

Under a Violet Sky

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Chapter one

February 1941

A light snow had just started to fall as the black, bullet-proof Mercedes carrying Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler left the autobahn, which flowed out of Bavaria into Austria. The car followed a country road for a kilometre and then stopped briefly as the driver instructed two guards, in winter overcoats, to open a wire mesh gate with barbed wire on top. The gate was the only break in a fence that stretched into the distance on either side.

After a kilometre and a half of treacherous driving along a narrow road with snow-covered trees on either side they arrived at a checkpoint where three guards, also dressed in winter overcoats, stood behind a yellow barrier, which straddled the road. They froze to attention when they realised who was in the car. A sergeant left the green wooden guard's hut and marched swiftly to the waiting vehicle.

"Heil, mein Fuhrer!" He barked, while saluting, after briefly looking in the car. He then signalled the guards to raise the barrier.

As the Mercedes drove slowly past the saluting guards Hitler turned to Himmler, and said: "I hope the money is being spent well here Heinrich."

"Yes mein Fuhrer," replied the small, bespectacled man, as he shifted uncomfortably on the seat.

They drove past green military trucks, which had black crosses with white outlines on the doors, and then turned sharp right toward a cliff face, which had been blasted out of the side of a mountain. The Mercedes pulled up in front of two green metal doors where two men in white lab coats waited. The driver jumped out and opened the rear door to allow the two Nazi leaders out.

"This is Doctor Teubert mein Fuhrer," said Himmler as he stepped forward to introduce a tall, thin man with brown, wavy hair, "he is Director Heisenberg's colleague."

"Heil, mein Fuhrer!" Teubert said with a salute.

"Ah Doctor," said Hitler. "What have you got here to show me?"

"Mein Fuhrer, as you know, we are in the process of building an underground laboratory and research area to aid in the development of the atomic bomb for the Third Reich."

"Yes Herr Doctor."

A guard pulled open one of the doors, and the group of men walked into the interior of the mountain. The gaping mouth of a large metal tube greeted them to their left and then ran into the distant darkness. There were cables and wooden crates lying everywhere. Men in dark, blue overalls were busily rotating spanners and turning screwdrivers.

"Mein Fuhrer, this will be Wehrmacht Two the most powerful cyclotron in the world. Thanks to the funding you have given us for equipment like this we hope to be well ahead of the Americans in uranium enrichment. However, this is not what I have asked you here to witness. If you would follow me please?"

They walked further into the mountain and entered a darkened area.

"Karl, the lights please?" Teubert said to a plump man in a lab coat with short, fair hair and circular spectacles, who stood in semi-darkness by a far wall.

Suddenly a large area was flooded with white light.

“Incredible!” exclaimed Hitler, for in front of him was a sleek, black bell-shaped object some five metres in diameter and four metres in height. A section of the upper surface was missing, and cables had been run inside.

“What is it?”

“Mein Fuhrer, this is a craft from another world, possibly from another galaxy. We call it ‘The Bell’.”

“How did you come by it?”

“It was shipped here from Poland.”

“Mein Fuhrer,” interrupted Himmler. “I was responsible for having the object brought here. The SS realised its potential when it was discovered in Poland, and after some initial work in the mine it was found in we thought it safer to bring such an important find back to the Fatherland. I telephoned Doctor Teubert, and he suggested bringing it here where he would investigate when he was held up with his own work.”

“I see,” said Hitler walking toward the ship. “So Herr Doctor, what have you discovered - an atomic generator?”

“No mein Fuhrer this craft flew by some type of polarizing anti-gravity action generated from an internal machine. The ship actually pulls the destination toward it when the machine is switched on and then flies at the speed of light to that position when the machine is switched off.”

“And you have done this Herr Doctor?”

“Well no, because we do not know how to set the machine for spatial flight, but we have had some success with inter-dimensional settings; you see, mein Fuhrer, this ship appears to not only fly spatially, but also dimensionally. I can pull up a dimension and hold it by reducing the power rather than cutting it all together.”

Teubert turned to a youth in a lab coat. “Günter, the goggles please?”

The young assistant handed out pairs of shaded goggles.

“If you would put these on gentlemen; there may be some bright flashes,” said Teubert.

Hitler and Himmler took off their caps and pulled the goggles over their heads. Teubert then signalled to his assistant, who then pulled a lever next to the light switches on the cavern wall. A loud hum then filled the air.

“An extra precaution gentleman: a force field around the ship – another toy The Bell has given us!” Teubert said, as he walked back and stood beside Hitler and Himmler. He then picked up a control with a cable, which ran into the ship. He flicked two switches and two electric motors burst into life and joined the cacophony that filled the cavern.

“We have to use our electric motors because we don’t know what the ship, and consequentially the anti-gravity machine, was powered by. The source might have been damaged before the ship was found,” the doctor said, before he turned a knob and the motors began to howl. As he did so the atmosphere around the black craft began to crackle with static electricity.

Suddenly there was a flash of light and a sound like the crack of a whip, and standing gaping at the group of men beside The Bell was the dark figure of a woman with a face of wrinkled light, grey skin and total black eyes. Her dark ragged clothes hung from her two metre tall frame. Lifeless, fair hair lay flat on the top of her skull and also fell down the sides of her head onto her shoulders.

She opened a distorted mouth to show a set of sharp, pointed teeth. Then, suddenly she leapt toward the men, but was restrained by the electromagnetic field. Hitler and Himmler jumped back as the electromagnets screamed with the extra strain placed on them and Günter, the youthful assistant, ran off into the darkness.

The demon closed her eyes and cackled. Then in a deep unworldly voice, she said: "You're all going to die, and I'm going to come for you!" Then she cackled again as she rose into the air.

Teubert, fearing that the electromagnets would not take another assault on the field, began to reduce the power of the motors and the figure disappeared with another sound like the crack of a whip.

Hitler removed his goggles and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "That, I have to say Herr Doctor, was interesting. How do you stop the ship from disappearing into the dimension?"

"By keeping on the power supply to the anti-gravity machine and then reducing it gradually when we want to end contact." Teubert said as he placed the control back on the floor. He then instructed Karl to stop the electromagnets. "Mein Fuhrer, do I keep up the investigation on the ship?"

"Yes, by all means, and Herr Doctor, not a word of what happened here today must escape this work place."

"Yes mein Fuhrer."

Hitler turned to Himmler as the black Mercedes sped towards Munich, and said: "Heinrich, I want you to close down the work under the mountain. I don't want word getting out that we, the head men of the Third Reich, were frightened by some vision from another dimension." He then gazed at the passing fields. "Do you understand what I'm saying? That ship's not to see the light of day again!"

"But, mein Fuhrer..."

"Heinrich," interrupted Hitler. "Pass it around that we found them working too slowly it will serve as a warning to Heisenberg or anyone else of what could happen to them if they do not get on with developing the atomic bomb for us; it will cause a kind of 'uncertainty principle' if you like."

"Yes mein Fuhrer," said Himmler as he watched a rare trace of a smile pass over his leaders face.

Later that day as the light began to fade two covered jeeps with black crosses on the doors pulled up at the check point in front of the mountain laboratory.

"Sergeant!" shouted a man clad in white winter gear.

"Yes Captain?" answered the sergeant, as both men saluted.

"Are the scientists inside the cavern?"

"Yes sir, they are hard at work."

"And the army engineers?"

"They are on a break in the cabin."

"You, your men, and the engineers are to report to the base in Rosenheim."

The two jeeps then drove to within two hundred metres of the cliff face and the men jumped out. Two of the commandos silently climbed above the half-closed green doors and set charges in several crevices, then threw the jointed cable down to one side. Another two climbed up a footpath one hundred metres from the doors and rolled heavy boulders over the escape hatch making sure one jammed the handle. The captain pulled both doors shut and chained them. He then cut the electric and telephone cables, before picking up the charges cable and laying it out as he walked toward the two vehicles, behind which his men took up position. He attached the wire ends to a detonator and crouched behind the driver's door of the lead vehicle. He then looked at his men and turned the knob.

The cliff face above the doors erupted, and big slabs of rock crashed into the ground amid great plumes of dust. The blast echoed around the neighbouring mountains setting large flocks of birds into flight.

The captain glanced at his handiwork through the settling dust as he rolled up the cable. He then put the detonator and the cable in the back of the lead vehicle and took a grenade from an ammo box. He signalled the second vehicle to leave before entering the front passenger seat. "Right, let's go!" he barked.

Pulling the cord the captain lobbed the grenade into the guard's hut as they passed. The resultant explosion ripped through the building and threw splinter laden dust into the air.

At the end of the narrow lane two commandos chained the gate after the jeeps had passed and then the two vehicles' drove off into the gathering gloom.

Chapter two

Present Day

Johnny Duncan gazed out of his spare bedroom window at the light rain which darkened the neighbouring slate rooftops. The dark rain clouds had settled over Arbroath after a bright promising start to the early spring day.

There was no bed in the room only a desk and chair by the window and an overflowing mahogany book shelve unit. His trusty laptop sat amid paper and tape cassette chaos on the desk next to the only other thing of value: his digital stereo radio/ cassette player.

Johnny had stopped for a roll-up break after a two hour marathon at the computer keyboard: his weekly column had to be emailed into the Dundee Courier the following morning by eight o'clock.

Having written the column for four years since going freelance Johnny had built up a loyal band of readers. He focused mainly on a satirical look at local and national politics. He also wrote a monthly column for The Scotsman newspaper, and articles for various international magazines including Time and Nexus – the alternative news bimonthly.

The rain became heavier and the drops hammered on the glass. He lit up the thin roll- up; inhaled deeply and leaned back on his chair. The shrill sound of the telephone interrupted his pleasure as the nicotine coursed through his system.

"Dad?" asked a girls voice as he put the receiver to his right ear.

"Caitlin! How's it goin'?"

"Okay. Gran's taking me to McDonalds. And we were wondering if you would like to come?"

"Yeah, of course. I'll meet you there in ten minutes?"

"Right. See ya!"

He replaced the receiver and took another draw from his roll-up after flicking ash into an ash tray with a small, grey skull, which grinned up at him from the centre. *His eight year old daughter, Caitlin, had perhaps suffered most from the break-up of his marriage to Sue*, he thought. Sometimes, when she stayed with him, he would find her crying about the way things had been. Brad, his son, was ten and, like many other boys of that age, played endless games of football with his chums never saying anything about the divorce to Johnny when he went to collect the boy.

Johnny blamed himself for the break-up. His drinking had increased through the years; not that he was violent when drunk - just pathetic. Working as a reporter for the Dundee Courier from the age of eighteen he reached the dizzy heights of senior reporter where he remained until resigning and becoming freelance at thirty- eight.

The drinking had started just as an after work get-together. The pressure of work led to an escalation, and before long he couldn't sleep without consuming half a bottle of whisky.

After two years of freelancing, and the drinking still at an unprecedented level; Sue gave him an ultimatum one night: either her or the drink. After an almighty row she packed her bags and took the kids to her mothers.

Stubbing out his cigarette he stood up and stretched, then ambled into the bathroom to clean his teeth – he liked his kids to think he had given up smoking. The doctor had advised him to stop after he found Johnny had high blood pressure. *He had tried he thought, but had failed miserably.*

“Hey! How are my two favourite ladies getting on?” Johnny asked, walking up to the table where Caitlin and her Grandmother, Ann, were sitting putting thin fries into their mouths in a half full McDonalds.

“Dad!” shouted Caitlin as she jumped up and gave him a hug. He looked at their table. “Do you want anything else?”

“No thanks.” Caitlin said.

“Mum?”

“No thanks John.”

He bought himself a latte and sat down at their table. A party of children started cheering as a man appeared with an overloaded tray.

“Dad, I’m trying to get Gran to take me to Pleasureland.”

“No, I’m taking you and your brother back to your mother’s after this - young lady.”

“Aw dad! Please?”

“No, your mother will have my guts for garters if we’re late.”

“John!” Ann exclaimed.

“It’s okay gran, I’ve heard worse than that from him.”

“Have you now,” said Ann, giving Johnny a disapproving look.

The village of Auchmithie stood on massive conglomerate cliffs and peered down at a dilapidated harbour, which had been ravished over the years by the merciless North Sea.

Johnny pulled up in front of a sandstone cottage on a street which led to nowhere. Sue and her new partner, Ollie, had bought the property, which had three bedrooms and a sizeable back yard for the kids to play in. Ollie was an ex-marine who had found work in the off-shore business. Johnny actually liked the guy and could find nothing to hold against him.

Sue appeared at the front door looking great in tight jeans and a loose, red sweater.

“See ya dad.” said Caitlin, as she gave Johnny a hug.

“Yeah, bye dad,” grunted Brad, as he opened the rear passenger-side door.

Johnny pressed a button beside the gear stick and the driver’s side window lowered as Sue approached the car. “How’re you doing John?”

“Fine. And you?” He then gazed at the pavement and took a deep breath. “Sue ...”

“Don’t John. I’m happy here with the kids and Ollie.”

“What! I was just going to ... oh never mind!”

Back in his spare bedroom Johnny stared gloomily at the icons on his laptop screen. *He needed a break*, he thought. He clicked on the broadband icon, and the Internet homepage sprung to life in front of him. After inserting ‘holiday’ in Google, endless pages of website addresses flashed up before him, mostly for package deals. Johnny, however, wanted something different; something historically or religiously interesting. He had always wanted to go to Israel – to Jerusalem. Holidays with Sue were always about one thing: the sun. Inevitably he found himself lying on some beach, which never really satisfied the restlessness within him.

He clicked on a ‘flights’ link and on impulse booked himself on an open return flight from London to Tel Aviv on Wednesday. *The great thing about being freelance*, he thought, *was the freedom just to go somewhere whenever he wanted.*

Johnny then stood up and stretched. It would be good to get away for a while from work and, hopefully, the nightmares he had been having lately.

Chapter Three

Wednesday morning was bright and windy. Johnny locked his flat door and headed down the stairs with his overnight bag – he believed in travelling light.

As he drove past the turn off for Stonehaven on the road which eventually led to Aberdeen he thought of Sue and the kids: he had phoned her the previous night and told her that he was going away on an assignment for a magazine. If his children found out he was off on a short holiday they would never forgive him for not taking them with him and if he did take them Sue would never forgive him for taking them away from school.

The airport car park in front of the building was nearly full, but Johnny managed to find a space away at the back next to a large, red pick-up truck with a golden eagle painted on the bonnet. He locked the car then strolled into the airport.

The check-in hall was filled with oil industry workers heading home after a tour of duty off-shore. He traced the British Airways desk; collected his ticket and then checked in for the flight to Heathrow.

The window seat next to Johnny was occupied by a fair-haired man in a grey suit who he assumed was a business man heading to London for some high-powered meeting.

“Colin McPherson,” said the man, offering his right hand.

“John Duncan,” said Johnny, shaking his hand.

“Business or pleasure?”

“What?” Johnny grunted.

“Are you going to London for business or pleasure?”

“Oh! I’m going on a short break. And yourself?”

“I’m off to London University to give a talk at a seminar.”

A stewardess checked their seats were upright and their seatbelts were properly fastened.

“I lecture on Geology at Aberdeen University,” the man continued.

The plane began to move and taxied onto the runway. Then the engine noise increased to a loud whine.

“I’ve just spent sometime in America studying sedimentary basins, and I’ve found something new and exciting – thus the talk at the university.”

Jeez, this guy likes to talk about himself, thought Johnny as the plane sped down the runway and then rose into the sunny midday sky.

The flight took an hour and a half, and when Johnny left his seat at Heathrow he felt like he knew all there was to know about sedimentary basins and how much he hated academic’s. He collected his bag from the carousel in the ultramodern terminal five and then took the bus to terminal one, where a human tide flowed by either side of him as he stood just inside the automatic doors looking for the El Al desk. The place was packed with people of all nationalities either moving around or standing in queues

A man in a yellow highly-visible vest gave Johnny directions to the El Al desk, where he collected his tickets. Then, after checking in, he exchanged some pounds into the Israeli New Sheckle before making his way through to the departure gate, where he sat until boarding began.

Although it was almost eleven at night Ben Gurion Airport was busy as he walked through the concourse. He eventually saw the exit and headed out into the warm Middle Eastern night.

He hailed the first taxi he saw, a Toyota, which pulled up beside him. The cabbie, a thick set man with black hair and beard jumped out and put his bag in the boot.

"Where to sir? He asked when they were both seated in the car.

"I'm going to Jerusalem,"

"No problem sir, I'm from Jerusalem.

The car sped off and was soon on Highway One amid trucks and buses.

"You're Scottish?" The cabbie asked, looking at Johnny in the rear view mirror.

"Yeah, and thanks I usually get asked if I'm English."

"This your first time in Israel?"

"Yes, I'm here for a short break."

Although it was dark Johnny could make out fields on either side of the highway, and town lights twinkled in the distance on both sides as the car sped on its way to the Israeli capital. Initially the land was flat, but it eventually gave way to tree-fringed hills.

"Where are you staying?" asked the cabbie, breaking the silence

Johnny gave the man the address of the hotel he had booked over the Internet. *The place was a bit expensive, but what the hell*, he thought, *he was on holiday*. He'd never been on holiday himself before. He'd been on assignments for magazines where he travelled alone, but a holiday was new ground.

He could see an orange glow in the distance over the hills. *Must be Jerusalem*, he thought as butterflies started flapping in his stomach. The Holy City: the place he knew that he had always wanted to visit.

The highway dipped and rose as it neared Jerusalem. Johnny swung one way then the other as the cab took a slip road and came out among street light illuminated white buildings. Then, after another ten minute drive through heavy traffic they pulled up at a large, white cereal box with balconies called the 'White Plaza.'

"Would you be able to pick me up tomorrow at two in the afternoon, I'd like to go to the Mount of Olives – you know, see the sights." Johnny said as he paid the cabbie.

"Of course. My name is David."

"I'm Johnny."

The large glass doors parted for him as he walked into the spacious air-conditioned reception. The polished, white marble floor reminded him of an ice rink, and he cheekily slid his bag up to the desk where a young dark-haired female receptionist sat. She checked him in and then sent him up ten floors where he inserted the key-card into the slot on the lock of door number 1016, and the red light turned to green. He then pushed the door open and walked into the darkness. He tried the light switch, but nothing happened. "Of course!" he said to himself, as he saw the small unit on the wall, which was illuminated by the light from the corridor. He pushed the card into the slot on the box, and, suddenly, the room was bathed in bright light.

He dumped his bag on the double bed and then headed into the en-suite and, running the cold tap, he splashed water onto his face. Then cooler, he made his way back into the main room, switched off the lights and pulled apart the curtains revealing a world of street lights set against dark hills in the background only noticeable under the starry sky.

The warm night air surged into the air-conditioned room as he opened the glass door which led on to his balcony. He strolled out and took in the breathtaking night time vista.

The dense cluster of lights that was the old city was dominated by the blue cupola of the Dome of the Rock. The new part of the city in the foreground looked like many other cities with its high rise buildings.

Back in the room he contemplated unpacking his case, but then he remembered the receptionist saying that one of the bars was still open to residents. He switched the lights back on and checked himself over in the long mirror on the wardrobe. Then, with the bag left on the bed, he took the key-card, pulled the door and clambered into the lift and descended to the ground floor.

The Long Bar was well-lit and had two whirring fans on the ceiling. Two men sat deep in conversation at one end of the black veneer bar and, in a corner, a couple sat looking at one another over Daiquiris at a table with a floating candle in a vase of water.

Johnny walked up to the bar and ordered a beer from the young curly-haired barman. He then sat on a stool and tapped his right foot to the jazz which had been turned up to just a shade above background.

As he took a gulp of his beer he heard the clack of high heels on marble. He turned to see a woman dressed in a light, tan blouse and brown trousers stride into the room with an air of elegance.

"Vodka and lime juice Moshe," she said to the barman in a polite American east coast accent.

"Yes madam," he replied.

Her light, brown hair was swept back into a short ponytail, and she wore large, gold earrings. Her tanned skin, which stretched delicately over prominent high cheek bones, gave her a slight Latin-American look.

"Thanks," she said as the barman placed the drink in front of where she had just sat down – two stools away from Johnny. She took a side glance at him, and asked: "Are you just in?"

"Yeah, I am," he said. "Why, do I have that rugged, windswept look?"

"No, I just haven't seen your face before."

The barman laughed as he dried a glass.

"You're Scottish – right?" she continued.

"Yes, I am. Is it *that* obvious?"

"You sound like Sean Connery; I think he's still the sexiest man on the planet."

"In that case: the namesh... Duncan, John Duncan!" Johnny said in a poor attempt at a Sean Connery accent.

"Veronica Cahill," she said laughing and shaking Johnny's hand. "And so Duncan, John Duncan are you here with your work?"

"No, I'm here on holiday," he said, before he drained his glass. "And yourself?"

"I'm a journalist with the Washington Post over here investigating material for the magazine."

"Hey, I'm a journalist as well!"

Johnny bought another beer and nodded to Veronica's rapidly emptying glass.

"Would you like another?"

"No thanks I'll need to go; we working gals need our sleep."

"Okay, nice meeting you. See you around."

"How about dinner here at the hotel some night -talk about journalist things?"

"Okay, fine by me."

"Great, see you!"

Johnny finished his drink as Veronica walked out of the bar. He contemplated having another, but tiredness was catching up with him.

A rumbling stomach woke Johnny up at seven forty-five AM. The sun shone between the open curtains and illuminated his bed as he jumped up and headed into the shower room.

Breakfast was cereal and toast in the large air-conditioned dinning room. He sat at a table by a window and stared at the relentless traffic, which roared past on the road beyond the hotel's small roundabout. As he sipped from a coffee cup he wondered what to do until the taxi came at two pm; he thought about going to the pool - he was on holiday after all.

The swimming pool was large, blue and sat at the rear of the hotel. Palm trees surrounded the area and waved in a breeze, which also caused small ripples on the surface of the water.

There were perhaps twelve people scattered around the perfect lines of white sun-loungers. A life guard dressed in a red vest and white shorts sat on a raised chair next to the deep-end looking bored.

Johnny threw his towel onto a lounge near the water and then stood under the cold spray of one of the showers, which were at each corner of the pool. He quickly jumped away from the iciness, and was glad to feel the warming rays of the Israeli sun. He then gazed at the azure water of the pool. "Might as well get it over with," he said quietly to himself.

He stepped gingerly down the concrete steps at the shallow-end. The water, however, was warm – a pleasant surprise for Johnny who was used to pools in Scotland and Spain where brass monkeys were scarce. He sat on one of the steps and gazed at the waving palm trees as he ran a hand through his short curly hair.

"What's wrong, are there piranhas in the pool?" asked an American voice. Johnny turned to see Veronica disrobe and then walk toward him in a skimpy, red bikini.

"Just contemplating which stroke to use," he said with a rising desire.

"How about the breaststroke," she said descending the steps then striding into the deeper water before finally swimming toward the deep-end.

She swam four lengths before climbing up the steps past Johnny. "Remember, dinner some night!"

"How could I forget!" he said as he stood up, and then ran through the shallows to dive into the deep water.

Johnny watched the Toyota cab draw up outside the hotel. He was sitting on a large, black leather settee in reception. There were two receptionists behind the desk dealing with a group of Italian tourists who had just arrived.

"Shalom!" Johnny said as he opened the rear passenger-side door and climbed into the car.

"Shalom!" replied David the cabbie. "The Mount of Olives today?"

"Yes please."

The cab left the safe haven of the hotel roundabout and merged into heavy traffic. They passed the large, pink coloured buildings of the train and bus stations and then headed along a street lined with vehicles on one side. A truck pulled out in front of them, and David shouted something in Hebrew, and then shook his head.

The taxi entered a busy street with darkened, pink buildings on either side, many had balconies from which baskets of plants hung. Johnny could feel the heat building as he sat in the back of the taxi. He had shut the window to keep the exhaust fumes from the traffic out, and sweat began to run down his back as they emerged on to a large square.

“There’s the New Gate!” shouted David as he nodded to an arch in a section of the Old City Wall, which had emerged from behind the traffic at the other side of the square.

They crossed the junction and followed the murky, cream coloured wall until they arrived at an oasis of grass and palms where David turned right and shouted: “Damascus Gate!”

Crowds were descending down stairs toward the arched portal where they passed stalls which sold ice cream and soft drinks.

“I hope you’re enjoying the whistle stop tour of some of the sights?” David asked, and then roared with laughter.

The taxi drove along another street with the wall running down the right-hand side until it joined Derech Jericho in the Kidron valley. On their left the Mount of Olives rose up and was topped by modern buildings, which Johnny thought looked out of place. On the right the Old City Wall ran along the top of the slope behind which sat the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount

David finally pulled up outside a big church characterised by four large columns at the top of some steps. A triangular façade supported by the columns featured a fresco depicting Christ as mediator between God and man. Three tour coaches were parked on the tree-lined street close to the church. Two of the buses were empty; the third was shedding passengers with cameras around their necks.

“Here we are, the Church of All Nations.” David announced.

“Thanks. Do you want paid now?”

“Nah! When do you want picked up?”

“Say... four-thirty,” Johnny said, looking at his watch.

A German tour guide pointed at the fresco on the outside of the church and described it to his attentive audience of twenty tourists as Johnny climbed the steps and entered the church.

Inside, the church was cool, and the bluish glass of the windows allowed only poor light to enter the building. *The place had a feeling of anguish which, after all, thought Johnny, was what the place was all about.*

Twelve cupola ceilings, supported by six columns, were painted blue and had gold dots representing the night sky. Each cupola had the coat of arms of each country which had donated toward the building of the present church.

The German tour group marched past Johnny and stopped at the section of bedrock where Christ was believed to have prayed in agony the night he was betrayed. Johnny gazed at them then left the semi-dark of the church and walked out into the bright Jerusalem sun. He stopped for a moment at the top of the stairs and gazed at the Old City Wall on the Temple Mount. Then, walking to the side of the building he looked up at the golden onion-shaped domes of the Church of Mary Magdalene as it peeped out between the trees further up the Mount of Olives. *What an amazing place*, he thought.

He entered the Garden of Gethsemane, which sat at the side of the church behind a light, grey metal fence. There was no one about; the other tourists were still in the church.

Johnny strolled along the walkway and admired the old gnarled olive trees as they sat in the dry, copper coloured soil between boulder lined paths amid flagrant flowers and green shrubs. Gradually he began to feel light headed, which he put down to tiredness and the strong Israeli beer he had drank the night before. The scent of the flowers began to intensify as he closed his eyes and rubbed the bridge of his nose between his index finger and the thumb of his right hand.

When he opened his eyes again the garden was in darkness. *A dark cloud must have covered the sun*, he thought, but when he looked up the sky was dark and the stars were out. He jerked his head to one side then the other - the church had gone - along with the metal fence! The garden looked different; gone were the block-lined paths, in fact all signs of managed horticulture had vanished.

“What’s happened?” he asked himself as anxiety began to grip.

Under some trees a number of men lay sleeping dressed in old robes. One, a thin man with a ginger beard, rolled over and looked at him, smiled and went back to sleep.

“What is this?” he said shaking his head, “some kind of re-enactment.” If so he was the only one in the audience!

He looked at his feet. He had on leather sandals; in fact he was also dressed in an old robe similar to the sleeping men. He felt his face; it was smooth, a lot smoother than usual. In his hand he held a crook: he was a Shepherd boy!

He heard voices, and when he turned he saw the light from lanterns bouncing beyond some trees. A group of men headed toward the rapidly awakening bunch under the trees. The men who had entered the garden were a mixture of well-dressed religious looking types with servants and guards carrying swords and spears. They spoke in Hebrew to the original group, and a man with dark hair and a shorter beard than the others stepped forward and pointed in the direction of where the church had been. Johnny allowed his eyes to follow in the direction and was transfixed by what he saw: a man was praying as he knelt on a rock. Tears welled up as he was thunderstruck by the realisation of what he was witness to: the betrayal of Christ.

The man he had now realised was Judas Iscariot led the band of priests and guards to the kneeling Christ, who stood up and looked in their direction. He approached Jesus; they briefly exchanged looks, and then Judas kissed the son of God.

The priests instructed the guards to take him, and three of them moved toward Christ. A servant of one of the priests got to Jesus first, but one of the bunch who had been sleeping under the trees ran up, pulled out his sword and sliced part of the man’s ear off. The servant’s screams echoed around the garden as blood gushed down his neck. The guards moved toward the man who threw down his sword at Christ’s bidding.

Jesus then moved between the guards and the man and then crouched down beside the howling servant. He placed a hand on the man’s injury and, when he stood up, the blood had vanished and the ear had been healed.

The last thing Johnny saw before the scene began to fade was Christ being taken away by the guards. In a flash, as if a picture frame had been changed, he was crouching by a dry stone wall. He wasn’t far from the Garden of Gethsemane as he saw it through the darkness just a stone’s throw away back across a field. He slowly stood up and peered over the wall into a field of scrub and flowers. Close to the centre stood Judas Iscariot who began to rise into the night sky. Then, two metres above the ground, with a cruel smile spreading across his face, he vanished in a burst of flame.

Suddenly, Johnny was back in the sunlit garden. He looked around not knowing what to expect, but the place was as before: quiet, with just the sound of insects and the distant hum of traffic invading the peace. He began to shiver even though the temperature was in the thirties! The familiar drone of the German Tourist Guide as he entered the garden with his entourage brought Johnny fully back to the present. *Time to go*, he thought.

On the pavement outside the church Johnny rolled a cigarette as he waited for the taxi. His thoughts were a mess; he couldn't focus on any particular thing he just had the desire to return to the hotel. He lit the roll-up and inhaled deeply. "This isn't doing my blood pressure any good." he told himself as the Toyota pulled up in front of him.

"Where to now?" David asked as Johnny climbed into the back.

"Back to the hotel"

"You all right? You look like you've just seen a ghost!"

"You could say that. I'm fine, something's come up that's all."

"Okay," said the cabbie, stretching the second syllable.

At the White Plaza Johnny decided he needed a drink; so he headed into the Palm Bar which, as the name suggests, had potted palms at select spots around the room. The place was surprisingly full even though it was five in the afternoon.

"A double Grouse." Johnny said to the barman.

"Ice sir?"

"No thanks."

No sooner was the drink placed in front of him than the empty glass was placed back on the bar.

"I'll have another. Oh, and a beer please."

He downed the whisky and sat looking at the beer. He wondered what to do next. He didn't really want go anywhere else in Jerusalem in case of another vision – unlikely, but you never know; so he finished his beer and headed up to his room.

"Hello, EL AL desk. Can I help you?" said a male voice; after Johnny rang the airline number he had been given.

"Yes, I have an open return ticket from Ben Gurion to London Heathrow and wondered how soon I would be able to return to the UK?"

"I'll just check sir."

Johnny sat on the bed and stared at the ceiling.

"Hello, Sir?"

"Yes."

"We have a seat available on tomorrow's ten-fifteen flight which arrives at Heathrow at thirteen thirty-five. Would you like me to book you on board?"

"Yes please."

After he had finished his call Johnny pressed the 0 button on the phone.

"Hello reception," said a female voice.

"I'll be checking out tomorrow."

"Okay Mr Duncan."

"Can I have some room service please?"

"Certainly sir what would you like?"

"Yes, can I have a kebab with some vegetables and a bottle of Grouse whisky sent up please?"

"Certainly sir!"

He replaced the receiver and then wandered over to the glass door to the balcony and gazed out over the white city as it shimmered in the heat.

The choppy surface of his mind had begun to calm down, and with the settling a thought surged up like a gas bubble and erupted onto the surface: the brief understanding look between Christ and Judas. He began to feel uncomfortable. He had investigated and written an article for a magazine a few years ago on the Gnostic Gospel where Christ had chosen Judas, His beloved and trusted disciple, to betray Him thus fulfilling the crucifixion prophesy. But what was in it for Judas?

His thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door.

“Room service!”

“Yes, come in.”

A young, black-haired Israeli waitress entered with a tray on which sat a silver dish cover and a bottle of Grouse. Johnny left the balcony door. “Just leave it on the table please.” He fished some shekels out of his pocket and handed them to her.

“Thanks – enjoy!” she said as she left the room.

He lifted the dish cover not sure if he was hungry, but the aroma of the kebab made his stomach rumble. He pulled the coffee table towards the seat by the bed; sat down and greedily scooped the kebab and all the vegetables. He then poured himself a large whisky and sat back.

The Gnostic view was of a Judas who was Christ’s most cherished disciple and accepted the role of traitor at the insistence of his lord. Johnny had accepted and believed this after talking to Gnostic scholars on the subject. But now all that was thrown into doubt after he had witnessed the second of his visions. A disciple should surely not rise into the air and vanish in flames with a grin across his face. The thought of that grin sent shivers down his spine!

He finished his drink and poured another. Why had he been chosen for the visions? After all he was a boozier, a smoker and he liked to think of himself as a womanizer hardly religious traits! But, perhaps, that was precisely the point, people would believe someone who was not particularly religious and couldn’t care less over a zealot on the matter of visions. When he thought back he had always wanted to visit the Holy Land. Had it been hidden in his soul since birth? Why had he wanted to go and visit the Mount of Olives straight away? And had all this to do with being a journalist and that article on Gnosticism; or put another way had he always been destined to write that piece?

“I’m starting to get a bit melodramatic now,” he chortled.

