

BELL ROCK LIGHTHOUSE

CONSTRUCTED 1807-1810
MODERNISED 1963-1964

Legend — 1, Main Navigation Light; 2, Emergency Light; 3, Tyfon Fog Signal; 4, Air Receiver; 5, Hand Operated Fire equipment; 6, Automatic fire equipment; 7, 5 K.V.A. Generating Set; 8, 10 K.V.A. Generating Set; 9, Lower bulk storage fuel tanks; 10, Upper bulk storage fuel tanks; 11, Twin air compressors (Fog Signal); 12, Salt water evaporator unit; 13, Salt water Header tank; 14, Salt water intake feeder tanks; 15, Fresh water storage tanks; 16, Adjustable bunks; 17, Intermediate floor; 18, Entrance door platform; 19, 10 cwt. wall-head jib crane; 20, Salt water toilet.

Other books available from this author:

A Collection of Ghost Stories Vol. I

A Collection of Ghost Stories Vol. II

Available from lulu.com

I would like to extend my thanks to...

Sue Baker

for burning the midnight oil

while editing this book.

In Memory of

HKW

and

NGB

Note from the Author:

Throughout the history of criminology in these Isles, once in a generation a crime of magnitude or notoriety will take place that captures the public's imagination unlike no other. Probably the most famous of all cases took place in the late summer and autumn of the year 1888, the location was London, England.

What follows is an account of the events of that time as seen through the eyes of one man, Chief Inspector Herbert Kitchener, whose notes have come to light in recent years.

Though the notes have no official status, this account is based directly on the contents.

Due to the fact that the people in the book may have living descendants, names and places may have been altered to protect their anonymity.

NW.

CHAPTER 1

In the year 1888 Queen Victoria had 13 years left on the throne. In the Strand Magazine the first Sherlock Holmes story had been published and the Police and Intelligence forces were engaged in the hunt, through the dark streets of London's East End, for Jack the Ripper

It was getting late; the tube wouldn't wait for her. The house was a mess, not in its normal state of pristine tidiness.

She heard the clank of the milkman. The wall clock showed eight thirty five. The milk was late, and if she did not hurry, so would she be.

It sometimes amazed her how she made it to the tube station on time every day. She pushed these thoughts and those of the previous evening out of her mind and fixed her mental energies on finding the jacket to her black trouser suit.

She knew that the steaming cup of coffee she carried around as she searched would go untouched as would the two slices of toast on the kitchen table which were already going cold, uneaten.

The jacket located, the coffee abandoned she closed the door behind her.

The Yale lock snapped as the door slammed shut. The house was now empty and quiet. The coffee still steaming in the mug, the toast going cold on the kitchen table.

The night before had started well. The restaurant was quiet; after all it was a Sunday night. The lack of clientele gave them a chance to talk, a chance to get to know each other a little better. He of course had chosen the

location and had shown a degree of taste; could this bode well for the future?

Their first meeting was fraught with the awkwardness of mutual attraction and the burden of age pressing on their very souls. An eternity of exchanged glances had passed between the two of them. Who would make the first move? As tradition dictates he made the primary contact. A rendezvous had been arranged and now here they were, sitting either side of the three-foot by three foot square of wooden table top, the rules of engagement were beginning to be drawn.

As the first course arrived the conversation was flirtatious, but disjointed. She would interrupt, apologise and then giggle. He would be the true gentleman and insist on her continuing. Plates empty, one set of cutlery down and the wine beginning to take effect, the conversation loosened somewhat. The couple opened up a little and expressed some of their innermost thoughts and feeling to one another.

His opening gambit had been the usual male tack. His likes - cricket, golf, football, basically sport in general. There were no surprises either in his choice of favourite consumables - real ale and curry. His career, however, did have a spark of something out of the ordinary. - A TV producer. She pursued this part of conversation asking what he had worked on? It emerged, nothing outstanding; Open University, a handful of children's programs - none of them known to her.

Apart from the TV Producer aspect of his tale, he could have been any member of the male species recounting his interests.

The main course arrived, holding off the approaching moment when she must respond with her story of loneliness. To her colleagues and friends her apparent lack of male attention was a mystery. She was, after all, an attractive woman, although she had seen thirty four summers, she could well have been mistaken for ten years her junior.

As their plates began to empty, so her tale began to unfold. Having graduated from Oxford with a first in history she gravitated towards a career in academia. After one year of C.V.'s, interviews and rejection letters she hadn't received any serious job offers and was becoming despondent.

It had been her mother, always logical, always right, that had come up with the idea of a career path for her daughter.

The question was finally asked, he seemed interested to know. The truth came out.

After the dessert, coffee and a promise to arrange another meeting, the couple parted. The capital flashed past as the taxi headed home. In her heart she knew that they would not meet again, not as a couple. So what! She had work in the morning and what was another one down. She'd enjoyed the meal and yes, even the company. It would be easy for her to be upset or even chastise herself for not trying harder to impress him, but why, it's his loss.

The next morning she passed the answer phone machine and didn't give it a second glance as the light flashed continuously. It was getting late; the tube wouldn't wait for her. The house was a mess, not in its normal state of pristine tidiness.

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A surge of bodies emerged from the entrance of Westminster underground station. She headed into the heart of the city, passed the Palace of Westminster. The faces of Big Ben showing the time, eight fifty.

In her job, time was important. Ten minutes to get to work, would she make it on time? Crossing the road she saw the familiar sign rotating. The words 'New Scotland Yard' catching the morning light that was squeezing through the surrounding buildings. To WPC Kate Wood the

building was like the city which had been her home for such a short time, it never slept? The desks are always occupied, the phones perpetually ringing, the canteen continuously dishing out egg and chips. On this particular morning the tea stained tables in the canteen were the least of her worries.

The previous day WPC Wood had received an e-mail. Her mail box frequently received all kinds of correspondence, circulars, reports, newsletters but this piece of mail had a rather important sender, no less than the ACC, Superintendent Marson. Marson was a man known by reputation. It certainly preceded him wherever he went within the force. He was known as a hard man, a hard worker who expected his officers to engage their own works with the same amount of vigour as himself.

Kate took a small intake of breath when she saw who had sent the message. Her hand became involuntary motionless on the mouse as she tried to highlight the message, gathering her thoughts as she opened the memo. As the message scrolled down the screen Kate's heart began to race. Only one month in this post and already a summons from the Superintendent.

In Marson's anti office Kate struggled to rearrange the shoulder strap of her bra. Why does that piece of clothing only irritate her at times such as this? Sitting at home, on the underground or even sitting on the toilet, not an itch. Did the bra strap register moments of tension in the wearer and move in some kind of telekinetic way?

"Come on, pull yourself together you're rambling", Kate thought to herself. There's no need to panic he's just another officer, though a senior one at that. So what did he want? Was it a special case? Does he need an assistant?

Her mind was rambling now at high speed, she knew that, but there was no way of stopping it. Had she done something heinously wrong?

No, she'd only been there a matter of a few weeks. With these thoughts rushing through her mind the door opened to the inner sanctum. This brought Kate back to the present with a sharp bump.

Superintendent Marson was holding the handle in his left hand while his right hand, open palmed, ushered her through the door and into his office.

‘WPC Wood, please come in.’

He followed her into the office. From her training she knew that her body language would be important in this interview. It gives a first subconscious impression to anyone you meet. Her mother always told her that first impressions were the most important. She walked through the door with a confident stride. Once in front of the desk she stood almost to attention, her feet parallel with her shoulders, hands held together behind her back. She gave the impression of someone not unused to conversing in the corridors of power.

“Sit down, sit down”, he commanded in a not unfriendly manner.

Kate followed the order and seated herself, with perfect posture, in the chair directly opposite him. Now feeling more relaxed she allowed herself a brief look around the room. She was surprised to see that it was decorated in the modern style, quite minimalist in some ways but most definitely the effect was ruined by the piles of papers and box files randomly dotted around the tops of the cabinets and littering the floor. Directly behind Marson, sticking out of the wall was a marble mantle piece, the fire long gone. The shelf contained an old clock, two pictures, a silver cigar case and a model of an old Metropolitan Police Box. A throw back to days long gone, before walkie-talkies, mobile phones and computers. Above the collection of curios a large black and white photograph hung. It looked as though it could possibly be the entire staff of New Scotland Yard.

Marson was in the act of pouring himself a cup of tea from the tea service on his desk. The beverage was being decanted from an ornate silver teapot into china cups.

“Tea?”

“Please, Sir.”

Marson poured out another cup full. “Help yourself to milk and sugar.” Kate poured a small amount of milk into the cup and placed it on the saucer on the desk in front of her. Marson dropped two lumps of sugar into his own cup and stirred it vigorously. “I know. I shouldn’t take it, but I’ve got to have some pleasures to break up the day. Now let me see...” He places the cup onto the desktop and opens a light brown cardboard file.

The folder contained only two sheets of A4 paper. He studied the text as though he'd never read it before but surely he must have? "So WPC, you came here straight from training. How are you finding it? Work ok for you?"

"It's a great honour Sir. I was the only cadet in my year to be posted here."

"How's the work? Is it taxing enough for you?"

"We all have to start somewhere Sir." He knew, as she did, that reading between the lines the answer was 'No'.

"I see from your record that you graduated from Oxford in..." he turns a page, "history."

"Yes Sir, as part of my degree I wrote a thesis on the link between crime and social conditions in Victorian society" she told him with pride. She remembered her days at Oxford fondly. She had been a few short months into her course when she had met Alistair, an undergraduate reading post-modern history. They had bonded almost at once and spent their entire four years together, both in lectures and socially. They had shared everything, notes, research, money and a bed.

When they both graduated, he on the back of her work, he seemed to distance himself somewhat. At least, that's the impression Kate got and then only two weeks out of the cloisters of the college he had left for South America with no word to her. Heartbroken she returned to the sanctuary of her family home. She knew he had used her for four years. Kate's mind snapped back to the present.

"Really, I do believe I've just the job for someone with your skills."

Kate was intrigued. He wasn't letting any more than that out, was this his way? Kate contemplated that thought, was he the sort who would build up your ego to ensure your full efforts would be thrust into the task selected for you or did he build you up to knock you down again?

"Finish your tea." he said, nonchalantly flicking a switch on his desk intercom and winking at Kate before addressing the machine. "Mrs. Briggs, any chance of a few biscuits in here?" Kate felt happy and surprisingly at ease drinking tea and talking to her superior and him, on

his part, appeared to be genuinely interested in her, her career and her opinions.

She would never have expected such a senior member of the police force to have the time or inclination to take such a keen interest in a junior member of the force, especially a woman. Even in today's police force the opinion of mere women didn't account for much.

Ten minutes later, the tea and biscuits consumed, WPC Wood followed Marson through the busy offices of the CID department. Always staying half a step behind her superior she felt a sense of achievement as she walked along with him, proud to be singled out over all the others for this special task.

It was nice to see the populace of the offices moving at more than a stationary rate. The normal speed of a desk bound CID officer was on average no faster than the second hand of a clock, slowly ticking away. As Marson marched through the office, legs swung off desktops, newspapers where hidden and keyboards became engaged in the sound of frantic tapping. It sounded as though the proverbial number of monkeys were busy working on the complete works of Shakespeare. Luckily for the assembled members of Marson's department he had other things on his mind.

The previous day Marson had attended a meeting with the Chief Constable and other high ranking officers. The head of the Metropolitan Police Division was in attendance accompanied by a posse of logistics and time and motion experts on secondment from the Home Office. The meeting was taking place in the comfortable surroundings of the Chief Constable's club. The steaming hot coffee was passed around freely as the meeting began. Marson should have realised there was no such thing as a free lunch.

The Chief said his piece, as did the head of the Met. That was the end of the pleasantries. The faceless bureaucrats from the Home Office occupied the next two hours of the attendee's time. A whole range of graphs, line, bar, area and charts, pie, pyramid, radar to name but a few were shown on an overhead projector during the unrelenting lecture that followed. The time and motion people talked of process flow while the logistics

representatives spoke of numbers and movements, skill matrixes and inventory.

It was clear to Marson what the outcome of the meeting would be. He realised that the axe was soon to fall on, not only his department, but also the whole of the Metropolitan Force. There were some hard times to come, he was told. On the brighter side any cost savings that could be made before the end of the financial year would be offset against the amount of next year's budget cut and job losses. Natural wastage was the term being banded around freely. Natural wastage, what was that? They had failed to mention one thing at the meeting. No one had bothered to mention anything about normal run of the mill Police work, officers on the beat. Did they not matter in this high-speed world of Internet crime? Now, at the end of the meeting, he had a heavy heart. The other attendee's, to his mind, did not share his feelings. An almost excited rumble was circling the room. To these aged, senior ranks natural wastage had only one meaning, huge pay off's and retirement to sunnier climes; playing golf in the sun or sailing around the Med. This was not for him or his department he resolutely told himself. We will find other ways of saving money. His worst fear would be to have to touch someone on the shoulder and tell them they were no longer required. What an awful prospect. What about the employees in his own charge? What would it be like for them knowing that until April next year they had the Sword of Damocles hanging over them?

Inventory. Yes, that's where he would start, get rid of as much rubbish as he could. Speaking of which...

A Junior Home Office Minister was approaching, a brandy glass in each hand. The dark liquid rotated like a whirlpool of cold tea as he walked. "Here you are Sir." The Junior Minister handed one of the glasses to Marson. "We met last year at the inner city focus group."

Yes, he remembered. Why was everything so cut and dried to the Government, everything so black and white. Take that focus group session last year for example. Inner city policing, more ethnic minorities into the force that would stop all the negativity with the local ethnic groups, simple?

His mind was wandering now, not really listening to the Minister, or interested in anything he'd said. Save money, how much had that bottle of Brandy cost? How much was the rent of this exclusive club costing his beloved Police force? No doubt the Chief would be in the secretary of the club's good books. One winner then.

Save money, where to save money? He knew just the place. Marson put his glass down, the contents untouched. Without saying a word to the Junior Minister, or anyone else in the room for that matter, he walked out. "Here we are then" Boomed Marson to Kate.

The pair stopped abruptly next to an old blue wooden door. Kate couldn't help but wonder what was going on? Why had they stopped here? As far as she could make out there were no empty desks to fill, no sign of an investigation room being used.

One or two curious heads had started to turn interested to see what the new girl and the old master were doing here?

"Shall we go in?"

Kate was confused. In one motion Marson opened the door and flicked on the old light switch which was positioned at the right hand side of the architrave. He gestured Kate through the door and she entered the mysterious room followed by Marson. Her heart sank like a stone dropped into a dark pool. The smell of damp and rotten paper filled her nostrils. Dusty shelves aligned the walls, packed full of old box files pushed in at any angle they would fit. In the centre of the room two more free standing shelving units disappeared into the gloom. Directly in front of the door an old desk was buried beneath fifty or so years of dust, its once red leather top discoloured with age. With the absence of any windows in the room the only illumination was provided by the single low wattage light bulb suspended from the cobwebbed ceiling. Kate had more than a good idea what she would be doing for the next month or so.

All the fears she had nestled at the back of her mind had projected themselves front and centre. Women in the Police Force were only good for helping old ladies across the road or giving road safety lectures to primary school children. She became aware of Marson standing next to her.

"This," he said with an air of pride in his voice, "is the Blue Room"

Kate was not impressed.

“Stored in this room are the case files of Scotland Yard going back to the mid. 1870’s. I would like you to sort through them. This should be a perfect opportunity for you to dig into the murky world surrounding this station.”

“Yes Sir.” She could hardly mask the disappointment in her voice.

Marson, always the gentleman, dusted down the old swivel chair adjacent to the desk. His handkerchief lost in the cloud of aggravated dust. Who was the last person to rest themselves in this chair? It looked as though it had been there since at least the early thirties.

“Have a read through the files, if they are not of historical importance then put them to one side to be shredded. If you deem them worthy of keeping they’ll be put onto a computer disk or stored on the Police computer or somewhere, not sure how they do it?” He stood up from the chair, “There you go, all ready for you.” He put the handkerchief back into his jacket breast pocket with a flourish, like a magician in the process of a trick. Did he do that in his spare time, at kids’ parties maybe? ‘The Great Marson, the Magic Copper.’

“I’ll leave you to it, enjoy yourself.” With that final rejoinder Marson exited the room closing the door behind him.

Kate looked around. The room was dark and cold, the sickly sweet smell of yellowing paper hung in the air. A layer of grey dust lay on everything, the metal light shade the box files, the racks, the floor. She surveyed the desk. How many cases had found their way into this room over the years? One hundred and twenty years of notes, evidence and charge sheets, who where the people resident in these case files, what ghosts would she meet in the archives.

The first pile of files fell onto the desk. Dust blew in misty clouds out from between the folders.

“Lovely!” the lone word came forward with more than a hint of sarcasm. Out of the corner of her eye she spotted something, salvation. It was an old gas heater, now, could she make it work? A high-pitched screech made her cringe as she dragged it across the floor from its historical home across to the desk. Slumping down in the chair from her exertions she turned the switch on the top half a turn. From the lower half of the

antiquated piece of machinery a low hiss escaped, ‘gas!’ Click, click, click, the igniter crackled into life. Whoosh, the orange and blue flame jumped out of the grill. She felt the heat on her calves. Time to get to work.

The first box, open on the desk. The contents placed one by one on the remaining free surface. Items listed, a black pocket note book, a man’s large gold wristwatch and a charge sheet. Ian Rohem, age 19, date 27 March 1974, charge, theft of gold wristwatch from pawnbrokers, Jacobs Well Mews.

I wonder what happened to him? He’d be in his forties now, middle aged. Was he a guest of her majesty or was he a responsible father with a nine to five office job? That could go for anyone whose names have found their way into this room. Most of them would be dead now, their acts of crime long forgotten. This is hardly the look into the criminal masterminds of London’s history she was hoping for.

The paper would be the first of many to make its way into the shredding pile, the watch, put to one side. Any items such as this could be sent to a charity shop or auctioned off for some worthy cause. She could use the box file for keeping them in.

The next file for attention was a plain A4 card folder. Its contents, a single charge sheet. Miss Sarah Chandler, age 26, date 4 May 1984, charge, soliciting. Shredder fodder. Let’s do the poor woman a favour, destroy her past history.

The morning dragged on. It was hard to have any sense of time in a room with no windows. Without a point of reference the brain cannot judge the minutes elapsing. By the time ten thirty had come around, Kate would have given anything for a cup of coffee. The storeroom had heated up nicely now and was quite comfortable.

Mind made up, she would go down to the canteen and get herself a cup of coffee and a bun. The caffeine injection would do her wonders and set her up to nit pick through the archives. Leaving the heater switched on so as to have a warm welcome back into the dark room, she left, closing the door behind her.

At that very moment Karen Christopher-Martin was having a similar thought. Karen was a slim, dark haired woman in her early thirties and

had started on the very same morning as Kate. They met in the reception whilst awaiting their escort onto the premises. The women had become good friends over the last few months, both had few friends in the capital and had at least the job in common. Karen had been put straight behind a desk doing no more than secretarial work. Her aspirations had been much greater than the tasks so far allotted to her.

The feeling of frustration was constant. She had experience in several unusual fields and a career in a special operations unit would have followed her training. After the incident in the gym when she had almost paralysed the self-defence instructor, an ex marine, she made no secret of her past. Karen was an expert in most martial arts and a contender for the Olympic shooting team so why had she been overlooked for Special Operations? Kate already knew the answer to that question, she knew Karen would make it, time was on her side.

Now the two WPC's enjoyed each other's company both professionally and socially. The two women often hit the town together on their days off. On such occasions it was becoming apparent to Kate that Karen's attitude towards the male gender differed from her own. Karen's attitude was that men were there to be used and had had many relationships. Most of her flirtations would only last a week or so, but still in her eyes 'a success'. Kate's ideas of a success in the relationship stakes were somewhat more conservative.

Kate spotted her friend in the queue for the drinks counter in the canteen. Her shape was unmistakable, broad powerful shoulders tapering down to shapely hips and legs. Kate silently came up behind, "Hello" Karen did not show any hint of surprise just slowly and coolly turned around to greet her friend.

"Where have you been all morning? I tried ringing your desk phone."

"Special duties for the ACC." She made the task sound considerably more glamorous than it actually was.

"Oh get her" mocked Karen, smiling.

The queue was small and already the drinks counter had arrived, "Tea please." Karen requested. The young girl serving the drinks slammed a white mug down under the boiler, pulled the lever and watched the boiling water slop around, in and out of the cup. Once full, the adolescent

girl heavy-handedly put it on the tray, then as a robot on a production line she sat on the stool next to the till.

“...and a coffee, please.” She turns to Kate, “Coffee ok?”

“Thanks”

The young girl gave a large sigh before repeating the process of drink dispensing. As the water poured, the aroma of coffee filled the air. The charming assistant perched back on her stool, read out the sub total off the small screen on the till.

“Two pound fifty.” Not a note of human feeling in her voice.

The payment handed over, Karen takes the tray and makes a beeline for the nearest free table. Karen then moves on to the next table and the next. Finally she lays the tray down on the first available clean table top, not that there were many around. Some of the eating surfaces had been cleared of disregarded cups and sandwich wrappers, but the surfaces not cleaned down.

“I can’t stop.” apologised Kate.

“Why?” Karen asked as she seated herself.

It was time to come clean. “There’s an old store room upstairs needs clearing out and guess who’s got the job?”

“You?”

“You bet. Marson said how interesting I’d find it, being a history graduate.”

“And is it?”

“If you think petty crime, domestics and prostitution interesting then yes.”

“Nothing juicy?” Karen had a glint in her eye.

“Not yet.” Kate checks her watch. The job she has been tasked with may be a boring one, but that doesn’t mean she would not give it her full attention.

“What time is it” Karen asks with an anxious look on her face.

“Half past, why?”

Karen suddenly stands up and puts the lid on her cup of tea.

“I’ve got to be going. I’m at a presentation about overspend or something with the Super. On for a drink after work?” she is desperately trying to put on her jacket one-handedly.

“Why not, nothing else doing” A drink after work would be a well-earned reward after the mind numbing boredom of the day. Kate would look forward to it. Something always happened when these two ‘singletons’ got together.

Unbeknown to the pair their work colleagues had nicknamed them ‘Jones and Bridget’. If they had ever found out the reaction would have probably been a favourable one. No one, however, had ever chanced engaging the wrath of the high kicking Karen. Their own ‘nick’ names for one another seemed to be more degrading than the male members of the workforce. Kate had christened Karen ‘Ginger Pony’ after one particular night of Karen’s flirtations with the opposite sex. Karen not to be outdone returned the pseudonym to fit Kate’s colouring, ‘Blonde Pony’ she would be known as, from that day.

As the storeroom door swung open a wave of heat hit Kate like a marathon runner hitting the mythical ‘wall’. Without further ado she turned down the heater before collecting the next set of files. She took a sip of her coffee.

The old file swung open, this looked more promising. Inside the folder lay an old leather pocket book. On closer examination the leather had cracked and faded with age, but how old was it? An elastic band held the covers closed. Next to take her attention was a bundle of papers held together with a red ribbon. All the text on the sheets, as far as could be made out, was in ink from a fountain pen. The handwriting looked almost copperplate, most definitely old school. Kate very carefully took out the book and wedge of papers and placed them gently down on the table. As Kate’s slender fingers picked up the book and gently tugged at the elastic band, it disintegrated on touch falling onto the tabletop. The book was carefully opened and Kate read the contents with interest.

31st August 1888

Suspect, Tall, Well Dressed. Top Hat Cloak.

Carrying Doctors bag.

Foggy Night did not see suspect’s face.

Followed down to River, took small boat up stream to Westminster.

“Wow” Kate said out loud.

Closing the notebook she noticed the gold leaf initials ‘H.K.’ in the bottom right hand corner of the front leather bound cover, Was this what she thought it was? No it couldn’t be. She turned her attention to the sheets of paper. The notes had been written by a Chief Inspector Herbert Kitchener, of course the H.K. on the book. A date was etched in the margin, 1888.

“My god!” what was she reading. Could this be the case notes of one of the most notorious crimes in the history of the Police Force?

Kate reads on...

CHAPTER 2

27 August 1888

The heavy iron girders holding aloft the pier disappeared in the heavy heat haze rising from the beach, it was a hot day. The huts standing along the seafront were occupied with day-trippers and residents of the grand old regency town of Brighton. Along the front gentlemen adorned in blazers and white flannels paraded with their wives and sweethearts. Donned in their stripy jackets they almost blended into the deckchairs that stretch out into the distance weaving in and out of the countless octogenarians. Parasols were the order of the day for the pale skinned fairer sex. The glare emanating off the sea of white lace discs was only matched by the glare from the August sun reflecting off the English Channel. For the owners of the shops, stalls, curios and bazaars that inhabited the length of the magnificent pier, the great engineering fete of the Victorian engineers, the summer had been a profitable one. The season had been a long one and the bank holiday had been a worthy swan song. Many a pound had been spent on the various magical machines, souvenirs and strange cure-all potions that were to be found for sale.

Very soon another customer would be heading towards the booth occupied by Mrs Betty Porter. A woman in her late fifties who had made a living in the travelling fairs that would roam around the country selling their wares at shows and village fates. Over the years she had saved enough money to purchase a booth in one of the most affluent locations she could ply her trade. She didn't require any particular skills for her employment; the gift of the gab and a keen eye was all that was required. The sign above the entrance of her booth was a vivid yellow adorned with green letters with a red shadow. The like of which could be seen on any Romany caravan.

‘Gypsy Rose – The Original Medium (7th Generation)’

If she was, as the sign promised, a medium she would have already foretold that her next clients were on their way down the pier.

Herbert and Muriel Kitchener strolled arm in arm along the boardwalk enjoying the late summer bank holiday. It was something of a rarity for Herbert Kitchener to be off duty on a bank holiday. His superiors though on this occasion had granted him a day's furlough and his spouse was determined to make the most of it. The day was something of a special occasion, for Muriel at least. It was her first day out of the smoke filled streets of London for many years and her first trip to Brighton. Having paraded the sea front, spent a dreamy hour at the bandstand listening to the music, she insisted on a walk along the pier.

Herbert Kitchener, unlike his wife, had visited the seaside resort once before. In his capacity as a Chief Inspector with Scotland Yard a murder investigation had brought him here.

A member of the public had reported that a duel, of all things, had taken place in St. James Park early one winter's morning. Kitchener had raised more than an eyebrow when his commander had ordered him to investigate.

An argument had broken out between two well-to-do gents whom, by the testimony, he could gather seemed to be not entirely right in the head. The dispute was over a young woman from a rich society family. Her father would not entertain either of the suitors. The two men, however, were still determined to make the woman theirs and the contest was set.

Kitchener picked up the man who had acted as referee on that cold morning. To save himself from being accused as an accessory to the crime he had been eager with information regarding the whereabouts of the victor in the battle.

Kitchener traced the suspect to one of the large hotels that adorn the Brighton sea front and the arrest was made. It was a simple affair with no resistance being given. The man was duly shipped back to the capital, where he had been put on trail at Streatham Assizes. The following spring, early one morning, he was hung by the neck on the gallows, his sins had found him out.

Muriel spotted the brightly coloured sign. The yellow, green and red screaming out to the passers by, easily visible through the crowded walkway. "Come on Bert, let's go in here." She attempted to manoeuvre her husband towards the red velvet curtain that separated the fortune-teller's inner sanctum from the outside world.

"Don't be daft." Came the reply. Herbert Kitchener was a logical man who held firm views about such things as the spiritual medium. One such person was occasionally called in by Scotland Yard to aid in the more baffling cases.

The man who purported to have a direct link with the spirit world would be allowed onto a crime scene. An act would follow, the medium would feel the 'energies left by the departed soul in the atmosphere'. Once the contact was made he would then shout out any random pieces of information vaguely relating to the identity of the killer. If he really was in communication with the spirit world wouldn't it just be easier to ask the victim of the crime, 'Who had done it?'

Kitchener had abandoned all faith in the prospect of an after life long ago. At one time he would have given a second, third or even fourth thought to the idea. Could the spirits of the dead communicate with the living? He knew his wife believed. She had never been a practising churchgoer, but he knew she believed. He being a case hardened officer of the Metropolitan Police had seen enough in his career to know there was no magic in the world, no link to the other side.

On special occasions the couple would have an evening out at one of London's many West End theatres. It was at the Palace they had seen a

magician lay a young lady on a board suspended between two chairs. After all the unnecessary waving of arms and running around the stage the magician removed the chair supporting the young assistant's feet. The girl remained parallel to the stage. A gasp went up from the audience followed by a stunned silence as the man of magic prepared to remove the chair supporting the girl's head. When the chair was whipped out from under her it was a signal for the amazed crowd in the auditorium to first sit in stunned silence and then erupts into a crescendo of applause. The crowd roared their approval as the second chair was replaced and the girl, removed from her hypnotic trance, took a bow with the magician. A trick, that's all it was, a trick. Just as much a show man as the Police psychic. Muriel, her arm linked through his, began to lead the reluctant Bert towards the booth.

"Come on, let's get our fortune told."

"They make it up as they go along."

Muriel wasn't having any of it. "They don't you know." She protested.

Muriel had first hand experience of the power of a medium. At least that is what she purported. In fact it was only second hand experience.

Earlier that year a travelling fair had arrived on the local park in Streatham Hill, South London. Among the wonders to behold, nestled between the bearded women and the escapologist, was 'The Greatest Man on the Five Continents.' Mr Mathew Smith was a spiritual medium. The sign above the door on his gypsy caravan promised any visitor a porthole into the future.

A young girl of only twenty-four summers entered the dwelling one summer's afternoon. Elizabeth Parry, a neighbour of the Kitcheners crossed the gypsy's palm with silver and awaited his pronouncements from the mists of time.

The old man told her many things before he dropped the bombshell.

Muriel was busy convincing Bert as to the accuracy of the fortune teller.

"That Parry girl from across the passage, she had her tealeaves read at the fair. The old man that did her, said she would be pregnant by the end of the summer and her not even married. You know what happened, she's three month gone now." Muriel's face clearly expressed her disapproval

of the fact, but at the same moment the feeling of triumph over her almost too matter of fact husband.

“He’d probably seen her down the east end of a night, plying her trade” Herbert Kitchener said. His off hand gesture he hoped would knock the enthusiasm out of his spouse.

Not having any of this Muriel dragged him inside. She knew what she knew. Too many tales had been told in the housewives gatherings, which were a daily occurrence in the Mews and passages around the town. Several of the gossips had stories to tell of mystics, their predictions and how they had come true. In no way, shape or form could the tales ever be verified, did they ever happen, let alone come to fruition.

Kitchener allowed himself to be dragged in. It wasn’t often his wife had a chance to experience the events of today, so he complied. As the red velvet curtain swished behind them they could have been entering a different part of the world. The room was dark and surprisingly cool, the only illumination was a single gas lamp suspended from the ceiling, red coloured glass encasing the dim flame. Inside it was extremely quiet, almost eerie, after the hectic rabble outside. It took a few moments for their eyes to adjust to the gloomy surroundings.

In the 10' by 10' room only shadows could be made out. The room was empty. Lining the walls hung old music hall bills with her name proudly displayed. A round table sat in the middle of the room covered with a green velvet cloth. A stained glass light shade diverted the red light onto the tablecloth.

“Please be seated.” A voice came from the darkness.

Muriel obeyed the command while Bert trying not to look surprised had a quick look around to try and locate the voice. In defiance he remained standing.

The woman turned to face them. She was standing directly opposite, the table between them. Strangely though Bert could have sworn she wasn’t there a moment ago. The shawl that draped over her rounded shoulders was black, maybe that had camouflaged her from his view as some animals disguise themselves from predators.

At first glance she was a gypsy, her clothes at least were of that style. Her face appeared strangely pale even in the red glow of the light; the cold almost opaque features gave her a look of near death. On her head was tied a red scarf, small gold disks hung from the hem and jangled every time the slightest movement occurred.

“Please be seated” the kindly voice requested, not ordered, as was Kitchener’s first impression. He seated himself. Happy with the conditions the old medium also seated herself. After a moments meditation she omitted a large sigh, closed her eyes and placed her old wrinkled hands, palms down on the table. The two long yellow nails of her thumbs crossing one another.

“It is customary to ask you to cross my palm with silver. By doing this act the future will become clear to us all.” Her hands turn; the palms turn skywards awaiting the penance for a glimpse into events not yet seen. Muriel picks up her handbag and places it on her lap, fumbling around in her purse for the fee. Seeing his wife in a state of confusion, Bert handed over a hand full of coins. Once the cash was safely deposited a pack of Tarot Cards are placed onto the tabletop.

“Cut the cards” ordered the old women.

Muriel transfixed by the gypsy did as she was asked. The cards were retrieved and dealt in a grid three by four. The bottom right corner a second card is laid on top of the corner card at a ninety-degree turn.

“Now behold the future.” Her old blue veined hand turned over the first card slowly, followed by another. The medium ponders before speaking,

“Children are important to you?” Her opening gambit was thrown.

