in his head, in his heart, in his soul. Destroy the cottage and they destroy her. Keep the cottage and they destroy him.

Roger heaved a suitcase off the top of the wardrobe, crashing it against the front panel. The loud hollow sound vibrated through his brain making him shudder, tense up, shake his head in swift stiff movements as a cold wet sensation spread over his skull. He swung the suitcase onto the bed then went to listen at the cow's door. She was snoring. In his room he removed from the suitcase a fitted blue dress that he'd made after returning from National Service - two years in the army where he'd learned to march, fire a rifle and eat slops far tastier than the muck the cow cooked. That was before he went to London to get away from her and discover a new life. In the barracks the others bragged about the women they had slept with, or shafted, as Craddock put it. He came from Dagenham and worked

for Ford. The girls were easy, he said. You could take your pick, a new one every night.

‘Why’s that?’ Sloan said. ‘You so bad none came back for seconds?’

The others laughed. Craddock lunged over the bed to grab Sloan, but he dived out of the way. Craddock’s foot got tangled in the blankets and he fell, cracking his chin and losing three teeth.

Roger had gone out the next night with Sloan and some others from the barrack, found himself a prostitute in Aldershot, and ceased to be a virgin soldier.

Further down in the suitcase was a crumpled green floral dress he’d made three years ago. After ironing it carefully, he slipped the dress on over a cotton wool padded bra and kapok and calico hip enlargers. He arranged a short brown wig speckled with grey on his head and slipped on a pair of tights that made him feel like a penguin with their long body and short legs. From the suitcase he took a small make up bag, gently stroked on some coral coloured lipstick and dabbed copious amounts of compact powder over his chin and cheeks to cover his beard shadowing. From behind the wide legs of the wardrobe he removed a pair of black kitten heeled shoes, bought in London, the money paid to a shop assistant who asked where he was performing, she liked drag acts - but Roger was not a drag act. He was a man whose mother made him dress as his sister.

He scrutinised his image in the mirror. The overall effect was acceptable - womanly, respectable, fifty-something - a man at peace with himself, in union, communion, with his sister.

He walked softly down stairs, side stepping the creaky treads, and emerged into the cool night air – free once again.

Chapter 1

Six weeks in rehabilitation and a commitment to Dr Kennimore to get a job, keep a diary and attend AA meetings had been Bacon's passport back to the village. He now surveyed his surroundings with a journalist's eye taking in the ancient church and pub, the Victorian school and telephone wires – all signs of history and a commitment to progress.

He strolled across the green to the *Wherwent Advertiser's* office to examine the photographs on the boards in the windows – the winning girl in jodhpurs at the gymkhana, the village cricket team, a farmer and his prize bull. In the corner, under the heading, 'Other Local Villages' was a picture Bacon recognised. A girl dressed in football strip had been banned from playing in the local schools' football league. The headmaster and her father claimed it was sexism. *The Messenger* ran the story supporting the girl, but in reality believed it was down to the school having only ten boys. The story died when an eleventh boy arrived and it was when a similar story was doing the rounds that the eleven year old Bacon, so intrigued by adult lies and manipulation, decided to become a journalist.

He entered the newspaper office where Alan Allenby was arranging articles on a large layout table. He didn't look up. This Bacon knew was a trick used by his old editor, Alastair Helmer, whose maxim was, 'Make 'em wait. Make 'em suffer. Let 'em know

who's boss.' It worked with new young reporters, but old lags, like him, just barged on.

'Alan Allenby. Editor.' Bacon said in what he hoped was a confident manner.

'You asking or telling?'

'Checking. Peter Bacon, journalist.'

Allenby ignored the proffered hand.

'And what do you want? Peter Bacon, journalist.'

Bacon smiled, 'Just moved back here from London. Fed up with the rat race and all that. Not married, no ties, mother getting on, living alone, wanted to be near her. And, if I'm honest with myself, wanted to move back to the village I love.' He knew he was saying too much. 'Those who explain, lie' was the journalists' maxim, followed by 'Silence is a vacuum needing to be filled.'

The vacuum was Allenby's but his long, slow sidelong stare told Bacon that he had no intentions of filling it.

'I was on the nationals,' Bacon said. '*The Messenger*.'

Allenby cleared his throat. He sounded croaky, like he was getting over a cold.

'We don't do scandal mongering here.'

'*The Messenger* has a massive circulation,' Bacon said. 'Over three million.'

'It needs it to pay its libel bills.'

‘Libel doesn’t mean the story isn’t true. It simply means that the article was deemed to have caused embarrassment or loss of personal esteem.’

‘Thank you for telling me what I already know.’

Bacon stepped nearer to the desk. A piece on Farmer Cullin’s pigsty was next to one on the street lighting on the sixties development.

‘It’s a shame about Farmer Cullin being conned like that,’ Bacon said.

‘Should have read this paper. Same thing happened to Ted Buck on Sunning Hill Farm. Anyway,’ Allenby said looking directly at Bacon. ‘I’m a very busy man. If you’ve got a story tell it quickly. I’ll see if it’s suitable for next week’s edition.’

‘As I said, I’m a journalist...’

‘You’re looking for a job.’

‘I have vast experience.’

‘Landymore.’

‘That story was true. It was just deemed to have caused embarrassment.’

‘Screwing a dolly bird. Would that I could suffer such embarrassment.’

‘Well, that aside, I understand a new development is being built just outside the village. I could work on that, if you like. I’ve noticed you’ve covered the meetings and planning applications with

commendable thoroughness, but I think there is an area that still needs to be explored.'

'And your commendable proposal is?'

'The human interest angle.'

'What human interest angle?'

Bacon rubbed his sweaty hands together. He wanted a drink.

'It seems to me, Mr Allenby that your articles cover the villagers' position superbly. You explained where it would be built, the fields that would be affected, the affects on farming, the village, shop, school...'

'I know what I've written. What's your suggestion?'

'I'll interview the villagers. See how it will affect them personally. But mostly, it'll be about the cottage that's going to be knocked down. A home will be destroyed.'

'The people in the cottage don't want to be dragged into this.'

'They are dragged into this.'

'Not through this newspaper they're not. They're very private.'

'All the more reason to interview them. Their privacy is being destroyed.'

'Look, I'll tell you what, Bacon, write me a few articles, bring them in, say Wednesday, and I'll take a look. Can't promise anything, mind.'

'That's a deal.' Bacon held out his hand for shaking. It was ignored.

Diary 1

Went for a job today. Local rag - runs on a shoestring, Alan Allenby, editor. After Cambridge he trained in journalism, got a job on one of the broadsheets, *The Times* I think, got the boot and ended up back here working for Daddy. Humiliating having to go to him for a job.

Remember him from school. Snivelling little git always wanting his mummy. Always whinging to the teacher about being bullied. A bit of pushing and shoving, kids' stuff and he makes out like its murder.

I need a drink, but that will pass, Kennimore said.

Walked past the pub today – several times. The Ploughman's Furrow, like that name. My hands itched, went sweaty. Perfectly normal. Kennimore said that too. Got the same thing last time I tried sobriety.

One day down and a VICTORY. Freelance work and no drink.

Good dinner. Shepherd's pie. Mum looked tired. Her age, I suppose.

Really miss Felicity. Wonder what she's doing. Screwing that posh no-good husband of hers, I shouldn't wonder. Always thought she'd leave him. Said she would. Well, sort of said she would.

I'll write to her. Now I've done rehab and got a job, she's bound to come back. Dr Kennimore said I should leave my old life behind but it's my old life I want back. Bet he's never been pissed in his life.

Went to AA today. Sat next to some woman there - Gertrude - not Gerty or Trudy like normal people, but Gertrude. 'It's the name my mother gave me and I honour her memory by using it.' What about her father? God, she was a snooty madam. 'What was Felicity like?' she asked in her bloody irritating high pitched Celia Johnson voice. 'It all sounds most terribly sordid, but really it wasn't.' Did she say that in *Brief Encounter*, or was it another film, assuming she said it at all. Whatever it was, one thing's for sure, if she'd have spoken in a normal working class voice no one would have had any difficulty in seeing it as all terribly sordid. She went on like they were a pair of sweet innocent star-crossed lovers, like everything was totally beyond their control, like they were some sort of middle-aged Romeo and Juliet.

Now there's a pair for you. Romeo and Juliet. Surely they were screwing before they were married. The swinging sixties for the fourteenth century. Their passions were raised by the virginals and the Madrigals. Or were they Tudor. Well, Shakespeare was certainly Tudor and with his version of history that'll do.

This is rambling all over the place. But that's what Kennimore said do. Just let it all spill out. It doesn't matter if it makes sense. Just let it flow. It's to be a stream of consciousness. Eat your heart out Virginia Woolf. This is Mrs Dalloway for the masses.

Must go to bed now so will do my aims for tomorrow, as per Kennimore the Great's edict.

Tomorrow's aims:

Start looking for the human interest on housing development.

Interview Mum over breakfast.

Interview the shopkeeper.

Interview the patrons of the Ploughman's. No. Won't do the pub. NOT THE PUB !!!

Chapter 2

Breakfast was old-fashioned porridge and sultanas. Bacon sniffed it and, fearing that it was part of a health regime, left it in favour of asking his mother her opinion on the new development.

‘It’s good,’ she said. ‘It’ll bring better facilities, maybe shops, more buses.’

‘But it’ll destroy the village character.’

‘What character? The character of the twenties development, the sixties development, the Edwardian, Victorian, Stuart, Medieval.’

‘All right, don’t get shirty with me. I’m simply applying the general principle that major developments destroy character.’

‘Is this for your article?’

‘Yes. I’m doing the human interest angle. I want to know what real villagers think.’

‘As opposed to weekenders?’

‘As opposed to the gob almighties.’

She poured his tea as he reluctantly spooned porridge into his mouth.

‘Did Alan Allenby happen to mention payment?’

‘Yes, per article accepted.’

‘And if they’re not accepted?’

‘Why wouldn’t they be? I’m a top journalist.’

‘Be careful.’

‘Careful of what?’

'Rumours. Just rumours.'

* * * * *

As Marcia Duff served Mrs Cranshall she poked a finger at *The Daily Messenger*. 'Local,' she said. 'Little girl. Murdered near here.'

'It says Newbury,' Mrs Cranshall said.

'Not far. Car. Bus. Train. Easy. Like Landymore. One who wrote the article. Local boy. Went to the village primary. Cost a packet - libel. Probably all true. No smoke without fire, I always say.'

'In my experience,' Mrs Cranshall said, squeezing the newspaper out from under Marcia Duff's finger. 'There's frequently plenty of smoke without fire. And usually for no good reason.'

Bacon, who had popped into the shop to read the headlines of the national papers, followed Mrs Cranshall outside. 'Excuse me,' he said, walking along next to her. 'I'm sorry to bother you, but I'm writing an article on the new housing development and I'm interested in knowing what the villagers think.'

Mrs Cranshall stopped and looked at him closely. 'Why ask me? There's regular meetings in the village hall, and articles in the local paper.'

'Yes, I know, but I'm interested in the human side. How it would affect the villagers personally.'

'As individuals, you mean.'

'Yes.'

She smelt faintly of lavender which blended naturally with the damp grass until a car's fumes barged in.

'With the sole exception of poor dear Roger, and his mother, it would affect people's lives very little, I'd have thought. None of the other developments have.'

'Really?'

'Yes. It's only weekenders who pontificate about the ruination of rural life and community spirit. Then they live in cities, so what do they know.'

'Good morning Mrs Cranshall,' said a smartly dressed woman with a loud voice and a condescending smile. She glanced at Bacon dismissively.

'Morning, Mrs Frobisher,' Mrs Cranshall said. 'Not gone back to Bristol this week.'

'Bath, actually. What a lovely morning, and with such a beautiful view.' She swept her arm wide. 'It would be such a pity to spoil it.'

'If you mean the development, that'll be that way,' Mrs Cranshall flicked her head back. 'But don't worry; you won't be able to see it from here.'

'It's the principle I'm talking about. After all, we don't want Wherwent to become another Andover do we now?'

'No, we certainly don't. Who wants schools, supermarkets, transport, infrastructure. Dreadful.'

'The developers' are holding their meeting on Thursday. Then you'll see. Urban sprawl, Mrs Cranshall, urban sprawl.'

'Like Bath.'

Mrs Frobisher huffed marching off towards the Goodman Estate.

'You're Peter Bacon, aren't you?' Mrs Cranshall said. 'The reporter.'

'Yes.'

'Doing articles for *The Advertiser*?'

'Yes. How do you...'

'Fancy a cuppa?'

'Please.'

Mrs Cranshall's cottage was three doors down from the shop. An uneven stone path separated two small gardens displaying traditional plants and the scent of lavender wafted through the air as she brushed past several bushes. The straw on the thatched roof was tired looking with patches of chicken wire showing. Two plaques, one split wood, the other chipped plaster, proclaimed the name, 'Lavender Cottage'.

The front door was low making him feel like Snow White stepping down into the dwarves' cottage. It led straight into the cosy living room filled with rag rugs. Bacon was directed towards the settee while Mrs Cranshall went to make tea. Thick gnarled wooden beams supported the ceiling. An unfinished rag rug lay on the floor next to a rocking chair that faced the television. The dull dusty smell

of hessian mingled with the scent of lavender and a roll of hessian, loosely wrapped in plastic, and a huge transparent bag of rags filled the tiny bay window while a pile of unused rugs lay under the sideboard, their edges extending into the room.

Mrs Cranshall brought in tea and cakes.

'You shouldn't have gone to so much trouble,' Bacon said.

'It's no trouble. I always have elevenses. Are you a mil or a mif?'

'Sorry?'

'Milk first or last?'

'Either,' Bacon said.

'Some people are fussy, but it actually makes no difference. It all gets mixed up in the end.'

'Someone should tell James Bond that.'

'Ah, yes, James Bond,' she said.

'You're a Bond fan.'

'Not really. But a friend of mine is. He runs the village film club. I always go to support him.'

'And he is?'

'Dear Roger Blackshaw.'

'And which is your favourite Bond film?'

'Does it matter?'

'Who is your favourite Bond?'

'Does that matter?'

He took his tea and rested it on his lap.

'The new development,' he said waiting for her to sit down. 'Do you think it'll go ahead?'

'Of course it will. Why shouldn't it?' As she handed him a slice of cake she leaned over conspiratorially. 'The reason I've invited you in is to ask you to be good to Alan. He's tried so hard to keep that paper afloat and he's not a well man. Those ingrates are bleeding him dry, if only they knew it.'

'Is the paper closing?'

'Who knows? Just don't expect too much, that's all I'm saying.'

Roger left early, making time for him to sit and relax on the bench before catching the bus for Southampton. This was his busiest teaching day, and he also had two driving lessons.

A pushchair juddered over the grass as a little girl running beside it stumbled and fell. 'Get up,' shouted the mother. 'Stop messing about. You're late. You spend little enough time at school these days, Christ knows.'

An estate car drove past. Birds twittered and the air smelt slightly of damp vegetation. Green algae covered one end of the pond while at the other end mallards dipped and paddled about. A cheer came from the school. It must be in session. That's what the old cow called it. 'When the school's in session I can get rid of you.' And when it was in session she would stand outside and argue with

the other mothers about knitting, sewing, cooking, anything. She was the only one who was any good at them and on the way home he would hear the stories of how she had put those stupid bitches in their place and he'd get a wallop just to remind him of his place – and that place was as her skivvy.

As Roger took *Casino Royale* from his battered manuscript case he caught a glimpse of a man leaving Mrs Cranshall's cottage. The man walked towards the darkened alleyway that led to Roger's lane. He turned his attention to the book and followed his habit of trying to remember the story of a book he had already read. He knew it was about a game of poker and James Bond had to win for some reason. Roger turned to the blurb. It wasn't poker, it was Baccarat. Of course it was Baccarat. That was Bond's game, just as bourbon was really Bond's drink, not vodka martini.

A hand gripped his shoulder, making him jump, dropping the book.

'Sorry, Roger, deary. Didn't mean to startle you. Waiting for the bus, are you? Shouldn't be long now.' Mrs Cranshall came around the bench to sit next to him. 'Just thought I'd say Alan's got someone doing a human interest story on the new development.'

'Is there any human interest?'

'There's self-interest. And I suppose those selves consider themselves human. But anyway, how's your mother?'

'Same as ever.'

'Haven't seen her much lately.'

'Neither have I. She eats, sleeps and causes a lump in the bed, that's about all.'

'Wait till the bulldozers get there. That'll get her up. Does she know about the development yet?'

'I haven't told her.'

'Who's going to sign the house over?'

'Me, if I can get away with it.'

'If you need someone to witness that it's yours, I'll do it.'

'That would be great.'

Mrs Cranshall tapped his knee. 'Here's your bus. Soon be easier by car.'

She heaved herself off the bench and walked stiffly back to her cottage.

On the bus a teenage boy was sitting hunched up with his Doc Martins on the seat. The cow had once confronted a boy who'd put his pale blue brothel creepers on the seat and was promptly told to piss off.

'I'm not your son,' the boy said. 'Don't assume we're all gutless wankers like him, you hatchet faced old hag.'

The cow immediately clipped Roger about the ear and told him to sit still and be quiet. When the Teddy boy got off he asserted his authority by dragging his knee length jacket over her head, ruffling up her hair.

'If you've got any guts,' he said to Roger, 'you'd leave that hag and start looking the bee's knees.'

The boy's hair was sleeked back to form a DA that brushed his black velvet collar. Roger had short back and sides and an over-large hand knitted beige jumper. The next Saturday he arrived home with a Teddy boy quiff, drainpipe trousers and a knee length blue jacket with black velvet collar. He had spent nearly all his wages. The following Tuesday he caught the coach to London, found a flat that was advertised in *The Evening Standard*, applied for several jobs, and waited three weeks till he could move into the flat. After he had settled in, he phoned every firm to register his change of address and to see how his application was going. Three said that they had sent him invitations for interview. Roger hadn't seen the letters and it didn't take him long to work out why not. One re-offered him an interview and he started the job the following week. That began his seven glorious years away from the cow.

He kept his quiff and DA, only changing it on his girlfriend's insistence. He'd known Lizzy for about six months when the Beatle's mop head became fashionable, and suddenly she didn't want to walk around with someone with a duck's arse on his head. It was only then that he realised what DA stood for. He changed the style that Saturday but always felt too old to be a mop head.

Mrs Frobisher lived in one of the more expensive properties on the Goodman Estate that were perched high above the pavement,

behind a series of steeply sloping predominately rockery gardens. The steps and upper path leading to the front doors were made from uneven stones, making them appear more medieval than from the 1920s. A hand-painted plaque declared that the Frobisher's terraced house was called Apple Tree Lodge.

Mrs Frobisher answered the door quickly, almost snapping the word, 'Yes.'

'Peter Bacon,' Bacon said. 'We met outside the shop.'

'Oh yes. You're desperate to get involved in our campaign, I take it. Come in. The place is an absolute tip, I'm afraid. The cleaner left last week without giving notice. Typical. You don't happened to know of any good cleaners, do you?'

'No.'

'Take a seat. That one will be fine.'

The living room was decorated with a large William Morris floral print on the walls, chair coverings and curtains, and was immaculate, smelling strongly of furniture polish.

Mrs Frobisher seated herself opposite, placing her slim legs elegantly to one side, making her resemble the perfect 1950s housewife in her black patent leather shoes, crease free clothes and perfectly coiffured hair. Bacon suspected that this was a dressing down day.

'This ghastly new development,' she said. 'I mean, what can one say?'

She was actually able to say quite a lot, but nothing of significance.

Outside high heels clacked along the brick pavement. Mrs Frobisher craned to see and waved ostentatiously.

‘The sixties estate has been a success,’ Bacon said.

‘Really. Such vulgar people. Do you realise there is actually a child there called Dean. I mean, I rest my case.’ She stood up abruptly. ‘Come,’ she ordered. ‘Let me show you the fuller picture.’

She breezed past him wafting furniture polish then he realised, it was actually her perfume.

Dutifully he followed her upstairs and into the main bedroom where mirrored doors covered the wall-to-wall fitted wardrobes and a king sized bed filled most of the remaining space. Two small bedside tables stood beside the bed, one held only a lamp and an alarm clock, the other, a matching lamp, a well thumbed copy of *Horse and Hound* and a hardback edition of Danielle Steel’s *Star*.

‘There, you see,’ Mrs Frobisher pointed towards the window. ‘What a magnificent view. I mean, just look at the rolling hills, ancient cottages, cows grazing in the meadows, shepherds tending their sheep, the labourer joyous in his toil. And God is in his Heaven. Who would want to destroy such an idyll? Developers! That’s who.’

Bacon saw the houses on the other side of the dipped green, some trees and the top of two tall chimneys. He couldn’t see any cows in the meadows, nor farmers tending their sheep, nor labourers

joyous in their toil. Nor, for that matter, God in his Heaven, but then he hadn't actually expected to see Him.

'That's where you must go,' she said, 'to see poor dear Roger. He doesn't say much, but one just knows he's absolutely devastated. And look, look here,' she flung open the window. 'There,' she shouted not looking out. 'See that. The church. Our beautiful ninth century church.'

'I think it's eleventh century,' Bacon said but was ignored.

He followed her arm of command and leant out of the window as far as he dared. He could see the roof of the school and the tops of trees but not much else.

'Would you really want to destroy that magnificent view?' she said.

Bacon looked at the magnificent view and found he wasn't much bothered.

Bacon was surprised to discover a bypass separating the village from the lane leading to Blackshaw's cottage. It wasn't busy but surely could be cited as a potential traffic hazard. The lane was hillier than he'd expected, making him tired and wanting a drink. It had only been six weeks, four days and thirteen hours since his last one and it was only the sight of the cottage that took his mind off wanting another.

A grass verge inclined sharply towards an old and splitting chestnut and wire fence which shielded the garden in front of the cottage. The low bottle green gate was made from four thick vertical lengths of wood held in place by a fifth that stretched diagonally across. A bolt secured the gate to its post. Tufts of trimmed grass poked out between cracks in the concrete path, and the brown leaves of the daffodils were tied back.

There was no reply to Bacon's knock so he looked through the letterbox but the spring was heavy, and the privacy of the household protected by two thick rows of bristles. Heavy lace curtains screened the windows either side of the door and a larger window, self evidently serving a room, displayed cheap net curtains. Bacon tiptoed across the lawn and by stretching over the flowerbed and using his hands to shield the sunlight, he caught a glimpse of a moving shadow, a skirt, or could it be a blanket protecting the inside door from drafts. He could definitely make out a dining table and chairs, television set and dresser. He stepped past the hard pruned hydrangea bush and a young purple rhododendron to return to the front door where he tried hammering on the knocker again but still got no reply.

'I'm a reporter,' he shouted. 'I'm trying to save your cottage.'

Around the side and back the brickwork was a much darker grey-red colour with the window surrounds decorated in light brown filigree tiles, making Bacon wonder if this might have originally been the front of the house. The two disproportionate chimneys were on

the same side of the cottage suggesting that only these rooms required heating. He tried working out the house layout - front room, scullery, kitchen, two bedrooms, and bathroom where the frosted window looked out - probably originally a tithe cottage belonging to the manor. He would check that out.

The back garden, much wider than the front, contained five flowerbeds - four oval, one circular - and resembled a municipal park with each bed consisting of an identical series of plants arranged in order of height, the tallest in the middle. Beyond the flowerbeds was a solid panelled fence and shed. Tomorrow he would return with a camera. Pictures would give weight to the articles, but tonight he would compose some pieces to show Allenby the quality of his work. He would take the devoted son and ailing aged mother approach then, after he'd interviewed Blackshaw, hopefully tomorrow, he would really lay on the devotion, even if he had to exaggerate it. He knew Allenby would accept that as all good journalists exaggerated when necessary to make a point.

A curtain twitched behind an open window upstairs. He didn't see it clearly, but he was sure that someone was inside. He rushed round to the front door but receiving no response to his knock concluded that it must, after all, have been just the curtain blowing in the breeze.

Roger returned to Wherwent exhilarated. Both driving instructors had predicted he would pass first time. The weak evening sun slipped over the weeping willow as some young boys played football beyond the pond. A couple of little girls poked long thin sticks through the algae, breaking it up, revealing the grey brown muddy water underneath. A slight chill refreshed the air as Roger rested on the bench, casually watching the girls laugh as a skittish water boatman propelled itself on its oar-like hind legs across the surface of the water

‘Oi,’ shouted one of the boys. ‘You leave my sister alone.’

The boy’s accent carried the flat vowels of Bermondsey or Tower Hamlets. The London accent had not blended with the local into a sort of Hampdon blur as was supposed, but rather, seemed to be taking over.

‘Perv,’ the boy shouted walking determinedly towards the girls. ‘Our mum warned us about pervs like you.’

The boy grabbed one of the girls roughly by the sleeve and pulled her back around to the far side of the pond.

‘Take no notice of them,’ Mrs Cranshall slid onto the bench next to him. ‘Something very odd about that family from what I hear. But that aside, I just wanted to warn you, there’s a reporter doing an article on the development.’

‘Where from?’

'Oh, don't worry. He's only freelancing for Alan so it won't be published. But the thing is - the reporter's Peter Bacon. You remember him, don't you?'

A lump like a broken twig dug into Roger's throat.

'I knew you would. Thought I'd better warn you, that's all.'

'Perhaps he's changed,' Roger said. 'Matured.'

'Well, he's certainly aged.'

'Thanks for the warning, Mrs Cranshall.'

'Eady. How many times do I have to tell you?'

After Mrs Cranshall had returned to her cottage, Roger tried to dismiss Bacon from his thoughts and concentrate on some reading before trudging home. Dusk was late. It was almost the longest day. James Bond had taken on Le Chiffre in a high stakes game of baccarat and lost.

The cottage was dark and the living room warm, but a chill was gradually taking over. Roger went upstairs to empty his manuscript case, organise it for tomorrow and arrange his jacket over the back of the kitchen chair that doubled as a bedside table. He threw *Casino Royale* carelessly onto the bed where it landed in the dip in the mattress.

Across the hall the cow's door was shut. He knocked once and entered.

The lump lay in the bed, its grey curls barely trailing along the pillow.

'Want some dinner?' he asked.

Silence.

'Tea? Supper? Whatever you're calling it these days.'

Silence.

He went downstairs to find dirty dishes waiting for him in the kitchen.

'Don't bother washing-up,' he shouted.

He moved the dishes to the draining board, wiped up the crumbs from the work surface and put the kettle on. From the fridge he took a readymade lasagne and a bag of greens, read the instructions for the lasagne carefully, put the oven on to heated up and prepared the greens. Today, he decided, the greens would be sliced across the leaves while they were still attached. That would annoy the cow. 'The leaves should be separated and stripped from the stalk using a knife.' Once she'd a row with Mrs Burman outside the school gate about this. How to prepare greens - you slice them on the stalk; you strip them off the stalk; you slice them lengthways; you slice them sideways; you slice them on the diagonal to the hypotenuse of the apex of the third leaf from the right. Stupid bloody cows. Who cares how they're sliced? Just bung them in boiling water, drain them, shaken not stirred, then eat them.

In the living room he switched on the television for the news. It had already started and there was no progress on the case of the murdered girl from Newbury - Daisy Thomlinson, eight years old and last seen on her way to the local sweet shop. The police were

appealing for information. And no, they were not ruling in or out any connection with Daisy's death and that of Lily-Mae Meadows whose body had been found near Wells in Somerset three weeks earlier.

Roger went to put the lasagne in the oven and returned in time to hear the latest news on Thatcher's emptying of the old Victorian mental hospitals and the care in the community programmes. He listened carefully to see if Tooting Bec Mental Hospital had been cleared out. It provided rehabilitation for drug addicts and drunks. It also provided Tooting with as fine a selection of nutters, as Lizzy insisted on calling them, as ever you could wish to see.

'There's one,' she'd told him, 'who touches the shop window then crosses the road to touch the shop window that side, then crosses back again to touch the shop window of the next one along. Then he crosses back again and so on. He shouldn't be allowed out amongst decent people.'

Roger said nothing as he remembered what the cow had said, 'I should have put you away. Spiteful, murdering bitch. Everyone said I should. You're so lucky to have me for a mother.'

And after her first and only visit to the cottage to meet the cow, Lizzy too thought he was lucky to have such a sweet lovely mother.

'You'll soon learn what she's like,' he'd said.

And Lizzy did learn – the cow started phoning her at work, at home, her family. Lizzy left him shortly after and the cow was happy.

Diary 2

Wrote well tonight. Really got into the swing of it. Some fantastic lines.

‘Depressed Mr Roger Blackshaw’ and all that sort of stuff. Really my forte. Helmer always liked my misery articles. He used to lap them up.

It’s what Allanby’s rag needs - a bit of tabloid. That’s why *The Messenger* sells millions and the *Advertiser* sells tens. Assuming it gets into double figures, that is.

Mrs Frobisher - what a supercilious binnet. When she made me lean out of the window to look at the church I almost said, ‘What a shame. I completely forgot to bring my periscope.’

And that wallpaper. Dear God, it was like sitting in Kew Gardens. Busy, busy, busy. I could feel the green fly crawling all over me. Or was that the DTs. The DTs might have been preferable.

It was like when I went to interview the parents of a kid who’d got arrested for peddling drugs at school. They lived in Trellick Tower. What a dump. Made the Covilles and the Powises look upmarket, but then I suppose they were up-market pre-bedsit land. Anyway, *The Messenger* was trying to get the black readership away from the *Sun*. I got up to the

twenty-fourth floor, or whatever and I was knackered. The lifts were out of action. What's new! A black woman answers the door and invites me in. All okay so far, except inside it isn't black. No glass fish on nylon dressing table doilies, no smell of fresh paint and wallpaper paste. But, it is clean. Spotlessly clean. I'm shown into the living room and at the end of it there is this fantastic view of London. I can see parks and squares and the sights, and I was getting a real feel for just how green London really is. But all the time I'm thinking there's something not quite right about this place. Then I look at the room itself and it's done out like a barn. The walls are pebble-dash. The ceiling's got cheap crappy plastic beams going across it, and there're these huge heavy horse harness things all over the walls. It turns out that the bloke who lives there always wanted to be a farmer, but he came from Hammersmith, so the closest he got to tending sheep was to drive a dray horse for the brewery. And when he left he took the harness things with him.

I wrote a really good human interest thing on that, then, had to write an apology the next day because the black woman I called his wife was actually his next door neighbour who had popped round to give him his lunch after his operation. Can't remember what for now. Gallstones, I think.

I was on the bottle then and pissed in the stairwell, then got thumped for it. I was really narked about that. The whole bloody place stank like a urinal.

Anyway, mustn't get worked up. It ruins my sleep.

Tomorrow's aims:

Interview Blackshaw.

Take copy to Allenby.

Take shots of Blackshaw's garden.

Might photograph Mrs Frobisher's magnificent view of the church. Should be good for a laugh, if nothing else.

Chapter 3

Alan Allenby's computer was an original. It cost thousands, ran on six inch floppies and Bacon was convinced, had a little man shovelling coal in the back.

'Morning, Mr Allenby,' Bacon said chirpily. 'How are you today?'

Allenby ignored him. He looked tired with dark shadows under sunken eyes.

'I've written a couple of short articles to show you my style.'

'I know your style. I've seen it in the tabloid.'

Bacon placed the typed sheets of paper in front of Allenby.

'I've gone for the personal sadness verses hideous estates angle. Ruination of the community, blight on the village, old cottages, mature gardens and so on. I was going to take photos to illustrate the articles.'

An unsmiling Allenby picked up the first article and read in a sing-songy voice, "Desperate Mrs Louisa Frobisher, 38 of et cetera, cried as she told me of her anguish over the proposed new housing estate, and her fears for the destruction of the beautiful rolling hills surrounding Cornfield Meadows." He put the sheets of paper down. 'Pure tabloid.'

'Thank you.'

'That wasn't a compliment. We prefer something more sophisticated here.'

'May I ask what your circulation is, Mr Allenby?'

'No, you may not.'

'It's not very big, is it? May I suggest that you are actually going under.'

'And you, Mr Bacon, may I remind you, have already gone under.'

'But I'm rising.'

'And you think that that's the way to get me to buy your article.'

'No. Sorry.'

Allenby huffed. 'Bacon apologises. Well, well, well. Now there's a headline for you. Let's try the Roger Blackshaw article. This should prove to be most erudicious.'

Allenby cleared his throat to make ready to read, and Bacon searched his vocabulary for 'erudicious' and found that it wasn't there.

"Desperate', desperate again, I see. 'Desperate Roger Blackshaw, 54, of Cornfield Cottage was almost crying over his cup of tea when speaking about his beloved childhood home.' Allenby stopped reading. 'You haven't actually spoken to Roger, have you?'

'Not yet. He wasn't in. I was just showing you this as a sample of my work and that I can deliver on time'.

'Roger's out a lot. Try again but don't bother with the mother. Bit of a cow. Deranged by my reckoning. Get what he actually thinks, if he'll speak to you. He's a private piano teacher, well

respected, can seem a bit odd at first, but harmless and loves his garden.'

'I've that in the article.'

'Wonderful. You observe.'

Allenby held out the articles and winced, clutching his stomach.

'Are you all right?'

'Yes, fine. And remember, we go for truth in this office. If we can't prove it, we don't want it. We're not scandalmongers.'

'But you're going down,' Bacon said taking the articles. 'Have you ever thought of freebees?'

'And exactly how will giving it away make money?'

'You get advertisers to pay for space then deliver the paper to every house.'

'In a village.'

'You spread out to the surrounding villages, maybe even a town or two such as Andover and Stockbridge. It's worth a try.'

'Big paper conglomerates already do that.'

'They were small individual papers that amalgamated into conglomerates and became successful.'

'Or unsuccessful.'

'Then they stop.'

Allenby breathed heavily, rubbing his chest hard. His fingernails were very pale.

'And remember, I want only truth.'

'You should see a doctor, if you want truth.'

'It's nothing. Indigestion.'

'It's morning.'

'I had breakfast.'

'I'll come back this afternoon with my truthful article. Have you got a camera?'

'Yes. Show me a truthful article and I'll show you the camera.'

'And let me use it?'

Allenby looked at him.

'Truth is what I'm getting at,' Bacon said.

'And let you use it.'

On his way to Blackshaw's cottage, Bacon noted the affected area – a small clump of woodland, a few fields, some trees and a lone cottage. He shrugged - nothing much lost then. He moved closer to the woodland and for a moment, his mind flashed back to when he had first arrived at *The Messenger*. The chief crime reporter had told him that the best journalists found stories for themselves and murder victims were often found in overgrown bushy areas. For the next few days Bacon had assiduously scoured every blade of grass looking for human remains until he twigged, it was a wind-up. Five months later a rival reporter got an exclusive when his dog sniffed out a body on Wandsworth common. Since then Bacon had occasionally looked around thickets, but with no great expectations. This woodland was clearly undisturbed.

From Blackshaw's front gate Bacon found he could see most of the church, the chimneys of the school and part of the meeting hall. Somewhere a bird twittered and it evoked the same sense of wellbeing he enjoyed at the hospital and Kennimore. He was sober; he walked in the grounds; birds sang and leaves rustled.

'Must be nice after the noise of London,' his mother had said.

'Birds sing and leaves rustle in London,' he'd snapped after three days of sobriety. Then after six weeks he agreed. It was nice after the noise of London.

Bacon banged the door knocker. There came the sound of shuffling then a slight shabby man in his fifties opened the door and stared at him.

Bacon eagerly took it all in - the thinning, greying badly cut hair, baggy flannel trousers, beige elbowed cardigan with pilling at the sides and sleeves, the threadbare shirt collar and fading brown tartan carpet slippers – a pathetic old man living on rations, desperate to keep the only thing he could call his own.

'Mr Blackshaw,' Bacon said.

No reply.

'You are Mr Blackshaw, aren't you?'

Still nothing. The unrelenting gaze unnerved Bacon. It was like the man could see right through to his very soul.

The urge to run away, have a drink, shout at the man, anything, overwhelmed him. Bacon took a deep breath, rubbed his hands together hard and said, 'Mr Blackshaw, my name's Bacon, Peter

Bacon, I'm a journalist with the *Wherwent Advertiser* and I'm writing an article on the development and its effects on you and your cottage.'

The man leant forward, poked his head out of the door, slowly twisting it to left and right, stepped back and closed the door.

A magpie ker-ka'd. Bacon looked round to see it standing on a supporting post on the fence the other side of the lane. It looked directly at him, ker-ka'd again, then flew off to land in the middle of the field searching out food.

Pity you're not a parrot, he thought, then maybe I could get the story from you.

* * * * *

Roger closed the door quietly, leant back on it and shuddered. Bile rose to his mouth giving him the vile taste of partly digested food. He forced it back down, leaving a lump in his throat, like a stone blocking his airway. His breathing was quick so he tried to slow it down by inhaling deeply. He raised his chin, held his breath for a few seconds then released it saying 'calm' in a long drawn out exhalation. He repeated this several times until the tension in his head subsided, then pushed away from the door, walked slowly into the living room and sank into the armchair by the dresser.

'Bet you're happy now,' he said, his jaws locked like a parody of a ventriloquist. After a few minutes he pushed up from the seat and walked over to the window. Bacon had gone.

Upstairs the view from his bedroom window showed the back of Bacon disappearing down the slope in the lane that led to the bypass and onto the village. He returned to the living room where he paced up and down from window to wall, fireplace to door, muttering, 'I hope you're satisfied. I hope you're bloody satisfied.'

His breathing became shallow and audible. He rubbed his sticky sweating hands together, wrung them, interlocking the fingers and unlocking them repeatedly, digging his thumbs into the eczema on the palms of his hands. The eczema had been there for as long as he could remember and was now red, burning and swollen. The centre flaked, while the edges were thick raised lumps. Between his fingers patches of eczema had flared into angry dry deep red itchy sores. Between his thumb and fingers, where it had been only red and dry, was now cut and bleeding.

He was worried about the cottage and the development. He knew that from the eczema. It was his monitor. When he was worried but not aware of his worry his palms and thumbs flared up. When he was conscious of his worry the area between his fingers flared up. When it was a sudden shock, his face burned red and angry around his eyes, but that hadn't happened.

‘I hope you’re happy now.’ He squeezed the words through his teeth. He looked up at the ceiling towards the cow’s bedroom. ‘I hope you’re fucking happy.’

Four years old was too young to take the blame for what he’d done. He remembered everything - the happiness he’d destroyed, the love, the death, his father leaving – all because of his jealousy. But he was just four years old. Yes, he knew he was lucky not to have been sent away and that his mother’s kindness had broken up the family. He knew they would have been happy without him. And maybe the cow had been right about Lizzy and starting a family. But even if their children would have been taken into care, parents trusted him with their children now.

Roger made lunch but couldn’t eat it so he took it to the cow’s room. ‘Luncheon is served,’ he said clattering the tray down onto the bedside table. She didn’t stir. He left slamming the door behind him, waited a few seconds and listened. Nothing. Maybe she was dead after all.

Melissa’s piano lesson was at five. That gave him enough time to go to Andover, buy some dress fabric maybe, and return on the next bus. His mind would have eased by then. But, ‘Bacon, Peter Bacon.’ Huh. Who did he think he was? James Bond?

When Bacon returned to the newspaper office he found Allenby pale and grey, hunched up and rubbing his stomach, his breathing awkward and shallow.

'You all right, mate?' Bacon asked.

'Fine. And don't call me mate.'

Allenby pulled open a desk drawer, removed a box of *Rennies*, snapped off four tablets and shoved them into his mouth.

'You sure you're all right?'

'Indigestion. Ever heard of it?'

'Not before lunch.'

Allenby sucked hard on the tablets. 'Well?' he said eventually.

'Get anything?'

'I saw Roger Blackshaw.'

'And?'

'Nothing. He wouldn't speak to me. Just stood there, looked up and down the lane then shut the door. Where do I know the name from?.'

'School. He's had a hard life. It does things to people.'

'We all have.'

'That's what I mean.' Allenby doubled over again clutching his stomach.

'You sure you're all right?' Bacon moved closer.

'It'll go soon. Fetch me that *Mars Bar* from the table over there.'

Bacon got the *Mars Bar* and handed it to Allenby.

'Open it.'

After a few bites Allenby relaxed a little, slumping back in his seat, one hand rubbing his stomach, the other hanging limply, loosening its grip on the *Mars Bar*.

‘I think you should see a doctor,’ Bacon said.

‘And I think you should mind your own business.’

Bacon waited. ‘Typing an article?’ he asked to break the silence.

‘Desk top publishing. Quicker than type setting. Surprised you London lot haven’t heard of it.’

‘Where are your assistants?’

‘Gathering news.’

Dust, more like, Bacon wanted to say, but instead he said, ‘Can I borrow the camera?’

‘What?’

‘The camera. I want some pictures for the article. Blackshaw’s garden, cottage. Paradise Lost. That sort of thing.’

‘Paradise Lost?’ Allenby said. ‘Ever read it?’

It was now Bacon’s turn to say nothing.

‘You’ll find one in the cupboard over there.’ Allenby pointed the *Mars Bar* vaguely in the direction of a large wall mounted cupboard. ‘It’s locked.’

The key was already in the lock. Inside Bacon found three heavy-duty reporters’ cameras from different eras in the newspaper’s history. The oldest had the large flashbulb contraption reminiscent of the sort used in Al Capone type films. Another looked like something

from when he was studying journalism, and the third looked like some modern rubbish better suited to family snaps than serious journalism.