He suddenly felt tired, so he stretched out on the bed and closed his eyes. He dreamt of sculpted angels on the outside of an ancient building that became alive and took flight over a dark landscape. Their small, delicate wings swept the black air aside as they flew over sleeping towns and cities until; finally, they ascended and drew the darkness with them as if pulling up a blanket, which had covered the land. They flew upwards until they approached a shining city with many tall spires, where they rolled the darkness up and cast it into a pit under the city. The angels then landed on the main central spire where they returned to stone.

Johnny woke up with a start. The room was in darkness, the only lights apart from the street lights, which streamed in from the glass door, was the green dot on the smoke alarm which flashed intermittently, and the red digital figures on the radio/alarm on the bedside cabinet which told him it was two-fifty am.

He rose and walked over to the balcony door and gazed at the lights of Jerusalem which had looked so magically enticing the previous evening, but now looked cold and forbidding.

He sat on the chair beside the bed and put his feet on the coffee table. He then pulled the duvet from the bed and wrapped it around himself and fell back into a dreamless sleep.

The shrill alarm of the radio/alarm, which he had set before his last whisky, awoke him at seven. He rubbed his eyes; stood up and then, throwing the duvet on the bed, made his way into the en-suite. The water of the power shower washed away all the unnerving, whisky laced thoughts of the previous evening.

After dressing and collecting his ticket and passport from the bedside unit Johnny took a last look out over the Holy City before he grabbed his bag and headed down to reception.

The Aberdeen flight descended through the grey clouds as he looked drearily out of the window. Johnny liked the thought that he was back home, but found himself dreaming of the sunny weather he had just left.

The big red pick-up still sat next to his car, which was covered in small rain drops that had fallen from the low clouds that swept across the airport. He fired up the engine and, after letting it warm up; he left the car park and headed for home.

Chapter Four

The radio filled the room with Rodrigo's Concierto de Aranjuez as Johnny flipped up the lid of his laptop and pressed the power button. The sun shone through white, skeletal cirri and threw shadows onto the magnolia coloured wall on his right as the computer sprang to life and told him he had several emails. He decided they could wait and opened up Microsoft Word.

He had to write the article about his visions; the world had to know, the journalist in him had declared! Earlier, he had phoned a contact at a national newspaper and cajoled him into getting his editor to take a look at the article.

The shadows on the magnolia wall lengthened as Johnny saved the final piece of the document. He had worked feverishly through the afternoon only stopping for one roll-up break. He read through the whole piece then sat back and stared at the setting sun. Classic FM pumped out Mozart's Requiem as he opened his tobacco tin and rolled a cigarette, and as he blew smoke toward the ceiling he asked himself if he *should* send the email – the earlier bravado had evaporated!

The internet jumped onto the screen after he clicked on the broadband icon. Entering the mail section he composed the email to his friend in Manchester, and then attached the article document. He then sat for what seemed like an eternity with the cursor on the send button. Then, finally he clicked on the small, red rectangle that was going to change his life forever.

Chapter Five

Johnny threw the Guardian newspaper down onto the coffee table and strolled into his small kitchen. He pressed in the red switch on the handle of his stainless steel kettle and then put two heaped teaspoonfuls of instant coffee into his treasured Arbroath Football Club mug.

The article in the Guardian had read better than he expected. When the editor had phoned him he had been dubious; the questions that he asked made him sound as if he was about to tear the facts apart. But the article read well and was on the second page. He had outlined the fact that initially the Gnostic Gospel had scored points due to his visions, but there was a problem with the part played by Judas Iscariot. He had added quotes from Catholic priests, who claimed that the second vision proved that the gospels of the New Testament were correct.

The switch on the kettle popped out, and Johnny lifted the steaming kettle and poured the boiling water over the coffee followed by a splash of milk and a teaspoonful of honey.

He strolled back into the living room and sat on his old settee. It had been an eventful week since the article in the newspaper: he had astonishingly been featured on the front of Time Magazine.

The sub-editor had phoned him and asked him to write up an article and to expect a photographer round. All this was a pleasant contrast to the last time he had dealt with the magazine where despite a good CV and a cutting edge article on religion he had been rejected at first.

As he sipped the sweet coffee he let his head flop back onto the top of the rear of the settee. He stared at the artex ceiling, which had originally been white, but was now a light, brown due to a film of nicotine.

The emails sent through to his address at The Courier were eye opening – just as he had expected them to have been. Most were damning, one, from a sect called The Friends of Judas had threatened him with physical violence if the accusations were not withdrawn. Another from an anonymous sender had threatened to destroy his soul! “Just how that would be done was anybody’s guess,” said Johnny, laughing to himself as he rose up and walked through to the spare room.

He switched on his laptop and then checked his Courier mailbox. He decided not to read anymore of them, even the numerous new ones, and began to delete them stopping suddenly at one from The Friends of Judas entitled retribution. He opened the file and read it: As the accusations have not been withdrawn retribution will be swift! Johnny deleted it and laughed. He had been threatened by cranks before; it was part of the job.

After leaving Morrison’s with two bulging bags of groceries Johnny crossed the car park, negotiated the dual carriageway and turned into Guthrie Port. The sun had set, and shadows lurked around the buildings.

A man in shabby clothes stepped out of a shop entrance making him stop and stare. He had long straggled grey hair and a dirty beard. But it was his eyes that transfixed Johnny: they were a brilliant, blue.

Johnny politely nodded to the man and then moved around him and walked on. He was keen to get to his flat not only because of the tramp, but because the plastic handles of the bags had begun to dig into his hands.

That night he dreamt that his body had risen up into a starlit sky and his consciousness had then been sucked out by a radiant being with brilliant, blue eyes.

As Johnny's mind flowed toward and then through the being he felt undying love. But the feeling began to fade and he woke up with a start.

Standing at the bottom of his bed gazing at him was the tramp with the bright blue eyes.

"What the...?" Johnny shouted as he jumped out of bed. "How did you get in here?"

"That's irrelevant," said the tramp in a deep, rich voice.

"Get out – now!" Johnny shouted grabbing his jeans. "I'll call the police!"

"You've just had a dream where your soul left your body and flowed through me."

"How do you know that?"

"Please, we need to talk about your visions in Jerusalem.

Johnny pulled on his jeans. "Who are you?"

"Let's just say I'm here to help."

Johnny sat down on his bedside chair and stared at the man. "Okay, let's say I believe you. What do you want to talk about?"

"You were given the visions to warn mankind!"

"Warn of what?"

"The Sin Gatherer needed someone to betray him to the authorities for the crucifixion prophecies to come true. The demon Samael sent one of his minions to possess Judas Iscariot, who gladly betrayed him. Samael, the architect of this universe, cannot leave the thirteenth dimension, where he was banished by Christ. His daughter, the Angel of Darkness can leave – she has great power.

There are men who are carrying out tests that will eventually open doors to other dimensions; if the door to the thirteenth dimension is opened Samael and his minions *will* inherit the earth!"

"What can I do?"

"You must stop this at all cost!"

Johnny felt his eyes becoming drowsy, and he eventually fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. He awoke with the sound of mail dropping through the letter box. What had happened during the night came thundering back into his mind. Did it really happen or had it just been a dream? If it was just a dream what was he doing sitting in the bedside chair with his jeans on. He jumped up and searched the flat, but the tramp had gone, if indeed he had been there in the first place.

The rest of the day, when he wasn't working on his columns, Johnny spent agonising over what he had been told the previous night. He phoned an old acquaintance that lectured on physics at Edinburgh University. "Ray, how's it going?"

"Johnny Duncan, well, well, it's been a while. Are you still freelancing?"

"Yeah, listen I need to pick your brains about doors to different dimensions. Are boffins working on some powerful machine at the moment?"

"Well, there's the Large Hadron Collider at CERN, and I've heard rumours that they're going to be carrying out some type of experiments at a secret location in the Mojave Desert; in fact I think it's pretty soon. They're going to answer a few questions I reckon! Portals to other dimensions are the things of science fiction at the moment, but – who knows."

After the phone call he sat staring out of his window, the trees swayed in the wind, which swept in off the North Sea. What was he to do?

Time to go in search of a drink – it was Saturday night after all. He washed and shaved then donned a clean t-shirt and headed out to the Burns Bar in the centre of town.

A band was blasting out some rhythm and blues standards in the small pub. Johnny bought a pint of Guinness and stood at the crowded bar and gazed at a football match on a screen above the heads of people seated along a far wall.

Saturday night brought bunches of fancy dressed women out on hen parties into the bar where they mingled with groups of men knocking back rounds of spirits. Johnny was caught in between two such groups thinking about leaving when he was tapped on the shoulder.

"I'm still waiting for that dinner mister!" Shouted a voice he recognised. He turned around and was transfixed by the figure that stood in front of him. "Veronica!" exclaimed Johnny as he jerked his head back and opened his eyes wide in surprise. "What...? I can't believe its you!"

"In the flesh," she said with a dazzling smile.

"How did you find me? And what are you doing over here?"

"Well, how about buying me a drink and I'll explain."

He bought her a vodka and lime juice, and they went over to a table with two empty seats.

"One of your former colleagues at the Dundee Courier told me the best place to find you on a Saturday night was in here. I looked in earlier, but couldn't see you, so I had a walk around town for a while." She took a sip from her drink as the band launched into another number. "The next parts a bit delicate. After you featured on the front of 'Time' my paper wanted to get an interview with you, and I told them that I would be able to get it."

"And me thinking that you had come all the way here to see me."

"Listen Mister, you've no idea how many favours I had to call in to be here."

"Och, I'm only kidding; I'm glad to see you," he said, finishing his pint. "Like another?"

"Why not."

"Well don't go away," he said as he stood up and headed to the bar.

Johnny looked at her as he waited for the drinks. She wore a tight knee length black skirt and a puffy, suede jacket over a white blouse. Her hair, as before, was brushed back into a short ponytail.

He took the drinks back to the table just as the band finished the number. "There you go madam," he said as he placed a glass in front of her.

"These visions, did they actually happen on the day I saw you at the pool?"

"Yup, and more. Listen, let's finish these and go somewhere quieter."

"Okay. I'm staying at a bed and breakfast by the harbour."

They strolled up the High Street and then entered Becketts Lounge. The place was empty save for a couple who sat on stools talking to the barmaid.

Johnny bought two drinks and then sat beside Veronica, who sat on a bench seat beneath a wood panelled wall which faced the door. Laughter drifted through from the public bar.

"So what actually happened?" Veronica asked.

Johnny described exactly what happened – both visions.

"Now it seems I'm either flavour of the month or shit of the week depending on your point of view."

"You've certainly opened up a can of worms in the States."

"I'm starting to wish I had kept quiet."

"No, I think you were meant to witness the visions then tell the world."

"Well, 'Time' certainly did that, but there's more to tell and I need a bigger media." He took a long sip from his pint. "Changing the subject: it's a bit late for dinner now."

Can I buy you a takeaway curry? And there's some wine left in a bottle back at my place."

"You certainly know how to treat a gal" Veronica said with a radiant smile.

They climbed the worn steps that led to Johnny's front door. The stale air in the stairwell smelled of garlic. Veronica laughed at Johnny as he climbed the stairs in the 'lead boots' routine with the takeaway from a local Indian restaurant.

All laughter stopped, however, as they turned the corner by the close window and found themselves facing his front door.

"Jesus!" Johnny shouted as he leapt the remaining steps and stood in shock on the landing.

"What the...?" Veronica exclaimed.

On his light oak-stained door was a large, red swastika which looked like it had been painted in blood.

Johnny tried his door – it was locked. He then touched the swastika. "Its paint." He said as he unlocked the door. "I'll need to check the flat. Just stay there please."

He went inside and switched the lights on, then surveyed all the rooms. Everything was untouched; no one had been in the flat. "Its okay you can come in!" he shouted from the living-room, but she was already in the small hallway closing the front door.

"Have you any idea who would have done that?" Veronica asked. "You should report this to the police."

"Oh it's just some idiot. Let's not have it spoil our evening."

"Well, okay."

"Sit down, make yourself at home," he said, opening out an arm toward the living-room.

He then went into the kitchen with the takeaway and appeared a few moments later with two heaped plates. He set them on the coffee table and then returned to the kitchen, where he grabbed a half full bottle of red wine from the fridge.

Veronica perused his CD collection, "Is it okay if I put on some music?"

"Sure!" he shouted from the kitchen.

She hit the power button on the player and popped a disk into the drawer which had opened. Music instantly wafted around the room

"Perfect. Debussy," said Johnny as he re-entered the living room with the bottle and two glasses.

"Nice looking kids," Veronica said, nodding toward the photographs on the mantelpiece of the redundant fireplace. "Both yours?"

Yeah that's Caitlin she's eight and her brother, Brad, he's ten. They both stay with their mother and her partner." He pushed a heaped forkful into his mouth. "You got any kids?"

"No, I was engaged once, but it fell through. I was too busy with my career I guess."

"Any regrets?"

"Yeah, sometimes I think I would have liked to have been a mom."

"There's still time. I think you would make a great mum."

After they had eaten their fill of the curry Johnny cleared the dishes away and switched on the television. He flipped through the channels, finally settling for a black and white French film with sub-titles.

They settled back on the settee, and Johnny put his arm around her shoulders. She responded by putting her head on his chest. He lifted her head up gently and kissed her moist lips. She manoeuvred into a position where she could kiss him with greater passion.

When they paused, he said: "We could continue this in bed."

“You don’t waste anytime mister.” Veronica said before laughing.

Johnny lay in the bed with his hands behind his head and duvet up to his waist. He watched Veronica wriggle out of her tight skirt and then slowly unbutton her blouse. She then undid the clasp of her lacy, white bra, and let it fall to the floor, revealing perfectly formed breasts with large, red nipples.

All this was having the desired affect on Johnny. Veronica turned toward him and said: “Is that a tent pole; or are you just glad to see me?”

She climbed onto the bed and pulled the duvet aside to reveal his erection. He sighed as she gently pulled a flavoured condom over the protrusion and took him in her mouth. He brought his hands down from behind his head and grasped at the duvet as he watched her bobbing head through glazed-over eyes. Just as he was about to gush she stopped and raised her head away from his groin.

Johnny pulled her purple knickers down over her black stockings and rolled her onto her back and gently opened her legs and stroked her clitoris with his fore finger before entering her.

He pushed his cock into her core and started to thrust, deeper and deeper as she moaned: “Keep going, keep going.”

Just as he was about to come he withdrew and then turned her onto her belly; he watched as she raised herself onto her hands and knees, then he slid his left hand from her velvety bottom up her side to caress her breasts. He entered her again and began thrusting, his hips slapping into her backside. He took his hand away from her breasts and again stroked her clitoris.

Suddenly, as Veronica shuddered and emitted a sigh, Johnny could hold back no more and he spurted into the sheath.

Johnny opened his eyes and watched the grey daylight pour through the space between his drapes. He then turned his head and smiled at Veronica asleep with the duvet pulled up around her neck.

He went into the bathroom, showered and shaved then, retuning to the bedroom, he pulled on his clothes.

“Where are you going?” Veronica asked, in a husky voice.

“I’ve just remembered, I’ve run out of coffee. Would you like a croissant or something?”

“Croissant would be fine – thanks.”

“I’ll be ten minutes,” he said, pulling on a jacket.

He unlocked the front door and stared at the swastika. *He would need to cover it with a few coats of stain*, he thought as he pulled the door shut with a click of the latch.

Veronica was dozing when the door bell rang. Her consciousness began to climb up through the layers of sleep toward awakening much like a diver ascending the depths of an ocean toward the surface.

The doorbell rang again. She climbed out of bed and wrapped Johnny’s bathrobe around her semi-naked body and then crept out of the bedroom and into the cold hallway. She peered through the spy hole, but saw no one. *Was this the return of the swastika painter*, she thought! A sharp rap on the door brought her out of her reverie.

“Dad! Wake up!” shouted a young voice.

Veronica opened the door, and a small girl with short, light brown hair walked in.

“Hello. Is my dad still asleep?”

“He’s gone to the store for coffee.”

“Are you his new girlfriend?”

“Well, we’re just friends.”

Veronica followed the girl into the living room where they both sat down.

"My names Caitlin."

"How do you do Caitlin? I'm Veronica."

"You're pretty. My dad needs a girlfriend like you. He gets lonely sometimes."

"Well thank you. You're very pretty yourself."

"Are you American?"

"Yes."

"Could you and dad take me to Disneyland?"

Veronica laughed. "We'll see."

They both turned when they heard a key in the front door latch.

"Dad!" Caitlin shouted as Johnny pushed open the door.

"Hey, Princess!"

She ran and hugged Johnny. "What's that on the door? I forgot to ask Veronica."

"So you two have introduced yourselves," he said, giving Veronica an approving look. "That's just a friend of mine mucking around."

"Dad, Veronica said that you and she would take me to Disneyland in America."

Veronica raised her eyebrows, and said: "Hey wait a minute I never said..."

"It's okay Veronica I can guess what was said," interrupted Johnny, giving Caitlin a disapproving look before bursting into laughter.

"Gran and I were wondering if you would like to come shopping."

"I know, I spoke to Gran downstairs. I've got some work to do I'm afraid princess."

"Aw dad!"

He reached into his pocket and pulled out ten pounds. "Here, buy yourself something."

"Okay, thanks."

A car horn sounded from below.

"I've got to go," said Caitlin, rising from the settee.

Johnny walked after her into the hallway. "Remember and be back for four; or I'll have your mother on my back."

"Okay – see ya!"

"Great meeting you!" shouted Veronica.

After a few moments Johnny came back into the living room.

"What a great kid," Veronica said.

"Yeah – she's a handful."

After breakfast Veronica showered and dressed. The pair then strolled through the streets of Arbroath toward the harbour. They stopped outside her bed and breakfast, which was opposite the yacht filled harbour. Johnny gazed at a seagull as it tried to balance on top of a mast.

"Well, I'd better go, I've got things to do," he said.

"Thanks for last night."

"Yeah it was good."

Veronica sighed. "I'll have to go and write up the article I suppose. Will you come down and see me tonight?"

"Just try and keep me away."

They kissed then Johnny walked home with one thing upper most in his mind: that damned swastika!

Veronica phoned him while he was staining the front door. "That bigger media you talked about last night; I think I can pull a few strings and have you interviewed by an ABC team."

“Oh Veronica, I don’t know. I’ve been interviewed on television before and did not like it.”

“Come on John what have you got to lose!”

“Well, probably quite a lot, but okay.”

Chapter Six

In the neat garden a young girl hummed an enchanting tune as she collected dead flowers and laid them in a wicker basket with a large handle. She was dressed in a puffy, cream dress, which had a big, red bow at the back. A round, white hat sat slightly tilted back on her head and the golden locks of her hair fell on to her shoulders from under it. She had a contented expression on her angelic face as she worked.

The garden was enclosed by a tall privet hedge and sat under a violet sky. Although it was daytime there was no visible sun overhead. A tennis racket and a skipping rope lay on the extensive lawn under a swing, which was suspended from the only tree in the garden.

A man in white robes strolled into the garden and stopped behind the girl. "Your flowers are beautiful my dear."

"Father," she said gently as a breeze ruffled her hair.

"I need you to go to the Land of Trees again my daughter. There is a flower which must be collected and placed in your basket.

"Oh father, you know I never want to leave my garden."

"I know, I would not ask it of you if it were not important," he said as he turned and walked out of the garden."

"Very well," she said, more to herself than her father.

She rose up slowly and followed him.

Chapter Seven

The sunlight danced around the rooftops as Johnny strolled down Guthrie Port toward his close. He had spent the night with Veronica and now he had to email his column away to the Courier.

He climbed the stairs two at a time eager to fire off the fruits of his labours. He slid his key into the main lock, but found it to be unlocked. *Strange*, he thought for he always locked the main lock when he left the flat for more than a few minutes. He pushed the small key into the latch, turned it and then pushed the door open, and he walked into the dark hallway, his heart thumping. There was a strange putrid smell hanging in the air.

Johnny switched on the light and nervously pushed open the living room door. Light spilled over the carpet and rose over the back of the settee. There was no movement from inside the room. He wiped the sweat from his forehead and pushed open the doors to the other rooms; everything was as he left it.

He strode into the living room and switched on the light, then froze. There was a band of red around the walls at head height with drips running down to the skirting board. The red wasn't paint, for lying on the rug by the fireplace was the body of a man.

He crept around the settee past his CD player, which was lying on the floor beside the CD rack, its disks scattered around the carpet. He stole a glance at the body and instantly wished he hadn't, because the eyeballs of the corpse had popped out of their sockets and hung down as if looking at the blood splattered chin. Blood oozed out of the nose and flowed over the earlier congealed effluence. More blood flowed from the body's ears on to an already soaked t-shirt.

Johnny felt vomit rising up his gullet. He ran to the toilet and violently threw up the contents of his stomach. After he had flushed the cistern he splashed cold water onto his face. He then ran out of the flat and jumped down the few steps onto the window landing. Gazing out at the back garden he pulled his mobile from his jacket pocket and rang 999.

Detective Sergeant Dave Mitchell was about to leave his desk when the phone rang.

"Dave?"

"Yes."

"Comms room here. There's been a body found at 10b Guthrie Port. Two uniform officers are at the scene."

"Okay, wilco."

He replaced the receiver and turned to Detective Constable Colin McAllister, who was about to take a bite from a cheese sandwich. "You'll need to leave that just now Colin there's been a body found in Guthrie Port."

The two detectives climbed the stairs to find Sergeant Hamish Murray standing with Johnny on the landing.

"Hamish! What's the crack?" Dave asked, looking at Johnny.

"This is John Duncan – the owner of the flat. He found the body when he returned this morning."

"Okay, I'll need a statement sir. Could you just wait here?"

Sergeant Murray took Dave aside with a firm grip of his elbow. "This is bad Dave. I've never seen anything like it. I hope you haven't had a big breakfast!"

Dave subconsciously patted his jacket pockets looking for the cigarettes he had given up three years previously. He sighed then pulled on a pair of shoe covers and a pair of investigation gloves before entering the flat.

The lights were on as he and Colin passed through the small hallway and into the living room. He recognised the smell only too well – the smell of death. He inspected the blood on the walls and the CD player on the floor next to the scattered disks. Then he moved over beside Constable Jim Malcolm who was standing looking at the body. “My God!” he exclaimed as he looked away for a moment. “Any weapon constable?”

“No sir.”

“Crivens!” Colin exclaimed. “What’s happened to this guy?” he asked no one in particular.

Mitchell knelt down by the body and took his mobile from his pocket and flicked it open. He pressed a key while inspecting the corpse. “This is DS Mitchell. We require a forensic team at 10b Guthrie Port Arbroath – there’s a battered body.”

He finished the call and then pressed another key. “Sir, I think you’d better make your way to 10b Guthrie Port.” He listened for a moment and then said: “The owner found a bloodied body in the flat when he entered this morning.” He listened again and then closed the mobile. “Colin, put on a pair of investigation gloves and look around for anything unusual,” he said, rising up. He then walked out of the flat and down the few steps to the window landing where Johnny was standing exhaling a plume of bluish, grey smoke beside Sergeant Murray. “Hamish, you’d better set up a cordon around the front of the close and call up a few more men and start asking questions around the area.”

“Okay I’m on it.”

Mitchell turned to Johnny, “Mr Duncan, where were you last night?”

“I spent last night with a friend.”

“Could I have the name and address sir?”

“Veronica Cahill. She’s an American reporter and she’s staying at the Harbour View Guest House.

“Okay, could you take me through the events which led to you finding the body?”

“Well, I came upstairs and never really noticed anything out of the ordinary. I put my main key into the lock and found it to be unlocked, which I thought was strange because I always lock it before leaving the house for any length of time. I then unlocked the latch and entered the flat.

“Before we go any further sir,” Dave Mitchell stroked his jaw, “why is there a swastika on your front door?”

“Veronica and I came back on Saturday night to find it daubed on the door.”

“Did you report it?”

“Detective Sergeant, in my line of work if I reported every crank thing that happened I would have no spare time!”

“Okay, carry on sir.”

“I looked in all the rooms to see if anything was missing, but everything was as I left it. Then I entered the living room and put on the light intending to open the curtains. But the blood spattered walls and the dead body froze me rigid.”

Johnny paused for a moment and stared out of the window up at the sky where small, white cumuli were being blown along by the wind. “I then ran out of the house and phoned you people.”

“Okay, next question: did you recognise the victim?”

“No, I’ve never seen him before.”

Two men in white protective suits with the hoods down climbed the stairs and then stood beside the two men on the landing. One carrying a large, black plastic case asked: “DS Mitchell?”

“Yeah, that’s me. The body’s in the living room,” he said, pointing toward the open front door.

Colin McAllister strolled out of the flat.

“Any luck?” Dave asked the young detective.

“Nothing.”

“Knock on the doors of the other two flats and find out if they saw or heard anything last night. The lady’s in downstairs I saw her peeking up the stairs earlier.”

He headed down stairs just as a man with thick, grey streaked, black hair started to ascend. He wore a black, knee length coat over a dark, grey suit. “Colin,” he said, nodding as the two men passed one another.

“Sir,” replied DC McAllister.

Dave Mitchell moved to the front of the landing. “Sir, this is Mr Duncan he owns the flat, and he found the body when he entered this morning,” he then turned to Johnny, “this is DCI James.

“I read your column.” James said as he drew level with the pair and looked at Johnny, “every week in the Courier.”

Johnny raised his eyebrows and nodded his head.

“I’ve also read the article in Time Magazine about your adventure in Israel; seems like you’ve stirred up quite a hornet’s nest.”

“Yes,” said Johnny nodding.

“Right Dave, have you taken a statement from Mr Duncan?”

“Yes Sir.”

“Let’s have a look inside then.”

They entered the living room where one white-suited man was taking photographs of the body and the other was searching the carpet area between the settee and the body. As they stood by the victim a voice boomed out, “DCI James!”

The two men turned toward the door to see a tall blond-haired man in a blue coverall walk toward them.

“Doctor Connors.” James said.

“Not a pretty sight,” the pathologist said, looking at the corpse.

“Are they ever?” James replied, “We’ll let you get on Derek,” he continued as he and Mitchell walked over to the window. They turned and looked back into the room. Gordon James took a deep breath. “So where was our Mr Duncan last night then Dave?”

“He was staying with a woman at the Harbour View Guest House.”

“You’ve got a name I take it?”

“Veronica Cahill.”

“Did he know the victim?”

“No.”

“What’s Colin doing?”

“He’s talking to the neighbours in the building. Hamish Murray and his men are knocking on doors in the street.”

They walked back into the centre of the room.

“Contents of the pockets anyone,” said the Pathologist, holding up a clear plastic bag with items inside.

“Thank you Derek,” said DCI James accepting the bag. “Anything else for me yet?”

“Time of death approximately nine-thirty last night. Can’t see any wounding or bruising. The skull appears to be fractured, not consistent with a blow or blows externally to the head more as if blood surged into the cranium at massive pressures.”

“Strange.” D S Mitchell said shaking his head.

“Yes, I’ll have more for you when I get the body onto the slab.”

“Okay, thanks Derek,” said James, taking Mitchell aside. “Dave, you get down to the Harbour View Guest House and get a statement from this Veronica Cahill. I’ll see you back at the station later.

DCI James moved back to the window and watched as a large, black cloud dispatched rain drops onto the glass.

Chapter Eight

The Harbour View Guest House rose four storeys from street level and sat gazing, over the harbour, at the sea. The building was painted in a dark yellow and had green windows with mock grey shutters.

DS Mitchell opened the glass inner door and entered the light, blue hallway, which had a reception desk under the stairs. He let his right hand drop onto the brass bell on the desk. A girl dressed in a white blouse and black skirt appeared from a door at the back of the hallway

“Can I help you?” she asked.

“Yes, I’m DS Mitchell – Tayside Police,” Dave said, showing her his warrant card. “Is there a Veronica Cahill staying here?”

“Yes, she’s in room four.”

“Can I talk to her please?”

The girl lifted a receiver and pressed a key, after a moment she said: “Miss Cahill, there’s a policeman at reception who wants to talk to you.”

She then replaced the receiver. “She’ll be down in a minute.”

“Okay – thanks,” said Dave as he walked back to the glass door and peered out at the harbour. He shook his head as he remembered when he was a kid he could almost cross from one side of the harbour to the other on the fishing boats which were moored side by side. *A sign of the times*, he thought: the outer harbour with only a few small vessels in it, and the inner harbour, a marina filled with pleasure craft.

“What can I help you with officer?”

Dave turned to see a pretty, well-dressed woman descend the last few steps of the staircase.

“Miss Cahill?”

“Yes.”

“I need to talk to you,” he said, turning toward the girl. “Is there somewhere we can talk?”

“There’s the dining room,” she said pointing to a door opposite the desk.

He led the way into the room, which consisted of five neatly laid out tables.

They sat at the window table.

“Do you know John Duncan?”

An alarmed expression crossed her face. “Yes. What’s happened to him?”

“Nothing. Did he stay with you last night?”

“Why...yes! He came to see me at around eight and left this morning around seven-thirty.”

“Was he with you the whole night?”

“Yes, we had dinner in here and then sat and had some drinks with Frank the owner until about ten-thirty. Look, what’s happened?”

“Mr Duncan discovered a body in his flat this morning.”

“Oh my God! How is he?”

“He’s fine. He’s helping us with our enquiries.”

He gazed out at the bobbing yachts. “Are you over here working?”

“Yes, I’m doing an article for my newspaper on Johnny.”

“I understand he’s uncovered something of religious importance.”

“Yes, he’s stirred things up a bit.”

“Over the last few days, have you noticed anyone or anything unusual?”

“There was a swastika painted on Johnny’s door on Saturday. I urged him to report it, but he shrugged it off as the work of a fool.”

“How long have you known Mr Duncan?”

“Not long. We met about ten days ago in Jerusalem. Johnny was on holiday; I was there working. We stayed at the same hotel.”

“This was when he discovered whatever it was he ...discovered?”

“Yes, he had visions in the Garden of Gethsemane.”

“And you were with him at the time?”

She smiled and then said: “No, I was working.”

“Okay, that’s fine for now. I need to ask you to stay in the country for a few days? There will be more questions.”

“Sure, I doubt my editor would let me leave now anyway. Can I go and see Johnny?”

“I would leave it for a few hours. The forensics people are there just now.”

Chapter Nine

DCI James looked at the white board with two photographs of the blood-soaked body stuck to it and the names of John Duncan and Veronica Cahill written in blue erasable ink. He took a sip from a steaming mug and stared at another name: Rudolf Lehmann. He turned to DS Mitchell and DC McAllister who were sitting at their desks. "Okay, what have we got? A body which the Pathologists report says has no wounds, no bruising, but has a fractured skull, a crushed brain and massive blood loss – most of which was splattered around the walls of John Duncan's living room.

He took another sip from his mug. "Mr Duncan comes back from a night with Miss Cahill and finds the main lock of his front door unlocked. Entering the flat he finds the body of Rudolf Lehmann on his living room carpet. Nothing's been stolen; nothings been damaged apart from the CD player, which was knocked over. The fingerprints in the flat apart from the victims belong to John Duncan and Veronica Cahill, who have an alibi, and his daughter Caitlin. So what do we draw from this?"

"That the victim used keys to enter the flat and was waiting for Mr Duncan, replied Colin.

"But what happened to him between entering the property and Duncan finding his body?" Dave Mitchell asked.

Gordon James walked over to the window. "Rudolf Lehmann – a small time thief from Stuttgart - suddenly comes over to Scotland to harass and, we suppose, ultimately kill John Duncan."

"The German police say he's a neo-Nazi sympathizer, but not a member of any group – as far as they are aware." Dave said as he rose and headed for the bubbling coffee pot.

DCI James turned and looked at Dave Mitchell. "The pathology report said that the victim had traces of red paint on his hands; so he must have painted the swastika on the door on the Saturday night. He then returns the next night to murder Duncan. But why paint the swastika on the door the night before he plans to return and confront him?

"Hey boss, the boys a nutter, sounds like he was capable of anything!" Mitchell said as he filled up his mug.

"Colin, what did the neighbours have to say?" asked James.

"The woman downstairs, a Mrs Spink, says she heard thumps and shouts on Sunday night at around nine, but just thought it was Duncan and few friends. She heard nothing the night before. I tried the flat upstairs, but there was no reply. Mr Duncan reckons the couple who stay there are away on holiday."

"Okay," announced James, "what about the murder itself?"

"It appears that the victim was swung round at high speed from a pivotal point," said Colin.

"I had a word with the pathologist about this and he reckons that there's no way that humans would be able to rotate a body at such a rate as to cause these injuries especially in the confines of the apartment's living room. If it were possible, you would need two perhaps three strong men, and there was supposedly no one else in the flat. Anyway, there would be bruising on the legs where the victim was gripped, and the report said there was nothing." Mitchell said as he sat down behind his desk. DCI James stroked his chin. "It's puzzling okay! Mr Duncan and his visions are the key to this though. Dave, you'd better have another talk with him, see if there's anything else he's remembered."

Johnny put the tin of apple-white matt emulsion on the coffee table and sized up his living room walls. The blood had been washed off, but they looked grubby.

"Well, let's get started," said Veronica taking a roller out of its wrapping.

"Just what I like: a keen woman!"

She laughed and poked his arm. "Don't push your luck painter-boy."

He moved the settee and stared at the place where the body had been. The rug had been taken away and the carpet had been cleaned, but the memory was still there, nothing could wash that away.

"You sure you want to stay here John?"

"Yeah of course. Where else would I stay?"

"You could stay with me at the guest house for now."

"Let's get on with the painting," he said, opening the tin.