“Not really.” Kitchener interjected thinking he would try to nip this in the bud. Shoot her down early, make her look incompetent and maybe they could leave and get on with enjoying the rest of the bank holiday.

Muriel had fallen for the bait the suggestion planted in her mind was already finding a link. It was quite clear to her exactly what the seer was referring to.

“Edith my sister that is, she has two girls. Do you mean her?” The question sounded as though it was spoken rhetorically. Did Muriel in her heart know it was in all probability a con? If she’d have been asked she would have said yes, but at this time she really wanted it to be real.

The fortune-teller jumps immediately on the affirmative. Suddenly her manner changed, as did her attention.

“You Sir.”

Surprise, mentally he takes a step back as she turned over the cards.

“Yes.” The sceptical reply came with a hint of irony in his voice.

After studying the cards for not more than a couple of seconds she ventured her next words of wisdom. “The letters H and K are showing themselves to me.” A pause follows waiting a reaction. Muriel is jumping up and down on her chair at this latest revelation, how did this old woman know. For her there was only one explanation, her mood of excitement was very shortly to come crashing down.

“Your work is important to you. You have not reached your true station professionally, you will” Muriel almost fell from the chair. She couldn’t believe the talents of the old woman sitting opposite. The letters, her husband’s initials and his work, was he up for a promotion? “I will now turn over the final two cards, these cards are the most important of the reading. The zenith of knowledge.” Slowly she turns the cards.

As the first shows its identity, Muriel takes a sharp intake of breath. The card depicts a skeleton in the guise of a ferryman, punting his boat across the River Styxs, ‘Death’ inscribed in black letters at its base. Not wanting to give out any prophecy of doom the old woman was quick to reassure her clients.

“Please do not alarm yourselves. The death card signifies that a change of circumstances is approaching. One of you will be heading in another direction in the not too distant future.”

Relief, at least for one of the three bodies around the table.

The final card is revealed. The card showed the image of a castle turret being struck by lightning, the word ‘tower’ at the base.

“What does it mean?”

The old gypsy sat behind the cards almost in a self-imposed trance.

“What does it mean?” repeated Muriel.

“The Tower signals, Death” before her client could speak again, “it may not be anyone you know, the spirits are sometimes confused, just as we can be.” Panic was setting into her voice, “The reading is over.”

No more would be forthcoming from the lips of the seer. The couple stepped out of the cool serenity of the booth back into the hot August sunshine. Muriel was not at ease with the predictions recently foretold. She held her husband's arm, partly for safety and partly for comfort. Bert knew his wife had been moved by what had been said. He would try and cheer her up.

"Are you ok, you've gone awfully quiet? You're not putting too much on that are you?" he gestured back towards the booth.

"You heard what she said."

"You don't believe any of that, do you?"

"You heard her, the Tower, Death. Who's it going to be?"

"I'm not going to worry too much," Bert said in an off hand manner.

"She got your initials right, H, K." this to her was proof absolute.

"A smart piece of detective work that is" he explained. When standing in the booth he had seen the woman's eyes scan him from head to toe looking for anything she could use in her work. "My initials are on the fob of my watch chain, the chain you bought me, and she just simply saw them and remembered them. I wish some of the men down at the 'Yard' had such keen observation skills when in the field.

The tour of Brighton's famous landmarks continued. Muriel didn't want the afternoon to end. It had been a fabulous day, but now the day was drawing to a close. The sun now cooler on the skin and redder in colour as it began to sink below the pavilion.

"Where would you like your supper then?" Bert checked the time before returning the watch to his pocket. "We've only got an hour before the train." The heavens were burning red and orange, on the beach only a handful of bodies remained.

"Could we have fish and chips at one of the café's along the front?" This would be the perfect end to her Brighton odyssey.

"Of course"

In the west the sun had almost set on the perfect day. Not that Muriel Kitchener saw anything of it. Her legs stretched out in front of her as she slept in the second-class compartment. Bert looking out of the window at the countryside rushing by felt her head slump against one of his broad shoulders. Turning towards her he saw his wife asleep. With a smile he

turned once more to look out of the window towards the twilight sky. The train laboured towards London and home, a London that, by the end of the week would never be quite the same again.

On the road connecting High Wycombe with its neighbouring village of West Wycombe sits a small church on a hill. The hill over the ages had been the location of many buildings. An Iron Age fort resided here in the 5th century and before that it had always commanded a position of strategic advantage.

In the 1750's a series of harvests had failed in the agricultural economy of this part of Buckinghamshire. Sir Henry Dashwood (later Lord de Despence) observed the failing and looked upon the farmers and their families with pity. Fate also shone on him. Fate was a factor Dashwood took as a direct sign from God. He did not adhere to that particular deity though.

The farmers gathered together on his land one sunny September morning in 1745. A fair wage was promised to every man who gave a fair days labour. The plans presented to the labour force were of a system of caves to be excavated beneath his estate.

The system would consist of half a mile of tunnel intersected with seven chambers. Stewarts Cave, Whitehead Cave, Franklins Cave, Children's Cave, the Banquet Hall, Miners Cave, then over the River Styx and finally the Inner Temple.

Dashwood's promise of good money dispelled the questions raised of, why? Over the course of the construction many rumours and gossip spread around the surrounding villages as to the reason for the caves. In the local coaching inn the word was that an invasion force was being amassed on the other side of the Channel. The caves would serve as a bolt hole for the government to retreat in times of national crisis. On the completion of the caves a gothic church facade was erected fuelling more rumours and speculation.

In 1752 the Hell Fire Club opened its doors for the first time. In its years of operation many famous people passed through the gothic entrance. John Wilkes MP, Lord Sandwich, the First Lord of the Admiralty and the American statesman Benjamin Franklin to name but a few. Many clubs

and societies have also held their meetings there; the Dilettante Society and the Divan Club were regular visitors.

Events that actually took place in the catacombs were much more macabre. Satanic rituals and orgies were the main activities indulged in and even the grotesque act of human sacrifice took place. Dashwood and his cohorts would indulge their outrageous dalliances with much merry making.

The Hell Fire club came to an end, the cave closed to public and private use, but tonight a one-off meeting would take place.

Around dusk an intermittent flow of gentlemen entered through the gothic facade. This collection of men was no ordinary group. Among their number could be found Government Ministers, high-ranking civil servants and Ambassadors. All the attendees entered the cave wearing black cloaks and white masks.

Lord Moran walked the long corridor linking the circle and Franklin's Cave. The sole lantern in his left hand lit the way, his right hand skimming the wall as he slowly felt his way along the dark passage.

Fear and trepidation coursed his veins. The passage was the most frightening place he had ever been and he a battled hardened officer in the Scots Guards.

All the members of the secret society would be dressed in the same attire. If he had met one on his way he would have probably died of heart failure. His Lordship was not one for showing any sign of emotion least of all fear.

By his own calculation it seemed he had walked a quarter of a mile when footsteps could be heard to his rear. In the field his army training would tell him to utilise any naturally available cover. Here in this rat hole, no cover was available. This was a concern on two levels; firstly all the high council of the society was here, an ambush waiting to happen. Secondly no one was bringing up the rear; this was a badly organised rendezvous. The footsteps echoed his own. He stopped, so did the mystery footsteps. As he began to move once more the sound once again started. Increasing the pace Franklin's cave was finally breached. Here there was adequate

cover to wait and discover who his pursuer was. Crouching behind a rock he waited.

A minute passed, then another. No one came into the cave. Conscious of the time, he had to move on, the meeting would not wait. Maybe the footsteps he had heard were only an echo after all.

It was with trepidation that he passed over the River Styx and stood at the entrance of the Inner Temple.

A voice from the darkness broke the silence, "We've been waiting, take your place."

The cavern was approximately thirty feet in diameter and fifteen feet high in the centre. Twelve men had already taken their place in a large circle, the final member of the gathering arrived, the circle was now complete. The task was at hand.

Chapter 3

Night had fallen, the land turned over to the nocturnal creatures. The fox, badger and hedgehog roamed freely with only the occasional poacher to be avoided. No animal could be found directly above the sanctum of the Hell Fire caves. Could the creatures of the night sense the brewing storm or could it be the smell of blood, long since spilt on the Altar. A train of thirteen nuns, heads bowed, entered the caves gothic frontage unnoticed. Way below ground level in the Inner Temple thirteen masked bodies faced each other. None of them would know the identities of the other attendees at the gathering. These gentlemen, some of the most powerful in the Empire all had something in common. They could pass one another day to day without knowing that they were part of one of the most secret and ancient societies on the planet. Its heritage can be traced from ancient Egypt, through Persia, up to Italy and across Europe during the renaissance. The trail crossed northern Europe spending time in Napoleon's France and now finally coming to rest at the centre of the British Empire. It would soon be moving on once again to the America's to establish a new power base.

Along with its more well known sister society the Freemasons, it had a foothold in the corridors of power across the world. They were the Luminary.

“In the last year I have travelled as part of my remit as Minister for...”

“No names or references Sir.”

“I do apologise Sir, having travelled to the colonies in India and South Africa it is clear to me that our Services are seriously under provisioned. The repercussions of the Crimea are still being felt, not to mention the Zulu Wars.

“This is all irrelevant, the lower classes in this country are getting above their station. They seem to think because they have done a days work it entitles them to certain rights. The ugly head of socialism and trade unions is starting to raise its head once more, even rumours of votes for all citizens has been heard. As far as I know she has said nothing?”

“The rabble in India will not stay silent for much longer.” Interjected another voice, the mask muffling his voice, “Unless action from the top is taken to quell the situation there will be an uprising. It happened before, the mutiny.”

The group fell silent, the chairman thought for a minute considering the options. “It would seem to me drastic action is required. If we do not act, our power base will be depleted. I am open to suggestions.

A deep voice boomed from behind one of the masks, “The Prime Minister is more at home with keeping the Lady happy than with the efficient running of the colonies. I suggest we move on him.”

“Why not go above him, replace the head and the body will move to a different set of commands.”

“Mr Chairman, Albert, he would be as easily manoeuvred as a mannequin.”

A moment of silence followed. The group digested the information and plans revealed. “We must stay in the shadows. It is vital that if we replace the monarch with him, we cannot be seen to be pulling the strings of, as you so rightly said, the mannequin. The protection of the society must remain over all.”

“I have an idea Sir, of how to remove her and keep our hands clean and the society secret.”

The chairman turned to see the line of nuns enter the Inner Temple. As they entered one by one the habits draped over their shoulders fell to the floor. It was clear that these women were no sisters of mercy, more whores of Babylon.

“We shall discuss the details later. I see the entertainment has arrived.”

Home for the Kitcheners’ was a small two up, two down terraced house. It sat at the bottom of a passage leading off Jacobs Mews, Paddington Green. The oven was the focal point of the small kitchen. Here Muriel would cook all manner of delicious food for her husband to enjoy. The aroma of freshly baked bread would escape through the green, wooden framed windows out into the yard, welcoming Bert home after a busy night at the yard. “The best smell in the world.” He would say as he came through the back door.

The clean sea air of Brighton enjoyed only five days ago was a complete contrast to the smoggy air of London. As the passengers disembarked from the train the smell of soot and sewage seemed to Kitchener to be more pungent than normal. He made his way to Scotland Yard for his evening shift; he stopped for a second to view the river. The fog clung to it like bindweed around a plant. After a warm day the night felt cold, not many of the inhabitants of the city were about. A handful of men came and went from public house to public house, the odd staggering minister meandering across the green. The usual collection of prostitutes was dotted randomly around the street corners offering their usual services at the usual rates. Why did they all dress like music hall tarts? London had been like this for as long he’d been at the Yard, nothing really changed in the capital, like the Empress they would remain for ever.

That was one thing noticeably absent from his day out; women of ill repute were noticeably absent from Brighton. Were all the men folk of that seaside town content in that area? Thinking on, looking at the average age of the inhabitants they had little need for women of the night.

A young constable stood guard at the foreboding black iron gates at the entrance of Scotland Yard. A brief salute was offered by the youth. In the courtyard a four-wheeled carriage passed him on its way into the dark streets. Kitchener's thoughts again returned to the present. Every night he would enter this famous old building. Telegrams would come in, be sorted and despatched to the relevant department, maybe one or two would come his way. If they ever did they were always the same, domestics, robbery, a body found in the river. What chance had the force of solving a murder when the body had been dumped in the River Thames several weeks earlier? The pathologist had given nothing away, only guessing at the nearest week to death. Age was a non-starter; at least he could have a fare stab at the sex of the cadaver. Even when a list of persons lost had been consulted it could have been one of fifty or sixty persons at least. Solving crime in this vast metropolis was not an easy task.

Inside the gas lit offices where he resided professionally, the night watch were already at their work. Piles of paper had collected all over the desks as the officers and constables alike sifted, sorted, filed and destroyed the sheets. Telegrams came and went, collated at the front desk. Once read by the desk sergeant he would distribute them around the relevant chief inspectors to discharge among the ranks. On Kitchener's desk lay a mountain of unsorted work to be dealt with. That was the trouble with having a couple of days leave, the work didn't stop arriving and with the shortage of personnel it was left up to the whole workforce to clear the backlog of cases, regardless of attendance. Passing an eye over his overburdened desk he picked a piece of paper at random.

The note was written in the desk sergeant's hand. The style was very much like his manner, large and unwieldy. Mrs Fortesque of Romford Gardens has filed a report accusing a neighbour, a Mrs April of having a garden fire in the hours of daylight.

"My God." He said to no one in particular. Is this the best the whole city can offer in the annals of crime? A glass of whisky beside him, Kitchener sifted through the reports. He became aware that at the far end of the office a small commotion had ensued. He presumed that a shipment of opium must have been intercepted at the docks. This sort of excitement normally followed such an event. Not that any of the drug had ever made

its way into his possession, unlike some of his fellow officers, or so it was rumoured.

He ignored it. The perpetual pile of paper sitting awaiting his attention hadn't decreased in size at all. He was too busy with his lot to be worried about another case.

The woman at the centre of the chaos was Edith Higgins. Edith was one of the many prostitutes to be found in and around the East End. This particular woman though was not like the others.

Edith was an attractive woman and well educated. She knew and could converse on wide range of topics and at any level. Literature was a particular passion of hers, Shakespeare being high on her list of most read authors.

Miss Higgins was from good stock; her family was a respectable middle class one. The head of the brood, Arthur, made his money in the tea trade. His company had owned three tea clippers until last year. The first tea leaves harvested would arrive in London at the start of the picking season. Now his fleet had been expanded, for last year the company had at great expense purchased a steam going iron ship. The journey from the far-east plantations had been cut in half. His tea was the first to hit the London market and fetch the highest price.

Edith had been taken under the wing of the family business as a clerk in the shipping offices on Pall Mall. With her excellent education she soon found her niche and became head clerk. Somewhat of a grand job for a woman, a still young woman. The gentlemen working under her after a month or so of bitterness soon realised that the best person had the job and besides who was going to complain to her father?

Then why was Edith Street walking at night? She had become bored with office life and the family firm. She wanted more. Not more money, she always had money in abundance, she wanted more excitement in her life. On mentioning to her father the prospect of going 'in company' to oversee the tea harvest she thought this may give her the adventure she sought.

He did not agree.

"No daughter of mine is going to foreign parts with its disease, pirates, cut throats and brigands. Its no place for a young lady" At that moment Edith

made the decision that she would make her own way in life, so she left the family firm.

As far as she could see the empire was ruled by men. Only one woman had a say and she was at the very top. If Edith couldn't command power and authority in the official world then she could move in those circles unofficially and manipulate the men of power for her own needs, and make a fortune doing it.

Edith put her good looks, intelligence and excellent education to good use. She was only a prostitute, but she was at the head of her trade. Her clientele were all high-ranking members of the government and civil service, not quite the premier and his close circle of ministers, but still a handful of the cabinet were on her client list.

Tonight she had been on her way to a rendezvous with a high-ranking civil servant when she had come across a dead body. Her thoughts had been elsewhere. The last two nights had been quiet, all her usual clients for some reason had been out of the capital. Her eyes had almost missed the body lying there. Eyes focused, brain re-acted, the body froze. She tried to scream. Eventually it came out. Passers by began to gather round then the constabulary arrived. Minutes later she had entered the gates of Scotland Yard.

The noise continued. Kitchener reluctantly swung his legs off the desk and craned his neck over in the direction of the front desk. All the attention seemed to be centred on a woman of about thirty years.

"What the hells going on?" another rhetorical question. As a senior officer and because he was bored of the hum-drum cases assigned to him he would make it his business to find out what was going on. There was no need for him to trouble himself with finding out as she was destined to be escorted to him.

The woman it seemed had brought something into the station that was out of the ordinary. This he thought as he walked along between the rows of desks would need the personal touch. Chief Inspector Kitchener with his wide stride arrived at the front desk before any of the lower ranked officers could get a word of sense out of the women. As he arrived at the gathering the crowd miraculously parted like Moses parting the Red Sea allowing Kitchener access to Edith.

His first impression was that this was a well-to-do woman in a state of distress. On these points he was correct though he was wrong on another. Kitchener would never have considered her being in the trade she pedalled. As he engaged her she was out of breath and trying to talk. Kitchener gave the order, "You two there, help her to my desk and get her a cup of tea or something." Two burly constables each with an arm under her own helped her across the office and set her down in Kitchener's chair. "Thank you men. You can get back to work now." A nod of recognition came from the two men who returned to their duties. "Now my dear..." Kitchener asks offering her the whiskey glass, which she takes off him and drains in one slug. "What can we do for you?" The woman of ill repute composes herself before excitedly blurting out the words, "She's dead, there's been..." her voice trails off as she points towards the door she had recently entered. Now using all her composure to make herself understood, "Murder, in Whitechapel.

On the hills above Edinburgh a cold wind blew in off the North Sea, The day had been warm, but now the mood of the weather had changed for the worse. The night had cut its way across the cobbled streets, which were now dark and empty. The only life to be seen was the occasional vagrant ambling along. The gaslights illuminated their faces, which were red from the effect of the cold wind.

There was another man around the streets that night and he wasn't a homeless traveller. He could quite easily have been mistaken for a vagrant, skulking around the shadows a green whiskey bottle in his hand, but looks can be deceiving.

John Cooper kept in the doorways and alleys out of sight, turmoil running through his head. What was he doing. He knew he'd get caught, just like last time.

Did he care?

No.

He was only doing this for the honour of his ancestral line. Crossing the street he could feel the cobbles under his feet, feet that he must be in agony with, cracked, split and red raw.

He didn't feel the pain.

Another dark alley to hide in. A lamp lighter passed the entrance to the alley. No work for his trade here, all the gas lamps were illuminated. Cooper's paranoia frightened him into a freeze, was the lighter spying on him? Was he being followed? "I must be careful" he heard himself say. Who was he speaking to? It must have been himself.

Summoning up all his courage he took a tentative look around the right hand corner of the alleys entrance. The lamp lighter was making his way down the street, into the distance and into the gloom of the night. He became aware of a presence to his left; slowly he turned to see a policeman approaching. The cape hung over his shoulders as his lamp flitted from one side of the road to the other. Panic overcame Cooper. His breathing increased rapidly, faster and faster. What should he do? What should he do? Almost passing out with fear his back hits the cold wall, sliding down his body descends onto the cold hard ground. The silence is deafening, the heavy footsteps of the constable's boots came closer and closer until at the entrance to the alley he stops.

Cooper can almost touch the backs of his trouser legs. What should he do? Hit him and run or stay silent and still. After what seemed to be an eternity the Policeman flexed his legs and moved off down the road. A sigh of relief escaped him. Bracing himself, he ran out of the alley and away down the street, away from danger, away from the Police.

Twenty minutes later, after crossing half of Edinburgh, it came into view. There it was, the house he sought. Cooper looked around him, his brain was racing so frantically that, as he looked he did not see, his senses told him no one was around, the road was deserted.

He must act quickly if he's not to be seen, do the job and get out. The phrase circled his mind, do the job and get out. His poor head; would the voice of his grandfather ever go away? Oh to be free of it. Once he had done this perhaps...

The voices had started two weeks after the death of his maternal grandfather, a man who had been so proud of his grandson because of his aspirations.

"He could be working on a piece of history." The old man would tell people, "Something his own hands had worked on."

One week ago on a warm summer's morning the letter had arrived falling onto the front kitchen doormat. The contents of the envelope were taken out and disclosed to his assembled family. The pain filled his heart as he read the short memorandum. His dream had been shattered. The job he had always longed for was now out of his reach. No words of comfort from either his mother or father could console him, the damage was done. So that was that, not only had it destroyed his grandfather, now it had betrayed him. No, not it, it couldn't be blamed. The true betrayer was Stevenson.

As though an outside force had wiped clear his mind he was thinking clearly now. Looking down at his hands he saw them ramming a rag into the neck of the whiskey bottle. The colourless liquid inside sloshed around. Checking the outlook again, still clear.

Matches? Coat pocket. Clank the bottle rested on the flagstones while John rifled through the pockets of his overcoat. As each pocket is found to be empty his frustration mounts. As he battles with the lining of one of the pockets a stray coat tail makes contact with the grounded bottle. A heart stopping moment as the bottle sways from side to side, finally falling onto its side and slowly rolling into the gutter. Like a cat at a bird Cooper pounces on it. Holding it up to one of the gas lamps he inspects the damage. Enough is left in the bottle to carry out the task. The rag put there only moments before had acted as a sponge absorbed most of the liquid before it had a chance to escape.

Panic hits, stepping back into the shadows he strikes a match and lights the rag. The cloth burns with a blue, orange flame. Cooper watches the flame dance in his hand the heat warming his face. The liquid absorbed by the rag in the fall accelerated the burn, launch was required immediately. He ran across the cobbled street, his right arm coming over in a circular motion, its away. The projectile smashed through a downstairs window. He heard and felt the heat from the explosion and watched the house burn. Neighbours were starting to emerge from their dwellings up and down the road. Run, his mind told him, run, but his legs did not move. John Cooper remained standing watching the house burn.

Shortly after the blaze took hold of the second story, the fire brigade arrived. A large crowd had started to gather. The water rained down on

the flames and a Police Constable circled the crowd asking if anyone had been seen acting suspiciously in the vicinity before the fire had started? A neighbour pointed an accusing finger of suspicion at Cooper who was standing mesmerised by the fire. The policeman went over to Cooper and asked him if he was responsible for the fire. John Cooper offered no explanation or resistance as he was lead away and locked in the rear of a four-wheeled cell.

High above the city streets of Edinburgh the old majestic building looked down onto the Firth. The doctors and staff of the Royal Scotland Secure Sanatorium considered the view of the metropolis to be the only benefit to working in this establishment. The old building was cold, drafts blew along the corridors; corridors firmly believed to be haunted by the tortured souls of who had ended their days in that desperate place. In ten years time Harry Price the famous parapsychologist would proclaim that this place “is one of the most haunted locations in Scotland.” Half hospital, half prison the Royal Scottish Sanatorium stood as a beacon of fear to anyone planning a plea of insanity in the local courts or assizes. To the guards, doctors and inmates alike this was one of the most desperate places in the country.

As with all houses of detention such as this, visitors seldom came. It would only be on the warm summer days when the more trusted patients would be allowed out into the grounds to receive their visiting nearest and dearest.

In the early hours of the morning the grounds surrounding the sanatorium were as quiet as the grave. Dawn was showing the first signs of venturing over the horizon. The sky was still inky black and the stars shone in the heavens. In the shaded entrance to the building the glare of the one street light cast a gloomy pool on the ground. Into the light drew a four-wheeled Police carriage. It came to rest adjacent to the four stone steps leading up to the entrance hall of the building. There would be no dawn for the eyes of John Cooper.

The rear doors of the carriage opened and with a gesture from one of the officer’s truncheons, Cooper climbs out the back of the van. Handcuffs around his wrists his eyes follow the stone pillars up to the over hanging

roof. The building could have almost been mistaken for the Parthenon or some other Greek temple.

A short handing over ceremony ensued, "Prisoner 42 to be transferred into your charge." Out of the shadows of the doorway emerged two white-coated men, one of which relieved the constable of a sheet of paper. The man studied the sheet in his hand before speaking.

"Thank you constable, we'll take care of him now."

Cooper is escorted up the steps and into the darkness of the interior. Even in his detached state of mind John was aware of the feeling of oppression. The building felt cold and damp and had the bare minimum of decoration. The walls were of a dirty cream colour, the bottoms of which were black with mould and mildew.

"John Cooper, arson attack. He showed signs of a mental problem when the police took him in." explained the guard. A guard, the white-coated man who had welcomed him in was only a guard! Cooper had presumed that the man held a medical post in the hospital.

An acknowledgement came in the form of a nod of the head from the duty doctor sitting behind the desk. After looking down his nose at the note handed to him, he spoke, "Put him in examination room number two."

Instantly the patient was marched off down one of the many gloomy corridors which stretched out through the building like the labyrinth. The only Minotaurs that lurked here were not mythical beasts but where in the minds of the guests and no Theseus to slay them.

Lining the walls on either side were heavy iron doors, large domed rivet heads protrude out from the cold metal. He had no idea how far he had proceeded along the corridor when they arrived at door number 2. The guard in custody of his right arm relinquished his grip to retrieve a large bunch of keys from his white coat pocket. He inserted one into the keyhole of door number two and turned it, the lock clicked. The sound echoed around the building. A scream came out of the darkness; such were the acoustics of the building no sound ever could be placed to its point of origin.

John heard the squeak behind him then the bang of the door closing. He took a look around his new abode. A dim shaft of moonlight protruding

through the bars served as his only source of illumination. He could see his breath rise through the light. Outside the night was warm now so why was it so cold in here? The floor was damp under his feet so he sat on the low hard bed. Was this it? Had he come to this? A cell in a mental hospital when he should have been given the job that was his by right. It dwelt on his mind; he had failed to kill that man, would he get another chance? Maybe he could reap his revenge and it didn't have to be on the man?

It wasn't until twenty minutes later that two white-coated doctors walked down the corridor to room number two. On the wall next to the door the name John Cooper had been scribed in white chalk on a black-framed board.

"Here we are then, John Cooper." Doctor Montrose didn't look up from his notes as he spoke. All the staff had hoped for an early night, it wasn't to be. The second man, Doctor Jacobs released the observation flap on the door and peered through. On the bed sat a man, knees tucked under his chin in a foetal position. Could it be the man silently cried for the comfort of his mother's womb or was it more likely that he was just trying to keep warm.

"We'll keep an eye on this one, at least for a couple of days."

"Is he a danger to anyone?" asked Doctor Jacobs, studying the patient.

"Only if your names Stevenson"

"Stevenson?"

"All the Police Doctor managed to get out of him was that his grandfather had worked for Robert Stevenson some years ago. He is convinced that Stevenson 'Did him wrong' in some way."

"Did they find out how, or who his Grandfather is?"

"We don't know who he is yet. What ever it is though the hatred must run deep. When he was picked up he had just thrown a home made explosive into Stevenson's town house, then waited around for the Police to arrive."

"He waited for the Police to arrive?" he had never heard of such an instance as this before. "Do you think he was content having carried out his task, not caring for the consequences to be faced?"

“Could be.” Doctor Montrose replied with a shrug of his shoulders as he looked through the observation hatch, then snaps it shut.

Chapter 4

23rd December 1888

Herbert Kitchener smelt that familiar aroma of coal and steam the moment he entered the grand entrance of Kings Cross Station. The cast iron arches disappeared into the clouds. During the daylight hours shafts of light would pierce through the thick white clouds, but now the evening had fallen and the rafters were in darkness. He was dressed for the weather. The winter in London had so far been a cold one, a complete contrast to the blazing hot summer they had enjoyed, it seemed so long ago now. Scotland Yard was having one of the hardest times in its history, time hung heavy. Each day that went by the frustrations of the entire force grew.

Scotland, according to his wife would be colder than London? As a result she had packed him extra jumpers, shirts and vests, protection against the elements.

The station had an element of warmth to it, but still the cold wind found its way into every nook and hole. At the gate allowing access to the platforms he handed his ticket to an elderly gent whose sole responsibility was to usher travellers through to the correct platform. The ticket

inspector was a veteran of the Crimean war; the little finger on his right hand was missing, amputated in a field hospital after the battle of Maiwand. The disability did not affect the operation of punching Kitchener's ticket.

"Overnight sleeper to Edinburgh, platform 13 sir." The guard advised as though he said the words one hundred times before.

"Thank You." The confirmation was sincere.

A scarf hung around his neck to keep out the winter cold; it also obscured another souvenir of the Crimea, a scar on the front of his neck where shrapnel had taken a lump of flesh from him. He readjusted the scarf as Kitchener made off down the platform.

As the steam hissed out of an uncountable number of engines Kitchener acquired the assistance of a porter who, with the aid of his trolley helped Kitchener with his baggage. The young lad did his duty admirably and was duly rewarded as a sovereign was placed into his hand, "Thank You Sir." He said sounding years above his age.

Kitchener slid the door of his sleeping compartment closed. This small room would be his accommodation for tonight. It was small and cramped with room only to do what was necessary, stand and sleep. He placed his suitcase down on the small table under the window, unclipped the catches and opened the top.

As he looked down at the contents the whole compartment lurched forward. The movement unsettled him, but when the second shunt came Kitchener had steadied himself. The wall on the opposite side of the platform slowly began to pass the window left to right.

The huge blue A4 class engine puffed great plumes of smoke into the roof of the station canopy. Once outside the smoke blew high into the cold night air. The sound of steam valves exhausting and whistles being blown faded as the carriage pulled out into the black night.

One hour later he returned from the dinning car. The excellent meal of rump steak and the two or three brandies to follow now lay heavy on his stomach. An early night was called for.

In the one-man berth he took his pyjamas out of the suitcase. On top of one of the many jumpers Muriel had packed for him lay a green box. He

picked it up and smiled. Removing the lid, there bedded in the felt lined case, lay a silver pen. A small card lay on top of the writing implement.

‘Happy Christmas, Love from Muriel’

He looked at the card and it warmed his heart. Replacing the lid he returned the box to the safety of the suitcase.

Outside the London rain had turned to sleet. The train thundered northward out of the capital towards its destination.

It was one of the quietest nights of the year in the reform club. Most of its clientele had left the capital and returned home for the Christmas holidays. Most of the waiters and staff had been sent home early owing to the lack of members present. In one of the many rooms the fire still burnt as bright as ever. Even at this late hour three men sat around in high backed leather armchairs talking.

The two young men on the whole didn’t speak, they sat and listened like two schoolboys engrossed in a lecture from an old master. The third man an older and wiser imposing figure did most of the speech making. Brandy in hand he ran the fingers of his right hand through his grey hair and picked up his large cigar out of the ashtray and continued his pronouncements.

The discourse was now coming to a close. Many foreign policies had been discussed that night. The foreign office was of the opinion that Her Majesty’s Government was starting to become dangerously lackadaisical on the matter of running the Empire.

“...and as for India, well all we need is a change of agenda.” The grey-headed man sat back in his chair taking a long drag on his cigar.

“How will we change the agenda on India sir?” One of the young men asked the old master.

“Some things are inevitable young Jackson”

The hospital was as quiet as a graveyard. Only the occasional moan or scream broke the silence of the night. This was something that the residents and staff had grown accustomed to. The Doctors were all

huddled around the fire in the dispensary, the air hung heavy with a cocktail of pipe, cigar and cigarette smoke. The topics of conversation were all of a medical nature. Doctor Montrose told his captive audience of the latest case he was involved in, that of John Cooper. The other doctors also told their weird and wonderful tales of man's fight against insanity and the losers in that constant battle - a whole catalogue of despair.

In cell number 2 nothing moved. The bedclothes cover the body at rest on the bed. Under the cold metal frame of the bed a small pool of maroon liquid formed, drip, drip continued the stream. Cooper watched the consistent drip from next to the door. A sense of power surged through him as he watched the life drain out of the guard concealed beneath the sheets. The dinner plate lay neatly arranged next to the bed, a wisp of steam rising from the uneaten food.

He should eat, who knows when or where he would eat again. This was logical reasoning, did this mean his thoughts were under control?

With a smile he looked out of the door checking the corridor. There were many sounds in the dark corridor, screams, shouts and cries of insanity.

At one end of the passage was the night watchman at the reception desk, his back towards the cells, his feet rested on the desk and his nose buried in a newspaper.

Bare feet on a concrete floor are as near silent as a mouse. The night watchman didn't know what had hit him, why should he have been on his guard, nothing ever happened. The odd loony would occasionally throw some kind of fit or attack, then all he had to do was ring the bell for a doctor to attend to the situation. His mind was not on the job, why should it be; after all it was now Christmas Eve. This would be his downfall.

From his rear a hand clamped onto his chin. With hardly any time to react a second had grasped the left hand side of his head. No time to even think, his last conscious thought was to shout out, "What the..." the voice fell silent as the hands twisted his head sharply in an anti-clockwise direction, his spine cracked his neck broken.

