## The Secret Cave

## Chapter 1

The early autumn sun had begun to slip silently like a thief into the cold dark Irish Sea. Jeffrey sat fidgeting, impatiently peering through the windscreen of his blue Ford Escort. He didn't mind admitting to himself that he was nervous and not just a little apprehensive. He felt a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach, a gnawing feeling which bored deep into his soul bringing a pained and anguished look to his youthful face. The haunting sound of a seagull did nothing to lift Jeff's mood as its forlorn call echoed through the air of the all but deserted shore. Making its way inland from the seashore driven by the incoming cold the birds call drifted away into a lonely shadowy

A life, which should have been so good, was so good began to leave a sour and bitter taste in his already dry mouth. Shakily he looked down at a vicious looking hunting knife lying on the passenger seat next to him. Its blade, sharp and gleaming, cold, hard and efficient seemed to him to be just like her. It sat as if to taunt him and he wondered if he really could go through with using it. Earlier he had worked himself up into such a jealous rage, but now in the cold dim light of the fading day... well; he began to doubt himself.

nothingness. And all at once Jeff felt the deepest despair.

Suddenly a familiar shadowy figure emerged from a distant cave entrance, Jeff caught his breath, for even at this distance he recognised her, she was moving quickly and furtively like a wild animal afraid of discovery. Glancing at his watch, he noted the time 5.00 pm. It was going to be dark soon and the sky was beginning to cloud over, it was going to rain and his view of the cave would become obscured. It wasn't for the first time that day, that Jeff cursed his bad luck.

It had been one of those accidents of fate, that Jeffrey had uncovered Shirley's deception. If he hadn't arrived home early twice last week in order to surprise her, he would never have become suspicious, something which at the time had made him feel guilty. He told himself repeatedly that he was being foolish, that there was probably a simple explanation for it, and yet something deep in the back of his mind just wouldn't let go. An inner voice nagged at him making him act out of character, this spying just wasn't him; it belonged elsewhere to someone else. He wasn't like that and yet... As it turned out he had good reason to be suspicious, Shirley he found, was sneaking out every single day and not arriving back until 5.30 pm. At first he considered that she had merely gone back to work, but then why would she have been so secretive about that, it made no sense. She had blatantly lied to him, blatantly and without shame lied to him and that could only mean one thing in Jeff's mind and that really had shook him to his core.

Shirley and Jeffrey Benson had been married for only a short time, roughly around three months. Everything had been fine, in fact better than fine; just as it should have been in the early days of a marriage, but then Jeff found during the last few weeks that a subtle change had come over Shirley. Nothing he could really put his finger on, he sensed her tension. She evaded answering him when he inquired how her day had been, always

giving vague ambiguous answers. Was it he thought that she had given up her work, after all it had been Shirley's own idea to give up her career when they married. Maybe she regretted it. Hadn't she told him how her modelling had taken her all over the world? Perhaps she was bored, feeling stifled and caged in her new role as housewife, maybe now she regretted her decision. He was simply at a loss, was she up to no good? Why else was she lying to him? That of course had been then, and this was now and now he was sure, as sure as if he had found them together in each other's arms. Jeff had to shake the image which had horribly formed in his mind, clear from his head; he had to keep alert, to watch. He had to find out, he had to know who, and then when he did, he would know just what to do.

By 5:45 the cave had disappeared into the murky evening light. The rain, which had been promising to show, was now coming down hard and cascading over the windscreen which had long since misted over inside of the car. Jeff sat cradling the knife that he had bought earlier that day. Opening the car door after realising what a fool he had been, and with tears in his Grey weary eyes, he threw the knife over the fence and into the dark where it belonged. Deep down he knew that he had never intended to use it, not really, but it had brought something to him when he was feeling helpless, lost, unable to turn back destiny, he saw it through a misty red rage as away to throw destiny a curve ball by interfering with its plans and keeping the newly formed lovers apart, but he knew... he always knew he could never, would never use it.