They were halfway around the room when the doorbell rang. Johnny wiped his hands and opened the door.

"Detective Sergeant, come in."

Dave Mitchell followed Johnny through to the living room and nodded to Veronica.

"Good idea: painting the walls. I take it your staying on then."

"Like I said to Veronica: where else would I go?"

"I just need a few minutes of your time."

"I need a break anyway. Veronica can carry on though," he said laughing.

"I'll put the kettle on," she said as she threw the roller onto its tray.

Johnny sat on a chair and signalled for DS Mitchell to sit on the settee.

"The victim was a German national: Rudolf Lehmann. Does the name ring any bells?"

"No."

"We can't figure out how this guy was killed. I mean there was no one else in the flat. The only fingerprints found were his, yours, Miss Cahill's and your daughters."

"I heard that you took Caitlin's fingerprints?"

"Well, we had too. Her mother wasn't very happy, but it's a murder investigation."

"That's who I heard it from - loud and clear!"

Veronica handed the two men steaming mugs of coffee and then sat on the other chair.

"Could the murderers have worn gloves?" Johnny asked.

"There were no other DNA traces found. And if it had been done by several men there would have been bruising on the victims legs which, according to the pathologist, there wasn't."

"Yeah," acknowledged Johnny scratching his head.

"Another puzzling thing is why this German came over here to lie in wait for you. Is there anything that maybe you've forgotten?"

"Well, I was thinking about that and there were a few crank emails I received. One in particular from a group called The Friends of Judas."

The detective wrote the name in his note book. "When did you receive the email and do you still have it?"

Johnny took a sip from his mug and then placed it on the coffee table. "I received the first last Wednesday."

"What, there was more than one?"

"Yeah, the first asked for a retraction, and the second came two days later saying as there had been no retraction retribution would be swift. I'm afraid I delete all emails after I've read them."

“Okay, anything else?”

“No that’s it – I can’t think of anything of relevance.”

“Okay, thanks for your time and, happy painting,” the policeman said as he finished his coffee and then rose from the settee.

Chapter Ten

Dave Mitchell replaced the telephone receiver as DCI James walked into the room.

“Sir, bad news!”

“Is there any other kind?”

“John Duncan received nasty emails after the articles in the magazine and the newspaper. Two in particular were from a group who call themselves The Friends of Judas. The second of them warned of retribution.”

“Could just be some lunatic. Did you trace the email?”

Dave ran a hand down the back of his head. “Nah! Duncan deletes all his emails. I contacted German Police, and they’d never heard of them. They did, however, have some news on Lehmann: it seems he had some connection with *De Fortschrittsbewegung Drei* – The Progressive Movement Three a neo-Nazi group led by a man called Johannes Menzel who claims to be descended from Hitler himself through an illegitimate daughter. The Deutsche copper said that if Lehmann was their hit man, then whoever killed him, taking into account there was no weapon used, must have either taken him by surprise or there were a few of them, because he’s been arrested a few times and some of the arresting officers still have the scars and bruises.”

“What *has* our friend Mr Duncan brought to this patch?”

“They *could* try to finish the job sir!”

“Yeah, you’d better contact Duncan and warn him. We can provide a higher profile uniform patrol down Guthrie Port, but that’s all.”

Chapter Eleven

The scent of the flowers wafted in the breeze as the girl, in her cream dress, swung back and forth. The swing, two lengths of rope and a rectangle of wood, hung from the only solid branch on the small tree. Her basket, half full with dead shrivelled flowers, sat discarded at the edge of the lawn next to a bush where bees hummed as they collected pollen. The man in white robes descended from the sunless, violet sky and came to rest in front of her.

“Father!” she cried. “Will you come and push me?”

“My child, I have come to ask you to return to the Land of Trees once again.”

A shadow passed over her features. “Why must I go back there?”

Darkness descended over the garden. The fragrant smells and the drone of the bees had gone.

“Because the wrong flower was picked the last time.”

Her face became distorted, and her mouth enlarged and filled with pointed teeth. Her soft, blue eyes had gone and were replaced with total blackness. The child’s skin became pallid and wrinkled. “Don’t fuck me around!” she thundered, in a voice that shook the garden. The man stepped back, but there was no sign of shock written on his face.

As quickly as the demonic features had appeared they were gone. Her skin returned to porcelain, and her mouth shrank back to normal. The light returned to the garden, and the scent of flowers again wafted in the breeze.

“Very well father, I will do as you ask.”

Chapter Twelve

The phone rang as Johnny stepped out of the shower. He dried himself with a blue fluffy towel and then pulled on a pair of kaki combats.

"Yeah, hullo," he said into the receiver – his wet hair pointing in all directions.

"John, its Sue here, I need someone to look after Caitlin today. I didn't want to bother you with what's happened and all. But the thing is Ollie and I have to travel to Edinburgh for a dinner tonight, and I was wondering... Oh, would you do me the favour? Brad's staying with a friend."

"Yeah, of course."

"Thanks. We'll drop her off."

Caitlin dressed in a pink t-shirt and dark blue track suit bottoms walked into the living room from the kitchen. "Dad," she said in a sighing voice. "You've no Coke, and I want a pizza."

Johnny put down the lid of his laptop. "Okay, let's go to Morrisons and get some stuff."

"I want to watch TV."

"But I'm not supposed to leave you alone."

"Dad, I'm eight, and I'm not coming," she said haughtily.

"Well okay," he said putting a jacket on. "But don't open the door to anyone or answer the phone until I get back."

Caitlin listened to the click of the latch as her father left the house and then she walked over to the coffee table, picked up the remote control and switched on the television. She then went into the kitchen, opened the fridge and grabbed an ice lolly, then she headed back into the living room where she suddenly stopped – she had forgotten to tell her dad to get some crisps. Shrugging her shoulders she went to sit on the settee where a girl in a cream, old-fashioned party dress sat.

Caitlin raised her eyebrows and smiled. "Hello!"

The girl smiled, and said: "Hello."

"What's your name?"

"Lilim."

"My names Caitlin. Are you a relation of Veronica's?"

"Yes," she lied.

"Would you like an ice lolly?"

"Okay."

Caitlin went back into the kitchen and fetched another lolly from the fridge. "There you are," she said handing Lilim the lolly. Then the two girls settled down and watched a cartoon.

"Where do you stay Lilim?" Caitlin asked suddenly.

"I stay in a place with a beautiful garden, which has a swing and other things to play with."

"It sounds nice."

"Would you like to come and see it?"

"Yes, I'll ask my dad when he gets back."

Lilim gazed into Caitlin's eyes and a great tiredness descended over the eight year-old. She yawned and lay back into the settee and fell into a deep sleep. She dreamed of flying up through puffy white clouds.

Lilim flew up from behind her and took her hand." Let's go see my garden."

Up they flew, higher and higher until Lilim tugged Caitlin side ways where they saw a vast glittering city with a multitude of spires, some of which pierced the clouds above. They flew over the city before descending into a green rectangle. Caitlin closed her eyes at the quickly approaching ground.

"It's okay Caitlin you can open your eyes now," said Lilim, walking over to her swing. "Would you like to try my swing?"

Caitlin stood where she was and looked up at the violet sky; she knew better than to think she was still dreaming. This girl had taken her away to some mysterious world!

"Please sit on my swing – now!" Lilim shouted.

"Oh, very well!" Caitlin shouted back.

She sat on the swing and Lilim pushed her back and forth. After a while Lilim stopped pushing and walked across the lawn and picked up a racket and a ball. "Come Caitlin I want to play tennis now."

"I want to go back to my dad's."

"Not now – let's play tennis."

"I don't want to play tennis."

Lilim stomped her feet. "I want you to play tennis with me –now!"

Caitlin grabbed the other racket and swung at the ball Lilim served to her. She connected well, and the ball flew at a blistering pace hitting Lilim in the stomach. She doubled over and made a growling sound. Caitlin ran up to see if she was all right, but stepped back in horror as Lilim raised her head to reveal a face with total black eyes and a large mouth filled with pointed teeth. But in a flash it was gone and Lilim's angelic features returned. Caitlin ran away over the lawn. She had no idea where she was going, but anywhere was better than being with that...thing!

She ran around the tree where the swing swung back and forth in the breeze and bumped into a man in a white robe.

"Caitlin!" Johnny shouted, closing the front door.

As there was no reply he walked through to the front room and saw the glow from the television in front of the settee. He smiled when he saw Caitlin asleep and then quietly made his way through to the kitchen, where he took a pepperoni pizza out of a cardboard box. He switched on the oven and shoved the pizza inside. Then he poured some Coke into a glass and took it through to the living room.

"Caitlin," he said quietly, "I have some Coke for you."

She must have been up late the previous night, he thought as she slept on. He gently lifted her up and took her into the bedroom where he laid her on the bed and covered her up with a blanket.

An hour later, with the aroma of pizza wafting through the flat, Johnny opened the bedroom door and walked up to the bed. "Caitlin!" he said. "The pizza's ready; its time for tea."

There was no response; so he tapped her gently on the shoulder. "Come on baby, time to get up." With still no response he took a firm hold of her shoulders and gave her a shake. "Caitlin – wake up!" Still, she slept on; so he went into the kitchen and fetched a glass of water, which he sprinkled on her face. She sighed, but went on sleeping.

"Oh my god what's wrong with her," he said in a pleading voice. "Caitlin –wake up!" He shouted at the top of his voice. But, there was, again, no response; so he ran into the living room and grabbed the house phone and dialled 999.

"Hello. Which service – ambulance, fire or police?" asked a robotic voice.

"Ambulance."

“Name and address please?”

“John Duncan 10b Guthrie Port Arbroath. It’s my daughter – I can’t wake her up.

“Is she still breathing sir?”

“Yes – it’s just - I can’t wake her up!”

“Okay sir, there’ll be a crew with you shortly.”

He replaced the receiver and ran back into the bedroom. There was no change, she slept on. After what seemed like an eternity Johnny heard the distant scream of a siren. He stared at his daughter’s peaceful face. “Why don’t you wake up baby?” The siren grew louder and louder until it stopped outside the building.

Johnny ran and opened the front door then descended a few steps to meet the crew: a ginger-haired well-made man and a tall, brown-haired woman both in green work suits.

“Mr Duncan?” asked the man.

“Yes, it’s my daughter Caitlin – I can’t awaken her. She’s in the bedroom on the left.” Johnny said, pointing to the open door.

They rushed past him into the flat and through to the bedroom. The male paramedic placed his kit bag on the floor at the side of the bed and felt the side of Caitlin’s neck for a pulse.

“Has she been given any medication?” he asked.

“No”

“How long has she been sleeping?”

“About two hours.”

“Could she have taken pills from where you keep them when you were in another room?” the woman asked.

“Ehm...! I don’t think so. I’ll go have a look.”

Johnny opened the kitchen door to plumes of black smoke, which were issuing through the vents on the sides of the oven. The smoke alarm in the hallway erupted into life as Johnny opened the oven door with protective gloves on and grabbed the heavily smoking black disk, and put it in the sink. He then ran into the hallway and fanned the alarm with a tea towel. Back in the kitchen, Johnny closed the door behind him, opened the window then checked his medicine shelf.

“Sorry about that I had a pizza in the oven. There’s no medicine missing,” he said when he returned to the bedroom.

The female paramedic raised one of Caitlin’s eyelids and then snapped a small plastic tube. There was a sharp odour of ammonia in the room as she held the broken tube under the girl’s nose. Caitlin, for her part, kept on sleeping.

“Mr Duncan, we’ll need to take Caitlin up to Ninewells Hospital.”

Chapter Thirteen

Johnny grasped the arms of the chair he sat in as the ambulance swung through the traffic with the siren howling. Eventually, the journey became smoother as they sped along the dual carriageway on to Dundee and, Ninewells Hospital.

He looked at Caitlin lying strapped in the bed and cursed the day he decided to go to Jerusalem. *Her condition was nothing medical*, he thought, *it was definitely something to do with the nightmare he was involved in.*

After a while they turned into the drive that led to the concrete leviathan that was Ninewells Hospital. The ambulance took a sharp left and hauled up outside the Accident and Emergency Department

Johnny unstrapped himself as the back doors opened. The two paramedics lifted Caitlin out on the stretcher she had been lying on, on top of the bed and put her on a trolley, which was waiting by the doors.

Inside, a young female doctor with long, blond hair looked at Caitlin and then let the paramedics take her into an empty resuscitation bay. Johnny followed and watched as the doctor and a nurse pulled a curtain around the area.

"Mr Duncan?" asked another nurse. "Are you the father of the patient – Caitlin Duncan?"

"Yes."

"Her address is 12 Ethie Street Auchmithie, Angus. And your address is 10b Guthrie Port Arbroath."

"Yes."

"Thank you. Could you sit in the waiting area please? We'll keep you updated when we can."

Johnny sat and stared into space. *He would need to let Caitlin's mother know what had happened, but later*, he thought, because he would need to go outside to use his mobile, and he didn't want to miss an update on his daughter.

After sometime the doctor with the blond hair came and sat beside him. "Mr Duncan, I'm Doctor Macmillan. We've examined Caitlin, and the good news is that she's perfectly healthy. However, she's in a coma. We've taken a blood sample for toxicology tests, the results of which we'll get back tomorrow. She's being taken to a ward where she'll be monitored around the clock."

"What could have induced the coma?" Johnny asked.

"I don't know. Coma's can be brought on by metabolism abnormalities, strokes, drugs and concussion among other things. They generally last a few days to a few weeks."

"Could the shock of seeing something out of the normal bring one on?"

"It's possible. Why, did she witness something strange?"

"No, I just wondered."

"A neurologist will see her tomorrow and an EEG will be run. I'll get a nurse to fix you up with accommodation as you stay in Arbroath."

"Thanks doctor."

After he was shown his room Johnny left the building and rolled himself a long overdue cigarette. He stood among the other smokers and inhaled deeply before reaching into his jacket pocket for his mobile. He rang Veronica and explained what had happened and managed to put her off from coming to the hospital until the morning.

“That was the easy call,” he whispered to himself as he exhaled another cloud of smoke. He pressed a key and after some bleeps a voice told him that the person he was calling was unavailable. *Sue’s mobile was off*, he thought with some relief. He took another draw on his roll-up, and thought: *whatever it took he would get his daughter back*.

Chapter Fourteen

The man in the white robes stepped back. "And who do we have here?"

"I'm Caitlin."

"Are you a friend of Lilim's?"

"Father!" Lilim shouted as she ran across the lawn.

He fixed Lilim with a penetrating gaze. "Where has Caitlin come from my dear?"

"She comes from the Land of Trees father. She is the progeny of the flower to be picked."

Understanding spread across his face. "Ah, very good."

"I want to go home," whined Caitlin.

"And you will, but first a game of hide and seek. Close your eyes and count to twenty young Caitlin then find Lilim and home you go." he said, giving Lilim a knowing look.

Caitlin shrugged and covered her eyes with her hands and counted to twenty. When she took her hands away from her face after counting, the garden had gone, and she was standing alone in the gleaming city amid the impossibly tall spires.

Caitlin didn't know where to start looking, but one thing was for sure: she was going to find that bitch!

Chapter Fifteen

Johnny climbed in between the crisp, white sheets. The room smelled of hospital sterility, but he cared not, because he was totally exhausted, both physically and mentally. He switched the television off with the remote control and closed his eyes.

He dreamt he was crouching by a dry-stone wall. There was a flash of light from behind the wall, which frightened him, but he couldn't summon up the courage to look over the top.

After a few moments a voice boomed out: "I know you're there!"

Every atom in his body told him not to, but he stood up, and he suddenly realised where he was. The voice belonged to Samael. "Mr Duncan, I believe I have something you want."

"What?" Johnny uttered, surprised that he could talk.

The demon king waved an arm, and Johnny stood in a city, which looked familiar. Caitlin walked by; she seemed to be searching for something. "Caitlin baby!" he shouted as tears welled up in his eyes. But she kept on walking. It was as if he was behind soundproof glass - able to observe, but not interact.

Suddenly he was back behind the wall. "Okay, what do you want?"

"Now Mr Duncan you will do nothing to influence your wise men from undertaking the work they are about to do on the dimensions. As soon as you admit to the visions as being fabricated you will have your daughter back."

Johnny awoke and sat up. He was sweating profusely. *This just gets worse*, he thought. At least he knew he was getting Caitlin back – if a demon could be trusted!

Chapter Sixteen

Caitlin walked up to one of the white spires, threw her head back and gazed up. The smooth conical wall tapered to a spike as it entered the clouds. She walked around the wide base until she came to a large opening where she disappeared into the darkness. Inside there was nothing; no stairs or lifts just a large empty area perhaps three metres high. She touched the wall; it was cool and smooth.

Caitlin ran out and looked around the city. Where were all the people? She looked in another building; it was just the same- a façade - an empty city with empty buildings which had spires that reached the clouds. What a very strange place!

Fairground organ music suddenly filled the air. Caitlin ran through the spires, on and on in the direction of the music. Eventually she saw it in what seemed to be the central square of the city: a large blue and white helter-skelter surrounded by stalls and tents. At the back of the conical slide stood a large motionless suspended chair ride, which suddenly came to life and rotated with no one on board.

Caitlin walked past the stalls of coconut shies while, above the sound of the music, her name was mockingly chanted. She ignored the ranting and stopped at a stall which had the heads of six clowns at the back. The heads with huge distorted mouths turned from side to side. Coloured balls of the type jugglers used sat in piles on the front of the stall. She picked up a ball and threw it at one of the heads. The ball bounced off the top of the clowns head. She threw another and another until all the balls were used up then she moved on toward a large white tent. A sign above the opening read: The Hall of Mirrors. Inside, the tent was a maze of mirrors. Caitlin stopped to look at her reflection in the first mirror; she had a small squat body with a long, thin neck and a bullet shaped head. She giggled as she moved onto look in another where she had a very small head and neck with a huge body and long thin legs. She then moved further into the tent and looked at her appearance in a wide, gold framed mirror, but her attention was drawn by the distorted image of a girl in a cream dress. "Lilim!" She shouted, turning round to find another mirror with only her distorted image looking back at her.

"You can't catch me Caitlin, haitlin! Lilim shouted, her voice filling the tent.

Caitlin moved further around the glass maze and looked in a round mirror. Lilim's face suddenly gazed into the mirror from behind her.

"Boo!" Lilim shouted.

Caitlin spun round, but again she saw her reflection in a mirror across from the round one. "Caitlin, taitlin! You can't catch me. You're not going home!"

Caitlin then heard laughter become distant. She ran out of the tent and surveyed the fairground, but there was no sign of Lilim. She walked past the helter skelter and the remaining stalls before leaving the fairground. The music and the chair ride stopped as she passed through the exit.

She strolled along a street of shops wondering if indeed she would be going home anytime soon. She stopped outside an old-fashioned sweet shop. Brightly coloured confectionaries of every type filled large jars in the big, latticed window.

Inside, teddy bears in satin suits of various colours sat on shelves between brightly coloured boxes with big, red bows on their lids. Caitlin walked over to the counter where a box of fudge lay. She loved fudge and couldn't resist taking a piece and popping it in her mouth. But immediately she spat it out - the sweet had no taste! She opened a jar and grabbed a red and white gob-stopper and then stuck it in her mouth. But again she spat the sweet out. *The sweets were like the whole place*, she thought – *a sham!*

Caitlin walked along the remainder of the street with one thing on her mind: how was she going to catch the bitch. She recalled the childish way Lilim reacted when she refused to do something. *If*, Caitlin thought, *she was just to take it a bit further!* She stopped and stood at the bottom of a spire. “I’m not playing this childish game anymore!” She shouted at the top of her voice

The violet sky darkened slightly. “Caitlin, saitlin! Come find me if you can.”

“I told you I’m not playing anymore, this whole place is a sham!”

The spires began to shimmer and fade. “You will find me now or I will...”

“Or you’ll what? It’s time you grew up Lilim!”

The buildings disappeared, and darkness began to descend around Caitlin. She shivered as coldness crept over her body. Then in the eerie twilight she saw a black mist head toward her, closer and closer it came until she was engulfed. She heard whispering, but she couldn’t make out what was being said. Then, suddenly a dark figure moved toward her.

Chapter Seventeen

Johnny was woken up by the shrill ring of the room telephone. "Hello," he said sleepily into the receiver

"Mr Duncan, hospital reception here. I have a Miss Cahill at the desk. Shall I send her up?"

"Yes – please."

He splashed cold water onto his face and then pulled on his trousers. He looked at his reflection in the mirror above the sink. He needed a shave and a shower, but he wanted to speak to Veronica first.

There was a knock at the door. "Hi Veronica, come on in its good to see you," he said as he opened the door and then walked over to the chair by the bed to retrieve his shirt.

"Jeez John. How is she?"

"Still in a coma the last time I saw her. I've heard nothing; so I assume there's no change."

"I couldn't sleep worrying about Caitlin and yourself."

"Thanks Veronica." He picked up his mobile from the chair. "I'll need to call her mother; I couldn't contact her last night. I think it's all right to use a mobile in this block." He pressed the key for Sue, and after a few rings a hoarse voice answered.

"John – is everything all right?"

"Sue, don't get alarmed. Its Caitlin, she's asleep and... can't be woken up."

"What!? What do you mean can't be woken up?"

"Yesterday she fell asleep in front of the TV while I was making the tea, and when I tried to wake her – I couldn't!"

"Oh dear!"

"We're in Ninewells. They've carried out tests and said she's in good health, but in a coma. The doctor says it could last from a few days to a few weeks."

"My baby. I'm coming up," she said and then hung-up.

Veronica, who had been gazing out of the window, turned toward him. "Look John, maybe I'd better go."

"No, I want you to stay," he said, throwing the mobile onto the bed. "I'm going to have a shower."

After he washed and shaved they went down to the main concourse for some coffee. Outpatients were arriving in droves and looking for their destinations as Johnny and Veronica entered an open-plan café. They bought some toast and coffee and sat at a table near the back wall.

"I can't believe Caitlin's in a coma she seemed so... lively when I met her."

Veronica said.

"Veronica," said Johnny as he buttered his toast. "There's something I should probably tell you." He took a bite of his toast. "Physicists in your country are working on some type of machine which will open up some spatial dimensions. I think one of the dimensions is what we would call hell."

Veronica took a sip of her coffee. "Where did you find this out from?"

"I was visited by someone or something; no vision this time he seemed as real as you or I. He said that the experiments must be stopped at all costs."

"How does this tie in with Caitlin?"

"In a dream last night I was shown Caitlin or at least her astral body or soul or whatever by Samael - he's probably who we would call the 'Devil'. She was searching for something in what I believe to be the thirteenth dimension. I could see

her, but couldn't talk to her, I was just an observer. The demon made it clear that if I wanted to see her conscious again I would need to deny seeing 'the visions'."

"Oh God! So we cancel ABC?"

"For now, yes."

Caitlin lay peacefully sleeping on a bed with the back section raised. A clear tube entered her arm under a large sticking plaster. The ward she was in was full except for one bed.

"Caitlin." Johnny said gently. "Veronica's here to see you and mums on the way."

He held her right hand. "Are you going to wake up today baby?"

A male doctor with thick, black hair approached the bed.

"Mr Duncan?"

"Yes."

"The toxicity tests have returned with a negative result; so we can cancel that out."

"What's next doctor?" Veronica asked.

"EEG."

"Okay, thanks doctor," said Johnny.

Sue came rushing in accompanied by Ollie. "Oh baby!" she exclaimed as she stood by the bed.

"What did the doctor say?" she asked Johnny.

"They're still carrying out tests."

"How could you let this happen?"

"Me!"

"It's something to do with this trouble you've caused."

"The doctor says coma's can be induced by many things."

"Who's this?" Sue asked, nodding toward Veronica.

"I'm Veronica Cahill, a colleague of John's," said Veronica with iron in her voice.

"I'll wait on you downstairs John, she then said looking at John.

"I'll go too." Ollie said, turning to follow Veronica.

"So what happened, again?" Sue asked with venom.

Johnny went through the sequence of events again, tactfully leaving out the fact that he had left Caitlin alone for a short while.

"I'll never forgive you John Duncan, if she doesn't pull through."

"Come on now Sue, she'll wake up and want a McDonalds in no time."

"How can you be so sure?"

"I just know - that's all." He gave her what he hoped was an encouraging smile. "I have to go and see about something will you give me a phone if there's any change."

He left the ward and descended an empty staircase before walking along a busy hallway with a highly polished floor and paintings on the walls.

In the central concourse he saw Veronica and Ollie sitting in the same café he and Veronica had been in earlier. The crowds hid him as he made his way toward and then out of the main door.

A bus arrived and dispatched visitors and more outpatients for the already crowded hospital as he took out his tobacco tin and rolled a cigarette. After he lit up he pulled his mobile from his jacket pocket and rang his sister, Gemma.

"Johnny, long time no hear."

"Yeah, well, you know, I've been busy."

"I've been reading about you."

"Listen Gem, I need a favour. Are you still into that paranormal stuff?"

"Yes, now and again. Why?"

"I need the services of a kosher medium, psychic type in the area."

"Keith Moncliffe, Camphill Road Broughty ferry; he's the best."

She then gave Johnny the man's number.

"Thanks sis. I'll explain all later. See ya!"

He made the call to the number and then put the mobile back into his pocket.

When he went back into the café Ollie had gone back upstairs.

"Where have you been?" Veronica asked.

"On the phone. Veronica, I need you to drive me to Broughty Ferry."

"Where?"

"Come on, I'll show you the way."

After a short drive they pulled up outside a three storey solidly built cream-coloured house. The stainless steel sign on a gate pillar of the garden wall read: Keith

Moncliffe Bsc (Hons) Psychology.

"You sure about this John?" Veronica quizzed

"As I explained on the way here, I've no choice." He opened the car door. "Are you coming?"

Johnny pushed the bell button on the small portico and waited. A tall woman with thick, brown hair above a face with a pale complexion and grey eyes eventually opened the door.

"I'm Mr Duncan; I phoned about an appointment. You said there had been a cancellation."

"Yes, come in."

They followed her through to a room with wood panelling on the lower half of the walls; white painted plaster making up the rest. A glass coffee table in the centre of the room had papers and magazines scattered upon it.

"Please wait here. Mr Moncliffe is with a patient," the woman said as she closed the door.

"Thank you," said Johnny.

Veronica sat and browsed through a magazine as Johnny paced back and forward; then finally moved over to the window and gazed at the well-kept garden. After about half an hour a well-groomed man of about forty with short, fair hair and a brown goatee opened the door. "Mr Duncan?"

"Yes."

"I'm Keith Moncliffe," he said as they shook hands. "You told my receptionist you had an emergency?"

"Yes," said Johnny, as he turned to Veronica. "This is Veronica Cahill, do you mind if she sits in?"

"No, not at all. Could you follow me please?"

The room was bright and reminded Johnny of his doctor's surgery. The only thing that differed was the presence of a red leather couch.

"Please take a seat," said the psychologist.

The pair sat on stainless steel and black leather seats in front of a glass top desk. Johnny looked around, and said: "I'm not sure you're..."

"Mr Duncan, I am not only a psychologist; I'm a medium and a good hypnotist. Now, what's your problem?"

Johnny decided to put Caitlin's and his fate in the man's hands. He explained in detail all that had happened.

"So you see Mr Moncliffe, I need someone to take me to the thirteenth dimension."

"Far too dangerous Mr Duncan. You understand that this place you talk of is otherwise known as hell. If you go, you may never come back!"

"I'm prepared to pay you well."

"I don't know..."

"Mr Moncliffe, do you have children?"

"Yes, and very well, but you must do exactly as I command."

"Of course."

"Right, make yourself comfortable on the couch. Now, normally to induce hypnosis I ask the patient to count down from two hundred. In your case we need to induce an astral projection of sorts; so I need you to start counting from one. Miss Cahill as I'll be in a trance –like state I would like you to alert my receptionist, Miss Wilkie, if anything untoward happens. Please do not try to awaken us."

Moncliffe stood up and pulled the chair out from behind his desk, then placed it beside the couch and sat down. "Right when you're ready close your eyes and take a deep breath then begin counting."

Johnny closed his eyes and felt slightly apprehensive as he started to count.

"That's it, now just relax," said the hypnotist. "We're climbing up a beautiful staircase. Feel yourself getting lighter with every step; up, up we go."

After a while Johnny wasn't sure if he was still counting out loud or in his head. He could hear the hypnotist's voice all around. He felt warm and peaceful, the apprehensiveness had gone. Soon he stopped climbing and simply floated up through the clouds toward a brilliant, blue sky. A radiant being floated up beside him.

"Still very relaxed and becoming lighter and lighter," said the being.

Johnny realised the figure was Keith Moncliffe.

They entered a massive sphere of white light where Johnny was sure he could see figures moving and he felt love. Then they floated on upwards out of the top of the sphere and into another similar sphere. They floated through one sphere after another. The further they rose the darker the spheres became, and the feelings of love began to diminish. Johnny could still see groups of figures but they were no longer white. They slowed as they entered a particularly dark sphere. "This is the twelfth dimension. I will go no further; however, I will wait here for your descent," said Moncliffe.

Johnny moved upwards while voices flowed through his mind. "Go back now or you will never go back at all," they teased, but Johnny kept on rising. He left the twelfth dimension and entered the thirteenth.

The dark encroached upon him and made him shiver. Wisps of black mist moved toward him and then passed through him. He heard a whisper. "This is the place of the damned. Look up!" He looked up and saw, set against the backdrop of star-studded infinity, a bridge-come-stairway which linked the sphere with a smaller sphere. Souls climbed the steps one after another.

A scream brought his attention back to where he had stopped. Suddenly a small figure ran out of the gloom. "Caitlin!" he shouted as the figure became clearer.

"Dad!" she shouted, running into his arms. "What are you doing here?"

"I've come to take you home baby."

A growl came from the dark from where she had emerged. "Dad we need to go – now!" But it was too late: a dark figure with light grey skin, and a mouth filled with sharp pointed teeth, flew at them.

Veronica watched with concern as Johnny's breathing suddenly became erratic, and he entered a stage of REM. She looked at Keith Moncliffe, but he still seemed to be peaceful. What it all meant she wasn't sure; but one thing was for sure: Johnny was in the thick of it!

In the hospital, Sue looked up at Caitlin's face; she was sure she heard a sigh. She noticed that the child's breathing had changed and that her eyelids flickered. "Nurse!" she shouted.

A male nurse appeared he was short, but well-made with cropped red hair and tattooed arms. He looked at Caitlin.

"This is good," he said. "I think it means she's dreaming. I'll call Doctor Macmillan to check." He then turned to Sue. "Don't worry we're winning."

Chapter Eighteen

The horror that was the Angel of Death stared down on the cowering pair in the gloom of the thirteenth dimension. They both closed their eyes and Johnny said a small prayer. When he opened his eyes again he was descending with Caitlin in his arms and the shining figure of the hypnotist alongside. He heard a spine chilling scream from above, and he assumed that the Dark Angel was a bit miffed.

“What happened?”

“I saw the danger you were in; so I threw a psychic net around you both and pulled you down.”

Caitlin woke up with a start. “Mum, where am I?”

“Oh Caitlin dear,” said Sue as she wiped the tears from her eyes. “You’re in hospital. We were all worried.”

“Where’s dad?”

“He went off somewhere... I’ll need to phone him.”

“It was dad; he came for me!”

“What do you mean honey?”

“Mum, you have to go and phone dad; see if he’s okay.”

“Okay, but I don’t understand.”

Veronica breathed a sigh of relief. “Am I glad to see you both back with me again? How did it go?”

“Very well,” answered Johnny.

“Yes, but you may be in for trouble in the near future,” said Keith, rising to stretch his legs.

“I need to find out how Caitlin is.” Johnny said, pushing himself up from the couch.

“You can use my phone if you wish.”

“Thank you, but I have my mobile,” Johnny said, switching on his phone, which immediately rang. “Hello, Sue.”

“Johnny she’s awake; Caitlin’s okay!”

“Oh thank God!”

“She’s asking for you.”

“Okay, I’m on my way.”

“Thanks Mr Moncliffe I can’t thank you enough,” he said as he put his mobile back in his jacket pocket. “How much do I owe you?”

“Miss Wilkie will deal with that. I want you to call or come to see me again for I fear that this isn’t over yet.”

“Johnny paid up at the receptionist’s desk adding an extra one hundred pounds for a job well done.

Johnny walked into the ward with tears in his eyes and hugged his daughter then hugged his ex-wife.

“Thanks for coming for me dad.” Caitlin whispered when he turned back toward her.

“Will someone tell me what this ‘coming to save me’ is all about?”

“Oh mum, let’s just be happy for now!”

“Come on Sue let’s go and let Caitlin get some rest,” said Ollie as he took her arm and gave Johnny a nod.

“Well, okay. Will you be okay baby?”

“Yes mum.”

“We’ll be back tomorrow to take you home.”

“Dad,” said Caitlin, after her mother and Ollie had left. “Will it be okay to sleep tonight?”

“Of course honey. Don’t you worry about a thing; I’ve done what they wanted; now you watch some TV, and I’ll see you soon.”

“How do you know the demon won’t come back for Caitlin or yourself?” Veronica asked as they drove along the dual carriageway that connected Dundee with Arbroath.

“Well the way I see it, they’ve shown me how powerful they are; so I’d be a fool to do anything that would endanger my daughter again. I obviously won’t be going ahead with the TV interview. And I have Keith Moncliffe to call on if needed.”

“Why *were* you chosen for the visions?”