‘Has this got film in?’ Bacon asked.

‘If it’s the new one, yes. I used it yesterday.’

‘Photographing what?’

‘Buy the paper on Friday and find out.’

Bacon locked the cupboard and waited, wanting Allenby to give instructions as Helmer did - ‘Get me his face.’ ‘Show me the cottage.’ ‘I want the garden.’ Allenby said nothing.

‘I’ll get everything then,’ Bacon said.

‘You just do that.’

As he returned to the cottage Bacon began to feel more positive. If Blackshaw refused to speak to him, so be it. He would compose his own article. That, he reasoned, was standard practice.

The house looked quiet and peaceful in its isolation – a nameless cottage on a nameless road. Not quite the parsonage of Bronte fame, but certainly one that had a Hampshire ruggedness about it. He would call the road Cornfield Lane after the Cottage. He had once visited a council terraced house in Vauxhall called Corn Meadow Cottage. Helmer had made him remove the name from the article as the family were victims and it made them sound like prats.

Bacon took photographs of the cottage and surrounds.

Through the lens the isolation was magnified. A crow squawked in

the field, chasing away a couple of magpies. So much for two for joy, he thought. Cumulus clouds billowed overhead and the hexagonal chimney stacks looked to Bacon to be unique - he would check them out. The village which appeared cosy and sheltered, nestling amongst the trees and hills, made the cottage seem even more exposed and vulnerable.

Next he took the gardens, paying particular attention to the formal flowerbeds at the back and the wooden shed with its rusty corrugated tin roof. Lastly he photographed a splintered tree stump in the field behind, probably a victim of the 1987 hurricane, he guessed.

Through the broken window panes in the shed he could just make out severed rows of yoghurt pots, each containing a sturdy shoot that was ready for planting out.

He returned to the front door to knock long and loud but still no reply. The ground floor windows were all fastened shut but the upper rear window was still open from last time. He couldn't see a ladder in the garden so returned to the shed where after giving the heavy padlock a good tug found that it was broken and opened immediately.

'You cunning little sod,' he said.

Once inside, the shed was quite light so he quickly spotted a builder's ladder lying under the bench.

It was mossy and unsteady, but extended sufficiently for him to reach the upstairs open window. He checked again that no one was

in and still getting no reply to his knock, returned to the ladder and made to haul himself up to the window. He was out of condition and heaving his tubby ill used body up each rung was difficult and tiring. By the time he reached to see into the window he was out of breath and sweating.

The window was grubby so he rubbed at it smudging the outside, spat on the smudge and rubbed some more. Now it was streaked with grime. Through the blur he fancied he saw a crumpled bed and something on the bedside table, a bowl perhaps. He banged on the window. Nothing. Reluctantly he pushed at the window and was surprised at the ease with which it opened wide. He gingerly climbed another two rungs until he was high enough to hook a leg over the ledge. So far, he reasoned, he'd committed no offence - except for trespass, of course, breaking and entry into the shed and attempted breaking and entry into the cottage, but no real offence. Once inside he could be deemed a burglar. On the other hand, who would know? He would get a better article with an inside story. He could give quotes to Blackshaw, that was standard practice, and he would be one step nearer to getting back where he belonged, on the nationals.

The bedroom was stuffy with stale air that held the whiff of fresh food and unwashed clothes. On the bedside table the bowl turned out to be a cup of un-drunk tea and a plate of untouched cold meat and coleslaw. In the corner a wicker Ali-Baba basket overflowed with dirty nightdresses, bed linen and underwear. The bed had a lump

running down the centre which, upon poking cautiously, was found to be very soft. A wig of grey curly hair sprawled like a recumbent rat across the pillow. Bacon pulled back the bedclothes to reveal a row of cushions running acting as a spine down the length of the mattress.

He took a photograph before replacing the bedding carelessly, then turned his camera to the bedroom itself. He photographed the food, the Ali-Baba basket, the pile of opened presents stashed in the corner and the wardrobe chocker block with unworn but dated clothes.

Satisfied, he turned his attention to the front bedroom where it was clean but sparse. In the wardrobe Bacon found the box of trinkets and photographs of young children and teenagers, and the suitcase of homemade women's clothes. A sewing machine which fitted neatly between the wardrobe and the outside wall was threaded and oiled. He photographed everything.

In the living room, next to the armchair by the Welsh dresser, he found knitting tucked inside a *Waitrose* plastic carrier bag and a pattern showing an attractive brunette. The armchair faced the television that was sharply angled away from the other armchair.

The kitchen looked newly painted, not shabby like the rest of the house. As the kitchen was traditionally the woman's domain, Wherwent, Bacon concluded, had its very own Norman Bates.

* * * * *

'I've got it,' Bacon shouted, charging into the newspaper office.

'Got what?' Allenby was sitting upright and seemed pain free, but grumpy.

'I've got pictures that prove that that Blackshaw bloke has something wrong with him. He doesn't live with his mother.'

'Yes, he does.'

'No he doesn't. He stuffs cushions on the bed in her room to make it look like he does.'

'She does that. She's odd.'

'She's odd? Wait till you see what I've got on film. Where's the dark room? I reckon no one sees her because she's dead.'

He emerged some time later to show Allenby the black and white photos that made the rear bedroom look larger. A dress Bacon hadn't noticed was lying over the back of an old armchair. Full knickers, full-length slip and a bra with a stretched and wrinkled midriff were draped over a wooden arm of the chair. Under the blanket the wig and lumps looked nothing on film. And even with the blanket pulled back the pillow and cushions were quite innocuous.

'Is that it?' Allenby flung the pictures back at Bacon. 'He's a lonely middle-aged man who's had a hard life. I doubt he's ever had a girlfriend, let alone sex. And it certainly wouldn't occur to him to pay for it.'

'What about this then?'

Bacon sorted through the photographs to find the pictures of the cardboard box and its contents.

Allenby took a magnifying glass from the top drawer of his desk so that he could more easily make out the faces of the children in Bacon's picture of the photographs in Blackshaw's box.

'Ah, yes,' he said. 'That's little Benjamin Banyard. He's in London now working for a petrol company. Shell, Esso. And that's William Swarbrick. Don't know what happened to him. Left the village with his family some years ago. And that, I think, might be Lisa Turner. She's on telly tonight. Nine-thirty. Beeb two. Watch it. Roger certainly will.'

'These are the children Blackshaw has taught?'

'Yes.'

'He's a Norman Bates.'

'Rubbish.'

'He's killed his mother and keeps her alive with all this bed nonsense.'

'Rubbish. He's a sad lonely man.'

'He's a paedophile and murderer.'

'Rubbish. He runs the village film club.'

'Show *Psycho* does he?'

'He's a nice man. He just has his ways.'

'I'll prove he's a psycho.'

'He's a decent hardworking bloke.'

'And I'm an investigative journalist.'

'And exactly where the hell does paedophile and murderer come from? You're still not going on about that bilge you told us all at school.'

What bilge?'

'That bilge that that cow of a mother of his told you.'

'When?'

'When he was four. And don't say you don't remember. It was one of those stories that once heard is never forgotten.'

'What about when he was four?'

'Never mind.'

Chapter 4

The house didn't feel right. Roger moved around the living room cautiously, like a cat stalking its prey. The room smelt wrong. He sniffed at the air. The scent was faint, almost non-existent, but it was there – perfume, aftershave, something pongy. The cow didn't wear it. She only wore pong if he gave it to her as a present, and then it was merely bath salts that smelt cheap and felt like un-dissolved soap powder gritting the bottom of the bath. But this smell was not freesia or rose, nor even lily of the valley. This was masculine, the sort of fragrance that he might have worn were he not allergic to the stuff.

He went upstairs to the old cow's room where he found the lump still laying down the centre of the bed, high domed in the middle, curving off to almost nothing at the feet.

'Has someone been in this house? Mother, I'm talking to you. Have you had a man in the house? I don't care if you have. I just want to know what my chances are of palming you off onto some poor unsuspecting sod. Don't build my hopes up, Mother. Am I going to get shut of you?'

He fancied the lump moved, but when he went round the bed to the window, the direction she always seemed to be facing, and lifted the blanket, her eyes were shut.

'Huh, pretending to be asleep as always, I see.'

He took the untouched plate of luncheon meat and coleslaw from the bedside table and carried it downstairs. In the kitchen he threw away the food, washed the dishes, removed the rubber gloves he always wore for protection, and looked at the eczema on his hands. It was getting bad. Not at its height, not oozing and flaking and burning, but still red raw and itchy. The rest would come soon enough. He felt his cheeks, around his eyes, his forehead. The skin was hot, and the tender area about his eyes was almost burning.

In the back garden the breeze immediately chilled his face, easing it. He inhaled deeply, taking in air until his stomach and chest expanded and the smell of still heavily dewed grass filled his nostrils, clearing them of the manly sweet clawing stench of aftershave. He was never sure if it was envy or self protection, this abhorrence to chemical smells that came from a bottle. All he knew was that initially, he frequently liked the scent but it quickly became repugnant to him. The distant whiff of new mown grass wafted over from the fields. He loved the smell of grass, especially damp grass. He loved the sparkle of dew, the clean, healthy, warmly comforting naturalness of its odour, and mostly, he loved the feel of its dampness against his bare feet.

After lingering in the doorway a while he became more settled. The smell in the living room had obviously been a figment of his imagination. No one would ever come to the cottage, and certainly not to court the old cow. And she didn't welcome visitors, not even school friends, but then that hadn't been much of a problem. He

wasn't allowed any. His few friends would meet him in the village until the cow found out and scared them off. Lizzy had reluctantly been allowed over the hallowed portals and was greeted with the smell of dirt and neglect. The cow had made no attempt at cleaning or tidying up but limped around the place feigning pain and complaining of loneliness. Lizzy had given her his telephone number in Tooting, and the cow was ringing up two, three times a day after that. If he wasn't in then she lied to his flatmates about him. He knew she did. Two of them had told him.

In his bedroom he removed the cardboard box of trinkets from the wardrobe, sniffed it, chastised himself for being silly and placed it tenderly on the bed. If the cow had known about it she would have destroyed the box years ago. He lifted the lid just enough to slip his hand inside, rummage around and remove a photograph.

It was black and white and showed seven boys aged eight and nine. They were standing in front of the old manor house. Next to them was the old oak tree that was nowhere near the Oak Tree Farm Estate, but still gave it its name. Mrs Cranshall, or Eady Pensonbay as she was then, had taken the photo on her day off from working as a wartime ancillary nurse in the new house over yonder, out of sight of the camera lens. Mr Cranshall, whom she was courting also worked there as one of the gardeners, but instead of growing the flowers that had once graced the surrounds of the private green, he now grew vegetables. And in the bottom left hand corner he could just be seen tending a plot. After this photograph had been taken the

boys - Roger, Alan Allenby, Bacon and the four evacuees from London - climbed into the manor house through the broken windows then climbed the rickety stairs that led to the minstrel gallery-style landing. The landing turned off in both directions from the stairs, forming a walk round that left a large gap in the centre creating a vaulted ceiling. They used to play cowboys and Indians, whooping and wooing with birds' feathers in their hair and using broken twigs as guns. Then when the evacuees came they played war games but no one ever wanted to be the Germans. They were going to lose and who wants to be the losers.

The London boys were staying with Bacon and Allenby. They weren't like the village boys. These Londoners were both wise and naïve. The cow wouldn't have any evacuees staying in her house. She didn't want their filthy habits, and dirty talk polluting her home. She didn't want them giving Roger any more ideas than he already had for misbehaving. These were strange boys. They had arrived late, not until the end of October, when the Blitz had been in full swing for almost two months. They slept under the bed, not on it. They didn't know what sheets were and they peed themselves at night. But then they had seen bombs falling. They had seen houses blown up and people killed. They had been sent from their homes to a place of safety in the country, and even though that was three years ago, their bed wetting was still forgiven.

On this occasion, Bacon agreed to play a German. Someone had to make a fight of it, not a game, a fight. Bacon always made a

fight of things. He was running along the upstairs landing with Roger chasing him. Roger was laughing. This was fun. It was the third time they had allowed him to play with them. Roger could run faster than Bacon and had almost caught him when Bacon fell through the rotting wood where the planks met at the corner. An instant later the cow stormed in demanding Roger return home. He'd sneaked out of the house when she wasn't looking, and she wanted him where she could see him at all times.

Bacon had landed awkwardly, spraining his ankle, and was moaning in pain on the floor. The cow looked at him, smiling, her eyes immediately sparkling with warmth and kindness. She bent low as she walked towards him, her hand reaching out.

'What happened to you, darling,' she asked soothingly, beguilingly. 'Your poor ankle. What have you done?' She gently squeezed his ankle, stroking it, examining it, testing it for injury. 'You poor, poor darling, it must be very painful.' She caressed his hair, letting her hand glide over his ear, his cheek, and resting on his chin. 'You poor, poor thing, we must get you to a hospital. How did it happen?'

Bacon pointed at the hole in the landing above, where Roger was looking down on him. 'The floor broke,' Bacon said.

'He pushed you down, I see. He pushed you.' She stood up in an instant, Bacon forgotten, fury in her eyes. 'You've done it again, haven't you. You murdering little bastard. It's not enough that you've taken my poor darling Dolores from me, now you have to take this

poor boy from his mother. You should be hanged.’ She mounted the stairs, stamping on every tread, stumbling once where the rise was higher than she had allowed for. ‘I should have you hanged,’ she bellowed. ‘I should have let them put you away, like they wanted to. But, oh no, not me, I’m too kind, too generous, too forgiving, just too plain good for my own good. I insisted they let you stay with me, and look where it’s got me. Now you’re murdering other people’s children.’

Roger made no attempt to move, but cowering by the hole, waited for the blows. And they came, raining down on him hard on the head, the back, the arms, the legs, backhanders, open palms, clenched fists, both hands, her handbag swiping round, catching him on the face, the head, the back. She grabbed his shirt, shaking him from side to side. ‘Murdering vicious bastard. You murdering vicious bastard.’ She swung him too far, his feet teetering on the edge of a splintered floorboard, his shirt ripped and he fell through the hole, landing beside Bacon.

The cow swung round, accidentally catching one of the cowering London boys with her handbag, thundered down the stairs to grab Roger by his torn shirt and drag him to his feet. ‘Not content with drowning your sister, not content with pushing him through the floor, now you’re trying to kill me.’ She wrapped the front of his hair around her finger and pulled at it, pushing him back with her other hand, and pulling, jerking, tearing at his hair.

Roger slipped the photograph back into his cardboard box and searched for another trinket, the roots of his hair now hurting. He rubbed his head carefully, gently rolling his scalp round and round to ease the pain and remove the memory. He worked the trinket in his hand, his eyes closed as he tried to guess what it was. A bracelet – no, it was too large. A necklace, yes, but the feel was unfamiliar – glass beads, with a flaking chrome chain. Who wore such a necklace? He searched his mind, but nothing. It was one of the girls, obviously, but which one? He opened his eyes to gaze at the blue, white and pink beads but they meant nothing to him, so he searched the photographs for clues. Still nothing.

He put the necklace back in the box and returned the box to the wardrobe before taking out a red floral skirt and plain white blouse. When he had dressed he looked at himself in the mirror and was satisfied. He looked good, pretty almost, in a mature woman sort of a way. He was prettier than the old cow. Dolores would have been prettier than them both. He ran his fingers through the light brown and grey flecked wig, examined his make-up and felt whole.

The heels clanked on the floor making a different sound to his man's lace-ups so he lifted himself onto his toes and glided downstairs.

The phone rang. It was a wrong number - something about Social Services. 'There are no children here,' he said and put the phone down.

He checked his handbag for the front door keys and hairbrush. Dolores would always have carried a brush. She wouldn't have been vain, but she would have cared about her appearance. Not like the old cow who only imagined she cared. The keys were in the bag. He gave the wig a quick brush from underneath, flicking the hair out to give it more bounce.

Outside the air was warm on his hands, but the compacted face powder prevented it penetrating to his skin. He liked the feel of powder; it made his face feel protected, or, at least, less battered by the elements, and wished he could wear it all the time. He tipped up his head letting the hair swing loosely across his back, loving the feel of the weight of hair as he swung it gently from side to side.

Roger walked out into the lane, enjoying the patches of blue sky and the poached egg look of the milky sun as it struggled through the clouds.

* * * * *

'Got you, you bastard,' whispered Bacon to himself. 'And I've got my story now. Nationals here I come.'

Bacon was hiding behind one of the scant hedgerows on the other side of the road. He watched as Blackshaw stood at the front door of his cottage enjoying the air. Bacon snapped one, two, three shots of him. One with his head flung back, nose in the air, another with him appearing to look straight at the camera, and the third, with

his hand flicking like a girl through his shoulder length wig. Bacon waited for Blackshaw to shut the door and walk out into the road.

‘He even wriggles his hips like a girl,’ Bacon muttered. ‘He actually thinks he’s a woman. What a perv.’

Roger Blackshaw, well-respected member of the tiny village community of Wherwent in Hampshire is seen here dressed as a woman. This in itself would not be a problem. What our readers choose to do in the privacy of their own home has always been a matter for the individual. This newspaper has a long and noble tradition of defending the rights of individual choice. But this man has a position of trust in the village. He teaches the piano to young children in their own homes, sitting next to them, touching their tiny hands as they struggle to feel the notes, wrapping his arms around them as he fingers the keys. But, it is not just his gender-bending that gives rise for concern. It is what he keeps inside his house. In his bedroom he has a box hidden away from prying eyes. Inside the box are trinkets that once belonged to the children he has taught, but worse still, he harbours photographs of their innocent trusting young faces.

Oh yes, Bacon thought, Allenby would have to take this now. The safety of the village children is at stake.

Bacon watched as Blackshaw walked up the lane away from the village to the brow of the next hill. There he waited as if surveying all around him, before returning to the garden path and going round to the back of the house, his hips swaying

exaggeratedly, his handbag swinging from the crook of his arm.

Bacon sneaked out from behind the prickly hedgerow, un-snagged his jacket, and ran, keeping low, across the lane and in through the garden gate.

He flattened himself against the wall leading down to the back garden. The camera was held next to his chest, like a cop holding a gun as he makes his way around a building after his man. Bacon popped his head around the corner. Blackshaw wasn't there. Bacon nipped down the path remaining close to the wall of the house. At the end he stopped, popped his head forward and found Blackshaw sniffing the buds and flowers in the centre plot.

Bacon took a couple of snaps.

Blackshaw wandered out of the garden and through a gate half hidden behind an herbaceous border and out into the field. Bacon snapped him leaving the garden.

He nipped, bent double, around the oval flowerbeds and up to the fence where he hid while he took another series of shots showing Blackshaw ambling around the field.

Bacon glanced up at the house. The upstairs rear window was open but the curtain barely fluttered in the breeze. Bacon watched Blackshaw and waited.

Blackshaw spread his arms - an aeroplane - and gently swayed, twisting this way and that, twirling around, letting the skirt rise up and billow like a crinoline lampshade.

Bacon took a series of photographs.

Blackshaw wandered around, tiptoeing between the white daisies and yellow buttercups. He picked daisies and buttercups and made a chain, put it on and wandered over the long grass by the fence to sniff the hedgerow.

Bacon photographed it all.

'You really do think you're a woman, don't you?' he muttered.

* * * * *

Roger idled away in what he assumed had been designated the cornfield by the ingrates. It was used for pasture and the previous year the bullocks being fattened for slaughter had grazed there for several weeks before disappearing. It was some time before it registered with Roger what had happened to them and he felt guilty about enjoying his cottage pie that night. It was the large champagne coloured bullock that had attracted him. He named him Toby, and although he would call out to him, Toby only squinted and chewed.

Daisies and buttercups were poking through the grass. He bent at the knees, making sure they were kept together, and plucked two daisies, ensuring that they had nice long stems. He dug his nail into one stem and pushed the stem from the other flower through the slit. He then plucked another daisy and another, and adding the occasional buttercup he made a full chain that fitted easily over his head.

Dolores would have done this, he thought. She would have made daisy chains. That's why she had the plastic daisy chain necklace that Roger had been made to wear. Another of his punishments for what he had done. And as he got older the punishment became more severe as the too short chain dug its rough edges into his neck, drawing blood.

The daisies fell softly over his white blouse, blending with the colour. Dandelions were still in flower. They were tall this year as no bullocks had been in the field to trample them down. Roger added a couple of dandelions to the chain, balancing them over the stems. He giggled. He would wet the bed tonight. That's what happened when you picked dandelions. He had wet the bed every night until he was fourteen whether he picked dandelions or not. The cow told lies.

He wandered over to the long grass. A rat jumped out of the way, bounding off towards the copse at the far end of the wide-open field. He could remember when this used to be six small fields with high hedgerows bordering them, but then automation came and the old farmer, like most farmers, had knocked down the hedges to open up the space. Although Roger liked the openness, part of him yearned for the smaller cosy fields with their patchwork effect created by the variety of crops.

Once back in the cottage he daintily bounced as he toed each tread of the stairs, swinging his head back letting the hair sway from side to side. In his room he stood in front of the mirror and in a low

whisper said, 'Look, oh glorious mumsicles, see what Dolores is wearing. What's the matter? Don't you want to see what that spiteful little bitch has done to let you have your Dolores back?'

* * * * *

'I've got him now,' Bacon said waving his camera in the air. 'I've got proof about Blackshaw. Photographs of him dressed as a woman. And he shouts at his mother. Allenby? Allenby?'

Allenby was not in the front office. Bacon went along the dark corridor to the door at the far end.

The door opened onto the kitchen. It was old, grubby and bare with a chipped stone sink and one tap. A rickety wooden table stood opposite. A jug kettle, teabags and sugar were on the table and a bottle of milk standing in a bucket of cold water was under it. A filthy roller towel hung from a rod screwed to the back door.

Outside brambles in the overgrown garden trailed across the broken flagstones of the path. Bindweed crawled up the panelled fence. Thistles swayed gently in the breeze, while chickweed covered the ground so completely Bacon could not see the soil.

A few feet along the wall a short door had been left ajar, its blue paint so badly peeled there was more exposed wood than colour. Bacon looked through the diamond shaped cut in the door panels. As he opened the door the dull stench of a blocked sewage drain barged into him as it escaped to freedom. The toilet bowl was brown

stained and the heavy iron cistern was rusty. A knotted chain hung down to about six foot from the concrete floor, and a small shelf housed a loose pink toilet roll, with an unopened twin pack of *Andrex* standing next to it.

Back in the dark corridor Bacon took the only door he hadn't tried. Behind it was a staircase leading up to a large office.

Row after row of archived newspapers filled the room. At the front by the window overlooking the green were three dust-ridden wooden desks, each with an old-fashioned typewriter. The keys had raised metal edges attached to long thin curved spokes. The red and black ribbons were dry. Bacon hadn't seen typewriters like these since he was a local reporter in Essex.

He returned to the front office which now seemed new and fresh.

'Alan,' he called again.

The room was silent except for the constant hum from the computer. The chair was pushed against the wall. Bacon rolled it forward to sit on. The computer screen showed a letter to a newspaper conglomerate, *Newspapers National*. He had never heard of them. *Newspapers National* was to typeset all the pages of the forthcoming edition except for the front page. That would follow early Friday morning.

'Who are you?' a voice asked.

Bacon looked up to see a pimply youth standing in the centre aisle.

'Who are you?' Bacon asked.

'I asked first.'

'I'm a reporter,' Bacon said.

'Don't give us that,' the boy said. 'There's only Alan working on this newspaper, and me. I'm training to be a reporter. And old Joe, of course.'

'Old Joe?'

'The handyman. Though he's too old to be handy at anything. He does the cleaning and maintenance.'

'I thought Mr Allenby had two reporters working for him.'

'No. One reporter, me, and I'm on work experience. I finish next week.'

Bacon looked the boy up and down. 'What articles have you written?'

'Nothing exciting. No murders. No rapes and muggings and things like that. And certainly no UFOs.'

'Do they have many UFOs in Hampshire?'

'Some.'

'So you want the big stories.'

'Course I do. Don't everyone. Don't want to be writing about sheep dipping all my life. Or who's married who.'

'Well,' Bacon said getting up, 'I'll tell you something... What's your name?'

'Jason.'

'Well, I'll tell you something, Jason. If you want the big stories you have to go out there and find them.' He stepped to the side of the desk away from the boy. 'You don't just stumble over stories, you know, Jason.'

Bacon tripped, thumping his shoulder into the wall.

The boy laughed. 'You stumbled over something there, mate.'

Bacon looked to see Alan Allenby lying face down on the floor.

The boy moved round to see what Bacon was looking at.

'The phone,' he said. 'Where's the phone?'

'There,' the boy pointed to the end of the desk.

'Phone for an ambulance. Nine, nine, nine. Give this address.

Middle-aged man found unconscious.'

The ambulance took about twenty minutes to arrive. As soon as it rolled around the green, curtains twitched and front doors were opened. Mrs Cranshall walked purposefully across the green to where Bacon was saying to Jason, 'You've got your story, now. 'Editor found collapsed'. Go with them. Do three hundred words. His readership will want to know what happened.'

'You can't send the boy,' Mrs Cranshall said wrapping a protective arm around his shoulders.

'He's a reporter,' Bacon said.

'He's a schoolboy.'

'Get this Joe bloke then.'

'Who's Joe?'

‘The handyman.’

‘That’s Burt and he’s over ninety. I’ll go with Jason. Don’t forget to lock up behind you.’

Bacon returned to the office to process the photographs. When he emerged again it was early evening. The air was pleasantly cool on his face after the darkroom. He watched with a stab of envy as a couple of men entered the pub. He’d enjoyed a drink after work. Then he began to enjoy a drink during work until he needed one before work. After that, life became a fog. But before London he remembered that he had never really felt at home in Wherwent. He was a city boy with a city boy mentality. Like Jason, sheep dipping did nothing for him. He liked the big stories and had a nose for them and he was onto one now. He would need to fill it out, of course, get the history of the village, find out about Blackshaw’s early life, and especially find out about what happened when he was four.

Across the green Blackshaw strolled up to the bench by the willow tree, placed his manuscript case next to him as he seated himself and prepared to read the book he had removed from his pocket.

Bacon returned to the office. Upstairs he used the telescopic lens on the camera to zoom in on the book, but the way it was held meant he couldn’t see the cover. Pity. It might be something salacious. A magpie hopped across the grass. One for sorrow, he thought. A second swooped down from the oak tree by the school. Two for joy. He scoured the trees for a third. There was one on the

roof of the shop. Three for a girl. Was there four for a boy. Yes, and five and six, that's silver and gold. He looked around for a seventh. He couldn't see one for a story never to be told but he'd tell it anyway. Who cares about magpies?

Blackshaw got up and walked across the village away from his cottage.

Bacon rushed downstairs with the camera to follow him. Hopefully, whatever Blackshaw was doing wouldn't take long. There was an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in Winchester tonight.

Diary 3

AA went well tonight. Shirty Gerty, call me Gertrude, was there still doing her it's the name my mother gave me cobbler, then practically went paralytic when I called Felicity Flick. 'Though perhaps paralytic's not quite the right word. Or maybe it is. It's not drink that made her paralytic, it's her obsession with abbreviated names. One chocolate liqueur from a bloke called Bob and that's her zonked out for the night.

I've run out of things to say. Keep writing. That's what Kennimore said so that's what I'm doing. Writing, writing, writing. But nothing.

I know what I'll do. I'll look at those photos I took of Blackshaw's gaff and come back to this a bit later on. Can't sleep at present, anyway.

Eureka! I've found it! My memory's been jogged. It's in the photos of the photos. There's this picture lying on the top of the pile of jewellery junk, a bit lopsided, but I can still see it shows me and Allenby with Blackshaw and those four kids from London. Mum took Albert and Stanley, and Mrs Allenby took Arthur and George, I think that was their names. We all used to play in the old manor when I fell through the floorboard and that cow of a mother of Blackshaw's came charging in to the house shouting the odds about murder or hanging or whatever. I'll try Allenby about it tomorrow. God, she was a right piece of work. I actually felt sorry for Blackshaw that day.

He did better than me at school as well, if I remember correctly, but his mother wouldn't let him go to the grammar in Winchester. In fact, I don't think she even let him stay on at school. He had to be out earning his keep or something.

She made that specimen, what was she called – Sheila, Shirley, something like that, look almost nice. She was attacked, if I remember rightly. A mugging - it was near the time that they first began to use the word 'mugging'. Until then it was always called street robbery and most of the broads continued to call it that until fairly recently. She was the victim and I had to do the victim's story angle on her. She was pretty, but really reckoned herself over and above that and she could just turn it on and had all the men wound round her little finger. I did the background on her and found that she was a right cow. She worked freelance or some sort of self-employment and to maximise her earnings she used to just generally cause trouble by slagging off everyone else who worked on the same basis - especially the newer ones. Consequently, they couldn't get work elsewhere as it seems that wherever they tried she'd

been there first, warning the companies about how bad they were. Biggest joke of it was, she had to do reports on outside agencies, and her reports were the most complained about for inaccuracies and omissions. Didn't seem to matter though, - she just batted her eyelids and made her demands and that was that. All the bosses just fell into line and everyone else was forced to follow. I told the police all this but they said they already knew it but as she was the victim there was nothing they could use usefully to forward her case. I couldn't use any of it either, for the same reason. People were losing money left, right and centre because of that baggage - many struggling to make ends meet as far as I could see. That's what drove me to write that article on corruption in high places. Only the places weren't that high. I wasn't allowed to go up there. But I tell you - doing the background gives you a good ninety percent chance of finding out just exactly the extent to which all this sanitisation and canonisation that goes on with these people goes. It's hardly skin deep.

Sometimes you find out that it's the other way round. Those who appear bad are actually the good ones. But they often only appear bad because of others' lies. And the lies often sound believable as they are true but told by people who struggle with pronouns.

And then of course, there're the ones who are basically good, have a reputation for being good, but can be right bastards when it suits them. And God help the person who is at the receiving end of their bastardism, assuming there is such a word. And if the ones at the receiving end complain about the 'nice' one then that just goes to show how nasty and jealous they are. People are so complicated and gullible, if you ask me. That's what newspapers often rely on. I learned that early on and determined that I wouldn't fall into that trap. Idealism, whatever happened to that. I used to have it by the bucket load - went out the window when the bottle came in through the door - I suppose. And I'm not sure that I know how to get it back. To be honest, I'm not sure I want to. Life's so much easier without it. Now there's an admission for you. That must be what Kennimore meant by the more you write, the more you reveal about how you really feel. And how do I really feel? I don't know. Shocked. Surprised. Stunned. I'm not at all sure that I ever really had idealism. I think I was always a bastard, if I'm honest with myself. Always a bastard. A git at school, I know. A shit in my first job. No, that's too strong. A continuing git in my first job. Then what? A good journalist turned bad. An adequate journalist turned inadequate. A good journalist who was a bad person. Or a bad journalist who was basically a good person. I don't know.

I don't know what I was. All I know is, I want to get back on the big papers doing the big stories, and I fear I will do almost anything to get there.

Should I mention all this at AA next week? I'd like to, but then there's Shirty Gerty who'll be doing her supercilious bit. She'd only make matters worse. How on earth you're supposed to open up with Old Miss Judgemental there I don't know. And then again, maybe by next week I'd have got to the truth. But at present it's gnawing away in my mind. I'm doing something wrong. I know I am. That's why it's gnawing. But what I'm doing wrong I really don't know. Perhaps if I sleep on it and see what comes up, maybe that'll work. I'll be seeing Allenby tomorrow, anyway, so I can ask him. He's bound to be able to shed some light on it all. Or maybe he's part of the past of when I was a git and doesn't feel inclined to talk for whatever reason. And then again, maybe it's because I'm still a git. I don't know. I'm too close to me to be able to tell. I just can't get far enough away to be objective. Even Mum's not playing ball on that one. And maybe that's what the trouble is. Maybe I'm still a git and I'm the only one who can't see it.

Look. I've gone and got myself depressed now, and this is supposed to be therapeutic.

Tomorrow's aims: (if I must!)

Find out about the murder and see if that is the 'when he was four' thing.

Visit Allenby in hospital and hope the nurses have improved since that article I wrote about them then had to re-write as it 'doesn't show them in a very good light. They're supposed to be angels of mercy'.

Possibly see if I can find the two brothers that lodged with us during the war. Maybe they can remember something.

And lastly, stop getting myself depressed!

God, life was so much simpler drunk!!

Chapter 5

Bacon woke feeling miserable. He had slept badly and found introspection was not good for the soul. Breakfast was a depressing affair with his mother calling him sulky and accusing him of behaving as he had when he was a child. This only added to his lack of confidence and increased his levels of self-doubt. He walked to the newspaper offices like an automaton and it was only after sitting at Allenby's desk and looking blankly at the back of the boards in the window that held pictures from various stories that he remembered that he was going to trawl through back copies to see what he could find on the murder incident.

Several hours later he stretched to his full height. Pouring over old editions of the *Wherwent Advertiser* made his back ache. The history of the village, although undoubtedly truly fascinating to someone with its tales of the late arrival of the sheep dip in 1939, James Buckley winning the rhubarb competition for the third year running, and the indecision over calling the cemetery Marrow Pits after the land, or Hobble Lane after the road, had taken its toll and bored into him like a dentist's drill. Frustrated at not being able to find anything he could use for his articles on past developments, he wandered over to the window. Outside the day was bright and sunny, but years of grime stopped the sun's rays from penetrating far.

Across the green Blackshaw was reading on the bench shaded by the weeping willow. He looked calm and peaceful, every inch the respectable citizen. Bacon retrieved the camera from the table next to the folder of backdated newspapers and took a cloudy photograph of Blackshaw through the window. Bacon waited. There was a loud scream from one of the children in the school playground.

Blackshaw raised his head from the book, looked towards the playground, then returned to reading. Bacon angled the camera to include the edge of the school in the next shot.

Mrs Frobisher was walking past the church towards the vicarage. A heavy bag hung from her shoulder and in her hand she carried a pile of leaflets. She posted one of the leaflets in the letterbox, waved to the vicar as he stared through the net curtains and walked on to the row of cottages. A workman scraping his spade along the pavement took a proffered leaflet and stuffed it unread into his overalls' pocket. She moved with a sluggish grace in her flat brown lace-up brogues. She was wearing a straight dull brown tweed skirt and dingy looking green wax jacket, making her appear every inch the archetypal countryphile. The villagers themselves wore exactly the same style of clothes as city dwellers.

When Bacon returned his attention to Blackshaw he was gone. Bacon scoured the green and surrounds but couldn't see him. He unlatched the window but it wouldn't rise. The sill was thick with dust, and the paint yellowing and peeling, except where it held the window fast. He thumped the frame with the sides of his clenched

fists, dislodging something, cracking the paint. The wood sounded solid. He pushed hard at the window, cracking the paint some more, then by thumping around the frame on both sides he loosened it sufficiently for it to be torn away from its binding.

Outside the air smelt fresh and clean making him aware of the mustiness of the room.

A gentle breeze stroked his cheeks and nose, and the sun was pleasantly warm, making Mrs Frobisher look ridiculous in her wax jacket. The clouds were light and fluffy. Cirrus, he thought, or the other ones that began with 's'. He'd learned about clouds at primary school as fighters and bombers used cloud cover to move around in. He'd also learned about the bombers' moon and the fact that they should always try to fly with the sun behind them. The primary school looked exactly the same now as it did then, except then the classes had been much bigger. He left there for the grammar in Winchester along with Allenby, the only two to go. Bacon usually came in the top five or so along with Townsley, Bevin and another boy whose name he had since forgotten. And then there was of course, Blackshaw. He was always near the top or usually at the top. Allenby was always near the bottom. He didn't pass his eleven plus, so his father bought his place at the grammar. Far brighter boys than him had gone to the new fangled Secondary Modern, even when they were eligible for a grammar school place. It was a point of pride for parents whose child had passed the Eleven Plus to say, 'He passed for the grammar you know'. In the end it came down to

money and luck. Some parts of the country had lots of grammar schools while others had few. Some education authorities handed out scholarships like fresh air while others made Scrooge look generous. Bacon had written an article on it for *The Messenger* and with each word his support for the grammar-modern system evaporated.

Mrs Cranshall was just going into the village shop. A blackbird sang. He knew it was a blackbird; it was used to begin that Beatles song. A pigeon cooed its bass note conspicuously out of time with the blackbird and something chattered in the far distance while a magpie hopped across the grass cha-ka-ing.

Mrs Frobisher hadn't returned from around the corner, and Bacon was curious to know what the leaflet said. He left the window open to air the room while he nipped downstairs and outside to find her. She was on the road leading to Winchester, booming at some poor unsuspecting pensioner about the need to fight the scourge of the development.

'Hello, Mrs Frobisher,' Bacon said with huge bonhomie.

'Coming to the meeting tonight?'

'Of course, Mr Bacon. We are organising it. This is one of our stalwarts,' she added nodding towards the confused pensioner.

'Have you got one of our leaflets?' She thrust one in to Bacon's

hand. 'The committee has worked very hard to ensure that we have got the tone, the wording, everything perfect.'

Bacon eagerly took the proffered leaflet and immediately spotted a spelling mistake.

‘The meeting’s at 7 o’clock tonight in the Church Hall,’ she said as if saving an illiterate from embarrassment, then leaning forward confidentially said, ‘I went round the Oak Tree Farm Estate for the first time today. That convinced me. We certainly don’t want any more of that sort of thing in the village now, do we? I mean, I’m not a snob, but... And of course, we’ve got to save Cornfield Cottage for that dear Mr Blackshaw. He must be worried sick, and such a lovely sweet man. He teaches my eldest, you know. Absolutely brilliant. Fiona Mulcaster recommended him. Melissa absolutely dotes on him.’ Mrs Frobisher nodded towards the green. ‘A sceptic approaches.’

Bacon looked up to see Mrs Cranshall walking across the grass smiling broadly, her cheeks rosy-red.

In an unnaturally loud voice, hoping Mrs Cranshall could hear, Bacon said, ‘What do you think are the chances of saving Mr Blackshaw’s cottage?’

‘We’re very hopeful,’ Mrs Frobisher said. ‘He loves that cottage. And it is such a major part of the history of the village.’

‘Morning Mrs Cranshall,’ Bacon said.

‘Morning, Peter. Morning Mrs Frobisher. Still plotting about poor Roger’s cottage, I see.’

‘It’s very old,’ Mrs Frobisher said. ‘It’s probably the oldest thing in the village.’

'Really,' Mrs Cranshall said. 'I wouldn't have thought it was that old. In fact, my mother could remember it being built.'

'I think not,' Mrs Frobisher said. 'It dates back at least two centuries.'

'1912 is when it was built. That makes it seventy-seven years old by my reckoning.'

'Really.'

'And I think you'll find,' continued Mrs Cranshall, 'that Roger isn't all that bothered about you saving his cottage.'

'Mr Bacon,' Mrs Frobisher said appealing to Bacon for support.

'I'll interview him.'

'You leave poor Roger alone,' Mrs Cranshall said. 'Hasn't he suffered enough.'

* * * * *

Allenby had been taken to the same hospital that Bacon attended for his AA meetings. A flower stall stood outside the main entrance. Bacon walked past it then returned to buy a bunch of mixed carnations but, feeling foolish carrying them, held them stem uppermost, the flowers barely missing the ground.

Allenby was sitting propped up in bed by several pillows, reading *Murder on the Orient Express*.

'I know who's done it,' Bacon said.

Allenby looked up, surprised to see him. 'So do I. I'm just reading it to see how Aggie laid out the clues.'

'They're all there. I've checked.'

Bacon had no idea if they were there or not. He'd only seen the film, and fallen asleep until being woken by an usherette at closing time. His girlfriend had already left and although he phoned her a couple of times he never saw her again.

'To what do I owe the pleasure?' Allenby asked.

'I've just come to see how you are. And then to pick your brains.'

'Good of you to pretend you care.'

'What have you got?'

'Ulcers.'

'Oh.'

'Don't worry. They're not contagious.'

Bacon held out the flowers like they were soldiers on parade. 'I got you these.'

'Thank you.'

'Didn't know which were your favourites.'

'They're nice.'

A vase of yellow and pink roses was already sitting on the bedside locker. Bacon looked inside the cupboard section for another vase but found only an unused bed urinal.

'The roses are nice,' Bacon said.

'From Mrs Cranshall.'

'Very nice.'

They fell into an awkward silence until Allenby said, 'Have you seen Jason. It's his last day tomorrow.'

'He came with you to the hospital.'

'He's a good kid. No journalist, but a good kid.'

'Did he write any articles?' Bacon asked.

A patient began coughing up phlegm down the other end of the ward.

'He's not got long,' Allenby mouthed. Then louder he said, 'Last autumn I got Jason to write an article on the green. It should have said, 'Here are six photographs showing the beauty and variety of the old village green', he typed, 'Here are sex photographs'. That wouldn't have been so bad, but one of the photos showed old Mr Carstairs sitting on the bench fast asleep, with his little Westie humping his left leg. I hadn't noticed it until Mrs Cranshall pointed it out to me.'

They started to laugh, but Allenby stopped short as pain surged through his stomach.

'Does it hurt?'

'Only when I laugh.'

'What did his wife say about it?' Bacon asked.

'About what?'

'The photo.'

'Carstairs never married.'

'Strange, is he?'

'Because he never married?'

'It tends to mean something.'

'Yes. It means he's a bachelor like you.'

'I've had long term relationships. Usually with married women.'

'Married women. I know that from somewhere. In a book.