The lifeless head hit the desk with a thud. Cooper busied himself going through the watchman's pockets for keys and money, anything worth having for the days ahead. His bounty gathered he makes for the external

door. Carefully sorting through the keys recently acquired, each key is placed into the lock and turned. On the fifth attempt the key turns and the lock clicks.

Wait, shoes, he didn't have any shoes. The night watchman, he had shoes and an overcoat. They would do. The escape was on. Silently he walked out into the darkness of the night. Panting and out of breath, he reached the outer edge of the wood that served as a border to the hospital. Cooper looked down onto the gas lit city. He knew where he had to go and what he had to do.

Chapter 5

The intermittent clack of ivory echoed around the empty billiard room. Six tables ran end to end in the dimly lit room. Only three lights burnt over the table, a game in progress. The glare from it projected a circular pool of lime light on to the floor. Four men surrounded the table; all were dressed for dinner though stripped down to their waistcoats. The duration of this particular frame of billiards had continued for several hours. Such an event was not unknown between two seasoned professionals, but these four players were nothing of the sort.

A tall man with his grey hair swept back over his head, bent over the table taking time over the shot. Once executed, a young man to the right spoke. "Any contact from our agent?"

He two other cue-wielding men grimaced as the grey haired man turned to the youth with a look of contempt on his grey face. The look though soon changed to puzzlement. The young man instantly knew he had said something wrong. All three awaited the eruption. The reply came, "Do you really think he would?" the eruption never came, only a simple quiet question.

“Well, Sir, I, don’t...” he spluttered out. The senior of the two presses home the point, “What do you think he would say if he were in a position to send a communication? It would hardly be acceptable for our man to explain the situation. That is, if he were in a position to send one do you really think he would? If the plan is proceeding as to programme then our man will be unable to contact us.”

As a dressing down from a seasoned professional goes it was a kindly one. The youthful looking diplomat was still under the elusion that talk on this subject was acceptable in a public place. It was a question that should never have been asked. The brief exchange had left a shadow over the game. The air was filled with not only the cigar smoke that twisted through its own rings but also with a tension when the atmosphere becomes charged before a thunder storm. Some great release was needed for the four men in this room, not to mention the countless number in the corridors of Westminster. This day would be a point of no return. If the events of today were a success then prosperity would return to the empire and they would reap their rewards. If not it could be the end for the conspirators, the Government and quite possibly the whole fabric of the colonies.

Tonight an assassination attempt would be made on the Empress.

Would her death herald a new glorious era for the Empire? Lesser events have been the catalyst for wars, uprisings and revolutions. Many political factions held a presence in London, agents and subversives from all the major European powers, French, German and Russian spies manoeuvred to gain an advantage over the British. Would the Empire be strong enough to withstand a war directed at its very heart? For many years rumblings had been heard in the central European states, war it seemed was only a matter of time.

Since the Napoleonic wars, border disputes intermittently arose between the French and Germans, the Russians and Germans not to mention the Austria-Hungary infighting and alliance building. All of these and more looked upon the British Empire with envious eyes and tactical brains. It was not an easy task managing to run a quarter of the globe and maintain a solid line of defence around the Mother Island.

“So, what is the correct procedure Sir?”

“When for?”

“Tomorrow.” The youngest of the players had not heeded the warning.

“I will be attending the Christmas Morning service in the local church with my wife, as I do every Christmas morning.”

“No Sir, after the events of today.” He took a chance. Was he trying to evoke the wrath of his master?

“I take it you are referring to the hypothetical situation of the demise of the Monarch?” he said in a quiet voice.

“I think that is what he is trying to say”, interjected one of the other two men present. The comment defused any tension before it arose. He didn’t break off from walking around the table eyeing up the position of the balls before laying his hand down on the green baize ready to take his shot.

“Hypothetically, if such a case were to arise, Parliament would sit in emergency session to appoint the new monarch. It is, of course a formality as the throne passes to the natural heir. Within the month a new incumbent would be crowned and take up all duties, rights and privileges. In the event I presume you are referring to, the current Head of State passing away on a public holiday, such as tomorrow, a similar course of events would follow. With the House dispersed because of the holiday it would be impossible for a sitting the following day. The House would therefore be recalled and the duties performed when an adequate number of Ministers would be in attendance.”

“How long would that be Sir?”

“Two, three days at the most I would estimate.

Light dawned on the young man’s face, it was all so real now, “So, hypothetically we could have a new Head of State by the start of the New Year.”

“Hypothetically, yes.”

The triad of young men reacted with an uncontrollable surge of excitement at the last mono phrase, the grey haired man didn’t. Cool as a mountain snow fed stream, he remained as calm and collected as a man of his experience and years should. He was one of a small handful of people in the country, if not the world, that knew the consequences of the action planned.

Treason was still an offence punishable by death. He always knew the risk was high, but the power base was due to move on. The organisation, and he himself in particular, firmly believed that the Empire required a firm hand from the throne, at present there was none. A strategy was formed, pieced together over many hours of secret meetings in various locations and meticulous planning by the leading thinkers in the country. Many were on side of the plan devised, all believed it, and they all believed the lie.

The Luminary had decided that the next logical power base would emanate from America. It was time to move on. The British Empire now was at its apex. Like all good things the Empire would come to an end. History provided the evidence; Rome, Greek, Norman and Napoleons Empires had all fallen; now it was time for another.

The easiest way to destroy a body was from within. All around, disease spread through the London streets carried in the sewage and dirty water consumed by the residents of the city. Once the disease had hold, the organs would cease to operate then the rest of the body would follow. The comparison was exact. What was the Empire if not a body, each working part relying on another? What would become of this great land, this England? To the members of the Luminary that was not an issue to be concerned over.

The one o'clock gun had sounded a time signal for the departing ships in the Firth of Forth. The countless crewmen of the vessels would be spending Christmas away from home this year. The echo reverberated around the ancient city. Never had the city streets looked so pristine and clean. Flags hung from windows, bunting adorned the streetlights and the pavements were vagrant free. The Edinburgh of late 1888 had come a long way since the dark days when Messrs Burke and Hare terrorised the city streets.

In the central Police Station much activity took place. The Station House stood on one side of the quadrangle the other three sides bordered by a twelve-foot high stone wall. A hole in the wall directly opposite to the Station House served as a gateway to the outside world. In the orifice

hung two large heavy oak gates. When closed, nothing from the outside world could gain access.

Amongst all the chaos of the day a four-wheeled carriage came through the arched gate and clattered to a halt on the cobbled courtyard. The cab had entered unnoticed by the assembled officers and constables whose minds were focused on their own tasks. The black door swung open, out came a patent leather shoe, followed closely by the body of Chief Inspector Herbert Kitchener.

As the cab drew away he surveyed the Station yard, not as big as he was used to, but maybe these officers could still teach the complacent Scotland Yard detectives a thing or two. On any given 'normal' day, running was strictly forbidden in the grounds of the station. The chief constable had made that very point two years ago when a young cadet, running across the yard, had slid in a pile of manure, recently left there by a horse, and crashed at his feet soiling his new uniform. The Chief made the point that it was 'unprofessional' to run around the station.

Returning the change from the fare into his pocket Kitchener failed to notice a small thin man rushing towards him.

"Inspector Kitchener?" asked the man with breathless anticipation.

"That's Right"

"Chief Inspector Norman Boyd." The short of breath man introduced himself, holding out a hand. Kitchener took Boyd's hand in his and shook it firmly. Kitchener was of the opinion that a lot of a man's nature could be detected from a simple handshake. Apart from the numerous secret society handshakes, the normal greeting could be subdivided into two categories.

The firm handshake was Kitchener's personal preference. When dealing with the owner of a firm handshake he instinctively knew that he was a no nonsense, hard dealing man such as himself. A limp handshake immediately rang warning bells in Kitchener's mind. This he found was normally the greeting of a pathetic mind, or a devious one.

"This way please..." Boyd with a gesture of his right hand steered the Englishman towards the Station House. "Its not often we have a Scotland Yard-er gracing our station."

The two Detectives side stepped a brush-wielding constable, furiously at his work. "If the truth be known," started Kitchener, "I'd rather not be here at all, we're rather busy of late at the Yard. This by rights should be a military operation.

Boyd understood immediately what the visiting officer was referring to. "Of course, the Ripper. He's been a wee bit quiet of late I understand." "He's gone to ground somewhere, but we'll get him before he can strike again.

Boyd closed the Station House door behind him. The freshly applied Royal Blue paint shone as the sunlight reflected off the swinging door. The aroma of fresh paint hung heavy all over the Station.

Inside the building it was clear that Boyd was a fan of a good fire. The interior radiated heat from all quarters. In Boyd's small office the fire was burning as frantically as it had been in the reception area. Enjoying the sudden warmth, Kitchener removed his overcoat, hung it on the hat stand and then settled himself in front of the fire. By the time Boyd had managed to manoeuvre himself around his desk and seat himself, Kitchener's legs were becoming somewhat overheated. It felt as though the heat from the fire had almost melted the backs of his legs' and in reaction he stepped away from the hearth. The material of his trousers touched his skin and a momentary stab of pain swept over his thigh.

"Please sit ya down." Offered Boyd.

Easier said than done, thought Kitchener as slowly and carefully he sat opposite his small contemporary, the trouser legs now cooling rapidly.

"Would ya like a wee dram? Just to keep the cold out of course."

Cold, in here?

"After all it is a special occasion." A note of pride in his voice.

"I don't see why not." Kitchener replied, enthusiastically. This was turning out to be quite civil. Maybe he was going to enjoy his stay in Scotland after all. He may be forced to spend Christmas away from his beloved Muriel, so he may as well enjoy himself.

Boyd with a smile on his face opened the bottom draw in his battered old desk. A bottle of single malt was extracted and placed on the desktop, two odd glasses followed. A generous slug of whisky was poured into each

glass. The fuller of the two was offered to Kitchener, who gratefully accepted it.

“Your health.” Boyd made a toast.

“Seasons greetings” returned Kitchener.

Both men took a drink. Bert could feel the warmth of the liquid returning life back to still cold parts of his body.

As the two detectives warmed themselves in front of the fire, Douglas Strand, a large bearded man navigates a small steam launch across the North Sea. This was a long awaited day for him. Setting sail this morning from the boat yards of Edinburgh he was bound for the Bell Rock Lighthouse. This would be his first tour of duty. In the launch he carried the much-needed supplies of food, linen and tobacco to name but a few of the vital items required by the crew.

The crew consisted of three men, the Captain, First Mate and an Engineer. Strand would be relieving the Captain for a well-earned Christmas leave, his last ration of holidays. His next tour of duty would be his last, as he would be standing down as the Captain and taking his retirement from the Northern Lighthouse Board. The first mate would be taking on the mantle of skipper, leaving Strand to become the new first mate.

The light was first lit in February 1811. A vital navigation aid for shipping bound for the port of Edinburgh from the north. Before the lighthouse was built, many hundreds of souls had been lost on the treacherous, sandstone outcrop eleven miles off the mainland. The rock was made more dangerous by the fact that it was only visible for a few hours a day. The rest of the time it nestled below the surface, invisible to shipping. Access to the rock had to be judged to the minute. Unloading the incoming keepers and provisions had to be swift, as was the loading of the resting keeper; every minute was precious.

Today the sea was calm and the journey a good one. At last the tower was in clear view, his voyage at an end. It came as a great relief to Strand not wanting to be late for his first introduction to the Rock.

Douglas Strand had joined the Northern Lighthouse Board when he was a wee lad of twelve years old and he had toured several lights in the service. The one commission he had dreamed of had eluded him until now. The

last posting he had been given, had been at the Souter light on the North East Coast of England. A summons arrived there two months ago, informing him of the imminent transfer back to Scotland and to the Rock. A sense of pride almost overwhelmed him as he stepped off the launch and onto the sandstone, which would be his new home for the next three months. Looking upwards towards the lamp room the tower reached up into the sky, almost touching Heaven itself.

Knowing time was of a premium on the rock he climbed up the access ladder to the main door, twenty feet above the surface of the rock.

The air had been calm but now, above sea level, the wind was blowing. Not storm force, about five knots he estimated. Once upon the access panel he took a look down at the boat before turning his attention to the heavy iron door. "Strange." The door was locked. Again he turned the handle and pushed with his shoulder, still no response from the door. This was unexpected; not the start he had hoped for. What else could he do, three times he knocked with a clenched fist?

No answer.

He knocked again, this time using his heavy boot. The metal of the door clanked as the steel toe-cap tapped against it.

Still no answer. Strand looked up in desperation at the lamp room. He could swear, yes, he was sure someone was moving up there.

"Come on with ya lads, I've got ya Christmas dinner down here." He shouted skywards. The cries were lost in the roar of the waves and the howl of the wind. Once more he tried the door; but it was not to be.

Douglas Strand was at pains to know what to do. He couldn't break down the door; it had been built to withstand the roughest of seas. The prospect of going up the tower and gaining entrance through the lamp room was out of the question with a boatswain's chair. That left only one direction open for him.

Looking down towards the rock below he could see the water rise. The launch, when docked, had been level with the jetty, now the bow was at least one-foot above the walkway. Had he misjudged the tide? Had he misjudged the time?

There was only one course of action left to take; to set off back to the main land and raise the alarm.

The Inspector's office felt to Kitchener, uncomfortably hot. Dressed in his warm winter clothing, on the insistence of his wife, he could feel the beads of sweat rolling down his chest and temples. Strange, the small slight Scottish inspector didn't seem effected by the heat; did he always have a blazing fire? Maybe he hailed from warmer climes. It was possible that he could have been born in foreign lands; maybe his father had been posted to India, Australia or the Cape.

The pleasantries now over, the conversation turned to a more business like manner.

"I'm not officially here you understand, so I have no jurisdiction in this area." Start a little humble thought Kitchener. "I must though ask for the full co-operation of you and your men." Should he tell more of why he was here? Enemy agents could be found in the strangest and most unlikely of places. Kitchener liked this little man though. The handshake he had offered had been an acceptable one. Surely he could be trusted with the burden of responsibility that had been thrust upon his shoulders.

"We first picked up rumours of a plot to..." he hesitated, then, "...assassinate the Empress. These threats, although not vouched for by any of the known political agitators, have to be taken seriously".

"If the unthinkable were to happen it would evoke a constitutional crisis, of which her majesty's government, well let us say... no Government, would like to be responsible for appointing a successor."

Kitchener, having divulged the basic fundamentals of the case judged Boyd to be in a state of shock. The very thought of an attempt on Her Majesty's life was beyond comprehension. Norman Boyd had been a supporter of the Queen for many years. Along with the bewilderment a sense of confusion coursed through his mind. What had Kitchener meant by 'not wanting to be responsible for appointing a successor.' Were they his words? He had said something very similar.

"Good Lord! That's awful Inspector, if it were to happen though, surely Prince Albert...?"

"As I said, no one would relish the prospect of appointing the natural successor." Kitchener's words gave Boyd the distinct impression that Scotland Yard would not be drawn on the issue. He could imagine

though, why the Government would be opposed to the Prince Regent succeeding the crown. The Prince, according to rumour and gossip was not averse to spending the occasional evening in the Whitechapel area of London and indulging in a dalliance or two with the local prostitutes. More of a concern was the rumour of an involvement in the Ripper murders. Nothing had appeared in the press to justify this, nor had any statement emerged from Scotland Yard, but still the rumours had spread, spread as far as Scotland and beyond.

“I am well aware of your concerns Inspector, but you are in my jurisdiction now and must follow my lead. As you said you’re not here officially, anyway I have the local knowledge.

Kitchener knew that the Edinburgh Police Force was no more au fait with such matters than a village constable. What did this little man know of the workings of the British Government or the secret services. Maybe he should try a different tack.

“With respect to you, you can hardly know what you’re dealing with here, security on a matter such as this is a very complicated affair. With the modern advances in science, the assassin’s job becomes easier every day. For instance, did you know it is now possible to obtain an explosive device half the size of an association football? Do you play Association Football here?” Did that sound patronising? If it did at least he’d got his point across.

Would Boyd take offence? If he had, Kitchener was never to know. The situation was immediately defused by a knock at the office door.

“Come in.” ordered Boyd with just a hint of anger in his voice.

The door opened and a uniformed constable entered, his manner was eager to please. A draft of air blew across Kitchener’s hot face, the air was cool and welcome, like a sea breeze on a balmy summer’s afternoon. The young PC carried in his hand a sheet of paper, folded with two neat folds opposite edges touching. The sheet was passed from the constable to the Inspector.

“Thank you, that will be all.” The young lad left the room allowing another welcome blast of cool December air onto Kitchener’s face. Whilst Kitchener enjoyed the cool air Boyd unfolded the note whilst answering Kitchener’s question, with a hint of sarcasm, “I do believe there are a

couple of teams over in Glasgow that play on a Saturday afternoon.” On turning his attention to the now unfolded piece of paper, his mood at once clearly changed. Kitchener watched the little man with interest; clearly something was wrong. He opened his mouth to ask the nature of the problem but before he could make a sound Boyd’s voice reverberated around the station.

“Constable!”

The constable’s young, honest face once again rounded the door. “Sir?” Boyd handed the piece of paper back to him. “Organise a search. Work under the instructions of the good Doctor. If possible I want him found today, if not make sure the town is secure. We don’t want him running around the streets over the next few days.”

“Yes Sir.” replied the constable, with a sense of pride in his voice. He had been given the responsibility of progressing the task and he wouldn’t let the Inspector down.

“Trouble?” asked Kitchener as the young lad closed the door behind him. Did Boyd hesitate before answering? “One of the poor men from the Hospital Inspector, he escaped last night.

Two pieces of the answer to his question puzzled him, the word 'escaped' and 'poor man'. "Poor man?" he enquired.

“It’s a mental hospital Inspector. The poor men and women who reside there are all out of their minds.”

“Are they dangerous?” Alarm bells had started ringing; this could be a cause for concern. He could well do without a crazed psychopath running around the streets while her majesty was in residence.

Outside, the activity in the court continued. Jack Parker, a young PC, busied himself pushing an old yard brush across the courtyard. Jack upended his brush and examined the bristles. On the left-hand edge of the brush head the bristles projected six inches out of the base, diagonally tapering down to no bristles on the right hand end. He thought, incorrectly that a brand new brush may have been purchased to celebrate the Queen’s visit, but no, it was not to be. No wonder the Scots had a reputation for their prudence. The courtyard was spotless that morning. He had arrived for work a whole half an hour earlier than his shift was due to start. Yesterday, all the personnel on duty today had received news of their

duties. Jack was slightly disappointed with his own allotted task but all the same, he had thrown himself into it. The courtyard had the brush firmly pushed over it and was in a pristine condition when his superior, Chief Inspector Boyd had arrived. Boyd crossed the cobbled yard without a word to Jack who stood proudly to attention. Twice since that moment he had to brush the debris from the cobbles. The morning's arrivals deposited samples of soil, grit and sand around the courtyard and the constant stream of carriages left trails of brush fodder. Each time, with no word of complaint, he would reach for his brush and clear the decks. If a royal visitor was going to make an appearance in his station it would be immaculate on her arrival.

While sweeping the cobbles a third time the continuous pain in his lower back throbbed. This was not what he had expected to be doing when he had joined the force. On the day he began work here at the Station his mind overflowed with good intentions. He wanted to serve the community and the people of the city and here he was, sweeping a courtyard, there must be more to police work than this?

Jack never saw him approach; all he saw was two muddy boots running past the head of his brush. Large sods of mud fell off them as the large man, in an overcoat and woollen hat, passed by before stopping outside the Station House. The red-faced man leant against the wall out of breath and coughing like a forty a day pipe smoker. Jack once again cleaned the offending piece of ground. When he looked up again at the latest visitor to the station, the man had disappeared, he presumed, into the Station House. A moment of uneasy silence hung over the conversation in Boyd's office. Both men's thoughts dwelt on the residents of the hospital. Kitchener couldn't help but think of the possible threat posed by the escape. Was it just bad security or was it part of the assassination plot. The silence was suddenly shattered as the door burst open and Douglas Strand fell in to the room. The intruder, obviously in a state of discomfort, knelt on all fours on the floor, he struggled for breath in the humid room. Boyd's reaction resembled a cat jumping from a roof. He jumped out of his seat and around his desk to assist the newcomer.

"Good God man, help him, the chair."

The two detectives lifted the weighty body of Strand into the chair vacated by Kitchener only a few moments before. Inspector Kitchener's first impression of the man was that he was a seafarer, a sailor perhaps. What could a sailor be doing falling into a Police Station? Was he on his Christmas shore leave and had become worse for wear in some pub brawl? This man was out of breath and sweating, he had been running. If someone had given him a good beating, could he have made it up the hill to the Station?

Boyd on the other hand knew this man, but where from? He too had come to the same conclusion, that the fellow catching his breath in the chair opposite was a member of the sailing community. He or his wife did not know any mariners, so where did he know this man from? Had he been thrown into the cells one drunken night?

"Whatever's the matter?" Boyd asked now Strand's breathing was of a more rhythmical pattern. Strand composed himself and drew in a deep breath before answering.

"It's the light, there's something amiss with the light."

While Strand struggled to speak the sentence Boyd was in the process of rummaging around in his bottom drawer. He produced another glass into which he poured a generous measure of whisky. Handing it to Strand he spoke quietly, "Here drink this."

Strand curiously held the glass in both hands as though the brown liquid inside was warming his hands through. He raised the glass to his mouth and took a gulp. Still fatigued and his breathing and swallowing not in synch, a fit of coughing followed and the whisky projected itself across the desk. After a short spell of backslapping, the coughing subsided and Strand regained control of himself and took another large swallow of the drink.

"Now man, what's amiss with the light?" Boyd enquired in a gentle tone. Strand took another drink before answering. "Thank you, my name is Douglas Strand, I am the relief keeper for the light." Strand was a large set man in his mid twenties. His large muscular body set off by a florid face the bottom half of which was covered by a bushy, brown beard. Now his woollen hat removed the beard and hair joined in one continuous wave

of brown framing his facial features. By the light of the fire, a definite hint of red could be seen in his hair giving it the appearance of copper wool.

“The Bell I presume you mean?”

“Aye, that’s right.”

Boyd was quite aware that the Englishman would have no idea what the conversation was about. “The Bell Rock Lighthouse Inspector, eleven miles off the Forth.” Enlightenment dawned on Kitchener’s face.

“I was supposed to relieve the Captain for his Christmas leave, said Strand. I steamed there this morning on the early tide. I’ve just transferred here; its my first tour of duty. I arrived with the tide, making sure there was plenty of time to unload and transfer. The strange thing was, when I climb the ladder to the access platform and tried the door I found it to be locked.” He paused a second, “ Bolted from the inside. I waited a while, banged on the door even tried shouting up at the lamp room, but no one came.” It was a short tale; it seemed to take all his energies to tell it. Strand slumped back in the chair staring into the middle distance.

“How did you know the door was bolted on the inside and not just locked?” asked Kitchener. Did the Scotland Yard man smell a rat?

“When I attempted to open the door, I could hear the bolt.

“Were there any signs of life?” Boyd asked.

“I knocked loud enough to raise the dead, I’m sure of that.” He paused. It was very important to him to get the story straight in his mind. “I’m not sure whether I imagined it or not, but I’m sure I saw someone moving in the lamp room as I looked up.”

This was not the best time for such news, Boyd thought to himself. He was already juggling several balls in the air like a circus acrobat. On a normal day this problem would have been given his undivided attention. As it was someone else would have to do the donkey-work this time. He broke away from these thoughts and put his mind back on the job in hand.

“I take it you were expected?”

Strand answered firmly as he was sure that his fellow countryman didn’t believe his tale, “Of course, the Skipper would be waiting for the launch, for his leave.” His eyes passed from Boyd to Kitchener and then back again. The look in his eyes betrayed a sense of desperation.

“Did the light look damaged at all?”

“I couldn’t tell.” A note of desperation was now entering his voice.

What could he do? Whoever he sent would miss the Royal visit and his men had put so much effort into the preparation of this event. Who would miss the pomp and circumstance, the crowds, who would have their Christmas ruined? In a flash it came to him. The two men watched as Boyd circumnavigated his desk and opened the door.

“Constable.” Boyd yelled through the small crack between door and frame. The door remained ajar as Boyd returned to his desk and seated himself. The other two occupants of the room breathed deeply on the cold air. After a moment of silence Boyd dropped the bombshell, “We’d better get you kitted out in oils if you’re going to the Rock.” The statement was directed at Kitchener, who made no effort to reply. Then, gradually the words finally registered in his mind.

“What?” he boomed. The Englishman is only stopped from launching into a full salvo by the arrival of the young constable re-entering the room.

“We need waterproofs for the good Inspector here.” Boyd could feel his authority over the Englishman coursing through his body and he enjoyed the fact that Kitchener was momentarily speechless.

“Right you are Sir.” came the reply.

Kitchener was still in a state of shock; had he heard correctly? Surely he had. The Inspector was going to send him to this lighthouse in the middle of the North Sea. “I must protest”, Kitchener had finally found his voice, “I am here on the most serious of business.” He face was red with anger as well as the heat from the fire.

Boyd cut him short and in a low almost menacing tone said, “I have the strongest fear that your suspicions could be realised.” Confusion ran around Kitchener’s head, “Then why send me to a lighthouse in the middle of the North Sea? No one could mount an attempt from there. I take it there are no cannons on the rock?”

Again Boyd got to his feet. Silently he walked around the office, he gave the impression of someone who was at pains with stating the obvious. He came to rest next to a map, hanging on the wall.

“No Sir, there’s no cannon on the light.” Strand helped. “So why must I be sent to sea when at any moment an attempt could be made on...”

Boyd held his hand aloft, palm facing Kitchener, “Just hold on Inspector, just hold on.” He turned towards the map to find his bearings. “Now let me see.” Kitchener was becoming impatient. How dare this little man order him around? His mind went back to his school days and his English Master, Mr Lawn. He was a small man with a large complex. Anyone who dared mount a challenge on him would receive a beating and the thing that most challenged him was a pupil who dared to be taller than himself. Kitchener had always been tall for his age and had been on the receiving end of the master’s anger several times. Did Boyd have the same tendencies?

“Now, where is the Royal Yacht sailing from?”

“Well, St. Andrews.” Kitchener felt as though he was at school once again being patronised by his old English master.

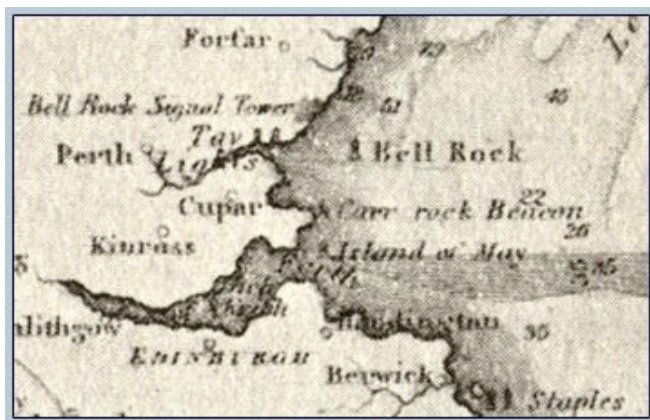
“In the evening?”

“Yes, about six o’clock. I was about to take you through the itinerary when...” Boyd cut him off in mid sentence, much to his frustration.

“It will be full dark by then?”

“Yes, I still don’t understand...”

“Here look at this map.” Boyd turned his attention to the map hanging on the wall behind him.



He ran his finger up the map until it came to rest at the upper edge. "See here, this is where St. Andrews is, just off the map." The finger moved southward twelve inches, "Edinburgh." The finger now made a return journey northward, stopping on a small mark. Examined closely the mark now being tapped by Boyd's index finger was a small symbol indicating a lighthouse. "The Bell Rock, as you can see, any ship approaching Edinburgh from the north has to use the light as a beacon to navigate a safe course into the Forth. Kitchener was now paying close attention to the lecture; he was back at school bowing down to the greater knowledge of a smaller man. "If anyone has captured the light then there will be no need for any bombs, guns, or assassination attempts directly on her majesty. All they need to do is turn off the light." He leaned back against the wall

Kitchener slowly stood up from his chair and walked over to the map to take a closer look. His skin moments before had been glowing red with fury, now the colour had completely drained out of it. His blanched cheeks fitted well with his horrified expression.

"My God." He could see clearly now. The Bell Rock Lighthouse lay directly in the path of the Royal Yacht. Why had no one foreseen this?

"So are you bound for the Rock?" enquired Boyd.

The office door opened, the cold blast of air sent a shiver down Kitchener's back. Framed in the doorway was the constable cradling a set of waterproofs over his arms.

"On the chair please constable."

Kitchener hadn't taken his eyes of the map for several minutes. It seemed to have captivated him in thought. "How long before it gets dark?"

"About four hours." Strand informed him.

"And then another two before the Royal party arrives." Kitchener lost in thought, turned to face the other men, a look of urgency in his eyes,

"Come on then, we've no time to lose." Kitchener left the room, pausing only to pick up the waterproofs. Strand followed after giving Inspector Boyd a shrug of his shoulders. Boyd sat down behind his desk and relaxed. He picked up his glass and drank, smiling to himself.

"Well, that got rid of him."

Chapter 6

A wind blew around the cold, wet iron of the access ladder at the base of the Bell Rock Lighthouse. Sea spray whipped Kitchener's face like a thousand grains of red-hot sand. He was so cold, the exposed skin of his hands and face burnt. He looked over at Strand who didn't seem the slightest bit concerned with the weather conditions. He must be hardy to the cold and wet after a lifetime in and around the seas and oceans of the world. Half way up the access ladder Kitchener paused, held his breath and looked around. All that was to be seen was a grey sea merging with a grey sky and waves as high as a three-story house rolling along. Why in the name of heaven would anybody want to work here? This must be the most desolate place in the whole world, totally isolated. Looking around it was as though the rest of the world didn't exist any more, just a lighthouse on the edge of the world.

On boarding the steam launch on the banks of the Firth of Forth Kitchener watched the swirling waters. He was reminded of the opening of one of his favourite composer's operas, *Das Rheingold*. His opinion soon change as the shelter of the coast line disappeared and the waves rolled and tossed the boat about, this was more of a *Die Walkure* feel as he imagined the horseman jumping over the waves.

He shivered and looked up the ladder. Strand's boots were disappearing onto the access platform that jutted out adjacent to the doorway. Looking down once more at the rock he started to climb. This would be the start of a longer climb, but already Kitchener had had enough.

Strand stood on the access platform looking out to sea as Kitchener came to the top of the ladder. The keeper was taking large lungs full of sea air as the Inspector finally clambered, somewhat gingerly, onto the platform. "If I knew I was going to have to climb the damn thing I may have thought twice about coming." wheezed the out of breath detective. Strand with a laugh raised a finger and pointed skyward, "We've got to get up there yet."

As Kitchener's eyes looked up his heart sank. Heights had never been something he felt comfortable with. The prospect of standing up there in the Lamp Room, surrounded by the crashing sea all around, did not fill his sinking heart with joy.

Strand firmly tried the door handle as Kitchener tried to come to terms with the situation.

"Its still locked."

As well as the rattle of the door in the frame another sound emerged from the door. A metallic clank, clank could clearly be heard indicating that a bolt was drawn across, locking the door from the inside.

"Great", Kitchener's voice didn't show any signs of enthusiasm. "There's only one thing we can do, how strong is that door?"

"Its built to withstand high wind and wave."

"Right, with me then..." Kitchener turned his shoulder towards the door.

Strand soon took the hint and did likewise. "After three..." On the count of three both men lunged their shoulders against the door. The impact had the same effect on both men as they fell backwards. The door was as solid as a brick wall.

"There's no way we're gonna get through that, its rock solid."

Kitchener said nothing. He looked down at the waves crashing against the rock and shuddered, then his gaze turned upwards towards the top of the tower. No going up, no going down. "There's only one way in as far as I can see, here watch this..." out of his pocket Kitchener produced a

selection of rusty old keys, one for all occasions Strand thought to himself, but said nothing.

Kitchener fingered through the bunch and selected one. Carefully he inserted it into the keyhole. Strand counted at least half a dozen withdrawals and re-entries of the key. Kitchener's face was a picture of intense concentration. Eyes focused and tongue making all manner of movement, both in and out of his month. Suddenly Kitchener stood back from the door and turned to face Strand, a self-satisfied smile on his face. "Being a Scotland Yard detective does have its advantages you know." he said nodding towards the door.

Strand pushed the door; once again there was no movement. Confused he turned to Kitchener, "I thought you'd unlocked it?"

"I have, I can't unlock the dead bolt though."

Strand couldn't help feeling slightly foolish, of course he'd picked the lock but the bolt remained intact. That, however, only left one locking device to break through. Once again on Kitchener's lead the two men put their shoulders to the door.

On the second attempt the door burst open and both men collapsed into the building, the larger, Strand falling onto Kitchener's back. The room was small, empty and dark. At the opposite end of the corridor a ladder bolted to the wall was dimly illuminated by a weak light from above. Only the light from the open door made vision possible in the gloom. Both men picked themselves up off the floor, looking slightly embarrassed. "Another ladder?" the half fact, half question came from Kitchener. He had seen enough of ladders already today.