“I’ve thought about that too. I believe it’s simply because I’m a journalist I suppose who happened to have a few choice articles published in some international magazines.”

“So what now?”

“What now? Well, I will need to take the risk and try and stop these experiments in the States. How? I don’t know.”

They turned right under the railway bridge, and Johnny glanced up at Arbroath Infirmary sitting gazing nonchalantly out at the North Sea. “Are you coming up to the flat?”

“It depends, are you cooking dinner?”

“I’m the guy that sets out to make an omelette and ends up with burnt scrambled eggs, but okay.”

“A pizza and some wine will do fine.” Veronica said, and then laughed. “I need to go back to my room and get some work done also check the emails. I’ll come by at seven.”

Johnny opened the door to his flat, listened, and then crept in and looked in every room. “What am I doing?” he asked himself. “This whole thing’s got me freaked.” He did some housework and then sat down in front of his laptop in the spare room. He had his own work to do.

At five past seven the doorbell rang. Johnny, freshly showered and shaved, ran through to the hall and opened the front door. “Veronica! You look good enough to eat.”

“Mm...! Maybe later,” she said, walking past him through to the living room.

The doorbell rang again. Johnny tugged the door open again.

“Pizza sir?” A gangly youth asked him.

“Dinners arrived,” he said as he laid two thin cardboard boxes on the coffee table and then waltzed into the kitchen humming the ‘Blue Dunube’. He returned with a bottle of red wine and two glasses. “Wine madam?”

“Yes please.”

He filled her glass up to the brim.

“Are you trying to get me drunk sir?”

“Yes,” he replied, watching the wrinkles at the sides of her eyes as she smiled.

“Good, I feel like getting drunk after all that’s happened.”

“Sounds good to me,” he said as he sat down and opened his box.

Johnny was awoken by a loud crash from the living room. “Jesus! What was that?” He shouted, as Veronica mumbled something and then went back to sleep. He jumped out of bed and pulled on his bathrobe. A cracking noise and the smell of smoke made

him rush to the door. "Oh shit!" he shouted as he gradually opened the door and saw flames spreading through the living room. The right hand window had been smashed and black smoke was escaping through the jagged hole. He ran into the hallway and closed the living room door, then ran back into the bedroom and pushed the door shut as the smoke alarm began to scream.

"Veronica, get up!" he shouted as he ran over to the bedside chair and started hauling on his clothes.

"What's up?"

"It's the living room; it's on fire. Come on we got to get out of here."

Bizarrely, he heard the letterbox flap close, which he put down to a draft caused by the broken window. He took his mobile from the bedside unit and pushed it in his pocket and then grabbed his jacket. By the time he had his jacket on Veronica was dressed.

"Right," Johnny said, as he apprehensively opened the door. "Oh no!"

The hall carpet was ablaze and flames were creeping up the walls and pushing black smoke onto the ceiling. He slammed the door shut and pulled a sheet off the bed, then rolled it up and tucked it along the bottom of the door. He then ran over to the window and pulled up the lower frame. Looking down he shook his head – the garden was further away than he remembered. The distance was just too great for a 'hang and drop'. He pulled his mobile from his pocket and rang 999.

"Which service: ambulance, police or fire?"

"Fire – we're stuck in the bedroom at 10b Guthrie Port Arbroath, the rest of the flat's on fire!"

"Right sir, there will be an appliance with you shortly."

He hugged Veronica as they stood by the open window. Smoke was squeezing into the room from the minute gaps between the door and its frame. The heat became unbearable and the sound of cracking and smashing deafening.

Johnny started coughing, and Veronica began sobbing with despair when suddenly, they heard the sound of aluminium on sandstone. The top of a ladder had appeared at the window. Johnny looked down and saw Bob Tosh, the roofer, who lived two blocks along the street standing at the bottom. "Okay John I'll hold it steady, down you come!" he shouted.

Johnny pulled his head back in, and said: "Veronica, you first."

She removed her shoes and threw them along with her handbag on to the lawn. Then she climbed out of the window and onto the ladder. "Oh my God! Oh my God!" Veronica shouted, climbing shakily down the ladder.

"It's okay Veronica I have hold of the top and Bob has the bottom. You're doing fine." Johnny said.

The roar of the fire increased as it raged through the flat. A big black mark appeared on the inside of the bedroom door. Johnny burst into a fit of coughing.

"Good lass," said Bob as Veronica stepped off the ladder and gave him a quick hug. Flames suddenly ripped through the bedroom door as Johnny climbed out on to the ladder and then descended to the safety of the garden.

The three stood on the grass and looked up at the smoke belching out of the bedroom window. Suddenly the bathroom window cracked and they saw flames dancing around inside.

"We best move into my garden," said Bob as he took the ladder down.

They made their way through the garden gates which connected the properties as a siren screamed to a halt on the street outside.

"These lads will take care of it!" Bob shouted.

Johnny hugged Veronica as they watched Bob put his ladder away.

"Marj'll have the kettle on John, why don't the two of you go up to my flat." Bob said as he approached them.

After climbing the stairs Johnny knocked gently on the maroon door and pushed it open.

"Come on in," said a soft voice. "We're in the kitchen."

Johnny went into the neat kitchen, followed by Veronica, to find Mrs Spink, his neighbour, sitting chatting to Marj Tosh beside a steaming kettle.

"Thanks for this Marj," said Johnny. He then turned to Mrs Spink. "I'm glad to see you Mrs Spink."

"I saw Mabel standing out on the street gazing up at the fire," said Marj.

Bob strode into the kitchen as Marj started to hand out mugs of tea. "I'm just in time then."

"You can make your own, Bob Tosh, these are for my guests."

"Hmm...! Typical," said Bob with a laugh. "The firemen are running hoses up your close and their shooting water in through the front windows off that hoist thing they have. Hamish Murray's there and he says he's coming up for a statement."

The doorbell rang; so Bob left the room, and when he returned he was followed by a stalky paramedic with a shaven head.

"Anyone require treatment here?"

"No, we're all right," said Veronica, looking at Mabel Spink, who nodded her head.

"No smoke inhalation or cuts?"

"No, fine," said Johnny.

"Okay I'll leave you to enjoy your tea."

"Would you like a cup?" Marj asked.

"Not while I'm on duty," the paramedic laughed.

Sergeant Hamish Murray knocked on the kitchen door just as the paramedic was leaving. "Hope you don't mind Bob – the front door was open so I just came in."

"No that's all right Hamish come on in."

"Mr Duncan. We meet again."

"Yes, under different circumstances."

"An eventful life you lead."

"Well, I don't plan it this way."

The policeman took out his note book. "The firemen have got the better of the fire now. You won't need me to tell you that the house is pretty well gutted."

He wrote something and then said: "I'll need a statement please."

Johnny gave the sergeant the sequence of events.

"Okay," said Hamish, after Johnny had finished. "Have you got anywhere to spend the rest of the night?"

"Yes sergeant we'll be staying at my bed and breakfast: the Harbour View," said Veronica.

"How about you Mrs Spink?"

"Mabel will be staying with us," said Marj.

"Okay then, thanks Bob. Oh, CID will be down to see you tomorrow Mr Duncan."

"All right, thanks sergeant."

The next morning as the sun was playing cat and mouse with a large rain cloud Johnny walked along the High Street and then turned down Guthrie Port. He was stopped in his tracks by the sight of his flat: the windows were rectangular, black voids, and the blackness seemed as if it was creeping up the building above them.

He climbed the stairs and stood gazing at his front door, which was still intact and open. "Hello, anybody there?" he asked as he walked over the scorched floorboards, some of which were burnt away leaving the blackened joists exposed.

"Yes, in the living room," said a familiar voice.

"DS Mitchell," said Johnny looking at the black walls of his living room.

The policeman was crouching as he searched around the floor area in front of the right hand window. "Ah, Mr Duncan you've saved me a journey I was just going to come and see you." He looked up at Johnny. "A bit of a mess?"

"Yeah, you could say that."

"Have you got anything to add to the statement you gave Sergeant Murray last night?"

"No."

"Well, we're dealing with a case of arson. The forensic chappies have found pieces of a bottle in the living room that have traces of petrol on them. The reason why you and Miss Cahill couldn't get out of the bedroom was because petrol had been poured through your letter box and ignited. We've found a petrol can in a wheelie bin down the road and suspect it to be the one that was used."

"I thought I heard the click of the letter box flap last night, but assumed it was just the wind."

"Whoever did this wanted you dead I'm afraid. Lucky for you Bob Tosh is a light sleeper."

"Yeah, I owe him a big one; he's a good man."

"So, any idea about this one?"

"No, must be those neo-Nazi's I guess."

"We're working with the German police on those people. They're a slippery bunch; apparently nothing can be pinned on them. How about the murder, have you remembered anything in connection with it?"

"No – nothing!"

"We're no further I'm afraid." DS Mitchell said, standing up. "Okay. You're staying at the Harbour View?"

"Yeah."

"Well, take care."

After DS Mitchell left Johnny walked through to the spare room and stared at his laptop, which was melded to a charred floor joist. He stared out of the crack in the blackened glass of the window and watched the large rain cloud, which had escaped the sun; deliver a shower in the distance. He then took out his mobile; he had some calls to make; first was his insurance company.

Johnny walked into Veronica's room at the boarding house and collapsed on the bed. "Well I've phoned the insurance company and bought myself another laptop."

"Where is it?" Veronica asked, looking up from her computer.

"Och, they don't have the model I want, but the guy in the shop said he'd have it in by tomorrow. I need to write my column as soon as possible!"

"You can use this one when I'm finished," said Veronica as she resumed her work. "Johnny?"

"Yes my sweet?"

"I phoned a colleague of mine, Dave Martin, about this dimensional thing. And he said, among other things, that some old German guy and his son had been bugging scientists and politicians to stop the tests, because, get this, during the Second World

War Hitler was scared off by some experiment with a UFO where something materialized from another dimension. He was of course laughed off as a joke.”

“What’s his name?”

“I thought you’d be interested; so after some arm twisting I got Dave to email me the details. His name is Günter Wiedemann and he lives in Stuttgart. I have a mobile number, that’s all.”

She stared at Johnny. “I wonder if what he saw was similar to that thing that you and Caitlin escaped from?”

“Could be,” said Johnny as he sat up and looked out at the harbour. “Could be .”

Johnny rang the number given to him by Veronica as he sat by the window and gazed at the yachts bobbing up and down.

“Ja!” said a firm voice.

“Hello Mr Wiedemann, my name is John Duncan. I am calling from the UK about the dimensional tests about to be conducted in the United States. I believe we both have an interest in stopping them.”

“Where did you get this number?”

“From a secure source.”

“Are you the John Duncan that I read about in Time Magazine?”

“Yes, that’s me. I was wondering if a colleague and I could come over to Germany to meet you.”

“You will be phoned back shortly!” The line went dead. Johnny looked around at Veronica, who was absorbed in her work. He thought better of disturbing her and watched a boat leave the safety of the harbour for the open sea instead. His mobile rang. “Yeah, hullo – John Duncan.”

“Mr Duncan my name is Matthias Wiedemann. My father has told me that he would like to meet you to discuss the mutual interest?”

“Fine.”

“Very well, please understand we have been the target of fools; both the harmless kind and the dangerous kind, ja!”

“We will be most discrete Mr Wiedemann.”

“Please phone me on this number when you have arranged to come to Stuttgart and I will meet you. For now – goodbye.”

Chapter Nineteen

Johnny and Veronica sat on the British Airways 11:55 am domestic flight to London Heathrow on a rainy Thursday in Aberdeen, and as the plane began to taxi to the runway Johnny shook his head.

“What’s up?” Veronica asked.

“The last time I sat here in one of these I was going on a well deserved break. And look how that turned out? The only good thing was meeting you.”

“Well,” said Veronica, grasping his arm gently, “you’re going on another well deserved break, but this time with me, and we’re going to gather a few facts along the way.”

Johnny felt apprehensive about going to meet the old German, as the plane broke through the dark clouds and settled into an azure sky. *It could be a waste of time*, he thought, but something had to be done and this was the best lead – the only lead! He had covered his work by not only doing one column, but two and then emailing them off. He had also phoned Sue and found that Caitlin was well and back at school. He would take his children out for the day when he returned, he mused.

They caught the connecting flight at 15:40 pm and then flew into a hazy Stuttgart at 18:25 pm. A cream Mercedes taxi took them east along an autobahn surrounded by green fields before turning north and passing through an increasingly urban area where they eventually entered a leafy suburban area, which revealed a panoramic view of the city of Stuttgart.

The taxi descended into the city centre and passed by the main railway station, a behemoth of a building with a church like tower, before the cab pulled up outside what looked like a sixty’s department store.

The Steigenberger Graf Zeppelin Hotel, chosen by Johnny because of his love for an old rock band, stood on Amulf-Klett-Platz and gazed across at the railway station.

“Mr and Mrs Smith,” whispered Johnny, as they walked through the plush main hall toward the check-in desk.

“Jeez! You’re so last century, but I like it.” Veronica said with a smile.

They checked in and headed up to their twin-bedded room on the third floor, where Johnny flopped onto one of the beds while Veronica started to take things out of her bag.

“What time do we have to meet this guy tomorrow?” she asked.

“Eleven o’clock in the main square, the Schloss Platz, by the Jubilee Column.”

“How about some dinner mister?”

“Yes my dear.”

They ate a local pasta based dish, maultaschen, and drank red wine in the intimate atmosphere of a white stucco-walled restaurant. After which the remainder of the evening was spent sitting at the bar where Johnny quaffed wheat beer and Veronica her favourite: vodka and lime juice.

“Maybe we should go out and have a look around Stuttgart,” said Johnny, after his third beer.

“Nah! I’m tired.” Veronica retorted.

“Yeah, you’re right there’s always tomorrow. Let’s go up and test the beds?”

“I thought you’d never ask.” Veronica said with a wide grin.

After a hearty breakfast of ham, cheese and enough dark bread to sink a battle ship Johnny and Veronica strolled along the Koenigstrasse - a tree lined pedestrian precinct with the usual array of shops found in any big city.

The late April day was humid and the sun hid behind light grey clouds. The buds on the trees, above waves of people washing from one shop to another, showed signs of opening up for the summer.

Johnny's senses were drawn toward a stall where big sausages were being grilled and sold on rolls with onions. The aroma was enticing, but he had had too much for breakfast, so he gave it a miss and stood with Veronica as she looked in an expensive shoe shop window instead.

"What is it about you women and shoe shops?" Johnny asked with a grin.

"Oh don't be such a frump, we've got the time."

Eventually they left the throng of shoppers in the Koenigstrasse and entered the spacious Schloss Platz with the baroque New Castle sitting in all its elegance on the far side.

People strolled, cycled and walked dogs along wide pathways as a thunderstorm rolled across the distant hills.

"Well that's obviously the Jubilee Column," said Veronica, pointing toward a big column which dominated the centre of the square. "How are we going to recognise him? Is he going to wear a red carnation?"

"He said he'd find us."

Large, well-painted houses gazed down from surrounding hills at the pair as they stood at the base of the column and watched people come and go. The thunder seemed to be creeping toward the city.

Johnny looked at his watch after a while. "Well, that's ten past and no sign of our man."

Then, a tall man with receding dark hair and a large moustache approached the pair. He was dressed in jeans and a light blue t-shirt. "Mr Duncan?" He asked in perfect English with only a slight trace of a German accent.

"Yes. Mr Wiedemann?"

"Yes I'm Mathias Wiedemann." The German said as the two men shook hands.

"This is Veronica Cahill – my associate."

After shaking hands with Veronica, Matthias said: "If you'll come with me please, I'll take you to meet my father. I'm sorry for being late, but I had to check it was you; I have a photograph on my mobile phone. Also I wanted to see if anyone was tailing you."

"Where did you get it?"

"From the internet."

They drove over the green Neckar River on a concrete bridge in Mathias's blue Mercedes and passed the silver, circular building of the Mercedes museum.

"Mercedes-Benz seems to be everywhere," said Johnny.

"Porsche and Maybach are also here; this area is known as the cradle of the German automobile. I worked for Mercedes-Benz all my working life and took early retirement last year."

The road eventually entered a tunnel, and when they emerged at the other end Matthias took a slip road and then took a right and drove half a kilometre along the road before pulling in.

"Just a precaution to see if we have been followed." Matthias said, looking in his rear mirror. Satisfied, he reversed the car into a side road and then went back the way they had come and entered the town of Fellbach.

They eventually pulled into the garage driveway of a two-storey detached wooden house. The front garden had two closely cropped lawns separated by a flagstone path. Manicured bushes ran up either side of the yellow painted building.

“Right here we are,” said Matthias as he opened the driver’s door and walked round the front of the car. “Please come this way,” he said as he followed a path, which took him past a large double glazed window and then, unlocking the dark wood front door, he said: “Please come in.”

The darkened hallway had a pine staircase, which led to the upper level. The walls were decorated with a deep red paper, which had flowers picked out in gold leaf. Matthias led them into a spacious living room where an old man dressed in slacks and a checked shirt stood up from a black leather reclining chair. His skin was pallid and wrinkled and he had large bags under his eyes.

“Papa, this is Mr Duncan and Miss Cahill,” said Matthias, holding out an arm toward the pair.

“Ah yes, it’s nice to meet you.” Günter said as he offered his right hand to Johnny.

“It’s nice to meet you too sir,” said Johnny, shaking the man’s hand.

Matthias strolled over to the large front window and pulled the partially opened blind fully up allowing more light to flow into the room. “Please sit down. Can I get you a cup of coffee or tea?”

“Coffee will be fine,” answered Veronica.

“Same for me.” Johnny said.

“Papa?”

“Herbal tea, Matthias.” Günter said as he slowly lowered himself back onto his seat.

“I trust you had a pleasant journey and that you find my home city to your liking?”

“Yes it’s a great city – very clean!” Johnny said.

“So, Mr Duncan I believe you’ve been seeing visions in the Holy Land?”

“Yes. Okay, firstly I’m not a religious person and secondly I didn’t ask for them, if ask is the right word. Now, cutting to the chase; I understand they were shown to me so that I would influence politicians and scientists to stop the experiments on opening a gateway to other dimensions.”

Günter leaned back into his chair. “Why you, and not some politician?”

“Because, I’m a journalist who has written some penetrating articles.”

Matthias returned to the living room with a tray of pale, blue china cups on saucers and a jug of milk.

“So Mr Wiedemann,” said Johnny as he accepted a cup of coffee and nodding to some milk. “Can you tell me what happened all these years ago?”

“I was a member of the Hitler Youth. I had been gripped by the hysteria that was sweeping across Germany at the time. I won’t deny it; I thought Hitler was a god. I was at a rally he gave in Stuttgart, and I knew then that I had to be part of the new world he talked about. Not that I had any choice you understand.” Günter paused to sip his tea, which Matthias had set on a small table beside him. “In 1940 I was sent to work with Doctor Teubert, a brilliant, young particle physicist well ahead of his time, on the Austrian border. His team were tunnelling under a mountain, where they were going to build a powerful cyclotron and centrifuge to carry out tests in uranium isotope separation and then produce a Nazi atomic bomb. The world believed that if the Third Reich were carrying out these experiments it was in Berlin. The leaders were happy for this deception to carry on while the main work was to proceed away from prying eyes in southern Germany. I was chosen because I had done well in science at school.”

Günter then told the story of the dimensional experiment on the day Hitler and Himmler were present.

Johnny's jaw dropped when he heard the description of the entity that materialized.

"That's a description of the Angel of Death. I had a run in with her. She manifested as a little girl, who befriended my daughter and then took her astral body to the thirteenth dimension."

"Did you get her back?" Matthias asked.

"Yes, with the help of a medium."

Günter nodded and then continued, "whatever it was I was not waiting for it to escape from the force field; so I ran out of the cavern and through a side tunnel to an escape hatch. I then ran through the trees and slipped under the perimeter fence. I ran as far away as I could from that thing!"

He paused and took another sip of his tea. "I took refuge with my family back in Stuttgart. As the days started to pass I was relieved, but puzzled as to why no one had come to look for me. Months later I heard that the cavern had been sealed up – with the scientists inside!"

"Dear God!" exclaimed Veronica. "How barbaric."

"From then I was no longer a Nazi. I remembered the fear on Hitler's face when the demon tried to get at him. He was no god!"

"We must stop these tests gentlemen," stated Veronica. "But we need some proof; some solid evidence."

Johnny sipped his coffee and stared at Günter. "The place where the experiments were to take place have you been back to the area?"

"I can see where you're taking this Mr Duncan. As far as I am concerned the mountain is a war grave."

"But if we can stop the tests Mr Wiedemann millions, indeed the world could be spared. The Dark Angel is one thing, but Samael, the King of the Demons, and his hordes flying out of some portal is quite another!"

Matthias looked pleadingly at his father. "Papa maybe it's time to open up the past to save the future."

"Open up the past," said Günter, shaking his head. "You never lived through these times: the fear and the killings. But yes, it is time to act for the sake of future generations."

"The place is now an area of woodland walks and mountain climbing," said Matthias.

"Can we go have look?" Johnny asked tentatively.

"Yes." Matthias said, looking at his father.

"Tomorrow?"

"Yes. Which hotel are you staying at?"

"The Steinberger Graf Zeppelin," answered Veronica.

"Good, I'll pick you up there at eight tomorrow morning. It will take about three hours to get there. Oh, and you'll need good walking shoes."

Johnny, and then Veronica stood up. "Well until tomorrow, and thank you sir," he said to Günter.

"Thank *you* my boy."

Matthias stood up and gathered the cups. "I'll take you back into Stuttgart."

That night, after dinner, Johnny left Veronica watching a film in their room and slipped out for a cigarette. The night was balmy, and an almost full moon shone down through the orange haze of the street lights. He rolled and then lit his cigarette as he strolled up to the corner of the street. A constant stream of cars and buses flowed by

on both sides of the street. Late night shoppers returned to the railway station festooned with plastic bags.

Suddenly a black BMW X5 screeched to halt and two heavily muscled men dressed in black got out and approached him. He turned and started to walk back toward the hotel entrance, but found his way blocked by a third man dressed in black. The thug had an obvious bulge under the left arm of his jacket.

"Mr Menzel would like a word with you," one of the two men approaching said, in English with a heavy German accent.

Johnny had no option but to get into the vehicle, which still had its rear nearside door open. He was followed in by one of the men, while the other got into the front passengers seat.

"Do not be alarmed Mr Duncan I wish you no harm. I merely want to talk to you," said a dark-haired man in a grey suit, who Johnny sat next to. "I am Johannes Menzel. The group I belong to are called Progressive Movement Three," he paused to let the information sink in. "We have followed you and Miss Cahill since you arrived yesterday."

"But...!"

"Oh yes, that silly old man's son thought he wasn't being followed, and we don't know where he stays!" Menzel said sarcastically.

The BMW pulled away and merged into traffic. They passed the railway station still busy with shoppers heading home.

"Where are you taking me?" Johnny asked, hoping the fear he felt wasn't coming across in his speech.

"Just for a drive so we can have a talk."

The vehicle pulled up at a crossroad, the red traffic light illuminating Menzel's face.

"These visions, did you actually see them?"

"Why do you need to know Mr Menzel?"

The driver gunned the BMW as the lights changed to green.

"Because the people I deal with Mr Duncan believe Judas to be the first anti-Semite: the man who betrayed the King of the Jews. First, we have these Gnostics with Judas being the beloved disciple of Christ, and now you with a deal made between the two, and Judas a demon who vanishes in a burst of flames.

"I will repeat what I've told many people: I never asked for any of this. I am not religious. I went to Israel for a break and was given these visions because I am an incarnation of a shepherd boy who was present in the Garden of Gethsemane." Johnny stared into the man's light grey eyes which burned with an unnerving ferocity.

"Was it you who burned my house in Scotland?"

"Mr Duncan, there are neo-Nazi fanatics all over the world. As I told the police I had nothing to do with that. The man, Lehmann, who was murdered in your house, was a fanatic. He was a fringe member of a group affiliated to ours, but again I had nothing to do with his actions."

The car slowed to a halt, and Johnny gazed out at a well-lit building and realised it was the Steinberger Graf Zeppelin.

"Goodbye Mr Duncan." Menzel said as the bodyguard on Johnny's right opened his door and got out to allow Johnny to pass. Then he jumped back in along with the other thug, who appeared out of the shadows, and the BMW sped away and merged with the other red tail-lights.

"Must have been a very long cigarette?" Veronica said sarcastically, as Johnny entered their room.

"I've just met Johannes Menzel and other assorted thugs."

“What? The guy that’s supposed to be descended from Hitler!”

“Yeah, that’s him.”

“What did he want?”

“He wanted to know if I really did see the visions.”

The BMW X5 sped along the autobahn which took the Progressive Movement Three to Munich.

“Well Johannes, what do you make of our Mr Duncan?” Hans Schroeder, Menzel’s number two, said, from the front passenger’s seat.

“I think he’s telling the truth.”

“This means we have a problem.”

“Mmm, indeed it could mean that Wiedemann tells the truth and that my Grandfather, our glorious Fuhrer was indeed frightened of something he saw in 1941!”

For a moment there was only the sound of the BMW engine purring as the kilometres passed by then, suddenly, the sound of raucous laughter filled the vehicle.

The next morning the humid weather had gone, and a healthy wind blew along Amulf-Klett-Platz as Johnny and Veronica stood by the front door of the hotel. A man with a yellow bag which had Stuttgarter Zeitung on it in black letters asked them if they would like to buy a newspaper as the blue Mercedes of Matthias Wiedemann peeled off from the passing traffic and came to a halt next to them.

“Good morning,” said Matthias as he opened the rear nearside door for the pair to enter.

“Good morning,” replied Johnny as he allowed Veronica in before him.

“Miss Cahill, good day,” said Günter from the front passenger’s seat.

“Mr Wiedemann! We weren’t sure if you were coming.”

“I must.”

After Johnny and Matthias were settled in they pulled out into the traffic and headed south with Matthias checking his mirrors for any sign of being followed.

“I wouldn’t bother with that Matthias. I was taken for a drive by Johannes Menzel last night, and he knows where you stay. They watch your movements.”

Johnny looked at Veronica with raised eyebrows. “I’m afraid they look on you as a bit of a joke.”

“Not so much of a joke now that you’re here – ja!” Günter said emotionally. Johnny had to agree with that as he watched the passing buildings.

South of the city they picked up the A8 autobahn and headed east past the bustling airport. They then drove fast through the German countryside as they headed toward Munich. A coffee stop was made just outside Ulm at a roadside service area. The place reminded Johnny of the service stops back home only the coffee was a lot better. His mobile burst into life while he was taking a bite from a chocolate filled pastry.

“Yeah, hello – John Duncan.”

“Mr Duncan its DS Mitchell here I’ve been trying to contact you, we’ve picked up a man called Albert Lehmann. He’s the brother of Rudolf Lehmann, and he’s confessed to setting fire to your flat.”

“That’s interesting, thanks for letting me know.”

“I called by the Harbour View and was told you had checked out.”

“Yes, we’re taking a break for a few days.”

“Okay then sir, we’re going to charge the man with arson and attempted murder. Oh and one more thing, he said that the neo-Nazi leader, Johannes Menzel financed Rudolf Lehmann’s trip over to the UK. It seems that he -Albert Lehmann - came over himself to revenge his brother’s murder.”

“Who was that?” Veronica asked after Johnny put his mobile in his pocket. Johnny updated her on the arrest for the fire as they finished their coffees. The foursome then left the café and resumed the journey.

Matthias skilfully negotiated the roads around Munich eventually picking up the road to Rosenheim and, as they left the city suburbs, Johnny saw the jagged horizon that was the Alps rise up in the distance.

An hour later Günter needed to stop again; so they pulled into a service area beside a large lake surrounded by trees and decided to have an early lunch. The place was empty save for a family of four, who were having a late breakfast, and a couple who sat in a corner with large coffee mugs. They sat at a pine table by a window and ate sausage and bread after which Johnny and Veronica walked through the trees to the lakeside. He rolled a cigarette and sat on a rock and gazed at the mountains.

“What a great spot,” he said, blowing blue smoke out between his teeth.

“Yeah it’s good to get out of the car for a while,” said Veronica as she threw a small pebble into the water, “I don’t know how we’re going to get into this place when we get there; I mean it’s been over sixty years!”

“Yeah, well let’s get there first then we’ll see,” he said, picking a piece of tobacco from his lower lip. “DS Mitchell said that it was Menzel who financed that Lehman guy’s trip over to Scotland. Although he denied he had anything to do with it last night.”

“I wouldn’t trust any descendant of Hitler to tell the truth.”

The journey continued through rural countryside until at Rosenheim they turned south and headed into the foothills of the Alps. They followed the River Inn as it flowed out of Austria on its way to the Black Sea passing quaint villages and hamlets.

After the town of Fischbach Matthias took a slip road off the autobahn to the right and followed a country road for a few kilometres until he turned into a car park surrounded by trees.

“Here we are mein freunde,” he said, “Zankel Country Park.”

The mountains rose on either side and made Johnny feel rather small. “Jeez this country just gets better and better,” he said as he closed the car door and took a deep breath, then walked over and studied a board, which had a map showing various walking routes.

Matthias opened the boot and retrieved walking boots along with two thin walking sticks for his father. He then grabbed a backpack which he threw over a shoulder. Günter sat on the bench of a wooden picnic table to slip on and lace up his boots. The quartet then set out along a woodland path led by the sprightly Günter who, suddenly seemed to be a man half his age.

“What good can we do if half a mountain lies up against these doors?” Veronica asked Johnny, when the pair started to fall behind.

“Remember Günter used an escape hatch to get out. I guess that’s what we’re going to look for.”

After a kilometres walk they arrived at a clearing at the base of a huge cliff which had boulders piled up against the face making a huge slope.

“This was the entrance; under that rubble lies two doors,” announced Günter as he looked at the scene with dismay written across his face

Johnny stared at the rocks, which were covered in lichens and moss. "It's hard to believe anything went on here."

"Believe it Mr Duncan!" Günter exclaimed. "Now follow me."

He walked to the right of the cliff face and followed a path between bushes and shrubs. He then climbed up between two huge rocks where he stopped and started to pant and cough.

"Papa, please rest!" Matthias shouted, putting his arm around the old man's shoulders.

Günter pointed at a mound of heavy boulders. "The escape hatch is under those rocks."

Johnny looked at Matthias, and then the two men walked over and began, with some considerable effort, to move the rocks. After half an hour of hard work they were faced with a basal rock, which they managed to budge with Veronica's help. Finally a rusty green hatch cover sat and stared up at them. Matthias tried to turn the handle but it was unrelenting.

"Let me try." Johnny said.

He grunted as he pulled on the lever, but it refused to move. Matthias picked up a rock and started to hit the handle, which eventually began to move a little with every strike. Ten minutes later he had the handle turned through forty five degrees. "That must be it!" Matthias declared. He then opened the hatch and stared into the inky darkness, which was pierced by the top of a rusty ladder. He reached into his backpack and pulled out a flashlight, which he gave to Johnny before pulling out another, which he switched on and shone into the opening.

The old ladder groaned as Matthias and then Johnny climbed down, flashlight beams probing the darkness. After a three metre descent the two men stood in a two metre square empty room.

"Okay Veronica, you can come down now if you want!" Johnny shouted.

"Papa you had better stay where you are!" Matthias shouted.

Günter looked at Veronica. "After all these years I have a chance to see it again, and my son wants me to stay here!"

Two light beams focused on the ladder as firstly Veronica and then Günter descended – slowly.

When they were all standing at the bottom, Matthias said: "Well Papa, which way?"

"Only one way – that way," he said, pointing into the mountain.

Matthias shone his torch in the direction his father had indicated to reveal an opening.

"Give me your torch John; it'll make me feel safer," said Veronica

Then, one by one, they headed into what was a narrow passageway. Their torches revealed roughly hewn walls and, on the ceiling, defunct lights were connected to one another by a pinned cable. The air was foul and seemed to penetrate their souls and depress their spirits.

An overwhelming sense of claustrophobia had begun to descend on Johnny; the thought of all that rock above his head he reasoned. Then, after a few metres the claustrophobia eased as they entered a large area.

"This is where it all happened," said Günter, who took Matthias's hand as they moved further in.

Veronica suddenly screamed as she held the shaking torch beam on an object on the ground.

"What's up?" Johnny asked as he stumbled toward her.

He found himself staring down the torch beam at a leering skeletal face. "Must be one of the scientist's."

The skeleton was dressed in a lab coat which was once white, but was now dark grey.

"Oh my God!" Günter cried as he approached them.

"There's another one over here," said Matthias as he shone his flashlight in front of him.

"My colleague's." Günter said mournfully.

Johnny took the torch back from Veronica and shone it around the cavern. "I don't understand. If this is where it all happened where is the UFO; where is the other equipment?"

Günter raised himself up from praying over the remains of his former friend.

"Matthias will you give me your flashlight."

After receiving the torch, he said: "If you will follow me please."

They followed the old German as he shone his torch around the walls until it found two massive, rusty-green doors, but he didn't stop there he kept the beam moving until it found a cleft in the rock.

"Our quarters were in an old cabin outside, but Doctor Teubert kept some scientific papers in here." Günter said, as he pulled a leather bound diary from the natural fracture in the rock wall.

"Well, well what do we have here?" said a voice familiar to Johnny as powerful flashlight beams shone on them.

"Menzel!" Johnny shouted as he turned

"Very perceptive Mr Duncan."

Günter, who was standing behind the other three, swiftly shoved the diary into Matthias's backpack.