Fewer complications. That's the theory.'

'Don't know about that,' Bacon said. 'Has your wife been?'

'I'm divorced.'

'Does she know?'

'She should do. She filed for it.'

'About you being in hospital.'

'No. And I don't want her told. The vulture will be rubbing her hands with glee.'

They fell into another uneasy silence until Bacon said, 'They came around to collect the paper for printing, so I gave them all the copy except for the front page.'

'That's for the meeting tonight.'

'That's all right,' said Bacon. 'I'm covering it.'

'I don't want any of your sleazy tabloid stuff. I run a respectable newspaper.'

'You run one that's going broke.'

'That's my business.'

'Not if I'm writing articles for it, it's not.'

Allenby shifted uncomfortably in his bed.

'Need help?'

‘No thanks.’ He lay back on the pillows, exhausted, sweating. When he had rallied his strength a little he said to Bacon, ‘I tell you what you can do. I’m going to be in here a few days, then off work for a bit. You can keep an eye on St Piles? Or St Giles for the Distressed to give it its proper name. It’s being closed. Probably won’t affect the village. Old Victorian asylum. I’m just running it as a change from the usual village gossip. Bit of local colour.’

‘Will do,’ Bacon said. ‘I want to do something on village history anyway.’

‘Not much point. The villagers already know it. The ingrates invent it. And the London overflow couldn’t care less about it. Besides, they cover it in school. Same as we did.’

‘Yeah, that’s right,’ Bacon said. ‘Didn’t someone make a model of the church and stuck it to a frieze but it fell on someone’s head?’

‘Oh, yes. Miss Cowley. She went all jittery and burst into tears.’

‘That’s right. Cowardy Cowley. The war I suppose did that to her.’

‘No, she was always like that. She taught my father before the First World War and she was nervous then.’

They fell into an awkward silence.

Further along the ward a heavy metal bedpan clatter to the floor giving Bacon a start. The too short curtain had been drawn around a bed near the door but the pan and its contents could be clearly seen.

‘Where’s the nurse?’ Bacon asked.

‘Down there in the room at the end. Where else would you expect them to be?’

The nurses didn’t stir so Allenby pressed the buzzer for assistance.

‘I’ve already done that,’ said the man in the next bed.

Allenby pressed the buzzer again.

Bacon stood up to see urine and solid waste spreading across the floor.

‘Angels of Mercy, huh,’ Allenby said. ‘More like Hell’s Angels from whom you need mercy.’

‘They invented that epithet themselves, you know, so they could get a pay rise,’ Bacon said craning his neck towards the nurses in the hope of embarrassing them into helping. It didn’t work. One nurse looked up, saw him and ignored him, so he went to them.

‘There’s a mess down there that needs cleaning up,’ he said.

The door to the nurses’ room was open. Five nurses, including a sister were sitting around a large square coffee table. Three had their black stocking feet on the tabletop. A fourth still had her shoes on. A nursing magazine poked out from under a clutter of women’s magazines. Eventually one nurse got up, dropped her magazine so that it opened at an article titled, ‘Why do Women take Orders from Men’. A large cartoon of a ridiculously tall Hitler pointing to the kitchen, while a timid hunched up woman dragged herself towards it covered a quarter of the page.

The nurse pushed passed Bacon, deliberately standing on his foot. The others remained seated, scowling at him. Bacon looked directly at them, huffed, then walked back following the nurse who now had her hands in her pockets.

She whipped the curtain open and in a loud voice said, 'All right, Mr Botling. What have you done? Made more mess for us, as if we haven't got enough to do already.'

'Tiring work reading magazines,' Bacon said before returning to Allenby.

'I'm impressed,' Allenby said. 'Quite the masterful one. Must come from being a bully. Now, the history of the village. Most of that's to be found in the old editions of the newspapers. Look from when my father became editor. Or earlier still. Start with the papers from just after the war. The first one, that is. Say, nineteen twenty. Maybe earlier. But, as you're in Winchester, there's the records office down on the edge of town. And the reference library. That's near the records office. Roger Blackshaw's cottage is the most recently built and last surviving part of the old estate. Even the old manor's gone now. Had to be pulled down, declared derelict a few years ago. I haven't used that piece of information yet, about the cottage being the last surviving place. I was going to put it in the article for tonight's meeting. Trouble is Roger doesn't really want to stay. If the cottage is pulled down he could get away from his mother.'

'His mother?'

‘He could just leave, I know, but he did that once before and got dragged back. But if they destroyed the cottage she would have nothing to drag him back to. I tell you, it’s the ingrates who are the only ones who want things to stay the same.’

They talked for a while longer about the article and the likely contents of the meeting then, when that seemed to be covered Bacon asked about the evacuation boys.

‘Have nothing to do with them now. They all went back to London.’

‘Do you know their addresses?’

‘Of course I don’t. And even if I did it would be from nineteen-forty-five. Why? What’s up with them?’

‘Don’t know. It was just a thought that had been triggered apropos of nothing.’

Bacon left twenty minutes later promising to bring in the next edition of *The Advertiser*.

* * * * *

Neither the Records Office, nor the Local History section of the library had any record of a Cornfield Cottage or a Cornfield Meadow nor anything resembling them. He did however find out that Roger’s cottage was used originally as the gamekeeper’s tithe home and didn’t appear to have a name. Somewhere along the line it was sold or given away to a Mr Humphrey Blackshaw who might be Roger’s

father. He'd have to look into that when he did the Births, Deaths and Marriages checks. He also found out that during the run up to the building of the Oak Tree Farm Estate the Goodman residents protested fiercely but the villagers welcomed it. Nothing, it seemed, had changed.

On the bus back to Wherwent, Bacon pondered the new development and found that the more he looked into it, the less he cared. He wasn't ambivalent or undecided, he really didn't care. Once back in London it would be forgotten and the only way to get there was with a big scoop. But the development was no big scoop. What he needed, he thought, was something like the Newbury killing. A nice juicy story about a little girl going missing or, better still, found murdered. He began fantasising. The murderer – dark, evil, faceless, was Blackshaw; and the investigator – cunning, brilliant, admired, was himself.

A branch from the hedgerow lashed at the window giving Bacon a start, and as with *Kubla Khan*, the moment was gone.

The village was gently bustling and the air pleasantly warm after the rain, making the grass smell damp. Bacon walked to the bench by the weeping willow and in his mind composed the opening gambit for his article against the development.

On a warm June evening warblers warbled in the nearby trees, chaffinches chaffinched or chirped or whatever they do, and pigeons cooed. In the pond ducks paddled and algae floated. And just

beyond the gracefully swaying barley, the gentle bulldozers smashed down trees and the one remaining cottage from the Wherwent estate.

'Evening, Mr Bacon.' Mrs Cranshall said cutting through his thoughts. 'Reporting on the meeting tonight?'

'I certainly am.'

'Well, make sure you get it right. We don't want any of those fancy romantic London views of village life. All ducks quacking and birds rustling through the gently bobbing trees. Especially not since we lost the elms to disease and it spoilt the view to Roger's cottage.'

'You've still got the elms around the green.'

'No we haven't. We've got oaks and beech, sycamore and birch. And a few foreign imports. But no elms. And the weeping willow, of course, which I suspect even you could name. Only thing you could ever identify was planes - Spitfires, Hurricanes, Lancasters no problem - but birds, huh. You couldn't tell a canary from a golden eagle.'

'You don't like me much, do you Mrs Cranshall?'

'I don't dislike you,' she said. 'I just remember you caused a lot of pain. Put up to much of it, I grant you, but you were old enough to know better.'

Bacon looked at her blankly.

'No, you don't remember, do you? Bullies usually don't remember. That's their biggest shame.' Mrs Cranshall walked on a few paces then stopped. 'And if you smell any cat's pee,' she said, 'don't shoot the moggies. It'll be the juniper in Mrs Worthy's garden.'

* * * * *

By the time Bacon arrived, the church hall had standing room only. On the top table were water jugs and glasses set respectfully to either side of a white drape that hid the model of the new development. A well thumbed flip chart stood at an angle on its easel.

Bacon tried to gauge the atmosphere in the hall. It was mixed - eagerness, excitement, anger – but mainly curiosity. He had completed the potted history section of his article and was tempted to write a draft of the meeting and not go, but he had done that once before as a novice reporter in Essex. He had already covered the rotary dinner three times, and was not pleased to be sent again. He also had a job lined up with *The Messenger*, so decided to just write an article and go to the pub instead. The article was fine, except for the part where he had completely forgotten to mention the after dinner speaker collapsing and dying as he was about to deliver the punch line to his second joke. After that, Bacon had reluctantly attended every event, although rarely sober.

Roger Blackshaw was talking to Mrs Cranshall who was sitting immediately in front of him. Next to Blackshaw was an overweight, elderly woman with grey curly hair poking out from under a black velvet ruched hat. Six men mounted the platform. Three were

carrying glossy booklets. The first man to the platform banged down his gavel for silence. The noise slowly died away.

'Who's that?' Bacon asked the man next to him.

'No idea,' the man said.

'Ernest Applegate,' Mrs Cranshall whispered theatrically.

Bacon sneaked down the aisle to crouch next to her.

'And what's he to the village?'

'Weekender. Roger here,' she wrapped her arm round her seat to tap Roger's knee, 'Roger teaches their little girl the piano. Recommended, he was. He's always being recommended, aren't you deary? He's a very good teacher. Taught Lisa Turner who's on telly tonight, beeb two, nine thirty. This wants to be finished by then.' She then named two others on the platform but not the three carrying the glossy booklets.

The oldest of the three was presenting a case for affordable housing in the south, and especially Hampshire. From the floor a middle-aged man was shouting his objections to new housing in the village, each objection greeted with loud murmurs of agreement.

'Who's the heckler?' Bacon asked Mrs Cranshall.

'No one local. He must be 'rent a job'.'

'Old for a job.'

'Yobs come in all shapes and sizes, ages and wages. I'm surprised you haven't noticed that.'

The two younger strangers were lifting up the veil from the model to show a miniaturised development that looked remarkably

similar in style and layout to the Goodman Estate, right up to the small green and pond.

‘As you can see,’ the older stranger was saying, ‘we have been particularly sensitive to the village atmosphere that you quite understandably wish to preserve, with, of course, consideration for the fact that we are approaching the new millennium just eleven years away.’

‘Where’s Corn Meadow Cottage?’ the heckler asked.

‘Cornfield Cottage,’ Mr Applegate corrected gently. ‘Corn Meadow is what this development will cover.’

Roger leaned towards Mrs Cranshall and whispered in her ear.

‘Where does all this Cornfield and Corn Meadow come from?’

‘The minds of the deluded. They think the countryside is all swaying barley and crisp morning air.’

‘What about the cock crowing at five in the morning and pig stink,’ Roger said.

‘Doesn’t quite cut the mustard, deary, so they ignore it.’

‘That’s your cottage there,’ a local farmer called over to Roger.

‘Do you want to keep it, or let it go?’

‘Keep it, of course,’ the heckler shouted.

‘You sold them those fields, Jack,’ Mrs Cranshall said to the local farmer.

‘I know I did, Eady. The young ‘uns don’t want to do farming and I’ve got to think of my old age.’

‘Fair enough,’ Mrs Cranshall said.

'We are in negotiations with the owner,' the older presenter said. 'Nothing has been decided yet.'

'The only thing that should be decided,' the heckler shouted, 'is that the development goes and the cottage stays, and this man stays with it.'

'And his mother,' a woman shouted.

The gathering clapped approvingly while Roger put his hands in his pockets.

Chapter 6

Roger arrived home from the meeting soon after nine. The news had started on BBC1 but he was too upset by the way the meeting ended to be able to pay much attention to it. The atmosphere became incredibly hostile and by the end the developers were practically promising to leave the cottage intact, and at one point seemed on the verge of backing out of the proposal altogether. He didn't want the cottage saved no matter how sympathetically designed the surrounding estate was. The developers had already doubled their offering price, and by his calculations, all he needed was another five thousand and he could be sure of having enough money to buy a one or even a two bedroom flat in Southampton, and put the cow in a home for up to ten years which would make her over a hundred. Why didn't those bloody weekenders just bugger off back to where they really lived, and leave him alone.

He pushed his chair closer to the television, catching the front left leg in the web of a threadbare patch of carpet but as he bent down to lift the leg clear, he became dizzy. Blood rushed around his head, sending a cold river over his brain like water in a menthol stream. He had stood for hardly a second before collapsing into the seat, his legs sprawled uncomfortably to the right, creating a pulling sensation down his left side. Gradually the coldness in his brain subsided, leaving him feeling unwell and nervous. He should really be careful. It was another warning that a stroke could be imminent.

He'd never actually had a stroke, nor had he sought medical advice about his likelihood of having one, but he'd heard that he was prone as the cold river of blood proved. He couldn't remember who'd told him that but he was sure it must be true. What else could it mean?

He remained settled if uncomfortable until his head felt warmer and dryer, then he rose slowly, steadying himself by pushing his weight down onto the back of the chair. When he was sure he was all right, he reached out for the living room door and wandered upstairs to the old cow's room. Inside her bedroom the air was stale.

'Want the window opened properly?' he asked. Without waiting for a reply he moved around the foot of the bed, misjudging the distance a banging his leg into the wooden rise of the bedstead. A dull pain briefly lodged in his lower thigh which he rubbed hard before continuing as if nothing had happened. 'Did you know that half the villagers think you're dead? The other half just wish you were.'

He opened the window wide and waited for the freshness to rush in. It didn't; just the gentle waft of damp grass hovered outside as if too timid to cross the threshold into uncharted territory.

'Lisa Turner's on telly tonight,' he said turning to face her. 'You remember Lisa, don't you. The girl from the Oak Tree Farm Estate. That talentless know-nothing good-for-nothing who only thinks she can play. You know which one I mean. The one who went to the Royal Academy of Music because those idiots don't know what they're talking about. She was the one who won a gold medal, huh, or so she says. Or was it because they took pity on the useless

article. You never could make your mind up on that one, could you? Well, that useless article is displaying her total lack of talent on national television tonight. Beeb 2 to be precise. Just thought I'd let you know. I should hate you to miss such a display of talentlessness. Not after you were trained for the concert piano by, Reg Handley no less. As if anyone had ever heard of him. Or your piano playing for that matter. Got rid of the piano I bought, didn't you? Think you'd have welcomed it, with your undiscovered talent. We could have enjoyed such wonderful Victorian family get-togethers tickling the ivories. Oh, well. And how is your broken wrist, by the way. You know, the one you broke thus putting an end to your career as a great concert pianist. Funny how there's been no mention of that wrist, except of course, for that time when you were invited to play when we were staying in that bed and breakfast place in Bognor. Or Bognor Regis should that be. Never could understand why you considered Bognor acceptable, but Brighton was down market. Especially seeing as Brighton has a royal pavilion while Bognor was buggered by the royals.'

The lump didn't stir.

'Oh well, lovely chatting to you. Always lovely to exchange views. Must nip off and see a bit of talentlessness now.'

Roger shut the door and wandered back downstairs. He felt better now. It lifted his spirits and meant that everything would be all right. He was now confident he realised. It was another of his

barometers. His eczema hadn't changed, and he was ridiculing the cow. Everything would be rosy.

The local news was showing and an article covering the continued closures of mental hospitals was reporting on the completion of the emptying of St Giles, with Bellmont, about ten miles away, almost empty as well. Most of the residents, the report was saying, had already been found accommodation outside. Two ex-St Giles patients, Maria and Vera, were shown hobbling around their kitchen trying to prepare a meal. They were so institutionalised they couldn't even shop on their own. Maria, it said, had been committed to the mental institution by her parents for moral turpitude as they didn't like her boyfriend, and Vera had been committed at the age of twelve for being unruly, although reports from the psychiatrist declared her to be withdrawn. Between them they had spent nearly a hundred years incarcerated

'That's where you should be,' the cow would tell Roger when the now defunct bus route took them past St Giles. 'I should've listened to them and had you committed. You're so lucky to have me for a mother. I'm just too kind for my own good.'

The phone rang. It was someone going on about social services. He didn't really listen to what was being said but thought vaguely that he heard the word tomorrow, and another word - run, son, mum - he wasn't sure, but as it didn't mean anything to him, he put the phone down and nipped upstairs while the weather report was showing.

In the top drawer of his dresser he kept a bundle of photographs of things of interest he'd noticed when out and about. Before opening the drawer he examined the markers he had laid out since reading *Casino Royale*. James Bond had wedged a black hair from his head on the edge of the drawer in his writing-desk, and sprinkled a faint trace of talcum powder on the inner rim of a porcelain handle. Roger had wedged one of his grey hairs on the edge of the top drawer of his dresser and sprinkled *Vim* on the underside of the left handle of the drawer. The hair was still there, but looked to be at a different angle, but the *Vim* was undisturbed. He didn't particularly care if the cow nosed through this drawer; it was all just a bit of a joke to him, but he liked to have something to verbally batter her with when he felt the need to stand up to her.

He shuffled through the photographs until he found the one he was looking for. He'd come across the house quite incidentally in Russell Place in Southampton when looking for the home of a new client. The photograph was of a blue plaque dedicated to RJ Mitchell, the inventor of the Spitfire. For years Roger had been a firm supporter of the fact that it was the Hurricane that had downed more enemy aircraft during the Battle of Britain than the Spitfire, but, after seeing the Hurricane and the Spitfire in a flypast he had to admit, the Spitfire did look by far the more elegant. So, when Roger found the plaque dedicated to RJ Mitchell, he made a point of taking his camera the next week for a photograph.

Roger put the rest of the photographs back into their packet then slipped the photograph of the plaque into his copy of *Casino Royale* as a page marker. He was feeling patriotic. He always did when his spirits were lifted. Life was going to be good; he would get the money; freedom awaited. The last time he felt anywhere near this good was when, during a television strike, over thirty people attended his film night. He was showing *Help* and after that all his pupils practice playing at least one Beatles' tune. He might even do that again tomorrow. He would look out his *Yellow Submarine* book of sheet music.

Back down stairs the national weather forecast was saying that it would be bright and sunny tomorrow, but after the meeting, Mr Pickles from Honeysuckle Cottage, next door but one to Mrs Cranshall's, had said it would rain. His corns were playing him up. He was always right. He'd predicted the hurricane in 1987 because he could barely walk for his corns. The next week Mrs Cranshall gave him some corn plasters. The corns were removed, but the weather forecasting continued.

Roger changed channel to BBC Two. The credits from the previous programme were still running so he went to the kitchen to make some tea and get a slice of Farmhouse fruitcake. The box had been opened and a large slice of cake was missing. Greedy bitch, he thought then cut some for himself and went back to the living room carrying it all on a wooden tray. The announcer was still introducing the programme. There were to be three performers, a

pianist, a violinist and a tenor. As he picked up the teapot he held it badly and the pot swung round spilling a large quantity of boiling tea onto his chest, burning the skin. It quickly penetrated, scalding deep and wide. He all but dropped the teapot back down on the tray then fumbled with each piddling little button, all the time the burn getting worse. The cow was laughing, sneering, cackling like a witch. He could hear her in his head. 'Serves you right, you stupid bitch. That's what you get for thinking you know anything about music.'

Roger grabbed at the edges of his shirt and ripped the front open. A red angry patch had already formed. In the kitchen he soaked a tea towel in cold running water and dabbed it at his chest. The water ran down the front of his trousers making it look like he'd wet himself. He ran cold water into the washing up bowl, and chiselled ice out of the metal tray that was always kept in the top of the fridge, but rarely used.

By the time he returned to the living room with the bowl of water and laid ice cubes on his chest, Lisa's performance had started. She was playing a Chopin Polonaise, but he couldn't identify which one. He never had to teach that far, and besides, he couldn't actually play all that well since the cow had given his piano to a charity shop and he couldn't practice.

He listened dazed, but in pain. She was truly a beautiful performer. He had taught her for barely four months, but he had been her first teacher and it was he who had first recognised her immense talent. He felt great pride in that.

Diary 4

Wrote well tonight. Included the bits about the birds and the bees and the sycamore trees and the Black Rock Sandy Mountain or whatever it is. Don't care if the villagers don't like that sort of thing. It's what gives the story its anger appeal.

Sounds like Blackshaw doesn't want to stay in the cottage. Perhaps he's got a burning desire to be homeless like me. Well, I'm sort of homeless, I suppose. No. I'm officially homeless. I got slung out by that cow Elsie Eastley and I'm only staying here, so that makes me homeless. How long had I been living in Eastley's dump? Fifteen years or more. You get pissed, all right, maybe more than once, but still, not that often. Had a couple of goes at going cold turkey, but do I get recognition for that. Do I hell. No. You're pissed. Get out. You're no good. Go. I had bloody good reason for being pissed. That story was red hot. No one else had so much as a whiff of an idea about it. And I had my sources. He said he knew Landymore and that he was definitely having an affair with that dolly bird. And she was a dolly bird as well. A real corker. Lovely figure. No fear of her falling flat on her face. And what does that fucking Landymore go and do. Sue. Why? Because he's having his fucking image improved? There he is with a wife with a face like a frog in a fart and his

kids look like Noddy and Big Ears in Torture Town. The biggest joke of it all is he was forced to admit that he's really gay. I got the Hilary bit right but, given a choice between a Hilary with big tits or big balls, who the hell picks balls unless you want a game of football.

Three million quid. That's what Helmer said I cost them. Three million quid in legal costs. Money well spent, I say. And I never saw a penny of it. Four times you get sued but because it's all in the same year it looks bad. But do they take that into account. Not on your Nelly. And then that cow Eastley wonders why I got pissed. She'd get bloody pissed if she got the sack. But there was no need to send those fucking great gorillas round - like waking up to find the bloody Krays gawping down at you. Halitosis and Scar Face - what a combination. And they nosed into my sobriety book as well. Luckily I hadn't written much last time. Got fed-up with it. Flick, or Felicity as she's now called because she's sober – Shirty Gerty would be pleased. But Flick wrote reams in her sobriety book then goes back to that no good husband of hers - Duncan the bunkum man. He doles out any load of old cobblers and she falls for it. 'cause he's my husband'. Some fucking husband. If he cared about her he'd have stuck with her – pissed or dry. That's what love is. Sticking with each other through thick and thin. I stuck with her. I didn't care how pissed she got. It was convivial. I

didn't care how sober she got. That was her choice. I stuck with her though, that's what counts. She's the one who wouldn't stick with me. More fool her. And she had such lovely nipples as well. I can still remember them bobbing about on top of that pair of crème brûlees. Oh, and sucking that lovely brown sweet sauce off the top of those perfect caramel domes and there, behind them were her lovely great pendulous orbs. Beautiful.

Anyway, can't go walking down that particular branch of memory lane again. Kennimore said keep it forward thinking and don't hanker for the past, just acknowledge it. Well I've acknowledged it, and well worth acknowledging it was too.

Still looking into when Blackshaw was four. Asked Mum today and she snapped at me 'leave it', like it was something to do with me. Tried to think who else I could ask but most of those likely to know wouldn't tell me - not according to Mum, any road. However, I think I've made a break through. When I asked about the murder Mum got really stroppy saying I'd caused enough trouble last time. I think the two maybe linked. I'll have to look into that – work on the principle that they are, see where that gets me. At least it's a lead. And if he did murder his sister when he was four then that might have been reported in the newspapers. Probably veiled, of course. Mysterious death, or something. I'll rummage through the rag

and try getting round Allenby to see if he will say any more. Or else try the newspaper offices in Colindale. Be a good excuse for going to London. Who needs an excuse? Just go. Might try Somerset House as well, or the new place, St Katherine's, I think it's called. Doesn't matter. I can picture it so can go there – see if the Births, Deaths and Marriages throw up something.

Anyway, beddy-byes now, so what for tomorrow.

Tomorrow's aims:

Check the photos are okay.

See what can be used for the story.

Make the flyers about the freebee.

Get them photocopied and distributed.

Chapter 7

Roger had two music lessons in Winchester and as there was a long gap between them, he treated himself to a pot of tea and cream cake in his favourite eatery, a small darkly lit café by the Cathedral. A window table was free so he quickly nipped into it before checking the rest of the room. It was bustling but not unpleasantly busy. The window was split by thin wooden frames into small panes of about nine inches by twelve. The pane next to him had a large artificial bubble that obscured his vision, making the visitors around the Cathedral grounds look disjointed and deformed. The café had already sold out of his favourite fresh cream apple turnovers and had only cream horns left, so he opted for a buttered fruit scone, but wondered if he shouldn't have chosen the fruit slice instead.

He'd had to make a quick decision, which he hated. The cow made him make quick decisions, then would clout him for taking too long. As he got older and stronger hitting him began to hurt her more than it hurt him so she bought a dog lead. They'd never owned a dog, but it came in handy for thrashing around, keeping him agile as she charged into the room flailing the lead over her head to land with a thwack on the chair he had just vacated. She'd then charge after him swinging the metal clip, always missing, but hacking great chunks of plaster out of the wall, chipping paintwork and leaving large nicks in the furniture until the joyous day when she flailed the lead too soon, and it clipped the top of the door frame, changed

direction and fell with a mighty whack onto her head. She screamed. He laughed. She got more annoyed, cried, kicked, punched, held her head and rocked back and forth blubbering long and loud.

‘Is it bleeding? Is it bleeding?’

‘No,’ Roger said laughing.

‘It’s nothing to laugh at. You wouldn’t like it if it happened to you, you spiteful bitch.’

‘But it’s only a bit of fun. That’s what you’re always telling me.’

Years later in London, he saw *Psycho* at the pictures. Norman Bates charged around the house wielding a knife like the cow had wielded the dog lead. Thereafter he always referred to the incident as the Bates Manoeuvre. Then, after he had returned to Wherwent, *Psycho* was shown on television. She watched it and accused him of being a Norman Bates.

‘You made me what I am,’ he said.

‘Don’t blame me because you’re a pervert.’

‘You made me dress as a girl.’

‘No wonder that Lizzy specimen left you. Even she couldn’t stand you.’

‘She left because you were always ringing her at home and work, telling lies about me.’

‘Lies. Huh. The truth, more like.’

Tourists flocked around Winchester Cathedral. There was a brief spell of bright, hot sun that made the damp pavements glisten. A short queue had already formed at the cafe door and it was getting

close to the time for his next piano lesson. He shambled out of the cafe just as a heavy shower started.

* * * * *

Marcia Duff was stacking cigarette boxes into the wooden display shelves behind the counter when Bacon shouldered open the door and stumbled into the shop, staggering under the weight of newspapers.

'Brought this week's *Advertiser*,' he said heaving the stack onto the counter.

'I wasn't expecting any this morning,' Marcia Duff said, 'what with Alan being took ill and that.'

'I'm taking over for a while, 'til he's better.'

'The usual number over there, please.'

'Want them anywhere in particular?'

'Between the nationals and the *Hampshire Chronicle*, as usual.'

She turned back to the shelf and continued stacking boxes, leaving Bacon to squeeze the *Wherwent Advertiser* in between the *Chronicle* and *The Times*. There wasn't enough room for them, so he shunted the *Chronicles* along crushing *Farming Today*, then pushed the broadsheets out of the way until they were mostly hidden under the tabloids. The topmost newspaper was *The Daily Messenger* which led on an article written jointly by Roy Learner and Jeremy Barts. Can't even write a story on their own, thought Bacon. He

removed all *The Daily Messengers*, concertinaing them between the *Mail* and the *Guardian*, leaving only the tip of the sword of Britannica showing above the edge of the *Mail*.

The *Wherwent Advertiser* stood proud of the other papers by a good eighteen inches. The front page was dominated by a picture of Roger Blackshaw standing outside his cottage dressed in a frock and wig. The caption read, 'Sir or Miss. Your Child's Piano Teacher', followed by a subheading of, 'Would you want this weirdo in your home?' At the bottom of the page was the beginning of a less significant looking piece on the development. The picture of Cornfield Cottage used to illustrate the article had been taken at the same angle as the one of Blackshaw thus clearly indicating the connection.

'I've arranged them,' Bacon said pushing up off his knees.

'Fine,' she said without looking round.

Her lack of enthusiasm deflated him so he walked slowly to the door in the hope that she would turn in time to admire what he already considered to be his newspaper.

'Wait a minute,' she said.

'Yes?' Bacon said over eager.

'That's far too many. Even with the meeting last night we'd be lucky to sell twenty. They share them around, you know.'

'Where does he sell the others? I've looked around for a distribution list, but couldn't find one.'

'Nowhere. Hasn't done for years really. That's why he's ill and having to sell up. The printers are buying it. They're big in this new door to door freebee market. It'll be the death of the traditional newspaper, you know.'

'When's he selling it?'

'The paper? It's already signed, I think. Three, four weeks and they take over. Can't remember now. George does all that sort of thing. We're advertising in it,' she said proudly. 'All our special offers.'

Bacon slumped out of the shop and wandered down to the bench next to the willow. A magpie hopped across the grass on the other side of the pond. He watched it for a few seconds then looked for a second one - one for sorrow, two for joy. A second one didn't come, and the first one didn't go. Three or four weeks and the paper would be sold. He'd seen the freebee papers. There were loads in London. They made their money from page after page of advertising, and a few lightweight, feel good articles. He'd never get back to the nationals and good gritty stories that quickly. Six months, he'd given himself, time to build up a significant portfolio of impressive work, and to prove that he was sober for good.

As the damp of the evening air seeped into him, bringing on a rheumatic twinge in his ankle, he rose and shambled back to the newspaper office, to where piles of undistributed newspapers waited for what he now realised was most probably the bonfire.

* * * * *

Roger returned to the village in the early evening. He popped into the shop to buy a packet of Treets as he always refused to call them Ms. Ms was American, Treets was English. It was also Marathon not Snickers, toilet or lavatory, not bathroom, and pavement, not sidewalk. Snicker, he remembered from when the Yanks were stationed in Hampshire during the war, was what they said when they meant snigger. But, on their good side, they brought chewing gum and one of the soldiers, a sergeant, gave him a packet with five strips in it, just like he did the other kids, but the cow made him share his packet around.

‘No, Mam,’ the sergeant said, ‘that’s his pack. The other children have their own.’

The cow stormed over to the sergeant, glared up at him and snapped. ‘He’s got to learn. He doesn’t matter.’

Roger felt a slight tug at his trouser pocket, and turned to see another soldier winking at him. When he got home he found three packets of chewing gum had been slipped into his pocket and he had always had a soft spot for Americans ever since, but Treets were still Treets.

Mrs Duff was saying, ‘It’s amazing how many still call them Treets. We just don’t like things being messed with, do we, Mr Blackshaw. I’m sure that’s why everyone’s so very keen to keep you in your cottage.’

Roger allowed a smile to flick passed his lips before saying,
'Have you got *What Car??*'

'No. Don't have much call for it. Can order it for you, if you like.
Have to pay in advance, though.'

After Mrs Duff consulted her publishers pricing ledger Roger handed over the money and began to leave, stopping and blocking up the doorway as he pulled at the packet of sweets trying to open them. Mrs Duff looked around the shop and, satisfied that she had performed all her necessary tasks, ambled over to the pile of *Wherwent Advertisers* and picked up the top copy.

On the green Melissa Mulcaster was prodding a long twig into the water. Roger wandered over, stopping a few feet behind her. She was swishing the algae around a bit, creating a gentle whirlpool with a couple of ducklings quacking softly, clearly enjoying the eddy effect. The adult female's head was deep in the water leaving her tail and underbelly on display. The male paddled away. Eventually the female lifted her head from the water and already it looked bone dry, while the male's iridescent head glistened and changed from deep blue to sea green and back again in the fading sun. Some of the baby chicks got out of the water, shook their downy feathers, and waddled, almost in line, over the open grass. Juvenile ducklings huddled in a loose group, clearly not keen on having their space invaded by the chicks.

Roger stepped closer snapping a twig which made her turn, lose balance and, with arms flailing, topple sideways in to the water. The splash was slight, discrete even, as her slim body sliced through the algae leaving the top of her head bobbing above the surface, her fair hair trailing amongst the tendrils of the weeping willow.

The pond must be deeper than Roger thought. Bacon had thrown him in there once, but all he remembered was slipping on the slimy leaves at the bottom. Roger reached out to grab a handful of Melissa's hair and lifted her head above the water. Her head was streaked with green gunge and rotting brown vegetation. She opened her mouth, gasping for breath, and blinked her eyes against the muddy grit and algae that irritated them. Roger pulled her from the water and carried her to the bench. Her wet dress clung to her shivering body and her teeth chattered loudly.

'Are you all right?' Mrs Mulcaster shouted as she ran across the green.

She held the crying Melissa near to her and made to kiss her head carefully avoiding any actual contact.

'She fell in,' Roger said.

'Oh, honestly, darling,' she said to her daughter. 'I've told you before. You really should pay more attention. I don't know, let's get you home.'

She removed her jacket and wrapped it round Melissa's shoulders.

‘Thank you, Mr Blackshaw,’ Melissa said as she was walked away. ‘I was so lucky you were close by.’

* * * * *

By the time Bacon had moved the stacks of newspapers to the floor physical exertion had exhausted him. Sweat wetted his brow, and he pushed both hands into the small of his back, rubbing them round to ease the ache. The office had become hot. He stepped outside where the cool air refreshed his face. After a while he wandered back into the office and into the kitchen to make a mug of tea to take upstairs ready to begin his search through the back copies of *The Advertiser* for the article on Dolores. The story of the little girl’s death, when he eventually prised some information out of his mother sounded vaguely familiar, but when he asked for more details she said it didn’t happen and changed the subject.

He searched the folder for 1939, going through it twice, the first time scanning it for the story, the second scouring it, but still nothing. There was the saga of Farmer Penbury’s rampaging bull, and much incessant editorial on Hitler’s rise and rise, but no local murders. He then covered all the years back to 1936, each year being examined with ever less enthusiasm, but still no local murders. St Mary Mead this village most certainly wasn’t. Miss Marple would have died from boredom. He then tried going forward, and searched the editions for 1940 and 1941, but still nothing.

His tea by now was almost cold, so he wandered over to the window to guzzle it back and watch the world go by. The fading sun spread a red glow across the evening sky as he sat on the sill by the open window. The village green basked in all its romantic glory with a little girl poking at the pond as ducks dipped unperturbed, and standing just behind her, the weirdo from the cottage. Bacon stood up, alert. He dumped his mug carelessly on the windowsill, leaving it to fall off and smash on the floor. The camera, he remembered, was on the table next to the open archive folder. By the time he returned Blackshaw was looking intently at the child who was now over stretching. Bacon clicked off a few shots just as the girl fell forward revealing Blackshaw's outstretched hand. Bacon snapped a few more times.

Blackshaw stood there, watching as the child drowned. Nothing could be seen of the little girl until eventually he grabbed her hair, yanking her from her watery grave. When she stood on the side, her dress almost transparent as it clung to her tiny body, the weirdo caressed her, soothing and enticing her to go with him. Fortunately for the poor innocent creature, her mother was close at hand ready to save her precious daughter from the clutches of a desperate predator.

Great stuff! - Yet another instalment of the evil that stalks a quiet English village. He'll be back on the nationals before Allenby can shout 'sold'. All he needed now was an interview with the mother.

By the time Bacon made it to the green, Blackshaw had gone from view, and mother and child were turning the corner towards the Goodman Estate. At a 'T' junction leading away from the new village green the mother and child disappear behind a large red and purple fuchsia bush that bordered the garden of a mid terrace house. Skulking behind the fuchsia, he could just make out the front door closing behind mother and child.

The impression of the house from outside was that it was just an ordinary middle class home with white window frames, red brickwork, plain white net curtains at every window and a well tended garden. They were just an ordinary family although he'd have to play down the middle class bit as that wouldn't go down too well with the Oak Tree Farm Estate.

Bacon rang the bell, introduced himself and got sent away, left in no doubt that the father did not consider that his child had been in any danger from that nice and wholly decent Mr Blackshaw. The father then disappeared into the house and returned seconds later only to swipe Bacon across the face with that evening's edition of *The Wherwent Advertiser*.

Bacon left slightly disheartened, but still, he felt, more than capable of writing his version of the story. All he needed was some solid information on the previous murder.

Chapter 8

'You're very chirpy this morning,' Mrs Bacon said.

'Got a good story.'

Bacon wiped up the remains of the egg yolk with his buttered bread and rammed it into his mouth.

'Must you eat like that?' she asked, siding away the dishes.

'In a hurry. This story'll get me back to London.'

'London?'

'The nationals.'

'What story? The development won't do that.'

'Can't tell you.'

'You're not stirring up trouble again, are you?'

'What do you mean, trouble? And where's again come from?'

This is a scoop. A genuine scoop.'

'So was Landymore according to you.'

Bacon ignored this and took a final swig of his tea and left.

Outside the early morning was fresh, but promised a warm, if not particularly sunny day. Dew paled the grass in the garden and made the ragged privet look lush. At the gate he stopped to breathe deeply. The air was clean, unused, no car fumes, just the smell of dampness. Cars were still parked in the gutter, leaving little room for other motorists to pass, while some straddled the gutter to block most of the pavement. The road looked more like prosperous suburbia than a rural idyll. He crossed the road to the large grass dip

that served as the Goodman green. The grass looked translucent, almost shimmering as the timid sun glinted on the heavy dew.

It reminded him of when as a child he used to play Spitfires, running through the dew, leaving a trail of dark green that criss-crossed like plumes of vapour in the sky. He spread his arms and making a deep whining noise that got louder, he ran down the bank, trampling the grass, wetting his trouser bottoms, a seven year old and carefree.

His mother stood at the gate, a yellow duster in her hand, a scowl on her face, just as she had nearly fifty years earlier and a war was being fought. She said nothing, but waited until she had his full attention before returning to the house.

Bacon slumped up the grass slope and into the house, changed into his old suit and left without either of them speaking.

In the village shop Mrs Duff was counting out the nationals before putting them on display next to the local papers. The pile of *Advertisers* had reduced but still stood proud of the others.

'*Advertiser* going well?' Bacon asked standing by the counter.

'About average.'

'The big story helping?'

'Not really.'

Feeling deflated, Bacon bought a carton of milk and packet of chewing gum, staggered at the cost and left wondering if village shops really deserved to be saved. It wasn't the car that was killing them; it was their prices.

Outside he unwrapped a stick of gum and put it in his mouth. Smokers often chewed gum when giving up, so he hoped it worked as well for drinkers. The first time he had gone dry he was researching an article celebrating twenty years of peace in Europe. There had only been twenty-one years between the two world wars, and in 1965 there was no imminent prospect of another. Bacon was investigating the Home Front. Writing about housewives shaping and colouring mashed potatoes to look like poached eggs annoyed him. That was women's stuff. He wanted one of the major theatres of war - Europe, the Middle East, the Far East. Instead he was dissecting gravy browning stockings, digging for victory and praising the red badge of courage. It was only when he hit upon the extent of the black market trade and in particular, homemade alcohol that his interest was fuelled: he realised it was the home brews, which frequently caused blindness, paralysis and death, that had really killed his father, not straightforward alcoholism.

The Advertiser's office, even in the middle of June, had a chill in the air. Bacon found a two bar electric heater which gave off the smell of burning dust and set it up near the computer. In the kitchen he found a chipped mug but no fridge for the milk. Back in the front office he rested his tea next to the coaster and seated himself at the computer to work on a flyer he wanted to slip into the paper. He was no type-setter, but he reckoned he could make a pretty good job at something eye catching using various fonts and sizes. The bold heading said 'Save Your *Advertiser*'. He fitted three flyers to a page,

printed off ten pages then, fearing the ink cartridge might run out, decided to photocopy the rest. The copier was small with a top that moved laboriously back and forth. When the printed sheet eventually emerged, it was buckled from the heat.

Bacon returned to the computer to re-jig the text and by using smaller fonts was able to fit six flyers to the page. The copier churned out five sheets before seizing up, leaving its glass plate burning hot. The computer managed just four pages before the printing got patchy and he had to stop as he needed ink for the letter to the publisher.

The village shop had no copier so he checked the bus times to Winchester, Southampton and Andover. Winchester was the soonest, but would take longer than going to Andover. He rushed back to the office, found a used cardboard backed envelope in one of the drawers upstairs, and noticed the double decker for Winchester coming along the winding lane in the distance.

On the bench under the willow tree was Roger Blackshaw reading a newspaper, and to the side, skipping around the corner, Bacon saw the little girl from the pond. Bacon fumbled along the windowsill feeling for the camera, but it wasn't there. He had left it in the darkroom after developing yesterday's pictures.

* * * * *

Roger stopped by the hedge belonging to the end cottage that edged the old green. He had walked down from his cottage in a daze, still remembering his triumph from yesterday. He had been praised and thanked. He wasn't useless. He wasn't someone nobody else wanted around. He had saved a life.

In his hand he carried a bunch of about twenty large headed dandelions.

'You'll wet the bed,' he muttered, mimicking the cow but sounding more like a parrot.

He'd stopped picking dandelions when he was six, but carried on wetting the bed every night until he was fourteen, then intermittently until he was sixteen when he had stopped completely. Today was the first time he'd picked them since a child and it felt good. There was no fear as he sniffed the bright yellow flower. It was full like a daisy, only with lots of small tufty petals in the middle that gave it a velvety feel that tickled his nose. He loved dandelions - they were not weeds. Hollyhocks were weeds. Convolvulus was weed. But dandelions were beautiful, vibrant, aster-like, and much maligned.