The drive home was uncomfortably short leaving little time to sort out his emotions. He knew that he had to hide them, tuck them away from prying eyes; two can keep secrets as well as one he thought to himself as he steadied his nerves. By 6 pm. Jeff was already pulling the car into the familiar driveway which he called home. The house lights shone through the dark, harsh and piercing. His tired eyes flinched at them; they somehow belied the abnormality of the situation, the turmoil Jeff felt within. He knew that she would be in there now and that she would behave like nothing at all had happened, business as usual, like butter wouldn't melt', such acting. Well if she could do it then damn well so could he. Until that is, he thought, I catch her out, and when I do... and when I do

"Hello Shirley." He forced himself to kiss her on the cheek. "How have you been? How was your day?" Trying to keep the sarcasm out of his voice and only just succeeding.

'Have you had a tiring yet, fun filled day' He wanted to say, but didn't

"Fine darling, It's been the usual, you know, I went shopping this morning. Sorry your dinner isn't ready yet. I got involved in a film on the television. I forgot the time." Jeffrey looked at Shirley, again she was lying and he found it difficult not to explode. He would follow her tomorrow and find out once and for all just who *he* was and then...

"Are you okay, you look a little tired Jeff, you haven't been over doing things at work have you?"

"No," he said too abruptly, "Just one of those days." He said more gently.

After dinner Jeff found himself looking through the Radio Times and he noted that there hadn't been an afternoon film on television. He thought about questioning her over this so-called film but then thought better of it. He didn't want to tip her off that he was on to her, no, he wanted it to come as one big explosive surprise when he walked in on them.

"Anything on?" asked Shirley.

"What? Oh just some political thing, how in hell they think this guy will ever become prime minister" he said pointing to a picture of some suited man in the Radio Times, "is beyond me, after all his dirty, sordid little affairs have come out."

"Oh yes he became prime minister all right but then voting is all ...." replied Shirley who started confidently and then faded away.

"I mean I think, maybe... no perhaps not..." she muttered.

Jeffrey stared at her in confusion for a moment, "Well I wouldn't vote for the creep."

Later as she reached for him in bed he turned away from her. "Are you okay?" she inquired with genuine worry in her voice.

"Yes, just tired, a big day tomorrow." He knew that he wasn't lying, at least about that, but sleep was shy and elusive the stresses of the day spinning round and round inside his head like a demented merry-go-round. It was a long night that night and an unpleasant one.

The next morning turned out to be bright and crisp. On any other occasion it would have been the sort of day that Jeff would have enjoyed, maybe even going as far as having a little stroll around before breakfast to take in the glory of the day. It was things like that which had first attracted Shirley to him. He knew this and partly because of it he sat sullen and brooding at the breakfast table. It was a quiet and uncomfortable start to the day which was rounded off with an indifferent peck on the cheek as he hastened out of the door. Shirley looked on in silence, her worry showing but failing to raise any response from Jeff. She told herself that pressures of work were getting to him and she vowed to have a serious talk about some time off for him, maybe a long weekend away would be the thing.

Jeff set off at a steady pace, drove around the corner and pulled up. He made a quick call into work on his mobile and made his excuses for the day then he settled down for what could have been a long wait. The knot and churning in the pit of the stomach was back again and he wondered if it had ever truly left him since the stress of yesterday, it seemed to him then that it had not. The time dragged by while Jeff sat anxiously waiting for his wife to appear. It had seemed like forever as he gazed at the façade of the little white fronted bungalow he called home, and yet in fact it was just over the hour before Shirley finally emerged. It was with a casualness that one associated with routine that she walked out of the front door and began walking back towards that infernal shoreline. The shoreline that he had once loved and had been so much part of their lives, now it somehow felt tainted, ruinous, it had in such a brief time almost become a place to shun.

Curiously, Jeffrey climbed out of the car, and began to follow her, leaving enough distance between them he hoped, so that she would not notice him. They had soon left the quiet regimented streets behind them as she made her way down toward the sea front. Intrigued, Jeffrey followed her. It was hardly seafront weather, in fact it was the typical November day misty, drizzly and Grey reflecting how he felt inside. The roaring familiar noise of waves crashing and the call of the seagulls grew stronger as they twisted their way down the muddy lane towards the beach. Luckily there were a number of other people about and so another figure on the path wouldn't stand out too much, or so he

hoped. And yet it was just that very thing that suddenly turned from friend to foe as he carelessly bumped into one of his neighbours.