"You followed us here?" Johnny asked, peering behind the torches making out four maybe five thugs with, he assumed, more than just torches!

"Something like that; so now we're all here, its time for a cosy little chat. That's what you English say isn't it Mr Duncan?"

"I wouldn't know I'm not English!" Johnny retorted. He then watched as the flashlight beams became brighter as the neo-Nazis came closer. "What is it you want to talk about Menzel?"

"The Bell and the other scientific stuff."

"Where is it?" Johnny asked, shrugging his shoulders.

"What? You mean he hasn't told you! Come now Günter, it's time to lay your cards on the table."

"What does he mean papa?" Matthias asked as Johnny and Veronica looked quizzically at the old man.

"Come on papa tell them." Menzel said cynically.

Günter looked thoughtfully at his feet. "We all knew that the Bell was powered by a small nuclear reactor. There was even a device which enriched uranium – a centrifuge. We realised *just* what it was we had in our hands. Doctor Teubert and the others, to my astonishment at the time, were Germans not Nazi's. They wanted to hush the whole thing up, but I was an idealistic youngster; my head was full of dreams – put there by Hitler; so I contacted the Furher's office and told them that something extraordinary had been discovered. When Teubert found out what I had done and Hitler and Himmler were coming he reprimanded me.

I was for telling them everything. They pleaded with me to stay quiet. Eventually I agreed to remain quiet until after the initial demonstration. An intelligent man, Franz Teubert, he seemed to know what was going to happen."

“So what happened to the Bell after the place was sealed up?” Johnny asked.

“After almost a year of hiding away and a lot of soul searching I couldn’t stand it anymore; so I contacted the Americans and eventually managed to convince them what lay under this mountain. They mounted a daring raid and somehow succeeded in taking the Bell and the equipment back to America.”

Johnny and Veronica were thunderstruck by the revelation.

“So you sold out your country Wiedemann.” Menzel taunted.

Günter raised his head and stared at Menzel with loathing in his eyes. “Sold out my country!” he shouted. “My country had been poisoned by people like you!”

Johnny put his hand on Günter’s shoulder. “What is your part in all this Menzel?”

“Carrying on from where your dead Fuhrer left off?” Veronica mocked.

“That mad Austrian. No Miss Cahill I serve someone more powerful than some Nazi. I have been recruited to make sure the dimensional tests go ahead.”

“Samael – you’re with the demons!” Johnny exclaimed.

Menzel laughed - cruelly

“What did he offer you – immortality?”

“Again, very perceptive Mr Duncan. We’ve all been offered a place in the new world, which is why the extra-dimensional experiments go ahead.”

“Why the neo-Nazism,” asked Matthias.

“Because it suited our purpose. I have been given large sums of money through donations from individuals and companies. You have no idea how many neo-Nazis there are throughout the world.

“And a lot of this money was re-donated to the tests - from a bona fide benefactor of course,” said Johnny sarcastically.

“It must be tiresome being right all the time Mr Duncan.”

“It has its advantages. Like I know it was you who sent Rudolf Lehmann over to kill me.”

“Ah yes, that hot-headed simpleton. And you’re still alive,” said Menzel cynically.

“Well that’s about to change,” he continued as the sound of safety catches being released filled the cavern.

“Now look Menzel... What can we prove? We’ve seen an empty cave in Bavaria.”

Matthias secretively reached into his back pack, and whispered: “When I shout guard your eyes’ then run to the escape hatch!”

“I can’t take the chance,” Menzel continued. “Anyway, conveniently, I have you all here together. Who’s going to find the bodies in this tomb?”

“I’m not coming son,” whispered Günter. “I’m not leaving this time. You three must get out of here I would just hold you back.”

“But Papa...”

“Do it now!” Günter ordered.

Matthias pulled a ring on the black object he had in his hand and then threw it toward the thugs. “Now!”

“What...?” Menzel shouted as a stunning bright light filled the cavern.

The three ran toward the tunnel under a hail of bullets, which ricocheted off the walls in every direction. Matthias turned back to look at his father. “I can’t leave him!”

Johnny grabbed him, and shouted: “Come on! He’s given us this chance; we’ve got to take it.”

They reached the tunnel, and Johnny pushed Veronica then Matthias in, before looking back to see that Menzel and his men were regaining their eyesight. He then ran on through the tunnel, as torch beams and bullets danced around him.

The ladder groaned louder than before as they ascended toward the disk of light. Then, as they fell out of the hatch, the sound of running boots filled the tunnel below. Johnny kicked the ladder, which gave out a final moan as it fell away into the dark. He then closed and secured the lid, and then he and Matthias rolled two heavy boulders over the top. The threesome then stood and looked at the hatch and caught their breath.

"Come on, back to the car I have a feeling this won't hold *them* for long!" Johnny shouted.

They ran past the cliff face and then through the trees to the car park. Matthias pulled out his keys and pressed a button; the lights of the Mercedes flashed as the doors unlocked. He then jumped into the driver's seat and fired up the engine. When they were all in he reversed and then sped out of the car park.

"Matthias," said Johnny, still panting. "Go in the other direction. They'll expect us to go back the way we came. We need time to think."

"Okay," said Mathias nodding.

They made a brief stop to pick up a vignette, which was required for the drive through Austria otherwise Mathias sped along the autobahn, which took them to Innsbruck under the gaze of the Tyrol Mountains.

"Where did you get the flare from?" Johnny asked.

"Günter told me to pack it and a pistol just in case. I don't know where he got them from."

"A remarkable man – your father!"

"Yes," said Matthias as he stared thoughtfully at the road which flowed toward them.

"What now?" Veronica asked.

Matthias looked at her in the rear view mirror. "I'll need to inform the police about my father."

"I would hang fire on that Matthias until we see how this is going to play out."

Johnny said as he gazed out at the scenery which was bathed in the spring sunshine.

"We're screwed without any evidence!"

"Veronica can help with that." Matthias said with a grin.

"What...?" A bewildered Johnny asked.

Matthias looked at Veronica in the mirror again, and said: "If you would look in the pocket on the back of my pack please Veronica."

She screamed with joy as she pulled out the leather-bound diary.

"Papa put it into the pack at the first sign of trouble."

The three looked at each other then burst into loud raucous laughter.

"I'll need to say it again Matthias: a remarkable man – Günter."

Once the laughter had subsided Matthias said: "I did not want to leave him. I should have carried him out."

"Listen here Matthias." Veronica said. "He didn't want to come. He wasn't going to come back even if the trouble hadn't happened. I think he had felt guilt throughout his life at what he had done all these years ago. He's with his colleague's now; with the ghosts of his past. He gave us the chance to live on and we've got to use it!"

"Yes, you're right," acknowledged Matthias, overtaking a truck filled with red and blue gas canisters.

They crossed the River Inn which was almost bright blue with melt water off the Alps. *The road followed the river and was like a friend who was guiding them on*, thought Johnny.

"So now we have the evidence, what do we do with it?" Johnny asked rhetorically.

After a few moments, Veronica said: "One of us will need to hide the diary in a safe place for the moment; or until I contact my newspaper and tell them what's happened and get them to inform our 'ear' in the White House."

Matthias pulled into a petrol station on the outskirts of Innsbruck. Johnny and Veronica went into the shop while Matthias fuelled up the car. They bought coffee and sandwiches then paid for the petrol.

Matthias drove the car around the back of the building where they sat and ate, hidden from the main road.

"So where do we go?" Matthias asked. "Do we risk going back to Stuttgart?"

"I think we should, answered Johnny. "We'll exchange hotels. Do you have somewhere to go other than the house in Fellbach?"

"Yes I do."

"Menzel's not going to shoot us in broad daylight. These companies and rich people who finance him would not approve." Johnny said with a wide grin.

"Okay let's go." Matthias announced, after draining his coffee cup.

They travelled along the E60 through some of the world's most spectacular scenery arriving in the suburban Feldkirch area at five pm.

After a short meal break they headed on through the town of Bergenz, which sat on the shores of Lake Constance. A paddle ship steamed lazily into the harbour as they drove along the lakeside road, which took them back into Germany where the landscape then started to flatten.

"You know Matthias," said Johnny as they neared Ulm "One thing that puzzles me: weren't there any question's asked about the disappearance of Doctor Teubert?"

"I would suppose Heisenberg was approached by some of Hitler's thugs in Berlin and told to keep quiet; or perhaps they simply announced that he had met with an accident."

When they eventually drove into Stuttgart Matthias drew up a few streets away from the Steinberger Graf Zeppelin and a weary Johnny and Veronica climbed out.

"I won't ask where you're going; I have your number and you have mine. I'll be in touch" Johnny said, holding open the front passenger door. "And Matthias, be careful"

"You too and here take this; you're the main man – ja!" Matthias said, handing Johnny the diary.

Johnny and Veronica approached the front desk of the hotel where a young woman in a neat, blue suit sat in front of a computer screen.

"Can I help you?" she asked in German.

"Yes I'm Mr Duncan, and we would like to check out tonight please," said Johnny.

"I am afraid you will have to pay for tonight as it is eight-thirty," said the receptionist switching to English.

"Okay," said Johnny as he handed over his debit card.

Ten minutes later they were back at the desk with their bags. Johnny nervously surveyed the foyer, as he asked the receptionist to call a cab for them. *There were couples heading for the bar or the restaurants, nothing sinister* he thought – *so far!* He gave the woman a tip and told her that if someone asked for them - they had left in a private car.

Eventually, after ten long minutes the automatic glass doors slid open, and a well-built, dark-haired man in a green sweater and jeans walked in, and said: "Taxi Mr Duncan?"

"Yes," answered Johnny as he and Veronica picked up their bags.

Outside, the driver put their bags in the boot and then opened the nearside passenger door of the white Mercedes. He then jumped into the driver's seat, and asked: "Where to?"

Johnny looked into the rear view mirror. "We need to find another hotel tonight. Do you know of one which will have a room available?"

The cabbie spoke in fast German into his mobile radio. Then asked: "What area of Stuttgart would you prefer?"

Johnny looked at Veronica. "Around the airport."

"Okay, that's easy," said the man as he turned around and started the engine.

They drove south, through the night time traffic. Johnny gazed at Veronica, her placid facial features orange in the glow from the street lights. "You okay?" he whispered as he put his hand on hers.

"Yeah, I'm fine," she replied huskily and then smiled.

They crossed the busy A8 Autobahn as an aeroplane flew overhead. Then after a few moments the cab left the southbound *Bundesstrabe* at the next slip road and drew up in front of a six-storey block.

"Hey, it's a Holiday Inn!" exclaimed Veronica

"They will have a room for you here," said the cabbie.

Johnny and Veronica retrieved their bags, paid the driver and then entered the bright foyer of the hotel. They booked a twin room on the fourth floor, which was clean and functional, but not very big.

Veronica threw her bag on one of the beds and then placed her laptop on the table by the window and opened the lid. "I'll email the paper and tell them what's happened."

"Okay, said Johnny as he picked up the telephone receiver. "I need some clothes washed.

"Good idea, said Veronica as she started tapping away on her keyboard, "I could do with getting a few things washed as well."

After a few moments Veronica stood up. "Shit!"

Johnny, who was stretched out on one of the beds, turned on to his right side and rested his head in the open hand of his bent right arm. "What's up?"

"Looks like they want confirmation that I'm not wasting their money: I've to go back to the States tomorrow."

Chapter Twenty

Johnny hugged Veronica as they stood at departures in Terminal One of Stuttgart Airport. "Give me a phone when you get there. Caitlin phoned this morning, she says to remind you about Disney World."

"I haven't forgotten," said Veronica, wiping a tear from the side of her eye. "Listen John I have something to tell you ..."

He put a finger to her mouth. "Not now, tell me later, as long as it's not about another man."

"No," she smiled. "Nothing like that."

They kissed and then she joined the queue for the security check carrying her laptop.

Johnny, whose flight wasn't until later, headed into a shop and bought a British newspaper. He then strolled into a busy café and got himself a latte and sat at a table which faced a departures monitor.

After a while someone sat down beside him. He paid no heed and kept on reading an article on the British monarchy as another person sat at the table then another.

"Really Mr Duncan German newspapers are much better than the British gutter press," said a voice in German accented English.

The voice sent terror through every nerve in his body. "Menzel!" he exclaimed as he raised his head and eyed the German and two of his thugs sitting around the table. "So you managed to slither out of the hole in the mountain."

"I'd like to sit around and trade insults with you all day, but let's get to business. You have something I want, and I have something you want."

"What do I have that you want?" Matthew asked cynically.

"Come on Mr Duncan don't be tiresome I know about the diary. Old Günter was very talkative before he joined his colleagues."

"That man was a hero."

"A dead hero!"

"You make me sick. What is it that you've got that I would possibly want?"

Menzel reached under the table and then placed Veronica's laptop on the table.

"What...? But you can't have, I just watched her go through security."

"As I told you before there are neo-Nazis everywhere."

Johnny felt his heart begin to sink. He looked around and saw passengers... happy passengers.

"Now Mr Duncan we understand each other – ja!"

"Where is she?"

"She's safe for now."

"Okay I'll get you the diary," growled Johnny.

"Right, where is it?"

"It's at the hotel we stayed in last night – the Holiday Inn."

Menzel turned to Schroeder. "Go and get Miss Cahill we'll meet you at the car."

In the car park Johnny was pushed into the back of the black BMW by Meine, the driver, as Menzel climbed into the front passenger seat.

"No tricks Mr Duncan," said Menzel as Meine got in behind the wheel.

The opposite door to where Johnny sat opened, and Veronica climbed in followed by Schroeder.

"Veronica, am I glad to see you?"

"Johnny!" she cried.

Menzel turned to face them, and said: "How touching." Then turning to Meine, he said: "Right let's go to the Holiday Inn."

While Schroeder stayed with Veronica Johnny led Menzel and Meine into the Hotel.

"Hello," he said approaching the reception desk.

"Mr Duncan?" the receptionist said.

"Could I have the key-card for the room we stayed in last night please? I've lost one of my rings – it has sentimental value," he said as he turned and saw Menzel and Meine loitering around the door area.

"It may have been cleaned."

"Maybe I could go and have a look?"

"Yes, okay."

Johnny took the card and headed to the elevator. At the same time Meine left Menzel and slipped into the elevator behind him. The doors opened on to the fourth floor and Meine followed Johnny along the deep, red carpet of the hallway. They entered the room and Johnny took out his penknife and went into the bathroom. Meine watched as he unscrewed the vent cover on the back wall above the cistern.

"Polizei!"

Schroeder turned sharply to look at the figure that had knocked on the window of the BMW beside him. Then he pressed a button and the window lowered. "Let me see your ID card," he barked.

An old Walther P38 pistol was levelled at him through the open window. "Will this do?" A familiar voice to Veronica said. "Put your gun on the front passenger's seat and come out of the car –slowly," continued Matthias.

Schroeder threw his semi-automatic onto the front passenger's seat and opened the door, then climbed out of the car.

"Now, hands behind your back. Veronica will you hold the gun?"

"With pleasure, and nice to see you."

They tied the thug's hands, gagged him and then shut him in the boot.

"The diary's hidden in the room we stayed in last night," said Veronica as they ran toward the front door. But they stopped abruptly when they saw Menzel, sitting in the foyer, through the glass.

"Round the back, there must be a fire escape or something," said Matthias.

They rounded the corner, which took them to the back of the hotel. A white truck sat beside open double doors, and a man in blue overalls jumped down from the open rear and then carried three cardboard boxes into the building.

The pair slipped through the open doors, after the delivery man disappeared into the darkness, and found a hallway that led to a swing door and, to their relief, a stairway to the right.

Johnny removed the cover and then stuck a hand inside and pulled out the diary. Meine immediately grabbed the book with one hand while pointing a handgun at Johnny with the other.

"Hoi!" Someone shouted.

As Meine turned he was caught on the side of the head by a ferocious left hook from Matthias. He collapsed onto the tiled floor of the bathroom, his pistol sliding around the back of the cistern.

"Matthias! Veronica! "Johnny shouted joyfully as he hugged them.

"Right let's go, said Matthias, "down the back stairs."

When they were out of the bathroom Johnny slammed the door and pushed the back of a chair, he had hauled from beside the window, under the handle.

Outside, they ran over the car park to the blue Mercedes, Johnny stopping briefly at Menzel's car to grab his bag. Matthias gunned his car when they were all in and, they flew out on to the *Bundesstrabe*.

"Where will we go?" Matthias asked.

"I'm going to put this," Johnny held up the diary, "in a safe place – in Scotland." He then turned around to face Veronica in the back, and said: "How about you Veronica what are you going to do?"

"I've no change of clothes; Menzel has my laptop; I'm coming with you for now." Matthias guided the car on to the east bound side of the A8 Autobahn. "You'll need an airport then; Stuttgart's out – too obvious."

"How about Munich?" Johnny asked.

"No I think Menzel might head there after Stuttgart. I'll take you to Frankfurt; it's a big airport – more people to mingle with. Would one of you start phoning airlines for a flight to the UK."

The journey to Frankfurt took an hour and forty minutes. The airport lay to the south-west of the city and sprawled over a large area. Matthias drew up in front of terminal two where the British Airways desk was located, Veronica having booked them on one of their connecting flights to Edinburgh.

"Well, thanks again Matthias. Will you be okay?" Johnny said.

"Yes I have many friends both gay and straight."

"I never realised you were... you know!"

"Gay. Yes, since I left school."

"No doubt we'll meet again," said Veronica as she raised herself over the back of the driver's seat and kissed him on the cheek.

When they were sitting on the London bound flight, which was speeding along the runway, Johnny said: "I never realised Matthias was gay."

"Yeah, I knew by his mannerisms."

"I guess it takes a woman to notice such things."

"You sexist beast!" she laughed as they soared up through the thick, grey clouds.

When the plane levelled out at over thirty thousand feet Veronica turned her head to face Johnny. "Where are you going to put the diary?"

"I'll tell you once I've made the phone call."

He then gazed out at the top of the cloud cover they had just broken through. "As a child I used lie on the grass of the park not far from my home and gaze up past the wiry branches of the trees and dream of floating up to touch the clouds. I thought that if I ever achieved this I would meet God, all white-haired, playing a harp or something."

"That's the image of God we, as Christians, were taught at elementary school," said Veronica, looking past Johnny at the clouds.

"A benevolent old man who looked after us in life and death."

"Yep!"

"All this before we grew up and started asking awkward questions. All this before life's realities began to bite."

"I suppose we were lucky, some kids aren't sheltered from the realities."

After thirty minutes the plane again broke through the clouds, downward, into a rain-lashed Heathrow. Johnny could just make out the terminal buildings through the watery haze.

Veronica gripped his arm as the plane bumped onto and then sped down the slick runway eventually coming to a halt and then taxiing into a slot.

“Well that’s the first part of the journey,” sighed Johnny.

“Yeah it’s on to Bonnie Scotland now,” said Veronica, undoing her seat belt.

Edinburgh Airport was relatively quiet as they strolled out of baggage retrieval and into the main concourse. Men in suits with briefcases scurried around looking at departure monitors while families sat in cafes waiting to go on holiday.

The taxi journey to the city centre took twenty minutes. In which time they passed street after street of blackened sandstone tenement buildings before entering the busy thoroughfare that was Princes Street.

The black cab drew up in front of the Ramada Mount Royal Hotel, a modern building that stood incongruently next to Jenner’s department store and gazed up at Edinburgh Castle.

They checked in and then dined in an Indian restaurant in Rose Street, which lay a block away from Princes Street, but ran parallel with it. After the hot curry and a pint of Guinness Johnny felt a lot better than he had done for days, and declared: “There’s nothing like Scottish food and beer to get you back on form.”

They left the eatery and strolled along the cobbled street past pubs and shops. The pair then turned down Castle Street and onto Princes Street, where they encountered couples window shopping and homeless people with dogs asking for money.

The evening was mild with only a slight breeze as the maroon city buses thundered down the road occasionally stopping to allow smartly dressed youngsters out, heading off for a night on the town.

In the hotel they went to the bar for a night cap before retiring. They sat at a table by a window and admired the illuminated castle, which looked as if it hovered above the city.

“I’ll make that phone call first thing in the morning,” said Johnny stifling a yawn.

“And I’ll have to buy some clothes.” Veronica said with a smirk.

Chapter Twenty one

Johnny walked through the large, grey stone arch and on up the drive past two sides of a rusty iron gate which lay discarded on either side each step producing a crunch from the rough gravel.

The dry tangled weeds in the unkempt garden on either side of the drive rustled in the wind and a bird screeched in the distance making Johnny glance anxiously from side to side.

The house was a Gothic behemoth, built of the same grey stone as the arch. Turrets reached up from each corner and were silhouetted against the starry sky. The lower windows were of the Gothic arch type and the black paint of the frames was flaking badly. The upper windows were oddly circular and were latticed. No light spilled out from any of them.

Johnny climbed the few steps up to the oak double door, which lay under an ornate portico and tried the handle. The door was unlocked, so he pushed the right hand side, which swung easily into the dark. As he entered he heard a wail, which made him shudder, but he proceeded on into the claustrophobic black.

The wooden hallway floor was partially covered with threadbare carpeting and the worn floorboards creaked with every step Johnny made. Through the gloom he could just make out a big staircase at the back. He heard another wail as he nervously opened a door to his right. The room was full of the ghostly white shapes of furniture covered with dustsheets. He jumped when he saw his reflection in a large mirror on the wall behind the door. Then, as he hurried out of the room, he heard another wail, which sounded like someone calling: "Dad!"

He moved to another door on the left and noticed that it was ajar and that an eerie red glow was creeping through the gap. Another wail filled his head: "Dad, dad!" *My God*, he thought, it sounded like his children; no, it *was* Caitlin and Brad. Slowly, he pushed the door open and stealthily crept in.

A large chair sat in front of a roaring fire and the glow was pushing the darkness away. A head bobbed above the back of the chair and Johnny realised someone was sitting in front of the fire. He moved nervously forward as the cry of his children came again: "Dad, dad, help us!"

Suddenly, as he reached the chair, a figure jumped up and turned to face him. "Oh my God!" he cried. Standing before him was the figure of the Dark Angel. He could make out the tall, black clothed body and the dirty shoulder length hair, but the face ... it was Veronica's!

Johnny sat upright in the dark. He was sweating, and he wondered where he was. Gradually, however, remembrance descended over him, especially when he saw Veronica sleeping peacefully next to him.

He jumped out of bed and rifled through his clothing until he found his mobile. Nervously he pressed in the number for Sue.

"Hello," said a sleepy voice.

"Sue, its Johnny."

"Johnny! What do you want at this time of the morning? You been drinking again?"

He looked at the digital clock on the bedside cupboard; the red numbers read: three-twenty.

"No! Look Sue, is everything all right? Are the kids all right?"

"Yes, goodnight; or should it be good morning!"

The line went dead, and Johnny threw the phone on top of his clothes then climbed back into the bed.

The next morning he drew back the curtains and marvelled at the sight before him. Princes Street Gardens in all their green loveliness stretched along the opposite side of the street. The Gothic Scott Monument stood in the upper gardens like a stone version of Thunderbird Three, and the castle, perched on its volcanic plug, looked glorious in the rising sun.

“Time for breakfast.” he announced as Veronica turned over in the bed and pulled the top of the duvet up around her shoulders.

After breakfast Veronica did a little shopping before they crossed Princes Street and walked along the side of the stately Royal Scottish Academy building. Buskers were setting up for another day’s performance as the pair passed the pillared building of the National Gallery.

“Okay! Where are we going?” Veronica asked as they started to climb the steps, which would take them to the top of The Mound.

“We’re going to the headquarters of The Bank of Scotland; I phoned an old friend who’s going to put the diary in a special safety deposit box.”

When they reached the top of the steps Veronica stopped and turned around to take in the view. Johnny, however, kept on walking with eyes wide, for coming skipping toward him was Caitlin!

“Baby what are you doing here?”

“Hi dad, I’m here with mum. We saw you climbing the stairs. Mum’s over there in the car,” she said, pointing over to the road.

Johnny glanced along the parked cars, but couldn’t see Sue’s car.

“Did you bring me a present back from your holiday? What’s that under your arm?”

“It’s...”

“Oh, can I have it dad?”

Johnny took the diary from under his arm.

“No!” Veronica screamed as she ran toward them.

Caitlin snatched the diary when Johnny’s attention was focused on Veronica. “No Caitlin... What?”

The young girl suddenly grew in size and her skin became pallid and wrinkled. The Dark Angel then threw the diary to two men standing beside a green Audi before she vanished. Johnny recognised Menzel and Schroeder as they climbed into the car.

He ran up and slapped the side of the Audi in frustration as it sped away. Menzel looked out of the rear window and gave him a ‘Hitler salute’. Johnny then slumped to the ground and sat on the pavement with his head in his hands. “How could I’ve been so stupid,” he groaned.

Veronica sat down beside him and put an arm around his shoulders. “Don’t blame yourself, all of us would have done the same thing in your position.”

He looked up at the sky. “I was suspicious when I couldn’t see Sue’s car, but when I looked at her; it was Caitlin – it was my baby!”

A man in a pinstripe suit carrying a briefcase walked past them and then began to descend the stairs. Johnny stared at him for a moment and then said: “Well that’s it! How did we ever think we were going to escape from them?”

“Come on now John, don’t get despondent.”

“What do we do now?”

“Well let’s get away from here for now,” she replied.

As they climbed down the stairs, Veronica said: “These dimensional tests are to be held somewhere in the Mojave Desert – right!

“Yeah.”

“Right let’s get back to the hotel and book two seats over to the States. We’ll go to Washington first; I have to touch base with the paper, then we’ll go over to the West Coast.”

“How are we going to find out where exactly these tests are taking place?”

“You leave that to me!” she said with a smile.

Chapter Twenty two

Johnny took his earphones off as the movie he had chosen finished and then took a sip of the orange juice he had been handed. He then turned to Veronica, who sat next to him on the British Airways flight to Washington Dulles. "Quantum of Solace – the new Bond movie; not bad, but I still miss the humour."

Veronica lowered her book. "James Bond huh! Sexist rubbish!"

"Hey! What happened to Sean Connery being the sexiest man in the world?"

"I like the men, not the movies."

"Who's being sexist now?"

"It's not the same thing."

"Ah well," he sighed, looking for another film.

"Why don't we just talk for a while," said Veronica, putting her book in the pocket on the back of the seat in front of her.

"What do you want to talk about?"

"Your childhood; your parents?"

Johnny dropped his earphones on to his lap. "Not much to tell really. I went to school in Arbroath. I liked sports and wanted to be a footballer."

"What stopped you?"

"When I got a bit older I became involved in under-age drinking and that was the end of any sports career. I did, however, manage to get 5 O-grades and two Highers. My father was an engineer in a local works and my mother worked part time when she could. What about your childhood?"

"I was brought up in Butler Ohio," said Veronica as she took a sip of her lemonade, "my father was the local Fire Chief; he was an authoritarian. He kept my mother tied to the kitchen sink, while he was either working or chasing other women. I hated him for what he did to her, and I swore that I would never let that happen to me. I always wanted a career in Journalism; so I made sure I got the grades to enter Merrill College."

"Are your parents still alive?"

"Mom still lives in the same house. My father died of a heart attack three years ago. The saddest thing is that after hating him all these years I cried my eyes out at the funeral."

"What does your sister do?"

"Ann's a housewife in Cleveland. She has a fine husband, Ian, and a son, David, who's, funnily enough, just applied to enter Merrill College."

"My sister Gemma's a solicitor in Dundee. She's like me: relationship's not being a strong point."

A meal of lasagne and vegetables was then served as Johnny settled down to another movie.

Veronica put her hand on Johnny's arm as the film she was watching finished. Johnny turned and smiled and signalled for her to take off the earphones. "What was it that you wanted tell me?"

"When?"

"At Stuttgart Airport. You said you had something to tell me."

The seatbelt sign suddenly illuminated and passengers started to return to their seats. A stewardess asked Johnny if he had any rubbish, and he put some empty plastic cups into her black, plastic bag.

Veronica touched his cheek, and said: "I'll tell you somewhere quieter."

Veronica's house lay in the town of Annandale Virginia - part of the Washington Metropolitan Area. The streets of the area were broad and leafy, and the houses were set well back from the road and were of various sizes. The drives that led up to the garages were infested with cars.

"I rent this place from a woman I know who works for the government," Veronica said as they walked up the driveway toward a two-storey, red-brick house, after climbing out of a yellow cab.

Veronica unlocked the brown-painted front door and pushed against a mound of mail.

"Come on in," she said, quickly picking up the letters and promotional leaflets.

"Mainly stuff for the recycler," she said to herself.

Johnny then followed her into the lounge, which was spacious and had a large window that looked out onto the front lawn. A small dining room, with a polished table and four chairs, was connected to the lounge by an archway.

"Sit down John until I get things sorted," said Veronica, before she pushed open a door in the dining room and disappeared.

He sat on a large, cream settee with brown cushions at either end. The walls were painted in a light, blue and were overhung with a white ceiling. A large, slim television hung like a black painting on the wall which faced the settee. In a corner, a cupboard had a large photograph of a smiling Veronica in between two women; one older; one younger: mother and sister, Johnny assumed.

Veronica strolled back into the lounge, and said: "Come on Mr Duncan time for bed."

"What? It's a bit early."

"It's not sleeping I've got on my mind."

"Oh the things you've got to do for queen and country," Johnny sighed as he rose off the settee.

Johnny looked at his watch; it was 7.40 pm. He had been woken up by a rumbling stomach and the shouts of children, which had drifted in from the street.

The bedroom was big with warm, amethyst-coloured walls. A sliding mirrored door wardrobe stared across a white shag pile carpet at the bed. Johnny raised his head and looked at his reflection – he needed a shave.

Veronica rolled over and kissed him "Would you like to go out for some dinner?"

"Yeah I want to sample some American food – those big platefuls I keep hearing about."

"Huh! Just a waste."

After showering, and Johnny having his shave, they left by the rear door. The evening was humid; the sun had begun to drop out of the sky casting golden rays over the houses.

Veronica hauled up her garage door and unlocked her silver Buick.

"Nice car," said Johnny as he sat in the passenger's seat.

"Thanks," replied Veronica, starting the engine. The vehicle suddenly filled with the sound of an announcer talking about the Washington Redskins.

"What type of food do you want to eat?" She asked as she reversed the car out of the garage.

"Anything American."

"Okay well, I know just the place."

They drove along the road and then took a left and headed along a busier road where houses eventually gave way to shopping malls and restaurants.

"Hey look at that – Fuddruckers!" Johnny exclaimed.

"Yeah it's a burger joint. I keep forgetting, you haven't been to the States before."

They eventually pulled into a parking lot outside a restaurant where a red neon sign, under a yellow neon star announced 'Silverado'.

Veronica undid her seat belt. "This is a popular place, I hope we can get a table."

Inside, a waitress dressed in a red and white vertical striped shirt told them that they were in luck: there were two vacant tables. They chose to sit by the window on the lower level.

The restaurant, as the name suggested, followed a western theme with cowboy paintings and Native American woven rugs hung on the walls.

"Yeehaw," said Johnny as he sat down.

"Oh my God!" Veronica exclaimed. "You're not going to embarrass me are you?"

"No mam!"

Another woman in a red and white striped shirt appeared at the table and announced that she would be their waitress for the evening. After handing them a menu she asked them if they would like something to drink.

"An orange juice please," said Johnny.

Veronica eyed Johnny, and then said: "A white wine for me please."

After the waitress scuttled away, Veronica said: "Not having a beer tonight?"

Johnny looked up from his menu, "Nah, I'm going to give up the booze for a while. Funny thing is, despite all the hassle that's been going on, I feel more contented than I have done for years."

After the waitress cleared away the dishes Johnny sat back and patted his stomach. "Man, those fajitas were great. I think I'm going to like it here in the States. When does the gunfight start?"

Veronica coughed as she sipped her wine and then said: "When I get you home."

"Wow! Just what I fancy: a feisty American woman."

The next morning after a breakfast of coffee and more coffee Veronica stood in front of the mirrored doors of her wardrobe brushing her brown hair. "What do you want to do today John?"

"I was going to come with you and see how a big city newspaper operates," he said as he strolled into the bedroom.

"Pretty boring I would have thought. Wouldn't you rather see some of the sights?"

"Oh I see, you don't want a small town hack showing you up," he said with a grin."

"Not at all; I thought, as its you're first time here...you know!"

"Yeah well, I'd like to go to the National Air and Space Museum and see the Spirit of St Louis I suppose."

"Okay – let's go!"

The day was steadily gathering heat as they drove along the Capitol Beltway on the way to downtown Washington DC. The traffic, according to Veronica, was light, as she turned left, at an intersection, on to the Henry Shirley Memorial Highway where the surrounding area had gone from mainly low-rise residential to occasionally high-rise residential.

Eventually the freeway became many freeways at different levels and veered to the right as it passed the United States Air force Memorial building.

"Hey there's the Pentagon!" Johnny shouted as the five-sided building loomed up on the left.

They crossed over the bottle green Potomac River and cruised into the centre of Washington. Veronica then negotiated her way through several busy streets before she drew up beside the large white cubes that housed the National Air and Space Museum.

"There you go John," she said, looking at her watch, "I'll meet you back here at say...one o'clock.

"Okay, see you," he said as he gave her a kiss and then climbed out of the car.

Inside the museum there were hordes of children milling about waiting on teachers and parents for tickets. Johnny made his way through the crowds and entered America's celebration of flight and space exploration.