From the edge of his vision he saw Peter Bacon outside the shop, a sheet of paper in his hand. Roger slipped around the corner and waited - the trouble he'd caused as a child still not forgotten. It was instigated by the cow of course, but he could have said nothing. He watched as Bacon checked his watch against the bus timetable then rush back to the newspaper office.

The windows of the office were shadowed to black so that Roger couldn't see inside. Mrs Cranshall had said Allenby was still in hospital. And Bacon was an experienced journalist, so it would make sense to leave him in charge. The skin around Roger's eyes had become hot and prickly. He patted it gingerly, but there didn't seem to be any eruption. The cow's voice from that morning echoed in his ear. 'That nice Peter Bacon knows what you're like. He knows what you've done and he isn't afraid to tell everyone.'

Roger made a determined effort to sound breezy when he went to the shop to buy *The Times*. He used to buy it every day, but the incessant strikes had put him off, so now he restricted it to Saturdays only.

Marcia Duff was filling the kiddies' selection trays with pink shrimps when Roger entered. The last shrimp dropped to the floor so she picked it up and was about to throw it onto the heap with the others when she saw Roger, and put it in her mouth, seemingly more in defiance than for customer care.

'Come for your *Times* have you?' She bent down behind the counter and re-appeared with the newspaper. 'Like a copy of the *Wherwent Advertiser* while you're about it? Very interesting article in it yesterday.'

'No thank you,' he said. 'I went to the meeting on Thursday and I never read the *Advertiser* anyway. Have you got my copy of *What Car?* yet, please?'

'Next week. They've promised next week,' she said in an off-hand, almost surly manner

Roger thanked her, paid for the newspaper and left, convinced that she had forgotten to order it.

The air outside cooled his eyes. A plane flew high, probably a military one from the base at Wallop. Roger had no real interest in planes, and once he had got past his lessons in identifying war planes at school, he had pretty much forgot about them, and certainly he had never bothered to discover the difference between various types of commercial planes let alone modern military ones. Indeed, he was not even sure that he could identify Concorde.

An enemy Messersmidt had once crashed in a field belonging to the great estate where Mr Cranshall became head gardener. It was being used as a recuperating hospital for military personnel but later became a hotel. Many of the injured who went there ended up in mental institutions or Star and Garter and Cheshire Homes, hidden away from public view. They were locked away for the rest of their lives, just for being disfigured for fighting for their country. Life was longer than murderers got, but not longer than children got if their parents didn't want them. A news item a while ago had said children used to be locked away in mental institutions for no other reason than their parents demanded it. And parents really did have that much power. There was that woman who was sent to St Giles for getting pregnant after she was raped; and a man who had hit his father when the father had taken a belt to the dog. So Roger was

lucky. He knew that. He'd always known that. The cow was right.

Most mothers would have put him away for what he'd done to

Dolores. At least he had that to be grateful to her for.

He sat on the bench by the willow, but before he could open his paper he heard, 'Mr Blackshaw, Mr Blackshaw.'

Melissa was skipping towards him. She didn't break stride, but spoke jerkily as she got closer.

'I was hoping I was going to see you,' she said. 'I've got a present for you.'

Melissa slipped on the dew rich grass, collapsing to one knee. She recovered quickly, picking herself up and brushing the grass from her knee. 'Mummy always says I'm clumsy.'

'Yes Mummy does,' said Mrs Mulcaster from outside the shop. 'I'm just going in here, sweetheart, to get the paper and your comic. Don't let the bus go without me.'

Melissa limped over to Roger. 'I haven't hurt myself. It was just a shock really.' She seated herself close to him. 'My knee's filthy. Look.' She pushed her leg out, straightening her knee. It was green and muddy, and slightly pitted from tiny stones. Grass and mud stained the hem of her blue Liberty print dress.

'I'll wash it off in the pond in a minute.'

'I wouldn't do that, if I were you.'

'I won't fall in again. Promise. I've got mud on my dress.' She lifted the hem to show him. 'I think I'm in trouble.'

'If you remove the lumps of mud I think you'll be okay.'

‘Really,’ she sounded unconvinced.

‘Well, better off, perhaps.’

He reached over and with his middle finger flicked the largest lump of mud off the skirt.

‘See, it’s better already.’

Melissa tried flicking the rest off but without her two hands holding it taut, the fabric flapped, making it difficult, so she gave up, leaving the skirt to fold back onto itself so that it didn’t cover her knees. She slumped back into the bench, sighing deeply. A duck quacked.

‘Oh, I’ve got something for you,’ Melissa said suddenly perking up. ‘Here.’

From the tiny Chinese silk purse pouch she had slung across her chest she removed a pair of earrings. They were dangling, pink glass with petals that curved out as on a fuchsia. Inside opaque white balls, stamen or stigma, tinged against the petal.

‘I know you like earrings,’ Melissa said. ‘You collect them from your children. And you like these because they ting. You said so.’

Roger nursed them in his hand. ‘Thank you,’ he said. ‘Thank you very much, Melissa. I will treasure these always.’

The Winchester bus crawled around the corner. Melissa leapt up and ran across the road shouting, ‘Mummy, Mummy.’

Roger rushed after her, wanting to get to the stop before the bus drove past.

Only three seats remained. One was next to a boy, the other, a double. Generally, Roger didn't like sitting next to people, but today he sat next to the boy so that Melissa and her mother could take the double.

* * * * *

The film in the camera clicked on for several shots before Bacon lifted his finger from the button. The little girl's skirt was quite high, not high enough to hide her face, nor high enough to lift it completely off her lap, but high enough to show plenty of bare leg, right up to where the muscles in her thighs flattened out on the bench to meet in front of her crotch.

He whipped the camera back up to his face. Blackshaw's hand had reached out to the raised hem and Bacon could feel his story developing.

The despicable beast grabbed at the hem as the already defenceless, bloodied and bruised child tried to clean herself. His huge, strong hand enveloped both of her tiny hands, forcing them up into the air, forcing her to reveal herself in the most degrading way imaginable. With no mother there to protect her, the degenerate shamelessly wheedled his way into her affections and trust.

The little girl's skirt fell to her lap. Bacon photographed it where it now lay, crumpled and ignored.

It was only after the fiend's lust was spent that she was allowed to cover herself up. But he still was not satisfied. With trembling fingers the poor innocent child was forced to hand over her prized possession, her lovely...

Bacon peered through the lens but couldn't make it out. He would get a magnifying glass to it when the photos were developed.

...forced to hand over her prized possession, her lovely whatever. Only then was the poor terrified creature allowed to go. She ran to the shop, screaming hysterically for her mother and the protective arms she so desperately needed. But even then the beast wasn't finished and ran after her.

* * * * *

The printers collected the new front page at lunchtime and promised to have it back to Bacon by early evening. It was a double page spread that he would wrap over the hundreds of newspapers he still had left. There were, according to the best estimates, a little over six hundred individual dwellings in the village, not counting the farmers and their tithed cottages. He'd ordered enough for each front door, with a few extra to show to the nationals when he sold his story, and hopefully, got his new job.

All afternoon Bacon felt agitated and excited. He phoned Helmer several times, but was told his old editor was in a meeting.

He was put through to Speck-eyed Trev. Bacon was insulted. Trev still hadn't even made his first by-line.

The other papers in turn rejected his calls. By the time he crawled upstairs to the archive room he was so despondent he could have wept. It was with little enthusiasm that he resumed his search for the Dolores story.

Chapter 9

The novelty of wrapping the additional sheet around the outside of the newspaper palled after the fifth time, so Bacon trundled off earlier than originally planned, to deliver the extra page and the newspaper to each household. He'd taken his mother's new tartan wheelie shopper from under the stairs as it was much larger than the old tatty one she had actually given him permission to borrow. A good number of the papers fitted in the trolley, and the sheets fitted easily into an old newspaper-boy's shoulder bag he found on the top shelf of the camera cupboard. The combined weight of the bag and trolley pulled at his shoulder, so he slung the bag over his head to wear it across his chest, before stuffing his pockets with the flyers that explained that the paper was a freebee.

The trolley vibrated uncomfortably as it clattered along the uneven pavement, sending unpleasant tingles up his arm, so he moved to walking on the roadway. The air still smelt fresh, as if people were reluctant to use it. There was some movement around the old green but most of the weekenders appeared to have not yet risen, leaving the Goodman Estate a dewy peaceful haven. As he passed the house, his mother stood at the gate, her arms crossed, scowling.

'I hope you know what you're doing?' she said.

He looked straight ahead, ignoring her.

The Oak Tree Farm Estate was past the Goodman, away from the village. It was the first time he had been there since returning and he felt a twinge of sadness with the unambiguous realisation that the train station and old Jack really were gone. Compared to the rest of the village, the Oak Tree Farm Estate looked cold and hostile. There was no green in the middle for children to play, only a large concreted area for cars to park making the 'Keep off the Grass' notice a bit superfluous. The buildings were light grey concrete, with only some scattered brick effect on the outside walls at eye height, and front doors painted in a range of colours to give a lift from the almost uniformed bleakness of it all; that uniformity being shattered every so often by those who had obviously bought their homes during the Thatcher sell-off of council houses. In those properties the windows and doors were markedly different. Some had porches added to the front, and one had even erected pillars complete with ornate capitals linked by an entablature which all but swallowed the bright blue front door.

He took the newspaper, additional page and flyer to the first front door and posted it. Already he was bored. Three hours, two trolley loads and barely two hundred papers later he was exhausted.

'Get some volunteers,' his mother had suggested over breakfast. 'If the story's that important everyone will want to see it today. What is it anyway?'

He'd shown her the front page. She barely glanced at it when she threw it into his face.

'You can't be serious,' she said. 'This is rubbish. Absolute rubbish. Don't you think you caused enough trouble last time?'

'What last time?'

'Don't pretend you don't remember.'

'I don't.'

'We had enough trouble with the war. And him, poor sod, with that vile floozy of a mother of his.'

'Floozy?'

'Yanks. One Yank and they were down. That was her. Although some called her a prick tease. And poor Roger surplus to requirements so she tried to get rid of him but couldn't, so she used you to cause trouble, and you, you stupid idiot, fell for it.'

'But if it was during the war then I was what, five years old.'

'Nine. And quite old enough to know better.'

She grabbed the mug from out of his hand, slopping tea over the table cloth.

'And don't make a mess. When are you going back to London? You're just like your father. A bullying drunk.'

She crashed the cups and saucers down on the tray and disappeared into the kitchen. Bacon followed but found he had nothing to say so stood at the door waiting for her to speak. She didn't.

* * * * *

It was mid evening before a tired and hungry Bacon ventured back to his mother's cottage. His dinner was on a plate keeping warm in the oven. The roast beef was dry and curled around the edges, the potatoes too hard to get a fork through and the carrots and peas shrivelled beyond hope.

Mrs Bacon was sitting in the living room watching a programme on the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

'You deliver the papers then?' she asked angrily.

Gun shots sounded in the background as Kate Adie said 'Tell the world'.

'Yes.'

He made himself a thick cheese sandwich then returned to the living room to eat it. HP sauce oozed through the bread, turning his fingers brown and his mouth dirty.

'Deliver to everyone, did you?' she asked.

'Until I ran out.'

'So, not outside the village then.'

'You mean to Blackshaw.'

'Yes.'

'Yes.'

'Post it through the letterbox or give it to him personally?'

'Posted it.'

'And Roger was there to pick it up?'

'I don't know. Does it matter?'

She switched off the television.

'You just love causing trouble, don't you?' she said. 'Just love it. Landymore. That woman from Coronation Street.'

'Emmerdale Farm.'

'And God knows how many others. And now poor Roger.'

'Poor Roger. He's a pervert.'

'Absolute rubbish and you know it.'

* * * * *

James Bond was getting his balls bashed. Roger was sitting on the bed reading *Casino Royale*. The further he read into the book the more the story came back to him. Bond had gone in hot pursuit of the girl, or woman, as Roger corrected it, political correctness not a major trait in the Bond books. Bond was naked and defenceless, a prisoner tied to a wicker chair. A hole had been cut into the bottom for him to sag through. A thin man, not Le Chiffre, had an old fashioned cane carpet beater with which he whacked Bond's under carriage. Too much of this and he could be left impotent. Le Chiffre was giving Bond no quarter. There was no rescue, no romantic ending, no-one rushing to his defence. Bond would just have to bear the pain until he was taken to the brink of madness.

Just like the cow, Roger thought. No let up, just dragged to the brink of madness, and beyond, if she has her way. Well he wasn't mad. She hadn't broken him. He was still standing. Maybe a little crookedly, but standing just the same. Roger read on some more,

stopping only after he had read Bond's reflections on what he'd heard from survivors of German and Japanese torture. Their pain and suffering gave way to a feeling of warmth and languor, even a sexual twilight where pain became pleasure and hatred turned into a masochistic infatuation for the torturer.

Roger got out of bed, pulled his pyjama bottoms around to ensure the front opening was shut and went to the wardrobe. From it he took the clothes he wore as Dolores. He held up a blue full-skirted dress against him. It reached to mid calf. That wasn't the look he was wanting so he threw it on the bed before dragging out a white dress patterned with large red flowers. He didn't recognise the flowers, but peonies would be his guess. It didn't much matter. They were red. That's all that counted. The cow hated red, so whenever he was feeling recalcitrant he would deliberately buy something in as bold a hue as he could find. Sometimes he even bought it for her. That was always fun - a guaranteed rant followed by days of sulking and all on his terms.

He hooked open the wardrobe door so that it stayed almost at breaking point against its hinges, and examined himself in the mirror – the stubble on his chin and cheeks, the crow's feet around his eyes, the lines engraved in his scrawny neck. He was not handsome, he knew, and would certainly not have been beautiful if he'd been a woman, but more than anything, he was not happy. His unhappiness showed in his pale blue eyes. Even when he smiled,

and he was smiling at himself in the mirror now, his eyes twinkled, but underlying the brightness there remained unmistakable pain.

He unbuttoned his pyjama top, leaving it to slide down his arms to his hands where he caught it to languorously hold at arm's length before letting it fall seductively to the floor beside him. Next he pulled the loosely braided cord of his pyjama bottoms slowly unravelling the bow, letting the pyjama trousers slipped past his hips and over his thighs leaving him naked and exposed. He was large, well endowed, as the saying went, not the wee willy winky the cow ridiculed him for being. He was bigger than Alan Allenby, and he was certainly bigger than Porky Bacon. He'd compared them all at junior school. His must have been twice the size of Bacon's. When he told the cow she called him a poof and a Nancy, then made him wear a dress. If he liked boys' dicks then he should be a girl. It was the only time she made him wear a dress and he wasn't replacing Dolores.

Roger struggled into a pair of girdle knickers he'd bought deliberately too small. They weren't perfect but they flattened him a little. Over the girdle he slipped ice blue frilly lace French knickers. Lizzy had never worn frilly French knickers, although he'd asked her to several times. He'd even bought her a pair but she said they weren't for her; they were for him and his pleasure. She wore bloomers. They were close fitting, almost knee length and hideous.

Roger danced around the bedroom floor, his hands held out as if holding a woman - or was it a man - he could never work out the positions. He waltzed back and forth, dancing the steps he imagined

he'd been taught on his three trips to the dance school in Wimbledon. He'd met Lizzy on his first visit, danced with her on the second and asked her out on the third. Neither went back until Lizzy started going every Thursday without telling him. She only stopped when she met her Yorkshireman. Forward, side, together, forward, side, together, he glided around the floor. He kissed his imaginary partner. His lips puckered up, his head bend down. The partner was shorter, a woman. He wouldn't have a tall bird. It would look ridiculous. When they went out it would look like she was taking him for a walk. He was light on his toes, ascending and descending in smooth graceful motion, his head tilting this way and that. He was waltzing like Courtney Jones and Doreen Denny. He stopped. He stamped his feet and clapped his hands. He was doing the Latin American like Donny Burns and Gaynor Fairweather. He arched his back and watched the floor as he twisted from the waist. It was the flamenco, the paso doble, the rumba. He clapped his hands above his head, stamped his feet, taunted the bull, flaunting his skills. Then, back to the waltz, the quick step, the fox trot, the tango. It was suggestive, erotic, cheek to cheek like Valentino, then like the whore turning her head away from the stench of garlic and filth from her cowboy partner. Roger jerked and pulled, twisted and turned, how dare she ignore him. He'd paid for her company. His French knickers fluttered with the breeze from his movements. He skipped his feet back and forth in quick sudden motion, tripping himself up and collapsing onto the bed.

He was hot and sweaty and had an erection. He released himself from the panty girdle and relieved himself by hand. Only then did he realise that the spine of *Casino Royale* was digging into his back. He pulled the book out and wondered briefly if James Bond had ever been a dick chick. He doubted it. But then, would Ian Fleming admit to it even if he had. After all, James Bond was, as everyone knew, really Ian Fleming. Or, more likely, what Fleming wanted to be.

The door to his room was ajar. He slipped into his dressing gown before crossing the landing to the old cow's room and her open door.

The lump with the mop of grey curls on top lay still.

'Mother,' he whispered, then, more firmly, 'Mother.'

The lump didn't stir.

He stepped around the bed to look her in the face but it was hidden under the bedclothes so he nudged her and getting no response nudged her more forcefully. The blanket collapsed. He grabbed hold of a corner, pulling it back to reveal cushions.

'Where are you?' he asked in a low growl.

He went downstairs, searching the living room, the kitchen, even under the stairs. She wasn't there. 'You can't find me.' He could hear the cow cackling in his ear. 'I'm too clever for you. I've always been too clever for you.'

Outside the night air was cool and smelt clean and fresh. It must have rained earlier. It was damp as he slapped one foot after

the other onto the cold stone step. A sharp pain shot through his legs. He looked up and down the road. Only the silhouetted trees against the steel grey sky looked back at him. In the distance some lights shone from the houses in the village. The longest day would be soon.

Roger propped open the door using the coconut rush welcome mat before patting barefoot down the hard stony path and onto the grass. The grass was wet and soothing after the path. As he trampled down the grey shadows that were the flowers he prowled across the garden like a cat stalking its prey. Something squished unpleasantly under his foot. A slug he assumed and rubbed his foot against the grass to clean it.

In the field at the rear of the cottage a cow mooed. The farmer was late getting them in for the night.

Back in the cottage he walked on his heels, not wanting the slug gunge to stain the floor. In the kitchen he pulled an old newspaper from a cardboard box in the corner where they were stored ready for use for wrapping up vegetable peelings. The pages were larger than *The Times* and of a different quality. He glanced briefly at it, found it was the inside pages of the *Advertiser* and, after assuming the cow had bought it on one of her rare trips to the shop, wiped the worst of the gunge onto it before using it to stand on. He was then able to hook first one leg then the other over the sink to wash his feet and dry them on the tea towel without messing the floor.

Upstairs the cow had not returned to her bed. He left the cushions and wig exposed, before returning to his own room to sleep fitfully.

Diary 5

Delivered the papers today. Mum's really pissed off about my story. You'd think she'd be pleased a pedo is being found out, but she won't have it. And what is all this about last time. I don't know any last time. There were no pedos in the village when I was a kid or else we'd have all heard about it. And I've certainly never had any pedo articles rejected, nor any trouble from any I've written for that matter. It seems to be the only area where you can write stuff and there's no trouble. Mind you, I've never named names before. Granted, it was easier that way. Everyone likes suspicion, then they can all make up their own minds. No one's much bothered about hard facts, not when it comes to pedos. There again, I've never done the crime desk or the women's pages and *The Messenger* didn't carry a children's page. And if it had, I certainly wouldn't have been the one covering it.

I don't know, you go to London, make as success of yourself, hit a bit of bother and when you try to get yourself back on your feet you get all this. I used to be a bit of a git, I know, but that's all in the past. I'm all right now. I know I am. Flick told me so when I saw her in London just before I left. Admittedly, I had to push her for an answer because she was

back with that useless husband of hers, but she wouldn't have said it if it wasn't true.

Had to have a cheese sandwich for dinner. It was delicious, sort of, but I kept thinking that there was something about a cheese sandwich. I have a sneaking suspicion I puked over Helmer's cheese and tomato sarny the last time I saw him - when he told me my continued employment was surplus to requirements. He always eats cheese and tomato and they always make me feel sick. I don't know why. I love cheese and HP Sauce. Must be the tomato.

Was thinking today about when I'm back in London. I'll get a job, done deal really. Then I'll have to find somewhere to live. Don't want to end up sharing a bench with a couple of Mick drunks outside a church like last time. God, I can still remember the feel of that bloke's coat. It was like a dead slug all slimy and horrible and gut wrenching. And as for the stink and the livestock crawling all over him. And then there were the teeth and talons. Two teeth and thick, yellow gnarled talons like an eagle's claws. He was all streaked with dirt and sharp glinting eyes. And then that wash and shave in cold water in the cafe in Portobello Road. Thank God for the market traders and the six am cafe. Mind you, it's a good place to go after a night on the bevy. Good decent English fry-up and you sober up a treat. Grease soaks up alcohol.

One of those widely known facts amongst us social drinkers.

No. Not us. You're off the booze now, remember.

Princess Anne and Tim Laurence were the main story that day. *The Messenger* ran it as the front page. Real scoop. Only practically every other paper running it as well. 'Anne - Sad, Shattered, Alone', something like that. That's what the *Mirror* ran with. They all had the same sort of thing. *The Messenger* had 'Anne in her despair'. Nothing too alliterative or balanced A-S-S-A. Oh no, not *The Messenger*. Let's go upmarket.

Upmarket! Who the hell upmarket buys *The Messenger*. It's a tabloid and should be proud of it. And what was it Helmer said to me, oh yes, that was it, 'You bring the fine and honourable reputation of tabloid journalism into disrepute'. Just because we lost a case about sex, drugs and a dead groupie. He was a rock singer for God's sake. What else was his life going to be like? But oh no, not Dick Worthy from The Tangled sodding Brains. Didn't drink, didn't do drugs. Why the bloody hell were they called The Tangled Brains then. Should have been called The Goody-Goody-Two-Shoes. Presumably didn't screw either. Mind you, upon reflection, I did feel a bit bad about that one. His kid brother od'd when he was nineteen and his mother was an alkie. But, in fairness, you can't be expected to know everything. But Helmer reckoned that I didn't do enough background. I'd made assumptions.

All right, I admit it. I've got things wrong in the past.
Satisfied, oh Kennimore the Great. An admission. That's what you said. Write a diary, just let your thoughts flow and admit your failings. Well I've admitted my failings. And whatever those failings are, or have been, I'm certainly making up for then now. I'm saving little girls from a pedo. That surely counts for something.

Now calm down, Peter. Calm down. You're getting yourself all morbid and stuff. Let's jolly up a bit and start thinking about tomorrow's aims.

Tomorrows aims:

Go to developers – maybe they'll be working on Saturday with all this development stuff brewing.

Take paper to show them what Blackshaw's like.

Maybe look into those evacuee kids. See if they remember anything. I know, I'll try the Imperial War Museum, see if they can point me in the right direction, or else the Archive Offices in Kew. Somewhere along the line I must be able to find at least one of them. Must check their names. School records, that'll do it. Sweet talk the headmistress. I could always get on with authority.

Also, I must think through my approach to Helmer – GOT TO GET THAT ONE RIGHT!!!

Look for more on when Blackshaw was four and the murder. Wonder if that's what Mum's talking about. But that's nothing to do with him being a pedo. I'll have to think about that one.

Also, must work on next stage of campaign.

Chapter 10

Bacon caught an early bus to Winchester so that he could visit the developers, but finding their offices closed, returned to Wherwent keen to see what effect his article was having on the villagers. The lane leading to Blackshaw's cottage was quiet but some distance ahead a couple of women were assiduously studying copies of *The Advertiser*, then scanning the landscape. The taller of the two nudged her companion and pointed towards the clump of trees and bushes near the entrance to the lane, the other nodded and they moved on. At the brow of the second hill just before the cottage they stopped, pointed some more, huddled together, their heads almost bumping and held the newspaper up to compare the picture with the cottage and its disproportionately tall chimney stack. The stouter woman looked back over to the clump of trees and across the lane. Bacon had almost caught up with them but not wanting to be noticed, leaned nonchalantly against the fence, his elbow resting on the top rail as he looked over the field. The woman saw him, glimpsed at the newspaper then, immediately satisfied, showed the paper to her companion and they both turned full-square to him and stared defiantly.

Bacon nodded his acknowledgement and smiled broadly.

'Morning,' he said. 'Turned out nice again'.

'Come along, Lou,' the taller woman said. 'We've seen enough here. We don't want to get caught up with his sort.'

As the two walked passed with an air of victorious petulance, he realised they must have thought he was Blackshaw.

'It's not me you stupid cows,' he shouted but they walked on arm in arm, their heads tilted back.

Bacon watched and waited until the women had gone over the last brow in the lane going towards the village before removing his copy of *The Advertiser* from his jacket pocket. By using the photographs as a guide he found that he could easily identify the trees, fences and cottage that gave the images their geographic location. The photograph showed the field with Blackshaw surrounded by buttercups and daisies and to the side of it, Corn Meadow Lane, and as far as Bacon could see, it also showed a man who was surely taller and thinner than him. Bacon huffed muttering, 'Stupid bloody cows.' He leaned back against the fence and pondered. They may have assumed that he was Blackshaw, but if it is bringing sightseers out to the cottage, then surely, his position on the nationals must be assured.

He rolled the newspaper, tucking it under his arm workmanlike, wandered up to the gate in front of the cottage, stopped, gave a contented sigh and walked decisively along the path and rang the doorbell.

Roger arrived at the Fortune's house five minutes early to teach Lucinda and Hector the piano. He had gone to the shop to pick up *What Car?* only to find that it still wasn't in and he suspected, still

hadn't been ordered. He left the shop disappointed but with Marcia Duff assuring him that she would give the suppliers a piece of her mind when she phoned them on Monday. But as she still came over as off-hand, even dismissive, he left the shop determined to buy a copy when he visited Southampton after he had finished with the children's piano lessons. Things were moving fast, he could feel it. He had his driving test in a few weeks time and with the money from the sale of the cottage he would be able to put the cow in a home, buy a car and buy a flat.

Just inside the front door the Fortunes had an old-fashioned stained wooden coat stand complete with a central mirror and, either side of the mirror, three wooden hooks all empty save for a scarf. Below the hooks were umbrella stands flanking the section used for the storing of shoes. The first umbrella stand contained a man's furled black umbrella and a small floral one which Roger assumed belonged to Lucinda. In the shoe section lived two pairs of men's black town shoes and one pair of brown brogues and the second umbrella stand housed a selection of old newspapers.

In the front room resting on the coffee table were today's *Times* and *Mail*. They appeared unread. The upright piano was by the wall directly opposite the windows where the curtains were still closed and casting a gloom about the place. Mr Fortune lifted the lid on the piano before going over to the window to pull back the curtains allowing the daylight to charge in like an invasion taking over all but the most resistant corners of the room. The piano keys shone in

sharp relief, bright white, highly polished and Roger suspected, seriously under used.

‘Well, if you just like to settle yourself, Mr Blackshaw, I’ll call Lucinda. It is Lucinda you see first isn’t it? Mrs Fortune usually deals with this sort of thing.’

‘Whoever,’ Roger said. ‘It really doesn’t matter.’

Mr Fortune left the room to call Lucinda while Roger removed the practice pieces from his music case and arranged them in the order for playing.

‘Darling,’ Mrs Fortune called to her husband.

‘Yes, darling,’ he answered.

‘Can you get me the newspaper, please darling? I need to put some peelings in it.’

‘Which one darling?’

‘Any. That *Advertiser* rubbish. Except for the articles on the development of course, that’ll be fine, please darling.’

‘Certainly darling.’

Roger seated himself on the lower of the two piano stools listening and shuddering. In his experience, couples who called each other darling a lot usually did so to cover up the fact that they’re normally going for the jugular. A united front for his benefit – such artificiality unnerved him but still it was better than having to put up with them bickering and arguing.

Lucinda slid around the door like she shouldn’t really open it at all. She was small for her age, non-communicative, withdrawn.

When Roger returned from Southampton he found the lane unusually busy. Pedestrians were wandering along the road, many carrying copies of *The Advertiser*, most looking around the area, holding up their newspapers as if making comparisons. It's the development getting nearer, he thought, and they don't like it. But he didn't care. The development would free him and, with a copy of *What Car?* in his pocket he'd soon be away. As he passed one couple, the man said something but Roger didn't catch it so smiled and nodded and walked on. It was a habit country folk had of talking to complete strangers. But he felt it was an intrusion, a way of letting him know that he couldn't just go about his business. Someone was always ready to tell the old cow. Or maybe she just guessed. He'd once tried walking in the opposite direction to the village, along the lane and further into the countryside but had got so completely lost that it had taken him nearly six hours to find his way back to the cottage. When he arrived he had to knock on the door for over half-an-hour before the cow would get out of bed to let him in. He was eight years old; she seemed disappointed to see him.

As he opened the garden gate a woman walked over and spat at him, a glob of spittle landing on his jacket sleeve. 'You disgust me,' she said, and walked back triumphantly to a small group of women and a chorus of 'well done' and 'that showed him'. The woman turned to face Roger, her arms folded, her head nodding and a smirk of power and satisfaction on her face.

Another bloody stupid cow who thinks she rules the world,
Roger thought, well tough because I'm leaving and I don't care how
much the development upsets you. He walked up the path to the
front door and put the key in the lock.

Diary 6

Went to the cottage today, hung around for a while. Thought of leaving a copy of the paper in the letter box but I delivered it last time so didn't bother. Loads of people strolling along the lane doing their sightseeing bit. Most satisfying. Clearly got a big story here. Nationals, here I come. Helmer won't know what's hit him when I go charging into his office on Monday.

It'll be like when I got that exclusive on the Tory MP over accepting bribes from an energy consortium. Oh, no, maybe not that one. That got rejected. It turned out he'd worked for the consortium on an advisory basis before becoming an MP. Something like that. I got the gist of it, but the details were a bit hazy.

That's the problem really, I'm always in the right area, but sometimes the details are vague. The devil's in the detail, that's what they say, and it certainly is when you end up in court. Take Landymore for example. Now he was having an affair. I was right there. It just happened to be with a bloke, not a dolly bird. That's life. People get things wrong. Why can't others understand that? They're so sanctimonious. This everything-must-always-be-right mentality is ruining journalism. You're not allowed to get a single thing wrong. Not a word, not a fact, not an action. The slightest mistake and that's it, you're out. No question, no apology, no explanation. Just piss

off! You're no good. You're not wanted. On the scrapheap. Why do people have to be so judgemental? Why can't they be more open minded and free living? In short, why can't people be more like me!

Talk about free living, I suppose I'll have to start paying Mum rent now that I'm about to become fully employed. I'll have to find a place in London, of course - can't keep travelling every day. It'll cost a fortune what with the bus to Winchester, train to Waterloo and tube to Fleet Street.

I'm like that Organ Morgan in *Under Milkwood* 'I'm a martyr to music'. Well, I'm a martyr to journalism. Actually, come to think of it, it's his wife who's the martyr to music. He's the one who's 'Up all night playing the organ'. Pure smut that play. Absolute filth from beginning to end. Great stuff!

Like my journalism. That's great stuff. The problem is getting people to recognise it. They used to. When I started out I was a high flyer. Mind you, so was Allenby and look how he turned out. He got the broadsheets and got kicked out. And I got the tabloids and the by-lines. Well, I'll be back with my by-lines before long, just wait and see. Getting this Kennimore. I'm coming back!

Talking about coming back, what shall I do tomorrow? It's Sunday. I think I'll put my feet up and have a rest. I've earned it. It's knackered all this going round interviewing people. And

besides, nothing ever happens on Sundays. So that'll be Monday I'll have to plan for.

Monday's aims:

Go to the developers.

Try the local history for the class register and evacuees.

Go to Somerset House, or wherever, and get the birth and death certificates for Blackshaw's sister. Check name. Maybe Mum knows.

Might check for the evacuees as well. Never know. Might produce something.

Might try the National Newspaper offices in Colindale, as well. Too late to order papers, but could see what they can dig out – assuming there's enough time, that is.

MUST GO TO THE MESSENGER. GET MY JOB BACK!!!!

Chapter 11

Bacon rose particularly early on Monday morning and, although his mother was up and about, there was no breakfast waiting for him. As she was refusing to speak to him, he took his shaving gear and other toiletries to *The Advertiser's* offices. Experience of being thrown out by girlfriends had taught him that this was the route to expulsion, and women never threw your shaving gear after you.

Breaking news obviously wasn't a major feature of life at *The Advertiser* as there were no proper amenities for him to use. The D-Day landings was probably the last big story handled here he mused, until he found the chip mug commemorating the Queen's coronation. It was hidden behind a faded curtain hanging under the sink along with a mottled chunk of mirror that was the corner of a larger one. He wiped the mirror across his backside to clean it then stood it propped up against the coronation mug on the draining board, and except for a few nicks, enjoyed a good close shave, making him feel refreshed and ready for the day.

He'd kept back a few editions of the newspaper and additional front page which he rolled up and slipped into his jacket pocket. He wanted to carry a briefcase for a professional image, but not finding one, opted for the ordinary workingman seeking to protect his family look.

At the stop the short queue was boarding the Southampton bus. It was twenty minutes till the Winchester one so he seated himself on

the bench under the willow to enjoy the tranquillity of the pond. A man slammed the front door of his cottage before slamming the garden gate. Know the feeling, mate, Bacon thought. A dark blue Sierra turned onto the green from the Goodman Estate as a grey Volvo passed going in the opposite direction. Rush hour Wherwent style. Oh, to be in London. A loud puff of air from the pneumatic breaks told him that the bus had stopped. He rushed to the passenger entrance, clambered aboard and quite out of breath fumbled for his fare, but finding that he didn't have sufficient change, had to break into a five pound note, to the evident disapproval of the driver who whipped his hand over the top of the tiny ticket counter to tap vigorously at a notice declaring that the correct change must be provided. Bacon shrugged and determinedly slapped the five pound note down onto the tiny counter but on looking around at the other passengers for approval found that no one was paying him any attention. However, he did notice that Blackshaw was seated in the third row back, staring out of the window. The driver more loudly slapped down the change in such a way as to send many of the unnecessarily low value coins bouncing off forcing Bacon to scrabble around on the floor as the driver jerked the bus into motion. Blackshaw looked up, followed the spectacle dispassionately and slowly moved his head back to stare out of the window, but Bacon fancied he was actually watching him in the reflection and felt unnerved.

* * * * *

Roger had two lessons in the morning in Winchester but nothing in the afternoon, so he promised himself lunch in the little café by the cathedral, followed by a quick trip around the cathedral itself before catching a later bus home.

As he left the cottage that morning the air outside was warming up, but still slightly damp. He walked fast, his head held high, trying to look carefree, jaunty even, in an effort to shake off the gloom that the old cow's words had inflicted on him. When he'd taken in her breakfast she was sitting up in bed, her arms crossed over her stomach, the sleeves of her nightdress worn thin to almost transparent. Without looking at the breakfast she'd ordered him to remove the muck from her sight and as he moved around the bedroom opening the curtains and making the place nice for her she sang, 'Your last day of freedom. Your last day of freedom. Now you've got to pay.' It was a song in need of another line, but the next line never came. It was just the hint, just enough to make him worry. What was she up to now? Where the lane dipped, a crow scudded across the field scattering the blackbirds. A magpie looked on, a little distance away, unconcerned as it turned and hopped towards a thicket. One for sorrow. The cow's words echoed in his mind, 'Your last day of freedom. Now you've got to pay.'

Above the rooftop on the hills overlooking the village, Alf Bickersleigh's sheep were grazing. Roger had been invited to Alf's

wedding to Jennifer Tuffnell, but only discovered that when Alf asked why he'd been too proud to go. The cow had gone, though she hadn't been invited, but she'd made a point of telling everyone that he'd refused to lower himself by attending a farmer's wedding so she'd gone in his stead. Roger apologised profusely, saying he didn't know he'd been invited. He knew about the wedding as such things were common knowledge in the village, but even though they'd been in the same class at school, he'd no expectation of an invitation. Alf, Roger was sure, had never truly believed or forgiven him.

The magpie perched briefly on one of the uprights of the wire fence, turned full circle, then flew off to the top of a tree, landed unsteadily and jumped to the next twig where it stayed, fighting for balance. One for sorrow, he thought again. He searched for another. A second magpie, two for joy, jumped around in the grass in jerky uneven hops. Roger gave a half smile. Whatever the cow was up to, it would be all right. A third flew past, landing on an upright behind him. He checked to see that it was a different bird - one in the tree, one in the grass and one on the post – definitely three. He checked for a fourth but there wasn't one. Three for a girl. Interesting.

As he reached the brow of the hill in the lane, just by the narrow clump of trees and bushes that hid the 'A' road, several people were standing around. They waited silently, held back by uniform police officers and some blue and white plastic tape. The tape was

wrapped around the poles on the fence, then over to a metal stake that looked like an enormous meat skewer. From the stake in the field the tape reached over to a bush, and with the shrubbery making the fourth side, the square was complete. The tape hadn't been there when he came home last night. He was sure of that as he'd seen old Mr Davis chasing his dog out from the thicket and complaining about him always sniffing around where he shouldn't, only for the dog to run straight back into the thicket again.

There didn't seem to be much activity going on inside the tape, although some men were standing about. A woman in a beige Mac kept lifting her feet to stop her heels from sinking into the soft earth.

Roger didn't recognise any of those standing outside the tape. None seemed to be villagers, and if they were they weren't ones that he ever spoke to. The bystanders looked worried, curious, ghoulish. As he passed some of them looked directly at him, but most craned to see what clearly they were unable to see. In the lane three cars were parked obscuring part of the view behind the tape. One was a marked police car. Four more cars were parked further down the lane, where the road darkened behind the trees and bushes.

At the 'T' junction Roger waited for a blue car to pass, but instead it turned up the lane towards his cottage. Across from the 'T' junction and along a little was the side road that led into the village. It formed a sort of dog's hind leg of a junction with his lane and a red car was nosing out of it without indicating. No other drivers so no need to indicate your intentions, thought Roger. Well done. The red

car crossed over the bypass road and straight past him towards the crowd and the police tape. A blue Ford followed, then a grey Volvo.

From the top of the alleyway leading to the green, Roger could see Bacon sitting on the bench by the duck pond. Bacon looked round and Roger fancied Bacon was sneering at him. It was the sneer he remembered from when they were children. The whole school was in the hall singing songs and chanting nursery rhymes, going through their tables and reciting poems. It was a cheap lesson that used no electricity, paper or ink. They used to do this for at least an hour usually twice a day. Outside the window a magpie landed on the top of the bare oak tree. Bacon saw it, nudged Roger and said, 'One for sorrow. That's you at playtime, mate.' The lesson ended when they finished chanting the magpie rhyme, and they filed straight out into the playground. At the railings stood the cow handing out his ration sweets to any boy who would kick him for her.

* * * * *

The developers told Bacon they didn't wish to be party to any sleaze. Gutless! And what's with this, no evidence? What were the photos? Besides, they wouldn't stop the development. If anything they would help cement it.

He left the developers earlier than expected, feeling deflated and disgruntled, but brightened a little when he found that the local history office had the registers for the primary school during the war.

The boys that had stayed with his mother were Albert and Stanley Grindle, and Allenby's evacuees were Arthur and George Fletcher. Each evacuee had two addresses next to their name, the first for the village and the second for their home. Bacon counted the evacuees and found they outnumbered the village kids. A couple of the other evacuees he remembered but most were just so many names on the register. He also noted that the number of evacuees declined markedly during the late autumn of 1941, the months leading up to the introduction of compulsory national service for women under the age of fifty who didn't have dependents to look after. Bacon covered this in his article on the home front, but when he stated that mothers wanted their children returned so that they didn't have to go out to work, Helmer made him remove it. He changed it to a hint so that anyone capable of inferential reading would get his drift, but even that was too much so he had to delete all reference to returning evacuees and national service for women thus making his comments regarding the infrastructure for children being in the country while a significant number of children were in the cities look like Government incompetence. But Helmer seemed happy with that – so, clearly not opposed to skirting around the truth when it suits him was Bacon's argument. Helmer's argument was that he wanted what sold newspapers. But as Bacon stated some years later that the Landymore article had sent sales zooming, he was immediately sacked.

Bacon spent over an hour gathering information on the evacuees and was still in good time to catch the train to London. From Waterloo he took the Northern line to Tottenham Court Road then changed for Holborn and walked. The exercise would do him good. That's what they'd said at the AA meeting. Exercise produces endo-morphines that are nature's natural uppers. He was to get high on exercise. It didn't work as well as whisky, but he loved London, hail, rain or shine, and the sun was shining bright today, both in his heart and in the sky.

Aldwych ran straight into Fleet Street where *The Daily Messenger* offices were located. At the bottom of the steps he hesitated, calming himself, preparing his speech. For the first time he saw the ornate double doors with the filigree art nouveau swirls of leaves and stems. He looked hard at the doors. How many times had he passed through them? Thousands. How many times had he actually seen them? Only for the first time today. They were so familiar yet totally new to him – a bit like how he felt about Wherwent.

Inside the newspaper office it was a fury of activity. Something was happening. A big story, or potentially big story, was breaking. Paper was flying, literally in some cases, phones were ringing incessantly. No one acknowledged him.

Helmer was in his office, his head hanging low as he read through newspaper copy.

Bacon knocked on the door.

'Put it there,' Helmer ordered, stabbing his finger into the pile of A4 sheets.

Bacon took a deep breath, stepped in to the office and said, 'Hello, Alastair, great to see you.'