"Mrs Coulson, I'm so sorry."

Mrs Coulson was a big woman and the collision had almost knocked her over, he cursed himself for not paying attention. Had he not been so intent on looking down he would have seen her, but instead here he was apologising profusely for his clumsiness.

"Mr Benson is that you, oh you frightened the life..."

"Yes, yes I really am..." It was then that he looked away, and began to scan the area for Shirley. "Damn it, Damn." He set off down to the edge of the beach looking left and right but somehow in that short time she had gone he had managed to lose sight of her. Although Jeff searched for her, it was no use she was nowhere to be found. Angrily he made his way back to the car passing the indignant Mrs Coulson on the way.

A heavy sea mist began to roll in and by the time he had phoned work to tell them of his change of plans it had become quite heavy. He almost wished that he hadn't phoned in when a blond woman came into sight, at first he

thought the figure to be Shirley but as she came closer he realised his mistake. The woman glared at the staring

figure as she passed. He averted his eyes and wondered what she must have thought of him madly eyeing her up. A noise startled him as his mobile phone informed him that he had a text message from Shirley.

It read "Have a nice day honey and do take it easy."

Bitch was all he thought.

He sat a moment longer with his eyes shut trying to blot out the thoughts rushing at him like an express train. When he did open them again he then noticed the rotund figure of Mrs Coulson who was stood at the corner watching him with a style one would come to expect from a nosy neighbour. It did however spur him into action and he quickly brought the Escort to life squealing the tyres as he set off for work.

Jeff pulled the Ford into a tiny private car park in front of a small office bearing the name of Benson and Associate Engineer Designs. It was one of those old office blocks that was starting to look a little dated. The four bay car park was now full as Jeffrey looked over and noted the ostentatious Jaguar of Bill Preston, the other half of the teams rather showy car. Bill was always flashy and gregarious but a firm favourite with the clients, whereas Jeffrey always felt a little uncomfortable dealing with them, Bill on the other hand shone at it. Andy, the junior designer's old VW Beetle, a classic as Andy would have it, seemed to be sat rusting before his very eyes; it had the sorry appearance of a long abandoned car. Tucked up in the corner was the more practical Vauxhall Corsa belonging to Ms Sheldon the secretary, and the heart of the business enterprise that was Benson Associates.

Jeff mounted the few steps leading up to the office and stepped inside the warm outer room to be greeted by the slim figure of Gillian Sheldon. "You look terrible, are you sure that it isn't you that's ill?"

Jeff gave a wave of his hand as he walked past and towards the rear office as if to say don't ask, and so she didn't.

Bill was already waiting and as Jeff sat down at his desk he shoved a letter in front of him. "This is all we need, that new mark two as failed prematurely and the company is furious, threatening to sue."

Jeff took up the letter and began to read it studiously, he turned and smiled at Bill. "Not our problem, they changed our specs. I told them not to. No doubt trying to save money, Talk to them Bill let them know what arses they've been."

Bill snorted, "I may perhaps be a little more diplomatic about it but your right the Carlisle plant is running the unaltered spec and it's been no problem, I'll ring after lunch he is always half pissed after his pub lunch...." then he added "Hell you look like death warmed ole' boy to many late nights eh?"

The routine of the day seemed to help Jeff to lighten a little as he pushed the problems he was having at home into the back of his mind. Occasionally something would remind him and the pain welled up and flooded his soul with sadness and sorrow, but he quickly pushed his feelings aside as something demanded his attention placing his mind elsewhere.

Later that day Jeffrey arrived home a little later than usual as the traffic had been worse than normal. It was already dark as he walked in through the door. The wind was beginning to pick up again it was almost as if the weather was reflecting his dark mood, the mist of the day had cleared but it was like the mist that seemed to surround his wife hiding her from him, was she really who he thought she was, did he know her at all he wondered as she greeted him with a warm smile.

"The weather is awful." moaned Jeff

"They should have turned the generator on." replied Shirley

"Generator, What generator? What are you talking about?"