The central atrium was impressive; aeroplanes of various ages, including the 'Spirit of St Louis' - hung from the ceiling as if frozen in flight. *Well*, he thought, *this is good, but why didn't she want me to see her work?*

Two hours later and Johnny stood on Independence Avenue beside where he had been dropped off and surveyed the passing cars for the silver Buick. The traffic was heavy and noisy, and Johnny found his mind longing for escape.

Veronica finally drew up ten minutes later and gave him a wave. He ran along to the car and slumped into the passenger's seat.

"Well, did you see the 'Spirit of St Louis'?" she asked with a smile.

"Yeah I did and a hell of a lot more as well."

"Want some lunch?"

"Yup!"

Veronica swung the car out into the traffic and headed for the Potomac. "Well, we're heading for the west coast tomorrow morning – 9.15 flight - Ronald Reagan to Los Angeles."

"Good girl."

"That's not all. I know where the tests are taking place."

"You're just something else."

Chapter Twenty Three

Johnny and Veronica drove out of Los Angeles International Airport in a metallic green Pontiac and followed the signs for Interstate 10. The freeway they were on was a river of flowing metal in both directions under a broiling sun. They eventually picked up the 'ten' and headed east past the shimmering glass and metal towers of downtown Los Angeles.

"This is something else; I can't believe I'm really here!" exclaimed Johnny, who was driving.

"Just keep on this freeway; we're heading for Phoenix."

The flatness of suburban Los Angeles eventually gave way to a hilly area where big houses gazed down at the busy road. After the huge Kellogg Intersection the landscape flattened out again, but was fringed with peaked mountains on the eastern side.

"How about some grub Veronica?" Johnny asked as Lynyrd Skynyrd asked for their bullets back on the radio.

"Yeah, pull-in wherever you want."

Life size replicas of dinosaurs stood at the roadside in Cabazon, the town Johnny had chosen to eat in. "Jeez, it's roasting," he said as he opened the driver's side door, "the cars air-conditioning gives you a false impression of the outside temperature."

After some pancakes and coffee in a diner called Bedrocks they were back on the road again in a flat, desert-type landscape dominated by a huge tower of a casino, which looked totally out of place.

The land became craggy as the road climbed out of the green oasis that was Palm Springs and, after the summit of the mountain, it land flattened out again before it began a gentle descent.

"Is this still the Mojave then?" Johnny asked looking at a large saguaro cactus.

"No, I think we've passed into the Sonoran Desert," said Veronica, looking at the roadmap she had found in the glove department. "I think we should stop at a town called Blythe up ahead and find a motel. We need to leave the interstate just after it, but we should rest and refuel."

As they drove into Blythe the sun had begun to set turning the desert landscape a pinkish-red.

"Wow! What a great colour." Johnny remarked.

"Yeah, it's something special isn't it?"

They checked in to a Travelodge and spent a comfortable air-conditioned night.

"What are we going to do when we get there Veronica?" Johnny asked as they sat in the forecourt of a gas station with coffees and muffins the next morning.

"Try to get in and get them to stop the tests. We did all right under the mountain in Bavaria."

"Yeah, but we had Mathias and Günter there. This place will be a populated government site I assume."

"Well, let's see," she said, nodding for him to start the engine.

They crossed the Colorado River, which was on its way to the Gulf of California with parts of the Grand Canyon, and entered Arizona. Then, at the town of Quartzite they left the interstate and headed north along a two-lane that stretched into the scrubland, straight, like a ruled black pencil line on vellum.

They came to a crossroads, and Veronica said: "Turn right here John."

She looked at him as they drove and then exclaimed: "No wait John, turn back!"

“What, back to the I 10?”

Veronica rubbed the sides of the bridge of her nose with the index finger and thumb of her right hand. “No, head north.”

“What’s wrong, are we lost?”

“What? No! I mean yeah. I just got mixed up, that’s all!”

She studied the map. “We’ll need to turn left ahead and cross the Colorado and then look for the 95.”

They drove through the dusty desert and eventually stopped at a town called Parker where they had coffee and pancakes in an old diner on the main street.

The bridge over the Colorado River reminded Johnny of something he once constructed out of Meccano. And the water reminded him of milky coffee: light brown and frothy at the edges.

Back in California, they left the Colorado Valley and drove through the arid, featureless landscape until they came to a crossroads where Johnny filled the tank at a gas station. There was a red digital read –out above the door, which told him that the temperature was 92 degrees Fahrenheit.

The 95 took them through a flat land, with dried up river beds, to Needles, a town which lay in the Mojave Valley. They took Pew Road out of town, which skirted agricultural land before climbing to the Needles Highway.

“We need to take the next left John,” said Veronica.

They turned onto a narrow road, which climbed up the rocky hillside.

“Look out for a dirt track on the right.”

A few hundred metres further on there *was* a dusty track on the right. The only problem was that a large mesh metal gate with a huge padlocked chain spanned it. A sign on the centre simply read: KEEP OUT.

Chapter Twenty Four

Michael Catone stepped out of the shower and grabbed a white towel from a neatly folded pile, which sat on a stainless steel shelf and dried off. He then wiped the condensation from the mirrored door of the cabinet above the cistern and lathered his angular jaw with white shaving foam. Then, taking a safety razor from a holder on the sink, he closely shaved the stubble from his face. He had been summoned to a meeting with Director Blakely at Langley; so he wanted to look dapper.

Out on the freeway heading for Fairfax County he thought of his father, Adriano, a third generation Italian American. He had been a tough cop in Chicago all his life until he retired last year and, ironically, after facing death at the point of a gun or knife many times, had dropped dead of a brain haemorrhage. He had wanted Michael to be a doctor, certainly nothing to do with law enforcement. But, after many arguments with his father, Michael applied to the CIA and was eventually accepted. The last heated argument ended with them hugging, and Michael saying "I'll make you proud of me papa." *That's what he was still doing, two years on*, he thought, as tears slid down his face.

He parked his black Mercury, checked his appearance in the rear view mirror and then walked toward the arched entrance of the CIA headquarters, his mind turning over what the meeting with Blakely was to be about.

Michael ran a hand through his thick, black hair and then straightened his green neck-tie before knocking on the varnished wooden door, which had National Clandestine Services Director in small gold letters on it.

"Come," boomed a female voice.

A thin woman with short, red hair sat reading behind the only desk in the room. She suddenly raised her head, and said: "Ah, Catone. Sit down please." She pointed to a seat in front of her desk and then closed the folder she was reading and took another from a drawer under the desk.

"Operation Dimensions," she announced putting the folder in front of Michael.

"Study it, We think the officer involved has been some how compromised and has been feeding us disinformation."

Michael picked up the file as if it were infectious and looked at it.

Blakely stared at the young officer. "We need you to do a surveillance job and assess. Your travel details are in the file. Thank you!"

"Michael new the meeting was over with the brusque 'thank you'; so he rose and left the room with the folder. He then headed along the corridor until he came to an open area filled with desks. He sat at a desk second on the right and placed the folder down on top and stared at it for a while.

"Hi Michael," said a tall man with cropped brown hair and a pockmarked face.

"George! What's new?"

"Nothing much; I'm more of a contracts manager now. Gotta keep an eye on the green badgers"

"Yeah well I'm on for a bit of surveillance."

Michael watched George Grey walk along the central aisle and sit at a desk next to a contractor. He had worked with George a few months previously. They were under cover with two other officers as Miami Bookmakers who were interested in getting into the illicit drugs trade. They were to infiltrate two Colombian Cartels and instigate a war between them.

Michael accompanied George to an initial meeting with one of the Cartels in a seedy Miami hotel where the merchandise was sampled and a working relationship set up.

The next step was a trip to Colombia and the Cartel's base – a villa outside Bogotá. Michael and the leader, Miguel Gordilla found common ground in the works of JRR Tolkien; Lord of the Rings being one of Michaels favourite books. He discovered the drug baron to be knowledgeable on literature and classical music, but violence was never faraway. A rival cartel member was executed around the back as they sat sipping brandy on the large veranda at the front of the house.

In the end, the two agents were lucky to escape with their lives after the other two officers were rumbled by the other gang and word spread.

After studying the file for a while Michael stood up, stretched and exhaled explosively. *My God, he thought, a UFO from the Second World War, outer dimensions and neo-Nazi's – I need a caffeine break!*

He gazed out of the small kitchen window at the neat gardens as he waited for the kettle to boil. He had almost quit after the Colombian operation, but the thought of his father and the man's fight against crime had shaken the self-pity from him.

Back at his desk he placed the coffee mug on a wicker mat by a small potted cactus took a deep breath and began a detailed study of the file. Half an hour later he stood up and stretched. He was to fly out to Los Angeles that evening and follow his subjects, who were flying out the next day.

The freeway back to his home in Hyattsville was blocked. He could see flashing blue lights ahead over the lines of metallic roofs. He switched on the radio and tapped his fingers on the steering wheel to a Bob Marley song.

The cars in the lane he was in suddenly started to move, and eventually he approached the cause of the hold-up: a blue BMW had smashed into the rear of a brown Oldsmobile. Firemen and Paramedics were extricating people from the wreckage.

God, thought Michael, one minute you're driving along the road with all your personal thoughts, and the next minute you could be trapped in crumpled metal.

Back home he opened his canvas kit bag and placed some clothes alongside the toiletry bag that permanently remained there. He then phoned his mother and told her that he would be away for a few days.

The Los Angeles flight took off on time and rose into the clear blue sky. Michael settled into his James Herbert novel. Reading took his mind off the potential dangers ahead and engrossed him like a film could never do.

The next day he watched Johnny and Veronica stroll into the main T1 concourse of Los Angeles International Airport with the rest of the passengers who had just arrived from Washington. He followed them to the Hertz hire car desk and then left the building and went to Parking Lot B where he retrieved his car.

The traffic was heavy on Airport Boulevard, but Michael managed to pull into a small bay from where he watched the Hertz courtesy buses enter the compound and drop clients off at their respective cars.

He saw Johnny and Veronica eventually climb down from a bus and put their bags in a green Pontiac. Michael started his engine while keeping his eyes fixed on the pair as they entered the car

Eventually they left the car park, and Michael followed them onto Interstate 405 heading north. Then carefully, staying a few cars back and thankful for the heavy Los Angeles traffic, he tailed them onto Interstate 10 east through the heart of the city and on, through the sprawling suburbs.

He followed them through the heat of the Mojave Desert finally stopping in Blythe where he emailed his report and then, spending an uncomfortable night in his car, he

waited for the pair to reappear the next morning from the motel they had checked in to.

Chapter twenty five

Johnny jumped out of the car and grasped the padlock so that it lay in the palm of his hand staring up at him. "Right, let's go back to town. This isn't going to stop me," he said as he let it drop.

They headed back to Needles and bought a heavy-duty pair of wire cutters from a hardware store. Johnny then ignored speed limits as he drove back to the track where he put the thick chain into the jaws of the cutters. He then brought the handles together with a grunt and the chain with the padlock fell to the dusty ground. Then he pushed open the gate and jumped back into the car. Clouds of dust flew into the air behind them as they drove up the track, which wound its way diagonally up the mountainside.

"You sure about this?" Veronica asked nervously.

"You seem to have changed your tune. What happened to all the earlier bravado?

Listen we've come this far we've got to see it through now."

"Don't you think it's just too easy?"

"Yeah well, maybe this is the way they want it: just to look like any other bit of desert hillside."

After a while he suddenly stopped the car and opened the driver's door, "come on."

Veronica followed him as they stumbled over a rough, boulder-strewn ground until he said: "Look."

Veronica peered around a rocky spur into a flat inner area. The side of the mountain which faced away from the highway had been quarried out and there were several openings in the sides. Men in white lab coats were entering and leaving blue cabins, which surrounded a helicopter pad with a small, blue bell helicopter on it.

"Jesus!" exclaimed Johnny, "okay Veronica let's go."

"Maybe we should wait here for a while and just watch."

"No, I think you should go and have a closer look Miss Cahill," said a voice with a German accent.

Johnny looked back and saw Menzel with two of his thugs, Schroeder and another, standing behind Veronica with Heckler and Koch sub-machine guns. He shook his head and exhaled loudly.

"I was disappointed that you took so long to get here Mr Duncan."

"You've been waiting on us?"

"Of course, did you think you could just walk into a secret site such as this? I told the government people that I would deal with you. Now if you would be so kind as to head for that first portal."

Johnny and Veronica climbed down the inner side of the spur and walked around the edge of the helipad with Menzel and his men behind them. They entered the opening and found themselves facing closed grey elevator doors. Schroeder tapped in a code on a keypad at the side and the doors slid open. "Get in!" He commanded.

Once all five were in the lift Menzel hit the 0 button on the inner pad and the doors closed. Johnny then felt a little nauseous as they sank into the ground at great speed. Then, suddenly the elevator stopped, and the doors opened on to a chaotic scene where men in lab coats rushed around checking pieces of equipment then writing on clip-boards. To his left Johnny could see people sitting in front of computer screens behind a large window in what he assumed was the control room.

Then, through the melee there it was: the Bell, sitting on a plinth, the black surface reflecting no light. A team of men in blue overalls were milling around it as if the craft had just flown in for a pit-stop.

“Yes Mr Duncan, the alien craft that Hitler, because of his stupid pride, turned his back on. Just imagine how different the world would have been if he hadn’t. The Nazi’s would have won the atomic bomb race!”

“I don’t understand. Why is the US government now interested in this?”

Menzel laughed. “These people are not exactly model citizens; they belong to the CIA ja, but a secretive branch. They are interested, because of the power that they could have over any enemy if they could travel dimensionally – they could just appear anywhere. Star Trek for real - ja!” Menzel said with a grin. “The Bell had been stored here in this old mine since the Second World War and all but forgotten until it was accidentally found recently. But, don’t just take my word for it; ask Miss Cahill she will have no doubt read a file on it at Langley.”

Johnny stared at Menzel with knitted eyebrows. “What? Don’t bring Veronica into this.” He then turned and looked questionably at Veronica, “Langley, but that’s the CIA headquarters in Washington!”

Menzel’s walkie-talkie crackled into life. He walked away from the group as he answered it.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about Menzel.” Veronica said when he rejoined them.

“Oh don’t you Miss Rodgers! It is Rodgers isn’t it? And you won’t know this boy I suppose?”

The lift doors opened and another two of Menzel’s thugs dragged Michael out into the cavern.

“He told my men when they picked him up beside your car that he was a tourist who had lost his way.”

“I’ve never seen him before!” Veronica shouted.

“Well you won’t mind if I blow his brains out then,” said Menzel as he raised his pistol and aimed at Michael. He released the safety catch. Seconds passed which seemed like hours before Veronica growled: “Wait!”

Chapter Twenty six

Veronica stared at Menzel. "Okay," she hissed. "I'm a CIA officer. My name's Erin Rodgers." She then looked at Johnny, "I'm sorry John."

Johnny looked at the floor and shook his head. "I don't understand; you're a reporter."

"No, I was undercover as a reporter with the Washington Post. The Agency officers don't go undercover as journalists, but in this case it was thought appropriate."

"And you and me..., that was all a sham?" he asked with a faltering voice. "This was what you were going to tell me – wasn't it?"

"Oh, how heart wrenching." Menzel mocked.

"It was no sham. I *was* going to tell you." Veronica said, ignoring the German. "I was sent by the Agency to initially find out about you; I was told that you were a subversive risk to the US. Then when I got to know you I realised there was something wrong. I was then to observe you and Günter, as you were considered a threat to the tests. I was to report back on the neo-Nazis as well. The government, no matter how dark the department and these gentlemen are not what you would call: good bed-fellows."

"But, wait a minute; I met you before I had the visions!"

"It was because of the articles you wrote for Time and Nexus. Don't you see? They must have been too close for comfort."

The metallic voice of a PA system reverberated around the cavern: "Please clear the area around the Bell. Nonessential personnel will now leave the test hall."

"Right, over there." Menzel said to Johnny, Erin and Michael, as he pointed to the side of the control room. "As I'm such a good person I'm going to let you watch the experiment before I have you killed."

The lights in the cave dimmed and a spotlight illuminated the UFO. An eerie blue light shone from the large window of the control room where white coats and blue overalls jostled for a view.

The atmosphere around the black craft began to crackle and hiss. *Some sort of electromagnetic field*, thought Johnny; his Higher Grade Physics coming in handy at last.

There was a flash of light, and standing before them was the Angel of Death. She was just as Johnny had remembered: grey wrinkled skin, dirty shoulder length fair hair, a thin body draped in black, shabby clothes.

"What do we have here?" she asked in a rasping, mocking voice.

"Where do you come from?" the PA system asked.

She cackled, revealing pointed, yellowing teeth

"I come from beyond nothingness. I come from nowhere. I come from everywhere. I come from eternal damnation; where I'm going to take you all, you sons of whores!"

She then rose into the air and began to spin as she stretched her arms out to form a crucifix shape.

After a moment the cavern began to shake – violently. Bits of rock dislodged from the ceiling and fell around Johnny and Erin. Menzel and his thugs ran into the control room.

"Cut the power!" shouted a tall, thin man in a lab coat.

"I'm trying sir," said a younger blond-haired man sitting in front of a computer, "but it's as if whatever that is out there's blocking my attempts."

Johnny signalled for Erin and Michael to run to the elevator. The doors were closed; so he slammed the call button with the palm of his hand, but nothing happened.

Chapter Twenty Seven

It was a perfect late spring day. Cars crossed the curved white structure that was the Hoover Dam, which lay on the border between Nevada and Arizona. Tourists on day trips from Las Vegas gazed in awe over one side at Lake Mead, whose waters were rising after years of drought, and then over the other side at the breathtaking drop to the Colorado River, which was cutting its way through Black Canyon.

Sighs of wonder, however, turned to screams of horror as the area began to shake. The tremors were gentle at first, but built in intensity with every passing second. Rock pieces the size of small cars broke off the surrounding cliffs and crashed onto the dam, some rolling down the spillway into the river below.

Tourists ran along the trembling walkways as waves from Lake Mead started to smash into the side of the dam throwing up white froth, which splashed onto the road. Drivers heading south-east desperately blasted their horns at the vehicles in front; but a large boulder had crashed onto the centre of the road effectively blocking the Arizona side of the dam. The Nevada side was rendered impassable by cars off the dam piled on top of one another.

The screams and shouts were suddenly drowned out by a deep growl as a giant fracture appeared on the cliff of the Arizona side of the dam and ran all the way down to the canyon floor. Then with a horrendous groan a large part of the rock face along with part of the dam sank into the earth.

Unleashed, Lake Mead gushed in a frothy hell through the large gap and surged along the canyon taking boats and wooden riverside cabins with it. The water crashed around bends loosening rock and sweeping away trees and shrubs.

Chapter Twenty eight

After the earthquake had passed, Jim Hart, the Davis Dam Power Plant head engineer, stood beside the control room of the switch yard with his men. The yard sat on high ground adjacent to the dam. He had ordered his men off the dam during the worst of the tremors. He cast an eye over the dam, which was sixty miles south of the Hoover dam; everything looked okay.

"What do you reckon Jim?" Trey Wylde, an electrical engineer, asked his boss.

"I'm not sure, that was a hell of a quake."

His cell phone chimed into life. "Yeah, hullo."

"Jim, its Ron White at Western Control Phoenix here. Listen, for Christ's sake, you gotta get away from there! The Hoovers been damaged, Laughlin and Bullhead are hopefully going to be evacuated. Just get yourselves up to higher ground."

As he stuffed his mobile in his trouser pocket a violent aftershock hit the area and a large fracture appeared at both sides of the far end of the reservoir.

"Jesus Jim, look!" Trey shouted as other engineers joined them.

A wall of water surged along the lake toward the dam.

"God! It's too late," said Jim wearily as water rushed over rock promontories and islands.

The men watched in horror as the wave crashed into the earth-fill part of the dam and ripped it apart. The Forebay Bridge, which spanned the channel at the power plant, was partially destroyed as the water rushed toward the main part of the already weakened dam.

The wave smashed against the concrete, but it held and the water flowed over the top. An upturned yacht from a nearby marina crashed into the dam and was held there by the force of the water.

A few miles south of the dam people ran around the large, white cuboids that were the Laughlin casinos and gazed in terror at the torrent rushing toward them. Some stood transfixed still in shock by the earth tremors, which had damaged extensive parts of the city; others wisely ran into the buildings and headed for the stairs.

A police car drove around telling people to head for higher ground oblivious to the little time that was left before the wave struck. The task was obstructed by the confusion that reigned as cars with people trying to escape south blocked Casino Drive, the main drag. Other escapee's took Highway 163 to higher ground and beyond.

Cars and coaches were pushed into one another as the deluge surged through the town. Boats on the river were ripped from their moorings and swept downstream. The Laughlin Bridge was mostly swept away with only some twisted metal left protruding above the speeding water level. The casino towers stuck out of the water like groynes at a beach during high tide

Eventually, the wave hit the centre of residential Bullhead city, which lay within a bend of the Colorado. The wall of water paid no heed to the path of the river however, and swept over the city taking parts of buildings with it and upturning vehicles. Many shocked citizens were swept away in the deadly current.

Water, a vital life ingredient, swept children away from their mothers; husbands away from their wives all in a gushing hell. The victims screamed in horror and disbelief as they were pulled away from their normal existence.

The flood began to lose intensity as it hit the agricultural land south of Bullhead city, and by the time it flowed into Lake Havasu most of the energy had dissipated. The

surface level of the lake had, however, risen enough to flood downtown Lake Havasu City.

The earthquake had turned the lower Colorado between Lake Mead and Lake Havasu into one large lake, the cost: the submerged cities of Laughlin and Bullhead along with many other smaller communities in the area.

People stood on the tops of towers in Laughlin and Bullhead waving frantically as helicopters flew over the expanse of water, but the initial aircraft were looking for people still alive *in* the water.

Families also started to appear on the rooftops of their homes that lay on higher ground. Many survivors stood or sat at the waters edge after swimming or wading out of the flood. Emergency teams from unaffected surrounding towns were doing what they could to reach them.

Jim Hart paced back and forth with his cell phone held to one ear desperately ringing his home in Bullhead City, but there was no answer.

“Shit, I ain’t ever seen anything like this!” Trey said as he turned from looking at the flood with tears in his eyes.

“We just can’t stay here, people: our families need our help. I’m going to look for my folks!”

“Yeah, let’s go!” shouted another man.

So the seven engineers set off over rough terrain with heavy hearts.

Chapter Twenty Nine

Johnny slammed the palm of this hand against the call button again, but still nothing happened. The main shaking had left with the Angel of Death, and peace had started to reign in the cavern again.

The door of the control room began to slowly open until an aftershock hit the area and it was pulled shut. Bits of the ceiling and walls, again, began to fly around the cave and, sparking cables flowed out of a cracked conduit, which ran up one wall.

Eventually the shaking subsided and Johnny looked at Erin as a gurgling sound filled the test hall. Then, suddenly, jets of water shot out from cracks in the roughly hewn walls.

Erin screamed as Johnny desperately pressed the call button and, at last, the doors rolled back. The Threesome then ran into the elevator as a rock fragment the size of a cannonball, propelled by a big jet of water, shot across the cavern and smashed into the window of the control room.

Although water flowed into the lift, the doors began to close on the chaotic scene as Erin breathed a sigh of relief. But with only centimetres of gap left between the two sides a hand grasped one of them and the doors stuttered.

“Oh my God!” Erin shouted.

Johnny recognised a ring on the small finger with a swastika engraved into it and instinctively raised a foot and stamped the hand. The fingers released their grip and the doors closed allowing the lift to begin its upward journey.

Johnny stared at Erin as they heard shouting and pounding from below. “Menzel’s not happy.”

“Do you reckon there’s another way out?”

“I don’t know – probably not.”

“So we’ve condemned these men.”

“Like his grandfather did to the scientists in Germany,” said Johnny sarcastically.

“What about the government people?” Michael asked.

Johnny shrugged his shoulders.

The lift suddenly came to a halt and the lights went out.

“Shit!” Michael shouted.

“Looks like the waters got into the works,” said Johnny.

“What now?” Erin asked.

Johnny felt around the walls and then said: “Michael gives a lift up. There’s bound to be a hatch in the roof.”

The young officer clasped his hands together and Johnny put his right foot in the ‘cup’ and was hoisted up. He felt around until he found an indented square, which he pushed up to reveal the lift shaft. There were cables and pipes stretching up as far as he could see through the murky darkness and, much to his relief, a metal ladder.

“Come on!” Johnny shouted. “There’s a ladder!” He then pulled Erin up through the hatch. “Start climbing,” he said, reaching down for Michael.

Johnny watched Erin and then Michael climb up into the dark. “Look out for the outer doors they should be on your right!” He then stepped on to the ladder and began to ascend.

After a while there was a loud crack and a bullet flew past Johnny’s head.

“Curses!” he exclaimed as he looked down, “Menzel!”

“Another bullet flashed past him and ricocheted off the ladder causing sparks to fly through the dark.

“I’m at the doors!” Erin shouted.

Menzel was just below the lift when he stopped climbing and aimed the pistol directly up the ladder and began to pull the trigger, but a rushing sound made him look down. Water was gushing up the lift shaft. He turned and pulled the trigger, but the gun jammed; so he just gazed at the dark figures way up on the ladder as the water engulfed him and then pressed his body into the bottom of the elevator.

“I can’t get them open!” squealed Erin as sweat ran down her forehead and stung her eyes.

Michael climbed up beside her and looked around the shaft for something to lever the doors open, but there was nothing.

“You’d better come up with something – fast!” Johnny shouted looking down at the rising water.

Chapter Thirty

The two agents clawed frantically at the doors as Johnny felt the chill of the water bite into his feet. Mercifully the gush had turned into a seep. *After all that's happened, was this where it was to end*, he thought. The cold climbed over his knee caps forcing him to pull up as close to Erin and Michael as he could.

"Come on you two get those fucking doors open!" he shouted as the water rose to his waist.

Erin screamed as the water touched her feet, and then said with a sigh: "It's hopeless."

Then with the water still rising the doors rolled back, and a big figure stepped back as Michael and Erin tumbled out into the starry night.

Erin gazed up at the figure and then broke into a broad smile as she got up and hugged Matthias.

"Matthias!" John shouted as he stepped out of the lift shaft. "The main man!"

"Nice to see you too John."

"Great timing as ever, but what are you doing here?" Erin asked.

"I'll explain later, you'd better come and have a look at this."

They followed Matthias across the empty helipad and then climbed up and stood on top of the rocky spur.

"For heavens sake...!" Johnny exclaimed at the sight of the expanse of water that had filled the Mojave valley. He shook his head as he watched helicopters, which looked like fireflies, fly over the surface searching forlornly for survivors.

Michael stepped back with raised eyebrows. "Where...did that come from?"

"The earthquake damaged the dams upriver," answered Matthias.

Johnny turned to Erin. "So that's where the water in the cavern came from."

"Those poor people," said Erin in a faltering voice.

"What happened down below?" Matthias asked.

Johnny explained the events of the last few hours.

"Well my friends I am really glad to see you after hearing that. I am here due to...; you're not going to believe this I think." He took a deep breath and then continued, "my father came to me in a dream and showed me what was going to happen to you; basically just what you described, so I flew to Los Angeles and then drove here. I watched the valley below become flooded after the earthquake and then saw men from the cabins there leave in the helicopter. Then, eventually, I heard your shouts and prised the doors open with an iron spike I found beside the cabin."

"Well, we're glad you came. This is my associate, Michael," said Erin nodding toward the young officer.

"Associate?"

"Yes Matthias, I'm a CIA officer, my name is Erin Rodgers. I was sent undercover to report back on John and your father.

"Günter in a dream" said Johnny, gazing at the stars.

"Ja, I wasn't sure if I was being foolish coming here on the strength of a dream, but obviously it was no dream," said Matthias as he stared at Erin. "The CIA; this has taken me by surprise. I don't know what to think. And you and John were a... what do they say - a couple.

"Not any longer." Johnny said defiantly.

Erin stared at him through the darkness. "Listen, I had orders to take you to another site and..."

“And what? Kill me! I’ve had enough of you and this whole thing. I’m going home to my kids.”

“Yeah that’s it, on you go. You’re good at thinking of yourself,” said Erin with wrath.

Johnny shook Matthias’s hand and said farewell to Michael. He then scrambled down the mountain towards blue flashing lights.

Erin watched Johnny climb down the mountain with sadness in her eyes. She wanted to call him back; tell him she was going to quit the Agency for him, but pride, and the fact that Michael and Matthias were close by, stopped her. “Okay,” she said.

“We should get off the mountain and report back.”

Michael pulled out his mobile, “I’ll contact the LA office and get us a ride.”

“Where’s your car Matthias?” Erin asked.

“Down there, under the water.”

“I’ll get the Agency to sort it out.”

“Thanks. What are you going to do now?”

“Oh, there’s something I’ve got to see to back in Washington.”

Chapter Thirty one

Johnny drove along the homage to gambling that was the Las Vegas Strip. He passed a pirate battle on a life-size model of a galleon outside a casino called 'Treasure Island'. On the other side of the street 'The Venetian' hotel/casino was a mock-up of St Marks Square in Venice complete with tower, bridges and gondolas.

The place was thronging with tourists. *What had happened a few miles away had not affected business here*, thought Johnny scornfully. *Just a bit of superficial damage, nothing to interrupt the intake of money.*

He had spent the night at a small hotel after being dropped off by a coach, organised by the authorities, which was taking flood victims to alternative accommodation. A large number of the survivors were put up in temporary accommodation such as a large sports centre in Boulder City, but Johnny, along with many others, opted to pay for a hotel room.

The Las Vegas airport was closed to normal business due to the disaster; so Johnny had hired a car for the drive to Los Angeles, and planned to get a flight back to the UK.

The Interstate 15 took him out of Las Vegas and into the desert where a hot sun hung in a whitish blue sky, and little, white clouds drifted lazily over the dusty terrain. He tried to keep thoughts of the previous day away, but they kept creeping into his mind. *What would Erin do now? And, more importantly, was she right? Did he always put himself first?*

Chapter Thirty two

Erin and Michael landed at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport as a summer shower swept up the Potomac. The aeroplane slipped into its allotted bay in front of the upturned egg box-like main building. They parted in the three-tiered main hall; Erin heading for her vehicle in the terminal three car park; Michael using an ATM before collecting his car.

The George Washington Memorial Parkway took Erin along the south bank of the Potomac. Central Washington sat on the opposite bank, to her right, and the Pentagon and then Arlington National Cemetery lay on the left.

Eventually she left the built-up Metropolitan area and entered residential Mclean – part of Fairfax County. She gazed down the banking at the quiet waters of the river and thought of Johnny and the look in his eyes as he announced that he was leaving. Then she thought of home and a hot bath, but that would have to wait, because she had requested that the de-briefing session with her director, Karen Blakely, took place right away.

Blakely and Erin had been recruited and trained up, at the Farm, at the same time. Blakely came from a well-heeled Washington family - her father had been a director with the CIA and, to her the Agency was just a game – a deadly game.

Two years previously Karen, while working under-cover in the field, dismissed intelligence about an attack on the American Embassy in Angola. The building had subsequently been destroyed by a bomb and ten personnel and fifteen civilians killed. Erin thought at the time that Karen's career was over, but three months later, during a period of turmoil in the Agency, she was promoted to Director of NCS. Erin, among others, from that moment on built up an unhealthy resentment for her boss.

After the security check she parked her car, attached her badge and then strolled along the walkway which led on to the arched entrance to the Agency. She had to find out who was pulling the strings behind the surveillance of Johnny. Whoever it was had almost killed her twice, so her safety was not of importance. Was there a demon in the CIA or the government? The way to find out was through Karen Blakely-tactfully. If she went in shouting and blaming people – tongues would tighten.

Erin stood outside Blakely's door for a second, took a deep breath and then knocked.

"Come in!" shouted a low woman's voice.

She opened the door and walked in. Karen Blakely sat in a dark blue suit tapping away on a computer keyboard; her hair shorter than Erin remembered.

"Erin," she said, after looking up from her monitor, "take a seat."

Erin pulled the seat out, away from the desk and sat down. The room had numerous photographs hung on the walls; one, next to her framed degree, was of Karen playing baseball with an older man, whom Erin assumed to be her father.

"So, what happened in that old mine in the Mojave valley?"

Erin gazed past Karen out of the window at the old headquarters building. "I thought your trainee would have informed you."

"Michael Catone is no trainee. He was sent to carryout surveillance on you, because we thought you had been compromised." The computer screen gave her face a light, blue complexion. "I want you, as the case officer, to tell me what happened before you write up your report. There's a team on site at the moment, but until the water subsides there's not much they can do."

"What made you think that I was compromised?"

"The reports you sent in suggested that were the case."

"I see," said Erin unconvincingly. She decided that any more confrontational questions would be counterproductive; the way to get the answers that she wanted was to turn the tables and spy on the Agency.

Erin went through the sequence of events, carefully leaving out any interaction between her and Johnny.

"What's your assessment? Do you think that's the end of the threat?" Blakely asked. Erin laughed and then said: "Well, it's the end of the neo-Nazis, but as for any supernatural involvement – who knows!"

"Okay officer, you can write up your report. Thank you!"

As she drove home Erin thought: *one way to find out who was behind all this was to get into Karen Blakely's computer, there were classified files she could access through her own terminal, but to get the juicy stuff on this case she would need to access the director's machine; the only drawback being the password.* But then she smiled as she signalled to pass a large, red truck.