Helmer looked up. 'What do you want?' he said.

'I've got a great local story for you, but it's of national interest. I'm doing further work on it so I've brought you the first copy. Need London for some background but didn't want to get so engrossed in my research that I forgot to come here.'

He proudly slammed down a copy of the *Wherwent Advertiser*, covering the sheet Helmer had been reading. Helmer looked at the picture of Blackshaw taking earrings from Melissa.

'So.'

'It's a great story,' Bacon said. 'Paedophilia in a rural idyll.'

'That's new?'

'That's Wherwent.'

'Wherwent?'

'A small village in Hampshire.'

'I know where Wherwent is.'

'Do you?' Bacon sounded surprised. 'Did I ever mention it to you? It's where I was brought up.'

'We weren't bosom buddies as I seem to recall.'

'Well how do you know it?'

'You should know.'

Bacon looked at him confused.

'It's today's big story,' Helmer said sarcastically.

'Big story? What do you mean? There's no big stories in Wherwent. Except this one, of course,' he said poking his finger at *The Advertiser* and hopefully recovering quickly enough to steer Helmer away from any jibes.

'You've just come from there so surely you know.'

'This is the only big story going on in Wherwent. And it's mine. What other is there? I went straight from Mother's to the bus stop and there was certainly nothing going on there.'

'You must have missed it then.'

'Where is it? What is it? I can do some work on it when I get back tonight.'

'Don't bother. We've already got people there.'

'When did it come in?'

'Early hours.'

'Well you can't expect me to go patrolling the village all night.'

'Maybe not. But as it's gone to all the nationals, didn't you notice any increase in cars or something. Or is this one of those ultra busy villages?'

Bacon pondered the car situation and concluded that there may have been a couple extra, but he couldn't say that there was anything to tweak a journalist's nose.

'All I know is,' he said after he'd finished his musing, 'I've just given you a big story. Is it the same one?'

'Did it sound like I was saying it was the same one?'

'Well, whatever that one is, I'll look into it when I return, but with this one there's this bloke, Roger Blackshaw, he murdered his sister when he was four.'

'Bloke. Four. Adult? Child? Am I missing something?'

'As I said, I'm doing some background on it today. Can't get all the information in Wherwent. So I thought I'd come here as well, kill two birds with one stone, as it were. His mother told me all about it and he's a weirdo who dresses as a woman and accepts gifts from little girls.'

'When?'

'When they give them to him.'

'When did his mother tell you about this?'

'Years ago. When I was a kid. She told us all, or more accurately, she called him a murdering bastard and accused him of trying to murder me.'

'How?'

'By pushing me down a hole in the floor.'

'What were you doing?'

'Playing cowboys and Indians in the old manor house.'

'You fell through a hole, you mean.'

'I'm going to see if any of the other kids we were playing with can help with the story'.

'And where does the murder when he was four come in?'

'It was either then or afterwards she told me he murdered his sister. I'd pretty much forgotten about it until all this pedo stuff started.'

Helmer got up and from the door bellowed, 'Oliver!'

'Sir.' A young bright-eyed boy in his early-twenties, rushed over to him.

'Check this out. I want to know about the murdered sister. The bloke was four at the time so by the looks of it, you'll need to dig back to before the war. You'll be looking for a dead girl rather than a four year old murderer. Even they didn't publish that sort of thing in those days. And get Tom Tassier on the phone for me. He can do some digging around down there.'

'It's a good story, right,' Bacon said eagerly.

'Don't know yet. May be relevant, may not. We'll see. Now piss off, I've got work to do even if you haven't.'

'Ah well, that's the thing. I came here for a second reason. In fact by primary reason for coming was because I want my job back.'

'Tough.'

'But, I've just given you a good story.'

'No, you've just given me, by your own admission, a load of local gossip that needs checking out.' Helmer poked Bacon in the chest with his index finger. 'The you that was originally employed here, would have got the full story for himself and presented me with good copy. Not given me some half inched crap that still needs checking out let alone writing up. Especially when you consider what

else is going on down there. And, may I remind you, this ferreting out stories to investigate was always Tom Tassier's particular area of expertise. Your area of expertise, until you let the bottle take over, was researching stuff. In short, Tom's the investigator, you're the researcher. Stick to libraries. You get lost after that. Now, like I said, piss off. I've got work to do.'

Bacon tried using a phone in the news office but as his mother answered Helmer slapped his hand on the cradle, so he went in search of a public phone box but only had enough change for a short call which was just long enough for him to discover that his mother knew nothing about anything going on in the village as she hadn't been out.

A gloom descended over Bacon as Helmer's words repeated in his brain, 'The good you, the you that was first employed here.' On and on it went like a dagger gouging out his confidence. Had he really sunk so low? Was he really ever any good? At least Helmer had said he'd been good. But good compared to what? Perhaps he only meant good compared to how he is now. Or perhaps he meant good as in being as good as he believed he was. Four tube trains stopped and left the station before he felt ready to travel to the register office. He made a half-hearted attempt to find the birth and death certificates for Dolores, but when he failed, fell back on past experience which had taught him that records were frequently posted incorrectly, and when having concluded that the nineteen thirties

were particularly bad for this, especially as he didn't have a first name to go by, caught an early train to Winchester and spent the whole journey pondering whether to return to London the next day to search for the four evacuees. On the bus he decided it would be a futile exercise as he knew only where they lived forty-five years earlier.

At home his mother insisted that there was no big story, only rumours and lies which no right-minded person would believe. After scoffing down his dinner he gathered up his reporters note book and pen and Allenby's camera and left the house to his mother's yells that he was at it again.

Bacon wandered off towards the Oak Tree Farm Estate reasoning that any major event would most likely be there but finding all was peaceful and quiet he followed the path round until he found a narrow alleyway that took him to the back of the estate and onto a wooden fence that separated the field beyond from the estate land. The field was overgrown near the edges with a variety of weeds and bushes. By stepping onto the bottom rung of the fence he could see over the weeds and into the field. Tall thin stems covered in whitish downy gossamer like fluff tickled his chin but by brushing the tallest of them aside he could see clearly into the field. The weedy patch stretched for about four feet then changed into a crop. The field looked peaceful and un-trampled.

Bacon climbed down from the fence and looked around. Running right back to the field fence were the fences from the gardens. The garden to his left was well tended while the one to his right was evidently used as an outside junk room.

Bacon walked back to the road and after trying the corresponding alleyway at the other end of the row of houses, made his way back through the Goodman Estate and onto the village. A couple of teenagers were co-noodling on the bench under the willow tree, the girl laughing loudly as the boy said something before rolling her downwards and out of sight.

Bacon walked by the edge of the green passed the shop and through the alleyway to the A road that cut off Blackshaw's lane. There were cars parked in the by-pass and, as he made his way along the lane he found a small gathering of people with a couple of policeman guarding the area fenced off by blue and white police tape.

'What's up?' he asked a woman standing nearby.

'Don't know. No one's saying. But the reporters who were here have all gone to a press meeting in... Where was it?' she asked the man next to her.

'Winchester. Headquarters.'

'Winchester. Headquarters,' she repeated to Bacon. 'Must be important.'

'When did they go?'

‘About ten minutes ago. A press conference was announced and they left.’

‘Murder, I reckon,’ said the man. ‘No one’s saying, but must be murder.’

Bacon moved away scanning the scene with his journalist’s eyes and concluding that the man was most probably right. ‘Who’s been murdered?’ he asked the nearest policeman.

‘Nothing to do with you sir. Please move away.’

Bacon began to walk away casually, his hands in his pockets, hoping he looked nonchalant as he scrutinised the scene for a way around the roped off area, but finding none, wandered over to where two further policemen stood protecting the side of the taped off section. They gave a synchronised turn of the head, a forbidding expression on their faces. Bacon braced himself, smiled broadly, and as he was in the process of approaching the pair, heard voices ordering the gathering to disperse. Bacon pressed on but before he could get a foot on the slight slope leading to where the policemen stood, they both turn fully towards him and standing side by side formed a barrier that Bacon clearly couldn’t breach.

‘What’s going on?’ he asked.

‘Nothing to do with you sir. Please disperse.’

‘You’ve called a press conference,’ Bacon said.

‘That’s right sir.’

‘I’m press so therefore it must be something to do with me.’

'You should have gone to the press conference then shouldn't you sir.'

'Couldn't. I was in London and only just got back.'

'Can't help that sir.'

'Therefore, as I'm press it's something to do with me so what's it all about?'

'If you just like to move on now please sir. You'll hear about it in the papers or on television, I shouldn't wonder.' The policeman moved forward gently pushing Bacon back, manoeuvring him towards the bypass.

It was too late for him to go to Winchester, even in a car, so he slunk off home, despondent. He had gone to London to get his job back by providing a big story, but found that he'd left the big story behind. And he knew that the only thing likely to cause so much activity would be a body. And a body usually meant murder.

Chapter 12

Roger stayed in Winchester longer than originally intended as, after his visit to the cathedral, he took the opportunity to go shopping. On his return to Wherwent he sensed a slight strangeness in the atmosphere, but nothing that particularly pricked his interest until he reached the bypass leading to his lane. There he found the 'A' road congested with cars and bystanders. His first instinct was to assume that an accident had happened, but when there'd been a three car prang on the bypass some years earlier, apart from Marcia Duff pontificating on the dangers of major roads, no one seemed much bothered. The lane was even more heavily cluttered than the bypass, with outside broadcast vans and television cameras taking up an inordinate amount of space. Reporters, judging by their notebooks and heavy duty cameras, blocked the rest of his path. He lingered briefly, considering his options for getting home. His instincts told him that all this interest was down to the development, then he remembered the blue police tape at the bottom of the lane when he'd left that morning. Roger was not especially curious by nature, preferring information to come to him. This was the attitude he applied to life in general and always to films and television programmes. Ten years earlier when *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* with Alec Guinness was the big television sensation he had never been able to understand all the who-ha that went on at the time about it being unfathomable, incomprehensible, jumbled, messy. It

was perfectly straightforward to him – all you had to do was wait for the information to be presented, which it invariably was, and then everything gradually slotted into place. He even managed to work out who was the mole, although his decision was based primarily on who was the other really big name on screen.

Most of the bystanders were strangers to him, but a few he recognised - villagers he had seen around but never spoken to. The crowd waited mainly in silence except for one voice that rose high above them. It was Marcia Duff giving forth in a tone that meant that what was being said was just so much conjecture and noise. 'Well, what do you expect', she was saying. 'I pointed it out to people. Lord alone knows, I pointed it out to them.' Roger decided to avoid her so nipped along the bypass to an unpromising looking muddy lane which was half blocked by a black Fiesta. The lane began with loose stones making a fairly solid base but soon descended into a slippery mud track where the heavy overgrowth prevented the sun from penetrating strongly enough to dry out the path, even during hot summers. He considered going back to the bypass and returning to the cottage along the lane but decided against it so removed his shopping from their carrier bags and stuffed it into his pockets or hung it temporarily on the bushes ready to be carried by hand. He then placed a plastic bag over each foot, covering the shoe and tying the handles around his ankles to secure them in place. The brambles and leafy twigs from bushes caught on his clothes as he walked so he stuffed the jumper he'd bought under his jacket for

protection and pulled his jacket close around him. The mud squelched underfoot, giving off a sour odour, as the path veered sharply away from the direction of the cottage to take him to the very top of the field where it was at its widest. From there he left the path, lifted the heavy metal bar that anchored the gate shut and pushed it open just enough for him to gain entry to the field. The field was lower than the path forcing him to hook his foot under the cumbersome gate and heave it up high to enable him to lock it. After taking the narrow mud path at the top of the field, thus avoiding the crops, he climbed over the fence onto the lane and walked the short distance back down the lane to his cottage.

After disposing of the tatty muddy carrier bags in the outside bin he removed his shoes and climbed up the stairs in stocking feet dampened by the mud and the heat generated by the plastic carrier bags. Mud stained the turn ups on his trousers so he changed into an old pair and left the muddy ones hanging over the back of the kitchen chair in his bedroom to dry out ready to be brushed clean tomorrow. He hung his jacket on a hanger in the wardrobe before going to the kitchen to prepare a light tea consisting of a ham and tomato sandwich and a slice of Genoa cake. He had eaten dinner in Winchester and didn't want another full meal. The cow could starve. He was fed up with cooking, only for her to leave it and get something else later on.

'We can't afford to waste food,' she would rage at him if ever he left anything on his plate - but when she wasted food that was different. 'That's me,' she'd yell. 'I can do what I like.'

As a treat for doing so well with the sale of the cottage, he'd bought himself a packet of cocoa covered almonds. They were expensive but, it was Mrs Cranshall saying, 'remember Harrods,' that gave him the confidence to even try for an increased offer from the developers. Roger had gone to London to buy the cow's Christmas present, but primarily to see the lights in Oxford Street. On a whim he'd decided to visit Harrods. In all the years he'd lived there, he'd never been to Harrods and Lizzy wouldn't go as that was a posh shop for posh people, or those with pretensions - not for ordinary folk like them.

It was the food hall that caught his attention. He'd read somewhere that Harrods sold the cheapest bacon. He didn't want any bacon; he just wanted to see if it was cheap. He never found the bacon counter, although he did find the impressive mosaics and a dazzling array of exotic foods he'd never heard of. But, his greatest joy came when he found the counter that sold nuts and dried fruits displayed in small cooper barrels lined with hygienic containers. The nuts were expensive but, deeming that as it was Christmas he deserved a treat, and could munch the nuts on the train home. The quarter of cocoa covered almonds he'd ordered made the old fashioned balance scales clatter onto the metal plate, and after checking that the correct weight had been placed on the balance,

trotted off to the kitchen department where the food scales on display showed that he had actually been given a little less than eight ounces. After sampling the nuts and finding them delicious, returned immediately to the food department, where he hesitated before summoning the courage to buy a quarter of a pound of each type of coated nut, then staggered out of the shop under the weight of them all.

At home, still feeling smug about his nerve in getting one over on the rich, he put out some nuts in small dishes and placed them around the living room, hiding the rest in his room, ready to be eaten over Christmas. The cow had emptied the dishes before bedtime and when, the next day, he went to put more out, he discovered that they'd disappeared. Search as he might, he never found the nuts, and by the time he went again to London, Harrods had bought electronic scales.

When a few days later, he admitted to Mrs Cranshall that he felt guilty about Harrods, she told him he'd stolen nothing. The contract was made at the point of sale, and if they wished to give him nearly twice the amount he was paying for, that was their choice. Roger still wasn't sure, but when she went on to praise him for using some grit and gumption it suddenly became wholly acceptable.

Roger switched on the television. He was too late for the main news but was content to sit down with a cup of tea and watch *South Today* with Sally Taylor. She was new to the programme and he'd fancied her from the moment she appeared. He liked her blonde hair

and long slim hands. But mostly he liked her voice. It was calm, authoritative, and serious when it had to be, but with an underlying hint of humour that showed itself during the comic items. She was definitely his sort of woman.

She was in serious mode now, talking about the latest developments on the care in the community programme that the Thatcher government was imposing. He didn't like Thatcher. She was definitely not his sort of woman. He also didn't approve of the closing of the hospitals. He thought it was just another example of her ill-considered cost cutting plans. Thatcher, frankly, terrified him. He wasn't rich enough to like her - only lucky enough to live nowhere near the lodgings set-up for the ex-inmates. Villages and desirable residences, he knew, missed most of the harsher realities of life. It was the urban poor who had to put up with things. The picture on the screen showed the crumbling façade of the old Victorian hospital that was nearing the completion of its emptying programme. Unfortunately, the clearing out was continuing unabated, without there being enough suitable accommodation in place. Roger huffed. Typical!

Using his teeth he managed to tear open the transparent cellophane wrapper of his packet of cocoa covered almonds. The bag split almost in two, scattering nuts over his lap. He picked them up, removing one from the crease in his trousers at the top of his thigh, and put four in his mouth. The rest he returned to the packet.

The phone rang. It was some woman going on about some child and social services and hospitals. It was garbled and so rushed the words were swallowed. In the background he could hear another woman, who sounded like she was egging on the first. After asking a couple of times for clarity, Roger gave up and put the phone down.

As he settled back in his armchair the living room window smashed. Something hard scraped off the edge of the varnished table to land with a thud on the carpet somewhere near his armchair. From outside a thin chant started. 'Murderer. Murderer. Murderer.'

Roger stood up, letting the bag of cocoa almonds fall to the floor. He stepped to the side of his armchair, away from the window, looking around the carpet for the something hard that had smashed the glass. Behind the chair his foot rocked awkwardly on a crooked, solid lump. His foot slid off, but when he went to put his weight on it, his ankle twinged. A knobbly grey stone was lying by the leg of the chair. He left the stone where it lay and limping slightly, made his way towards the window. From outside the word 'murderer' was being repeated over and over again in a slow rhythmic chant, the last syllable given extra emphasis. His shoulders tensed; a sharp pain dug into the muscles; the tension ran up his spine into his head. A cold wetness spread across the inside of his skull as one blood vessel after another burst. His head shook in small juddery sideward movements. What on earth was going on?

He stood back from the window, not daring to go too close. Shattered glass had slashed the net curtain. Shards of glass lay on

the table, window ledge and carpet. Sharp slithers trapped in the curtain caught the light making the netting looked sequinned, while shards poked dangerously out of the carpet where it was too dark for them to glisten. Glass crunched under Roger's feet leaving chips lodged in the soles of his slippers. It cut through the rubber and into his heel. By using the sides of his feet he shuffled to the nearest dining chair. The chair was tucked under the table so had missed out on being covered in debris. From his slippers he removed several pieces of glass and two fragments from his heel.

Another stone shattered the upper pane in the window. The chanting changed, getting longer, louder, more urgent.

'Murderer. Pervert. Murderer. Pervert.'

The chant was faster now, the tempo consistent, pleasing to the ear, the words almost murmured. It was only the meaning that was harsh.

Roger carefully made his way to the living room door and up the stairs to his bedroom. He put his shoes on before going to the window, angling himself flat against the wall but in such a way as to enable him to see out.

Twenty or so angry men, women and children were gathered in the lane outside the gate. Behind them were what Roger assumed must be the same reporters from earlier in the lane. They were taking photographs and making notes. More people were joining the crowd, some rushing forward, others seeming to be led by their own curiosity. A large van was parked partly on the grass verge to the

side of the lane. It had BBC Outside Broadcast printed on the side. A man with a microphone was standing in front of another man holding a camera, while a third twiddled knobs on a black box that hung from a wide strap across his shoulder. A large silvery white dish and bright light illuminated the man with the microphone.

More stones were hurled at the cottage smashing downstairs windows and pummelling the door and brickwork.

Roger sneaked into the old cow's room where he found the wig hastily spread out on the pillow. Her body look disjointed and deformed.

'Made sure you escaped, didn't you,' he yelled. 'You destructive bitch.'

He threw the bedclothes on the floor revealing the hastily arranged cushions that formed her body.

'What have you done now?' he shouted. 'What have you been saying? Who have you been telling tales to? Murderer, pervert - where the fuck does that come from? And don't bother telling me to stop swearing. Fifty fucking years ago. That's when. I was just four years old. I didn't know what I was doing. And you're still going on about it. Can't you just, for Christ's sake, just fucking let it go?'

He turned sharply towards the bed and pummelled the cushions, punching them, grabbing them, tugging them, trying to rip them apart. The covers didn't rip. From the bedside table he went to snatch a knife but he'd tidied the tray away. He crashed out of the room, slamming his shoulder into the door frame, his unlaced shoes

flopping against his bare feet, one falling off, making him slip on the stairs, tweaking his ankle as he slipped down several steps, stopping about halfway. His other leg buckled painfully underneath him, and it was only his hold on the banister that stopped him falling further.

The sole of his bare foot hurt from the friction burns from the carpet, and a continuous stabbing pain shot through the arch. His buckled leg was hooked back against the wall and twisted against his ankle. He rolled over to the side, dragging himself closer to the banister, lifting his bare foot up to the step just below him. Gingerly he put weight on the bare foot, supporting himself with the banister, until he was able to move the buckled leg round, and place it next to the other one. He rubbed hard on both legs and feet, desperate to make the pain go away.

When the pain had reduced a little, he removed his other shoe then tried pulling himself up on to his feet. His ankle smarted, but by putting most of his weight onto the banister he was able to hobble down to the newel post. He limped a few tottering steps around the newel post and stretched out his hand towards the door frame into the living room, but as he stepped forward a stone careered through the glass panel in the front door landing inches away from his back foot before bouncing onto the bottom stair. Fragmented pieces of the stained glass bird flew into the hallway to lay strewn about his feet. He barely noticed the sharp stab as a shard stuck out of his foot, protruding from the bone on the top of his instep. He bent down to pull it out, bracing himself against the pain, but no real pain came. It

simply slid out in one smooth stroke. He was surprised. The cow would have wiggled it back and forth, her tongue sticking out of her mouth, salivating with pleasure as the glass cut further and deeper into his flesh.

Outside the chanting was getting louder, harsher. 'Murderer. Pervert. Murderer. Pervert.' They were clapping now in time to the chant – a chorus of claps always landing on the first beat of the bar. Mur-derer. Per-vert. Mur-derer. Per-vert.

Roger pushed himself towards the living room door, reeling into the back of the armchair. Sally Taylor was talking about a body found in a shallow grave.

A thin trickle of bright red blood dripped in small droplets onto the carpet. 'There he is,' someone shouted, but there was no increase in chanting or stone throwing. Through the hole in the front door panel Roger could see two maybe three police officers standing between the crowd and the gate. He felt safer now as he limped to the kitchen to rinse his foot in the sink. The *TCP* and plasters were upstairs in the bathroom cabinet, so he dried his foot on the tea towel before wrapping it over his toes and securing it with a knot at the back of his heel. Most of the word 'Glass', woven in blue into the edge of the tea towel, was written across his upper foot so he rolled the cloth over to obscure the lettering.

After applying copious amounts of antiseptic he waited for the stinging to subside before dabbing on plenty of Germoline and an Elastoplast. He stuck the plaster on so that it was raised slightly in

the middle. Mrs Cranshall had shown him how to do that when he had fallen over on the gravel and cut his knee so badly he still bore the scar. It was the first time he'd worn a plaster that was painless. The cow always stretched it over the cut then pressed down hard 'to make sure it stays firmly in place'.

Chapter 13

Bacon was lying on his bed looking at a small crack that trailed along the corner edge of his bedroom, travelled across the ceiling then came to an abrupt halt a couple of feet towards the light socket. He couldn't remember seeing it before, but supposed it had been there all the time. A slight browning spread down the wall to the peeling picture rail and carried on for a few inches before turning into beige coloured tramlines that must have developed from rainwater seeping in.

'Peter. Peter,' Mrs Bacon shouted from the bottom of the stairs.

'What?' he shouted back.

'Down here now.'

'I'm not a bloody kid.'

'I want you to see this.'

Bacon reluctantly dragged himself off the bed, forced his feet into his shoes and slowly descended the stairs, thudding heavily on each tread. His mother's hand rested on the newel post at the bottom.

'See what?' he said.

'Out there.'

It was warm for early evening. Children were playing in the dipped green and a pigeon cooed seductively.

'What is it?'

'They've all gone past now. I dread to think what trouble they're causing.'

'What are you talking about woman?'

‘Protesters, I think is the polite word. Angry, stirred up people who carry banners. And some carry newspapers.’ Mrs Bacon slammed a copy of *The Wherwent Advertiser* and additional front page into his stomach, winding him a little. ‘Some people seem to think this represents proof.’

‘It is. He’s dressed as a woman.’

‘Of murder.’

Bacon walked past the police tape wrapped around the trees and pegs, and past the parked cars till he reached the point where he could hear the chant of ‘Murderer, Pervert,’ waft over the hills and down the lane. It was faint but clear enough for the words to be audible. He had heard this sort of thing before when he had gone as backup with crime reporters to suspects’ houses as the police made daytime arrests.

‘What’s up?’ Bacon asked the constable standing nearest to the road.

‘Nothing for you to concern yourself with, sir.’

‘Not again. Look, what’s going on up there? I’m press.’

‘Then you’ll know from the press conference, won’t you, sir.’

Bacon gave up and trudged along the lane towards the cottage, weaving between the now loosely gathered sightseers, journalists and parked cars. He didn’t feel well. His head swam and he was drained of energy. He hadn’t eaten since the decidedly unimpressive sandwich he’d bought from the kiosk at Waterloo station and now he was beginning to feel slightly sick. He put it down to the processed cheese being off, but deep down he knew it was apprehension.

Outside Blackshaw's cottage a large group had formed. They were waving banners and copies of *The Advertiser*. The banners were evidently hastily put together, written scrappily in black felt tip and mainly said murderer or pervert. Television vans were parked along the verge and journalists stood around the edge of the protesters, some questioning people in the crowd, others chatting amongst themselves.

Bacon recognised Tom Tassier from *The Messenger*. His nickname was Terrier Tassier because once he got his teeth into a story, he didn't let go. Helmer trusted him. He was the big story gatherer, the scoop man, the one who dug deeper and further than anyone else, and had never had an article rejected or prosecuted. Bacon didn't reckon much to him. A couple of times Tassier had done all right, then a rival would print something that topped everything he'd written, making his article look pedestrian. Or so Bacon told anyone who cared to listen. Few did.

Bacon moved to the back of the crowd where he was hoping to be inconspicuous. He watched Tassier as he scribbled something in his notebook, looked towards the crowd, then scribbled some more. Something was stirring.

'Look. That's him. There,' shouted the man who appeared to be the leader. He was pointing down the lane towards the village.

Behind Tassier, Bacon could see Blackshaw on the brow of the hill. He was wearing a different dress to the one in the photographs but it was unmistakably him. He was walking slowly, timorously, towards the gathering, his hands clasped tightly around the handle of a cheap plastic

handbag. The handbag swung into his upper thighs as his hands pushed the handle of the bag into his stomach.

‘That’s him,’ a woman shouted.

The crowd turned to face Blackshaw. He shuffled nervously from one foot to the other as photographers took pictures and reporters hastily scrawled notes. Blackshaw held his hand to his face, shielding it from the stares and the cameras as if frightened, confused.

‘Get him,’ the man shouted.

Blackshaw stepped back, moving away from the crowd as it inched towards him. He looked behind but there was no one there - realisation slowly dawning. He shuffled backwards more urgently, each step shorter, quicker, but the faster he moved away the more the crowd pushed forward. It was him they were after. He turned and ran back along the lane, tripping, stumbling in his chunky heels - the crowd behind him gathering force, roaring, catching him.

‘After him.’

‘Get him.’

‘Don’t let him get away.’

The mob separated as the fastest got to the front. Their thundering steps almost in unison, an unnerving rumble, the hunt with the whiff of the fox. They got closer, thudding and thumping, shouting and baying. Blackshaw was surprisingly slow - his skirt hampering him, its fullness trapped between his legs making him stumble. He stretched out his hand to save himself. He ran on, the mob getting closer. Bacon ran with them, struggling in the slow group but still gaining on Blackshaw. A policeman

guarding the murder site was on his radio. He held an arm out to stop him but Blackshaw brushed past. The small gathering of sightseers and journalists waiting by the tape moved back allowing him to pass - the mob now only yards behind. Blackshaw ran straight into the road, straight in front of an on-coming car.

The car hit him, throwing him into the air. He tossed over the bonnet, bounced on to the roof, bounced off the roof, slid down the back of the car, hit the tarmac, bounced another twice until being thrown against the grey stone wall to land just in front of a parked car on the opposite side of the road.

His body lay facing the wall; his head facing the road. His uppermost arm was thrown above his head coming to rest against the wall, while the other arm was trapped under his body, running across his shoulder blades. One leg was lying straight while the other twisted back on itself.

Dark red viscous blood poured from the back of his head and seeped under his body into the wall. Death had loosened his muscles and staining was already appearing from under the skirt.

The ringleader stopped at the body, looking only briefly at it before shouting, 'Let's go. Run. Go.'

He ran into the village, followed by the others.

The car stopped twenty yards further along. The driver staggered out of the door and leant heavily against the side, his elbow on the roof, his forehead cupped in his hands. He was shaking, his head rolling from side to side, his throat contracting, gulping, like a cat dislodging a fur ball. The

remains of not fully digested food burst onto the roof of his car, before trickling down the side congealing, most not reaching the road.

Bacon stayed with the body.

‘Christ, they’ve killed him,’ Tassier said.

Bacon turned to see Tassier staring at the body in horror, disgust.

‘They’ve killed him,’ he said again.

‘What’s the matter, Tassier? Never seen death before?’

In the distance a siren was coming closer.

Bacon leaned over the body, careful not to touch it. He pulled back, landing heavily on his haunches, his head slumped forward. He gave a deep juddering sigh.

‘It’s not him,’ he said. ‘It’s not Blackshaw. It’s a woman.’

* * * * *

Outside the cottage the chanting had been replaced by soft chatter. Roger flattened himself against the wall in his bedroom and looked out of the window. There was only a small crowd now, the few stragglers who hadn’t suddenly gone running off down the road. They were standing around, shuffling from one foot to the other in tiny repetitive steps as they craned their necks to see down the lane towards the village. Roger swung round the window flattening himself against the opposite wall and, sliding as close as he dared to the window edge, straining to see what they were looking for, but he could see nothing of interest – the angle was wrong. He had a view

of the fields and bushes and trees bordering the narrow muddy lane he had sneaked along earlier, and from the village he could make out the top of the school roof and the edge of the church spire, but to be able to see directly down the lane he would need to open the window, and that he most certainly did not want to do. He remained hidden behind the wall to watch and wait as a few of the protesters began wandering slowly, cautiously down the lane, talking in clusters, questioning what was going on, their banners waving pointlessly in the air, forgotten as they rested against their carriers' shoulders, their interest in him seemingly waning with every stride they took towards the village and the new object of interest.

In the distance he could hear the sound of sirens.

A magpie flew into Roger's eye line. All his years in the country had still not prepared him for their size. He always expected them to be smaller, more like blackbirds.

The magpie landed on the guttering above the window, its long tail wagging up and down to keep its balance. One for sorrow. Roger edged closer to the window. The few people keeping vigil were all elderly, save for one fat woman and her two young children. The children were grubby, miserable, separate from the mother although only inches away. Withdrawn was the word he used to describe such children. And withdrawn children always meant abused children – he could recognise the signs. It came from knowledge, experience, a clear understanding that such children not only existed, but were frequently found, commonplace, and invariably described by their maternal abusers as shy. And others were stupid enough to believe

it. Roger felt a bond with the children, although they would never know it. Two pretty girls and a fat unsightly mother. The girls stood no chance, but the mother would praise herself for being kind, selfless, a protector of children, a force against evil, for who else would stand up for children if she didn't. He had seen it in the cow. An article on the news about a child murderer would produce a tirade of condemnation as the newsreader provided a glancing indication of the murderer's deeds. And whenever he'd pointed out to the cow that she was more than a little tarred with the murderer's brush he would receive a wallop, or the dog lead would be thrashed around the place. But the two little girls stood outside stoically waiting for the blows that they knew would surely fall, if not tonight, tomorrow, or the next day, but someday soon.

The mother and the old were clearly no longer interested in him but he was unable to catch what they were saying, only picking up the occasional murmur, 'I think,' 'I reckon,' but he could never hear the end of the sentences.

A police officer talking on his radio moved to position himself directly in front of the garden. Roger couldn't make out what was being said, catching only the acknowledgement of the call. Another officer stood a little further over, in front of the damaged window. They looked at each other and nodded.

The mother turned to the officer in front of the gate and said, 'What? What was that? What did he say?'

The officer said nothing.

The woman repeated more loudly, demanding. 'I said, What did he say?'

The officer remained silent.

'Did he say it wasn't that murdering pervert ran down the road just now? Did he say it wasn't that Blackshaw bloke? Well. Did he?'

Nothing.

'He's still in there, ain't he? That pervert's still in there. You're protecting a pervert, ain't you? You're protecting a pervert.'

The others gathered around the policeman as an old man poked him in the shoulder. 'Are you protecting a pervert? A murdering bastard. What about protecting our children? Who's protecting them? They're the ones what need protecting. Not bloody murdering perverts.'

The officer brushed the man's hand away. 'Please don't do that sir. And stand back.'

'What's the matter? Too busy protecting perverts?'

The old man prodded the officer again. 'We want him out here where we know how to deal with his sort.'

'Don't do that sir. And move back.'

'We want him,' said the woman. 'We want him out here.' She pursed her lips, folded her arms across her chest and jerked her hips and shoulders up and down in opposite motion. She looked clumsy, ridiculous, comic even - certainly not intimidating.

Roger continued to watch from the upstairs window. The old cow moved liked her when she wanted her own way and wasn't getting it. She was showing her annoyance. Roger had long since learned to either ignore

it, or better still, copy her with an exaggerated action, breathing even more loudly, snorting like Farmer Stringer's bull. It had never stopped the cow from doing it, and only ever got him a whack, first with the palm of her hand, then as he got older, with the flailing dog lead. But it annoyed her on his terms, and he had always been able to out run the dog lead.

The magpie on the guttering bobbed its tail in front of the window. Roger looked around for a second. 'Two for joy. Two for joy,' he whispered.

He couldn't see another. The first scratched its talons into the guttering on the roof before scuffling round to fly over the heads of the protesters and into the field where it landed on the top of a spindly tree with a narrow pale knobbly trunk. A silver birch possibly, though probably not. It had weeping willow like leaves, twig like branches. He kept meaning to look it up in a plant book, but never did. The magpie turned its head to face the sound of an aircraft. It was small and low, a glider most likely from one of the many private airfields that were around and about. Left over from the war, was how they were described, but Roger wasn't sure that there had been that many RAF bases in the area.

That's another thing he would find out about when the problems with the cottage and developers were out of the way, and he had got the old cow into a home – birds, trees and history of Hampshire.

A blue car pulled up behind the small gathering, beeping. The crowd turned to see. A man got out of the passenger seat. He was stocky, running to fat, about Roger's age, maybe older, wearing a well-worn mid-grey suit. It was tight around the upper arm and the jacket flapped open. He had an air

of authority as he looked directly into the crowd, turning his head, unambiguously taking in their faces, making a mental note of them all. A taller, slimmer, younger man got out of the driver's seat, locking the door before he too surveyed the crowd.

An old woman shouted, 'Seen enough, have you?'

The fat man seemed unperturbed as he walked around the car, and led the way towards the gate. He spoke to the officers in a deep, controlled, firm voice. 'Disperse this lot. Surely they've got homes to go to. And keep them away from my car. I don't want it damaged.' He turned to face the cottage. 'And get someone to board up this lot. And if you saw anyone who did it, nick 'em.'

The fat man opened the gate and followed immediately by the other, made his way up the path to the front door. Both looked at the garden on either side of the path but their faces registered no emotion.

Roger waited, bracing himself for the thunderous bang on the heavy black doorknocker. It came in three even beats, like a metronome marking time. There was nothing fancy about it. No rat-a-tat-tat; no durr dur-dur durr; no four hits forming the opening bar to Beethoven's Fifth, as the postman did on the few occasions he delivered a parcel. It was usually for the old cow from the clothing catalogue. She rarely kept the clothes.

Roger stayed by the wall. He didn't want to move. Policemen were downstairs - CID. They'd come to arrest him, to make him pay for what he had done to Dolores, and for dressing as her.

The old cow said they would. 'It's illegal. It's a crime. You'll go down for it. You just see if you don't. It's what you deserve. Pervert.'

And she had seen him last night, taken a photo. It was the click of a camera he'd heard. It would be a Polaroid. That would give the picture immediately. Or it might be a disposable, with the photos developed within twenty-four hours. No, she wouldn't be able to do that. It was a Polaroid. She must have bought one from somewhere, gone out without him knowing. That would be easy. He had a routine. He was out all day Wednesdays, all day Mondays, and usually out for most of the other days as well - anything to get away from her.

The knocker banged again three even beats. Even his knock had authority.

Roger took the bag containing women's clothes from inside the wardrobe and carried it to the old cow's bedroom. The wig had fallen off the pillow and lay splayed out on the sheet next to the top cushion. The other cushions were dented from where he had punched them. He shoved the bag under the bed, then hastily pushed the cushions into a fuller shape, lined then down the bed, put the wig on the pillow, then heaved the heavy weight of bedding off the floor and onto the bed. He spread it feverishly over the cushions, straightening it out to remove the creases in the candlewick bedspread.

The doorknocker banged three more times.

'You won't get him,' a woman shouted. Her voice was harsh but sounded hoarse. 'The murdering pervert. He is in there but you won't get him out.'

From the landing at the top of the stairs Roger saw the face of the authoritative man through the gaps in the broken glass. It was round and

ruddy. To Roger it looked healthy, although to a doctor it might have meant something else. The man's eyes were bright, alert, intelligent, but mostly, they were shrewd.

Roger must have been lost in the shadows at the top of the stairs for the man looked straight into the hallway through the broken glass. Then the other man looked in. He was paler skinned with a long lean face. The thin one stepped back as the older man's head dropped out of sight. There was a rattle on the letterbox as the older man gave a muffled shout through the double row of brushes protecting the hallway from draughts.

'Open the door please, Mr Blackshaw. It's the police. We mean you no harm. We just want to talk to you.'

Roger lingered at the top of the stairs, unsure what to do, but if he refused to open the door, they would only break it down. He stepped towards the stairs, flattening himself against the wall. His left hand stretched out along the wall as if guiding him around an uncharted cave. He stepped down onto his left foot and winced. A sharp pain shot through his foot where the shard had stabbed into it. He stepped down each step in turn, hoping the officers would go away before he reached the bottom.

The older man looked through the broken panes in the door.

His eyes crinkled up as Roger came into the light. He must be smiling. The shark has seen his dinner. *Jaws*. No, James Bond. *Live and Let Die*. The sharks eat Felix Leiter.

Roger opened the front door. The stocky man was smiling, not a malicious smile, not a happy smile, not anything really - just a smile.

‘Mr Blackshaw? I’m Detective Superintendent Fenton and this is Inspector Bodley.’

They both held out warrant cards that they seemed content for Roger to examine at his leisure. Roger stared at the warrant cards, one to the other and back again, but saw nothing. He didn’t read them. They could have been the Queen’s speech for the grand opening of Parliament for all he knew.

‘Can we come in, Mr Blackshaw. It’ll be more private inside.’ He had a Yorkshire accent, similar to but not identical to Lizzy’s.

The gathering stared straight at Roger. A woman shouted something but he didn’t catch it and a policeman ordered her to move on. Roger stepped aside to let the officers in. Glass crunched under foot as they moved into the hallway.

‘We’ll get this cleaned up for you, lad,’ the superintendent said. ‘Good job you’ve got your shoes on. Should do your laces up, though, in case you trip over them. Perhaps a pair of socks might be more comfy.’

Roger turned to go up stairs while the inspector followed him.

From the mirror on the door of the wardrobe Roger could see the reflection of the inspector’s gaunt eagle like features as he entered the room. The inspector looked to the side, his hawk eyes taking in the chipped paint on the skirting board, the empty corners, the army surplus bed, and over to the polished wardrobe in need of a new coat of varnish and non-matching chest of drawers. Then he looked at the walls with its old fashioned girly wallpaper of bunches of large faded pink roses on the ends of thick browning stalks and scarcely green flattened leaves. Then he looked at the

mismatched strips of lino and bare untreated floorboards and the rag rug from that Auntie June woman.

The inspector's face registered nothing. He was just taking it all in, building a picture, and Roger knew what that picture was – a lonely man, downtrodden, perverted. His private humiliation - his bedroom – was exposed for all to see. A man, a proper man, wouldn't still be living with his mother at fifty-four. He wouldn't still be living with some woman's wallpaper from between the wars. He wouldn't have bare floorboards and rag rugs like some poverty-stricken Victorian relic. He was odd and his oddness was his noose. The serpent across the hallway had wound herself around his neck and with each passing year had tightened her grip.

From the top dresser drawer Roger took two socks and slipped them gingerly onto his feet. His socks always matched as he only had black. He laced up his black town shoes loosely, picked up his jacket from the wardrobe and led the way downstairs.

The superintendent was wandering around the living room, looking at everything, his hands resting comfortably behind his back.

'Ah, Mr Blackshaw. That's better. We've arranged for a carpenter to come along and place some temporary boards over the windows until you can get a glazier out in the morning. And we'll leave a constable standing outside all night. Now, would you like to talk here, or would you prefer to talk down the station?'

'Talk about what?' Roger asked.

'Well, perhaps if we talk down the station it might be more private. I'll switch the telly off, a lad.'

The *Terry Wogan* show was on. He was introducing his last guest, 'The fantastic Thora Hird'.

The superintendent led the way to the front door. Outside was a constable standing on the step while a new constable stood at the gate. A third was ushering the remains of the protesting mob along the lane.

'Keep an eye on things, lad,' the superintendent said to the constable as he passed. 'We'll be back no doubt.'

'Sir.'

'Would you like a blanket?' the superintendent asked Roger. 'To hide under. Many people do.'

Roger shook his head then hung it low before stepping out onto the garden path to some shouts of abuse from the stragglers further down the lane, but it was a feeble protest and Roger felt no fear from it.

Chapter 14

Most of the crowd had dispersed from outside the cottage, leaving only one elderly man standing guard. He looked frail and confused, with shoulders hunched and his hands in his pockets, he shuffled this way and that, clearly unsure what to do.

‘Check him out,’ said the superintendent as they passed the officer standing by the gate. Then turning to the other officer he asked, ‘Any more trouble?’