"This is the first of two access shafts. We need to go up two flights of stairs before we reach the Lower Engine Room."

"Lower Engine Room!" thought Kitchener, how many were they? "...and the top?"

Strand paused for a moment before he answered, prolonging the suspense. "Another eight floors." Strand closed and bolted the door. Suddenly the small room had a foreboding feeling to it. Kitchener felt uneasy, he could feel the breath of Strand on his neck, it felt hot and damp. Kitchener edged forward along the passage until he could feel the cold, iron ladder in his hands. The climb had started, up towards the light. Moments later

he was aware of Strand's heavy boots thumping the rungs of the ladder below. "I'll have whoever bolted that door." He shouted down. Why he had made the statement was unknown to Kitchener. Maybe it was a fore warning to anyone who may be aloft, alerting them of the two men's presence but was he warning a friend or foe?

"The weather on the rock can change awful quick, maybe the wind was blowing the door open?"

"That's as maybe, I think we should act with stealth." He looked up before continuing. "Anyone could be in here with us."

It came as a relief that the first set of stairs was only a short climb.

Kitchener's head appeared through the hole in the floor of the Lower Engine Room, looking right then left scanning the room for any signs of life.

"Come on with ya?" Strand's impatient voice came from below.

Kitchener's face grimaced as he heard the Scottish accent drifting up the access shaft. What an asset he would be in the undercover world of the detective force, Kitchener sarcastically thought. The room appeared to be clear. The burly figure of the Inspector walked around the room looking for any signs of life. Strand followed almost immediately behind him up the ladder, "The crew may be away up in the lamp room, I saw someone moving up there earlier. This is only the lower engine room."

"Lower Engine Room?" Kitchener's knowledge of the operation of a lighthouse was on a par with his knowledge of the provinces of India. What happened in the Lower Engine Room? Why did a Lighthouse need an engine room for that matter, lower or any other?

Two generators dominated the room. The two iron cylinders hummed a low methodical rhythm while radiated heat filled the room. Through a small glass window just above the door, flames could be seen licking upwards. These pieces of machinery were obviously in good working order. The oil gauges indicated that the level was at its optimum point, the green paint shone and the furnaces were full of coal. Who had maintained them? Was the crew safe after all? If that was the case why was the door locked? Why had the relief keeper not been admitted when the captain was keenly awaiting his arrival? Too many questions ran around

Kitchener's consciousness. He needed more data. "Is the weather the only reason the door would be bolted?"

"Privateers have been known to operate around this rock for a hundred years. Ever since the days before the lamp, ships would flounder on the rock upsetting their cargo, easy pickings for the smugglers."

"Privateers, I thought the local authorities had put paid to those long ago?"

"Most likely the wind though, could blow the door clean off its hinges it could. I know one thing for sure though..."

"What's that?"

"Something made them lock it."

"...and someone has been stoking these boilers. Do you see anything amiss in here?"

Strand looked at the two generators. His face bore a blank expression as he stared at the two pieces of machinery. Though it was only a brief moment before Strand answered, it seemed like an eternity. Did Kitchener read something into that pause and lack of expression? An expression that almost betrayed a lack of knowledge maybe?

"No, everything looks fine, you have to remember though, its my first time here."

That would explain the pause, Kitchener surmised. Behind the generator furthest from the stairs a pile of coal wedged itself between the machine and the wall, an old shovel lay beside the black heap. His examination finished, Kitchener prompted a move, "Come on then," he sighed, "We'd better find out what's going on here. I do have a job to do back on the mainland and I don't relish the thought of spending Christmas here."

The assent of the tower continued. Again the stairs were mounted with the utmost stealth. Once again the room they entered appeared to be clear and Kitchener found the room to be very much a facsimile of the room directly below. This room contained one large piece of machinery not unlike the generators below. It gave the appearance of a barrel lying on its side with a large pipe emanating from its top. The pipe rose approximately three feet before a ninety-degree bend projected it towards the concave external wall and out of the building. Along the wall next to the exiting pipe were arranged a collection of several large dial indicators.

As far as Kitchener could tell they indicated pounds per square inch, but pounds of what?

This room was the Upper Engine Room. Like its lower relation the room didn't contain an engine. It did, however, contain a vital piece of equipment for the safe passage of shipping. Kitchener looked around in bewilderment, "This room, what's it for?" The reply came once Strand had found his bearings, "Compressor" he said, slowly walking over to the machinery and checking the readings. "For the fog horn."

All this equipment for the fog horn. The compressor was huge, the thought crossed his mind, was Strand romancing him. He had had first hand experience though of that piece of machinery and it was deafening. "Does everything look in order?" he asked the question again. Now, that enquiry served two purposes. Ever the Policemen, Kitchener was trying to catch the Keeper out, to relieve the tension of the situation more than anything, he told himself.

"It would appear that way."

So the climb continued with no revelation from this room. The next floor up was the storeroom. Shelves and barrels filled the room. Space was in short supply, once both men were in the room, space was even more sparse. The shelves contained all manner of dried foodstuffs, fruit, herbs and endless jars of pickled consumables. The barrels brimmed with salt packed around all kinds of meats, chicken, ham, pork and beef. One thing was clear, though the storeroom was not full, it was adequately stocked. Starvation was out of the question; food and water were in abundance. This fact only added to the mystery.

On the other side of the curved, stonewall the wind blew against the tower. Around the rock on which the lighthouse clung for dear life the water, for the second time that day, had started to rise. The steam launch now appeared to be in clear water, no sign of the jetty was to be seen. The two men were trapped eleven miles off the shore, surrounded by the icy waters of the North Sea.

Kitchener passed a quizzical eye over the crew's bedroom. Standing on the top of the stairs he checked the room for personnel. He could see that three men lived and worked here. Every room he had come to was the same, repetition everywhere. The walls were perfectly curved and no

matter which way he turned the same piece of cold, stonewall would stare back at him. Being a Londoner, straight lines normally greeted his gaze wherever he cared to look. Wide open streets with sunlight shining through windows. Green, he had never appreciated green before. Hyde Park, what he would give for a walk through Hyde Park. On second thoughts, maybe not. On Christmas Eve a brass band would be playing and he hated brass bands.

Two adjustable bunk beds filled most of this room. Both projected out from the wall. This was a place where privacy and personal space were not an issue. When asleep the three Keepers would be literary on top of one another. Did they all sleep at the same time or in shifts? Maybe one would sleep while the other two saw to running of the lighthouse.

Three out of the four bunks were made, the blankets strewn across the foot of the bed. The forth was currently in use as a dumping ground for all manner of clothing and equipment.

Kitchener was becoming fatigued with the climb. Thinking it was time for a breather, he insisted on an examination of the room. It would be a decision that would result in valuable time being lost in the investigation and a discovery of paramount importance not being unearthed with time to act. Kitchener slowly and methodically walked around the room.

Strand watched the Scotland Yarder while wondering what exactly he was doing. Strand didn't understand how the police investigated a crime scene, so he took it as read that the officer knew what he was doing.

In reality, however, Kitchener didn't have a clue what he was looking for. At least he had a chance to practise his trade. He felt more useful doing something rather than letting Strand tell him this and that about pieces of machinery he didn't have a clue about. While working he had a feeling of superiority, he was in charge of the situation.

One by one he placed the palm of his hand on the mattresses, all cold. "No one has slept in these for some time." Not knowing what to do he randomly picked up the crew's possessions and equipment and gave the impression he was gathering clues. Each crewmember had a small wooden cupboard on the wall, only large enough to contain a razor, shaving soap and shaving brush. This really was a life of isolation and

deprivation. After a final look around, the two men continued their assent.

On a wind swept cliff top to the north of Edinburgh a white building sits looking out to sea. The two-story house nestled itself behind a sea wall, its only defence from the elements. Rising out of the centre of the building mirroring the Bell Rock Lighthouse itself, a signal tower rose into the blue sky. On top of the castellated tower a flagstaff reached into the sky. On the staff a copper ball, circa fourteen inches diameter, sat at rest at the base.

The building was the Bell Rock Signal tower. It served two purposes, the first was to provide accommodation for the lighthouse keepers and their families and the second was a point of contact from the rock to the shore. James McDonald ran the signal tower, the latest in a long line of men to hold the title, 'Master of the Tender'. As Master of the signal tower his role was the very backbone of the whole lighthouse operation. The Bell Rock Lighthouse and crew were dependent on his actions.

His duties consisted of the maintenance of the shore to lighthouse ferry, which was used for all movement of keepers and equipment. He also maintained the well-being of the off duty keepers and their families and, of course, the daily signalling to the lighthouse. Every morning in the house at the stroke of nine o'clock, McDonald made the journey up the spiral, stone staircase which wound its ways up the inside of the tower. Today was a special day and many preparations were under way for the returning Captain, who was on his last furlough before leaving the service. Preparations for a Christmas meal were also in full swing. Normal signalling time was between nine and ten o'clock but the weather today had not been conducive to the sending of a signal. The sky was overcast and a sea mist had rolled in. The lighthouse was not visible so, after an hour of waiting, McDonald returned to his other duties. Every day the procedure was the same. Between the hours of nine and ten o'clock the crew of the lighthouse would send a signal to the shore by raising a large copper ball up a flagstaff on top of the lamp room. The signal indicated that all was well. If the ball remained dormant, the

master would mount an investigation. It was not uncommon for the entire crew to fall ill.

McDonald could view the lighthouse using the five-foot Achromatic Telescope mounted in the observatory at the top of the tower. Once the signal had been given, he would reply in the same way. In the event of poor visibility in the morning a signal would be transmitted at one o'clock. James McDonald took a silver pocket watch out of his waistcoat pocket and read the time. It was now one o'clock, time to return to the signal tower. He turned to look at the weather conditions out to sea. The sky was now blue with a smattering of nimbus cumulus high in the atmosphere; a complete contrast to the grey sea mist of that morning. His old eyes squinted to make out a tiny black dot on the horizon. That tiny black dot was the reason he was here. Turning away from the sea he headed back up the path toward the house.

Much activity and commotion greeted him when he entered the front door. There was a lot of work to be done, but such was the noise in the house he could not concentrate on any one thing for more than a few moments, so he sought solitude on the cliff top.

Fighting his way through the crowd of women, children and dogs, he made his way to the door. The door only he was allowed to enter. He passed through closing it behind him. James knew that this was something of a special occasion for the women of the house. The five of them were busying themselves preparing all manner of fare for the party. He still had a job to do. Tasks still needed to be performed.

In the tranquil calm of the observatory he once again looked out to sea and fondly reminisced about his days as a skipper on the Inverness line. How he still longed for those days of adventure at sea. Days that had suddenly been cut short when, during a storm, a falling sail had trapped his leg. His calf was crushed and the pain almost sent him insane. The bottle of rum rushed to him, by a concerned crew member, did nothing to dampen his agony.

His vessel didn't carry a surgeon only an unqualified doctor. The number of doctors willing to take to a life at sea had diminished since the end of the Crimean War. A practise on dry land was a much safer option. The doctor amputated his right leg, just below the knee, on an old table in the

cockpit. It wasn't the cleanest of jobs the young medical student had ever seen but the Captain was more than grateful. He had lost his leg but at the same time his life was saved.

The pocket watch now in his hand had been presented to him, from a grateful crew, on his retirement from a life at sea. The hands on the face of the timepiece showed one o'clock precisely. McDonald put his eye to the viewing lens on the large brass telescope and waited for the signal.

The living room situated on the sixth floor of the lighthouse was almost comfortable. Two sofas sat in the middle of the room and a picture hung on the wall. A writing desk with an open logbook on the desktop leant against the curved wall. Directly opposite the ladders on the other side of the room sat a small but functional galley.

"Come on, come on." Strand's voice became clear as his head appeared though the floor. Once in the room he continued straight up the next set of steps without pausing. Strange thought Kitchener, he's suddenly in a rush. Kitchener pondered the thought for several moments. After coming up with several hypotheses for Strand's change in behaviour Kitchener began to feel uneasy being on his own in the room and quickly followed Strand up the ladder.

Unbeknown to the two men this hasty departure from the room had caused the detective to miss a vital clue. There in the room the mystery would deepen.

Chapter 7

It had been one of the longest hours of McDonald's life. Two o'clock was fast approaching and the lighthouse had given no signal. He continued to check his watch constantly up to the very stroke of two o'clock.

"God Man?"

McDonald paced up and down the small room. As every second passed, he would check the view through the telescope. On seeing no change he would mutter to himself through weather cracked lips and continue to pace up and down. By the time a quarter past the hour came around, McDonald knew action was required. Strand had departed for the rock this morning, taking the horse and trap with him into the town. It was common practise for the returning keeper to use the two-wheeler to return to the signal tower. He would have to go on foot into the town and take a launch out from the harbour, after raising the alarm.

In the living room the door of the signal tower burst open, rebounding back off the stone wall. The master stood framed in the doorway, his face as white as a ghost. The commotion in the room came to an abrupt halt as all the occupants turned to see the masters pale face. His wife was the first to break the silence. "James, whatever is the matter?" Her concern was clearly visible. Never before had she used her husband's Christian

name in public, always he would be addressed as 'Master'. Only once before had she seen her husband's face so pale and that had been on her first visit to the hospital, after the removal of his leg.

Mrs. Josephine Percy, the Captain's wife, looked at him with concern showing on her face. McDonald couldn't give much away; after all she was waiting for her husband to come home for the penultimate time. He couldn't tell her much, he didn't know anything.

"There's a problem on the Rock."

The jubilant atmosphere faded instantly. Everyone in the room was well aware of the dangers of working at sea. After many years the men of the rock and their families had become complacent to the dangers, everything was routine. This made McDonald's mono statement harder to come to terms with, complacency breeds mistakes.

The Master, silently and with a great presence, walked through the living room. As he arrived at the front door no one uttered a word. Silence reigned as he packed his shoulder bag with his equipment; an oil lamp, compass and water bottle were all carefully placed in the bag. The door closed behind him.

It was several moments before anyone dared speak. "What do you think is wrong?" asked the Captain's wife.

"I don't know, it must be a problem with the light, maybe its nothing."

The Master's spouse tried to sound reassuring to her old friend.

"I do hope everything's alright." Josephine replied, but in her heart she knew something was very, very wrong.

"Which room's next?" panted an out of breath Kitchener, climbing the steps.

"The Lamp Control Room." came the voice from the room above.

"So if anyone is here, there's a good chance that is where they'll be." said Kitchener as his head appeared through the hole in the floor.

"Or the Lamp Room." Strand's head slowly emerged through the hole in the floor. Cautiously he looked around the room like an animal looking for its prey. As far as he could observe no one was in attendance. Looking down the ladder at Kitchener he gave the signal, "All clear." Neither man would admit it to one another, but both gave a sigh of relief.

The room was slightly bigger than the apartments visited so far. This part of the building was not restrained by the dimensions of the tower. It sat on top of the main structure and acted as a cradle for the lamp although bigger because of its location, the room was so full of equipment that three keepers would struggle to all stand shoulder to shoulder in the room. Three major pieces of equipment resided in the Control Room.

A large column stood in the middle of the room. This was the main piece of equipment dominating most of the space. On top of the column rested the lamp and rotating lenses. On its side several switches and dials indicated the rotation speed of the lens. The second piece of equipment was the Fog Horn Regulator and the third, the fire control system.

The fact that no one was in the room could only point to one logical explanation, if the lighthouse was still occupied, the residents could only be in one place.

Strand slowly circumnavigated the room checking the various dials and read outs on his way around. Kitchener watched the keeper at his work while pondering their next move, "Well?" Kitchener whispered. As Strand drew in a breath to speak, Kitchener raised the index finger of his right hand and placed it on his lips, before pointing upwards towards the lamp room. Strand was under no illusion that the inspector required silence. No warning must be given to those aloft in the lamp room. If there was a nefarious presence in the uppermost room, the Scotland Yarder wanted surprise on his side. Who knows what was waiting for them?

Taking a moment to look around he could see there was nothing at hand that would double as a weapon, working on the assumption that someone was in the lamp room he somehow needed to equal the odds or even gain an advantage.

"Are we ready?" asked Strand. The tension could clearly be heard in his voice.

Was he? Kitchen's head swirled like the wind around the tower, was he prepared to meet his fears? Who was up there, why did they need to lock the door? If no one was to be found, would he be relieved or would the lighthouse have an even greater sense of foreboding to it. "Give me a

minute.” He needed to catch his breath and compose himself. Once in the lamp room he needed to be at the peak of his powers, both mentally and physically.

“I thought you policemen were all fit?” Strand couldn’t resist poking a little fun at the out of breath inspector.

“Come on then.” He knew it was now or never. He couldn’t let this large burly man know his fear; a brave heart was needed here, he told himself. With a deep breath Kitchener took the lead and started to climb the ladder. Slowly, taking one step at a time, each rung ascended lasted the duration of an intake and exhale of a breath. Strand watched from below, the Inspector was now at the top of the ladder. Strand readied himself. This was it, with one last breath of air in his lungs his head appeared in the lamp room. Quickly he looked around, left, right and finally behind. “Good God?” Strand was eager to climb the ladder and see for himself what had caused the pronouncement from Kitchener.

“There’s no one here.” Kitchener finished off the statement for Strand. He stepped off the ladder and looked at the centre of the room. The clear and red glass lenses sat at rest on the base unit, “So where are they?” he mused to himself. Strand’s giant figure had joined him and they stood looking around the room. Strand’s expression echoed Kitchener’s; what was going on here?

The relief keeper not knowing what to do or say turned to look out over the sea. Taking a deep breath he watched the waves crash into one another, he always felt at home at sea. Kitchener stared at the middle column looking quite ill. Like a capped schoolmaster, Strand made a complete revolution of the room looking out at the sea. A smile came to his lips as he passed by the Inspector, who was looking more and more ill. Finally his sturdy frame came to rest. “I don’t understand this?” The question was sincere; he hadn’t the least idea what had become of the three keepers. The lamp cradle sat to his right, it had several panels attached to its outer surface. Half a dozen leavers protruded from each. Strand eyed the panels with a face that showed a sense of mischief, even in these tense times, his mood would have appeared to have changed from concern to that of a playful child.

Running his dried cracked hand over the levers and picking one, he pulled it down. The lens started to rotate in a clockwise direction. Reversing the switch the rotation glided to a halt.

“That seems to be working fine.” Strand lost himself in thought for a minute. An uneasy silence had descended on the room. Greater than a pregnant pause for thought, a sinister atmosphere filled the air. Strand could almost feel the residual presence of evil, for he was a believer in such things. Seafaring societies and families all have a strong faith, they needed one. Frequently news reached dry land of yet another disaster at sea. The wives of mariners needed some hope to hold on to. Ever since the days of the Greek myths, sailors had looked to the Gods of the sea to protect them; nowadays it was only one incumbent deity.

Strand believed all his life that his mother had offered prayers for the safe return of his father and brothers from the unforgiving seas and oceans. No one had ever explained to him who the sailors needed protection from, but it must be an evil spirit.

Strand relieved the tension, “Have you ever seen a lamp burning at close quarters?”

“It would blind you wouldn’t it?” replied Kitchener.

Strand smiled, that would be a logical assumption he supposed. If a flame needed to be seen from the horizon, then it would have to be bright.

Kitchener had no knowledge of the use of lenses to focus and enhance a single light. Strand opened one of the panes of glass and the lenses seated behind, both swung open on a hinge situated on the right hand side, allowing access to the lamp. From his large trouser pocket Strand took a box of safety matches. Striking one of them, he placed the flaming end on the wick of the lamp. The wick engaged and a small flame burned with a yellow glow. Strand placed the glass tube over it and turned the calibrator on the side of the control panel, “There.” His voice was as warm as the flame. This was the first time he had lit the Bell Rock Light, it was a moment he would cherish for the rest of his life. The flame refracted through the lens as Strand closed the glass door.

Kitchener was expecting a burning light as though the sun had fallen out of the sky, but all he saw was this small flame, “Is that it?”

“The lens magnifies the light” explained Strand. “Not to anyone standing on top of the light, but if you are miles away...” He was about to embark on a long and technical explanation of the finer points of the optics of the lenses and how this single point of light can be seen from the horizon when he realised that Kitchener didn’t look at all well. “Are you not feeling well?”

Kitchener wasn’t, he would have asked why two out of the four circular pieces of glass were red, but his mind wasn’t on the job. All his attention had switched to his stomach, ominous rumblings were emerging from that part of his anatomy while his head spun and the colour drained from his cheeks. “Not really.” The reply was one of a man not in the best of health. Kitchener’s pale face looked straight down at the floor, his right arm outstretched supporting himself against the Lamp.

“Why dunna ya go outside and get some fresh air in ya lungs.”

“Will that help?”

“It may do, keep ya eyes on the horizon” Strand advised. Many novices of the lighthouse life suffered from seasickness, even though they had been excellent sailors. Strand didn’t know the details of why, nobody had ever told him. He did have a vague memory of his grandfather explaining it to him years ago, but that was in a roundabout kind of way. All he could remember was it was something to do with movement and your ears. On a ship the brain balances one against the other. On a lighthouse you are on solid ground yet the sea still moves. A similar effect is given when you stand on a beach at the water edge and look out to sea. The brain can become confused and think that the body is falling when you’re standing perfectly still and upright. Once the eyes have lost sight of a fixed point of reference, normally the feet, you are at the fate of your sense of balance. This effect can cause some people to fall over and some to feel sick, Kitchener was experiencing both sensations.

The distance from the centre column to the exterior wall of the room was no more than five feet; Kitchener crossed it on his hands and knees. Having made it to the door his shaking hand fumbled around in search of the handle.

Strand watched, a smile on his face. After a few moments of entertainment watching the Policemen struggle, the lighthouse keeper crossed the room to the floundering detective and opened the glass door for him. Strand all of a sudden felt an empathy with the Englishman, he was so proud. It was obvious that he needed a helping hand, but he never would have asked. Strand admired that; he would have been exactly the same.

Pathetically, Kitchener crawled outside.

The walkway ran the entire circumference of the lamp room. Around its outer edge an iron handrail was the only barrier to prevent someone falling off the edge. It was with this rail Kitchener pulled himself up to a semi erect position onto his knees. "Why did I ever come here?"

With his eyes firmly fixed on the horizon he slowly began to pull himself to his feet. His left hand slipped off the top rail and as he dropped back to the floor his gaze rested below on the crashing waves at the base of the lighthouse. Kitchener was sick through sheer terror. The vomit, he watched fall all the way down taking several seconds before hitting the water and dispersing in the waves. Breathing heavily he began once again to pull himself to his feet. The knuckles on both hands were white as he held on to the handrail for dear life and breathed in the salty sea air.

Inside, Strand viewed this with amusement. Leaning against one of the glass walls which lined the room, he smiled and held his hand on a large switch marked 'Air Comp. Test'. Waiting for the optimum moment when Kitchener had finally made it to his feet and felt a little more at ease with his surroundings, Strand dropped the lever.

A deafening low-pitched moan of the foghorn filled the air. Kitchener jumped a good twelve inches before landing on his knees, white hands still firmly fixed on the handrail. Cold beads of sweat ran down his face and his whole body trembled like a frightened kitten.

Strand gave a little laugh, he couldn't help himself. "That seems to be working fine." He said in a nonchalant manner.

"Good God man, you could have killed me." Never could Kitchener remember having such a feeling of helplessness, as he did now. The large, burly Policeman had been reduced to a nervous wreck.

For his size, which was considerable, James McDonald was a formidable athlete. When living a life at sea a certain amount of fitness is always required. Nowadays steam is the preferred method of powering ships, but in his day sail was the source of propulsion known. This was one of the factors of McDonald's strength, the brace had to be turned, the rigging climbed and the sails pulled.

As he ran along the cliff top dressed in full oilskins his mind was set, determined to reach Edinburgh harbour. The steam launch normally used for the routine journeys to and from the rock was out of action, the main steam valve had blown during a test run yesterday. The relief keeper Douglas Strand therefore had set off early that morning from the signal tower to walk down into the town where the relief boat was housed in a boat shed. This fact was something McDonald had written several letters about to the Northern Lighthouse Board. In the event of an emergency, such as this, it would be necessary to walk the long path into the town. One launch was not enough. He didn't like steam-powered craft at the best of times, sail was what he was brought up with and sail had served him well all his life.

It was like the plans to convert lighthouses from oil lamps to this new Edison electric lighting. Electricity - no one knew how it worked, he did not trust it, as far as he could see it was magic, devilry; stay with oil, you know where you are with oil.

Of all the days for something to go wrong it had to be this day that the boat was out of action. McDonald sweated in his hot oilskins, his face a dark shade of red as he puffed away like an old steam locomotive. Only sheer determination on his part kept him going; that and the fact that the keepers could be trouble, he was their only lifeline. All of a sudden he was brought to a halt by a deep groan emanating from the sea. He stopped running and almost rooted to the spot he turned to look in the direction of the lighthouse.

"No, not good." He shook his head as he recognised the sound of the Bell Rock foghorn.

Inspector Boyd sat behind his desk. The scent of whisky filled the air in the warm room. The three empty glasses still sat on the surface of his

desk, untouched since his two visitors had departed far across the cold sea bound for the Bell Rock. The Inspector's fingertips pressed against each other as he sat deep in thought, considering the problems the day had thrown up. With a sudden jolt he jumped up and walked to the door. Opening it slightly he hollered out, "Constable, I need to send a telegram."

Stepping backwards, so the rear of his legs were positioned in front of the fire he waited for the young lad to take his message.

Chapter 8

Kitchener had heard the old sea dogs telling their stories in the pubs around London. He had always thought of them as, to coin a phrase, 'Fishermen's Tales'. Many stories he had listened to about how the weather changes at the drop of a hat. Until now he had always presumed that they were just that, stories. Now he had seen it with his own eyes. The weather was now calm. No wind could be heard and no crashing waves around the base of the tower. The fresh air and view from the top of the lighthouse was now almost enjoyable. Though his knees gave the occasional involuntary wobble he felt fine as Strand joined him outside on the balcony.

"Are ya feeling any better?" asked Strand. A hint of guilt in his voice.

"Not really," lied Kitchener. He hadn't forgiven Strand for the stunt with the foghorn. Now though it was time to get back to business. "What do you think is going on here?"

"I dunna know; who's been running the light? That's what I want to know."

"Who?" asked Kitchener in a questioning type of way.

"The keepers man, the keepers. Where are they?" wasn't it obvious to him. Someone must be here to maintain the running of the machinery.

The tower had been scaled yet the two men had not crossed anyone's path. No one was in attendance.

If this was the case who had been stoking the boilers and checking the oil for the lamp? Someone must be here.

"I thought I knew what was going on here, but now I'm not sure".

Kitchener was working on the assumption that there had been a case of food poisoning or, at the worst, one of the keepers had lost their mind and barricaded himself in the lamp room. Now as far as he could make out only one explanation remained.

"What?" replied Strand.

"You're sure the lamp is in working order; there's nothing wrong with it?"

"Its fine, I'm sure of that."

He knew Boyd was wrong. No one had come to put the light out of action. As he knew all along, the mainland would be the location of any attack on Her Majesty's life. "Nothing out of the ordinary in the motor or the oil tanks?"

"As I have told you, its my first time at this lighthouse but nothing looks amiss with the workings of the machinery as far as I can tell.

"Just the crew then, that's the only mystery here. Come on let's get back inside and I'll tell you what I thought was going on. It will use up a bit of time until the tide turns and I can get back to the mainland." That's all Kitchener wanted to do, get back to terra firma. He was neglecting his duty and all because of Boyd's wild ideas. Why had he sent him here?

The sense of danger had now abated somewhat. Now there was only one thing to do, sit it out and wait for the tide. While waiting for the elements it would give him a chance to prove to Strand that it wasn't only old sea dogs who could tell a tale or two. The relief lighthouse keeper was in for a treat.

Boyd's legs roasted as he stood in front of the fire. He wondered to himself how much more punishment they could take from the blazing heat, he was almost at the point of no return. If the material of his trousers became any hotter then it would be too painful to sit down in them. As he embarked on the journey back to his desk a knock came at the door.

There was no way that he could make it back to his chair in a reasonable time. His trousers burnt the skin of his legs every time they clashed. Standing next to his desk he grabbed the lapels of his jacket to try and give a look of authority, "Come," he bellowed in his slight tone. The door swung open and a fresh-faced young constable appeared around the doorframe, "Sir." The tone in his voice inferred he was eager to please.

"Come in lad, close the door and take a seat." The young lad did as he was instructed. Boyd meanwhile took several cautious steps behind his desk and towards his chair. Feeling confident the heat had dissipated from his trousers, he gingerly sat down. "Right," he said in a meaningful, business type of voice, "Take this down." Boyd composed himself as the constable readied his pad and pencil.

"Sir...Inspector...Kitchener... at... Bell...Rock... Lighthouse...stop...He...suspects...attempt...on...Queen's...life...stop...Advise...stop.

"See that goes to Scotland Yard immediately."

The young lad eyed up the whisky glasses on the desk and was thinking that if the Inspector were in a benevolent mood then maybe he too would sample a wee dram of the sweet liquor.

Boyd had sat down too soon in his chair and his legs felt like they were about to spontaneously combust. "Well, what are you waiting for lad?" The young constable jumped out of his chair and bolted towards the door. As he opened it to leave, Boyd was already beginning to stand up. A feeling of relief came over him as the material fell away from his skin. Then much to his annoyance the constable turned back and looked into the room.

"Sir."

"What." Why was he still here? Didn't he know Boyd had important things to do?

"Doctor Montrose is here to see you Sir, he has expressed it to be a matter of urgency."

"Really, can't it wait?"

"He was most insistent on it Sir."

"Very well, get that telegram sent off then show him in."

“Yes Sir.”

Finally the door closed giving Boyd the opportunity to freely move around his office desperately waiting for his trouser legs to return to something like a normal temperature.

Quietly Strand and Kitchener descended from the Lamp Room. Kitchener was deep in thought while Strand didn't know just what to think, he was becoming more and more resigned to the fact that something un-natural was happening.

“Could they have gone over the side, up there?” Kitchener motioned his hand back up towards the lamp room.

This Englishman obviously didn't have any knowledge of the Northern Lighthouse Board's rules and regulations, “No, not experienced keepers, they wouldn't have been on the balcony together anyway, not all at once.”

“Somebody could have thrown them off?”

“Who? The door was bolted from the inside, remember. That means whoever threw them off must also have...” Strand's voice trailed off while he gave an involuntary shudder, someone had walked over his grave.

“...Jumped.” Kitchener finished the sentence off for him.

“Aye.” Strand replied, “What where you going to tell me?”

“Come on I'll tell you in the living room.”

Once again both men set off down the stairs.

Trousers now cooled, Boyd was back in his chair behind his desk. The two empty whisky glasses were back in his desk drawer. He was using the brief period of time wisely by catching up on a few pieces of outstanding paperwork that commanded his attention.

A knock came on the door, disrupting his train of thought. “Come,” he said in an authoritative voice. The door swung open and there framed in the doorway was a little man in a large grey overcoat, supporting a bowler hat on his head. He was Doctor Montrose of the Royal Scottish Sanatorium.

“Please come in and take a seat Doctor.”

“Thank you Inspector.” The Doctor removed his hat and coat before neatly hanging them on the hat stand. Once he was happy with his dress he took up the invitation and seated himself.

“Would you like a wee dram with me Doctor? Its awfully cold outside of late.”

“Thank you, no,” the little man replied politely. The doctor did not partake in drink. He believed intoxicating liqueur to be the stuff of Satan. His father had fallen fowl of the demon drink when Montrose had been a wee boy of twelve years old. It was because of the subsequent illness caused by his excesses that he finally persuaded the young Montrose to seek a career in medicine and abstain from alcohol all his life.

“Fine, a little early for myself too. So what can I do for you doctor?”

“Early this morning one of our patients broke out of the hospital, Inspector.” The small man admitted in a low voice.

“Yes I am aware and we have a search underway now Doctor.” This is not what he needed, to be going over the same work again, didn’t he have enough to be doing without having to nursemaid a doctor? Boyd had more important things on his mind, a royal visit was first among his thoughts. He was just about to get a little short with the doctor then...

“I think I know where he’s bound for Inspector.”

“Really?” this was more like it. If the doctor could shed a little light on the case then fine, maybe they would be able to catch the fugitive before the distinguished visitors arrived.

“John Cooper is the man you’re looking for Inspector. His grandfather worked with Robert Stevenson on the lighthouse at the Bell Rock. Cooper is convinced that Stevenson cheated his Grandfather out of the keeper’s job. We dunna have any evidence to substantiate this, but it is what he firmly believes.”

“Is this the young man who attempted to set fire to Mr. Stevenson’s town house a couple of nights back?”

“That’s him Inspector. Now he’s hell bent on becoming the lighthouse keeper and take his grandfather’s rightful place on the rock.”