A lazy sun had begun its slow descent as Erin cruised along the street and into her drive. The neighbour's kids were playing baseball on their front lawn; the scent of magnolia's filled the air – it was a perfect early summer evening.

Inside, her house was humid and there was a stale odour; so she switched on the air conditioning. A wave of cool air swept through the rooms and replaced the humidity. She dumped two Wal-Mart bags on the breakfast bar and then opened the large silver fridge/freezer to start the process of scrapping out of date food and replacing it with new stuff. The house phone rang when she had her head in the fridge compartment. She pulled her head out and slammed the door, then ran into the lounge.

"Hello," she said brightly holding the receiver to her ear, but there was a click and the line went dead.

Unnerved, she instinctively peeked out of the side of the closed blind. All was as it had been when she drove up: the kids were still playing; the sun was still slowly falling out of the sky.

"Oh, probably one of these computerised dial ups," she said to herself, disappointed that it wasn't Johnny. She switched on the television, and the noise of an inane game show filled the room. The sound comforted her and strangely calmed her nerves. In her bedroom, Erin took off her clothes and donned a silk robe. She then entered the bathroom and ran a hot bath; she would have a soak before dinner.

Back in the kitchen she put half a chicken in the oven and turned on a gentle heat. Her mobile rang; so she searched through her coat, which still sat on a breakfast bar stool. She looked at the small screen, but there wasn't a number. "Hello," she said as she held the phone to her ear, but, like the house phone, the line immediately went dead.

"Okay!" she shouted, "now I'm really spooked."

She switched the cell phone off and then went into the lounge and pulled the landline cable from the wall.

After turning the hot water bath tap off she entered her bedroom and drew out the top drawer of her bedside unit and took out her handgun, checked it was loaded and put it in the pocket of her robe.

After checking that the house was secure she slid off her robe and slipped into the bath. The water soothed her as she rested her head on the top of the back end.

"Got to calm down," she told herself, "got to think rationally. She let her toes play with the foam from the bath salts she had added.

Her eyelids became heavy as she began to slip into a relaxed state of mind. Then, tottering on the edge of consciousness, she felt her skin begin to tingle. The water was

becoming hotter. She checked the tap, but it was off. Small bubbles rose through the water all around her. The water had begun to boil, and her skin was turning red. She pounced out of the bath showering the floor tiles with frothy water.

The bath was a frenzy of bubbling water as Erin grabbed a towel and gently dried her aching skin. Pulling on her robe she ran from the bathroom sticking her hand in the robe pocket which contained the gun. She felt assured as she ran her fingers over the cold contours of the firearm.

The front door bell rang; so she ran into the bedroom and looked out between the curtains, but as her view was limited she saw no one. The bell rang again.

She nervously descended the stairs and made her way to the front door with the handgun drawn. She nervously unlocked the door and opened it as far as the security chain allowed. She then pushed the barrel of the gun through the gap, and shouted:

“Go away and leave me alone or I’ll blow your fucking head off!”

“Jeez, I just love you feisty American women,” said a familiar voice in a soft Scottish brogue, which washed over her in a wave of joy. She felt goose flesh spread up from her legs and flow over the rest of her body.

“Johnny,” she said as she slumped onto her knees. “Is it really you?”

“Are you going to let me in; or am I standing out here the rest of the night?”

She took off the security chain and then fell into his arms. “Am I glad to see you?” Tears welled up in her eyes as she pulled the top half of her body away from him.

“Don’t ever leave me again,” she said firmly.

“I won’t,” he said, pulling her towards him. “I won’t.”

Chapter Thirty Three

Johnny and Erin stood in her bathroom and looked at the foamy water, which was in a tranquil state once again. She had told him what had happened from when she had entered Blakely's office.

"The water, just boiled?"

"Sounds unbelievable, but look at my skin," she said as she held her arms out.

"What could make water boil in a bath?"

"Beats me," she said, pulling the plug.

"Are you going to get a plumber to check the bath?"

"That was nothing to do with the bath."

They headed downstairs and Erin headed into the kitchen, and shouted: "Coffee?"

"Please." Johnny answered as he sat on the settee in the lounge and stared into space.

"Listen John," said Erin, entering the living room with two steaming mugs, giving one to Johnny before sitting down. "I'm going to quit the Agency." She held up her hand when Johnny started to say something. "It's true my orders were to take you to another site, but I... I just couldn't. Anyway I think they would have killed me as well. And please don't take my decision lightly; I stayed with the Agency after nine-eleven when droves of officers quit and became contractors for huge amounts of money. I still put country above financial gain."

"Where do we go from here?"

"We've got to flush out who's behind all this."

"How are we going to do that?"

"Well, I'm going into Langley tomorrow to write up my report and do a bit of info gathering."

"Better be careful."

"What made you come back?" she asked, sipping her coffee.

"I told you, I just love you feisty American women especially ones that are CIA agents."

Erin tipped her head back and roared with laughter.

"No, I realised I had walked out on something special and you were right: I do just think about number one."

"I was angry."

"And right."

"Are you hungry?" she asked looking toward the kitchen.

"Oh yeah!"

Chapter Thirty Four

The next morning Erin was at her desk in the officer's room preparing her report. She had moved her seat closer to the outside edge of the desk to give herself a clear view along the corridor - and Karen Blakely's door.

At ten past ten she noticed the director's door open and Karen head out with a briefcase in hand. *Well it's now or never*, she thought. Standing up she stretched and then looked out of the window. There was only one other officer in the room, and he was totally engrossed in writing up a report. She strolled out of the room and entered the corridor with her pulse rate rising.

Erin pushed open Karen's door and walked into the empty room. She then closed the door as far as she could without actually shutting it and walked in behind the director's desk

The monitor screen had dolphins swimming across it as she sat down in the swivel chair. She then tapped the mouse; a rectangle appeared and asked for a password. Erin typed in 'big red' and the screen changed to one with icons on a blue background. Karen Blakely had been nicknamed 'big red' as a trainee due to a fondness for the gum of that name and, because she was a tall redhead.

She scanned the folders, eventually finding one entitled 'dimensions'. She clicked on the icon, and reports from her and Michael appeared along with a list of events.

At her car, Karen found that she had left her cell phone on her desk. She opened the BMW and laid her briefcase on the front passenger's seat. Then, after locking the car, she headed back along the walkway toward the building.

Erin looked down the list and found nothing very interesting except one insert dated the 20th of April which read: 'meet L to discuss Project Proteus'. She gazed thoughtfully out of the window at the large white cumulus which drifted over the building. Suddenly she was brought out of the reverie by the sound of a voice from the corridor. "Can I have a word Karen?"

Erin froze; *oh my God she's coming back*, she thought. She closed down the folder then stood up and moved toward the window as Karen and Jim Phillips, a director from another department, entered the room.

"Erin!" Karen exclaimed. "Can I help you with something?"

"I just wanted to see you about some leave, but I'll come back when you're free."

"All right," said Karen stretching the second word as she looked at her computer screen.

Erin finished the report and then left the building with two things prominent on her mind: who was 'L' and what was Project Proteus?

Chapter Thirty Five

Erin woke up and gasped: "The Lincoln Memorial - tomorrow three pm."

"What?" asked Johnny sleepily.

"I ... don't know, just the Lincoln Memorial tomorrow."

"Oh God I thought we were getting away from this cloak and dagger stuff."

"I have a feeling this is going to answer a few questions."

"So we just show up to meet what could be the Dark Angel," said Johnny sarcastically.

"No, I don't think it's a demon," said Erin as she climbed out of the bed and wrapped her robe around her.

Johnny got up and pulled his jeans on then followed her down to the kitchen. "What if it's a CIA trap. I mean you're not exactly flavour of the month right now," he said as he leant on the door frame.

Erin switched on the kettle. "So, the CIA are contacting people by mental telepathy now are they?"

"Well...yeah, you know what they're capable of."

Johnny had a point, she thought as she put heaped teaspoonfuls of instant in two mugs. "Okay I'll take care, but I'm going - I need some answers."

"What do you mean 'I'?"

"You're not coming, it's too dangerous."

"Whoever it is will hardly try something in such a public place, anyway just try and stop me; after what we've been through I'm ready for anything."

"Well okay James Bond," she said with a smile, handing him a mug.

They crossed the Potomac by the Arlington Memorial Bridge on a cloudless, hot summer's day. The pillared, white Lincoln Memorial building rose up from behind some trees as Erin changed lanes.

She eventually parked the car, and they strolled along the tree-lined Henry Bacon Drive until it merged with Lincoln Memorial Circle where the pair walked around the outer perimeter sidewalk and then stood and gazed along the elongate Reflecting Pool toward the fawn coloured obelisk that was the Washington Monument, which pierced the clear sky.

"Jeez, this is really impressive, said Johnny.

"Yeah, it makes me proud. No matter the bad things America has done, this makes my patriotic heart beat a little faster."

Johnny looked at his watch. "It's ten to three we'd better head over to the memorial." They climbed the steps along with a throng of tourists and then stood in between two pillars. A white marble Abraham Lincoln stared past them and out over the National Mall.

"Superb, isn't he?" asked a gravelly voice.

Johnny and Erin spun round in unison to be greeted by the sight of a man with a grey beard and a black baseball cap above brown eyes. His long, grey hair was tied in a ponytail and hung through the back of the cap. He wore a dark blue sweatshirt above dirty Levi jeans.

"It's you!" exclaimed Johnny.

"Yeah I'm back in your life again Mr Duncan."

"But, I don't understand, your eyes... they're a different colour," uttered Johnny.

"Miss Rodgers," said the bearded one, nodding his head.

“You two seem to know one another?”

“This is the tramp I told you about,” said Johnny. “You know – that was in my bedroom.”

The tramp stared at Johnny. “Okay cards on the table time. Have either of you heard of Project Proteus?”

“Yes, I have, that is, I’ve seen the name,” announced Erin.

The man trained his brown eyes on Erin. “You would have seen this somewhere in Langley I assume.”

Three children ran excitedly past them as an overweight woman dressed in shorts and a loose, grey t-shirt shouted for them to wait on her.

“How would an angel know about Langley?” Johnny asked, after the woman had passed.

The tramp looked down at his old Levi’s and chuckled. “I’m no angel Mr Duncan. I used to work for the CIA. I was involved with Project Proteus: an offshoot of Project Stargate of which I’ve no doubt you’ve heard.”

Erin screwed up her facial features. “The remote viewing operation that was closed down after millions of dollars of taxpayer’s money had been wasted. Apparently there was only a twenty percent success rate at the tests.”

“That was what was released to the media, and of course the Russians. We’re speaking about the cold war here.” The tramp took a deep breath and stared at the Washington Memorial. “My name is Lindsay Koenig I was recruited by the CIA after I had shown exceptional telepathic skills at a special school in Philadelphia, which I detested.”

“So you’re ‘L’.” said Erin.

The two men stared at her.

“It was just something written somewhere – that’s all!”

“Why did you tell me all that stuff in Scotland?” Johnny asked.

“Because I wanted you to try and stop the tests in California.”

“Why me?”

“Why not you? You had written about the Bell and religion and had trusted media connections.”

“But in the Garden of Gethsemane ...”

“Mr Duncan,” interrupted Koenig, “what happened in Jerusalem was a fabrication. I was there. I made you see these things.”

“What ...?”

“I can make people imagine things that would not otherwise be there. Just like this ...”

Johnny and Erin gasped. Koenig had gone and in his place was a radiant Christ, who gazed at them with piercing blue eyes. Then a second later Koenig returned and continued, “Proteus was a Greek ‘shape-shifter’, to use the modern term. He was a telepathist; incorrectly termed a ‘seer’ during his lifetime. The changes were not physical changes more a shift in the perception of the observer influenced by the telepathist.

Erin shook her head. “So why did you make me believe my bath water was boiling the other night?”

“Ah now we’re getting to the crunch. That wasn’t me. You see, there were two main telepathist’s involved with the project. The other was a guy called Nathan Malloy; he was, and still is, more powerful than I am. He was irate when the government pulled the plug on Stargate, which of course meant the end for Proteus as well. It wasn’t the money; it was all the hard work we had put in; all the secrets we revealed to the CIA.

Hell, we were in the Kremlin on several occasions – uninvited of course. I couldn't have cared less about the abandonment, but Nathan took it bad, swore he'd make the US pay."

"But if you passed on important info why did they close you down?" Erin asked.

"Because of public opinion. They asked some of us to stay on as contractors, which I did for a while, but Nathan, well he told them to go to hell."

"I'm getting confused how does all this tie in?"

"Well Mr Duncan, what better way of getting back at the US than to destroy something they're proud of; something that was constructed using engineering genius; something that showed America could hold back the forces of nature?"

"The Hoover Dam," answered Erin.

"Right, that's what part of it was all about. That was Nathan's bit."

Erin looked at some people reading the dedication behind the Lincoln statue. "Why didn't you stop him?"

"I didn't really know what he was planning. Even if I had known; an army wouldn't have been able to stop him."

"So, what happens now?" Johnny asked.

"There's one other person you need must fear; she is ruthless and has her own agenda."

Erin gazed into Koenig's eyes as understanding seeped into her mind.

"The neo-Nazis; they were just part of the plan?" Johnny asked.

"Yes, they needed the help of some extremist group to collect money and generally take care of things. He must have offered them some type of controlling role in the new demon filled world I guess. Much like the Nazis offered their party members."

"Will he strike again?" Erin asked.

"I wouldn't think so; after all he got what he wanted....!"

Suddenly Koenig vanished leaving his sentence hanging in the air.

Johnny searched around the pillars, but the telepath had gone. "What do you reckon?"

Erin stared at him with fire in her eyes. "I reckon we go and get drunk then we go and see Karen fucking Blakley!"

Chapter Thirty Six

Erin knocked and then strolled into Karen Blakely's office followed by Johnny. Karen was on the telephone, but she signalled for them to take a seat. Johnny looked around the room as he sat down. *Just like an office anywhere*, he thought. The CIA had always been some shady spy outfit from films; he had never assumed that they operated from such normal rooms, indeed, apart from the security, such a normal building.

"Okay Karen, time to open up," said Erin when Blakely replaced her receiver.

"I don't have to divulge anything."

"Like hell you don't," said Erin with menace, "you almost got us killed."

"Maybe you haven't realised, but that's an occupational hazard for a case officer."

"Don't give me that bull Karen."

"Okay since we've known each other for years. What do you want to know?"

"We've encountered Lindsay Koenig."

"Right, he came to me about three months ago with intelligence on Nathan Malloy – he was another telepath...."

"Yes, we know about him," interrupted Erin.

"Well, Lindsay feared that Malloy was going to strike somewhere in the states. He reckoned it was to do with the tests that were to be carried out in the Mojave Desert. He feared an attack on Las Vegas or LA, but he wasn't sure as he couldn't break through the mind barrier Malloy had built around himself."

"Were the CIA involved in the tests?" Erin asked as she stood up and strolled over to the window.

"No, Officer Rodgers they were not. Now I must get on. You can have that leave you requested," said Karen as she passed a note to a puzzled Erin.

Erin looked at the note and then said: "Okay, Thank you."

"All right, what did the note say?" Johnny asked, opening the passenger's door of Erin's Buick.

"We've to meet her in Reveller's; a bar in Georgetown at one," answered Erin, climbing into the driver's seat.

"Because of bugs – yeah?"

"More, prying ears I would have thought."

They crossed the Potomac by the Chain Bridge and then headed south along Canal Road. Eventually Erin turned into a built up area. "This is Georgetown; it's older than DC itself."

Johnny watched as brightly painted buildings, which stood shoulder to shoulder passed by as they cruised along M Street. The sidewalks were filled with lunchtime shoppers and browsers. People sat on wooden seats between the trees that lined the road and read newspapers.

She pulled up beside a two-storey building with deep, red walls and green windows. A yellow sign over the door said Reveller's in red letters. There was a board on the sidewalk, which told people that the establishment was open for business.

They entered the darkened bar, and Johnny followed Erin through to an area at the rear. Some of the tables were taken by lunching businessmen, who were either talking to other businessmen; or to their mobile phones. The worn wooden floor reminded Johnny of old shop floors from his childhood.

“How about some lunch?” Erin asked as the pair sat in a booth, which had a low hung light shade, which cast bright light on to the old table.

“Yeah, I could use some chicken or something. And I’ll have a Coke.”

“You let me drink alone last night and now Coke today; you don’t have to turn into a saint just because of what I said in the Mojave.”

A waitress in blue jeans and a red sweater appeared, and Erin ordered two chicken salads and two Cokes.

At one o’clock Karen Blakely strode into the bar. She looked very much like a woman of power dressed in her pinstripe suit over a cream open neck blouse. Johnny caught Erin’s eye and nodded toward the approaching Karen, who slipped past a couple easing their way into either side of a booth.

“Sorry about the cloak and dagger stuff, but I thought we would be better talking here,” she said, sitting beside Erin.

The waitress came over with Johnny and Erin’s food, and Karen ordered a club sandwich and an apple juice. After the girl left Karen looked at Erin and then at Johnny. “Officially the CIA had no involvement with the tests.”

“And unofficially?” Erin asked.

“Unofficially well, I tried to find out which directorate sanctioned them, but came up against a wall of silence in the male dominated corridors.”

Erin took a sip from her Coke. “Why did you want us killed in Arizona?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh come on Karen. You gave me the orders: I was to take John to a site outside Parker where I reckon I was to be executed as well.”

“I never gave those orders. I sent Michael Catone to send back intelligence on you as you had gone quiet on me – now I see the reason why. You know these guys, Koenig and Malloy, have some strange powers. We’re really up against it; I’ve no idea who’s really who!”

Erin stared at Johnny through the spreading light beam as the full implication of what her boss had just said sank in.

Chapter Thirty Seven

Johnny watched the Potomac flow slowly toward Chesapeake Bay as Erin drove him over the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge on their way back to Annandale.

"I don't know who or what to believe," he said.

"Welcome to the wonderful world of subterfuge a'la CIA," said Erin who ran a hand over her head while the other remained glued to the steering wheel.

"The steering's become ropey," said Erin as she fed the wheel back and forwards through her hands.

"We'd better pull in somewhere."

"Oh my God!" she screamed, as she desperately tried to control the wheel.

Johnny placed both his hands on the dash board. "Brake Erin!"

"They're not working!"

They veered across onto the outer lane and hit a green Volkswagen side on, which pushed them back into the central lane where a truck crashed into the Buicks rear causing it to spin and then topple over several times.

Caitlin skipped across the grass with an ice-cream in her hand. "Come on dad!" she shouted, as she headed towards brightly painted swings.

Brad was already swinging back and forward. "Yeah, come on dad!"

Johnny felt tears well up in his eyes as he watched the children – his children.

Suddenly a bleeping noise filled the park and then he opened his eyes.

He was lying on a bed in a room – a hospital room. The bleeping noise was coming from a monitoring unit to the left of his head. He couldn't move his head; so he stared at the ceiling, it was easier to stare at the ceiling.

A nurse came into the room. She was tall, thin and had shoulder length blond hair.

"Mr Duncan, you're awake!" She looked at the unit to the side of his head. "I'll have to tell Doctor Patel." Johnny tried to speak, but nothing issued from his mouth.

The nurse left the room. He had wanted to ask her why he was in hospital. What had happened? He looked back at the ceiling; it was easier just to look at the ceiling.

An Asian/American man in a white lab coat came into the room. He had a receding hairline, and a well trimmed goatee hung from his chin. "Mr Duncan, so nice to have you back with us, I'm Doctor Patel," he said, as he looked at the monitoring unit.

"What happened to me doc?" Johnny asked in a croaking voice; surprised that he could speak.

"You were in an accident Mr Duncan. You've been unconscious from concussion for over twelve hours. We've ran tests and there seems to be no serious damage apart from a severe whiplash, which will eventually go."

Suddenly the events came rushing back into his memory: the car crashing into the outer lane, being hit from the back and finally toppling over. *Erin*, he thought. *What about Erin?*

"How is Erin doctor?"

"Now Mr Duncan you must rest."

Johnny grabbed the man's wrist. "What happened to Erin?"

A sadness spread over the doctor's face. "I'm sorry Mr Duncan; Miss Rodgers didn't make it – she died from her injuries on the way to the hospital."

Johnny looked at the ceiling – it was easier to look at the ceiling. Suddenly tears rolled down his cheeks, and he began to sob.

It was a warm day at Cedar Hill Cemetery. Johnny watched Erin's coffin being lowered into the ground. He still had on a cervical collar and bruises were in the process of leaving his face. Apart from Erin's mother and sister, who he introduced himself to; the only person he recognised was Karen Blakely. She wore a black suit and brown sunglasses covered her eyes.

He stepped forward and threw a single red rose on top of the coffin and then said: "Goodbye Erin."

A tall man in a grey suit with long, brown hair, which was streaked with grey caught up with him as he left the graveside and headed toward a waiting cab. "Mr Duncan, can I offer you a ride?"

"No thanks I have a cab."

"Please, sir, you will want to hear what I have to say."

Johnny stopped and looked at the man. He had deep brown eyes and looked to be in his early fifties. "I don't care; I'm going home."

"This is very important. My name is Nathan Malloy."

The black Chevrolet Avalanche cruised along the neat road. Lines of headstones interspersed with trees stretched into the distance on either side. Johnny stared forlornly at the graves and wondered when the nightmare was going to end.

"I don't know what you've been told Mr Duncan, but I'm guessing it has something to do with me," said Malloy, as he stared ahead. "I've been followed lately by CIA spooks – agents. I Left the Agency years ago, but it seems you're never really allowed to leave. I don't practise telepathy anymore, but I 'saw' you and Officer Rodgers talking to Lindsay Koenig."

"He said you were to blame for the destruction of the Hoover Dam. He said you wanted revenge on the US for the demise of the Stargate Project," said Johnny. Malloy shook his head and exhaled loudly as they drove past the light pink pillars of the main gate. "I run a successful IT business. Why would I want to destroy the Hoover Dam in some fit of revenge?" He eased the pick-up into the traffic of Pennsylvania Avenue and headed toward central D.C. "No Mr Duncan, if I were you I would beware of two people: Director Blakely and Lindsay Koenig."

Johnny gazed at the yacht marinas as they crossed the river. The fact was he didn't know who to believe, and he wanted to go home and forget all about it. But how could he? Someone had tampered with Erin's car and killed her. Innocent people in the Mojave Desert had been drowned. Günter had been murdered in Germany. Didn't he owe those people something?

"Where are you staying?" Malloy asked.

"At the Quality Inn on New York Avenue."

They eventually pulled up outside the sand-coloured, two-storey hotel, and Nathan Malloy put his arm on the top of the passenger's seat as Johnny climbed out.

"Farewell Mr Duncan and be careful these people are dangerous."

Johnny watched as the black truck merged with the traffic before turning toward the hotel. "What now Johnny boy ... what now?"

Chapter Thirty Eight

"Hi Caitlin, its dad," Johnny said into the receiver of his room phone.

"Dad! When are you coming home, I've missed you."

"Soon baby. I've missed you too. Where's Brad?"

"He's playing football for the school team."

"How are you getting on? No more nightmares I hope?"

"Dad, you and I both know that was no nightmare, and no, I haven't been bothered again."

"Fine," said Johnny, as he thought how grown-up she sounded. "Oh well I'll go now. I'll bring you back a present. Say hullo to your mother for me."

"Bye dad, I love you."

"I love you too baby"

He lay on the bed; the setting sun was pushing yellow rays between the slats of the blinds, which hung over his window. *Better not to tell her about Erin* he thought, that could be done when he returned home.

The other call he made was to the Dundee Courier. They had run a gardening column in place of his, and the editor was wondering when he was to return. He assured the man that he would start writing again soon. *It would need to be very soon*, he thought, as he could not afford to stay in the US much longer. He was already eating into his meagre savings.

The next morning he took the metro to tree lined Idaho Avenue, where he walked into the Second District Police Station and asked to see Lieutenant Dewar - the detective who had turned up when Johnny had requested to see someone in Homicide while he was in hospital.

Heb Dewar eventually came down the marble steps of the central staircase. He was a well-made man with thin, red hair. "Mr Duncan what can I do for you?"

"I've come to see if the report on the Buick is in," said Johnny, who had been sitting on a wooden bench in the reception area.

"Okay, if you'll follow me please."

Dewar's desk sat by a window and was covered in masses of paperwork. "Excuse the mess he said, as he pulled up a chair for Johnny to sit on. He then grabbed his mouse and clicked a few times and then said: "the report on the silver Buick says that it was an accident."

"Lieutenant, someone tampered with Erin's car; the steering and the brakes were okay, it was a new car for Christ's sake."

"Mr Duncan it *was* an accident."

Johnny looked at the empty paper coffee cups on the window sill behind the police man. "Can I see the car?"

"It's in a pound somewhere waiting to be crushed. Why don't you do yourself a favour sir and go on home."

"I can't lieutenant, I need to carry on, I owe it to my friends."

"Then here." The cop passed him a white business card. "I never gave you this!" Johnny read the card: "Kyle Miller P.I."

"He's your man; used to be a cop, and he doesn't like spooks!"

The brown two-storey building, in Georgetown's 36th North West Street, sat between a similar building painted red, and a three-storey modern office block. The window shutters were painted yellow and were black in places with grime from the road.

Johnny pushed the button for 14b at the side of the weathered, mahogany panelled door.

"Yes?" asked a voice through a metal grille under the button.

"Mr Miller its John Duncan – we spoke on the phone."

"Ah yes, come up."

A buzzer sounded and Johnny pushed the door open and walked into a white staircase. Red painted wooden steps led him up to two doors: one was black MDF with a brass handle, the other, a glass panelled door, was opened by a fair-haired man in his early forties. He wore a red checked shirt, which was open at the neck, and black Wrangler jeans.

"Mr Duncan – come in."

"Thank you," said Johnny, as he closed the door and followed the man into a large, bright room. The ceiling was white and had an ornate, circular cornice around a central light pendant, which had a white cube shade. The walls were cream, and one had several glass shelves upon which sat a variety of African wooden carvings. Woven rugs rested on the laminated wooden flooring, and a large, circular glass coffee table held the central position in the room.

Kyle Miller sat on a black leather swivel chair behind a pine desk, which lay in front of the large window. "Sit down please," he said pointing to a large, black leather settee. "So, what can I do for you Mr Duncan?"

"I was involved in a car accident on the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge in which a colleague was killed, and although the police say it was an accident I know the car had been tampered with."

"Why do you suspect this?"

"Because not only did the steering go, but the brakes failed – on a new car!"

"I see, and who do you suspect?"

"The CIA; or at least rogue elements within the CIA."

The PI whistled and then stood up and looked out the window.

"I've heard you're not exactly keen on the Agency," said Johnny.

"Mr Duncan, I was a cop here in DC for twenty three years; lets just say I've had my fair share of brushes with them and the FBI," said Miller, as he remained looking out of the window. He then turned and sat on a corner of his desk. "What did you do to annoy the CIA?"

"I want you, Mr Miller, to find out what really happened to that car. Can you do this?"

"Sure but it's going to cost, not only my fee, but also cash to grease a few palms."

"Okay I'm prepared to pay."

"Right I'll need five hundred dollars up front."

Johnny gave him the cash.

"Now go home and relax. I'll call as soon as I have something."

Johnny desperately needed a drink as he sat on the metro on the way back to his hotel. He had almost succumbed before Erin's funeral, but he managed somehow to hold out. However, sitting on the train surrounded by strangers, any of whom could be spies, he felt lonely, like a small frightened boy stuck in a grown-up's game. Drink was a comfort blanket – a shield from reality.

What was he going to do? Even if he found out the car had been tampered with; the CIA were essentially above the law, and he was nobody. Maybe it was time to head home? *One good thing, he thought was that they probably would not attack him again as his profile had been raised, particularly with the police.*

The train pulled up at the station close to his hotel and the doors hissed open. He stepped off and walked along the platform towards the stairs. He suddenly turned around and watched as two people: a woman in a red jump suit and a man in a brown jacket and grey trousers walked towards and then past him.

That man got on where I got on thought, Johnny. “Jeez, I’m getting paranoid,” he said to himself as he shook his head and climbed the stairs.

Johnny strolled across the hotel parking lot and then, unlocking the door, he entered his room as a man in a brown jacket and grey trousers sitting by the window in the reception area lowered his newspaper and pulled out his cell phone.

Chapter Thirty Nine

Two days later Johnny's mobile rang as he stepped out of the shower. He grabbed a large, white towel and quickly dried himself off then, tying the towel around his waist, he answered the phone. "Yeah, hullo."

"Mr Duncan its Kyle Miller."

"Ah yes."

"I have some information for you. Will you be able to come to my house?"

"Yes, I'll be there in about an hour and a half."

"Okay, until then."

Chapter Forty

Johnny pushed the button and waited for Kyle Miller's voice to flow from the metal grille. But nothing happened; so he tried again, but still there was no answer. He was about to pull out his mobile when he noticed that the front door was slightly open. Johnny pushed the door open and looked up the stairs. He noticed that Millar's glass door was also open; so he climbed the stairs.

Knocking on the door, he shouted: "Mr Miller! Hullo, it's John Duncan." After receiving no reply he walked into the hallway and looked around then headed into the living room.

He froze because before him, by the large coffee table was the body of Kyle Miller lying on its side in a pool of blood. Then stars and darkness descended over him.

The disk of light at the end of the tunnel became larger and larger until he gained consciousness. His head thumped and nauseousness shook his body. He was lying on the laminated floor of Kyle Miller.

Johnny sat up; the body of the PI was on its back and a large knife handle protruded from the chest. Dollar bills were scattered about the floor, some lay in the widened deep, red pool of blood. Thunder rolled in the distance and became louder and louder until, suddenly, four uniformed police officers burst into the flat.

"Don't touch anything!" shouted Sergeant Duane Ellis, as he surveyed the living room. He then pulled on a pair of investigation gloves and, crouching by the body, he felt for a pulse. "This ones a goner."

He then moved over to Johnny. "What's your name sir?"

"John Duncan."

"McLeod, get an ambulance here, and you'd better alert forensics," the Sergeant said to an officer. "Lowkowski, get a cordon set up downstairs – no one without authority in or out," he said to another.

Johnny felt the thumping in his head intensify as he tried to focus on the dead body of Kyle Miller. "Jeez, I don't feel too well."

"Let's help you up sir," said Ellis, as he crouched behind Johnny and put an arm under each armpit and pulled him up.

Johnny felt the blood rush from his head and thought for a moment that he was going to pass out. He put a hand on his forehead. "Christ I feel dizzy. The body... it was on its side when I came in Sergeant; someone must have rolled it over while I was unconscious."

"We'll get you outside for some fresh air," said the cop as he helped Johnny out of the house.

When they reached the bottom of the stairs a red and white ambulance screeched to a halt next to the area cordoned off with yellow and black tape. A tall African/American paramedic in blue overalls came running up to the pair.

"Here you go son," said Ellis leaving the paramedic to take Johnny to the ambulance where the other paramedic, a short well-made female Hispanic, opened the rear door.

"Lowkowski!" Ellis shouted.

When he had the young officer's attention he nodded toward the ambulance. Realising what he meant the officer headed toward the vehicle, as three men in green overalls and one in blue coveralls passed him and presented themselves to the sergeant.

"Up there guys; the victim's in the living room."

Heb Dewar was on his fourth cup of coffee when the call came in. He had spent the previous evening at his local bowling alley losing at ten-pin and drinking beer – heavily in both cases.

“Suspected murder down in Georgetown Heb,” said Chris Gaft, a fellow lieutenant twelve years Heb’s junior.

“Jeez, just as well the coffee’s starting to do the trick.”

“Come on pal, I’ll drive.”

The address sounded familiar, but Heb couldn’t place it – not in his delicate state. He felt butterflies begin to flap in his stomach, however, as they turned into North West Street, and he saw the white squad cars sitting outside Kyle Miller’s front door.

Chris parked his Mercury across from the taped cordon, and Heb jumped out and strode toward Sergeant Ellis. “Duane! What’s happened here?”

“Oh right, Heb. There’s a body up in that apartment with a knife in the chest; no real signs of a struggle - some cash lying around.”

“Who does the apartment belong to?” Heb asked with a sinking feeling.

“A Kyle Miller.”

“Yeah.” Heb said nodding.

“Do you know him?”

“I used to work with him – he was a cop. Don’t you remember him; he used to rub the CIA and the FBI up the wrong way.”

“Yeah, come to think of it I do recognise the name. There was another guy up there claims he saw the body in a different position before he was clobbered.”

“Where is he?”

“Getting treated in the ambulance. He’s in bad shape. His names John Duncan – he’s a Brit.”

“I know,” mumbled Heb as he headed toward the vehicle.

Johnny sat on the gurney and watched with one eye as Lieutenant Dewar walked toward the ambulance - the tall paramedic was shining a small torch in the other.

Heb knocked on the open door with his warrant card in hand. “I’m Lieutenant Dewar. How’s Mr Duncan?”

“In poor shape. We’re going to transfer him to hospital. It appears that he’s suffered several blows to the head.”

“He was in a bad car accident a week ago.”

“Right.”

“Okay. Which hospital?”

“GUH.”

Heb went over to where Sergeant Ellis and Chris Gaft were standing. “Could you send a unit with the ambulance Duane? Duncan doesn’t leave his room, and more importantly no one other than medical staff and police allowed in.”

“Okay,” said Ellis, as he moved off.

“Well Chris let’s go up and have a look.”

Heb knocked on the glass door at the top of the stairs and shouted: “Lieutenant Dewar and Lieutenant Gaft, can we come in?”