‘No sir. They all went down that way.’ He nodded towards the village. ‘I don’t think it’s the murder site. I think it’s the accident they’ve gone to gawp at.’

‘Murder site?’ Roger mumbled but no one seemed to hear.

The first officer finished checking the old man and returned to the superintendent. ‘Nothing on him sir. I think he’s been forgotten.’

‘If he belongs to anyone who’s been here, give ‘em what for, take their details and report them to social services.’

‘Sir.’

Roger climbed into the back of the car while the inspector got into the driver’s seat and the superintendent seated himself next to him. This wasn’t right. Roger knew this from the films and television shows he’d seen. When people were arrested they were always put in the back and a policeman would sit next to him to stop him from attacking the driver or trying to escape. Perhaps he wasn’t considered dangerous enough for that.

The inspector drove up the lane away from the village, straight into where it narrowed so much that hedgerows lashed the sides of the car. After a few hundred yards they reached a tight crossroads where five equally narrow lanes met. On the tiny grass verge opposite was a wooden signpost with five wooden arrows that pointed towards each of the lanes. The policemen consulted a map and swiftly concluded that they'd be better off turning round and going back down the lane.

Outside the cottage the confused old man was being bundled into the back of a patrol car and, as there was no room, it reversed all the way along the lane until reaching the bypass where a second constable guided the car into the bypass.

At what Roger assumed must be the murder site, the inspector waited for the superintendent to make enquiries.

'No more trouble sir,' a uniform sergeant was saying. 'Not since all that down there.' He nodded towards the lane. 'An ambulance has been and I've left it protected, so I came up here to check things out.'

'Good. Keep on your toes. Call up for reinforcements, if necessary.'

A flash of light dazzled Roger leaving a white sun in his eyes, solid in the middle and flicking out strips of brightness against a black background. He closed his eyes which gave him some relief.

'Drive on,' the superintendent said then, over his shoulder, he said to Roger. 'Sorry about that sir. Must have been a stray photographer.'

On the bypass the inspector stopped by another band of blue and white police tape. This one seemed to be protecting only stains in the road. A policewoman was standing to the side of the tape which was creating a bottleneck forcing traffic to pass in one direction at a time.

'Any witnesses?' the superintendent asked the policewoman.

'Don't know sir. Just arrived.' She seemed more intent on staring at Roger than paying attention to the superintendent. 'I think we've got the films from the cameras though sir.'

'Good,' he said. 'Any sightseers get their names and addresses, and call for reinforcements if necessary.'

'Will do sir.'

The journey to the police station continued in silence.

At the station Roger was immediately escorted to a bare room with cream coloured walls, white door and surrounds and strip lighting in the ceiling. On the table was a machine for making voice recordings. Four wooden kitchen chairs were arranged with two either side of the table.

'If you'd like to take a seat, Mr Blackshaw,' the superintendent said motioning to the chairs on the opposite side of the table. 'I'm sure we can get this over and done with quite swiftly.'

Roger took the seat next to the wall, furthest away from the door. He'd seen all this on television detective programmes. It was from them that he knew what it was that the inspector had been thinking about his bedroom. There was no uniformed officer standing by the door, so he obviously still wasn't considered dangerous.

'Now, Mr Blackshaw,' the superintendent said. 'You can have a solicitor present if you want, but you're not under arrest, and we've only got you here to ask a few questions. We thought it might be nicer than sitting amongst all that debris rent-a-mob has caused back at your cottage.'

Roger nodded. His hands were on his lap and he was bent forward as if his stomach ached.

'Firstly, Mr Blackshaw, or may I call you Roger?'

Roger nodded.

'Firstly Roger, would you like us to call a doctor to examine your feet. It's nasty stuff is glass and it can easily worm its way into the flesh and fester.'

Roger shook his head.

'Are you sure?'

Roger nodded.

'Well, if you change your mind, let us know and a doctor can be easily arranged. Now, let's get on then, shall we.'

'Where do you come from?' Roger asked.

'Sorry?' the superintendent said.

'Where do you come from? Which part of the country?'

'Yorkshire. But don't worry, I'm not a professional Yorkshireman, and I don't think all southerners are pompous, namby-pamby, stuck up, brats with more money than sense and Rolls Royces coming out their ears.'

'Which part of Yorkshire?' Roger asked.

'Keighley, or near Keighley, in truth.'

'Do you know a Lizzy Bickerstaff?'

'I haven't lived in Keighley for over twenty years.'

'She returned twenty-five years ago. She married a vicar or something. A man of God anyway.'

'Well, if he's a man of God, then I probably wouldn't know him too well. But, shall we get on with this Roger, only we're very busy and we've a lot to get through before night's out.'

'Sorry,' he said slumping down again into his near foetal position.

The superintendent leaned forward. He was sitting diagonally opposite with the inspector directly in front of Roger.

The superintendent's voice was calm, kind, coaxing.

'Roger, can you tell me about Dolores, please?'

'Dolores,' Roger said. He dipped his head down, the weight of it pulling on his neck.

'Dolores,' the superintendent repeated.

'She was my sister,' Roger said. Bubbles formed at the corner of his mouth swallowing the words.

'Sorry, Roger, I didn't quite catch that.'

'She was my sister,' Roger said more loudly.

'And what happened to Dolores?'

Roger shrugged and sniffed loudly.

'What happened to Dolores, Roger?'

'I...' Roger stopped. He looked up at first the eagle faced inspector, and then at the superintendent with his round ruddy complexion. 'I killed her,' he said dragging out each word.

'You killed her?' The superintendent sounded incredulous.

'And when did you kill her, Roger?'

'When...' he looked at his hand as it was held out palm down to show a height that would reach to just above the table top.

'And how old were you at the time, Roger?'

'Four. I was four years old.'

'And do you remember it?'

Roger nodded. It was a series of small bobs that might have gone unnoticed if not looked for. He kept his eyes on the superintendent; the detective giving no indication of his thoughts. Roger looked away, ashamed.

'Tell me about it,' the superintendent said. His tone was enquiring, soothing. It was a voice to be trusted.

It was the voice Lizzy used when she wanted to know about the old cow. It was not the voice she used when she told him she was leaving him for another man. It was not the tone she used when she said it was the cow who'd driven her away. The cow had Lizzy's telephone number, address, those of her friends, family, work, and

she'd contacted them all. She must have rummaged through Lizzy's handbag on her visit to meet the in-laws. If he couldn't stand up to the old cow, why should she have to put up with her? It was the following week that Lizzy said she couldn't see him on the Thursday, and it was only later that he realised it must have been because she went back to the dance school in Wimbledon. That Easter weekend had destroyed his only chance of marriage and happiness, and the possibility of putting Dolores's death behind him, and the cow had destroyed it.

Roger looked up at the superintendent. It seemed as if he should be crying but he didn't cry. He hadn't cried since he was a child – not since he'd learned that if he cried then he would be given something to cry about. A harder whack, a thrashing with the dog lead, a jolly good kick. He wanted to cry when Lizzy left, but he hadn't. He couldn't. When the others in the house were out he'd sit on his bed in the room he shared with Tony and try to cry. He'd tried so hard it hurt.

Boys didn't cry. Men didn't cry. He was British – a stiff upper lip and all that. And he would have been just a stupid, pathetic, self-piteous little bitch. No one sympathised with him. No one felt sorry for him. He was just a nasty little bitch who got what he deserved. Everyone knew what he was like. It was just that that stupid Yorkshire bitch took longer than most to realise. But as soon as she did she was off. Just like the others. What others? Lizzy had been the only one, and he'd lost her because she wanted to meet his

mother. And she wanted to meet her because she thought he felt so superior, so special, so southern. She'd surely never considered that he didn't want her to meet the cow because he was ashamed of his mother, ashamed of his past, ashamed of what he'd done to Dolores.

'Tell me about Dolores,' the superintendent repeated still in the same calm, kindly, trustworthy voice.

But then, that was his job to prise information out of people using the tone of voice he thought would be most effective. All good coppers were good actors, like all good teachers and all good barristers. There was no great mystery to it.

Roger sighed. He'd had fifty-four years of pain and misery. And now he was going to jail. But he would kill himself first. That way it would all be over, misery done, justice served.

'I killed her,' he said.

His throat was dry and the words got stuck as if glued to the back of it.

'Some water,' the superintendent said to the inspector.

The inspector scraped the chair back into the wall before stepping one foot out of the door.

'Geoff, large jug and a plastic cup. Hurry, please.'

The superintendent waited for the inspector to be seated before he spoke again. 'We're getting you some water, Roger. Now tell us, in your own time, how you killed Dolores. Don't rush. We're in no hurry.'

Roger squeezed his interlocked fingers so tightly they felt like they were slicing apart.

'I pushed her,' he said.

'Where did you push her?'

'Into the water.'

'What water?'

'The village pond.'

'Why?'

'Because I was jealous.'

'Jealous of what?'

'I don't know. I can't remember.'

'How do you know you were jealous?'

'The cow...my mother told me.'

'Now you tell us the story right from the beginning in your own words. Don't worry about what you don't know or can't remember. Just tell us again how old you were at the time.'

'I was four.'

'And your sister was?'

'Six.'

The door opened and a young constable in a new uniform came in carrying a tray that held a large plastic jug and a white styrofoam cup.

The Inspector took the jug and cup, poured out some water and gave it to Roger.

The constable stood by the desk still holding the tray, looking at Roger like he was a tardy customer in a restaurant.

‘Thank you, constable,’ the superintendent said.

The constable jerked his head round as if pulled from a trance and left.

Roger drank deeply. When the cup was empty he put it down on the table and the inspector immediately filled it with more water.

‘You were four you say, Roger,’ the Superintendent said. ‘Now tell me about that day.’

Roger closed his eyes.

A little girl was running and skipping along the lane away from the cottage. She was wearing a pretty blue floral dress with a fitted bodice, gathered skirt and white contrasting Peter Pan collar. It was like the Liberty print floral design that Melissa often wore.

The little girl had light blonde hair that was coiled into ringlets. The top rows of ringlets were bunched up and held together by several little blue ribbons formed into bows with the long trailing threads of ribbon fluttering in the breeze as she danced and skipped along the road.

Her plain ox-blood coloured shoes had a bar going over her arched instep. She wore bright white ankle socks with little frilly strips of blue lace around the turned down tops.

The little girl was happy. She was laughing and smiling, clapping and singing. Her laugh was joyous, like a throaty gentle witch’s cackle without the cruelty.

Behind her were two adults, a man and a woman. They were walking with the woman's arm linked into the man's, and her other arm stretched across her body so that it rested on the man's upper arm. A small black handbag hung from the crook of her elbow to bang softly against her hip.

The woman was young and beautiful, with shoulder length brown curls cascading from under a neat dark blue velvet hat with two upright brown feathers rising from the top. She wore a pale blue loosely fitting lightweight coat that had been left open. The ends of the coat flapped to reveal a bright blue and white floral dress. The dress reached to just below the woman's knees. Below the dress she had slim shapely legs that were made more elegant by the tan coloured high-heeled shoes that covered her dainty narrow feet.

The man was tall, much taller than average and handsome. Over his slim frame he wore a navy blue lightweight serge suit, highly polished black shoes and a dazzling white shirt with a plain blue tie knotted into a full Windsor.

They were smiling broadly, watching the little girl proudly, indulgently.

Behind the happy couple was a little boy. He was sullen, hard, with a cruel callous stare. He was staring at the little girl. There was hatred in his eyes. He wore dark clothes. They were dishevelled, grubby, no better than he deserved.

The day was hot and sunny. The sky was azure, like a Mediterranean sky in high summer. Birds twittered and flew around.

The birds were blue. Even in the distance their iridescent feathers sparkled in the sun giving off a blue shimmer through the heat haze. They dazzled in their glory.

The little girl saw the blue birds and pointed.

'Look Mummy, look Daddy. They're beautiful.'

Mummy and Daddy looked and saw and admired for they were indeed beautiful.

The little boy looked and saw that they were an ugly waste of space.

Mummy and Daddy sat on the bench by the pond in the old village green. It was quiet and peaceful. No other families were there. The little girl stretched a long thin stick out into the water. She gently patted the top of the water with her stick barely breaking the surface. The little boy was hunting around for a stick of his own. There wasn't one. There were only twigs, too short to do anything with. The little boy ran up to the little girl.

'Give me your stick,' he demanded.

'No,' the little girl said reasonably. 'I found my own stick, Roger. Now you must go and find yours.'

'Give me your stick,' little Roger demanded, 'Or I'll kill you.'

'Now, Roger, darling, that's very naughty,' said Mummy in a gentle kindly way. 'Dolores is playing with the stick she has found. Now you must go and find your own stick to play with.'

'I want that one,' little Roger demanded.

'You can't have that one,' Daddy said more firmly. 'Now come with me, Roger, son, and I will help you find a stick of your own.'

Daddy stood up and held his hand out for little Roger to take.

'That's right, Roger, darling,' Mummy said. 'Go with Daddy and Daddy will help you to find your own stick.'

'No,' little Roger said. 'I want that one. I want Dolores's stick. It's not fair the way you people treat me. I want that one.'

And with that Roger turned and pushed Dolores into the pond and held her head under the water until she drowned.

Roger fell silent.

After a while the superintendent said. 'Couldn't your mother or father have stopped you?'

'Stopped me?' Roger said.

'They weren't far away.'

Roger looked confused. 'I must have been very quick.'

The superintendent sat back in his seat, saying nothing for a long while, but just looking directly at Roger. The inspector looked at him as well but he too made no attempt to talk.

Roger said nothing. He just waited to be hit or shouted at or charged. Something, anything. It would happen. He knew it would. He deserved it.

The superintendent stretched out his arms so that they reached across the table. He arched his back until his shoulders clicked then leaving his hands clasped but relaxed he stretched his arms out until

they almost touched Roger. He held that position for a few seconds before leaning forward saying, 'I'm sorry lad, but I simply don't believe your story.' He moved upright, leaning into the back of his seat, making it creak. 'You see, Roger, Dolores died on the bypass road at the end of your lane earlier this evening. She was accidentally knocked down by a car as she was being chased by the mob from outside your cottage.'

Roger registered nothing. He simply stared blankly at the spot where the superintendent's hands had rested.

'Did you hear what I said, son. Dolores died this evening. She was sixteen years older than you and she died this evening. Accidentally knocked down by a car. You did not kill her.'

Chapter 15

Before returning to the cottage the next morning, the police stopped at the accident spot to allow Roger to get out of the car and spend a few quiet moments, head bowed in contemplation. The young officer standing guard stared directly at him, but the inspector jerked his head sideways for the officer to look away.

‘May I, please?’ Roger said, pointing towards the three bunches of flowers lying half under the police tape, the flowers heads barely missing the stains on the tarmac.

The largest bunch consisted of a variety of home grown country cottage flowers with a floral patterned notelet attached. Roger lifted the edge of the notelet and read the words, ‘Rest in peace, Dolores. May you find the happiness you deserve. With all my love, Eady Cranshall.’

The other two bunches were shop bought. One had a piece of paper pinned to it with the word ‘Sorry’ written in thick black felt tip. The other had a formal In Sympathy card attached with a verse that seemed ridiculously personal considering that the sender did not know Dolores. Below the legend was the handwritten message, ‘In deepest sympathy, from all in the village’.

‘Who left these?’ Roger asked the constable.

‘Don’t know their names sir.’

‘A description,’ the inspector said.

‘That one,’ the constable said pointing to Mrs Cranshall’s bunch, ‘was left by a woman in her sixties or so. That bunch,’ he pointed to the bunch that said Sorry, ‘was left by a man. Mid thirties, average height. And the other was left by a woman in a wax jacket.’

‘Thank you, constable,’ the inspector said.

‘Thank you,’ Roger said and turned to climb into the back of the car.

When they arrived at the cottage Roger was relieved to hear from the lone officer standing guard, that it had been quiet all night save for a man delivering a letter for Mrs Blackshaw, and an older woman making enquiries after Mr Blackshaw.

‘Have you seen Mrs Blackshaw?’ the superintendent asked.

‘Not a dickybird.’

To Roger the superintendent said, ‘Do you want us to see her for you? Explain.’

‘No,’ Roger said, ‘she won’t accept what you say. I know her too well. Her word is law.’

‘Well, if you need someone to back you up with the truth, we can always send an officer round. You know our number.’

‘Yes, I’ve got it,’ Roger said patting his trouser pocket. ‘Thank you. But if someone else told her, she wouldn’t believe him either. She’d only say I’d put him up to it. That’s what she’s like. You don’t know her.’

'Believe you me, Roger,' the superintendent said with a knowing smile. 'We spend most of our working lives dealing with people like your mother, one way or another, don't we Inspector?'

'Certainly do,' the inspector said. 'They stick to their story and we stick to the truth. And n'er the twain shall meet.'

'So you see Roger,' the superintendent said, 'your mother is nothing we don't know about. After all this time we're not so easily fooled. But, like I say, any problems just get in touch. We can always send someone round.'

Roger limped unenthusiastically along the garden path and waited as the uniformed officer got into the back of the car and the policemen drove off in the direction of the crossroads.

The makeshift boards nailed to the outside of the shattered windows and door panels made the hallway and living room very dark and, even with the lights switched on, a sinister gloom pervaded the place.

Lying on the welcome mat was a single typed envelope addressed to Mrs Ivy Blackshaw with 'by hand' written where the stamp should have been. In the left-hand corner was the embossed logo belonging to the developers. Roger picked up the envelope, scrunched it tightly in his fist then ran up the stairs to the old cow's room, crunching on the glass that was embedded in the carpet. The usual lump trailed down the centre of the bed with the grey curls barely reaching the pillow.

‘It’s for you, you miserable cow,’ Roger shouted. ‘A letter from the developers. What are you up to now?’ He flung the envelope onto the lump. ‘Here, take it. And I didn’t kill Dolores, by the way. You had her locked up. The police told me.’ He leaned over the lump, his head inches from the grey hair and bellowed, announcing each word slowly, carefully. ‘I did not kill Dolores. You had her put into a home. A loony bin. You put her there, you callous cow, you spiteful bitch. You put her there.’ His voice became shrill before cracking. ‘A home for the mentally ill, you bitch. She was sixteen years old and I hadn’t even been born.’ He pushed heavily against the hard firm lump, levering himself upright. ‘You are truly, truly evil. You know that, you vicious spiteful evil bitch, you cow. You truly evil cow.’

Roger grabbed the envelope, ripping it open, tearing through the logo. The corner of the letter was left inside the envelope but the text was untouched. The script was obscured as he struggled to read it through the tears that blurred his vision. His mind wouldn’t let him focus on the words so, struggle as he might, he was unable to make sense of the text. In frustration he screwed up the letter, hurling it against the wall above the cow’s head. It ricocheted off the wall to land feebly on the highest part of the lump, before bouncing off the lump and onto the floor, there to roll away from the bed and stop just before hitting the wall immediately below the window.

He ran from the room and down the stairs with the sound of sneering cackles ringing in his ears. ‘I beat you. I beat you.’

His mind was too dazed to allow him to see the stairs clearly as he tripped and stumbled, falling on the last few steps, catching his heel, jerking his back, causing a twinge in his shoulders. He snatched open the front door, making it creak on its hinges before running down the path, straight out of the gate and into the fencing on the opposite side of the road. The crossbar stabbed into his stomach bending him double over the top bar until he almost toppled into the field. He twisted upright, turning to face the cottage. It was old and ugly, tired and worn. It was out of place amongst the green fields, but when it went, the green fields would go as well. Nothing would be gained.

A magpie hopped along the guttering, dipping his head into the trough, drinking the trapped water. One for sorrow - got that bit right, he thought. He heaved himself off the fence and hung his head as he lumbered along the lane towards the village, his timeworn eyes barely focusing on the grey uneven road.

The warm air felt cold on the sweat from his cheeks and forehead. A bored policeman stood in front of the blue and white tape making the tape shudder slightly as he rocked gently back and forth. Roger gave him a self-conscious half smile but as it was not returned, he dipped his head low and walked on. The cars had gone from the lane, leaving it free and clear. At the crossroads a blue car sped past rustling the cellophane wrapping on the flowers which were now propped upright against the hedgerow. The police tape had gone as had the constable. A large council van rolled around

the bend in the bypass to stop next to the flowers, effectively blocking the road to through traffic. From the back of his van the driver and his colleague removed a chunky hosepipe and after some fiddling began to cover the blood stains with detergent ready to hose down the road and remove the stains.

Roger watched and wept. For what he wept he wasn't sure; for the loss of a sister he had never really known; for the loss of those years of childhood innocence; for being told all those lies; for believing all those lies; for his gratitude at her supposed kindness; or for the loss of his future free from the cow as she wins again. Roger's weeping got heavier, strangling him, pulling at his throat, making him gasp for breath and cry out in silent anguish. He pulled at the collar of his shirt, loosening it although it wasn't buttoned tight. His face ran hot with a burning sensation that seared through the skin around his eyes. His head swam cold as blood vessels burst sending a menthol stream up and over his brain. He lurched to the right, toppling over, thudding onto the roadway. A noise squeaked out of his mouth - the high pitched wail of impotent rage.

Roger didn't know how long he'd been lying there, his tears forming a small puddle on the tarmac; the tarmac's cold wet surface cooling that side of his face. But somehow he seemed to come too, aware of a presence, a gentle rustling of clothes and the faint scent of lavender.

Mrs Cranshall moved closer and bending down to stroke Roger's exposed hot cheek said, 'Are you all right now?'

Roger looked at her blankly.

'Superintendent Fenton came to see me because you mentioned me. I'm glad he did. And Alf Bickersleigh told me you were here.'

The tears rolled down his cheeks to drip off his chin and land on his shirt.

'That's good. Let it go, Roger, let it go,' Mrs Cranshall said soothing a distraught child. 'Just let it all go and it'll be better soon.'

Roger wept as Mrs Cranshall rocked him, not hurrying but waiting for him to finish when it was time. He stopped sobbing quite suddenly, anguish spent, tension gone. He relaxed, winding his shoulders, loosening them. He looked up at Mrs Cranshall who had rested her cheek on the top of his head. She smiled at him.

'There now, isn't that better? It's always good to let it all go.'

Roger pushed himself off the tarmac, and standing up, felt a rheumatic twinge dig into his upper arm where it had got damp from the roadway. Mrs Cranshall, stiff from crouching for so long, struggled to push herself into a standing position. He placed an arm under hers to support her until she was upright.

'We're a fine pair,' she said. 'A right pair of old crocks, aren't we?'

Small gritty indentations pitted his cheek and Mrs Cranshall brushed away some tiny stones that had lodged themselves in his skin.

‘Let’s go to my cottage.’ she said. ‘We can have a nice cup of tea and you can tell me all about it.’

‘Didn’t the police say?’

‘I want to hear it from you.’

It was unusually quiet in the village. No one was walking around the green, giving the village the air of a Clint Eastwood film - the man with no name and the town’s folk terrorised by those whose names they knew all too well. A couple of women standing outside the village shop stopped talking to watch Roger and Mrs Cranshall as they emerged from the narrow passage leading to the A road and the lane, and waited until they’d gone into Lavender Cottage before resuming their conversation.

The path to Mrs Cranshall’s cottage smelt strongly of lavender in the gentle warmth, becoming even stronger as she brushed against it. In the hallway five large rolled brown parcels waited for collection. Roger remembered from his youth when the post office van came to collect the rugs from the cottage by pre-arrangement. They were too bulky and too heavy to be handled at the small post office counter in the village shop. Five was the number of rugs Mrs Cranshall used to be able to make per week when there was a greater demand for them. Arthritis had slowed her down over the years, and demand had dwindled.

‘Still selling, are they?’ he said. It was the first words they had exchanged since leaving the bypass.

‘A bit of old fashioned rustic glory,’ Mrs Cranshall said. ‘Still sells in market stalls and in London. Now, sit yourself down, Roger, and I’ll make the tea then we can have a good long natter.’

‘About what?’

‘Whatever you want, Roger, whatever you want.’

The almost overpowering smell of hessian and lavender greeted him in the living room as the radio play softly in the background. He liked the radio but rarely had the chance to listen to it as he was out most days.

On the woven sisal footstool in front of Mrs Cranshall’s armchair, was a copy of the newspaper Bacon had delivered. The front page showing Roger dressed as Dolores was uppermost but Roger could only focus on one thing - the word weirdo. Weirdo, that’s what he was, a weirdo. He wasn’t treated like a weirdo at the police station. He was treated like...what? A criminal – no. A suspect – no. A nutter – certainly not. He searched his mind for the right word. Like a sad pathetic man. That’s how he was treated – like he was something pathetic.

‘Here we are,’ Mrs Cranshall said carrying a wooden tray piled high with tea things and cake. ‘Let us have a nice cuppa and you tell me all about it. I was hoping you’d come, but then, as I say, Alf popped round and told me where you were. The council men were

standing by you, not sure what to do apparently. Then Alf came along and you refused to go with him.'

'I don't remember that. Besides, Alf doesn't like me.'

'Course he does. He was the one who looked out for you at school. He sometimes used to come round and tell me.'

'But he hasn't spoken to me since I missed his wedding.'

'Yes, he was upset about that. He realises it wasn't your fault. He's been kicking himself ever since for not giving you the invite personally, or through me. He never thought your mother would be that cruel.'

'But I never see him.'

'Oh, he's busy, Roger. How often do you see Jack Rayner in the village?

'I see him in his fields.'

'But not in the village. Alf's a busy farmer. They don't come to the village very often, and Jenny herself only comes once a week or so. Then what with all those problems over the farm when his father died and Sally being born with downs. He really hasn't had the time. It's just one of those things, Roger, I'm sorry to say. Just one of those things.'

Roger held out the top sheet from the newspaper, the page falling full open to reveal the pictures of him in his dresses in all their glory. 'I didn't know about this. I don't buy the local paper. Did Alan do this?'

'No, Roger, certainly not. Alan wouldn't dream of doing such a thing. That was Peter Bacon. I told you he was back.'

'And you still let me into your house?' Roger said.

'Why ever not?'

He stared at her with incomprehension.

'Oh, don't you go worrying yourself about that now, Roger. I've known about all that for years. Blame your mother. She's the one who's done it to you. I know. Alf knows. Alan. Jack Rayner. Lots of people know. We're none of us bothered about it. Can't see why all the fuss personally. It's only convention what we wear. How's your mother by the way?'

'We had a mob round last night. I wondered why that was. They started smashing up the cottage.'

'So I heard. And I hope they're all suitably ashamed of themselves. Disgraceful.'

'They chanted 'murderer' and 'pervert'.'

'Ridiculous. The very thought of it. As if you'd harm anyone.'

'I suppose I'll have to stop teaching the piano now.'

'Why ever should you? The Mulcasters were most active on your behalf yesterday telling everyone how much Melissa enjoyed your lessons. And Mrs Appleby of all people, joined in. Mind you, the cynic in me says that's probably got more to do with the fact that if you leave the cottage then it will definitely be pulled down and they'll lose to the development.'

'She hasn't cancelled Belinda's piano lessons.'

'Maybe I am just being cynical, then.'

'I suppose I'd better go and see Mr and Mrs Mulcaster to thank them.'

'Well, Mrs Mulcaster anyway. Mr Mulcaster will probably be at work. It's Tuesday, remember.'

'Is it?'

'You look tired, Roger. Are you all right?'

'I've been at the police station all night.'

'Yes, I know. They took you in for your own protection. Not because you've done anything wrong. The superintendent told me.'

'But why did he come to see you?'

'You mentioned me as your friend. I was really pleased to hear that.'

He picked up his tea but the cup rattled on the saucer, slopping the brown liquid onto the coffee table. 'Sorry.'

'No problem. I can easily mop that up.'

After she'd wiped up the mess and returned the dish cloth to the kitchen she went over to the radio. 'Shall I switch this off, or would you prefer me to leave it on?'

'Don't mind. It was on when I came in.'

'Was it? I must've forgotten it when I left.'

She switched off the radio and seated herself next to Roger.

'It was for Dolores,' he said at last. 'They took me to the police station about Dolores.'

'Yes, Dolores.' Mrs Cranshall lifted her cup to sip the tea. It was hot so she put it on the largest of a nest of coffee tables then leant forward to cut the cake - cherry Genoa, homemade, always delicious. 'What about Dolores?'

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked loudly, like a metronome beating out time, syncopating with Roger's breathing.

'I didn't kill her,' he said at last. 'I didn't kill Dolores.'

'No, of course you didn't. What on earth made you think you did?'

'She said I'd killed her. The cow.'

'When?'

'When I was four and Dolores was six. She said I pushed her into the pond because I was jealous. But I didn't. She died on the road. She was knocked down by a car when they chased her into the road thinking it was me. So I suppose I did kill her in a way. If I hadn't dressed in frocks then...well. The police said so.'

'The police said you were responsible for killing her?'

'No, they said she was killed by being chased by a mob. But the mob wouldn't have chased her if I hadn't worn frocks.'

'That's not your fault Roger. That's like blaming the assembly line worker for a car crash saying that if he hadn't built the car in the first place then the car wouldn't've crashed. But it's this bit about she was six years old when you were four that's confusing me.' Mrs Cranshall took hold of Roger's cheeks clasping them firmly between her hands and gently twisting his head around to face her. 'Dolores

was sixteen, seventeen years older than you. Not two. She'd left home long before you were born. Months, a year or more maybe. I can't rightly remember now. Then your father left. Not sure how long after. Certainly before you were born. If I remember rightly, she wasn't even showing so he probably didn't know about you. And neither has ever been seen or heard of since.'

'What was he like?'

'You're father. A lovely man. But being systematically destroyed. Doted on Dolores. Tried really hard to protect her. But, well, he was out at work all day, so not much chance.'

'She said he was a shiftless, useless good for nothing she'd slung out.'

'That's more how I'd describe her. But no, he was a good man. Hardworking. He definitely deserved better than her. And I hope he found someone and has been happy.'

Roger turned to look at the clock, its tick sounding like a heavy dull clunk. 'The cow told everyone at school I'd done it. Murdered Dolores. She probably told Lizzy.'

'Who's Lizzy?'

'The girlfriend I had in London.'

'Oh, Roger, why didn't you tell me. I could have put you right.'

'I thought you knew. I thought everyone knew.'

'I had no idea. Even I never thought that that evil mother of yours would stoop so low. Oh, Roger. All these years. Why didn't you say something?'

'She told me not to.'

'I bet she did.'

They sat in silence for some while, Mrs Cranshall waiting for Roger to speak, and Roger not knowing what to say. After a while he sipped his tea. It was a good temperature, highly drinkable so he drank it back in one long guzzle.

'You must have been thirsty. I'll pour you some more. How about breakfast. Have you had any yet?'

'No,' he said. 'I just had toast at the police station but couldn't eat it.'

'Well you sit there and drink your tea and I'll make you a nice bowl of muesli. Will that be all right? I've not much else. I haven't done my weekly shop yet.'

'Muesli's fine. It's what I sometimes have. That or porridge. Muesli if I'm in a hurry. Porridge if I've got time. Sorry, I'm gabbling. Yes, muesli's fine. Thank you.'

Mrs Cranshall returned a few minutes later with a bowl of muesli with chopped banana layering the top. The muesli was hot so Roger slurped the milk off the spoon leaving the cereal and banana behind.

'What's happened at the end of the lane?' he asked. 'Where the police tape is around those trees.'

'I don't know. I've asked around but was told nothing. I even went to see the policeman by the tape and at the cottage before you returned. But he wouldn't tell me. Sub judice, I suppose.'

'No, that's when they're going to court.'

'Confidentiality then. Whatever it was, I couldn't get anything out of them.'

Roger ate his breakfast in silence – the clock ticking the rhythm of his heart in the background. He shuddered nervously. It sounded like his death knell.

Mrs Cranshall waited until he was finished before saying, 'What's your mother got to say about these photos?' prodding the newspaper with her finger.

'Nothing. I didn't know anything about them until I saw them just now, and she won't buy the local paper. When did it come out?'

'Friday. Peter Bacon posted them into every house in the village. Or paid some kids to do it for him.'

'Including the Fortunes?'

'I should think so. There was some talk about doing something about it, but mainly people were just gossiping but not particularly bothered as they didn't send their kids for piano lessons. Then as far as I can gather, the incident at the bottom of the lane made the idiot brigade put two and two together and come up with child murder.'

'A lot of people were strolling round the lane on Saturday when I came back from Southampton.'

'Sightseers. You always get those.'

They fell into a silence which was only broken when Mrs Cranshall asked, 'Did you know that Dolores was coming to see you or your mother?'

'No.'

'You had no inkling?'

'None.'

'No phone calls, contact from social services or the hospital to say that she was being released? Nothing lately to say that she was coming to visit?'

'No. Only...' He stopped, thought then said. 'Only some garbled messages over the phone. I thought they were wrong numbers. I vaguely remember some mention of social services, children, hospital, something like that. I can't properly remember now. I just thought they were wrong numbers or kids messing around. You know, a phone version of Knock Down Ginger. We played it once when the evacuees were here, but it was stupid. You just knock on people's doors and run away. Couldn't see the point. And I just assumed the phone calls were the same sort of thing so forgot them.'

'But if she was going to the cottage, she must have spoken to Ivy at some point, made arrangements, that sort of thing.'

'She must have. I'm out a lot so I don't know.'

They fell again into silence. Roger reached over and absent-mindedly cut a piece of cake and had three mouthfuls before realising he still had his muesli waiting for him. Mrs Cranshall smiled at him indulgently. 'Sorry.'

'It's fine.'

Roger finished the cake then said, 'But wouldn't they bring her? The social services, I mean. Wouldn't someone come with her to see that everything was all right?'

'You'd think so. But she was always very strong willed and determined. She'd fight back; stand up to your mother – publicly, privately. She knew her own mind and would speak it. That's why no one was surprised when she left. Even her independence fed into Ivy's hands. Easily covered up. She walked out, end of story. But maybe,' Mrs Cranshall said wistfully, 'she never fully lost her independence. Maybe that whiff of freedom had been enough for her to regain at least some of it. She'd been out for over a year you know. The superintendent told me.' Outside a dog barked and was told to shut up. 'Dolores has a job, had a job should I say. She worked as a cleaner in Southampton, even though she was over seventy. And she was an assistant in a charity shop too. I was told which one.'

'She was strong then?' Roger said.

'Very. You'd have been proud of her. She was too strong for Ivy to break. She was damaged, obviously. And probably with all that hospitalisation, she was severely damaged. But never destroyed. Not our Dolores. She was clearly never destroyed.' Mrs Cranshall patted Roger on the back of his hand. 'I think, in spite of everything, she was like you. She still managed to keep a whiff of independence. And being outside in the big wide world had brought it back. I like to think so. I really do.'

Roger smiled - a dreamy distant look in his eyes. 'I've always seen her as independent. Strong, ladylike, standing up to the cow. I'd like to be more like that, more like her. But I've always try to avoid the cow.'

'We all do, deary. Believe you me, we all try to avoid your mother.'

They both laughed.

'Will you come with me to see Mrs Mulcaster?' he asked. 'I'd like to thank her for sticking up for me.'

'Of course I will Roger. I'd be delighted. I was hoping you'd want me to go with you.'

As they left Lavender Cottage a mother rocking her toddler in its pushchair snarled at Roger, 'We're not finished with you yet,' and spat missing him by several inches. On the 'A' shaped billboard outside the shop a sheet of paper had handwritten in black felt pen, 'Local girl Melissa found dead'. The *Advertiser's* logo and heading was printed separately and pinned above the notice.

They stared at the words, their meaning forming an obscure message in Roger's mind.

'Melissa,' he said as if looking for confirmation that he had read the name correctly. 'Melissa Mulcaster? Do they mean Melissa Mulcaster? How many Melissas are there in the village?'

'Don't know, Roger. Probably loads. It's a very popular name. Might not even be this village.'

Roger looked at Mrs Cranshall sceptically.

'Let's go in Roger and get a newspaper. Then we'll see.'

Inside the shop Marcia Duff was giving forth on the latest developments into the investigation of Melissa, and on why she'd felt compelled to write the impromptu notice displayed outside.

'How do you know all this?' asked one listener with the enthusiasm of an eager co-conspirator.

'It's obvious really. I worked it out for myself. There's Newbury. Not far. And then the other one few weeks, months, whatever, back in Somerset. And then...' at this point Mrs Duff saw Roger and Mrs Cranshall looking directly at her.

'And then, Mrs Duff,' Mrs Cranshall said. 'And then...'

Mrs Duff stood up straightening her back, thrusting her chest out and breathing in heavily making her bosom swell and, looking defiantly at Roger said, 'And then there's the matter of that woman who was murdered at the end of Cornfield Lane.'

Mrs Cranshall moved closer, the listeners parting like rags being torn into strips. 'Cornfield Lane. Corn Meadow Lane. I do wish you people would make up your mind about what name you've invented for the B2479. That's its correct name by the way. The B2479. Or the Wherwent to Potters Beech road as it's always been known up till now. And the woman that was murdered, as you say, was accidentally knocked down by a car because she was being chased by a load of idiots stirred up by some ludicrous newspaper report that has absolutely no foundation what-so-ever. A newspaper

report that, may I remind you, you keep behind the counter ready to exaggerate and pontificate on at the merest hint of a customer.'

Mrs Cranshall leaned over the counter, lifting one foot up, leaving just the tip of the toe of the other foot brushing the floor, and pulled out the dog-eared copy of *The Wherwent Advertiser*. She slapped it down on top of the counter and said, 'Well, what have you got to say for yourself?'

Marcia Duff said nothing so Mrs Cranshall turned round to face the others who were now standing almost at the door.

'Well, you people then. What have you got to say for yourselves?'

No one spoke, as slowly one by one, they slipped out of the door and dispersed as if complete strangers.

When they'd all gone Mrs Cranshall returned her attention to Marcia Duff, 'We'll be back,' she said. 'Rest fully assured on that score. We will be back.' She flung open the door making the bell ring with a dull savageness and left with Roger trailing along behind.

There were no more incidents like the spitting woman on the way to the Mulcaster house, but Roger was quiet, shaken, nervous, limping slightly, occasionally bumping into Mrs Cranshall - a hurt child in need of protection.

From the front door they could hear Mrs Mulcaster singing to the radio, and once inside, found the blue floral dress Melissa had

been wearing when she fell into the pond, was draped over the end of the ironing board which was set-up in the middle of the living room.

After they had exchanged the usual pleasantries and declined the offer of tea, Mrs Cranshall asked after Melissa.

‘She’s absolutely determined that everyone knows that you, Roger, have not upset her in anyway. It’s quite her one woman mission.’ Mrs Mulcaster laughed. It was a light laugh, like Melissa’s, like the tinkle of the pink glass earrings that Melissa had given him, only adult.

Mrs Cranshall seated herself on the edge of the armchair nearest the door. ‘Do you know if there are any other Melissas in the school?’ she asked.

‘Not that I know of. Certainly not in Melissa’s class. And as far as I’m aware, not even in the whole school. But I may be wrong.’

‘What about the village?’

‘None that I’ve heard of. Why do you ask?’

‘The shop has a handwritten placard saying that a local girl called Melissa has been found murdered. Marcia Duff wrote it.’

‘Murdered!’

‘I think it’s because of the photograph of Roger with Melissa when she was holding her skirt hem up.’

‘But that was completely innocent. I know it was.’

‘It’s why there’s all that police activity at the end of my lane,’ Roger said hesitantly. ‘I think they’ve found someone.’

‘Yes, they did,’ Mrs Mulcaster said. ‘They found the body of a little girl from Woking. Tina something. Tina Brownlow, Brownleigh something like that. Six years old. She was snatched a couple of days ago from a children’s playground and her body’s been found in a shallow grave at the end of the lane. It was on the news this morning. It was found by a dog walker late last night. And Marcia Duff’s saying it was Melissa?’

‘A local girl called Melissa, yes,’ Mrs Cranshall said. ‘It doesn’t give a surname.’

‘I must get that removed immediately. If Melissa sees it, she’ll be terribly upset. Especially if she thinks Roger’s being blamed.’

As she spoke Mrs Mulcaster unplugged the iron leaving the half pressed dress where it hung, and stepped out of the room to unhook her jacket from the row of pegs in the hall.

She came back into the room tugging her jacket over her shoulders. ‘I don’t like to ask, but, well, would you mind coming with me. Give me some moral support? That sort of thing.’

‘It’ll be a pleasure,’ Mrs Cranshall said. ‘I was hoping you’d ask. And what about Roger? Would you like to come too, deary? The more the merrier I say.’

‘Oh, yes,’ Mrs Mulcaster said. ‘You absolutely must come, Mr Blackshaw. It’ll help clear your name as well.’

Roger nodded.

'Great,' Mrs Mulcaster said smiling broadly. 'The three musketeers. We'll soon get this nonsense sorted out. And then it'll be time to pick up Melissa for lunch.'

Roger followed the ladies along the narrow pavement and with each step he took towards the shop his mood lifted as he emerged like James Bond from self-doubt and depressing inactivity and into the sunny prospects of excitement, action and wrongs being righted.

Chapter 16

Once Mrs Mulcaster had extracted an apology from Marcia Duff and the placard outside had been changed to say, "Working girl found murdered. No connection with Wherwent", the three of them waited outside the school to collect Melissa for lunch. On her return to school Melissa insisted that Roger accompany her as she wanted everyone to see that he was a very close and dear friend who would do her no harm, and that she didn't care if he wore dresses.

'After all,' she said to the boy who had called him a perv a few days earlier, 'clothes are only conventions. Girls wear dresses and boys wear trousers. It could just as easily have been the other way round.'