"Oh, take no notice I was miles away." Jeff looked at her and she blushed slightly and turned her head away as if hiding something from him.

"How was your day?" asked Shirley

"You know, just routine as always, one step forward two back. How was yours?"

"Much the same as usual, I didn't see anyone, I didn't go out at all today. Promise that you won't give up Jeff, Promise me, no matter what, you won't give up it's so important, much more than you realise, more important than anything." She had tears in her eyes and flung herself into Jeff. Jeff despite himself wrapped his arms around her, confused he reassured her the best that he could. "I have no idea what you are talking about but ... I promise." Shirley looked up at him and smiled "Take no notice of me I'm just that side out."

He wondered how well he really knew her and above all what she had to hide. I will, he thought, follow her until I do find out.

The next day Jeffrey kissed Shirley dutifully goodbye and then once more he waited around the corner. True to form Shirley arrived roughly about the same time as the previous day, she was dressed much the same as before. Jeffrey followed the same pattern. Once again the mist swallowed up Shirley. This time thought Jeffrey I will go left. So left he went however, he was just as disappointed as before, there was no Shirley insight. Jeffrey by now was getting really annoyed, he was up until now used to everything in his life going plain sailing. This was getting to him in no uncertain terms. Jeffrey left frustrated with himself for not being able to find Shirley and angry with her

for being so deceptive. So his mood stayed with him throughout the day. This was remarked on several times during the day.

Arriving home again Jeffrey asked Shirley how was her day? Once more her answer was the same. The disappointment on Jeffrey"s face was obvious. "What's the matter with you?" Shirley ventured. "

"Nothing, nothing at all I've just had a trying day. I lost a couple of sales, I wouldn't have expected to lose."

"Oh poor you." She said affectionately stroking his face gently. " I'll run you a hot bath, that will help." Jeffrey studied her carefully today; he thought she was more like her old self. Perhaps he was worrying needlessly. Still he knew that if he was to have peace of mind he must find out what was going on.

The next morning true to form Jeffrey again embarked on his vigil. This time however, Shirley arrived thirty minutes late and looked quite flustered, In fact he noted she still had on her carpet slippers. What strange behaviour Jeffrey surmised. It was as if she had a rendezvous and dare not keep whomever she was meeting waiting. Seeing it was a very misty day. Jeffrey shadowed her closer than before. Shirley looked round only once, but never spotted him. His chances this time of seeing where she went must he thought be very good. She stopped suddenly, appearing to go into a cave. "Funny," Jeffrey said, "What an earth was she doing going into a dark cave." He ventured forward where the opening was? "It must be here." He muttered to himself, whilst pulling out his cigarette lighter. In the light he could still not find any way in. How could that be possible, he knew he had been near enough and although misty, saw her disappear at this very spot. Again frustrated he had no other recourse but to depart.

Jeffrey pondered over this all day, he knew however, that it was bad for his business and he must get this problem resolved as soon as possible. He wondered if he should confront Shirley with what he had seen. Then decided against it, because he could see that this showed a definite lack of trust on his part. If it should turn out however, that there was an innocent explanation he would look rather foolish to say the least. That night the conversation was very stilted, Jeffrey being preoccupied with the events of the day. Shirley obviously had something on her mind too. Jeffrey lay awake that night tossing and turning, after about two hours he decided to get himself a stiff drink, a nightcap. Passing by the hall on his way to the lounge, his right foot hit upon something cool and metallic. He bent down to pick it up, what's this he thought turning it over in his hands. It was a small spherical shaped metal object with two, what looked like fork prongs jutting out from the centre. This was like nothing Jeffrey had ever seen before, he noted that it fitted nicely into the palm of his hand. Where had it come from? He wondered. It was obviously Shirley's, but what on earth would she do with it? It sprang to mind that it undoubtedly had something to do with this morning and the cave. He promptly returned to his bed forgetting all about his nightcap. I will now have to confront Shirley with this object and find out what she had to say. Maybe he thought this would now be resolved once and for all.

That night Jeffrey slept soundly, the best night he had in weeks. He was up showered, shaved and breakfast ready when Shirley awoke. "What's up with you?" She said