A suited forensic officer complete with mask appeared at the front door. “Sure as long as you put on gloves if you’re going to touch anything.”

They walked through to the living room where another suited officer was taking pictures of the body and another was searching over a rug by the coffee table. A man in a white suit who had been examining the body stood up when he saw the two detectives.

"I'm Doctor Weller – the pathologist."

"Well doc what was the time of death?" Chris asked.

"Around ten-thirty this morning."

"Anything apart from the obvious?"

"Not from an initial examination. I'll be able to tell you more when I get him back to the centre."

"Well, I can identify the body; that's definitely Kyle Miller," said Heb shaking his head.

"What was he doing now?" Chris asked as the two detectives moved away from the body.

"He was a PI, and doing pretty well," answered Heb, as he looked around the room.

"It looks as if they had an argument over money and Duncan stabbed him."

"Yeah, but how do you explain Duncan being unconscious?"

"He must have been hit with this," said the forensics officer who allowed them in, as he held up a baseball bat in a sealed clear plastic bag. "We found it under the desk, it must have rolled there."

"So, Kyle hits Duncan with the baseball bat and Duncan responds by stabbing him."

"Hmm, or so we're led to believe."

"You reckon there's more to this?"

"Let's wait until we get the reports."

As they left the apartment Heb asked the uniformed cop at the top of the stairs about the neighbours.

"Nobody in sir. We've knocked on the door a few times, but there's never been a reply."

"Okay, thanks," said Dewar, as he and Gaft descended the stairs.

The next morning Heb strolled toward his desk with his customary coffee cup in one hand and newspaper in the other.

"Coroners and forensics reports are in for the Miller case Heb," said Gaft who was sitting at his desk studying the sheets.

"What are they saying?" Dewar grunted.

"Pretty much what we assumed: Miller's fingerprints only on the bat, but also traces of Duncan's skin and hair on the business end. Duncan's fingerprints, as requested from UK police, only on the knife. Time of death: ten-thirty am. Knife pierced the right ventricle of the heart."

"So, we know when the fatal stab wound happened, but we don't know if that was before or after John Duncan was hit over the head. And wouldn't a blow to the head knock Duncan out?"

"Well he claims he was knocked out, but the uniform guys found him conscious."

"We'll need to talk to the doctor who's treating him I suppose."

"I'll go over; we need an official statement from John Duncan anyway."

The morning sun spilled over the red blocks of Georgetown University Hospital as Heb turned into the parking lot. The hospital as the name suggested was part of the college and, as a consequence, was at the forefront of some great medical advances.

Heb eventually found, from a disinterested receptionist, that Johnny was being treated in Neurology, which was on the seventh floor of the PHC Building.

As he walked through the corridors Heb remembered why he hated hospitals: the odours of disinfectant, polish and other things.

There was a uniformed officer outside the room where Johnny was being treated.

“Hello son, I’m Lieutenant Dewar,” said Heb showing the young cop his warrant card.

Johnny pointed the remote control at the television set high on the wall next to the door and switched off a mind-numbing game show as Lieutenant Dewar entered the room. He then pushed a button on another remote control and the head of the bed rose up a few inches.

“How are you Mr Duncan?”

“Lieutenant! Better, thank you.”

“Good. Look, if you’re up to it, I need a statement.”

The sun cast thin, horizontal shadows on the wall to Johnny’s right as it shone through the standard hospital blinds. Johnny related what he could remember to the detective, who sat on a chair at the left of the bed.

When he had finished Heb Dewar looked at his notes and asked: “Did you see anyone leave the house as you approached.”

“No.”

“And, was there anything peculiar in the apartment to suggest that someone else was there like a noise or a movement now that you’ve had time to think over the events.”

“No – I was in shock at seeing the body, and the next thing I remember was coming round and the police show up.”

“Okay, now how do you account for your fingerprints on the knife?”

“Lieutenant, I never consciously touched that knife. I’m being framed. They tried to kill me in that car crash along with Erin Rodgers, and now, because they failed, this is their next throw of the dice so to speak.”

“Who are they?”

“Rogue elements within the CIA.”

“So you’ve said before, but why exactly are they after you?”

Johnny told Heb a shortened version of the whole story.

“Jeez! That’s some story,” said the detective, as he stood up and ran a hand over his scalp. “Okay I need to talk to the doctor who’s dealing with you. Don’t leave the country.”

“I can hardly stand up to go for a pee!” Johnny said with a grin.

Chapter Forty One

Doctor Ahmed Khan watched as one of his Pearl Gourami's chased a Cherry Barb through the thick aquatic plants in his bubbling fish tank, which sat on a sturdy cabinet in a corner of his small office. He had found watching fish a way to relax; away from the pressures of the hospital.

"Yes," he said in reply to a knock on his door.

A man with red hair dressed in a well-worn grey suit entered and said: "I was wondering if I could have a word with you about John Duncan."

"And you are?"

"I'm sorry, I'm Lieutenant Dewar – Metropolitan police," the cop said producing his warrant card.

"What do you want to know?" Ahmed said, as he pointed toward a seat.

Heb Dewar sat down. "How bad is his injury?"

"He's recovering from concussion. A PET head scan showed no bleeding in the brain, but he does have a linear fracture on the top of his skull at the front. The fact that this injury was sustained so soon after his hospitalization for the car accident has given us cause for concern."

"Okay. Thanks doc. Oh, I wonder can you help me. A pierced heart ventricle; how long before death?"

"Minutes. The brain would be starved of oxygenated blood."

"So, it would be possible for someone who had been stabbed through the heart to pick up an object and strike out."

"Possible, but not probable, because you need to take into account the fact that the person would be suffering from trauma."

Chapter Forty Two

Heb Dewar climbed the central stairs the next day with a heavy heart; he knew what was going to unfold that day. He popped his head into the office he shared with Chris Gaft. "Hey Chris, what's happening?"

"Captain wants to see you; well both of us really - about the Miller case."

"Okay let's go," said Heb throwing his newspaper onto the seat behind his desk. He knocked on the varnished door, which had Captain Brendan O'Neil on it in gold lettering.

"Come in," said a gruff voice.

"Yeah captain, you wanted to see us?" Heb asked, as he marched into the small office followed by Chris Gaft.

The captain, a man with thick, brown hair above a craggy face with tired grey eyes said: "The Miller case, how are things progressing?"

"Things are going well," said Heb before he proceeded to relay the events of the past few days.

"Well it sounds like you've got your man. I want an arrest made – there's pressure from above."

Heb gazed at his bosses family photographs on his uncluttered desk. "I'm not sure that Duncan did it. He claims he was framed. He *was* in a dubious car crash prior to this."

"That crash *was* an accident. I want him arrested – today gentlemen."

Where was this pressure from above coming from, thought Heb as he sipped a coffee at his desk and stared out of the window? Some CIA buddy of the captains; or a favour called in by somebody higher up!

Chapter Forty Three

Johnny dried his hair with a green hospital towel and then looked in the mirror on the back of the shower room door and combed his brown locks. He then walked into the main room and buttoned up his shirt and then checked his wallet. He retrieved his shoes from the main cupboard to the side of the window and then sat on the bedside chair and put them on.

There was a knock at the door as he threw items into his bag, which the police had retrieved from the hotel. The door opened and Lieutenant Dewar looked in. "Mr Duncan – feeling better?"

"Yes, but I've been told to take it easy, especially around the head area."

The lieutenant pushed the door open further and walked in looking at his feet.

"This doesn't look like a social visit," said Johnny.

"John Duncan I am arresting you for the murder of Kyle Miller..."

Johnny just watched the cop's lips move, but never heard his rights. He was handcuffed by Chris Gaft, who had followed Heb Dewar into the room.

Johnny was put in an interview room at the Second District Police Station. The room was bare save for a table and four hard plastic seats.

"Can I have an attorney?" Johnny asked.

"We're waiting on your attorney coming. Someone has paid for one for you," said Lieutenant Dewar.

"Who?"

"We don't know, but it seems that you have a fairy godmother, because someone paid for your hospital bills as well," said Lieutenant Gaft.

Eventually a tall, thin man dressed in a dark, blue suit was shown into the room.

"Gentlemen," he said as he nodded. "I'm Randall Page of Foster and Page Attorneys-at-Law."

Heb Dewar pointed to the empty seat beside Johnny.

"Can I have a private word with my client please?" The lawyer asked the two policemen.

When the two detectives left the room Randall Page turned his chair to face Johnny. He was a man in his late thirties, had deep brown eyes and light brown hair the front of which receded toward the sides. "Okay Mr Duncan, tell me your story."

"First of all this may sound odd, but was it someone who works for the CIA who paid for your services?"

The man smiled. "No Mr Duncan the man who paid my company does not work for the CIA; if he did I would not have taken the case."

Fair enough, thought Johnny as he proceeded to tell the attorney the whole story. He didn't leave much out – he needed someone to trust and that knew the ground, and this guy seemed to fit the bill.

Chapter Forty Four

Johnny gazed up at the violet sky between the white spires. He felt strangely at ease as if nothing could harm him in this place. He walked around the base of one of the towers and suddenly saw a figure he instantly recognised standing by the entrance to a tower. "Erin!" He shouted, as he ran toward the building, but she had gone!

He looked around and saw her by the entrance of another spire. "Leave me alone Johnny it's... not time yet."

"Erin – please!" Johnny shouted, as he ran into the entrance through which she had gone. The interior, however, was empty.

Johnny woke up and stared at the cell walls through the darkness. Tears ran down his face as his mind adjusted to reality – a reality he wished no part of.

The next day he was taken from the miserable prison in Washington DC back to the Moultrie Court building where his lawyer had entered a not guilty plea on his behalf at his arraignment

Bailiff's led him from a holding cell into a large courtroom where twelve jurors sat in two rows. He was placed beside Randall Page, who sat at a table at the front with his briefcase in front of him. Another table across the narrow aisle had the two men Johnny recognised as the public prosecutors.

The judge, the Honourable Willard Truman, sat and peered at the proceedings from behind a pair of circular spectacles. He was a big, African/American man with a double chin and greying hair.

A clerk stood up and addressed the court: "The people versus John Duncan." The prosecuting attorney, Charles Scholtz, a short, bulky man in a black suit with thick, wavy, fair hair rose from his seat and prepared to question the first prosecution witness: Sergeant Duane Ellis.

The sergeant was sworn in and sat in the witness box next to the judge.

"Sergeant, can you tell us, in your own words, what you saw when you entered the house at 14b 36th North West Street Georgetown?"

"Well, we found the street front door open so we climbed the stairs and entered the apartment – the front door being open. Mr Duncan was sitting on the floor with his hands on his head. Over by the coffee table, which was in the centre of the room, lay the body of Kyle Miller with a knife in his chest. There was cash lying around the floor.

"Was there anyone else in the apartment?"

"No sir."

"What did you do next?"

"I tested Mr Miller for a pulse, but finding none I attended to Mr Duncan."

"Okay, thank you sergeant."

Randall Page stood up and walked around to the front of the desk while fastening his jacket. "Sergeant, you say that when you arrived at the apartment the front door was open; so anyone could have entered and then left before you?"

"Yes, that could've been possible."

"Was there any real signs of a struggle?"

"Apart from the cash on the floor – no!"

"Would you not say, from your vast experience in such cases, that there should have been more signs of a struggle?"

"Yes."

Johnny watched the proceedings in physical form only; his mind was searching for Erin; searching for that place of dreams; searching for that place where he wanted to be, away from this wearisome world.

The next prosecution witness was Doctor Ahmed Khan, who took the stand with a copy of the medical report on Johnny.

A clerk appeared at the table and handed two sheets to Randall Page, who scanned them before nudging Johnny with his elbow, “you’re a free man!”

“Doctor Khan, will you give the court a brief outline of the medical report on John Duncan,” said Charles Scholtz

The Doctor ran through the report.

“Would you say then, that he had been hit once?”

“Yes I would, as the report says the PET scan shows one hair-line fracture on the skull where the skin had been broken – a compound fracture.”

“Okay, thank you doctor.”

“Doctor,” said Page, as he rose from his seat, “Your report says quite clearly that there was only one fracture on Mr Duncan’s skull?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“Well why does the actual PET scan show two fractures, which were not there when Mr Duncan had a scan done after his recent accident? To explain: I have been given a back-up hardcopy of the scan which is usually filed away and forgotten about and, an original hardcopy of the scan from the time he was hospitalized for the car accident. I will display them to the court. The original for the latest PET scan seems to have been mislaid.”

Murmuring erupted throughout the court.

“Order!” Shouted the judge, “Mr Page, Mr Scholtz – a word.”

Johnny walked out into the warm sunshine of Indiana Avenue. He shook hands with Randall Page. “Well thanks. But, Doctor Khan – why?”

“Your enemies had got to him – money, power, whatever!”

A black Pick-up screeched to a halt in front of the parked cars, which lined the avenue. Johnny recognised the driver as the passenger side window lowered.

“Please get in Mr Duncan?”

“Nathan Malloy, Johnny said, as he waved goodbye to his attorney and entered the truck. “It was you who paid my bills.”

“And supplied the scan evidence - I didn’t want to see you banged up for something you didn’t do!”

“Unlike some others, and thank you...thank you very much.”

“What now?” Nathan asked, as they drove along Pennsylvania Avenue

“I’m going to see this through. I’ve come too far to just walk away.”

“I thought that would be the case, that’s why I’ve booked you into the Marriot Hotel on 22nd Street.”

“Oh no Nathan, I can’t accept any more from you.”

“Of course you can John. Stay as long as you need; you’re now one of my customers.”

They turned into 15th Street. “I’m taking you for a hire car. This is a dangerous city. I’d feel better if you drove rather than walked and took the metro.”

They pulled up outside Enterprise Rent-A-Car on Vermont Avenue. “Its all arranged, just show them your drivers licence.”

“Nathan – what can I say?”

“Here’s my business card: if you need anything just phone. And for Christ’s sake take care!”

Johnny lay back on one of the beds in his room. "This is living," he said to himself. The receptionist had looked him up and down when he checked in, so he decided a shave and shower were in order before sampling the delights of one of the restaurants.

That night he slipped between the crisp, white sheets of his bed and thought how good it was to be in a real bed after many uncomfortable nights in cell beds where sleep was hard to find.

He dreamt of climbing through the different dimensions until finally emerging on the depressing thirteenth, where he was greeted by the Dark Angel.

"Why do you seek me?" She asked in her rasping voice.

"Because I need your help."

She laughed, and then asked: "Why would I help you?"

"Because in return I will give you my soul."

All traces of laughter left her features and her eyes focused on his, and Johnny felt an eternal sadness weaken his heart.

"Why?"

"Because I would like to spend eternity in the spire city."

"Ah – fantasy, but very well. What do you wish me to do?"

Chapter Forty Five

Lindsay Koenig suddenly sat bolt upright in his bed and switched on the light, which sat on his bed-side unit. Shadows jumped on to the walls. “Who’s there? I know there’s someone there!”

A figure stepped out of a darkened corner of the room, which caused him to stumble out of the bed. “You...but, that’s impossible, you’re...”

“Dead,” said Erin in a rasping voice. “And it was you or your associate that killed me!”

“But wait it’s me...we have a deal!” Koenig exclaimed when he realised who it really was.

“Yes, but you’re not Christ and anyway you got what you wanted: the place was destroyed” She said with a cackle.

Before Koenig could put up his mental shields his mind was penetrated and images of the people whose shape he had assumed appeared. What gave him the right to steal their identities they demanded?

His eyes were open as his body rose into the air, but he saw nothing in his bedroom; instead he saw a dark, tumultuous world where a stairway led up to another smaller depressing world. He noticed people climbing the steps with bowed heads, before his lifeless body fell to the floor with a dull thump, causing the light on the unit to topple over and make the shadows on the walls briefly dance.

Chapter Forty Six

The hotel room phone rang as Johnny was sitting reading an article in the Washington Post about a man, Lindsay Koenig, being found dead in his Maryland home by the cleaner. There were no suspicious circumstances, and an autopsy was to be carried out.

He lifted the receiver and answered. "Yes?"

"Mr Duncan, its Clara in reception. I have a call for you – a Miss Blakely."

"Okay, put her through please."

There was a click and then Karen Blakely said: "Mr Duncan?"

"Miss Blakely."

"All this has gone far enough; we need to talk."

Panic starting to set in now her associates out of the way, he thought.

"Very well, but I don't trust you!"

"I give you my word that there will be no more...actions. You can choose the meeting place."

"Okay."

Chapter Forty Seven

The heat of the day gushed into the Pontiac as Johnny opened the door and climbed out after parking on Jefferson Drive SW. He then strolled onto the National Mall and gazed at the giant obelisk that was the Washington Monument.

People on their lunch breaks mingled with tourists, who were busy taking pictures of one another standing before the great pillar. He crossed over two roads and walked over to the monument. Karen Blakely was standing by one of the flags which encircled the base.

"Mr Duncan," she said without taking her eyes off the monument.

"Miss Blakely."

She trained her tired eyes on him. "Right I suppose I should start at the beginning."

"All ways good, and the truth this time please."

"When I was a kid my grandfather told me stories about the power of the 'Nazi Bell', and he reckoned it was somewhere in the US. He was an SS officer that escaped to South America after the war and then managed to enter the US with the help of the 'Blacksuns' – a group of former SS officers who had settled into life stateside."

"Right," said Johnny, nodding.

"As you know Mr Duncan they were in all walks of life – banking, the military and the intelligence services - the Soviets being a prime target for their wrath. My grandfather – his real name was Jurgen Roth – worked his way up in the CIA; all the time trying to find out where the Bell was. He knew of course that the Americans had used the technology to help make the first atom bomb. My father, David, followed him into the Agency and then obviously me. Some would call it nepotism, but we didn't care, the Blacksuns bloodline felt strong – something special. When I heard that some kids had found something that fitted the description of the Bell in an abandoned government facility in the Mojave valley. I sent a special team to investigate. They eventually confirmed that it was the Bell.

After seeing it for myself I had the place sealed off and brought in a trusted scientist." She glanced over at Capitol Hill as if to seek approval. "I knew what was going on in the old mine would be noticed; so I put it about that a particle accelerator was being constructed – somewhere in the desert."

"Why didn't you just release the news rather than hush it up?"

"Because, Mr Duncan, after hearing these tales from my grandfather I wanted the power for myself to out do the male dominated hierarchy of the CIA. I would go to any length to achieve that; I didn't care who I had to enlist."

"Leads nicely onto Lindsay Koenig?"

"Ah, well, I'm CIA – I wanted a back-up in case the accelerator story didn't work; so Johannes Menzel came onboard, to give the whole thing crank-appeal. People would reject the notion of the Bell if Menzel was involved particularly the scientific community. The thing was he wasn't interested in dealing with the CIA; so I managed to get Lindsay to persuade him to join us with one of his parlour tricks. Koenig was paid well for the work he did." She paused for a moment. "Trouble with Lindsay was that I didn't know his family had escaped Nazi Germany – he was Jewish. There was nothing in his file about his religion or his family's background. You see Mr Duncan during the Cold War the CIA lapped up people like Lindsay, their background and religion was of little or no consequence."

"So he went against you and made me see the visions and then appeared himself as if he was some divine entity to get me to announce what was about to happen. Why not tell the world himself?"

“Who would listen to some spook who had been involved in the failed remote viewing scheme? No, from his point of view you were the right man. Anyway It didn’t matter because I brought the date of the tests forward.”

“And it was him, of course, who was hell-bent on revenge,”

“Yes, not only on the USA, but the whole Nazi thing.”

“What about all these people that were killed when the Hoover was destroyed?”

“I can only say I didn’t want that to happen, but Lindsay and the demon, if it *was* the Angel of Death, had other ideas. It wasn’t part of my plan you know. I wasn’t sure if what happened to Hitler and Himmler under the mountain was real or just something cooked up by the anti-Nazi scientists.”

“Oh the Dark Angel is the real enough.”

“Well of course, you’ve seen her.”

“You killed Erin!”

“Okay, I gave the order to ‘fix’ her car - I was getting desperate!”

“Then I was framed.”

“Yeah well, congratulations Mr Duncan you’ve survived neo-Nazis, demons and the Black Corps of the CIA.”

“One more thing; why did Menzel send someone over to kill me?”

I tried to stop that, but they’re hot heads; it was something about Judas Iscariot.” She looked around wearily; hordes of tourists were still taking photographs.

“Okay you can call in whoever’s got you wired up, I’ve given you enough.”

Heb Dewar and Chris Graft appeared out of the crowds and arrested her.

“I really only did it for America!” She shouted, as she was taken away by another two plain clothes policemen.

“Thanks John,” said Heb, as he took back the wire.

“Yeah well, she gave herself up – just glad to get it all off her chest.”

“Hey John she killed Miss Rodgers and all these people out west.”

“Goodbye Lieutenant,” said Johnny as he shook the policeman’s hand.

He then headed back along the National Mall. “Time to go home,” he said to no one in particular.

Johnny climbed into the hire car and turned the key in the ignition, but nothing happened – no lights; no radio – nothing! He raised his head up to the sky as if to gain some inspiration. Then he saw, from the side of his eyes, two figures approaching the vehicle. He instantly pressed the handle on the driver’s door and locked the car down. A hand reached for the front passenger’s door as the car suddenly unlocked and a man in a dark blue suit climbed in followed by another, similarly dressed, in the rear.

“Oh, what now?” Johnny asked with a sigh.

“We would appreciate it if you would you would come with us. The gentlemen we work for would like to talk to you,” said the man in the front passenger’s seat, who had cropped fair hair and light grey eyes.

They don’t look like thugs, thought Johnny – *no bulges in the jackets*. “Why should I come with you?”

The man next to Johnny turned from looking at him to stare out of the windscreen. “You are, of course, free to go, but take it from me this is a unique opportunity. My employers never talk to the media.”

Intrigued, Johnny agreed and, almost immediately, a black limousine drew up alongside the car.

“Mr Duncan please,” said the man who had been sitting in the back as he opened the rear door of the limousine.

The two men followed Johnny in, and they were driven to a tower of black metal and glass on Massachusetts Avenue where he was escorted past the reception of Transglobal Bank to an elevator with the doors open. A lift person pressed a button, and without a word being exchanged they rose through the floors at great speed.

The lift eventually stopped and the doors opened with a ping and bright sunlight swept into the box. Johnny shaded his eyes and peered out at a black Bell Helicopter, the blades a blur, sitting within a black circle with an 'H' in the centre.

"Just a short flight," said one of the men as they led Johnny over to the aircraft, heads stooped.

Inside, he strapped himself in beside a window and put on the headphones that had been lying on the seat. The others did the same and then pulled the door shut.

"Welcome aboard," said one of the two pilots, who turned and gave a 'thumbs up'.

"Flight time: an hour and a half gentlemen," he continued as the helicopter then rose up and flew over the city.

After a few minutes flying time Johnny looked down at the expanse of blue that was Chesapeake Bay. He then gazed the other way, past the two suited men, and saw the city of Baltimore ease gently by.

After a while, as the urban sprawl of Philadelphia stretched into the distance, he thought: *we're heading for New York*. A thought that was soon confirmed with the appearance of the patina green figure of the Statue of Liberty with the Manhattan skyline in the background.

They flew over piers flanked by many different sized craft before passing over the maze of towers of the city. The helicopter eventually settled on the helipad of a black metal and glass building similar to the one in Washington DC.

After the 'thumbs up' from the pilot Johnny unbuckled his seatbelt and followed the two men out of the aircraft and over the roof toward black elevator doors as a ferocious wind swept over the building and sucked the breath out of his lungs.

The doors rolled open and the men entered as a metallic voice welcomed them to the Transglobal Bank. And, after a very short elevator ride, the doors opened to reveal a large reception area. The two men led Johnny past a large mahogany desk where two women sat - both on the telephone.

A party of people led by a short man that Johnny recognised passed them going in the opposite direction. *My God*, he thought, *that was the French President*.

"Have a good flight sir," said one of the women from behind the desk, who had come off the telephone momentarily.

"This way Mr Duncan," said one of the men who had accompanied him.

As they led him toward two large, dark wood doors Johnny looked down at the black circular design on the white marble floor. Where had he seen that before?

One of the men knocked on the double doors and then opened them and announced: "Mr Duncan."

Johnny walked into a spacious office where one wall was glass and offered a spectacular view over the Manhattan skyline. The other walls were of panelled mahogany and were interspersed with paintings.

"So very nice to meet you Mr Duncan," said a man with thin, grey hair and blue eyes, as he walked round from behind a large desk, which sat in front of the window wall. "I'm Albert Redman, and this is Harold Collins," he said opening a hand toward a man who rose from a brown leather settee.

"Please have a seat," said Collins, a thick set man with a shaved head and a grey drooping moustache.

Johnny sat at the opposite end of the settee to where Collins repositioned himself. Albert Redman strolled behind a small bar, which had glasses of all shapes and sizes stacked at one end. Bottles of various spirits and liqueurs lined a shelf at the back.

"Would you like a drink Mr Duncan?"

"Lemonade will be fine – thanks."

After pouring two drinks Redman left the bar, handed out the glasses then returned behind his desk. "We asked you here today to answer some questions for you. We thought that after what you've been through and where you're going we, at the very least, were due you that."

"How do you know where I'm going?"

"Oh, we have our sources."

Harold Collins crossed one leg over the other and sipped his drink. He had on a light grey loose-fitting suit. "Albert and I together are Colman Holdings; we own many companies and banks – including this one." He turned and gazed out of the window.

"I'm afraid after all the effort you went through – Karen Blakely will be released and placed back in her position at Langley. The Bell will be retrieved and hidden in a better place this time."

"What?" A puzzled Johnny asked.

"You see Mr Duncan; it's not governments, and therefore government agencies, that rule the western world, it's the banks, despite what the media says. In fact most of the world leaders come to see us at one time or another."

Johnny chuckled.

"Mr Duncan please don't treat this lightly, we never talk to the media. You've been granted this interview because, as we said, of the position you're in. Imagine how many people – conspiracy theorists - would like to be where you are now," said Redman.

"The Blacksun!" Johnny exclaimed. I'm sorry, but I just realized where I saw that design on the floor outside your office. Are you members of the Blacksuns?"

"Arnold Redman laughed as he swivelled his seat from side to side. "Ah, the nitty-gritty!" He looked at Harold Collins. "Both our fathers were SS officers, who were helped to settle in the US after escaping Germany at the end the Second World War by a group known as the Blacksuns, who no longer exist. We are the direct bloodline of a small group of people who came to this planet ages ago through what is now called a wormhole. They arrived through the black hole at the centre of this galaxy. The term black hole is a fairly recent term, before this it was known as the black sun."

"So," said Johnny, as he stroked his chin. "You're ancestors were Aryan people from another planet who eventually tried to dominate this world."

"No Mr Duncan, not tried, but has dominated this world through capitalism. When that wall came down in eighty-nine the revenge was complete. We drank a toast to the great Sixth Army who was beaten not by the Russians, but by the Stalingrad weather and a leader that was suffering from Parkinson's disease.

"The theories were right then?"

"Mr Duncan, you will not be able to prove any of this and there is no way anyone from the media will get to us," said Collins. "We will look after your family. This is not a threat. We would just like to help," he continued.

"One more question, said Johnny as he placed his empty glass on the coffee table in front of the settee," something that has bothered me through this whole thing: if Himmler knew about the powers of the Bell before it was moved to Germany why didn't he tell Hitler?"

“We don’t know for sure,” said Redman,” but, we have two theories: the first is that he wasn’t sure exactly what he had - unlikely; the second, and probably the right one is that he despised Hitler – a man who espoused the Aryan and German ideals and was neither. He had just wanted him to fail. Now Mr Duncan, your helicopter awaits you. The pilot has been instructed to take you straight to Dulles Airport for your flight to the UK. If you would leave the keys for the hire car at the reception desk everything will be taken care of.”

Johnny stood up. “Well, thank you, it’s been most enlightening.”

“Farewell Mr Duncan,” said Harold Collins, as he picked up a copy of the New York Times from the coffee table in front of the settee.

As the helicopter rose above the Manhattan towers the Journalist in Johnny wanted to write an expose’, but he knew they were right: he had no proof. And he did want someone to look after his kids – who better than the banking elite of the world – even if they were Nazis!

Chapter Forty Eight

Commuters with magazines and packets of crisps ran past the window where Johnny sat on the Edinburgh train in Aberdeen Railway Station. He had just flown up from Heathrow and was now on the last leg of his journey from Washington.

Four men sat around a table, which was littered with cans of beer and spoke about what they would do on their time off from the oil rig they had flown in from.

There was the sound of the doors closing and whistles blowing and then the train slowly began its journey south. Johnny sat back and gazed at the sky. Rays of sunlight shone through holes in the dark clouds.

Back home, in Arbroath, Johnny checked into a guest house in Old Shore Head, which advertised sea views. He threw his bags on the bed and pulled out his mobile.

"Sue – its Johnny."

"Johnny! You're back."

"I was wondering, can I pick up Caitlin from school tomorrow and take her to McDonalds or something?"

"Sure that'll be okay; I'll phone the school."

"Okay, thanks."

He then took his clothes off and climbed into the bed. He was exhausted and there was a lot to be done the next day.

The following morning after he saw his solicitor, Johnny went to the police station and asked to see DS Mitchell.

"Mr Duncan?" said Dave Mitchell, as he opened the door to where Johnny sat.

"DS Mitchell, it's good to see you."

"Likewise. Come through."

They sat in the office which Dave shared with DC McAllister, who was out on a case.

"The case you were involved in was dropped. The Home Office asked us to shelve it; would you believe!"

"Well, yes I would," said Johnny, and he proceeded to tell the policeman what had happened to him – well most of it! "So you see Sergeant it would have come from the CIA."

"That's some story, but I'm glad to see you're alive and well."

"Goodbye Sergeant," said Johnny, as he stood up and shook hands with the man.

Caitlin ran out of Hayshead Primary School into her fathers arms. "Dad!"

"Baby!"

"Mum said you would take me to McDonalds?"

"Sure – let's go."

The restaurant was full of kids that were being treated by grateful parents: grateful in the sense that they would not need to stand in front of a cooker.

"Where's Veronica Dad?" Caitlin asked, as she grabbed a packet of fries from a red, plastic tray, which Johnny had placed on the table where she sat.

"I've something sad to tell you baby," he said as he sat opposite her.

Johnny told her about Erin and his adventures in America. "So listen Caitlin, I want you to be a big girl now, because I'm going to be with Erin."

"What? Oh no, dad!"

"You know where I'm going, and you can come and see me anytime. All you have to do is contact this man, with mum or Auntie Gemma of course." He gave her Keith Moncliffe's business card.

She threw down her fries and put her face on the fist of her upright left arm and stared out of the window.

He gazed at her sympathetically. "I wish it were different, but it has to be this way because of a deal I made. At least we still get to see each other"

"Well I suppose," she said slowly while taking her face off her fist.

"I want you to do what your mum tells you and tell Brad that I love him."

That night Johnny lay down on his bed, fully clothed, and fell asleep. He dreamt of rising through the air towards, and then through, the clouds. As he headed toward the twinkling stars he looked back and saw four angels with small, delicate wings approach and eventually overtake him. They then guided him up until he could see a mass of white cloud.

The angels flew up above the large, puffy ball with Johnny following and hovered for a while, which allowed Johnny to see the white spires, which protruded through a wide hole in the clouds.

He felt himself descend and then within the blink of an eye he was standing by one of the gleaming spires. He looked around, but the angels had gone. Johnny then entered the spire, but it was empty. He ran over to another and looked inside, but it was also empty. He looked in another and another, but the result was the same.

After a while he stood outside a tower and looked despondently at the ground, when a soft voice asked: "You looking for me mister?"

He looked up and smiled. "Erin!"

Her hair was longer than he remembered maybe it was because it wasn't tied back. She wore a long, pink gown. He ran up to her and they embraced. Johnny felt happier than he had ever done.

A short distance away a small girl in a cream dress hummed while she tended to her plants in the garden under a violet sky.

EPILOGUE

The child sat on the wooden slat, gripping the two lengths of rope either side and swung to and fro in the scented breeze that blew through the garden. She gazed placidly at the grass as it flowed toward her and then ebbed away. Her golden hair tumbled down from under her white hat and flowed over her shoulders.

She thought of Caitlin and wondered what it was like to be human – truly human; to have a father who really cared instead of a beast who asked her to undertake tasks she never wanted to do.

After a while the breeze started to chill her as the light began to fade. Lilim looked around the garden; something was wrong, because it was *her* who controlled the light and the breeze. Was something from the thirteenth dimension starting to break through?

Suddenly, a man's hand was placed over her right hand, then another over her left: someone was behind her! She stared in wonder at the hand covering her right hand, because there was a ring on the small finger. The ring was made of a dull metal and had a funny cross-like shape engraved into it.

"Raphael!" she shouted as she leapt off the swing slipping her hands neatly out from under the male hands.

"Lilim," growled Menzel. "How is my young sister?"

"I saw you in that cavern. Are you still playing your games?" she asked as her eyes became black and her skin began to wrinkle.

"I get bored. And since father can't join me in the material dimension I weary. I enjoyed being that dreadful little man - Adolf Hitler. The latest guise, however, was defeated by two physicals. Where are they by the way?"

"Oh, they're around. You have caused a lot of disruption in the Land of Trees and have sent us many dark souls. The Sin Gatherer will be most displeased!" They both erupted into laughter, and, as Lilim grew in size, they embraced.

End.

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