'That's her father speaking,' Mrs Mulcaster said. 'And that's a revelation to me, I must say. I never realised how broadminded he was about such things. You live and learn. Even after nearly eleven years of marriage you live and learn.'

Roger was reluctant to return to the cottage so stayed with Mrs Cranshall playing Banker and dominoes all afternoon. It wasn't until early evening that he ventured back, taking Mrs Cranshall with him for support. When they passed the policeman standing guard by the shallow grave, Roger looked firmly ahead. As they walked over the brow of the two hills and towards the cottage with its tall chimney stacks and the downstairs boarded windows, Roger could feel a sense of foreboding creeping up on him. The cottage looked shabby,

derelict but, there was, what appeared to be, a reddish glow flickering in his bedroom window.

Inside the cottage seemed abnormally quiet, chilly, and, like in a horror film, a fog had descended over it. There was a faint greyish cloud floating in the air and the unmistakeable smell of burning. A number of sheets of folded paper stood tent-like on the hall table. In Ivy's jerky handwriting the word 'Roger' had been almost etched into the top sheet. He looked at the paper and then at Mrs Cranshall.

She shrugged. 'Better read it, deary. Find out what it says. But let's go outside, shall we. You never know what she's been up to upstairs.'

He picked up the paper and they stepped outside where the air smelt faintly of smoky cow pats. By the fence bordering the field he held the sheets in such a way as to encourage Mrs Cranshall to read it with him.

*So, you think you can get the better of me, do you?
You stupid bitch. You can't. You never could and you
never will. The cottage is sold. I've been working on this
for weeks. Good of everyone to keep pushing the price
up for me with all their pathetic meetings and what not.
That last one clinched it, thank you very much. It got the
extra money I wanted. And do thank that nice Peter
Bacon for me. Porky always was a treat to deal with.
Such an obliging boy, always ready to hear what I had to
say and act on it. So very useful to me when you were at*

school. And he's been particularly helpful these last few days, if he did but know it.

I hear from the removal men that you murdered my Dolores. You spiteful little bitch. I always told you you had. Now you can see what you have done. You never did like to see me being happy. And I had everything set up very nicely for her as well. I got a nice room in my nice new house where she could come and look after me. And she would have made a damn sight better job of it than you ever did as well. I knew I should have kept her and got rid of you. And you, you stupid bitch, you were stupid enough to believe you killed her when you were four. You always were too easy for me to deal with. No real fun at all. I always could get the better of you. And destroying you was all too easy. And I have destroyed you. Make no bones about that.

I have burnt all your junk and now you are homeless, just like you wanted me to be. And after your nasty little perverted behaviour don't expect anyone else to give you shelter, not in this village. Not now they can see you for what you are and you have proven me right. All these years I have told them what you were like but they did not believe me, more fool them. Well, they do now. They have no choice. It is there for all to see. They all hate you and so they should. You are a disgusting

little pervert. Yes, pervert. That's what you are, a pervert. You always have been and you always will be. And no one will want you anywhere near their children anymore. They should not have let them near you in the first place but some people just can't be told. And in case you're worried, I'm very nicely set up, thank you very much. I have got a lovely large property. Far nicer than this one, and I have still got enough money left over to live well. And now the council will have to provide me with a carer as I cannot be expected to look after myself at my age. And don't even think you are coming to live with me because you are not. And no one will expect me to have you. You are too dangerous. You cannot be trusted. You are a murderer and I do not want you near me. I never have. You have only ever been of use to me as a housekeeper and a useless one at that, what with all that muck you keep serving me and call it food and you go and expect me to eat it. You are nothing but useless. And now you are no longer of use to me, not even as a housekeeper, so you can go. You are banished.

In case you are wondering, I signed for my nice new large property last Friday, the day I sold this one.

Good bye and good riddance.

Your ever loving mother, ha ha ha!

Mrs Ivy Blackshaw.

The note must have been written over several sessions as the handwriting clearly got tired and more shaky, and other bits had been slotted in, sometimes squeezed between the lines, other times filling the margins.

Roger handed the note to Mrs Cranshall before walking back to the cottage.

From the living room only the television was missing. In her bedroom her new, unworn clothes were gone. The rest were ripped up and strewn about the floor and bed. The mattress in the bed was ripped leaving the white stuffing to spill out onto the clothes and floor. In his room his bed was wet, a jug lay sideward letting the last few dregs drip onto the bedspread. All his clothes, both male and female, were slashed and thrown about, and his trinkets, the photos of those he had taught, and Dolores's white daisy necklace, were ashes or melting in the bonfire that crackled gently as it burned its way through the lino and on to the floorboards. The window was open allowing the smoke to drift out to be almost immediately swallowed up by the vast expanse of surrounding fields.

Outside a lorry drew up. Blazoned across the side and back were the words, 'Dobsons – the demolition experts' with a telephone number for Southampton printed boldly in the bottom right hand corner. Two men got out and banged the wooden stake supporting a large double-sided plaque forcefully into the soil next to the garden path. The plaque said, 'Sold for demolition. Demolition to start 21st June.'

'Tomorrow,' Roger said. 'That's tomorrow.'

Mrs Cranshall patted his shoulder. 'Don't worry, Roger, don't worry about any of this at all. You can stay with me. You can stay for as long as you like, for as long as you need. Permanently, if you wish. I mean that, Roger. I really mean that. For as long as you need to. As long as you want. Forever, if you like. There really is no rush for you to leave. None at all.'

'Thank you,' he said, the words catching in his throat. 'Thank you. Thank you very much, Mrs Cranshall.'

'Eady. How many times must I tell you? It's Eady to you. It always has been Eady. Please, Roger, call me Eady.'

'Eady,' he said, the familiarity embarrassing him. 'Thank you very much - Eady.'

Chapter 17

By the next day word had reached the village that the cottage was to be demolished ready for the developers to move in. Some of the committee tried stirring up a last minute protest, even suggesting a sit-in, but no one was interested.

Mrs Bacon crashed the breakfast plate onto the table in front of Bacon. The sausage was burned and the bacon brittle. He slapped huge dollops of brown sauce over the bacon, egg and tomato.

'Are you satisfied now?' she said. 'That poor Roger Blackshaw's homeless because of you. Mrs Cranshall came round to tell me.'

'How's that because of me?'

'You always had it in for him. I never understood why, but you always did.'

Bacon was just about to dig the burnt sausage into the sauce and egg yoke when the plate was whipped away from him.

'You've had long enough to eat that. Now go.'

Long experience of women had taught him that she wasn't joking, so he heaved on his jacket and walked out of the house in a daze and into the bright light of day. On the other side of the new green four women had gathered. They all turned to look at him, staring, not even trying to pretend that they were doing something different. They were talking about the article, he knew. What else was there to talk about?

He started to go in the direction of the sixties development but having walked only five paces, changed his mind and went in the direction of the old village green.

In the school's raised playground the children were running about, skipping, playing football, making a noise.

The church was open for prayer, the vicar standing by the porch, his hand held out in greeting. A young mother shook it, looked sad and thanked him as he helped lift her baby's pushchair over the step and into the porch.

As Bacon passed he was offered an ear to bend, or counselling, as the vicar put it, but he shook his head and stepped past the vicar and into the church.

Inside a handful of people knelt in prayer. An old lady sat on the edge of the pew, her blue veined hand outstretched to the book rest in front. Bacon looked around the church. It smelt of fading incense and burning candles. The disappearing knights from the crusade that formed the murals high up on the walls leading to the altar looked on unmoved.

He didn't stay. He had nothing to say to God, and he was sure God didn't feel inclined to say anything to him.

Outside he nodded a goodbye to the vicar before wandering past the church hall where the housing meetings had taken place, and on to the next building, the six hundred year old village pub. Find a church and you'll find a pub. That's what his mother used to say. She went to the church and his father went to the pub. That's

also what she used to say. But Bacon had never known his mother go to church, and he had been too young to remember his father going to the pub.

He opened the door to the saloon bar and walked in. It had the old familiar smell, that lingering whiff of stale beer. Whether it was a trendy pub in central London or the local in an unknown tiny Hampshire village, it always held the same warm, enticing aroma.

The pub was busy, even though it was only soon after opening time. As he moved forward he felt all eyes turn towards him. There was some whispering, 'That's him, the one what wrote the article', 'He's the one who led the mob that killed the woman', 'Tried to get an innocent bloke done for murder'. Ignoring them all he walked straight to the bar and slamming down his loose change said in a firm clear voice, 'A glass of orange juice, please. And a whisky. Better make that a double.'

Crime Fiction, Literary Fiction: Why the Demarcation?

Anne Jones

‘A history of crime in literature would be tantamount to a history of literature.’¹

In this critical rationale I shall examine the choices made when making genre assignment for novels. I will look particularly at the crime genre and literary novels which have crime as a major element. I will also consider whether such attribution is based on a standard set of principles or is arbitrary and flexible. In this regard, the possibility of snobbery, sales and other deciding factors will be explored and the views of authors, publishers², high street booksellers and libraries canvassed. However, although online bookselling provides a significant contribution to the sale of novels, the huge opportunity afforded to them for multiple classification removes the demand for the strict categorisation that the physical entity places on bookshops and libraries, so for this reason the views of online booksellers were not sort and their position will not be considered.

¹ John G Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance – Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (London, The University of Chicago Press, Ltd. 1976) 304

² After several telephone calls and emails, where possible, I still have not received any form of response from the publishers that I have to contacted. The only thing that I have been able to summise is that some publishing houses appear to expect the editorial department to make decisions with regard to genre, while others expect marketing to make such decisions. The publishing houses that I have contacted are: HarperCollins,

I will go on to discuss my book in some detail, making reference where appropriate to the genre / literary debate and to novels that have been in the public arena for a number of years.

But to begin with, I will explain the impetus that sparked my interest in this particular area of enquiry.

I have always considered myself to be a writer of non-whodunnit crime fiction, so it came as quite a shock to me when, some years ago, the critique I received after entering the WH Smith Ian St James short story writers' competition described my entry as 'literary'. At first I honestly thought that the wrong critique had been placed in the envelope as, for me, literary meant authors such as Greene, Orwell and Lawrence, and I would certainly never lay claim to be in their ranks, although I must say, I felt extremely proud and embarrassed at receiving such an accolade. The notion that my writing was literary was confirmed a few years later when I showed the first few pages of a novel to an agent at the Winchester Writers' Conference and it too was immediately hailed as literary. Two separate pieces of work and two different authorities surely confirmed my status. Fifteen minutes after seeing the agent I attended my one-to-one with a publisher who, upon being told that I thought my work might be literary, scoffed loudly, informing me that it was nothing like literary, nowhere near good enough, and whoever had told me it was, clearly didn't know what they were talking about. Since then, three

published authors have assessed the opening of a different book as general, literary and crime.

This disagreement over where my writing would be placed on the shelves of bookshops and libraries has left me rather bewildered. Laura Marcus observes that detective fiction 'is seen as a popular and lesser subset of high or 'proper' literature,'³ a view expressed of genre in general by Dorothy Koomson: 'genre labels are demeaning as they imply they are lesser than serious highbrow literature'⁴. But surely, what is deemed good enough to be "proper' literature' is the gold standard agreed by all. And what can be dismissed as 'popular' or 'lesser' is an easily identifiable brass standard. There is of course an obvious problem with such a sweeping generalisation. Dan Brown ostensibly writes crime fiction, as do Ruth Rendell, P.D. James and Ian Rankin, but surely even the staunchest adherent to the denigration of popular literature would allow that there is a discrepancy between the standard of writing presented by Brown and that of the others. So, if such a disparity appears in genre writing, might it not also appear in literary? Therefore, would it not be reasonable to consider that the lowest levels of literary writing cross over the highest levels of genre writing? If this is the case, then it begs the questions: When should a novel be considered literary? When should it be considered genre? And when should it be considered to be both?

³ Laura Marcus, 'Detection and literary fiction', *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Martin Priestman (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003) 245

⁴ Dorothy Koomson, Northguild Hall, Southampton. 12 May 2008

A quick glance at the books placed on the shelves in the crime fiction departments of bookshops and libraries shows that the majority of books come under the general heading of detective story/whodunnit/mystery⁵. And, although I do not disregard this area of writing, it is not the mainstay of my crime fiction reading. When I think of the 'crime' novels that I enjoy most, they seem to occupy a sort of hinterland between literary/general and crime fiction/other genre classification. It is where 'the borders between literary genres have become fluid'⁶ meaning that 'tracing the borders of a genre is inevitably a somewhat arbitrary process'⁷. Both these statements would seem to make my quest to discover when a novel is deemed to be crime fiction, when literary and when both, a rather futile exercise as there is so much movement and blurring that it might almost be a matter of personal perspective or taste. For example, Michael Denning says that 'common sense' tells us that 'cheap paperbacks and magazine serials are...entertainments, meant for escape and relaxation'⁸, and Graham Greene himself used the term 'entertainments' as a genre marker to distinguish between the

⁵ I have counted 'detective story/whodunnit/mystery' as one style of crime novel as the change in name seems to be more a matter of time, convention and preference of the writer. The early novels, say from Collins' *The Moonstone* to Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories and a little beyond, were classified as 'detective stories'. Early in the 1920s and throughout the Golden Age (approximately 1920-1945) the term 'whodunnit' was coined. Post-war 'crime fiction' was used more widely to describe novels where an investigation takes place but in doing so, this sobriquet might be said to have limited the range of crime fiction in the minds of many, reducing it to solely the detective side of the genre. Then around the turn of this century crime writers began to label themselves as 'mystery writers', the term long since preferred in America.

⁶ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London, Routledge, 1988) 9

⁷ Maurizio Ascari, *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction – Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) xii

thrillers and the serious novels in his oeuvre, and by doing so, told the reader how each book is to be read. But without this marker, it is questionable whether a reader of the text would realise that, say, *The Power and the Glory* is a literary novel whereas *Brighton Rock* and *The Quiet American* are entertainments and therefore a 'lighter read'. Kingsley Amis appears to find genre writing to be no different from any other type of writing. He says of genre writers, 'they have all sorts of things forced upon them: some sort of pace, a feeling of conflict, climaxes, anticlimaxes, suspense and so on. They have to do that. And having done that, they can then erect other matters'.⁹

There is a further problem with genre classification in that there is a level of arbitrariness as to where a book is placed on the shelves or in the minds of the reader. The closer to the centre of a genre the more unambiguously the text belongs to that genre. But what happens when a book strays towards the edges? Derrida argues in his work 'The Law of Genre' that the use of the word genre means 'a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: 'Do,' 'Do not'. (224)'¹⁰ But the hold on text is tenuous as genres bleed, transgressing the law of genre to blur the boundaries with other texts or subvert the 'norms and interdictions' as texts merely use genres and are not governed by

⁸ Michael Denning, *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1987) 2

⁹ Michael Barber, *The Paris Review Interviews'Writers at Work, Fifth Series*, edited by George Plimpyon (Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd, London, 1981, Winter, 1975) 187

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida cited from John Frow, The changing profession 'Reproducibles, Rubrics, and Everything You Need', *Genre Theory Today*, (PMLA (Publications of the Modern Language Association of America) Volume 122, Number 5, October 2007) 1627

them. Or, as Stephen Knight put it, genre writing has 'a consistent pattern of response' and not 'external regulation'¹¹.

I think that it may be this 'consistent pattern of response' that is the stumbling block for me with direct genre writing. When reading a detective fiction book I find that although I always start them with real interest, by the time the book reaches the denouement I have often ceased to care who has committed the crime(s). The most striking exception to this is the work of Agatha Christie. For me the appeal of her books is that they are puzzles with no pretensions to being anything else. The clues and red herrings are laid out openly so that the reader, by using what P.D. James defines as 'logical deduction', is able to disseminate the information and arrive at the correct answer(s). Although some modern writers also like to lay out the clues,¹² I find that it is with Christie more than any other that I can retrace the steps taken to elaborate (or hide) the information necessary to solve the crime(s). But rightly or wrongly, I sense that with many writers they often decide the solution only when they are writing the denouement. Indeed, Frances Fyfield, during a talk she gave at the Northguild in Southampton some years ago, proudly stated that she preferred her books to be referred to as mysteries as

¹¹ Stephen Knight, *What Kind of Ghoul am I? Genre and subgenre, How to Write Crime*, Edited by Marele Day, (Allan & Unwin, Australia, 1996) 5

¹² Most notably Colin Dexter and P. D. James praise each other for plotting in the clues in preparation for the grand revelation. During a visit to the Winchester Writers Conference some years ago I asked Colin Dexter how he planned in the clues. His reply was that he wrote a number of stories for several characters and had each tale criss-crossing with the other tales and hoped that the reader might be bamboozled by all the various strands and take a few wrong paths.

it was often a mystery to the writer as well as the reader as to who had committed the offences.¹³

However, I'm not sure that Christie or detective books in general, have been a particular influence on my writing. I have read perhaps only a dozen or so of her books¹⁴, most of Ruth Rendell's Wexford books and Reginald Hill's Dalziel and Pascoe books, and probably all of the Morse canon and P.D. James's Dalgliesh and Gray books, as well as assorted other detective fiction writers. Several years ago I tried my hand at whodunnit writing and found that not only could I not do it with any degree of confidence that the clues weren't being clearly signposted or so well hidden that even the writer found it hard to recognise them, I also managed to bore myself witless, something I have never done when writing a novel with a strong psychological bent. But it was the Ruth Rendell¹⁵ novels which dealt with the psychology of the characters and the aberrant behaviour of many that attracted my attention, although it was the reading of *Brighton Rock* and *The Third Man* that left me knowing that these covered the area that I wished to explore and would like to write about, namely, the seamier side of human nature. However, to be able to explore

¹³ In circa 2000 the BBC ran a two part series featuring two novelist at work. Minette Walters was one of the featured novelists and was writing *Shape of Snakes* (2000) at the time. The programme showed her deciding who she would choose to be the murderer. She was settling down to write that chapter at the time.

¹⁴ The Agatha Christie books are the only ones that I have reread to analyse the clues and red herrings. In every case the clues were laid out for the reader to identify, if able.

¹⁵ Although I have read many of Ruth Rendell's novels published under the name of Barbara Vine, I am not sure that they have been such an influence as, the Ruth Rendell non-Wexford novels tend to deal with loners, where as the Barbara Vine novels deal with groups of people who are involved in a mystery, and it is their individual involvement which is part of the solution to the mystery, as well as the mystery itself. When Ruth

this seamier side, I think that both the writer and the reader need to have a visceral connection with the characters and their situation rather than the intellectual connection that is more closely related to a good detective story.

But these more visceral books which occupy the hinterland between genres would appear to have remained substantially outside any unambiguous classification. Each of these books in its own way deals with crime, and although the crime need not be murder it seems almost that 'crime fiction by its very nature, has an intimate relationship with the dead body' as 'the corpse is a very powerful object', and whether the novel comes under puzzle, psychological, hard-boiled, thriller or one of the many other types of crime fiction, 'there must always be a corpse or corpses'.¹⁶ Following this definition, to occupy the hinterland, the novels I have chosen must therefore have a corpse or corpses whether on or off the page, or else they would not have the same degree of potential association with the crime novel. In the writing of this piece, I am going to refer to a number of novels but I will concentrate mainly on four books - *Brighton Rock* (Graham Greene, 1938) which first attracted me to the hinterland and made me want to write crime fiction which is much more fluid and less genre bound; *Rebecca* (Daphne du Maurier, 1938) for, although it has never been classified as a crime novel, it nonetheless is a novel with a crime element which if it were not there

Rendell was asked on a Radio 4 programme in the late 1980s why she had chosen to write under a second name, she gave the loner / group distinction as the reason.

would create an entirely different novel; *John Brown's Body* (A.L. Barker, 1965) as although there is no crime in the novel, without the double murder and the murderer going free, the novel would not have developed in the way that it has; and *Psycho* (Robert Bloch, 1959) for although it is a crime novel in that the protagonist is a murderer, it is often classified as horror, not least by the star of the film¹⁷. This classification of horror as being a crime so horrific that it cannot be comprehended as a normal part of life is an interesting area in terms of genre - what is considered to be a 'normal' murder and what is an 'horrific' murder. However I will not be exploring this blurring of genre as it is not particularly pertinent to this piece.

But before dealing with my book, I feel that a more extensive scrutiny of the placing of novels on the bookshelf might be in order.

Libraries and bookshops seem to be very flexible about where they shelve titles and authors. For example, the bestselling trilogy by Jake Arnott, *The Long Firm*, *He Kills Coppers* and *Truecrime* are almost invariably shelved in the general section along with literary fiction, even though they all deal solely with crime. Susan Hill, a highly respected literary novelist, is shelved always under literary, save for her detective stories featuring Simon Serrailler, which are always found under crime. Whereas Kate Atkinson is almost always shelved exclusively under literary even though her Jackson Brodie novels are clearly from the detective tradition, while other writers,

¹⁶ Sarah Dunant, *Body Language: a Study of Death and Gender in Crime Fiction*, *The Art of Detective Fiction* Edited by Warren Chernaik, Martin Swales and Robert Valain (McMillan Press Ltd, Basingstoke, 2000) 11

such as John Banville and Julian Barnes, make a clear distinction between their literary output and their crime fiction by using two distinct names, Benjamin Black and Dan Kavanagh respectively.¹⁸

I decided to take my research into book shelving a little further, so when I met Kate Atkinson at Dartington Hall Literary Festival, 2007 I asked her what the policy is regarding her novels. She said that she has not specified whether the Brodie books should be considered crime or literary as she saw no distinction between the two - they both require the same amount of work. This is not necessarily the view held by John Banville, who admitted that he spends far more time on his literary novels than on his Quirk series, giving far greater consideration to each sentence, its rhythm, phrasing and word usage,¹⁹ as 'What you get with Banville is the result of concentration. What you get with Black is the result of spontaneity. The first is an artist, the second a craftsman.'²⁰ But, the placing of Atkinson's Brodie books under general / literary does seem strange for two reasons. First, books shelved under crime generally sell better than the same book when shelved under general, and in

¹⁷ This refers to Anthony Perkins in the Hitchcock 1960 film and not the Gus Van Sant 1998 remake.

¹⁸ Dan Kavanagh novels are now out of print.

¹⁹ In Conversation: Reginald Hill and Benjamin Black aka John Banville, interviewer was Mark Lawson at Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writers Festival, Harrogate, 2009. It is interesting to note that Reginald Hill rounded on John Banville over this saying that he too spent a great deal of time on his sentences. Banville's reply that he also spent time on his crime writing, just not as much time as he did his literary work, did little to appease Hill and there remained a certain coldness between the two for the rest of the interview. Perhaps Hill's irritation can be summed up on a quote from Anne Simpson – 'Banville is the author of 18 books whose fastidious sentences are, for some readers vexingly mannered, and, for others brilliantly spellbinding.' <http://www.heraldsotland.com/arts-ents/book-features/the-two-faces-of-john-banville-1.1018546> 4 April, 2011

libraries, the crime section often has more loans against it than any other.²¹ Second, all the Jackson Brodie books have a liberal array of quotes making unambiguous reference to them being crime novels.²²

But publishers themselves are no help in this matter. According to Wikipedia, *American Psycho* (1991) by Bret Easton Ellis is never listed under crime, although the protagonist is an active psychopathic killer, and James McCain's *Mildred Pierce* (1941), was re-issued in 1989 under Vintage Crime, but there is no crime in it²³. A possible reason why *American Psycho* is never labelled crime might be that there is no police activity in the novel connected with the murders and Bateman is never arrested or even vaguely investigated.

In order to really clarify matters, I spoke to the senior sales manager of Waterstone's, West Quay, Southampton, but he was unable to give a definitive answer. The decision to put Susan Hill's Simon Serrailier series in the crime section came from the publisher,

²⁰ Anne Simpson. The Two Faces of John Banville. *The Herald Scotland*. 5 April, 2010. 4 April, 2011. <http://www.heraldscotland.com/arts-ents/book-features/the-two-faces-of-john-banville-1.1018546>

²¹ This is certainly the case, as stated by Richard Ashman, senior librarian in the Central Library, Southampton, during the recent *Murder they Wrote* series of talks, Saturday, 30 January, 2010, Northguild Hall, Civic Centre, Southampton.

²² *Case Histories* (2004 – quotes from Black Swan 2005 edition) – 'Jackson is a private eye and all-round good bloke...in this respect the book is more satisfying than many detective novels.' *Guardian*. 'I can't recall reading crime fiction quite like this before.' Philip Oakes, *Literary Review*. '...mark her out as a crime writer...' Heather O'Donaghue, *Times Literary Supplement*. *One Good Turn* (2006 – quotes from Black Swan 2007 edition) – '...has taken the crime genre to another level.' *Daily Express*. 'This is a detective novel packed with more wit, insight and subtlety than an entire shelf-full of literary fiction.' *Marie Claire*. 'Another beautifully crafted detective novel' *Glamour*. *When Will There Be Good News* (2008 – quotes taken from Black Swan 2009 edition) – 'By becoming a crime writer she has – in a way that other 'literary' types may wish to note – become a better literary writer than ever' *Guardian*. 'As with the best crime fiction, dramatic events and unexpected twists abound' *Independent*. 'plays with the tenets of the crime genre without ever sacrificing the essence of wit' *Scotland on Sunday*

²³ The 1945 film does have a murder in it, so it might be this that the publishers were trying to capitalise on.

as there was a major marketing promotion introducing them as Susan Hill's new crime series. But there was no such marketing promotion regarding Kate Atkinson's Jackson Brodie books, so they fell quite naturally in with her literary canon. With both writers, the crime novels are outselling the back catalogue, and he thought that as Atkinson has now produced four Brodie novels they may well be re-shelved in the crime section.²⁴ He went on to say that Patricia Highsmith has always been published under crime, even though her books are quite literary and with Jake Arnott the decision was to go with the literary side of his writing. Alexander McCall Smith is always shelved under crime, including his non-crime output, while other writers may be under several categories, and writers such as John Grisham and Robert Goddard may be under either crime or general, but double shelving is avoided. The senior salesman admitted that the decision can be quite arbitrary and largely sales driven. But if in doubt, they follow the classification given on the Waterstone's central computer to avoid confusion when re-ordering and obtaining books from other Waterstone's stores.

This direct research shows that literary genres are quite dynamic and open to interpretation on either a collective or individual basis. Maurizio Ascari when talking about the reading of crime fiction in the early twenty-first century said,

‘No act of reading can grasp the multi-layered structure of a text in its entirety.

²⁴ To date this still hasn't happened.

Reading always translates into a selection of elements from the texts we approach, responding to factors as diverse as education, motivation and concentration. We grasp only those aspects of texts that our cultural position and subjectivity enable us to recognise and to relate to other data'²⁵,

thus suggesting that hard and fast classification is difficult, if not substantially impossible, as individual and cultural influences and inference will always play a significant role in determining our understanding of a text. The corollary being, as has been stated earlier, the fluidity and blending of genres. But is this a bad thing? I think not as I agree with John Connolly when he said that the blurring of genres is how a genre becomes re-invigorated, and literary writers have always taken genre templates and re-worked them²⁶. Re-invigorating and re-working established templates is all part of the creative process and can, on occasion, produce seminal work that provides whole new areas for creative exploration.

During the writing of this critical rationale I have engaged in a range of research covering literary novels with crime at the heart, crossover novels and writers who produce one type of book for literary and another for crime. I have also researched the history of crime fiction, genre and its development and much else. Although

²⁵ Maurizio Ascari, *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction – Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) xi

²⁶ John Connolly, Waterstones, Above Bar, Southampton, 18th May 2010

the research is not used directly in this piece, it has nonetheless informed much of what has been written by helping me to think about the differences between various sorts of texts that have influenced me and my writing, and in doing so, has enabled me to clarify my understanding of the decisions I have made when creating my own book. The interviews directly with writers and booksellers have made it very clear that it is accepted and acceptable that genre fluidity makes consistent classification virtually impossible as with say, Atkinson's Jackson Brodie books, or Albert Camus's *The Outsider* (1942)²⁷ and that we should embrace this flexibility for its positive dynamic as it is all part of the un-decidability of text.

So the question remains, do I consider my book to be a crime novel? Or a hinterland novel? On reflection, I still consider it to be a crime novel that plays with the conventions of the genre as does for example, Joanne Harris *Blueeyedboy* (2010) which she describes as 'a kind of murder-mystery with no detective, no apparent crime and a couple of quite unreliable narrators'²⁸. In my book, crime, in its broader sphere, is the engine that drives the narrative. And the crime genre is much more expansive and interesting than its largest and, granted, most popular subgenre might suggest. The fact that more literary novelists are moving towards crime writing, or at least, not opposed to being associated with it, would indicate that genre is increasingly seen as a marketing marker and not a comment on the

²⁷ An English translation of this book is shelved under the crime section of the library in the Southampton City Libraries.

quality of writing. As long ago as 1972 Julian Symons prophesied that crime fiction 'could attract writers who twenty years ago would have written novels, readers who would have read them'^{29,30} And I think that this has largely proven to be true.

But before we look in detail at the writing processes that informed my book, I think a word should be said on why I became a writer. As a moderate to possibly severe dyslexic who has had to develop coping strategies so remediated to some extent over the years, I have always been confused as to why I should wish to write, especially as 'how to' books declare as essential that 'writers must be readers' and 'page struck'. Although I have always read, it has been in fits and starts, mainly only when travelling to school / college / work and very slowly, but I would not describe myself as 'page struck'. Since junior school I have written poems and short stories with sudden bouts of enthusiasm. It wasn't until a few years after I began writing in earnest that I realised why I wished to write. During a conversation with some work colleagues where we were discussing daydreams, I became aware that most people seem to daydream about themselves in exotic locations enjoying a desirable life,

²⁸ Joanne Harris. Blueeyedboy – About the Book. *Joanne Harris*. Undated. 23 February, 2012. <http://joanne-harris.co.uk/v3site/books/blueeyedboy/index.html>

²⁹ Symons, 240

³⁰ Julian Symons also predicted the rise of the Scandinavian crime novel in his 1972 book *Bloody Murder*. There can be many reasons for this rise, but the notion that British, American and European crime readers have suddenly developed a taste for detective fiction in a bleak and chilly landscape seems a little extreme. I think that it is arguably the case that the reason for the upsurge in popularity of the Scandinavian crime novel probably rests in something like these are countries each with their own language but small populations and therefore, small readerships and detective crime fiction travels well and is very international in its appeal. Therefore, Scandinavian literary writers have moved into crime writing to enable them to make a living from writing. And this is why

whereas I was in the middle of an ongoing daydream about a murderer. I was forced to admit that I always invented stories, usually using my own characters, maybe using existing characters from books or television dramas, maybe placing them in situations in which they would never appear, such as Columbo on a police exchange in Oxford and working with Morse. The stories I daydream recur with new developments added, elements changed to fit the new developments, and even on occasion, engaging in research to enable me to progress the daydream. I now work for an assessment centre which assesses the learning needs of students in higher education who have disabilities. I have assessed a number of students with specific learning difficulties who are undertaking creative writing courses. During the assessment I always ask these students why, as they are dyslexic, they have chosen creative writing. The replies have amounted to the same thing – I invent stories / characters / think up episodes for existing dramas, and we all seem to agree on one thing, reading is passive; creating stories is active. Although I fully agree that writers must be readers if only to enable us to learn from others and to be aware of the market place, I have on a number of occasions heard writers state that they became writers as they read avidly. P.D. James is the only writer who springs to mind who has suggested anything beyond reading when as a child she asked herself, ‘did Humpty-Dumpty fall? Or was he pushed?’.

MY BOOK

the standard is so high, thus suggesting that the readers of detective fiction are not only

The idea for *The Blackshaw Chord* came from a creative writing class where the tutor presented a selection of parcels and in groups of three we each had to choose a parcel and plan a story around all the contents. The only object I can still remember is the pair of earrings used in my novel. The story invented by the group was unambiguously crime, with a journalist, Peter Bacon, looking for a major scoop. He murders a young girl but seeks to direct the evidence towards Roger Blackwell. A police investigation was to occupy a significant percentage of the book using the detective fiction conventions of clues, a number of credible suspects and with logical deduction the reader would be able to work out who had committed the crime. But when no arrests are made of anyone, let alone Blackwell, Bacon was to write a series of newspaper articles dealing with police incompetence in general and on this case in particular. The articles were to be a major element of the book with Bacon running a second investigation, until the denouement where the police arrest Bacon. The action was to be seen from the viewpoints of the police, Bacon and Blackwell.

When a few years later, I planned the novel in earnest, I immediately made two changes. The police viewpoint was removed, having their investigation seen only through the eyes of Roger and his involvement in it, and Roger's surname was changed to Blackshaw as a private joke.³¹ By removing the police investigation

happy to read good quality literature, but that they are happy to positively embrace it.

³¹ St George's Hospital, Tooting used to be the annex to St George's Hospital, Hyde Park. When a patient received an appointment for the Tooting hospital the entrance given to the patient was usually either Recovery Street or Blackshaw Road. The Blackshaw Road

as a viewpoint, I had effectively placed a question mark over any notion that the book was a crime novel. And although established writers such as Ruth Rendell are able to move around the crime genre with books that have no investigation and remain crime writers, for less established writers, their position on the bookshelf can be rather capricious.

Initially Roger was to have three female relatives - his mother Ivy, Dolores his older sister by two years and her unknown dead twin sister Georgina. By the final draft, Dolores is the only one to appear on the page. Ivy remains a potent force in the story, but is off the page, and Georgina, who was to have been killed by Ivy when a toddler, was dropped as during the writing of the third draft it was evident that she had no real place in the narrative as I was increasingly exploring areas of aberrant but non-criminal behaviour.

I knew before I started writing the book that I wanted Roger to be the protagonist and Bacon the antagonist. I also knew that I wanted the reader to be very close to Roger's inner self, that although his story was to be written in third person, the reader was to know his thoughts and feelings as if in first. The reader could therefore become aware of his back story in a way that wasn't artificial or self-obsessed. For Bacon I wanted him to be seen through a rather more distant authorial third person. But as the writing progressed, it became clear that it would be good if the reader had some idea of his thinking. My supervisor, Aamer Hussein, suggested that as there

entrance was directly opposite the cemetery. The standard joke was that the entrance

was already mention of a sobriety diary which Bacon had kept for a few days the last time he tried become sober, this might be a good way of allowing him to speak directly to the reader without interfering with the authorial flow of his sections. This idea proved to work really well as it is written in a slightly rambling flow and allows some levity into the book and enables his back story to emerge naturally. In recent years, it has become much more commonplace to include in the writing, elements of the detective's life story which are not necessarily related directly to the investigation, and Bacon is, as I shall be exploring later, taking on the role of the detective.

However, keeping the balance between Roger and Bacon has been more problematic. As Bacon is the active character and Roger the passive, Bacon's position is more dominant. To maintain Roger as the central character I have tried to ensure that, except for interview scenes, Bacon's thoughts and actions are always directed towards Roger, whereas Roger's thoughts and actions are either directed towards himself or more often, towards Ivy or Dolores.

The first draft of my novel featured five chapters detailing Bacon's life in London and demonstrating the reasons why he returned to Hampshire. Apart from some re-writing and editing, these chapters remained intact until the sixth draft when in discussion with Aamer it was decided that they should be removed as Bacon's London fall from grace dominated that stage of the story. After a long break from the novel, we had independently come to the

conclusion that the London chapters delayed the beginning of the book and focused the reader's attention too much on Bacon. During the development of these chapters Roger was merely existing, going about his normal everyday routine. Bacon was the one who had the action and developments giving rise to questions that needed answering. This placed the emphasis on him and in effect made him the protagonist with Roger his future victim and passport back to London and the national newspapers. By cutting these chapters and placing the features that might be useful as background in the diaries towards the end of the book this has hopefully redressed the balance and brought Roger more to the fore.

As the book was originally conceived as a crime novel there needed to be a strong element of tension and suspense running through it. However, I knew from the start that I wasn't writing pulp fiction or a thriller, so wanted to relieve the tension periodically. This was most readily done via the sections detailing the church hall meetings to discuss the development. In some ways these sections are almost cartoonlike, which is deliberate. I see the weekenders as being pompous and self-regarding rather than avenging social angels fighting the good cause for the little villager. These lighter moments also afforded the opportunity to show the extent to which Roger is isolated even amongst the longstanding village community, and to see him outside the world of his mind as he is for a brief while, not alone although still lost in his loneliness. He does talk, throwing in the occasional sentence, but one senses that if the other person

didn't start the conversation then no discussion would take place at all. Even his chat with his ex-school classmate Allen Allenby consists of Allenby leading the discussion and Roger responding.

As I was writing the first draft, the book developed in such a way as to move it from straightforward crime to containing strong elements of social realism, while keeping the feel of a psychological crime novel. I became concerned that this was dishonest in some way but at the suggestion of Aamer, I read A.L. Barker's *John Brown's Body* as this demonstrated that crime does not have to be real, but can be imagined, implied or suspected. Reading *John Brown's Body* was appropriate for a number of reasons - not least as the novel was shortlisted for the Booker prize in 1969. There is about the book the feel of a non-Wexford Ruth Rendell story. Aamer, who knew Barker, said that Rendell had been influenced by her, but that while Rendell wrote crime with a psychological twist, Barker was more interested in the social. This is true of traditional crime writers for as Julian Symons says, there are those who choose to use 'the crime story primarily to investigate human personality and those chiefly concerned with expressing an attitude towards society'³².

There is no actual crime in *John Brown's Body*³³, only the false statement that John Brown, double murderer, acquitted due to lack of evidence, is living upstairs. For this reason Marise Tomelty, a new and rather unstable resident downstairs, seeks a relationship with

³² Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder - From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: a History* (London, Faber and Faber, 1972) 191

him wanting excitement, passion and fear. I found this book quite influential as due to a false allegation in the local newspaper, excitement, passion and fear of a different sort are engendered in the mob that has gathered outside Roger's cottage, and it is this mob rule that results in the unintentional death of Dolores. Barker demonstrated that just the suggestion of crime and the hint of a mystery is enough to invoke the feel of the crime genre and by doing so the writer is not being unfair to the reader, nor disavowing the book's credentials as a crime novel. But there are several novels where the crime is real, imagined, implied or suspected but do not fit into the crime fiction genre. In truth, it is the very fact that the book doesn't have a real crime, but is only imagined, implied or suspected that probably does more to prevent it from being seen as a crime novel, thus placing it firmly outside the crime genre and in the hinterland where the reader's interpretation of the text probably determines its place on an individual basis. In *Brighton Rock* the crime is real - Pinkie has murdered Hale and Rose can, unbeknownst to her, provide the evidence. In Daphne du Maurier's *My Cousin Rachel* (1951) it is suspected that Rachel murdered her older husband Ambrose, but his younger cousin Philip is never really sure of her guilt as he vacillates between conviction of her innocence, suspicion of her guilt and conviction of her guilt. It is left for the reader to draw their own conclusion. In *John Brown's Body* the

³³ There is the off the page reference to an underling at work who has been falsifying accounts and whom Ralph Shilling seeks to protect by replacing the money from his own pocket, but there is no crime on the page and this is the only reference to this matter.

murderer is implied, but the murder is confirmed by the research into old editions of newspapers. And in my book the murder of Dolores is imagined, although told as fact and the supposed murder of Melissa is off the page but the reaction to it is real. In all these books, even where there is a real murder to investigate, the police are either not present at all, or play so small a part in the narrative as to be sidelined.

But what is actually meant by the word 'crime'. The *Collins English Dictionary*³⁴ defines crime as:

An act or omission prohibited and punished by law
 Unlawful acts in general
 An evil act
 Something to be regretted: 'it is a crime that he died young'

The *Chambers Dictionary*³⁵ defines crime as:

A violation of law
 An act punishable by law
 An act of serious moral wrongdoing
 Sin, something deplorable (colloquial)
 To charge or convict of an infraction of regulations (Military)

So a crime can be something which is not in law criminal but is morally reprehensible.

Following this definition, in my novel there are two criminals, Bacon and Ivy. Neither is strictly a criminal in law, but both have perpetrated moral crimes against Roger. However, it is Roger who is perceived as the criminal. As a child Ivy would sometimes dress him as a girl, this being his punishment for murdering her Dolores. Roger continues to dress as Dolores but now as a self-inflicted punishment. Roger is doing nothing wrong as cross dressing is not illegal. Also

³⁴ Patrick Hanks, editor, *Collins English Dictionary Second Edition* (London & Glasgow, Collins, 1986) 369

³⁵ Sandra Anderson, Lynda Carey, Kay Cullen, Serenella Flackett, Alice Grandison, editorial team, *The Chambers Dictionary* (Edinburgh, Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd, 1998) 386

he is not a transvestite as he doesn't seek sexual gratification from his actions. But, to an outsider, his actions might be perceived as perverse, making him totally unsuitable for the teaching of young children. Bacon plays on this by creating a front page that shows Roger in a dress and labelling him a pervert. Roger has become a Norman Bates³⁶ character. But Bates was insane having murdered his mother and her lover out of jealousy, and then becoming his mother to murder Marion Crane to whom he is attracted. Roger is not insane, he is damaged. He has murdered no-one, but only believes he has. Bacon plays on this psychological damage to further his own ends. The book is permeated throughout with lies, deceptions, abuse, self-interest, and a general feeling of 'because I can' all of which are directed at Roger, but none perpetrated by him. Anthony Perkins, who played Norman Bates in the 1960 film version of *Psycho* said, 'it's a tragedy first and a horror movie second'³⁷. This is a reasonable description of Roger's life (and of the book) in that it is a tragedy first and a crime novel second.