“Great, that’s all I need.”

“It gets worse I’m afraid Inspector.” Once again his tone lowered. Kitchener knew there was worse to come; the doctor’s voice clearly gave

that away. "We thought he wasn't a high risk prisoner, no danger to the populace but I was wrong in my diagnosis". "I was incorrect in thinking it was only the Stevenson family that would be in danger. On his exit from the building he murdered a guard so he must be regarded as very dangerous."

"So, you think he may be heading for the Lighthouse?"

"From what I know, I would say that was where he would be heading for, yes." Boyd thought for a second. Fingertips together he rocked back and forth on his chair before standing and walking around the office and leaning against the wall. "This troubles me" said Boyd. "I sent an English police officer to the rock earlier today". "The relief keeper came here and told us of a problem at the rock." He took the doctor's hat and coat from the stand and passed them over to him before putting his own heavy black overcoat on. "I have an inspection to make then I will get straight onto it doctor. If Cooper is heading towards the rock, the crew will have to be warned."

The living room on the Bell Rock Lighthouse was a simple circular room, but practical. Much was crammed into the small space, although it had a spacious feeling. Two wicker sofas faced each other in the centre of the room; one of which was almost directly under the stairs leading down from the light control room. A desk was shaped so it would fit neatly into the internal curve of the exterior wall. Directly opposite the stairs a small galley, which served for all their cooking needs, was partly partitioned off.

Seventy years of keepers had passed through here, their souls haunted this room, once the lighthouse had been part of your life you couldn't let it go even in death. Now a mystery would unfold in this very room that would never be heard of outside its walls.

Kitchener was the first to come down the stairs, "If someone left the rock this morning, how far would they have got?" Strand was close on the Inspectors heels, "but what about the door?" Kitchener had reached the bottom of the stairs and was now fully recovered from the illness that had gripped him in the Lamp room. His face had returned to its natural florid complexion and his brain was once again working. "I'm speaking

hypothetically” he said turning to Strand, whose heavy boots crashed down on each wooden step with a thud.

“Difficult to say.” He explained as his large frame stepped off the bottom stair. “It depends on the craft, wind speed, sea conditions you know.”

That was no help to Kitchener; he was trying to consider all possibilities. Every time he came up with a plausible theory Strand dampened it with his observations. “Do you have any explanation for this?” The question was half asked in desperation, though he didn’t want Strand to know it.

“There have been many strange things happen on the rock over the years, unnatural things I dare not speak of.” Strand’s voice had dropped a tone and sounded mysterious and far away.

“I’ve heard stories myself, even in London.”

“Many men have lost their lives here, many ships have floundered and sank here. Who knows how many souls wander the rock.”

“Er, yes.” Came Kitchener’s tenuous, almost sarcastic reply. He was not a believer, a fact that Muriel couldn’t understand.

“You dunna believe in the spirits?”

“I’m not convinced I must say.”

Strand was almost offended by the Englishman’s offhand attitude regarding the souls of the long lamented mariners who lost their lives here. In disgust he crossed the room heading towards the galley. He had no cause to go into the galley, maybe it was just to get away from the non-believing Kitchener. As he crossed the room he froze to the spot as though some invisible force had hold of him. Whatever he wanted from the galley was long forgotten.

Unaware of Strand’s inertia Kitchener continued, “I’m sure there’s a perfectly natural explanation for all of this.” Strand had passed out of Kitchener’s sight and not being an ignorant person he turned to face Strand. What he saw was the keeper standing like a stone statue. All the colour had drained from his face and beads of sweat ran down his temples. The palms of his hands were cold and clammy and all the moisture had drained from his mouth, leaving his dry tongue unable to operate. A cold, white index finger raised into the air pointing down at the floor behind the sofas nearest the kitchen.

“What?” enquired the Police Inspector.

No answer was forthcoming from the dumb struck Strand. Kitchener sensing something was wrong joined Strand in the centre of the room and to his horror discovered the source of Strands paralysis.

“Do you believe now?” Strand’s voice was broken with fear.

On the wooden dusty floor behind the sofa two fully clothed bodies were slumped, leaning back against the back of the chair. Their eyes were open staring into space.

Both men were in their mid fifties. The elder of the two, who was nearer sixty than the half century was sitting further away from Kitchener. Both men wore the thick woollen knitted jumpers that all lighthouse keepers were issued with, as well as their oilskin trousers and boots.

To Kitchener it was clear who they were, though two questions immediately sprang to mind. How did they die, as there was no clear wound on either body nor any weapons in their hands; and the second question was one directed at himself, why did he miss them on the way up? Where they there on the way up? Each question seemed to generate another. Quickly he tried to recall the journey through the living room on the way up to the top of the tower. Something bothered him, but what was it? It was something he couldn’t quite grasp, his memory wouldn’t recall it. It was like rushing through a railway station on a high-speed train and seeing the name of the stop painted on the board. The sign can be seen, but not long enough to register the name of the station. The eyes nearly see it, but not quite.

Kitchener placed a reassuring hand on Strand’s shoulder then knelt down beside the nearest body, the cadaver of the younger of the two. For a moment he surveyed the body for any signs of attack or injury. Nothing apparent could be seen. His next course of action seemed strange to Strand, the Inspector sniffed at the bodies’ lips. It would appear that whatever he had been looking for was not apparent.

Kitchener had, in fact, been looking for signs or at least the smell of poison having been administered orally. After holding the back of his right hand beneath the nostrils of the dead man and checking the pulse in the neck he turned to Strand and shook his head. He stepped over the two corpses with one large step, which Strand thought somewhat

disrespectful. Kitchener repeated the same procedure on the elder of the two. Once he had satisfied himself with the explanation he took out the pocket watch from the elder man's pocket, opened the outer case and observed the movement was still working, the second hand ticking round. Time marches on. Closing the watch he returned it to the jacket pocket from where it had come.

The examination of the pocket watch had clearly shown two things to Kitchener. Whoever had perpetrated the crime, the motive was not robbery. A privateer would not pass up the chance of taking a fifty-guinea watch. The second point deduced was that the murder must have been planned. The lack of an obvious physical cause of death pointed to the fact that poison must have been administered to the crew. If this was the case it can be only presumed that beyond any doubt the murder was pre-planned, but where was the murderer?

Looking up at Strand he gave air to his thoughts, "The Captain and First Mate I presume."

"I think so."

"You think?" Kitchener asked in a questioning voice.

"I never worked with them, did I." Strand shouted, the fear and frustration in those words was clear to hear. After a moment he continued in a somewhat easier tone, "Look at their faces, they look as though they have been scared to death."

Never before had Kitchener come across a man being frightened to death.

"Is this it?"

"What is what?" Strand didn't understand the question.

Kitchener knew he had phrased the question badly, but still continued.

"How many keepers are there in this lighthouse?"

"Two Keepers and one engineer." He could see now what the police inspector was trying to establish.

"So where is the engineer? I am working on the assumption that this is the Captain and the First Mate.

"How can you tell?" How could he tell? He didn't know what the crew looked like so how could Kitchener possibly know? It was then that Strand realised he knew as much of the workings of the police as Kitchener knew of the logistics of running a lighthouse.

“The engineer’s hands would be covered in oil. Even when you wash them, oil gets ground in and doesn’t completely clean off. These two have reasonably clean hands, look at their fingernails.” Strand looked closely at one of the Captain’s hands, though not too closely.

“Oh yes, of course.”

Kitchener had recently read a story in the strand magazine by Arthur Conan Doyle entitled ‘A Study in Scarlet.’ His detective had used several excellent techniques in his deductions, so why not use them he thought for himself. This was the first opportunity he had had to do so. “Thank you Mr. Holmes.” He quietly admitted under his breath.

“He must be here somewhere?” Strand stated the obvious.

“The only way out would lead to certain death, the only safe route was locked and bolted.”

The Palace of Westminster was quiet that Christmas Eve afternoon. Only a few members of parliament remained in the offices that line the building, only a handful of civil servants remained in attendance. The majority of the Government departments and offices were now closed for the holiday though some departments operated with the same efficiency no matter what the time or date.

In a wood panelled office that commanded an excellent view of the Thames, an important looking man sat at a desk busying himself writing a letter. He was dressed in a morning suit, his grey hair slicked back over his head with oil. On his large rosewood desk the inkwell and blotter pad were not an inch out of place or a degree off the square. The arrangement of his desktop was similar to the arrangement of his life, controlled and regimented, nothing done without good planning or exact execution. Next to his industrious right hand sat a crystal glass with a generous measure of brandy filling it.

This was a man whose decisions could and would affect thousands of people in many countries all over the World. He was a silent member of Her Majesty’s Government. Only a select few in the very highest of officials and VIP’s knew of his existence. When he spoke, all listened. In many ways he held more power and influence than the Prime Minister

himself. In certain issues the Premier would act on this man's sole advice, such was his knowledge and power.

A knock came from the direction of the door. The grey haired man stopped writing, blotted the letter then covered it with a fresh piece of blotting paper. He always kept visitors waiting at the door; it was an indication of his seniority. No one could command an audience with him on their own terms. He was in command, walking over to the fireplace he looked at his reflection in the large Georgian mirror, which was suspended on the wall. Observing that a rebellious hair had fallen out of place, he proceeded to smooth it back over his head with the palm of his right hand. Happy with the result he straightened his clothes with two sharp tugs on his jacket before re-seating himself behind the desk and issuing the order to advance.

"Come." His tone was sharp and official. A no-nonsense command, reminiscent of his army days. A young man entered holding a piece of paper in his hand. Slowly he approached the desk.

"Yes?"

"This telegram has been intercepted en-route to Scotland Yard Sir." He handed over the folded piece of paper. This particular facsimile telegram had come from one of the many perpetually working Government Departments. Intelligence Departments never closed, the powers never took days off, so neither could the faceless inhabitants of the Secret Service.

Reading the telegram the grey haired man looked up. "Very well, we have our man there, there should be no problem dealing with him."

Douglas Strand stared at the bodies of the crew lying on the living room floor. Still he could not believe what he was seeing. Kitchener was pacing up and down the room thinking. "Is there anywhere in this building a man could be hiding?"

"No, its not possible, we would have seen him on the way up, wouldn't we?"

The policeman stopped pacing around the room and came to rest by Strand's side. "We didn't see these two on the way up did we?" That was a good point. When the two men had ascended the lighthouse Strand had

rushed up the stairs desperate to get to the Lamp Room. Kitchener had followed and was never given the opportunity to make an examination of the room as he had done in all the others. Where the bodies here when they came through the room?

“If the engineer had heard us he would have come out of hiding?” thought Strand out loud.

“Not if he was dead.” Kitchener paused to give Strand time to react, but nothing came. “So, where is the body?” “Maybe he’s too scared to come out of hiding?”

“He’s vanished, I tell you there’s something supernatural going on here, you heed my warning.”

Kitchener had had enough of this, action was needed here, not superstition, “Get a hold of yourself, no one vanishes. Come on we’ll search again. Like before, start at the bottom and work upward.”

“What about those two?” Strand gestured to the bodies lying on the floor.

“They’re not going anywhere.”

Chapter 9

The sun shone on the cobbled courtyard of the Edinburgh Central Police Station. The clatter of wheel and hoof on the stone filled the cold December air. The afternoon sun almost had a hint of warmth in it, made a degree or so warmer by the fact that the cold northerly wind had subsided.

In the centre of the courtyard a line of twenty men stood to attention, all eyes front and centre. The buttons on their uniforms glistened in the afternoon sunlight like stars in the black night sky.

The men had been hand picked to be presented to the Queen later that evening. Chief Inspector Boyd, dressed in a large black overcoat, inspected the men. A sense of pride filled him as he walked along the line. He had watched the progress of many of these officers from cadets to constables to inspectors. As he reached the end of the line he adjusted the lapel of one of the officer's jackets. Nothing had been amiss with the piece of clothing; he just liked to make a point. Perfection was not enough today.

“Good, good. You’re a credit to your uniform men. Her Majesty will never have seen such a well turned out group of men, and I...”

Boyd's flow was broken as the heads of one or two of his best men started to turn towards the gate. Their eyes had caught sight of a man staggering through the large wooden gates, his face was red from exhaustion. Steam rose in the cold air from his large frame. In the shadow of the gate he stopped to catch his breath. The newcomer was dressed in oilskins, another seaman then, thought Boyd to himself.

McDonald was exhausted, he could not go another step, out of breath he fell to his knees, his legs felt like the lead weights he would throw over the side of the ship to test the depth of the water when he was a young lad at sea.

"Don't just stand there lads," bellowed Boyd, "Get him into the station house." Two of the constables broke ranks and ran over to the man sitting on his knees. In spite of his considerable weight they managed to throw an arm over each of their shoulders and help the visitor into the building.

The search of the lighthouse began in earnest with the Lower Engine room. Having checked the two access ladders their attention was once more focused on the main part of the building. It was warm; the heat from the machinery gave a comfortable feeling to the room. Kitchener wondered why the living and bedrooms were not closer to the heat? Maybe it was the methodical hum of the machines put them off.

Kitchener was eager to start the investigation while his companion, following behind, did not show the same amount of enthusiasm.

"Lower Engine Room," said Kitchener with the equivalent of a spring in his step. "Its a bit of a mess. Do you think there has been a struggle in here?"

Strand passed a quizzical eye around the room. There was no sign of a frenzied attack; nothing was broken, only a shovel was lying on the floor making the room look a little untidy. "Engine rooms are always a wee bit on the messy side." Once again Strand inspected the pressure gauges connected to the pipes emerging from the generator. "Pressure still showing fine."

"If someone had killed the keepers to put the lighthouse out of action, why maintain the generators?"

“If someone’s still here.” Strand was right. Kitchener was only presuming that they were not the only life on the lighthouse. “These things can run for two or three hours without maintenance.”

“Well, yes, I...”

He is suddenly stopped from continuing by a loud metallic clank coming from the rear of one of the large green machines. Both men froze on the spot and exchanged nervous glances. A plan of action needed to be formed, and quickly. Someone was hiding around the back of one of the generators. It stood approximately four feet off the wall, just big enough for someone to crouch behind comfortably. Kitchener immediately took control of the situation. He raised a finger directing Strand to proceed around the left-hand side of the machinery while he himself tiptoed around to the right. The plan was to trap whoever was concealing themselves behind the machine. Both men edged their way to the rear, Kitchener was relieved that the search would soon be over and the mystery cleared up. Strand however was shaking. What was waiting for them around the back of the huge piece of cast iron? Was it a violent killer or a frightened engineer awaiting rescue?

Resting against the green paint of the generator lay an iron bar, which Kitchener had no hesitation in picking up. A weapon was such a great leveller when it came to a fight, a deterrent against any assailant. He raised the iron bar above his head ready to strike. Strand looked over at the Inspector who with a nod of his head gave the signal, “Now!”

To say McDonald was hot after his run to the Police Station would be an understatement. Now in Boyd’s office he struggled for breath. A constable was helping him peel off the wet oilskins from his body. As they came off the perspiration that adhered to them dripped onto the floor of the office. His clothes were soaked through with his own bodily fluids. They would soon dry in the comparative heat of Boyd’s room, the fire was still throwing out large amounts of heat.

“That will be all constable.” Boyd instructed the young lad as he hung McDonald’s coat and leggings up to dry.

“Thank you young man.” Wheezed McDonald as he left the room. He fell down into the chair with a thump and then began to regain control of his

respiratory system. Boyd sat opposite him and took two glasses and a bottle of whisky out of his bottom drawer.

“Drink?” Enquired the small Policemen.

“Aye” replied McDonald struggling to talk.

Boyd poured out two generous slugs of the liqueur and passed one over the table. McDonald was not a drinker as a rule, he took his responsibilities far too seriously to have his judgements clouded by drink, but this time he would put it down to medicinal purposes. He sipped the brown liquid, which burnt his throat on the way down. It seemed to strip the lining off as it slowly descended into his stomach. Boyd tossed his own drink back in one sharp movement. McDonald watched the little man and wondered how he didn’t do any damage to his neck drinking in such a fashion.

“You’re here with regards to the problem at Bell Rock I presume?”

“How on earth did you know about the problem with the light?”

McDonald was in a state of shock. If the Inspector hadn’t been a policeman of such high rank he would swear to him having knowledge of witchcraft. “I only sent the signal two hours ago.” Boyd smiled a reassuring smile; he could see the confusion in his visitors face. “Your relief keeper, he came here earlier today.”

“Who, Strand?” This did serve as an explanation of sorts, but it also added to McDonald’s confusion. Why had Strand come here? If there was a problem it would have been normal for the relief keeper to contact the signal tower, not the local constabulary.

“It was four hours since. He steamed out to the rock this morning, but couldn’t get in. The door had been locked from the inside.”

“Locked.” McDonald couldn’t believe what he was being told. Never in all his years had he ever heard of the lighthouse being locked.

“He returned to the mainland and upon docking he ran up here to raise the alarm. After a short discussion he returned to the rock and took a Scotland Yarder with him to investigate. McDonald looked puzzled, but laughed, “That I would have liked to have seen.”

Now it was Boyd’s turn to have a confused expression on his face. “What, an Englishman sailing to the rock?”

“No, old Strand running up the hill.” Laughed McDonald who was in danger of losing his breath once more.

Boyd wanted an explanation, “Old? No I’d put him no more than thirty years old.”

It was as though someone operating McDonald’s sense of humour had flicked a switch, he stopped laughing and his face instantly became more intense, peering into Boyd’s eyes, “What?”

The tension hung in the air of the Lower Engine Room, it could almost be seen, like the fog, which would cling to the River Thames. The critical moment had arrived. Kitchener and Strand simultaneously lunged around the back of the generator, Kitchener bringing down the iron bar to disable whoever may be there. Strike first; ask questions later is what this situation required. What he saw made him look in disbelief. The bar crashed down narrowly missing Strand’s head before landing on one of the many pipes situated behind the machine. A metallic clank echoed around the room.

The sudden noise awoke the occupant currently asleep behind the generator. A loud meow filled the room as a ginger cat jumped out from behind the piece of machinery where, up until a moment ago, it had been enjoying a nap in a warm dry place. The feline narrowly missed Strand’s face, talons ablaze, as it screeched through the air and up the stairs.

Both men were in a state of shock. Kitchener leant back against the external wall breathing heavily. Never before had he been so frightened.

“Did you know they kept a cat here?”

“No.” replied Strand, his face pale as though he had seen a ghost. He didn’t know how much more he could take of this.

In Boyd’s office a hint of panic had entered the conversation. Boyd thought of Kitchener’s paranoia, maybe he had been right after all. If that was the case Boyd himself had been totally justified in sending the Englishman to the lighthouse. What had he sent him to though? What danger was waiting for him there?

“So what are you saying? The man who came here earlier today was not Douglas Strand?”

“Only if he had lost twenty years overnight.” The Strand McDonald knew was a man approaching the half-century and in appearance looking considerably older than his years. His elderly appearance was also matched by his physical ability. No way could the Douglas Strand he knew have run up the hill from the boat sheds, which lined the banks of the Forth.

“I’ve sent Kitchener there with him.” said the small man in a hushed, strained voice. “We have a Police launch in one of the boat sheds down on the river.” His tone was now one of action. “We’d better get down there and make ready to put to sea as soon as the tide will allow. We must get to the rock; the Inspector could be in grave danger. I have an idea that the man purporting to be Douglas Strand is an agent plotting to...” he hesitates, “...come on.”

“The tide will be against us now.”

“We can at least make her ready to put to sea.”

The storeroom was only illuminated by a single shaft of natural sunlight coming through the small window. It was late afternoon now and the sunlight was weak and had a distinct orange glare to it.

Kitchener rummaged around the many shelves, “Looks as though they were getting low on supplies, but not starving though.”

“I have brought the provisions for the next month with me.” Strand took a tin box off one of the shelves and proceeded to open it. He checked the contents before sealing the box up and replacing it back on the shelf.

“What happened to the supplies you brought here this morning, where are they now?”

“I left them in the boat house.”

Kitchener didn’t remember seeing them there, “Really I don’t recall seeing them?”

“No, I put them in the back corner, in the dark where no one passing could see them.” Kitchener was about to challenge this when Strand continued, “All the flares are here.” He said looking in another box. On

the shelf above the box containing the flares sat a whole host of bottles and jars filled with pills and medicines for all illnesses and conditions. "All the medical supplies intact too." He observed.

Kitchener sighed a heavy sigh. The more they discovered, the stranger the problem became. With all the medical supplies intact, this closed down another avenue of investigation. None of the keepers could have overdosed on drugs causing them to take the others lives or in another case, their own. This area of thought gave him a new line of enquiry to explore though, "Do keepers go out of their minds very often?" Well, he had considered every other route and it was a possibility.

Strand considered the question for a moment or two. If anything like that happened to his fellow keepers it was not something advertised by the relevant lighthouse board. Lighthouse keepers loosing their minds and leaving lamps unattended was not a good image to portray. Seafarers needed the rock solid crew as a firm indication of the safe shipping lanes. Strand had heard the dark tale only a few weeks previous. To him it was absolute evidence of paranormal activity here on Gods earth. No matter what sceptics such as Kitchener believed or said.

The story concerned the crew of a land bound lighthouse. "There was a case a few years ago, up on the north West Coast, Flannan Isle, where one dark foggy night the full crew disappeared. It was said that they lost their minds and jumped off the Lamp Room after seeing a giant sea monster attacking the lighthouse." Strand believed the tale without question. "The keepers were never found, alive or dead." Stories of sea monsters were often told by sailors who inhabited the pubs around the town, whilst on shore leave. Strand had been told the tale by his grandfather, who had heard it in a pub late one winter's night, was it a true story? It was more likely to be seaman's one-upmanship in the tall story competitions fuelled by the drink. If the events had happened in that way, how did the teller know the poor keepers had jumped off the top of the tower, why not use the door?

Nobody could say, but then who knew what lived in the deep dark waters of the North Sea? Many people had seen the monster that resided in Loch Ness over the years, if one swam there why shouldn't there be more. Kitchener however was not sure, "Really"

“Of course the Bell Rock has its very own curse.” Strand left the sentence hanging, but the air of mystery he had tried to instil was completely wasted on Kitchener.

“Oh do tell me.” Kitchener said after a moment. He wasn’t going to ask but he took the hint, after all there was nothing else to do until the turn of the tide.

The grand old gentlemen’s club was situated in the heart of the city of Westminster, London. Its corridors had seen many great and good men pass through over the years. The smell of stale cigar smoke hung heavy in the air of the dark wood lined passages and rooms. Most of these were empty now, not many members were in attendance today.

The club had not been so empty two evenings ago. The main smoking room had played host to an impromptu lecture by the renowned scientist and botanist, Charles Darwin. He distracted an audience of members for two and a half hours with his extensive knowledge of botany, the origins of man, which caused the usual furore and his travels in far off lands collecting samples for the royal society. The talk had been well received and a firm promise was made that he would repeat the performance on a prearranged date.

In the reading room sat two men on high backed chairs. Both were reading a copy of today’s Times. Each chair had a small table situated off the right hand arm, on each table a perpetual glass of brandy. The two men were in the capital on business, the elder of the two morning suited men had grey hair swept back over his head. Plumes of grey cigar smoke lifted into the air, like great mushroom clouds above his head, while he passed an eye over the home news.

Outside in the cold, damp city Big Ben majestically peeled three times. The sound echoed around the passages and mews of the metropolis. The younger of the two men looked up from his newspaper and glanced over, through the cloud of smoke, at his grey haired superior. “Three o’clock sir, we are underway.” It was a careless sort of thing to say which showed all the inexperience of his lack of years. One more slip such as that and his services in the organisation would be no longer required. The mono-phrase had not given anything away, no one could have read

anything into it, but there was no room for loose talk in matters as important and as delicate as this.

The other man took note of the slip but said nothing, it would not go unremembered. A smile came to his face as he raised a glass in his right hand in a silent salute.

The younger man was a relative newcomer to the organisation to which they had both sworn an oath of secrecy. Not as worldly or wise as the grey haired man he required, on occasion, a prod in the right direction, to learn when to keep a discrete silence. He had just received a steering nudge. In embarrassment he changed his tack, "What is that tree doing in the lobby?" he asked not knowing what else to say.

The grey haired man once again stopped reading; he allowed the top half of the newspaper to fall away from him before answering. "I believe it was one of Albert's ideas. A Christmas tree, all the best houses have them now, it reminded him of home. Germany that is." He thought of the late Prince Albert, they were good friends in an unofficial way, though never seen together in public. Albert had a first class strategic, tactical brain.

The Empire had been safe with his steering hand at the summit.

The young man smiled and replied in a mocking voice, "It'll never catch on."

The senior member of the exchange smiled to himself, re-opened his newspaper and carried on reading the article on the repercussions of the Boar War on medical science. With the lecture from Mr Darwin still fresh in his mind he thought of scientific matters.

The world was changing, an age of change was sweeping over Britain and Her Empire. Medicines were beginning to cure all manner of disease, London had an underground rail system, and illuminating gas was being replaced with Edison Light, who knew were all this would end. Inventors and industrialists now commanded respect in today's society and command the biggest fees.

This was indeed a changing age and there was nothing he could do to stop it. He could however manipulate it to his own ends or to the advantage of his organisation. The acts that were currently in fruition would at a

conservative estimate give the Empire another twenty-five years at best. After that it would go the way of all things.

Over history, the secret society to which he belonged had followed the power base of the day; they had a hand in many Empires. As far back as the great Egyptian era through Mesopotamia to renaissance Italy the path could be tracked. In more recent times the society commanded seats of power in Napoleonic France and now the British Empire.

A new shift of the power base was due, but where to? It would be a location with money for potential. A decision would be made in due course.

Kitchener and Strand had once again returned to the living room. The search had found nothing. Both were convinced that whoever the attacker had been they were long gone by one means or another. Kitchener knew all that could be done had been achieved; a sense of helplessness engulfed him. All he could do now was to sit and wait for the tide to change. Strand was more than capable of running the lighthouse for the short space of time until the authorities arrived with a fresh crew or at least some kind of help.

Kitchener seated himself on one of the wicker sofas, his back towards the galley and the two bodies lying on the floor. There was no point in worrying now; he may as well take the time to recuperate before the torrid journey back to the mainland. Strand was standing, his body shivered as he looked across the room, "We canna leave those two there like that." He said referring to the two departed keepers.

"No" Kitchener sighed. In his line of work he had, over the years, become used to seeing dead bodies, Strand however was not. Looking around the room Kitchener looked for anything that could be used as a temporary shroud. Over the back of the sofas hung a grey blanket. He passed it over to Strand. "Here, cover them with this."

Strand took the blanket and held it close to his chest for a moment as though giving it a silent blessing. After staring at the bodies for a moment he summoned up the courage to step over them and carefully cover them with the makeshift shroud. Now he felt a little easier, why he did not know. Possibly it could be associated with the psychology of hiding the

bodies, they were no longer in the room. Slowly he returned to the sofa. Not until he was seated did he allow himself to take his eyes off the blanket.

An uneasy silence descended on the room. Kitchener thought of the tasks he would have to undertake once he was back ashore, that was if the Queen and party were still alive. He shouldn't think of such things. His mind jumped almost immediately to another question, why had he been sent here? Could Boyd be part of the plot? Was it his small part in the conspiracy to ensure that Kitchener was eleven miles out to sea when an assassination attempt would take place? None of these questions could be answered satisfactory until he had gathered more evidence. He must keep positive, there would still be time to intercept any assassin before anything happened.

Strand's thoughts were occupied only with the macabre deaths of his two fellow keepers, how had it happened? He was convinced evil forces were at work here tonight. Here isolated from civilisation, what were they to do? Not only did he think paranormal forces were at work here, he knew who it was. The former keeper who came to a tragic end here had returned, there was no doubt about that.

Kitchener broke the silence, "Now, what was you going to tell me about this curse?" he asked in a much more cheerful voice than the circumstances dictated, thought Strand to himself.

"There's something going on here, something unholy." A dark tone had entered his voice once again.

"Don't start all that again." insisted Kitchener.

"There are more things in heaven and earth than we understand. Look at those two poor souls, not a mark on them, yet still they're dead."

Kitchener already had come to the conclusion that they met their death at the hands of a poison or someone skilled in unarmed combat, not all murders were committed with knife or bullet. Clearly Strand's imagination would not accept such a mundane explanation. "What's your explanation then?" asked the Policeman, fed up with all Strands psycho babble.

"They were scared to death."

Throughout his years in the force, Kitchener had come across many variants on the cause of a death, but never had he heard of someone being scared to death. This would be worth listening to, “Go on...”

“Morris Tweedy.” Strand stopped talking as soon as he had started. Getting up from his seat he walked over to the cabinet shaped to the convex shape of the external wall. Kitchener could not help but be puzzled by his action. The burly figure dropped the latch on the top section of cabinet, “Aha.” he said with a note of pleasure. There in front of him sat a bottle of Scotch whisky. Two glasses were filled before he returned to the sofa passing one to Kitchener en-route, “Here, supplies.” He said with a smile on his face while making himself comfortable. “And just who on earth is Morris Tweedy?” asked Kitchener before taking a drink.

Strand took a sip of his own drink then he was ready to tell his tale. “It was fifty years ago this very day that Morris Tweedy left the rock for the last time. He was a huge mountain of a man in his late fifties. His face was bright red in colour, the lower half of it covered in a grey beard. The grey hair that it was made up of hung tangled and twisted, looking as though an animal had taken up residence in it.”

The repartee in Strand’s storytelling surprised Kitchener; the vocabulary was far better than his own. It must be a tale passed down over the years from keeper to keeper, embellished on every outing.

“He was a man of great experience...” continued Strand, “...twenty years he had worked and lived on the rock. He was heading home for his winter leave; it was a journey he had made many times before. After saying his goodbyes and leaving many, varied instructions to be followed to the letter by the three keepers remaining. Once happy that his directions were clear to all, he set sail for the mainland. That of course was in the days before steam powered ships Inspector.

The keepers watched him make sail before retiring to the lamp room to command a better view of the departing captain. When he set off the weather had been calm, not a cloud to spoil the clear blue sky, only a slight breeze coming across from the west. The wind was welcome, it gave just enough to tack against and take him shore bound.

Suddenly, to the horror of the three remaining keepers a storm blew in from the north. No warning was given by the elements. It was as though the devil himself had dropped it on them from the heavens. The swirling winds and current pushed Tweed's craft back toward the lighthouse and the deadly Bell Rock. The boat was tossed around by the crashing waves like a cork pushed into a bottle. Tweedy took in the sails to try and stabilise the boat, but to no avail. Even with his incredible strength he couldn't navigate the boat away from the danger.

The three keepers away up in the lamp room could only stand and watch in horror as the boat was smashed to pieces on the rock."

Strand's voice had risen to a fevered pitch as the tale was told it climaxed with the crash, and then it dropped almost to a whisper as he continued.

"He didn't stand a chance. Now on Christmas Eve he is said to walk the rooms of the lighthouse, his ghost trying to stop his living self from leaving on that last fateful journey. He is desperate to change history and give a warning to those who work the rock nowadays, never to take the sea for granted." Strand had finished the tale. He sat back and thought of the old keeper, long since gone. The exhaustion of it had taken its toll on him. He lay there almost still and silent without the energy to raise a finger.

"I don't agree with all this spirit talk. If they do exist then they certainly cannot harm us."

"Don't mock the dead, they walk." Strand warned with a deep felt sincerity.

"Not tonight." Kitchener's reply came almost as a shout, certainly it was said with a raised voice. Enough was enough there was no such thing as ghosts. His opinion was not one of the masses. Mediums, clairvoyants and psychics were the apples of the era's eye. Many of the rich and famous people of the day would consult their own ambassador to the spirits before making business decisions or embarking on marriages. These were the modern day advisors; did we put too much trust in them?

Slightly embarrassed by his raised voice and the fact that he had probably struck a blow on Strand's feelings; he turned his head away and sought something else to focus his attention on. Maybe his opinion was his own; maybe he should have kept it to himself.

Lying on the floor beside the sofa was a magazine. Bending over the arm of the chair he picked it up and turned to the front cover, it may fritter away the time until he could make his escape. The title of the publication was in white print in the top right hand corner 'The Strand Magazine'. His heart fell as he realised that he had already read it. On one of the quiet nights at the yard he had found a copy and read with the confines of that shift. Still, he thought its worth another look.

As he fumbled through the pages he became aware of Strand staring at him. It gave him a feeling of unease. Maybe he could take a hint. Reading the magazine on his knee he spoke in an official tone to Strand, "I don't think much more can be done here now. If there was a plot to take the lighthouse nothing has come to pass.

My priority must be to get back to the mainland, what time is the next tide?"

"I don't know, I'll find out." Once again Strand begrudgingly crossed the room to the small cabinet and opened one of the panels. He took out a large green backed book and thumbed through the many pages. Finding the correct page denoted by date order it took only a few moments for the reference he sought. "Low water mark at the Bell Rock, six thirty p.m. "They will have docked by then, oh well nothing I can do now. I'll just have to sit it out here." Once again he turned his attention to the magazine.