³⁶ Norman Bates is the protagonist in the novel, *Psycho* by Robert Bloch, 1959, but the film version directed by Alfred Hitchcock was such a success that the book is largely unfamiliar to readers and audiences, that any references will refer to the classic 1960 film starring Anthony Perkins. There are differences between the two Normans, which reside mostly in his appearance – middle-aged and fat (book), boyishly handsome (film) and habits – alcoholic (book), as far as we know, non-drinker (film). The character Norman Bates was inspired by the real life murderer, Ed Gein, who was the son of an alcoholic father and a domineering mother. The mother constantly warned her two sons about the sins of pre-marital sex, and railed against 'evil' women. After the death of his parents and brother, Ed Gein began grave robbing and made lampshades out of human skin, kept human organs in the fridge, and would dance in the moonlight wearing a 'nipple belt' and 'mammary vest,' believing that this turned him into a woman. The Ed Gein's story has also been cited as inspiring the Hannibal Lecter series by Thomas Harris.

³⁷ Uncited. Biography for Anthony Perkins. *IMDbPro*. Undated. 15 June 2011. <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000578/bio#quotes>

In my book I use a number of crime conventions, but tend to subvert the genre. By using an investigative journalist as a surrogate detective, Bacon should be the one who presents the clues and suspects to the reader. But, Bacon's detective skills are flawed. When he goes to interview Roger with regard to the housing development, Bacon realises that there is a better story, more likely to achieve his ends, in maligning Roger and making false statements. The investigation is both inaccurate and incompetent, and his findings inappropriately used. In fairness, it could be argued that Bacon seeks verification of the murder of Dolores by looking through old newspaper articles covering the death. Equally, and more likely, it can be said that he is actually looking for evidence to further his own version of events. There is no such newspaper article, but Bacon fails to see that this absence is highly significant. As a newspaperman he should have realised that the death of a child in a municipal duck pond, however it occurred, would be of great interest to any local newspaper and its readers, although, in fairness, it does not state in the novel that Bacon has been reminded of the details surrounding Dolores's death. . He only has vague memories and the attitudes of others to go by. However, Bacon compounds his omission by neglecting to fully investigate Dolores's background, age and whereabouts. His failure to find any reference to her birth in the General Register Office is put down to poor recordkeeping. This is quite possible as records are not always filed appropriately, and to obtain a full search undertaken by trained Record Office staff would

cost money. The newspaper would normally pay for this search, but as a freelancer, Bacon would have to pay for it himself, and Register Office allows itself several days to undertake such a search.

But the extent of his incompetence is finally revealed when he fails to identify an actual murder where the victim is buried in a shallow-grave in Roger's lane adjacent to the village. Bacon's investigative skills are more questionable than ironic, unlike in Ruth Rendell's novel *A Demon in my View* (1976)³⁸. *Demon* features a character who is a student completing his doctorate on serial killers. His landlord is a psychopathic serial killer who has taken more recently to using a blow-up doll on which to vent his sexual tensions. The student should be the surrogate detective, but his failure to associate the actions of his landlord with the actions of the serial killers he details in his thesis, makes his failure ironic.

Bacon's failure makes him doubt his own abilities and the extent to which they were ever really there. His thoughts send him leaping towards outrageous ideas for finding information such as visiting the London boys whom he hasn't seen since 1945, but after his failure to find Dolores's details, he reasons against looking for the boys in favour of catching an early train back to Winchester. The articles he refers to in his back story are all ones that require, not so much investigative journalism, as research journalism. It is the sort of information that could reasonably obtain by the simple expedient of

³⁸ Interestingly, Anthony Perkins also played Arthur Johnson, the serial killer, in the German film version of this book. Uncited. Anthony Perkins. IMDb. Undated. 15 June 2011. <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000578/>

going to a library or other appropriate body, seeking out the correct section and using published books and indexes. This therefore suggests that Bacon is not so much an investigator as in a detective, but rather, one whose forte is in the meta-analytical area of research. Helmer points this out to him when Bacon asks for his job back, but Bacon's problem is - he can't fully accept this.

In the traditional detective novel the detective, however flawed or misguided and inaccurate his investigation, will always find the solution. This is not a requirement of a hinterland novel, where all rules are there to be broken or completely ignored. And, I would suggest, crime novels in their broadest sense, not only do not necessarily require a detective, if there is a detective, he does not need to be good or competent, or, as Reginald Hill's *Dialogues of the Dead* (2001) shows, even find the correct solution to the case.

Bacon's failure to investigate does not prevent the discoveries about Roger's past coming out. Ivy has been lying. Dolores was not murdered and she is sixteen years older than him, not the two years older that he has been led to believe. This of course, creates a potential question in the mind of the reader. Is Dolores really Roger's mother? The question is never posed and certainly never answered. This is intentional. I want to present the information to the reader, raise potential questions, but not necessarily answer them. This breaks away from the crime tradition in that, particularly, with the detective story, the ending is always closed, not least because it is not the remit of the standard detective story to deal with the

psychological damage done to the survivors of the crimes, not even in those novels which would normally come under the heading of psychological crime. The psychology is to do with the behaviour of the murderer, not the effects of the crimes on the victims and secondary victims. But even where the perpetrator does get away with the crime as in Reginald Hill's *Deadheads* (1983) or *Dialogues*³⁹ there is closure to the books which ensures that all is revealed to the reader. For my novel, although the truth has been revealed to the reader and to Roger (and Mrs Cranshall) I want the reader to be left with possible questions. On the face of it, Ivy has won having sold the cottage making Roger effectively homeless. Or, is this all part of Roger's fantasy about his mother? Does she exist? Are there more secrets to be revealed? Is it not possible that he wrote the Ivy letter himself?

Either way, the village idyll with its picture postcard perfection and all embracing community spirit is at least undermined by murder, mob rule and evidence of a fractured society. The inner city has been brought to rural Hampshire and dark undercurrents have risen to the surface. *Pictures Of Perfection* (1994)⁴⁰ opens with a prologue describing a Hungerford⁴¹ type massacre by a disaffected member of society. All is revealed by the end and shows that it is only someone

³⁹ In *Deadheads* the murderer is suspected but Dalziel and Pascoe are unable to prove it. With *Dialogues of the Dead*, Hill not only has the dead victims speaking to one another, he also has Dalziel and Pascoe believing that the murderer is actually the latest victim, and that the actual murderer is a victim who fends off her attacker.

⁴⁰ A Dalziel and Pascoe novel by Reginald Hill, 1994

⁴¹ Hungerford is a small market town in Berkshire which had a population of around 5,500 people at the time. On 19 August 1987, 27-year-old Michael Robert Ryan, a local man,

shooting 'likely victims' with a paintball gun. Martin Edwards says of *Pictures* that 'in some respects (it is) a fairy tale, presenting a mythic portrait of life in the English country-side' and Hill is quoted as saying:

'One or two critics have suggested that *Pictures* is not really a crime novel, but I don't agree. You could say that in a sense it is about the greatest crime of the century - the destruction of community spirit and a whole way of life in England during the past fifteen years'.⁴²

So Hill is expanding the notion of a crime novel to involve things which are not criminal in any legal sense, but maybe seen as moral crimes, and for the exploration of this, he uses his series detectives, Dalziel and Pascoe.

And in many respects my novel is about that destruction of community spirit which Hill deplores. The various developments have broken down the community so that there are many more strangers living in the village, whether as weekenders, or as permanent residents. These permanent residents quite deliberately do not play a major role in the book as they do not play a major role in the community. The Oak Tree Farm Estate, which is where the main bulk of the new permanent residents live, has been tacked onto the back of the village behind the Goodman Estate. It is not a pretty

shot and killed sixteen people including his mother, and wounded fifteen others before committing suicide.

place to live – it is planned, functional, cheap, inner-city-like. It doesn't have the village feel of the Goodman Estate with its own green and variety of quaint cottages with built in quirks and peculiarities.⁴³ The fear, which comes only from weekenders, is that the additional new development would further hasten 'the destruction of community spirit and a whole way of life in England'. But, as the dark secrets that Roger has carried for the past fifty years seeks to show, that community spirit and whole way of life was probably more superficial than actual anyway. In a village with only twenty or thirty houses, it is quite probable that everyone will know everyone else by name and relationship to each other, but how well do they actually know them as people?

In *Rebecca*, neither the reader, nor the cast of characters knows, or even suspects, that Rebecca was murdered, let alone by her husband Maxim. Yet Maxim is very well known in the closed community of the household, the extended community of the estate, and the socially closer but physically more distant community of the exceedingly wealthy. It is the storm at sea that reveals the truth about Rebecca's death, and a trip to London that further reveals the cause of her death being, in effect, suicide by murder. One aspect that is never revealed or even discussed in the book is whether this

⁴² Edwards, Martin. Reginald Hill's Dalziel & Pascoe Series. Article originally appeared in Deadly Pleasures Bibliography of Dalziel & Pascoe novels. Undated. 7 June 2010. <http://www.twbooks.co.uk/crimescene/rhillme.html>

⁴³ The idea for the Goodman Estate was inspired by the Collins built Orchard Way estate in Southampton. Here the paving stones are uneven and made from a variety of bricks. The houses have a cottage feel about them and are deliberately small with low ceilings. There is a small green complete with stream and weeping willows, and Discovery apple trees line some roads as the hybrid London Plane lines many a road in London.

method of dying is designed by Rebecca to leave Maxim with the psychological scars of a murderer, or the physical punishment of being hanged. All the evidence presented in the book suggests that Maxim is the innocent victim and Rebecca is manipulative, spiteful and destructive, with no attempt made to suggest reasons for her behaviour. Ivy, like Rebecca, is off the page and only seen through the eyes of others. She too is manipulative, spiteful and destructive with no attempt made to analyse or justify her behaviour, but whereas in *Rebecca* the physical bond is broken by Maxim's actions, in my book the physical bond is broken by Ivy selling the cottage and disappearing. In both instances the psychological damage remains. Roger, like Maxim, has the psychological scars of a murderer, but unlike Maxim, not the fear or likelihood of being hanged. In *Rebecca* the revelation of the murder weakens Maxim's psychological state so that his role with his second wife becomes reversed. He is the child and she the strength that carries him. In theory, with Roger, the revelation about Dolores should strengthen and embolden him, but with Ivy's departure, he is left with even more unresolved issues, not just the years of destruction from the belief of his guilt, but now, from being denied the opportunity to fully and calmly confront her with his newly discovered innocence. He is only able to scream at her hysterically when still not aware of the full facts.

Daphne du Maurier described *Rebecca* as 'grim' and it being about obsession and jealousy. It deals with the past and the power and influence that the past has over us and the shadows it casts on

present day life, often creating vulnerability and fear in those caught in its evil trap. Roger is caught in the trap of fear of discovery regarding the death of Dolores. It casts so long a shadow as to affect his whole life and his relationship with the outside world and those in it. He is totally vulnerable and subject to Ivy's dictates and demands. Obsession and jealousy play no overt role in the book as Roger does not feel these emotions, but it might be implied that it is these negative traits that dictate Ivy's response to Dolores. Dolores is a young woman of sixteen when confined to a mental institution, and we know that Ivy was probably promiscuous during the war so sees herself as sexually desirable. The fact that she becomes pregnant with Roger around the time that Dolores is confined suggests that there was sexual activity in her life, whether with her husband or another we don't know. But we certainly know that Norman Bates' mother was sexually active as she had a new lover, and it was Norman's obsession with his mother and jealousy of her lover that fuelled his murderous drive. But with all these books, the murders are not only in the past, they are off the page and we only know about them through what we are told by various characters - Roger in my book; Maxim via the second wife in *Rebecca*; and the policeman in *Psycho*.

As the murders are off the page and in the past we have the problem of an unreliable narrator. As explained by John Hewitt, 'An unreliable narrator is a first-person narrator that for some reason has

a compromised point-of-view'⁴⁴, but I would argue that Roger is an unreliable narrator as the reader is very close to him, seeing the world through his eyes and being exposed to his thoughts, however unpalatable. Roger believes that he has murdered Dolores. And Bacon has some inkling of this from a vague childhood memory where Ivy shouted about it in the manor house. Bacon is known to be unreliable. It is his very unreliability that has caused him to be where he is now, in Wherwent trying desperately to return to London and the nationals. But it is the act of murder that has defined Roger's life and his belief in it that gives the story its authority. It is the revelation that it is untrue that creates the denouement and his failure to resolve the matter which leaves the novel open-ended. Narrators can be unreliable for a number of reasons: to deliberately redirect the thinking of the reader (and / or other characters in the book); for their own ends, as in for example Dr James Sheppard in Agatha Christies' *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926); because the narrative is written in the first person and the narrator's viewpoint may or may not be self-justifying such as in *Lolita* (1955) by Vladimir Nabokov or the reasoning of Danny, the ten-year-old murderer in *Border Crossing* (2001, Pat Barker)(third person)⁴⁵; first person is always unreliable as

⁴⁴ Hewitt, John. Explaining the Unreliable Narrator. *Poe War: Writer's Resource Center*. 21 November 2005. 24 November 2011. <http://poewar.com/john-hewitts-writing-tips-explaining-the-unreliable-narrator/>

⁴⁵ Danny is twenty-four years old in the book and remembering his actions as a ten-year-old boy. It is his conviction that he was winning the jury over when he was on trial fourteen years earlier, but that the jury was swayed against him by the psychologist stating that Danny was aware that death was permanent. This was evidenced by Danny saying that if you wring a chicken's neck you don't expect to see it running around the yard the next morning. However, psychologist would argue that ten-year-olds do not fully understand the long term consequences of their actions and that children have to move in

it can only be one person's viewpoint; the character believes something to be true whether it is or is not, as in my book.⁴⁶ And Sally Beauman suggests that the second Mrs de Winter was the first unreliable narrator in popular fiction.⁴⁷ But in a traditional detective novel, the murder(s) may or may not be on the page. Either way, it is immaterial as by the time the book is finished the reader has been furnished with the absolute and unambiguous truth and order is restored. It was the very fact that Dr Sheppard was unreliable that caused such a furore when *Roger Ackroyd* was first published. It was seen as being unfair to the reader. However, the reader of *Psycho* has no reason to consider the policeman to be unreliable when he details Norman's actions and the reasons for them.

The location in which the story is set often plays a vital character in the novels I have chosen for this piece. My book is set in a small imaginary village. It is the destruction of the surrounding countryside and the temporary residents' objection to any change that creates the platform upon which the story hinges. If the story were set in a city then it really wouldn't work in the same way. Public parks and commons are usually protected areas which cannot be built on and it took *The News of the World* publishing the photographs and names

to the Formal Operational* stage of their mental development to do that, which is at the age of twelve. It is for this reason that many countries have the age of criminal responsibility beginning at the age of 12, or even, 13 or 14. *Formal Operational is the fourth stage of child mental development as laid out by Jean Piaget, after Motor Sensory (birth to 2 years), Pre-Operational (2-6 years), Concrete Operational (6-12 years), then Formal Operational (12-15/16 years) and Abstract (15/16 years onwards). It should be noted that a significant percentage of the population (probably in excess of 50%) never reach the Abstract stage which is thinking in ideas.

⁴⁶ This list of reasons is not exhaustive but only a possible range of reasons.

of paedophiles to cause the riots on the Paulsgrove Estate, Portsmouth in 2000⁴⁸. Brighton with its seaside, piers, race course and the poverty in and around Nelson Place is a character in *Brighton Rock* just as surely as are Pinkie and Rose. In *Psycho* The Bates Motel is isolated with the main road passing by yards away which reflects Norman's psychological condition, just as in the isolation of the cottage reflects Roger's state. And for Rebecca's death to be believable as accidental, Manderley needed to be positioned next to potentially rough seas.

However, I would argue that a novel should really be set in its time and place, but that the story itself should be timeless. That is, the time and place should help influence external events but the characters should hold anywhere and for all time. Jealousy, obsession, manipulation, greed, self-interest, destruction, revenge and so on, are all personality traits that can be found reflected in all forms of literature throughout the ages and cultures.

But an area even more specific to the characters than location is the home. Homes often play a vital role in the development of plot and the psychological state of characters. Interestingly, in the novels I have chosen a number of the 'criminals' have remained living in houses long after the offences have been committed. In *Rebecca* Maxim kills for fear of losing his beloved Manderley which he

⁴⁷ Sally Beaman, *Living with Rebecca* (The Guardian, Wednesday, 12th September, 2001) <http://www.alanhoward.org.uk/living.htm>, 9th April, 2009

⁴⁸ During these riots not just alleged paedophiles but paediatricians and other innocent men were attacked. The Government and police were concerned that the continued practice by *The News of the World* of publishing details of paedophiles would simply drive the paedophiles underground making them far more difficult to keep track of.

eventually does when Mrs Danvers burns it down. Even when he returns with his new bride after his break in Monte Carlo, there is no question of him living elsewhere. The pied-a-terre in London was Rebecca's flat used by her for her liaisons. Pinkie continues to live in the lodging house after he has killed Spicer presumably by pushing him over the banister, seemingly unconcerned by the connection. Norman Bates lives and works in the motel and house that he occupied with his mother. Marise Tomelty, far from being distressed by the fact that a murderer is living upstairs is actually excited by it. And Roger is ambivalent about losing his home,

‘If she weren't there he would fight the development. But she was there. She was in his head, in his heart, in his soul. Destroy the cottage and they destroy her. Keep the cottage and they destroy him’.⁴⁹

It is Ivy living in the cottage that gives him his ambivalence, and it is only through a forced physical break that he sees himself being free of her.

In the standard detective story the home used to be a focal point with much of the action surrounding it. Indeed, it is during the proverbial gathering in the library that the denouement is frequently acted out. The library is of course, associated with the type of large house that traditionally appears in many Golden Age detective stories by writers such as Christie, Sayers and Allingham. In more

⁴⁹ Jones, Anne. *The Blackshaw Chord*. (Unpublished) 14

recent stories much of the action takes place outside the home with possibly only informal police interviews occurring there. But the home is personal, small, revealing a lot about the occupier – rather like a physical representation of the character's mind, and for much of my book, although we are often in the cottage, the reader is in Roger's mind. The cottage is Ivy-dominated, clinging to the past, even when it is unsuitable or unhealthy to do so, just like Roger.

'The inspector's face registered nothing. He was just taking it all in, building a picture, and Roger knew what that picture was – a lonely man, downtrodden, perverted. His private humiliation - his bedroom – was exposed for all to see. A man, a proper man, wouldn't still be living with his mother at fifty-four. He wouldn't still be living with some woman's wallpaper from between the wars. He wouldn't have bare floorboards and rag rugs like some poverty-stricken Victorian relic. He was odd and his oddness was his noose. The serpent across the hallway had wound herself around his neck and with each passing year had tightened her grip.'⁵⁰⁵¹

As said before, examining the effects of crime on the victim sets my book apart from the standard crime novel where the psychological effects of the crime on those who are not the criminal

⁵⁰ Jones, 204

⁵¹ This is a reference to *Rebecca* where Maxim dreams of a serpent winding itself around his neck creating the noose that will hang him.

are not normally dealt with. In the standard crime novel the aftermath is sanitised or quite often ignored, save for a concerned tone in the detective's voice when offering brief condolences to the bereaved before proceeding with the investigation. But in my book the real story from Roger's viewpoint is the effects of believing he is a murderer. Discovering that his mother has lied provides a solution of sorts for the reader, but does not alleviate his distress. There is, in effect, a sequel to be told before the story is fully resolved. Roger's already fragile psychological state is compounded by the revelation that his gratitude to Ivy for, if not her kindness, at least her maternal concern, by not putting him into a mental hospital, is all based on a lifelong lie. For the story to be resolved the reader would need to know what Roger now intends doing about his new situation and how it affects him. The way this book ends, Ivy has won. Roger has no money so can't start his planned new life and his psychological scars have deepened.

This means that the book is left open-ended. Although this technique is more sophisticated than might be usual in a crime novel, this is not why I did it. Originally there was to be a closed ending with everything resolved. In the outline Ivy was to appear within the first few chapters, but thereafter there was no real story for her to pursue, so I delayed her appearance in the first draft until the police investigation towards the end of the book. Ivy was to appear at the door to the living room and announce her presence with, 'That's where I should have put you', referring to an item on the television on

the closures of the mental hospitals. The ensuing conversation demonstrated that although Roger was by then fully aware that he had not murdered Dolores, Ivy saw the world from her point-of-view so continued with the lie. If Roger believed what the police told him that simply demonstrated his stupidity, especially as she had proof of his guilt in the form of Bacon's newspaper articles. In the following chapter Ivy was to be arrested for the murder of Melissa. Although these two chapters remained substantially intact for the following drafts, with only minor modifications, I decided to drop the arrest as it smacked strongly of a 1920s gathering in the library melodrama, making it completely out of character with the rest of the novel. I was also unable to fully justify Ivy as a murderer. She is manipulative and actively sets out to destroy lives, but she needs someone to vent her spleen on. Without that she loses her power. She didn't need to kill to destroy, she just needed to use the powers invested in her by the state to commit her offspring to a mental institution or to abuse a child with the likelihood of little or no state or personal intervention.

In successive drafts the investigation was moved to an almost off the page event, with the rather ludicrous and melodramatic revelations about Georgina having been murdered by Ivy dropped, thus making Ivy's appearance unnecessary. However I toyed with the idea of Ivy appearing to show that Roger was not a Norman Bates, but eventually decided that all the information would be presented to the reader for him to draw his own conclusions. This is

a deliberate move away from the *Psycho* scenario where all is unambiguously revealed.

But where there are similarities between my book and *Psycho* is with regard to outsiders and insiders. Outsiders enter the private world of Norman Bates and are destroyed, but it is actually Bates who is the outsider, removed from society by his location, actions and psychological state. In my book the weekenders are outsiders who arrive on Friday evening and leave on Sunday. They are their own community and have their own view of the world and of the village. There is little to indicate that they are part of the village, but a great deal to suggest that they see the village as theirs. They are the middle-class, worldly-wise city dwellers who must lead the country bumpkin in the fight against the city-slicker developers and tyrannical municipal overlords. They are outsiders who consider themselves the ruling insiders.

On the face of it, Roger would appear to be an insider as he has lived in the village for nearly all his life and is now central to its major concern, the new housing development, but he is primarily an isolated individual who is fighting for his rather precarious place in life, and that place, he knows, is not in doing their bidding. But he is quite happy for the weekenders' action committee to believe that they are doing precisely what he wishes by saving the cottage. He makes no effort to interact with the campaign either to support it or disown it. He is an outsider and the physical location of the cottage along a dark and lonely lane enables him to see the village, without

necessarily being part of it, and this physical state reflects his psychological state – dark, lonely, seeing life without fully entering into it. Ivy has brought him up to ensure that he doesn't belong, and Roger may or may not be able to break the feeling that isolation is his natural and rightful state. His fight for acceptance through his relationship with Lizzy ended in failure, and he has not engaged in the communal workplace after his return from London, but instead has opted for being self-employed and substantially a loner. Even his forced involvement in the new housing development has done nothing to alleviate his psychological distancing from others. This is of course, partly due to his ambivalence towards the destruction of the cottage, but there are indications that even without his unsettledness with regard to the development, he would not wish to associate closely with the wider community. He doesn't talk to the farmers, he doesn't acknowledge the other villagers and they don't acknowledge him. Even the norms of small community behaviour such as greeting those you pass in the street, including complete strangers, are removed from his level of social integration. And although he runs the village film club, he remains on the fringes of village society.

Bacon too is an outsider, for although he is from the village, he is a city boy at heart. His arrival in the village is the inciting incident which drives the narrative. Without Bacon much of the story surrounding Roger would not have unfolded as it has. The murder of the child from Woking would still have happened but there would

have been no suspicion placed on the village, no 'A' board poster suggesting that the murdered child was Melissa, and no accusations directly or indirectly indicating that Roger was the murderer.

Therefore there would have been no baying mob outside his cottage so Dolores would not have been hounded to her death. Ivy may or may not have sold the cottage as Dolores may possibly have returned to live with her there and Roger would probably still have a home but not a bedroom and now two elderly women to look after.

The development would be put in jeopardy, or at least altered but, in the end Ivy would still have won. She is not what Cawelti defined as the 'criminal overreacher'⁵² who fails, but rather more Ian Fleming's cunning baccarat player who knows the rules and can identify his opponent's tell.⁵³ Bacon more accurately fits the notion of the criminal overreacher with his 'individual complex of motives that led up to the crime' and 'the psychological consequences that followed it.'⁵⁴ It is he who is left to see the destruction that his actions have caused, and the reader is in no doubt that he has failed. Bacon does not secure a position on a national newspaper and he returns unambiguously to his alcohol addiction. Bacon's story is closed.

However, the real sufferers from the psychological and other consequences that follow the crimes are Roger and Dolores. Both have been seriously damaged by the individual actions of Bacon and Ivy. Ivy's actions have prevented them from enjoying normal lives –

⁵² Cawelti, 53

⁵³ The 'tell' is the name given to the mannerism or tick that a player unwittingly makes during games of bluff such as poker or baccarat when he or she has a particularly good winning hand to play.

Dolores by being institutionalised and probably unable to cope in the outside world; Roger by not being capable of forming normal relationships and left unable to shrug off Ivy's dark avenging shadow. Ivy is guilty of causing broken lives, but she has not suffered from her actions save for any maternal pleasure she has destroyed for herself. She has sold the cottage, taken the money which is now far more than the property is worth and is able to start a new and more comfortable life elsewhere. And the behaviour and interference of Bacon has left Roger and Dolores suffering directly from the actions of the mob outside the cottage.

But there still remains the question of whether the treatment suffered by Roger and Dolores at the hands of Ivy is credible. I say that it most certainly is. Roger's cross-dressing is predicated on a lie - he murdered Dolores. This lie would still work equally well if Dolores had never existed. However, Dolores did exist and it is her death that caused the revelations. Without her death the mob would have remained outside the cottage and the story would have taken a different twist. Therefore the story, to some extent, relies on Ivy's ability to put Dolores into a mental institution at the age of sixteen. This is more than plausible. Parents were able to section their children up to 1957 when the law was eventually changed, and a story appeared as recently as 2011 about a woman who had been sectioned by her parents for having a baby out of wedlock. The woman had been lucky enough to escape the mental institution in

⁵⁴ Cawelti, 53

1954 unbeknownst to her parents, and had managed to build a life for herself in London.⁵⁵

The childhood abuse suffered by Roger is also quite conceivable. The whole book rests on the notion that Roger remembers the open and unchallenged abuse that he suffered during various stages of his life, and, most importantly, that his childhood and adult lives have been blighted by the humiliating and frightening knowledge that he is a murderer. Without the memory of the murder and its consequences the story would be different. It is Roger's psychological state which drives the narrative as it is this that defines his life – he lives with his mother, he can't form a life beyond her reach, he undertakes a form of self-flagellation by dressing as Dolores and he has to make do with a surrogate family in the form of the children he teaches.

Roger's knowledge of his actions comes from his mother. There is no question in his mind that he has committed murder. He cannot remember a time when he had not been guilty of the act. Pre-school memories do exist and are real. They are 'provided by adults in verbal interactions' and 'endure certainly through the preschool period and probably into later years'.⁵⁶ It would then seem reasonable that Roger should remember this incident in such detail, and add his own interpretation to the image formed in his mind by Ivy's verbal description. False memory can be implanted not just in

⁵⁵ Uncited. British Woman Found Alive after 55 years. *Yahoo News UK and Ireland*. 15 June 2011. 15 June 2011. <http://uk.news.yahoo.com/38/20110310/tuk-dead-british-woman-found-alive-after-107bc4a.html>

young children but in older people. Several experiments have shown that just by asking adults to describe a childhood event which never happened and without providing misinformation, a significant number of subjects 'remember' that event.⁵⁷ The psychologist Martin Conway says: 'real-world studies demonstrate that human memories are inaccurate, incomplete, open to distortion, and wholesale fabrication'. False memory, or 'confabulated memory'⁵⁸ where the person 'fills in the gaps' between actual memories, are memories innocently produced using real people, places and events but are false and can often be proven so. False memories of this sort are quite natural and autobiographical. But as has been stated, preschool memory exists mainly through verbal interactions, but 'memories are vulnerable to distortions' and 'confidence and vividness do not go hand in hand with accuracy'.⁵⁹

Roger knows that he has murdered Dolores as he can vividly remember the whole scenario even though he was only four at the time. Whether it was Ivy who gave him the picture of her happy family and his jealous, sullen nature or whether it was provided by Roger is immaterial for the purposes of the novel. It is the fact that he possesses this knowledge that matters, and the possessing of this

⁵⁶ Martin A. Conway, Introduction, *Recovered Memories and False Memories* Edited by Martin A. Conway (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997) 9

⁵⁷ Conway cites a number of examples in his book such as Hyman *et al* (1995, Experiment 2) where after just three interviews 25% of the subjects 'remembered' an event which never happened. Loftus and Ketcham (1994) found that the details increased over several interviews, although Loftus and Pickrell (1996) found the increase in details was less marked. Johnson *et al* (1993) considered that the reason for the false memory could be that the subjects imagine what might happen and gradually convert their imaginings into memories.

⁵⁸ Conway, 3

knowledge and the abuse delivered to him from Ivy, creates the mindset that has shaped his life. Ian Hacking states, 'Child abuse is both an ultimate evil and causally powerful' and although there is 'little conventional proof that child abuse has terrible sequelae in adult life' it is accepted by psychiatrists, scientists, social workers and lay people that 'knowledge affects the way in which individual human beings come to conceive of themselves',⁶⁰ and 'development may be foreclosed when a particular version is granted complete authority'.⁶¹

Although Roger lives in a village where, ostensibly, everyone knows everyone else, much of the abuse he suffered is unknown or unacknowledged and is certainly ignored. Even Mrs Cranshall, his closest protector and ally, knows nothing of the tale of murder and although she has on at least one occasion, remonstrated with Ivy over her treatment of Roger, she still did not go to the police or social services to report the abuse. To acknowledge that childhood abuse takes place is to shatter the complacent view of family life. It is acceptable to hear Holocaust victims bearing witness to the cruelty they suffered, but it is not so acceptable to hear personal stories of abuse which are 'revelatory, shameful, and damaging to the individual and family'.⁶² Holocaust victims have the advantage of massive evidence to substantiate their claims and the power of collective suffering. Abused children do not usually have such

⁵⁹ Conway, 88

⁶⁰ Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul – Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995) 68

⁶¹ Michael Lambek and Paul Antze, Introduction: Forecasting Memory, *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, Edited by Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (London and New York, Routledge, 1996) xix

advantages. They are often 'brainwashed' by their abusers to keep the abuse secret, and if they don't, the abuser will almost certainly deny that any such behaviour has taken place. In Germany it is a criminal offence to deny the Holocaust, whereas parents who abuse routinely deny their behaviour and often profess to having been abused themselves as children and use this as a way of explaining and mitigating the very behaviour that they are denying.⁶³ Ivy does not appear on the page so cannot make such a claim, but were she to appear, she would certainly cite personal suffering as a child, and probably as an adult, but would also deny any abusive behaviour on her part.

In *Brighton Rock* Greene hints at the abuse that Pinkie and Rose each suffered as children and implies that it is this abuse that is part of their doomed relationship. Pinkie marries Rose as a wife cannot be forced to testify against her husband. Pinkie is neither kind nor gentle but Rose is unable to see his faults believing all is love. Rose has only known abuse and Pinkie's attentions are flattering. After all, he is a 'man of the world', rich and experienced, while she is a nobody who expects nothing and has received nothing, 'In Nelson Place from which she had emerged like a mole into the daylight of Snow's restaurant and the Palace Pier, she had never known a boy with enough money to offer her a drink.'⁶⁴ As a husband, Pinkie is substantially a failure. He is unable to show affection, and considers

⁶² Lambek and Antze, 188

⁶³ Citing from Hacking, 60

⁶⁴ Greene, 49

sex disgusting and degrading. He heard his parents' love-making through the thin walls of their house and found it abhorrent. The underlying text is that neither received love as children so are unable to recognise or experience love and are unsure what to expect from any emotional attachment. Rose suffers from obsession; Pinkie feels loathing.

In my book Roger and Lizzy were not in love, but they found their relationship acceptable as marriage was always a possibility. Roger hoped Lizzy's desperation would enable her to endure Ivy, although he resisted a meeting until Lizzy insisted. Through marriage Roger saw himself attaining a normal life with a solid settled foundation. To this end, Ivy works as a sort of lunatic wife in the attic, as in *Jane Eyre* (1847), except Roger is 'free' to marry but she destroys his relationship and Lizzy is not so desperate as to tolerate Ivy. Or perhaps she is not prepared to marry a murderer. The reason Lizzy left is never explained as Roger doesn't know it. All that can be reasonably assumed is, she found her new boyfriend before she rejected Roger. And this rejection sent him back to Ivy as it became undeniable that her power stretched beyond him, even when he was living in London.

The question of relationships crops up in all the books selected for this piece as it is relationships that are so basic and fundamental to the existence of human beings. People do not live in a vacuum. For newly-weds Maxim is quite distant with his wife but whether this is due to past events or his natural way is never clarified. When he

shot her, Maxim believed the very sexually active Rebecca was pregnant but there is no suggestion that he might be the father. This implies a total lack of intimacy between them. The second Mrs de Winter also fails to produce offspring although she dreams of having sons, 'our boys',⁶⁵ and the story is written in retrospect, being some ten years after the event. Even their nomadic existence fails to provide an adequate answer as Maxim's wealth would have ensured that they had the financial wherewithal to buy a property abroad. In my book there is no real indication of there being any physical intimacy between Roger and Lizzy, only, as shown in an earlier draft, a suggestion that Lizzy might have an aversion to such sordidness as is shown through, for example, her reaction to Roger's references to Ursula Andress in the bikini.

'You know that that Ursula Andress holds her stomach in,' Lizzy said. 'You can see it. We all say so at work. If she held it in any further you'd see her backbone.'

'All the better to make her you-know-whats stand out.'

'Her what?'

'Titties.' He gestured two unnaturally heavy breasts. 'Where she holds the conches.'

'She's a tart,' Lizzy snapped. 'All women who expose their breasts are tarts.'

⁶⁵ Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca* (Victor Gollancz, London, 1938 – quote from Virago Press,

‘When does she expose them?’ he asked.

‘You’d like her to, wouldn’t you?’

‘Oh, yes.’⁶⁶

This implies that Roger has no sexual aversion to women, certainly over the distancing of celluloid, but there is no indication that he actively pursued an intimate relationship with Lizzy, or any other woman save for the trip to the prostitute when in the army. And there is nothing to suggest that Lizzy wished an intimate relationship with Roger, or that she had rejected his advances.

The relationship between the characters in *John Brown’s Body* is curious in that Marise Tomelty doesn’t like sex and has only married her husband as she had been told to - “You take Jack Tomelty,’ her mother had said, ‘he’s not much but he’ll do for a start.’”⁶⁷ And in *Psycho* Norman Bates finds intimacy and even attraction to another (except for his mother), so unpleasant and frightening that it drives him to murder.

For each character the circumstances surrounding their issues with sexuality is extreme – For Pinkie it’s forced intimacy to avoid being testified against; for Marise Tomelty it’s the dangerous thrill from being close to a murderer; for Norman Bates it’s his disgust and fear a losing his mother; for Maxim de Winter it’s his fear of losing Manderley to another man’s child; and Roger has what some

2007 edition) 77

⁶⁶ Jones, Page 22 of the sixth draft

⁶⁷ A. L. Barker, *John Brown’s Body*, (The Hogarth Press Ltd, London, 1965 - quote from Virago Press 1999 edition) 7

consider a sexual perversion due to the damage caused by Ivy's abuse. None of these characters has a fulfilling sexual relationship.

The perception of perversion surrounding Roger forces him into extreme circumstances when the mob forms outside the cottage. Kingsley Amis says that by putting 'people into conditions of extremity of some sort, you won't find out *all* (his italics) about them, but you'll get to the inside of them quicker than you would in the 'drawing room, gin, and Jaguar' type of novel'.⁶⁸ This would appear to be fair comment. In my book the reader is very close to Roger, albeit through third person, but when the mob is outside it is only then that we get to see how close to the surface his memory and anguish with regard to the killing of Dolores actually is.

'What have you done now?' he shouted at the ceiling. 'What have you been saying? Who have you been telling tales to? Murderer, pervert - where the fuck does that come from? And don't bother telling me to stop swearing. Fifty fucking years ago. That's when. I was just four years old. I didn't know what I was doing. And you're still going on about it. Can't you just, for Christ's sake, just fucking let it go?'⁶⁹

The fact that Ivy is responsible for the mob forming outside the cottage due to him murdering Dolores is as far as Roger's thinking goes. Seemingly he cannot conceive of anything bad occurring in his life without Ivy being the cause or manipulator of his difficulties and

⁶⁸ Amis, 187

there is no real life for Roger outside his actions as a four-year-old child. In *Rebecca* Maxim is substantially a shadowy figure unfathomable to his new wife, until the body of Rebecca is discovered in the boat during a storm. From that point on, the revelations surrounding Rebecca's death increase the second Mrs de Winter's understanding of her husband. It is only through these extreme circumstances that his character and history are revealed.

For Norman Bates, extreme circumstances have a very personal definition – his mother's lover; his attraction to Marion Crane – all resulting in murder. The revelations by the detective about his past give *Psycho* its closed ending.⁷⁰ His actions are discovered; he is exposed; he goes to a mental institution. All is complete. This sort of ending would be acceptable in a traditional crime novel, and all of the other books I have selected are, in their way complete, in that the story is ended – but each of the others leaves the reader in no doubt that more will happen. Maxim has apparently got away with murder, although he has never actually been tried so may yet be hanged⁷¹;

⁶⁹ Jones, 185

⁷⁰ Of all the books it is only *Psycho* that has a sequel which has been written by the original author. The fact that that first sequel, *Psycho II* (1982) features Bates leaving the mental institution and going to Hollywood to kill those involved in making a film about his life might suggest some dissatisfaction on the part of Robert Bloch with the original film, but this sequel was not used as the basis for the story that appeared in the second film, *Psycho II*. Bates dies in Bloch's second *Psycho* novel even though a third book, *Psycho House* (1990) was written by Bloch. No subsequent *Psycho* film is based on a Bloch *Psycho* novel. Information was garnered from Wikipedia. Uncited. Robert Bloch. Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Undated. 18 December 2011.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Bloch

⁷¹ du Maurier didn't write a sequel to *Rebecca* so we don't know what she envisaged. Susan Hill was approached by the Daphne du Maurier Trust and asked to write the sequel which was published as *Mrs de Winter* (1993). Hill has Maxim dissatisfied with life abroad and longing to return to England. They return, buy a house and on a trip to London, the second Mrs de Winter is spotted by Favell who traces her back to their new home. This sets in motion a series of events which lead to Maxim driving into a tree near Manderley

wardrobes are not airtight so Marise Tomelty could still survive; and although Pinkie is dead, Rose has yet to hear the recording which she believes is a verbal love letter but where he actually says, “God damn you, you little bitch, why can’t you go back home for ever and let me be?”⁷², and there is a further story in that she has a ‘sudden conviction that she carried life’.⁷³ Indeed, Greene arguably deliberately leaves *Rock* open-ended by finishing with, ‘She walked rapidly in the thin June sunlight towards the worst horror of all’⁷⁴, referring to the recording.

My novel ends with Roger being homeless, but he must do something with his life, whether it is to stay with Mrs Cranshall or begin a new life elsewhere. The story is open-ended, as with *Rock* and *Rebecca*: no firm conclusion has been reached.

These endings set the novels apart from the standard crime story and place the books firmly in the hinterland that is the general fiction section of the bookshops and libraries. Or does it?

As has previously been said, Patricia Highsmith is shelved under crime although her books are usually open ended, and John Grisham

and being killed. It is not the legal system that punishes Maxim but the psychological damage caused by his actions towards Rebecca and the harassment that he suffers by the continued presence of Favell and Mrs Danvers. *Mrs de Winter* does not tell the story of what happened next as it is not written by the original author, but rather tells the tale of what one reader thinks may have happened next. This doesn’t invalidate it as a novel, but neither does it preclude any other writer from producing an equally valid sequel showing a different train of events. It is just that such a sequel would probably not have the approval of the Du Maurier Trust. Sally Beauman in *Rebecca’s Tale* offers a prequel to *Rebecca* and is sympathetic to Rebecca. Beauman refers to her book as a ‘companion’ to the original *Rebecca*.

⁷² Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock*, (William Heinemann Ltd, London, 1938 – quote from Vintage, 2004) 177

⁷³ Greene, 247

⁷⁴ Greene, 247

and Robert Goddard books are usually closed but are frequently shelved under general fiction.

So to return to the initial question: why the demarcation between literary fiction and crime fiction? I think that such classifications are unavoidable. The shortcomings of genre identification; namely its capricious, arbitrary and dynamic nature, has to do with the lively expansion of ideas and must be encouraged in order to keep literature fresh and invigorated. The shedding of such markers, far from removing the lack of clarity, would so confuse, alienate and generally disconcert readers, booksellers and librarians as to demand immediate reinstatement. Classification is unavoidable as are its short-comings. But it is these short-comings that in many ways are its greatest strength. They show the range and variety of text available to the reader, as well as offering the writer the greatest opportunity to expand and explore new and exciting horizons.

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