"I read that a few months ago. There is an excellent new author writing in it, name of Conan Doyle. He's written a story called 'A Study in Scarlet'. Local man you know."

If Kitchener hated one thing above any other it was being interrupted when he was reading. When he found himself reading either a work of fiction or an article in the newspaper he would lose himself in it, almost as though he was there and part of the events taking place, seeing it as it happens. Neither his wife or work colleagues would utter a word when he was found to have his nose in a book or a piece of paper work.

He took a deep breath and held back a full scale attack on Strands rudeness, after all he did not know of Kitcheners dislikes, "Yes, this

Holmes character.” Then once again he turned his attention to the magazine.

Strand sighed to himself, the policeman had said something earlier that he had heard but didn’t quite register in his mind at the time. “What made you think the lighthouse was going to be captured?”

Kitchener knew that he wasn’t going to get any of the magazines read. He dropped it to the floor in a manner which left Strand under no illusion of what he was thinking. After taking a long drink of whisky he was ready to tell Strand a tale that any old sea dog would be hard pressed to beat.

“It goes back to the end of August...”

Chapter 10

Both men were drinking their second glass of whisky as Kitchener started to tell his story for the second time. Strand had insisted on replenishing their glasses before commencement of the policeman's saga.

Again he started to tell the lighthouse keeper of how he came to be here under such strange circumstances.

"...the thirty first of August to be precise. That date will probably go down in history now. It was on that night that the first victim of The Ripper was found. Who knows, in fifty years time people may still be talking about him and his crimes? The first victim, Mary Ann Nichols was discovered that night, I remember the report coming in.

The next morning the entire Yard was out around the East End. Uniform were conducting door-to-door enquires while we in plain clothes walked the streets making discrete enquires around the more nefarious parts of the capital. I was given my own section of White chapel to patrol and all was quiet for a week or so. The enquiries turned up a description of the suspect. He was a well to do gentleman, carrying a doctor's bag. That was hardly surprising having seen the dissection of the poor women's corpses the mutilations must have been carried out by someone who had at least a limited knowledge of surgery. The description, as it was, could be

attributed to one of a hundred figures that frequent the East End daily. It could though rule out the lower classes, which make up ninety percent of the populace.

Chief Inspector Herbert Kitchener stood on the corner of a cold, dark, foggy street. He leant against the red brick wall of one of the many hovels that lined the streets of London's East End. The smoke from his cigarette rose into the fog and passed a white lettered sign bolted to the brickwork, it read 'Hanbury Street'.

Hanbury Street was a typical example of the dwellings in this part of the town. The walls were black with soot from hundreds of coal fires burning away. A cobbled road ran between the houses, steam rose from the piles of horse manure left there to rot, no one coming out to clean it off the road as they regularly did in the more affluent areas. Most of the doors remained unlocked, whether this was because the residents couldn't afford a locking device or the fact that the only contents would be something to sleep on?

Two figures emerged out of the fog. Two women, their faces painted with over the top colours and the dresses they wore covered in dirt around the bottom hemline. Kitchener was under no illusion what these women were or what trade they offered.

"Alright lover?" screeched the prostitute nearest to him. She spoke in a broad East End cockney accent. She was the younger of the pair, even with the make-up layered onto her face, he would not have put her older than twenty-five years, her travelling companion around five years her senior. "Fancy a bit of fun?"

"Ladies," he said in greeting, "You go careful now." Kitchener was one of the few men who had been polite to them for many a night. They were only trying to make a living, dishonest as it was.

"Will do ducks?" said the older of the two. They waddled away off into the fog, into the night; their voices could still be heard long after the vision of them had faded.

Kitchener couldn't help but be surprised at the amount of women still working the streets. A murderer was on the loose, but these young girls were still plying their trade around the dark streets and alleys of White

chapel. Times were hard in the capital as in the rest of the country. For the lower classes everyday was a struggle to survive and to feed their families. These poor women had to work, to survive. How long could the Empire last with this two-tier system?

His shift was coming to an end, so he started the long walk back to Westminster and the Yard. He gave great thought to finding a handsome carriage, but decided against it. He would be more use on foot than flashing through the streets in a cab. At least he could check the streets and alleys for possible suspects as he made his way back to base. Looking forward to his return to Scotland Yard he thought of his warm office and a chance to put his feet up and drink a well-earned cup of hot tea.

Having only walked past the end of two streets he was stopped in his tracks. There in the murky distance, a figure could be seen crossing the road. As far as he could make out it was a man meeting the description of his quarry. From the fleeting glimpse Kitchener got, he clearly saw the man was sporting a cape and carrying a doctor's bag. The only thing was that this particular man was wearing a top hat, dressed more for the opera than White chapel. No mention was made of a top hat in the description circulated to officers involved in the hunt. A lead though was a lead and this one must be followed up.

The shadowy figure disappeared into the night. It took a moment to register in Kitchener's brain, what had he just observed.

The officer picked up his pace and gave chase as quickly and quietly as possible; after all he did not want his prey to be alerted. As far as he could make out, the man was heading south towards the banks of the River Thames.

Kitchener was out of condition; the further he raced the more out of breath he became. Under his heavy overcoat his body became hotter and hotter. Beads of sweat rolled down the centre of his chest, a complete contrast to the temperature on the outside of his overcoat.

Ten minutes into the pursuit, the banks of the River Thames came into view through the fog, he had been right. This gave him a distinct view; he could only go one of two ways now, up or down stream. He could make out the figure a little more clearly. To Kitchener's surprise the dark figure

turned his heels towards him and hurriedly made off down a stone staircase leading to the water's edge. Kitchener rushed forward to gain a better view. He positioned himself on the embankment, down stream of his quarry. There he was climbing into a rowing boat. This must have all been planned. He was now under no misapprehension that this man must be The Ripper.

No sane man would row up the Thames on a foggy night in such a small vessel. Using the oar to push off from the wall, the small boat steadily floated out into the fast moving current of the river. The tide was coming in which helped to propel the boat at an incredible rate of knots.

No way could the already fatigued Kitchener chase the craft at such a speed. In annoyance he kicked the embankment wall, the frustration was overwhelming. "Damn", he said under his breath. After all this, the chase down the river that had almost killed him, he would lose him now. Kitchener's heart sank, he had almost had him. That man was Jack the Ripper; he had a feeling in his bones. Now because of his failure to capture him how many more times would he strike? Would he limit himself to London or spread further a field making the manhunt even more difficult.

Then, out of nowhere salvation came to his aid. Through the fog came the clip, clapping of a handsome carriage. He spun around on the spot to see the transport and then gave chase. "Cabby?" he shouted, though trying not to raise his voice too much as to make the man traversing the river aware of his presence. The driver had not heard the call. It wasn't until he took his life in his own hands and jumped into the road and furiously waved his arms in front of the cab, that the driver realised that his attention was required.

"Woe" shouted the driver at the horse under his command. The cab came to a halt. "Are ya' trying to get ya'self killed friend?"

Recovering his breath Kitchener walked around the side of the carriage, his tone was urgent, unlike the manner of the cab driver. "I need you to follow that small boat on the river, there." He turned and pointed out into the fast moving centre channel of the Thames.

“Are you having a laugh with me friend?”

There was no time for this, he was cold, tired and his feet had walked who knows how many miles that night? Producing a card out of his coat pocket he passed it to the cab driver and informed him who he was, “I am a Police officer, now follow that craft.”

“Right you are guv” said the driver with an excited voice, “Jump in.”

Kitchener had only one foot in the carriage as it pulled away, the door swinging around and trapping his trailing leg. He didn’t feel any pain; his mind was too focused on the chase.

Sitting in the dark cab he couldn’t believe his luck. Only a moment ago he was cursing at not having any fortune at all and now he was speeding across the centre of town on the heels of the most notorious killer seen for many a long year. If he captured this man he would be the toast of the Yard and famous throughout the Empire.

Watching the boat intently, his mind was focused upon one thing only, bringing this man to justice.

After approximately five minutes, for it was hard to keep track of time when other things were at the forefront of his mind, the Houses of Parliament loomed into view. The clock faces on Big Ben shone in the darkness, the time showed as eleven o’clock. On arrival at Westminster Bridge the driver brought the cab to a halt. Kitchener effused, poked his head out of the window and demanded an explanation as to why they had stopped.

“The road leaves the river here guvna, do you want me to go over the bridge onto the south bank or go round the Houses of Parliament?”

“Which ever stays closest to the river man, just do it.” Did it matter which bank they were on? “Come on, come on”, he said while his right foot

twitched up and down as though operating some invisible potter's wheel. Looking out of the carriage windows Kitchener had a clear view both up and down the river. To his horror the boat was nowhere in sight.

"He must be under the bridge." He hoped that was the case.

Once over the bridge Kitchener desperately looked up and down the river but there was no sign of the man or boat. Banging the roof of the handsome to signal the driver to stop, he dismounted and once again looked up and down the river.

Nothing.

Both men looked at each other in disbelief, where had it gone?

Kitchener scrambled down the bank. His shoes sank into the soft mud at the waters edge. Down on the mudflats he had a clear view under the pillars of the bridge. The huge arch reached across the water linking the two banks.

"As for the river..." Kitchener continued, "...no boats of any shape or form were there, it was empty."

"What?" exclaimed Strand who up to that point had been totally engrossed in the events of September.

"Nothing was there, the boat had disappeared."

"But how?"

"When I scrambled down onto the mud flats I could see a considerable distance, both up and down the river even with the fog. There was absolutely no sign of anything or anyone."

"So what did you do?"

"I kept my head, nothing disappears into thin air. Looking across at the Parliament building I noticed a sewer entrance. By my judgement it would just have been big enough for the boat to squeeze through. This was the only logical explanation I could see.

That was the end of the road for the investigation for that night. I couldn't make an investigation of the sewer without a boat, so I returned to the yard to present my report."

"What was the outcome of that? I can imagine all hell broke loose."

"Not what I expected, especially when I heard that there had been another murder in Whitechapel that night."

In a small dimly lit office in Scotland Yard Herbert Kitchener stood to attention in front of his seated superior. The room may be small, but the decoration was nothing short of palatial. The woodwork that aligned the walls reflected the meagre light from the single gas lamp in its polished surfaces. In a large glass fronted drinks cabinet at least half a dozen bottles of Irish whiskey sat neatly in a row on one of the shelves. On the shelf above, twelve crystal brandy glasses were placed at equal distances along the row. This room portrayed order and method. Was this a trait of its resident or the women that came into clean?

The man behind the desk sat and listened carefully as Kitchener gave his report of the incredible events of that evening.

“Are you sure about all this?” asked Sir Albert Hucksley, the head of the detective division of the London Police.

“As far as I could see Sir there was nowhere else for him to go, the banks on that part of the river are impassable, impossible to remove a boat out of the river in any case.”

Sir Albert sat in silence, deep in thought. He was a man with much weight of responsibility on his broad shoulders. It was not a fact generally known, but Sir Albert Hucksley was a high-powered man. His reports would find their way onto the desks of many high-powered members of Her Majesty’s government. He was one of the vital cogs in the country’s intelligence service. Many of his officers worked directly for the Government, not the Police service. Only a select few knew of this, none of the other officers had ever the slightest reason to suspect their colleagues were anything but Police officers.

All the information gained would pass over the desk of a little known grey haired man who conversed with Hucksley via the secret society.

More weight was added daily to Sir Albert’s burden. The Ripper investigation was like no other in the history of Scotland Yard, short as it was. Murder was commonplace in London, much more of a common event than the inhabitants of the city realised. This case though had captured public interest like no other.

The press and public demanded answers, but none were forthcoming and as far as he could see, they never would. The Ripper was as elusive as a ghost. Hucksley finally spoke, was there a hint of regret in his voice? “I

don't think this man has anything to do with the case Kitchener, you may go off duty now."

Was he hearing correctly? "Sorry Sir?"

"You may go Inspector." He said raising his voice so much that a few heads turned in the outer offices.

"With all respect Sir, there was a murder in Hanbury Street, 29 Hanbury Street. That's where I picked up the trail. Of course he had a bearing on the case, that man I followed was The Rip..."

Kitchener's flow was interrupted by a knock at the door, his superior held up his hand as an indication for Kitchener to be silent, which he was.

On the command of, "Come" bellowed by Hucksley, a uniformed constable entered the room. "What is it?" demanded a stressed sounding Hucksley.

"The victim Sir, we have a name." He began, not wanting to encroach the wrath of his superior, "Annie Chapman, Sir."

"Thank you constable that will be all." came the reply in a calm voice. Hucksley had deemed it unprofessional to shout at a junior officer, something he tried never to do.

Swiftly the constable executed a sharp about turn and left the room.

"It must have been him Sir..." continued Kitchener.

Again he was silenced by the imposing hand of Sir Albert, raised to stop him. "I'm sorry Kitchener that will be all. Goodnight." Without another word he picked up a piece of paper off his desk and started to read it, indicating that there was nothing more to discuss and the interview was over.

With a heavy heart Kitchener turned to leave. His mind was in a state of confusion. Why had he been dismissed without the slightest hint of an investigation? He turned once more to face the man behind the desk. Is there something, anything he could say to him to make him change his mind? Thinking better of it, he turned and left the office.

"So, what did you do then?" enquired an excited Strand.

"I went home and thought through the evenings events." He took a drink from his glass. His throat was becoming dry and speech became difficult. After a moment of vocal relaxation he continued the saga.

“The next night I arrived at my work as normal, to my horror I found that I had been reassigned to the Hyde Park beat.”

“Is that in Whitechapel?”

“No” he said in a raised voice, “Its on the other side of the town.”

“What, I dunna understand?”

“No neither did I, it just made me wonder about what had happened.” On the journey home that night he thought long and hard about what had happened. Why was nothing more done to follow his lead? Maybe the powers that moved above his position knew the identity of the killer already. Why not make it public knowledge then? Was it someone in the public eye? A Government Minister or a famous stage actor, who knows? “So what did ya’ do?” Strand was captured by the story and craved more information. Tossing back the last of his drink he brought the bottle back from the cabinet to the table offering it to Kitchener who gladly replenished his own glass.

It seemed strange, but the tale of a serial killer had cheered the mood of the two men cut off from civilisation in the North Sea. No more thoughts dwelt on the two corpses lying so close at hand.

“That night I didn’t go straight to Hyde Park, firstly I took a little boat trip.

He couldn’t have picked a worse night if he had planned it. The full moon shone brightly on the River Thames casting shadows as strong as sunlight. Nine times out of ten the river would have been shrouded in a blanket of mist, but not tonight. This was not the most suitable condition for covert operations.

Kitchener pulled the oars through the dark swirling waters. On each stroke of the oars a pain shot through his shoulders. It had been many a year since he’d rowed a boat, not since before he and Muriel were married. One sunny Sunday afternoon, donned in his immaculate red army uniform, he rowed his future wife around the Serpentine.

After much hard work the small rowing boat drifted up alongside the Palace of Westminster. Going against the tide he turned the bow into the sewer entrance. This proved to be a greater problem than he thought

possible. If his suspect had hidden in the tunnel then he must possess a comparable command of boating skills.

The navigation into the tunnel proved to be a complicated affair; the boat was an almost exact fit for the sewer. The boat used the previous night, he remembered, was a little smaller than the craft he had been able to commandeer tonight. Once the bow was firmly in the tunnel entrance he drew in the oars and found the only way to propel the craft was by the legging method, as used by the ostlers when pushing narrow boats through the long dark tunnels scattered around the countryside. The tunnel stank of methane gas, on several occasions Kitchener was almost sick with the putrid smell.

Despite all of this he carried on, determined in his course of action. A point of light had appeared way off in the darkness. This gave him an extra burst of enthusiasm and doubling his efforts he continued as fast as the slimy surfaces would allow.

The point of light became brighter as he travelled down the tunnel. Finally the boat emerged into a large tiled chamber looking not unlike one of the underground stations, which had appeared in London over the past few years. On the right hand side of the waterway was a platform for disembarking. The watercourse carried straight on through another archway. Did this lead to other drop off points? Kitchener thought it would be prudent to investigate this station first; after all there was no evidence to suggest more stations were in existence.

The only light source was from a lamp hanging off a hook on the wall.

Was it always lit, or just when the tunnel was in use?

“I knew it,” he said to himself as he looked around in triumph, he knew there must have been something here and he had found it. This raised other issues, did he report this?

If a cover up was in operation, any knowledge he had wouldn’t be needed and it could be detrimental to himself to offer any evidence.

Climbing out of the boat he found himself slipping on the tiled floor. The soles of his shoes were heavy with the residue off the walls. He took the lamp down from its housing on the wall then took a tentative step towards the walkway leading off from the platform.

Only darkness greeted his view. Slowly and carefully he set off along the narrow passage, his heart was in his mouth, he could feel it beating, its rhythm faster and faster.

How far did it go?

Something worried him more than the passageway leading out in front of him. He had the distinct impression that he was being followed. He couldn't be, there was nowhere to access the tunnel apart from the way he had come in, was there? Another thing; the dim gaslight didn't illuminate the passage more than ten feet in both directions, but he thought that the passage was beginning to rise upward.

The light reflected as it hit something metallic, the object glinted. A door handle that's what it was. He had reached the end of the passageway and there before him was a heavy wooden panelled door. "Well, this is it." he said quietly to himself, partly for his own comfort and partly to make anyone aware who may be following, that he knew they were there.

Why did he speak then? Surely he didn't want anyone to know he was in the building. Fear could do strange things to the mind.

With a deep breath he turned the handle of the door...

Chapter 11

Kate Wood sat engrossed in the notes of Herbert Kitchener. Several questions had come to mind. Who was he? Where did he live? His name was not one she had come across even in her extensive research at university. Did he have any family still living that could shed more light on the case? She could try to find out, after all, this was the very centre of the British Police Force. Two names to go on, a bonus, for his wife was mentioned in his case notes, Muriel. What was her story? Had any notes been passed down to his offspring or even down the generations by word of mouth? Questions all questions.

Kate decided to finish reading the case notes before exploring any other avenues of investigation. These notes had remained untouched for so long. Had they been used in the original case? They must have been, she decided. The case ran on for years after the murders stopped. Yes, of course they would have been considered, but why was his trip to Scotland connected to the Ripper case. Surely there must be some connection? The door to the dusty old storeroom opened. The draft blew dust across the floor. Kate turned to see Karen framed in the doorway. "Come on, have you seen the time?"

Kate had been so engrossed in the accounts of 1888 she had totally lost track of the time. It was in fact ten past five and time to leave. "Oh dear", she replied jumping up out of the dusty old chair. Suddenly she realised that she was in a state of half undress, lucky it was only Karen who had come in through the door. "I'll be with you in a tick." Kate hurriedly put on her shoes and finally her jacket.

Karen, at a loose end, used the waiting time to help herself to one of the files stacked up on the central rack. Opening it, and then glancing at the charge sheet she put it back on the shelf unread.

Kate, in the meantime, was busying herself stuffing all the bits and pieces of Kitchener's records into her black shoulder bag. The bag though, capacious as it was, couldn't take all the documents, the outstanding pieces of paper she put in a blue cardboard folder.

"Where do you fancy tonight?" asked Karen as she read the spines of the box files, "the wine bar?"

"Its as good as any." Kate replied, while struggling to turn the gas heater off. "Come on then, I'm ready for a large glass of something after being stuck in here all day."

She flicked off the old brown light switch on her way out of the door. The room was back to the dormant state it had been in for the last twenty years.

The two women walked at pace across the office floor heading towards the lift doors. They were stopped in their tracks suddenly by the imposing figure of Superintendent Marson.

He had found himself at a loose end and when this happened it wasn't unusual for him to have a stroll around the department and act the father figure to his officers. The department was almost empty now. He did the rounds turning off monitors that remained on, all showing a grey box with the legend 'Press alt. Control, + del.' The members of his department must learn to save money, even turning computer screens off saved pounds.

Seeing the two WPC's he made a b-line for them, someone to talk to.

"Taking your work home with you WPC Wood?" he asked spotting the file under her arm.

"Oh, er, yes Sir. Just a bit of bedtime reading."

“Excellent.” smiled Marson, “That’s what I like too see.” If only there were more like her.

“Thank you Sir.”

Both women hurriedly made for the lift before Marson could re-engage the conversation.

“Thank you Sir?” mocked Karen as the lift doors closed.

Marson could have sworn he heard the sound of laughter from behind the lift doors. He smiled to himself. He had high hopes for those two. With that thought he continued with his rounds. Look, another desk lamp left on.

Kate normally enjoyed the after work drink with Karen. It was the best way she could think of to relax at the end of the day. It was also an excellent way of catching up on all the gossip of the day. Talent spotting was always high on the agenda. Karen would position herself so as to gain a good view of the door and all those coming through it.

Tonight, Kate was not in the mood for such activities. She was anxious to get home and continue reading the notes that had filled her afternoon.

After only one large glass of wine she found herself making an excuse to leave, telling Karen that she had a headache, which she blamed on the old gas heater.

Karen didn’t mind in the least. She seemed to be pre-occupied by a young man she had just spotted entering the bar. He was a young PC that she had had an eye on for a couple of weeks now.

As Kate said her goodbyes to Karen, Karen made her move on the poor unsuspecting lad.

Superintendent Marson looked at his reflection in the mirror. Having dispensed with the uniform, he now wore a dinner suit and professionally pressed winged collared shirt. Putting the finishing touches to his bow tie he checked his reflection, both front and profile.

A knock came from the general direction of the door. He looked around, an embarrassed expression on his face at his moment of vanity.

“Enter”, he shouted as he crossed back to his desk.

A young sergeant came through the door leading from the outer office, “Your driver’s here Sir.”

“Ah, good.” Marson said as he once more fiddled with his bow tie.
“Enjoy your evening Sir.” The young lad said as he opened the door for his senior officer.
“Thank you, young...”
“Hopkins Sir.”
“Hopkins, yes.” He would enjoy the evening. There would be no talk of budget, logistics or job cuts tonight. This would come as somewhat of a relief after the week’s meetings and the problems raised by them.

In Kate’s tastefully furnished flat the breakfast pots had been tidied away and once again the living room was clean and tidy. Neatly arranged on the coffee table lay the pieces of paper taken from the Blue Store Room. Next to the settee a standard lamp gave the only illumination in the room. The smell of cooking filled each of the downstairs rooms of the red brick Victorian house.

Kate entered from the kitchen carrying a bowl of roast vegetables and pasta in one hand and a large glass of red wine in the other. Making herself comfortable on the settee, she took a mouthful of wine. A warm feeling filled her chest as she put the glass down on the coffee table. It tasted as though it was past its best, as indeed it was. The bottle had been opened on Saturday night; having drunk only half of it she had fallen asleep watching television. The wine didn’t receive any attention until the next morning when the cork was firmly returned to the bottleneck. It was still drinkable though, no need to open another.

Picking up a piece of paper from the coffee table she realised that her meal would be going cold. Not wanting to eat cold pasta she forced two forks full into her mouth before placing the next set of case notes on her lap. Squeezing a piece of broccoli into her mouth she started to read.

In the grand lobbying hall of the Houses of Parliament one of the many doors slowly opened, the hinges creaked with a low-pitched moan. The noise was amplified beyond all proportion in the huge high ceiling of the chamber.

From around the door the head of Chief Inspector Kitchener appeared. His jaw dropped as he looked in disbelief when he saw where he had emerged.

Why was he shocked? Deep down he knew, he knew something was going on, "Hell, this proves one thing at least." he said with awe in his voice.

His thoughts were interrupted as he heard voices coming from one of the many corridors leading from the main hall. In fright he almost stopped breathing. Pulling the door to, he listened intently trying to make out the conversation. The acoustics aided him considerably in listening in to the conversation.

The first voice sounded well read with a Home Counties accent, "The current situation is most unsatisfactory, something must be done about the head."

"Steps have been put in place regarding this matter. I spoke to the Home Sec..." said the voice. The voices merged with their own echo and became unrecognisable with the resonance of the marble lined corridors. What had they been talking about? The head of what? Was it the head of the government, or the Police"? Now he may never find out.

Later that night as he walked his beat around Hyde Park he recalled the events of the previous evening. He could prove nothing, he didn't actually see the suspect go into the sewer and maybe it was just a coincidence the passage led into the heart of Government. Maybe it was used for delivering food or drink to one of many other properties.

The park was dark and quiet, only the occasional rustle of a bush by some nocturnal creature would warrant Kitchener taking a second look. The sound of horses' hooves on the cobbled road broke the silence of the night. A four-wheeled carriage approached from the direction of Knightsbridge. Kitchener took hardly any notice of the cab; he was far too engrossed in his own thoughts.

He continued to walk in the opposite direction as the carriage came to a halt outside the Central Masonic Hall. Kitchener should have had his wits about him and taken more notice of the carriage. He would have recognised the passenger who disembarked from the transport was the

man who he had tailed only the night before, down near the river and he was still carrying the same brown doctor's bag.

As the cab pulled away Kitchener stopped and turned. The street was empty, no soul around. Kitchener shivered; cupping his hands he blew a warm breath into them trying to bring some feeling back into his fingers. Then with that done he continued his rounds.

Inside the Masonic Hall two men sat in the comparative warmth of the library. Both men were in the act of smoking a large cigar. One of the men had grey hair swept back over his head, the second was none other than Sir Albert Hucksley, head of the Scotland Yard detective force. An unexpected problem had arisen in their plans. The two great minds had to come up with a satisfactory solution, or a full report would have to be made to the society.

"Did he actually see him enter?" the grey haired man asked in a seriously grave tone.

"No, he could only presume he entered the Parliament Building via the sewer. This was solely based on the fact that it was the only route of escape for our man in the short space of time available to him."

The grey haired man tapped the index finger of his right hand against his dry lips. "Is he capable, this detective?" he said with disdain.

"He is one of the best ones, yes," said Sir Albert with regret.

"Shame, shame," he paused, "I think he should be assigned a special case. Safety of the Sovereign is always paramount in our minds. He can join the Royal party on the Christmas holiday to Scotland. That should keep him busy for the rest of the year and out of the way. See to it."

"Yes Sir."

Strand found the conversation fascinating, "So that's how you came to be with the royal party, a recommendation from the Chief Constable himself."

"It was an honour. The Ripper investigation still played on my mind. The next night I was back on the Hyde Park beat.

I'd already done a lap of the park and was outside the Central Masonic Lodge, when I looked into one of the windows..."

It was one of those feelings you may often get when you think you're being watched. That was exactly what Kitchener was feeling right now. He turned around and could not believe what he was seeing. A thousand things ran through his mind at once. There, framed in one of the first floor sash windows of the Masonic Lodge was The Ripper suspect. "My God." was all he could say.

His first instinct was not to be seen. He looked around for the nearest point of cover. Three feet to his left was an oak tree, so quickly he jumped behind it and hoped that his breath wasn't visible in the cold night air. For two hours he remained rooted to the spot, waiting for the man to leave. He was so cold; after all it was the middle of the night. Constantly he stamped his feet on the hard grassy ground, they felt as though they could freeze to the spot if not constantly moved. Jumping up and down on the spot he struggled to keep the blood circulating around all parts of his body.

The sound of a carriage drawing up broke into the silent night air. From the sound of it, the cab must have come to a halt outside of the Masonic Hall. Very slowly he looked around the tree, being careful not to expose any more of his frame than was required.

The carriage sat at rest with no passenger in sight to fill its interior. The horses were becoming restless, butting their heads up and down in the night air. The cab driver calmed them with an "Easy lads, easy." As if he'd spoken a magical spell the two charges came to an easy standing position. Not another sound was heard from them.

The heavy dark oak doors of the building opened and out he came, doctor's bag and all. Slowly, almost majestically he walked down the stone steps that lead from the doorway to the street below. Silently he mounted the carriage and without any command to the driver the horses pulled away.

A split second decision was needed by Kitchener; did he follow the cab or investigate the hall? The cab was almost out of sight and now he was freezing cold with standing around. The warmth of the hall seemed inviting as well as intimidating. So that's what he would do.

In the entrance hall of the lodge Kitchener could hear voices. He looked around for a moment trying to get his bearings. The room he stood in was

decorated with strange symbols and had regalia hanging from the walls. He didn't have the faintest idea what any of it was or its meaning. He was more interested in finding the source of the voices. The white marbled corridors stretched out in front of him, doors lined both sides of the passage.

Kitchener slowly and silently set off down the corridor in search of the source of the voices, which became louder the further down the corridor he strayed. Grateful for the marble floor, which was almost silent to walk on, no echo was given off the cold, hard surface. Half way down the passage he found the door he sought. Voices could be clearly heard from inside the room. On the door a wooden plaque indicated the room's purpose. 'Inner Members Library – Strictly Private'

So, even the Masons have a class system he thought to himself. Looking around to check no one was with him, he put his left ear to the door and listened.

Behind the door in the book lined library thirteen men sat around an oval table. The air hung heavy with grey cigar smoke. One of the many men spoke, "The press are having a field day."

All the man gathered there that night for the secret meeting looked pretty well similar to one another. Most had grey hair, all smoked cigars and dressed in winged collars and frock coats. "We have vigilantes on the streets, anything could happen. The last thing we want is the lower classes rising up; this is exactly the kind of thing that could be a catalyst for revolution. Its not long since the Great Mutiny and our forces are dangerously stretched across the globe. We should be taking care."

A hum of discontent circled the table. One of the attendees coughed loudly and repeatedly. He was unfortunate enough to be taking a mouthful of brandy as the last speaker's rant mentioned the prospect of revolution. His choking continued as a man with grey, swept back hair stood, ready to calm the situation.

"Everything's under control..." he spoke with such authority the uncomfortable hum that rounded the table died away. All attention turned to him. "The vigilantes are in my employ. They are just another distraction for the already over stretched Police Force. Now, two or three

more should be enough and then the plan will be in place and ready to put into action. I also have a cover story ready in the unlikely event of anything going wrong. Then it will stop.”

The assembled company sat in silence, each one feeling a little guilty for ever having had doubts about the master planner. Only one member raised, or at least dared to raise, a question.

“And her head?”

“Just another victim of our friend, its for the good of us all.”

“And our friend, Jack?” a murmur of unrest travelled around the room at the mention of the name all had sworn not to say,

“He will get his seat and pave the way, under our control of course, for all of them. Gentlemen, the fruits of our labour.” He raised his glass, as did all of those assembled, repeating the toast and then laughing at the prospect of a great empire to come.

Outside the door Kitchener listened intently. Trying to make sense of what he’d just heard, he decided that discretion was the better part of valour and made towards the front entrance.

In desperation he tried to string the snippets of the conversation together that he had managed to hear. No matter how many times he ran through them it came out with only the one explanation. Their friend Jack? That could only be one person, but then what did he mean by all of them, was there more than one Jack the Ripper? He was not convinced; after all he had seen him at the murder scene and here tonight leaving the meeting. Who was being referred to when the voice said ‘She’ and what was her connection to the Empire? The most logical explanation was too terrible to contemplate. Was she going to be a victim of the Ripper?

“I had to get a look at who was at that meeting.” Kitchener told Strand who was now sitting on the edge of his seat. “Hiding behind the same tree as earlier I watched them come out and I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. They were all Parliamentary Ministers in Government or opposition. The last man to leave was...”

He was interrupted by the sound of heavy footsteps coming up the stairs. Both men looked at each other, both with the same expression on their faces; that of fear. Kitchener made a gesture to Strand, who understood

immediately. Both men took up a position ready to intercept anyone coming up the stairs into the living room.

Strand stood there motionless, his hands were shaking like the leaves on a tree in an autumn breeze. He couldn't control his fear, Kitchener looked on and realised that the keeper wouldn't be much good if it came to a fight. Size and strength he possessed in abundance, but nerve, he had little of.

The footsteps became louder, getting nearer, until through the hatch leading down from the living room came a large mop of curly hair. Following on came the figure of Donald Preston. Slowly one step at a time he came up the wooden steps.

Kitchener readied himself for the pounce, but as the stranger reached the penultimate rung he saw the two men waiting for him, he let out a groan and fell head long onto the living room floor. Kitchener reacted immediately, "Quick man, get him up."

Both men lifted Preston onto the nearest sofa. He was considerably heavier than he looked. They struggled to manoeuvre him as his arms flopped around at the slightest movement of his body. Finally though they made it.

"Whisky" ordered an out of breath Kitchener.

Strand jumped to the task; such was the authority in the Englishman's voice. The keeper handed his own glass of whisky over, which was sitting on the floor next to where he had been moments before.

"Thank you." Kitchener took the glass from Strand and offered it to the newcomer's lips. "Here drink this," he said in a calm voice. A drop of whisky was gently poured into Preston's mouth. It appeared to have the desired effect as he came around and then the liquid hit his throat and a coughing fit erupted. Preston sat bolt-upright a look of horror on his face. Strand jumped back in fright at the sight of the large man in his state of panic.

Anticipating the reaction from him Kitchener held him down in restraint.

"No, please no?" pleaded Preston.

"Alright man, calm down, We're friends." Strand said in a calm voice, although speaking from a safe distance.

Preston, with an almighty effort, threw off the burley figure of the Police officer, tossing him across the room. Turning his attention to Strand he looked, and then calmed down, which was much to Strand's relief. This man was wearing the attire of a lighthouse keeper, rescue was here.

Chapter 12

On the waterfront bordering the Firth of Forth stands an old boat shed owned by the Edinburgh Constabulary. The wooden structure had been there for many years and was now in need of some repair. The roof of the boat shed looked unusually high, higher than was required for the small steam launches housed in it. This was a throw back to the great days of sail when the patrol boat, used for the pursuit of smugglers on the river, was a much bigger sailing vessel with large square rigging.

Late in the afternoon the air was damp and the light was beginning to fail on the banks of the Forth. In the boathouse the air was dry and warmer than outside, no wind blew within its confines. The smell of freshly sawn wood and creosote filled the shed.

Macdonald and Boyd arrived at the front door of the shed, both somewhat out of breath. The policeman passed the keys to the Master of the Tender who unlocked the door and entered the boathouse. Immediately he crossed to the launch to begin readying it for the trip, Boyd had only just entered the shed when McDonald called him over, "Bring the lamp over here."

"Is it ready to go out?" he asked, showing his lack of knowledge regarding all things sea going.

McDonald was away in the gloom at the stern, crouching down examining the hull. Though not much light penetrated that area Boyd could swear he couldn't see the Masters forearm.

"Not like this it isn't, bring the lamp down here."

Oh no, what was it? He knew that the boat hadn't been used for eight months at least, was it in need of repairs after all those months, he really couldn't remember. If it was, now would be when the force started paying for its neglect.

Boyd, as instructed, lowered the lamp to the bottom of the stern. A large hole could clearly be seen in the hull. McDonald looked at Boyd, "This has been done since the boat was last in the water, see here..." Boyd bent down to examine the hole, "the wood is dry and still clean, no water damage or discolouration."

"Sabotage?" realised Boyd looking aghast at McDonald.

"Ey?" he confirmed.

Donald Preston sat on one of the wicker sofas in the living room. In his hands he clutched a whisky glass to his chest while his face portrayed a look of terror. Slowly he rocked himself back and forth. Kitchener and Strand watched him from the galley. "Best leave him be, for the time being. He's in shock." Kitchener whispered in Strand's ear.

"Ey' caused by what though? He looks as though he's seen a ghost."

"I don't know, but chances are that he's killed his fellow keepers and gone out of his mind. He's a lot younger than those two down on the floor there," he said, pointing at the two bodies on the floor, "It would be easy enough for him to overpower them." Kitchener took his pocket watch out and looked at the time. Four thirty, things need to be done.

"Four thirty, its getting dark. Go and check the light. If he's been up there on his own..." Strand nodded his head in agreement, who knows what he could have done in his state of mind. The keeper quietly left the room, not taking his eyes off Preston as he edged past.

Once Kitchener was confident Strand was out of earshot he slowly approached Preston and knelt beside him. "Donald, Donald, can you hear me?" asked the Policeman in a hushed voice.

Preston said nothing; he just looked at the two dead bodies on the floor.

“Donald, that’s the captain and the first mate. Do you know what happened?”

For the first time Preston took his eyes off the two corpses and looked blankly into Kitchener’s face.

Donald Strand viewed the light with a sense of pride. Up in the very top of the lighthouse the oil lamp was burning steadily and the red and clear lenses turned in a slow rotation, occasionally casting a glow on his body as he walked around the lamp room.

The sun had set, but on the horizon the clouds were glowing red and orange with the sun’s dying rays. Even though the circumstances of this, his first day had been one of tragedy, a smile came to his face. He had fulfilled a lifetime’s ambition. Here he was the keeper of the Bell Rock Lighthouse and not only that, at this time he was in charge. He proudly stood looking out at the sunlight, his head held high and chest proudly protruding outward.

All was quiet in the wood panelled rooms of a gentlemen’s club in the heart of London. Sitting in a high backed red leather chair a grey haired man watched each passing person who entered. Not that there were many, only the occasional waiter breezed through to refill his brandy glass. He had drunk several glasses of various spirits already that day and was conscious that he probably shouldn’t have anymore to drink. After all things would become somewhat more hectic later in the day. For appearances sake though, as this was the eve of a holiday, normality must be maintained.

A young man of circa thirty years entered the room. Looking around it wasn’t difficult to locate the man he sought in the sparsely occupied room. The younger man obviously admired the older man; his hair was slicked back over his head mirroring the style of his superior. Only the colour was different, his own was a dark brown a complete contrast to the grey of the elder.

The young entrant took a seat next to the old master, who seemed quite pleased with himself. His face betrayed a smile; this would be a great day. All the plans devised by his master would finally come to fruition.

“Well?” asked the grey haired man, an acid look of disdain on his face, on seeing the smile on the young man’s face.

“Is the PM’s statement ready?” the fresh face youth asked.

The grey haired man said nothing. He raised a finger to his lips to indicate the lad was to say nothing more on the subject. Seeing that he had understood he went on to pat the left hand side of his chest, where in the inside pocket of his jacket sat a piece of paper. This piece of paper was the statement that the Prime Minister himself would deliver later that day on the devastating tragedy on the coast of Scotland.

The last weak rays of sunlight were disappearing behind the hills of Edinburgh. The street lamplighters were out in force lighting the gas lamps. An air of excitement hung in the air. The Queen would be arriving here in a matter of hours. Though commonplace, a visit from the monarch would naturally generate excitement among the locals. People had already started to gravitate towards the harbour, eager to procure themselves the best vantage point to observe the royal party coming ashore.

In the cold, dry shed Boyd and McDonald surveyed the damaged hull of the police launch. McDonald felt only annoyance and frustration. This would take time to fix, even a quick repair would take too long for his liking.

To Boyd the sabotaged boat was something of an eye opener. It was more proof to support Kitchener’s assassination theory. “So Kitchener could have been right?” he said quietly to himself.

McDonald also realised that Boyd’s assumption could be correct. Giving Boyd a concerned glance their attention was taken by other matters as a low groan came from the rear of the shed. The noise seemed to be coming from one of the corners where a pile of lobster pots were arranged in a semi orderly fashion.

“What in the name of heaven was that?” asked Boyd with a tremble in his voice.

“Bring the lamp.” McDonald recognised the moan, he was convinced he knew the identity of the source of the noise. McDonald rushed across the shed followed a little more cautiously by Boyd. In a dark corner the Master of the Tender began to throw lobster pots over his shoulder. He

had an awful feeling he knew who was in the corner of the shed. How and why he was there was another story. Locating his old friend took priority. Boyd arrived throwing light onto the scene. There in the darkness bound and gagged was a body lying on the floor, McDonald recognised him immediately, "Strand, what on earth is going on here?"

The man lying on the floor, as far as Boyd could make out was in his late fifties or early sixties. Certainly not the man who visited him earlier that day. This begged the question of whom he had sent to the lighthouse? McDonald hurriedly removed the gag from Strand's mouth. Now free to move his jaw bone again a spasm of pain filled the lower half of his face as the onset of cramp took hold. Once again he started to cough, almost to the point of nausea.

"What's to do man?" asked McDonald.

The feeling of sickness remained in his mouth. He could not speak; the pain in his jaw was too great. Slowly he closed his mouth. It felt better though ached with a painful constant rhythmic thud. It took a few seconds for Douglas Strand to compose his thoughts. Confusion ran through his mind, McDonald he knew, but who was the strange little man? What was he doing here?

When he finally started to speak his words were slurred and difficult to make out. His mouth was dry and his throat sore, "I dunna know." As he spoke his breath became visible in the lamplight, "I was getting the boat ready for the voyage to the rock when I heard the back door slam shut. I turned to look, but no one was there. I thought it was just the wind blowing up, then without hearing another sound something hit me across the shoulders. I remember hitting my head on the side of the launch as I fell. Then, then, that's all." He felt the bump on his left temple. Feeling a sharp pain he withdrew his hand with a quick jerk. "I'm not sure how long ago that was, I was due to sail at nine o'clock in the morning."

"Its four o'clock in the afternoon now Douglas." Boyd told him.

Boyd spoke quietly, "Who was it Mr Strand, did you see him, was it John Cooper?"

"Cooper, who's Cooper?" asked a bemused Strand, "I didn't see anyone."

Several moments had passed; Kitchener's attempts to entice Preston from his self-imposed trance had met with no success. The engineer had not moved a muscle since being seated on the sofa; the whisky glass had not even been raised to his lips.

Kitchener didn't have any idea of how to release this poor man from the mental ordeal he must be going through. He was not a doctor. Do the wrong thing now and it could send Preston over the edge, either mentally or physically. He felt more than useless. Leaning against the dividing wall to the galley he watched Preston intently for any sign of life. Nothing came. With a heavy heart his head dropped towards the floor as he stared at his feet then to his surprise he heard a voice.

"This morning..." Preston had started to speak. Kitchener quickly moved round the sofa opposite the engineer and listened to his words. The strange thing was, he wasn't actually talking to the Inspector, his gaze focused on the middle distance, but he was talking. Slowly he continued, "Eleven o'clock this morning. I was away up in the lamp room doing the usual checks. At that moment I was checking the rotation of the lens. All was quiet. The captain and first mate were about their business downstairs. It was clear that the sea mist had lifted and out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of a small vessel floundering dangerously close to the rock. I called down to alert the two other keepers who joined me in a matter of minutes. They too had seen the craft through one of the windows in the tower."

The three men looked out of the lamp room window, "Sound the fog horn Mr Preston, get their attention," ordered the skipper, "Come on, they'll need our help." The Captain and first mate made off down the stairs, the sound of their heavy boots clanking down the various sets of stairs. Preston could hear them quite clearly, fading away the further they descended down the tower. Remaining in the lamp room he watched the boat with a feeling of helplessness.

"Not taking my eyes off the floundering vessel I sounded the foghorn once more. It was impossible to tell if the mariner knew that he was so close to the rock. The foghorn didn't seem to have any effect on his position. From the course he was taking it looked as though he was deliberately trying to ground himself on the rock.

I sounded the foghorn again, but it was in vain. The vessel struck the rock at the same time as the Captain and First Mate stepped off the access ladder.

The Captain and First Mate Houseman ran over the sandstone to the crippled vessel. Picking their way through the splintered wood and fallen sail, Houseman found the fallen mariner.

“He’s alive Skipper.” Houseman shouted to the captain. His voice hardly audible above the crashing waves.

Understanding what Houseman had shouted over the roar of the waves the Captain climbed aboard the boat. Slowly and carefully the two men lifted the debris off the sailor who was trapped in the cockpit. “Come on, let’s get him into the warm.” Instructed the captain.

In the relative warmth of the living room the mariner was now fully conscious sitting on one of the sofas, a glass of whisky in his hand. The three keepers sat around eager to hear his tale.

“The young lad was shaken, but slowly he told his tale, which Preston now related to Kitchener.

“I was sailing down south, bound for Newcastle, when a storm came up.”

“Really, we haven’t had a storm here.” Questioned Houseman.

“It was late last night, further north up towards Cromarty. I’d got my head down for the night when I was woken by the storm. There was nothing I could do, just sit it out and wait until the morning. Then there was a loud bang that rocked the whole boat. I knew it was astern, so I checked for leaks in all the rear panels and luckily no water was coming through.” He took a drink before continuing, “The storm passed and when I awoke in the morning I set sail.

It didn’t take me long to realise that the boat was not behaving as it should be. I was having difficulty controlling the course. I realised that the noise I’d heard the previous evening had been something damaging the rudder. I continued on course but the fight against the current became harder and harder. No longer having any strength I was ready to give up the fight. Then I saw the lighthouse and steered straight towards it.”

“Are you mad man? You could have been smashed to pieces on the rock.” Interjected the first mate.

“It was the only chance I had.” He took down the last of his whisky. The Captain with his old, wise, reassuring voice eased the heated situation. “We have had a good look at ya’ craft. It could be made seaworthy again in no time at all. The relief boat will be here later today. At least we can get you ashore. Your boat can be patched up and towed to land.”

“That would be most kind.”

“See to it Mr Preston.” ordered the Skipper.

“Ey, ey Sir.” Preston without question left the room.

“He’s a first class engineer is our Mr Preston, he’ll soon have your craft seaworthy again,” I heard the skipper say as left.

“That was the last time I saw my fellow crew members alive.” Preston said in a melancholy voice.

Chapter 13

The six-course meal had been excellent; the wine beyond reproach, the company though was not as scintillating as the fare. The glass of fifty-year-old brandy now held in Chief Superintendent Marson's hand was a perfect end to the meal. Cigar smoke filled the air of the smoking room, so thick that faces at the other side of the room were difficult to make out. There must have been around forty men in the room he estimated, all dressed in dinner jackets. This is what the smoking room of the Titanic must have looked like the night it sank, he thought to himself.

Ten of the diners in the room had opted for the coffee after the meal while the rest had gone for the brandy, excellent as it was. The attendees of that night's dinner came from varying areas of law enforcement, legal and Government departments, all with one thing in common. They all were in some way connected to the process of de-sizing the Met. Many of the faces Marson recognised from the previous day's meeting in this very club. He wondered how his fellow senior officers from the Yard's various departments and from the other smaller stations planned on cutting costs. While he was lost in thought and planning a discrete exit from the proceedings, the Chief Constable approached the unaware Marson. "Paul, did you enjoy the dinner?" he asked in a cheerful voice.

Excellent Sir, most enjoyable.” Marson agreed. He would not disagree, after all this was the Chief Constable’s own club.

“I understand you’ve already taken steps to reduce your inventory costs?” Why did he have to talk shop? It was, he supposed, the reason they were all here.

“Yes Sir, it would be a sad day if I were to have to lose any of my officers when other forms of damage limitation could be utilised.”

“Good man, inventory control. Inventory costs money, or that’s what half of this lot tell me most days.”

“I totally agree Sir. That’s why I’ve put one of my finest brains on it. A real historian.” A note of pride was clearly visible in his voice.

“Oh yes, where’s he starting?” Kate would have not been surprised at the assumption that it must be a man.

“She Sir.”

“What? Oh, she, where has she started?”

“I’ve set her off in the bowels of the archives, in the blue room.” Both men chuckle together as though sharing a private joke.

“I thought the room was destroyed in the bombing raid during World War II?”

“The original blue room was, but the majority of the records survived and were relocated in the new blue room in the CID department. The records span from the early eighteen eighties to the nineteen seventies.”

Something struck a cord in the back of the chief’s head. If his memory served, then one or two sensitive documents were stored in that particular room. Information and case notes that were not in the public’s interest to come to light.

When he had been handed the top job he had been made aware of the sensitive information by the home secretary and given strict instructions they were never to be made public.

“I want a full report on what’s found, just out of interest of course.”

“I don’t see why not, I’ve told her to shred most of it.”

A grave tone entered his superior’s voice, “There are some things best left untouched, in the interest of security of course”

Marson couldn’t help but wonder what that comment referred to. So many crimes, notorious and otherwise, had passed through the archives in the

long history of Scotland Yard. Many cases the Met. would rather be buried for ever. The Hammersmith murders for one, no one was ever caught, and the failing to capture Lord Lucan was another. All the files on how they blundered around letting the majority of the gangs in the sixties escape. Many other cases known or unknown to the public eye the yard would rather forget, given the chance, but which case was he so desperate to cover up?

Ten minutes tube ride away, Kate was pouring herself a glass of red wine. As she read the old yellowing sheets of paper so recently liberated from the archives, Kate became engrossed in the story that was revealing itself. Making herself comfortable and ensuring the wine glass was in easy reach she continued to read.

The next page of the notebook was the last on the Ripper case. As far as the writer was concerned it put closure to it once and for all.

The trail for the Ripper had gone cold; no more murders had hit the East End for a month. The investigation had been scaled down and only a small core of detectives remained on the case. The general opinion was that whoever Jack the Ripper was he had left the area or the country, or alternatively died.

Kitchener returned to the humdrum affairs of Police work and thought little more of the Ripper case. Then on the 7th of November he was leaving the yard after his shift when a carriage drew up. Out of the rear door climbed two uniformed officers followed by the figure of a man, wrists bound together with handcuffs. The prisoner was bundled into the entrance of the cells under the watchful eye of Inspector Andrews.

“Kitchener.” Andrews greeted him.

“Andrews.” He returned the greeting. Before he had a chance to say another word his colleague was gone into the cell block.

Kitchener these days had little time for Inspector Andrews. Andrews had been given the task of heading the Ripper case and, as far as he could tell, he had made a right hash of it. After all, no arrest had been made, the bird had probably flown before the power of the law could fall on him.

He sat on the omnibus travelling home that evening, it was dark and cold now the winter had set in. The windows on the omnibus were misted over from the heat generating bodies crammed into the carriage.

The prisoner he had just seen looked familiar. Where had he seen him before? Andrews had been standing there, was that merely a coincidence or was it connected with the Ripper case? Andrews had, several days earlier, been sent to Liverpool on a case, who had he brought back?

That was it. It came to him like a flash lighting up a dark night. The man in the cab was the Ripper. The scruffy clothes had thrown him, but that man was the man from Hanbury Street. The same man he had followed down to the river then saw in the Masonic Lodge window.

If only they had listened to him, the lives of those poor women could have been saved.

That night was a sleepless one for Kitchener as he eagerly awaited the morning sunrise. He left the house one hour earlier than normal and en route to Scotland Yard he checked every newspaper seller's board. Not one mentioned anything regarding the Ripper investigation.

Strange, he thought to himself, the press showed such great interest in the case. Many rumours said that the press were planting false evidence to point suspicion at certain people or groups. Now a suspect had been taken in and nothing was being reported. Why wasn't it all over London?

On arrival at the Yard he immediately sought out Inspector Andrews who was pleased to talk about his latest arrest.

"Of course..." he said with a cheery voice on being questioned, "Francis Tumblety. He was picked up for gross indecency in Liverpool; I brought him back here to face a string of similar charges. We only just got him. The following day he was due to sail for New York."

"But, he was my suspect for the Ripper killings," insisted Kitchener.

"Impossible I'm afraid Bert. He was in custody in Liverpool the night you reported that."

Kitchener's protest went unheard. Andrews offered to show him the paper work relating to Tumblety and it did confirm what his colleague was saying.

Though the evidence pointed to Kitchener being wrong, he knew more than anything, he was right.

Francis Tumblety appeared in court charged with several acts of gross indecency on the sixteenth of November 1888. No mention of the Ripper murders was spoken of during the hearing. He was bailed by the court, then on the tenth of December acquitted by a judge at the Old Bailey. The last that Kitchener heard of Francis Tumblety was that while he was away in Scotland his suspect boarded a steamer on the twenty fourth of December. The ship was bound for New York via Paris and hot on his heels was the Chief Inspector of the Ripper investigation, Inspector Andrews.

The crew of the lighthouse had always kept a quantity of miscellaneous materials in the storeroom. Pieces of wood, iron, barrels of tar, bits of rope and boxes of nails all came in useful. Preston, ever resourceful utilised many pieces of the spare material on the repair of the small sailing vessel.

The rudder had, as reported, taken a hit. Over half of the steering device was missing. Preston lashed and battened a piece of iron sheet to what remained. When the ship had hit the outcrop of sandstone to which the lighthouse clung, a hole had been punched in the stern. The engineer made short work of the repair. Several planks of wood nailed to the hull plugged the gap and a layer of tar painted over the external surface weather sealed the leak. An excellent temporary repair. He hated the smell of tar. Ever since he was a child even the smallest hint of that aroma and his chest would tighten, his breathing fail until he collapsed to his knees. A life at sea was a strange career choice for a person with such an affliction?

When he had been at school, a good friend of his had a similar respiratory effect with creosote. Having such an allergic reaction would, you would think, put a person off using it for life. It was strange then that Wesley (Preston could never remember his second name) chose a career in carpentry.

Was it that the body can adjust itself to the smell or does the reaction after many years become the norm?

The waves began to encroach the rock, one in eight lapping up. The high waves sprayed the resonantly repaired hull. Soon the rock would be covered once more and the vessel afloat.

Preston hurried to gather his tool kit and collection of spare pieces of gash material together, saving them from a watery grave. He was most determined not to become another of a long line of victims of the rock. Climbing the ladder was no easy task when carrying armfuls of wooden planks and a small tin of tar. The plank would insist on entangling itself in the rungs of the ladder. Each time he would stop and release the offending piece, as below the water lapped closer and closer to the base of the tower. It may have proved easier to leave part of his load at the foot of the ladder. He didn't want to risk any of his precious repair materials being washed away by the encroaching tide.

Having returned all his repair kit to the storeroom Preston made haste climbing the stairs up to the living room. As he made his way up the last leg of the climb from the bedroom he was overcome by a strange feeling. Something felt wrong to him, but what was it. Then it came to him. It was an eerie silence.

There was no sound of activity coming from the living room. Maybe they were away up in the lamp room, he thought to himself. Of course that would be the simplest explanation, he assured himself. He would soon find out that there was a much more macabre reason awaiting him.

Looking around the room nothing looked out of place. The sailors' whisky glasses sat on the table, the contents unfinished. Without a second thought he continued up the steps to the light control room.

As he neared the top of the steps the feeling came over him once more, a sudden chill. He froze to the spot, his feet heavy in his boots and his hands gripping the rungs of the ladder, knuckles white with fear. On his neck he could swear he felt the warm draft of someone or something breathing on him. Sweat started to form on his forehead, his mouth became dry and he found it impossible to swallow. The hairs on his neck stood on end tingling with excitement.

Slowly he turned around, shaking with fear. He half expected to see the face of Morris Tweedy, the spectral keeper from all those years ago.

No one was there, such a relief came over him, and then out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of something that wasn't the norm. From his vantage point on the stairs he could see over the back of the sofa nearest the gallery. Two sets of boots pointed towards the ceiling. The feeling of fear swept over him once again. What had alerted him to them, was it the dead telling him to turn and look back down into the room? He had never had this feeling before in all his time at the lighthouse.

With an almost super human effort of willpower he slowly descended the ladder, each step an almighty effort. With great caution he crossed the room. Composing himself, he looked over the back of the seat. A feeling of sickness rose from his stomach as he looked down the back of the chair.

The Captain and first mate were lying dead on the floor, "Oh my God." Preston could hardly speak, whatever moisture had returned to his mouth dried instantly on seeing the bodies.

Heaven knows what had happened, they were dead though, no denying that, but how? As far as he could make out there were no signs of injury on their bodies and the expression on the two men's faces were ones of absolute terror or at the very least great pain.

After the initial shock his thoughts turned to finding an explanation for this. Who had perpetrated this wicked deed?

It could have only been one person in his eyes, the mariner they had rescued from certain death only an hour or so before, "The sailor." The sailor who had strangely enough never revealed his name to them, at least not in his presence. It was possible that the Captain and Mate had been privy to that information, but he would never know. So where was he now?

"Were there any signs of where this mysterious sailor had gone?" asked Kitchener listening carefully to Preston's account.

"No, I could hear something moving though, it was coming from above me. Slowly and quietly I climbed the two flights of stairs to the lamp room. To my surprise no one was in the room or outside on the balcony."

"So what was making this noise you heard?"

“The lamp was on and the lens was turning. I did not know why. This must have been the noise I heard. Suddenly I froze. I could hear someone coming up the stairs. Desperately I looked for somewhere to hide. I went outside onto the balcony and quietly closed the door.”

Strand’s heavy footsteps thumped down the stairs, his boots crashing down on every step. He was too big a man to act with stealth. He had been listening to the conversation, but for how long? “So where did ya’ hide man?” he asked on re-entering to the room.

The new voice came as a shock to Kitchener and Preston alike, the latter of the two looked up in horror before returning to a state of calm. He was obviously still in a state of shock over the events of earlier that day.

Kitchener made a mental note to be easy on him. Strand however could never be so subtle.

“Well?” he asked.

The mysterious mariner stood prominently in the lamp room. His large frame filled the available space between lens and outer wall. The lamplight illuminated his mop of curly hair at each pass. Slowly he looked around. The lens turned slowly as he circumnavigated the room. He knew the engineer was here in the building somewhere. The lamp room was the last and only place he could be hiding having searched all the other rooms with no luck.

The large framed man opened the door and exited onto the balcony. The cold wind whipped his face, the long tangled hair and bushy beard waved in the air. After one lap of the balcony he stopped and looked out to sea. He came to the conclusion that the engineer was no longer on the rock. Maybe he had thrown himself off the side at the horror of discovering the bodies of his crewmates. He may have made a swim for it, who knows. While fixing the boat a freak wave could have washed him out to sea. He really did not care, as long as he was gone.

“For two hours I swung under that balcony, suspended on the boatswain’s chair we used for repairs to the outer walls. Hanging on for dear life, my fingers were freezing as they held onto a bolt protruding from one of the

bricks. If he had seen me hanging there it would have been the end for me.

The wind constantly battered me against the wall; my hands and face were red raw, sitting in the cold wind. Still I hung on. I'm not sure how long I was hanging there, but I saw him leave in the boat I had repaired for him. Quickly, I pulled myself up. Once inside I ran down the full length of the house, down to the entrance hatch and bolted the door."

"So where have you been hiding yourself since Mr Strand and I arrived?"

"All over, in every room." It was surprising how many places there were in a lighthouse to hide, he went on to tell them. All the rooms were indeed small, cramped and compact, but with a little bit of thought, effort and knowledge many nooks and crannies could be found. "I didn't know who you were, you could have been him coming back to tidy up the job. I stayed as close to you as I dare. After listening to your conversation I soon realised that one of you talked like a lighthouse keeper and he had someone with him who wasn't connected to the sea. The English voice though bore no similarity or connection to the murderous sailor. When I heard your tale of The Ripper, that's when I revealed my presence to you. I must apologise about collapsing though, it was out of character." Preston took another mouthful of whisky. It made him feel much better; the alcohol was starting to take effect.

Kitchener pondered on what he had been told. If this sailor had been someone connected to his presence here why had he not destroyed the lamp or at least rendered it inoperable? Why had he left and not finished his mission? Would he be back?

Maybe it had been a mere coincidence that this man had turned up at this point in time. A random chance.

Wait. What if he killed the crew and left, the lamp would remain off. No light would shine tonight. If that was the case then surely he would have finished the job and waited for the engineer to make an appearance.

Maybe he had to be back ashore at a certain point, who knows?

"None of this follows any pattern. What's going on here?" after hearing no comments from either of the other two men Kitchener withdrew into a deep thinking session.

Preston, now feeling quite pleased with himself turned his attention to Strand. "You are Mr. Strand, are you not? Tell me, where was your last station before the bell?"

Strand wasn't prepared for the sudden interrogation session and was taken off guard by the question.

"Oh, er, my last tour of duty was a year at the Needles." Spluttered Strand.

"The Needles, really. They tell me that they are on the Edison Electric Light now?"

"Yes." Slowly came the answer from Strand who seemed to have other things on his mind.

Preston was not enjoying the disjointed conversation so he too followed Kitchener's lead and allowed himself to fall into the abyss of thought.

Strand felt as though he'd been left out of something as he watched both men sitting silently.

With a sigh, Preston took out of his pocket a silver watch and checked the time. "It will soon be getting dark Mr. Strand, would you be so kind as to check the oil tanks and the generators."

"Ey, ey Sir." At last a chance to get back to a normal lighthouse keeper's routine. Without hesitation Strand climbed down the stairs en-route to the engine room. In the quiet living room his heavy boots could be heard thumping down the wooden steps.

Kitchener's thought process was complete. Nothing new had come to light. The case was as much of a mystery to him now as it was on his arrival. More information was required before he could make an accurate summary. Where would new evidence come from? "Do you have any idea what the motive for the attack was?" not exactly a searching question in his probing for the truth. It was more of a shot in the dark. The reply to the question was not what he expected, but much more than he had bargained for.

"Never mind that, what about Strand." Preston whispered to Kitchener. This was something Preston wanted to keep between the two of them.

"What about him?" asked Kitchener in a hushed tone.

"I have the greatest fear that he is not who he is making himself out to be." Kitchener hung on to every whispered word. If what Preston was

about to say turned out to be correct, it would turn the case on its head. He must be sure he understood correctly.

“What are you trying to say exactly?”

Before answering Preston checked over his shoulder to make sure Strand was not in earshot. “The Captain of the Needles Lighthouse is a good friend of mine. They are on oil still, Edison light won’t be fitted until next summer and not once has he mentioned the name of Strand in any of his letters.”

Sitting listening to the conversation on the floor below sat Strand. His boots in his hand so as not to make a noise, he slid off back down the stairs to the engine room.

It was a jaw dropping moment for the Chief Inspector. The man he had entrusted his life to, was he a psychopathic murderer? Did he kill the crew, and what was he plotting now? Could he be the assassin Kitchener had come here to find?

Too many questions, he needed more data. Strand needed to be restrained and questioned before he could do anymore damage.

“One more thing...” Preston added, “The sailor who came here had long hair and a beard, but in a certain light I could swear he resembled Strand.” It could be true. Strand murders the crew, returns to the shore and pays a visit to the barbers’ shop before calling on the Police. Was getting the Police involved a bluff to clear his own name from any suspicion? Surely suspicion would fall on him if he was an impostor, but who knows how a psychopath’s mind really works?

Preston got to his feet, “I must make ready the lamp, its close to lighting up time.”

“Very well. I must go and find our friend, Strand.”

Preston climbed up to the lamp room as Kitchener descended into the bowels of the tower.

Dusk had fallen on the Bell Rock Lighthouse. The moonlight shone down through the intermittently cloudy sky. The lunar light lit up the south facing side of the tower with a pale eerie light.

At the very zenith of the tower the twin white and red beams of light shone into the darkness offering a safe route to all seafaring vessels and the men who pilot them.

The door separating the lamp room from the outside world swung on its hinges, the gentle breeze banging it into Preston's legs. Preston lay belly down on the walkway balcony. His legs lay in the lamp room while his head and shoulders hung over the ledge, looking down at the crashing waves below.

With his right hand he swung a boat hook under the balcony, searching for something. The metal hook at the end of the pole scraped along the stone wall of the tower.

On the fifth sweep of the hook he felt resistance. Preston smiled; he found what he was looking for. Lifting the pole upwards he seized the rope snared by the hook. Slowly and carefully he gradually pulled it up, hand over hand his breathing increasing until he saw something hanging on the end. At the end of the rope was a wooden crate.

The box was approximately a two-foot cube. Preston handled it with extreme care. Lifting it over the edge of the balcony he took it inside and carefully placed it on the floor.

A sinister smile came across his face. Soon it would be over.

The gentle hum of the generators reverberated around the room. All was still. The flickering of the flame visible through the observation window was the only sign of movement. The fourth member of the crew, Felix the cat was nowhere to be seen. After his rude awakening earlier that day he was no doubt residing in a new warm, dry refuge.

Kitchener descended the stairs with the utmost of caution. Each of the rooms between the living room and the lower engine room had been entered with stealth. Strand had not been in attendance on any of the floors. Kitchener could not help but remember the words Preston had spoken to him regarding the many hiding places that could be found in such a small place. Was Strand now in hiding, no probably not? He wouldn't be aware that his identity was in question.

Standing on the floor of the lower engine room, Kitchener crept around to the right hand side of the generator.

Deja vu.

The last time he took this route the events that followed had almost given him a cardiac arrest. This time however he was hoping for an arrest of a different kind.

Slowly he looked around the rear of the piece of machinery, nothing was there. A sense of relief came over him, though it was replaced quickly by a feeling of fear. A shuffling sound was clearly audible to his rear.

Paralysed with fear he hesitated to turn. That would cost him dearly.

The iron bar Kitchener himself had used as a weapon earlier that afternoon was brought down with a great force, hitting him across the back of his shoulders.

He hit the floor with a thud. A crimson trickle of blood ran across the floor spurting from a wound in the nape of his neck.

The iron bar clanked with a cold, hollow metallic sound as it was dropped onto the floor beside the motionless body of Kitchener.

Two boot-clad feet walked past the lifeless mass on the floor then up the stairs.

His body lay there sublime, left for dead.

Chapter 14

The following morning the sun shone through the windows of the CID offices of New Scotland Yard. Kate hadn't retired to bed until half past two the previous evening, but she was still full of enthusiasm to get back into that dusty old room and continue her reading of the archives. Unusually for her she had arrived early that September morning. The office clock showed seven thirty. It was that strange time in between shifts when no one was about in or around the department. The night shift would, as a rule, leave early unless an important investigation was in progress. They would, at such times, stay past the eight o'clock hand over time. She did not rush through the office as she had done the previous day; instead she took her time to saunter through. Looking out of one of the many windows lining the side of the room she could see, well, nothing really. Westminster W1 was crammed full of office blocks, which didn't allow for the capacious, panoramic spaces required for a view.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw the door of the Blue Room ever so slightly ajar. Feeling in her trouser pocket her hand closed over the cold, hard, metal key. She made a beeline for the door. Once there, she pushed

it slowly open with the index finger of her right hand. The long red nail flaked off a shred of blue paint as she did so.

Fumbling, her hand around the doorframe she found the light switch and flicked it on. The room became visible as the light flickered on; she was shocked to see that, in the room, there was nothing left. Literary nothing. Not a file, box, bin sack or shred of paper remained, the whole room was empty. The only things remaining to show this was once a storeroom were the empty shelves, the old desk and in the corner of the room, that old gas heater. Kate looked around the barren room, a feeling of dejection in her heart.

Something had happened here last night. Surely Scotland Yard couldn't have been broken into? No, of course not, there would have been the nightshift in the office. This just begged the question, what was going on? She needed a drink.

In the canteen Kate sat and stared at her cappuccino. A generous sprinkling of chocolate and vanilla lay on top of the whipped milky froth. Why didn't she get a bun as well? That would have made her feel phenomenally better.

For twenty minutes she sat thinking to herself, trying to make sense of what had happened the previous night. Then relief, Kate was taken out of her trance-like state by a bang, the sound of wood hitting wood. Through the double door entrance to the canteen, like a hurricane came Karen.

Spotting Kate alone at one of the tables she waved before procuring herself a cup of hot coffee.

Once safely in possession of her caffeine fix she joined her friend at the table. It was obvious to Kate that Karen was wearing the same clothes as the previous day. Normally Karen would rotate her collection of dark trouser suits, one not repeating itself in a single rolling week. So this fact could only mean one thing. Karen hadn't been home last night and seeing her friend in full swing in the wine bar, Kate had a more than good idea of what the explanation would be.

"Oh yes, and what was you up to last night?" she asked in a tone that left Karen in no doubt as to what Kate was referring. A bit of good juicy gossip would just be the thing to cheer Kate up.

"You heard then?" said a flustered Karen.

“Heard, heard what?”

“Bloody fire alarm went off here last night. I was in the wine bar, where you left me talking to a very nice young man...”

“Oh yes, I thought...” Kate’s interruption was in the same tone of voice as her opening gambit.

Karen though not to be out done butted back into the exchange, “...When, my pager went off. I had to come back at nine o’ bloody clock. I’ve been here all night. In fact I’m just on my way home now.”

“There was a fire here last night?”

“Haven’t you heard then?”

“No, I was in early. I haven’t spoken to anyone yet.”

“It was on TV, there was a crew here from London Today.”

“I never turned it on last night, or this morning.”

“After all that it was just a false alarm. Waste of a bloody good night.”

“Why were you called in?” Kate didn’t understand why members of the CID staff had to come in.”

“After all those *gorgeous* firemen had finished we did a sweep of all areas.

“Was anything found?”

“No not a thing. It was strange though. The firemen arrived in one of those green army fire engines. You know the ones I mean, they always have them on the news during strikes.” Karen rushed down her drink. It was far too hot to drink; it numbered her tongue as she drank it.

“Oh yes, I think I know what you mean.” She suddenly sounded far away. Was Kate being paranoid, had the events of the last two days anything to do with this, but?

Beginning to think that there was a link between the fire alarm and the Ripper notes she once again lost herself in thought. Someone high in the force, or higher still must have known what was in that room. They would also know that something in there was never for the public eye. Would they arrange such an elaborate charade?

Karen was still talking, but Kate didn’t hear a word. It was only when Karen rose to leave that Kate suddenly realised she had been talking for the last few minutes, “Oh yes, see you later.” Kate said absent-mindedly.

It was a fair bet that the men Karen had lusted over the night before were nothing to do with the fire service either civil or military. It was more likely they were secret service.

Unluckily for them the documents being sought were safely tucked away in the black shoulder bag belonging to Kate Wood, hanging over the chair in the canteen of New Scotland Yard.

Her Majesty's Yacht, *Surprise*, steamed through the North Sea as majestic a sight as you would ever see on the waves. Britannia ruled them and one of the passengers on this voyage ruled Britannia.

The yacht had stayed in dock for two days while the royal household had enjoyed today's furlough. A holiday for the assorted members of Her Majesty's staff and crew. Not a holiday for all though. Naturally a skeleton crew remained aboard to tend to the needs of the Queen and the Queen of the British fleet.

HMY *Surprise* blew out a plume of smoke from her single funnel. The white cloud rose into the dark sky as the boiler burned the coal shovelled into them by the stokers. On the bridge the Captain watched his officers about their work.

Captain Smith was an excellent leader of men. He possessed the ability to turn his conversation to any situation or any social class. Soon to leave the Royal Navy this would be his last Christmas cruise with his beloved yacht. A new career awaited him outside the service with the White Star Line. In years to come he would be the first to command the most famous passenger liner of them all.

As he watched the young lieutenant at the wheel he gave his instructions. "Give her a little more to port."

"Ey, ey Sir. A little to port."

"We should be able to see the Bell Rock any time now, there's no other sight like it on all the seas of the world."

"Yes Sir, so I have heard said."

"You have never seen it before lieutenant?" sometimes the Captain was guilty of presuming all his ranks had as much experience as himself.

In the darkness, the young officer pinpointed a flash of light and dead ahead a red flash followed. "There Sir. Dead ahead."

Once again the white flash became a red flash, then repeated.

“Ey lad. That’s the Bell alright.”

The Royal Yacht continued its journey towards the Bell Rock Lighthouse and then onto Edinburgh.

Preston was outside on the balcony when Douglas Strand came up the stairs into the lamp room. He stood silent and still for a few moments looking around the room. Though the lamp was on it didn’t throw any light around the room.

It always took a minute or so for his eyes to adjust to the darkness. During that brief time he heard a noise behind him. Preston had returned from his excursion outside.

“Oh, man. You gave me the fright of my life.” Strand said jumping on the spot while turning to face his fellow keeper. He looked at the man only three feet away from him. In the moonlight Preston looked extremely menacing, not someone to cross words with.

Preston himself showed no emotion. “Where’s the good Inspector?” he asked with a sinister undertone in his voice.

“Oh I dealt with him.” Strand replied under his breath.

“Good.” Preston answered with the same low sinister tone.

Strand at that moment was somewhat taken aback and began to feel uneasy. He had presumed, up to that point, that he was holding all the cards. Now it began to dawn on him that there was another player at the table with what could possibly be a stronger hand than his own.

This was not a worry to him, he was still convinced that he could easily rise to the challenge and go beyond the rules of engagement. He would strike first and take the upper hand in the exchange. So why could he only speak the word, “What?” in a surprised voice. He tried to compose himself, “Who are you? Your not a keeper are you?”

“I am in charge here.” He said in a cool calculating manner.

A fiery rage grew in Strands guts, his retort was one of controlled anger, half-menacing and half shout, “And I am not Douglas Strand. I am John Cooper and this is my lighthouse.” His voice was full of self-confidence and pride. His mark was made and no one would deny him.

His face changed expression as his eyes adjusted to the darkness. On the floor of the room he could make out the shadowy outline of a wooden crate and within it, several sticks of dynamite. "What, what's that, explosive?" he looked again and yes it was dynamite.

"Yes, that's right. Some of us are playing for high stakes here, not just the command of a lighthouse. I must thank you, with the good Inspector out of the way, that just leaves you."

What was happening? Cooper felt threatened. It was plain to see that this man, Preston, was planning to destroy the lighthouse. This great feat of engineering that his own grandfather had worked so hard on; giving up four years of his life for. Now it was up to his grandson to save it, he had risked everything to get here and now this stranger who had no right to be here was going to take it away.

With a yell Cooper launched himself at Preston. His outstretched hands searched for their target, his opponent's throat. Unbeknown to the amateur Cooper, Preston had spent many years in the British Army. Such an attack would not trouble the veteran soldier. As his attacker approached, Preston's defence and counter attack had already been planned.

With a slight side step he removed himself from the attackers projected flight path while in the same moment unhooking a flat knife concealed in his trouser belt. For a second it glinted in the moonlight as Preston held it out for the off-balance Cooper to fall onto.

Preston's reactions were as sharp as a cat. It all happened so quickly that the poor figure of Cooper was left with no time to react. The knife blade penetrated Cooper's stomach, a moment of pain surged through his midriff. It was all over; he was dead before his body hit the floor.

Another victim in the conspiracy.

The lower engine room was warm and dry. The four silent padded paws of Felix the cat landed on the floor. He searched for a new place to curl up and sleep. The ideal spot was found. The sleepy cat curled up against the lifeless, but still warm body of Inspector Herbert Kitchener.

Preston viewed the recently departed body of John Cooper aka Douglas Strand with a look of annoyance. The position it occupied on the floor was detrimental to Preston's progress. The explosives had to be placed,

the charges set and the fuses installed. The constant stepping over the body was becoming somewhat of an inconvenience. Having navigated his way around the body once too often, he'd had enough. Bending over Preston took a firm hold of the thick grey sleeves of Cooper's jumper and pulled the lifeless body out onto the balcony.

It was full dark now and Preston struggled to see. When the lens came round he was blinded by the lamp, then his eyes struggled to readjust to the darkness. Using his boot, Preston tried to push the corpse off the parapet. There was a problem; the handrail supports were too close together to allow the body to roll off. The vertical iron posts would either catch on his legs or his neck. The lens came around once again burning into Preston's eyes. "For Gods sake," he cursed. He tried another tack. Putting Cooper's legs through the gap in the railings he pushed Cooper out lengthways. Once the small of Cooper's back was over the edge his centre of gravity did the rest.

He was gone. Preston didn't hear the splash as the body hit the surf; it just disappeared into the black night.

Along the harbour wall the street lamps blazed with an eerie, green glow as the small steam launch chugged out onto the choppy waters of the Firth of Forth. Norman Boyd stood at the bow of the boat peering into the black night. As the craft ventured further out to sea Boyd's stomach dropped and the sickness started. Despite his condition he was eager to round the headland and catch a glimpse of the light. "Can't we go any faster?" asked the little man as he fought back the waves of nausea.

"No, not yet, the engine's still cold, its got to warm up a little."

McDonald shouted over the noise of the engine.

Slowly the boat made its way along the Forth and out into the North Sea. Boyd was anxious to arrive at the Rock as soon as the tide would permit. He was afraid that he was responsible for sending his English counterpart into grave danger.

As the launch rounded the headland Boyd saw the welcoming flash of the lighthouse in the distance, "Look man, the lights still on," he shouted aft to McDonald. A huge weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He hoped Kitchener was alive and well.

A ring of dynamite now sat in place around the lamp room. Each stick was connected to its neighbour by a length of detonating cord. The end of the cord lay next to the wooden box, within it lay another dozen sticks of explosive. Only the fuse needed to be attached then it would be ready. He took a brief respite, for his back ached. As he rose back to a vertical stance in the distance the lights of the royal yacht could be seen. It was still around one mile away, but he needed to finish the job in plenty of time for his own getaway.

It was quite possible that he himself would be killed in the ensuing explosion; he had to work quickly, but concentrate on the task in hand. If the fuse were to be set incorrectly then he wouldn't stand a chance of making it to the escape vessel which was already on its way to pick him up.

The fuse being used on this job was the kind notorious for burning too quickly, so who knew what would happen when the fuse was lit.

Out of the wooden crate he took an oil lamp, once more his back twinged on the return journey to the vertical. Lighting the lamp with a large match he placed it on the floor before disposing of the match out of the open door. The sulphur still burnt as it fell like a small firefly.

The time had arrived to extinguish the Bell Rock light for the last time. Dropping a large switch the oil supply was cut off from the wick. The lamp slowly died like the last throws of a dyeing star. Only the glow from the small lamp in Preston's hand offered any illumination.

A state of panic set in on the bridge of the Surprise, "What in heaven?" exclaimed the young lieutenant in a shocked voice as he let go of the wheel. The whole yacht lurched to port. The officer on watch felt the erroneous movement and turned to the lieutenant ready to demand an explanation.

He was about to dress down the lad when he too saw the lack of light out of the forward window, "Oh my God. Get Captain Smith up here at once." He knew even if the yacht's engines were turned off and it was allowed to come to a full stop there was still a chance of drifting into the Rock, which was fast approaching.

Shock was also the reaction in the small police launch. For Boyd this was the worst thing that could have happened. All his fears had come to fruition. Was Kitchener dead? And what had happened to the light? He could see the lights of the Royal Yacht approaching the Rock, the light was out but the Yacht was still moving, moving toward where it had, up till a moment ago, been shining, "More steam Mr McDonald, we must get to the rock."

Chapter 15

The last two pieces of fuse wire were being twisted together. Preston's fingertips were red raw with the constant battering they had taken over the past twenty-four hours. Crouching down in front of the wooden box he took the matches once again out of his pocket, ready to touch the fuse. Out of the window he could see the approach of the vessel, now it was time.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you." Said a voice.

On the opposite side of the box Preston saw two boots. He looked up and there, occupying them, was the figure of Chief Inspector Kitchener. Blood matted his hair to his head and ran across his face. He must have taken a good hit from something. His blood loss must have been great by the look of him.

Preston strengthened himself and eyed up the Policeman. They looked at each other, nose to nose like a pair of fighters in the ring. Kitchener stood with an almost military posture. His feet were set apart at shoulder width, his hands clasped together behind his back.

Preston defiantly faced him showing no emotion, the matches clasped in his left hand and the lamp in the other, "Its too late."

"Who for?" asked Kitchener, "Me, you, Her Majesty or just the Empire?"

A note of disdain could clearly be heard in his voice.

“How could you understand? It has taken months of planning to get me here...” how could he understand after all he was a mere Police officer, what did he know of the complexities of government and its relationship with the crown. The relationship that was choking the Empire.

“I understand,” butted in Kitchener, “I understand the whole situation. This has been manufactured by a collection of high-ranking Ministers and Civil Servants. I understand that you, you were the sailor whose craft floundered on the rock this morning, if that was true. You killed the Captain and the First Mate, what did you do with the engineer? Throw him over the side? It must have been a quick bit of thinking to take on the identity of the engineer and think up that tale you told us. Speaking of engineers where’s Strand? Or at least the man calling himself Strand.” So the Inspector hadn’t worked out every fact in the case.

Preston supposed he would forgive him for that, after all he was bleeding badly and was close to death, one way or another. “Don’t you know; he said his name wasn’t Strand after all, but John Cooper. He seemed to think that he was in charge of the lighthouse and had some kind of control over me,” Preston said in a cold calculating voice.

The advantage was back with Preston, he had the upper hand in this exchange. The longer Kitchener talked the weaker he became. From the colouring of his clothes and the general disorientation of the Englishman, Preston calculated that he must have lost a large amount of blood. Soon he would pass out. There would be no need to waste too much time or effort disposing of this problem.

“After attacking me, I presume it was Strand, Cooper I mean, who hit me...” he was beginning to lose his continuity, “He would have come up here.” In the flickering lamplight he could see a dark pool of blood on the floor, “and I would say you dealt with him.” Maybe he wasn’t as light headed as Preston presumed.

“He was of no consequence, what’s one life? The empire is collapsing in on itself, we need a new head of state that can be coerced into steering the Empire in the best direction for its longevity.”

“One life.” Kitchener’s blood was boiling, “You manufactured the Ripper murders to distract the attention of the press and the public, not to mention the Police away from what you and your conspirators were planning.

I was in Hyde Park during one of your meetings, I heard everything. As you all came out of the lodge I took a note of all your names. I thought at the time you were all in some kind of Masonic plot, but then I realised you’re not just members of the Freemasons. You and your conspirators are the elite, you are the Illuminati.”

Preston slowly nodded his head in agreement. He could not deny any of the facts the Inspector had pieced together. “These are desperate times a solution is needed before we lose control. This has come from the highest members of the Government.”

“All those women in Whitechapel. Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Liz Stride, Catherine Edows, Mary Jane Kelly and any more you could mention, all the victims that were never reported. Were they all just another life?”

“All for the greater cause, they won’t be missed. All I have to do now is touch off the contents of this box and everything will change, the whole Empire. You could be part of that change. Come with me and I’ll see you are rewarded for your vigilance here. You could have real power, elevate yourself above the lowly rank of Inspector.

Let me light this fuse then we shall make our escape.” Preston’s right arm had risen to a horizontal position. The lamp was suspended over the box.

“Well, what do you think of my offer, just one more death then the whole Empire is ours?”

“No.” shouted Kitchener as his arm swung around from behind his body at some speed. In his hand he held a small open metal tin. The colourless liquid contained in it splashed into Preston’s face. The aroma of paraffin filled the room.

Preston screamed with pain. He was blinded, his eyes burnt with a searing pain, in his disorientation he dropped the lamp and viciously rubbed his eyes with clenched fists.

Kitchener had spotted the paraffin in the storeroom and decanted a measure into a small metal tin. He had a feeling that some kind of arsenal would be required on encountering either Preston or Strand.

The Policeman lunged at Preston's large frame. He was going to make the most of the advantage he had given himself. Preston fell back against the external glass wall, his eyes still out of use. He was literally fighting blind.

In the wooden crate the oil from the upturned lamp had begun to leak out onto the straw packing. The fuel rushed past the flame, accelerating its burn. With a faint shattering sound (unheard by the warring parties) the glass protecting the flame cracked.

The day shift at New Scotland Yard was leaving for the night. The sun shone through the tower blocks of Westminster. The sun's rays were warm even though it was now heading down towards the obscured horizon, looking like a large sinking blood orange. Kate waited for her friend Karen outside the main entrance of the building. The sunlight interfered with her vision so she moved two paces to the right, into the shadows of one of the surrounding buildings and felt the temperature drop several degrees. She wondered to herself, which she preferred, the warmth of the blinding sun on her face or the chill of the shadows.

The afternoon had been a productive one. She wanted to find out more about this man Kitchener. While sitting at a vacant desk in the CID offices she took the opportunity to do a little research on the Internet. Into the input field of the search engine she typed the words 'Herbert Kitchener 1888'. To her amazement eighty pages of results were found. Maybe he had been famous in his day?

Soon her excitement waned as she found out that the majority of the web sites were in connection with Lord Kitchener of 'Your Country Needs You' fame.

"One More." She said quietly to herself as the mouse pasted over another page link. Then there it was, a link with the past. His name was mentioned in the census of 1887, not only that, but his address, Jacobs Well Mews. Where was that? She could find out.

In one of the many conference rooms in the building a set of large framed street maps of London hung on the wall. Annoyingly, all the maps were drawn in different scales. She took two off the wall and placed them on the table that commanded most of the floor space.

Now, where was Jacobs Well Mews? The first map to draw her attention was drawn at the end of the nineteenth century. Paddington Green was the general area, she knew that. There, she had found it. The small terraced houses that occupied that part of the capital were all long since gone. No chance of paying a visit to his home. She could work out where the plot of land was though. As part of her history degree she had learned how to triangulate positions from old maps. She had an opportunity once more to practise that skill, a skill she thought she would never require again.

Using the edge of a piece of paper she measured out distances from different landmarks and worked out the location. Transferring the calculations to the larger scale map she found her point.

She could not believe her eyes, "But that's right next to my house."

"Come on, let's go," said Karen not breaking her stride as she rushed past Kate. "Wine and talent spotting time." Kate gave no answer; she just smiled to herself and followed Karen down towards the river.

"Wait a minute," called Kate once they were a safe distance away from the Yard. Karen stopped dead on the spot and turned to face her friend.

"What's wrong?" she asked in a concerned voice.

The two women had come to a halt on the embankment of the river Thames. A boat passed behind them jammed full of tourists, cameras flashing, all aimed at Big Ben.

Before Kate dared to speak she looked around checking to see if anyone was loitering within earshot. Once convinced that there were no eavesdroppers in the vicinity she spoke. "I want you to come back to my place I've got something to show you."

Karen was somewhat taken aback by the invitation, "Really, why didn't any hunky Italians ever say that to me, or one of those gorgeous firemen from last night. Can we go for a drink first?"

"No listen," said Kate firmly, "It's funny you should mention 'those hunky firemen'. There is something strange going on. That fire alarm last night,

it wasn't a false alarm at all. You said the firemen turned up in a green goddess fire engine?"

"If they played their cards right they could have ended up inside this goddess." fantasised Karen.

"Green goddesses are army fire engines. Someone sounded the fire alarm to clear the building. When I got in this morning the storeroom I was working in yesterday was empty. I think something was in there that the powers to be didn't want making public. The army went in and cleared the room, the building was empty, no witnesses."

"Oh yes, what did they take then?"

"I've got it here." Kate lightly pats her shoulder bag. "Its a good job they are here, if I had left them in that room last night they would have been destroyed forever. Come on I want to show them to you, we'll open a couple of bottles and I'll show you just what I've saved."

Preston's sight was slowly returning, though the extent of his vision was still only a slight blur. The only source of light being the moon illuminating the room.

At present he was locked against the wall with Inspector Kitchener dealing out blow after blow to his face and body, the Policeman was winning on hits to his opponent. Now his sight was returning he could address the balance of the situation somewhat.

His sight had not returned sufficiently enough for him to locate his knife which lay somewhere on the floor. This was of no consequence, as he knew several ways of killing a man with his bare hands alone.

The dry straw in the box was starting to smoulder. A wisp of white smoke rose into the roof joists of the Lamp room.

Summoning up a burst of strength Preston turned himself and the interlocked Kitchener through one hundred and eighty degrees. Now it was Kitchener's turn to be trapped against the wall.

Preston was attacking purely on instinct; this was no different to fighting in the dark. Repeatedly he banged Kitchener's head against the wall. Each time he would edge the Policeman closer to the open door and the deadly fall taken by Cooper. Kitchener landed several firm blows to Preston's midriff and head, none of which had any effect on this mountain of a man.

With one more lurch Kitchener fell backwards out of the door and landed on the balcony. Not letting go Preston landed on top of him. Kitchener was reminded of the time a scrum had collapsed on him in a Police rugby match. Preston's weight was equal to the combined front row of the South London Constabulary. The relentless barrage of hits had subsided. Now with Preston sitting on top of Kitchener's chest he had changed his offensive tactics. It was difficult to breathe with the man mountain constricting his lungs so when Preston locked his big hands around Kitchener's throat it became impossible. The Police Inspector was passing out into unconsciousness.

Karen's long shapely legs climbed gracefully out of the black taxi closely followed by Kate, who paid the driver. "Cheers luv" he said as he watched the two girls walk up the garden path. His eyes lingered on the taller woman's lower limbs. "Bet she's wearing stockings," he said to himself before pulling away from the curb.

The journey home had been a subdued affair. Kate didn't want to talk about the case notes in public, but she could think of nothing else. At the front door Kate fumbled through her bag trying to locate her house keys. A tap on her shoulder made her jump with surprise. She turned to see Karen, her index finger raised to her red painted lips. Once she had given the indication for Kate to stay silent her finger pointed in the direction of the door.

The front door was ever so slightly ajar. Both women froze. Someone had been in the house. Were they still there? "Leave this to me." Karen said before quietly creeping through the door and into the hallway. Kate followed, only for the sake of not knowing what else to do and to keep an eye on Karen. If this was connected to the previous night's operation at the yard, then who knows who could be in there? Kate was sure though, if anyone was in the house then Karen was more than capable of dealing with them.

Only a few weeks previous a similar situation had arisen while Karen had been visiting her mother and father. During the excellent Sunday lunch a knock on the door interrupted the proceedings. The visitor was a woman

from across the road. She and Karen's mother had been good friends for many a year, but became closer since the neighbour had been widowed. The newcomer was in somewhat of a state. She was convinced that she had an uninvited guest in her house; so taking the safe route came to use her friend's telephone to call the Police. On hearing of the plight of the poor woman Karen forced another roast potato into her mouth and drained her nearly full glass of red wine before leaving the table and heading across the road.

Karen's parents and the neighbour watched through the living room window as Karen entered the house. The suspicions of the older woman were correct; a man was in the house.

Moments later the unruffled figure of the WPC emerged from the front door, crossed over the road and back into the house to continue her lunch, stopping only to give a smile to her mother's friend as they passed one another in the hallway.

Twenty minutes later an ambulance and Police car sat on the road outside the house. Within no time at all the small crowd of onlookers witnessed two paramedics leaving the house holding either end of a stretcher containing a hooded youth lying still, a hand clutching his midriff and a look of pain on his face. Following the medics a single Police constable came through the door carrying a kitchen knife in a sealed plastic bag. The two official vehicles drove off down the road. In the dinning room Karen didn't bat an eyelid as the siren sounded. She merely finished off her remaining homemade apple pie drowned in custard and refilled her wine glass.

Karen had finished checking around Kate's house. It was clear, if someone had been there, they were long gone. Kate was relieved, how glad she was to have Karen with her, what would she have done if she had been alone.

On entering the living room it was clear that someone had been going through her drawers and cupboards, but nothing was missing and the house wasn't the usual mess that normally ensued after a burglary. This had been no ordinary thief.

The expensive gold carriage clock, bought for her by her parents on her graduation, still commanded its position in the middle of the mantle piece.

Her bank and credit cards were still in the dresser drawer. They could have been looking for only one thing, the contents of her bag. It didn't take the two of them long to return the house to its immaculate state. With two bottles of wine opened, Kate showed Karen her findings from the archives. After half an hour, and half a bottle of wine, Karen sat back on the sofa, a look of amazement on her face. "My God," was all that ventured from her glossy lips. Kate herself was still busily reading the case notes, eager to find out the conclusion of the case, if it had one.

Kitchener could feel himself drifting into unconsciousness. If he was going to die here and now at least he could go with a pleasant memory. He thought hard. Thinking was all he could do now; all the energy in his body was completely drained. The loss of blood, doubled with the lack of oxygen had weakened him to the point of incapacity. In the wooden crate containing the explosive the smoulder ignited into a small flickering orange flame.

Kitchener's mind was no longer on the Bell Rock Lighthouse, he had drifted back to Brighton on that hot summer bank holiday with his beloved wife Muriel. The band played, and the seagulls cried in the heat, while the pavilion was unusually cool. Then the pleasant thoughts ceased and he had remembered the tarot card reading, the tower, death.

No, no, he wasn't having that. She couldn't have known.

Christmas and Muriel came into mind. That last night before he had left for Scotland. The present she had given him, his new silver pen.

Yes, he could still think of that, and touch it in his pocket. With an almighty effort he pushed his hand the two inches or so into his coat pocket and fumbled around trying to find it, trying to be close to Muriel one more time.

Preston saw his hand move into his coat pocket, so what, he was almost dead. All the life had drained out of the Policeman's face, only a few more seconds and it would be all over.

The pen felt cold and hard in his hand. With his thumb he flicked off the top then took it out of his pocket.

Kitchener opened his eyes and looked hard at Preston whose own expression changed to one of shock on seeing his opponent still alive. Kitchener's arm shot up from its position on the floor and plunged the pen deep into Preston's throat.

Preston let out the loudest most sickening scream that Kitchener had ever heard. Blood spurted out of the wound with rhythmic rapidity; like a red fountain.

Kitchener removed the pen, making the wound gape open, more blood poured out. Preston delirious with pain tried to get to his feet but fell back against one of the sides of the doorframe. His large frame fell forwards towards Kitchener's body lying on the floor.

Kitchener was saved from the falling body of the impostor by the balcony handrail. He doubled himself up over the edge perfectly balanced. Out of his mouth omitted a low groan. He had no energy to move and didn't care. His job here was done. Between his legs he could see the wooden box alight, soon it would set off the explosive and a chain reaction would commence.

Kitchener opened an eye to see the doubled up figure hanging above him over the rail. His only thought was to do his duty and restrain Preston, but how, he couldn't move? With a supreme effort of will he slowly began to move. If he can make it onto all fours then that would be a start. As he lifted himself up he was aware of a pressure on his back. Unbeknown to the semi-conscious Kitchener it was Preston's foot.

Preston felt the shift of his lower half. In terror he watched as the Policeman tried to stand, he opened his mouth to shout, but it was full of blood, no sound came.

As the Englishman rose he gradually upset the perfectly balanced man hanging over the rail.

Preston could feel his body slipping but he could offer no resistance. Ironically, he was despatched to eternity in the same fashion as he himself murdered two people earlier that day.

It wasn't until Kitchener sat on his knees and turned to face the paralytic murderer did he realise just what happened. With an overwhelming sense of remorse he sat back against the wall of the lamp room. The balcony was cold under his trousers. His body ached all over from his attack on

Preston. His torso and head ached from the endless pounding taken from his attacker. He lacked the energy to move.

Something drifted past him, what was it? It was a smell though his brain didn't register it correctly. He looked into the lamp room and saw in the centre of the floor the box of explosive now on fire. The paper had started to peel off the sticks of dynamite. He knew he had to take action. As fast as he could, which was at a snails pace. He crawled into the interior and pushed the burning crate towards the door.

With his last ounce of energy he threw the box as far as he could out into the dark night. With it gone he rested against the lower bar of the handrail staring into the night. He breathed heavily; his chest still ached from his encounter with the burly figure of Preston.

Then it came, the explosion lit up the night. He saw it and felt the searing heat on his face and knuckles as his hands gripped the rail. That's all he felt, all the senses of his body refused to register any other feeling or emotion.

Suddenly a sense of shock came over him almost forcing him backward against the wall. As the explosion lit up the sky Kitchener saw the face of Preston hanging six feet below the balcony. When his body had fallen his neck became caught and then twisted in the rope suspending the boatswain's chair. His two lifeless eyes bulged in the sockets of his skull. A look of abject terror was on his face.

Out at sea the Royal Yacht Surprise drifted onward toward the lighthouse. On the bridge, panic hit the assembled company as the explosion lit up the lighthouse directly in front of the bow.

"Hard to port man, hard to port." Yelled the Captain entering the bridge. The helmsman turned the wheel as though his life depended on it. The Captain joined his junior officer in holding the wheel. The yacht lurched to the right throwing all aboard across the decks; even Her Majesty was not excluded from the humiliation.

Kitchener knew, despite his own exhaustion, that there were still things to be done. "I must turn on the emergency light." The emergency light was situated at the very top of the tower.

Reaching up to the control panel, his blood-covered hand dropped the switch turning on the small light on top of the lamp room. What was he

thinking; the main light was still in working order. He would turn that on in a moment, once he had regained his breath. A huge sense of relief swept over him and gave him extra energy. Turning on the main light the machinery started to turn. A faint glow appeared as the oil seeped through the wick. Slowly he hobbled back outside. The Royal Yacht passed the rock lurching from side to side as a result of the drastic manoeuvres executed only minutes before. His sense of pride increased once he saw what he had done. He had saved the life of Her Majesty and the Empire. The Empire would now be free of the tyranny of the corrupt powers that had tried to take it over. Muriel would be so proud. No, he thought, she would never believe him.

Chapter 16

The Yacht was so close to the rock I thought I could almost reach out and touch it. I could make out the people's faces; they were clearly visible in the portholes. Framed in one of them I would take my oath that it was the face of the Empress herself. Did I imagine it? As best as I could manage I stood to attention I saluted her, then she was gone on her way to the mainland.

It was a clear night now, in the sky a million stars shone down and the moon watched over the seas. In a few hours it would be Christmas Day, this would be one I'd remember for the rest of my life.

Kate and Karen looked at each other in amazement. "I'm beginning to understand why the authorities wanted this to be lost forever."

"What are you going to do with it?" asked Karen while pouring another glass of red wine.

"I don't know." Replied Kate thinking. "I really don't know."

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Herbert Kitchener received the George Cross for his services to the crown in the honours list of 1890.

In the year 1892 he took the position of Her Majesties head of security. A role he occupied until Queen Victoria's death.

No one was ever charged with the plot to assassinate the Queen and Jack the Ripper was never caught.

The grey haired man, who was central to the conspiracy plot, left his job within the British Government to become Her Majesties Ambassador to the United States, where he and his fellow members of the Illuminati began to build a new power base for their organisation.

Epilogue.

The queue waited patiently for the guest to arrive, it was a hot sunny day that summer, but the crowd waited with eager anticipation. From behind a red curtain two figures emerged, one middle aged man and a woman in her late twenties.

The manager of the shop ushered the guest into a chair behind a table covered in the authors' work. The pile of hardback books bore an atmospheric dark picture of a lighthouse, shining out of the dark, on the front dust cover.

The red velvet rope was pulled back and the first reader came through holding out a copy of 'The Bell Rock Mystery' for the author to sign. As the lady reader laid her eyes on the writer her face dropped as though an immense disappointment had overcome her.

"Oh?" she said, "But?" still holding out the book.

The writer took the book from the ladies hand, “Not what you were expecting?”

“No, not really, I was expecting someone else, a man I thought, Neil...”

“I know, that’s me.” Smiled Kate Wood.

FINI



A Note about the Author

Neil Wesson started writing at the age of 30. Starting on screen and stage plays he soon progressed onto short stories as well as longer works.

As well as writing Neil is a keen sports fan and an enthusiastic musician with a hat for every occasion.

Picture taken at the Scarborough Cricket festival, 2006 ©.

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