

DARK SECRETS

Anthony John Warren

Chapter One

I couldn't understand why anyone would want to murder Nick Fowler. I had known him for some years and had always regarded him as a harmless, almost nondescript man – not one that you would particularly notice at a party – not that he ever went to parties. He had been found by his cleaning lady in the lounge of his apartment in Fetter Lane. He had been stabbed in the neck – a very deep wound inflicted, so the police said, by a long, sharp domestic knife, such as one used to carve the Christmas turkey. It had been delivered with some force.

I reflected that only two weeks ago we had met in the Cheshire Cheese off Fleet Street. We both had two pints of Old Brewery and complained that they no longer sold their pies and sausage rolls. Two weeks before that we had met in the Little Driver in Mile End Road near to where I live in Bow. That time it had been two pints each of London Pride. Some times we would meet in El Vino just across the road from Fetter Lane in Fleet Street. There it would be a couple of glasses of cheap red.

I had read the news of his demise on the front page of the Evening Standard and then seen it again on TV on the local London News programme. On TV the police were appealing for anyone who knew Nick, which I did, to contact them at Holborn Police Station. I eventually found the station, not in Holborn, but in Lamb's Conduit Street.

Forensics had done a complete search of his apartment and from his passport, bank statements and other correspondence they had already identified him. I was able to tell them that he worked as a clerk at chambers in the Temple at Kings Bench Walk. I told them that I was an assistant to the Chief Cashier at the Bank of England.

"Assistant Chief Cashier at the Bank of England!" mused Detective Chief Inspector Rose.

"No. Assistant to the Chief Cashier," I corrected.

"Is there a difference, sir," he asked.

"About 20K," I replied.

"Were you close friends?"

"No. Not really, more like acquaintances – drinking partners."

Forensics had found just four sets of finger prints in Nick's apartment; his, that of his cleaning lady and two that were unidentified. I had never been inside his apartment; we had only just met up in pubs. The murder weapon and door handles had been wiped clean. As well as this, if the murder had been premeditated, the killer would have worn gloves, but it may have been unpremeditated, done on a sudden impulse.

Fetter Lane, in which Fowler had been murdered, was situated within the City and County of London – the Square Mile. Its police force is separate from that of the Met and its headquarters are at the Guildhall, but it also has a police station at 182 Bishopsgate near the Liverpool Street tube and rail station. It was to this station that the murder was first reported. This station referred it to Scotland Yard who delegated it to their Holborn Police Station in Lamb's Conduit Street. There it came to the attention of Detective Chief Inspector George Rose of the Met.

George Rose, in his mid-forties, was tall, stocky, with strong, clean-shaven facial features and enquiring brown eyes. His dark brown hair was starting to grey at the sides. His detective sergeant, Bill Williamson, in his early thirties, was over six feet tall, slim, but muscular. His blond hair was cut short and he was clean shaven. His blue eyes seemed quiet and thoughtful.

Detective Chief Inspector Rose and Detective Sergeant Williamson visited the chambers in Kings Bench Walk. The Chief Inspector was of the opinion that this would be the most likely source to lead to Nick's killer. He felt that a disgruntled client of the chambers or someone who had been convicted by the efforts of one of the barristers there would be the most likely suspects. But as one of those barristers pointed out to him, it was the barristers that were usually the subjects of abuse and threats, not the humble clerk.

The cleaning lady had formally identified the body. The police were now seeking relatives and next of kin. They phoned me about this, but I could only tell them that I did not know of any relatives. Nick had always been very much alone.

My current girlfriend, there had been a few, and I were discussing the case, as we now referred to it, at the far table of the cosy Lamb and Flag in Rose Street. It was a few minutes past 12 noon and the pub had only just opened, so we were alone there apart from two men standing at the bar.

"Don't get too upset about it," Jane counselled me, "You didn't know him all that well."

"I don't think anybody knew him all that well," I replied. "I think it's just because of the fact that he was murdered. I've never known anyone murdered before. Most people wouldn't."

I took another sip of my pint of ale. It was the very drinkable Gale's Seafarer from Fuller's Griffin Brewery at Chiswick.

"I've just heard that it's been found that Nick had an auntie living in Wilmslow near Manchester. That was a bit of a surprise. Apparently she's insisted on coming down to help the police with their enquiries."

We finished our drinks, left the Lamb and Flag and made our ways back to our respective homes. We would not be sharing a bed this night.

Chapter Two

The next day I was sitting at a table in the far corner of the Crown and Sugarloaf – you may have noticed that I rather like pubs. This one is one of my favourites. I was the only customer there at before 5.00 pm. You have to be there before 6.00 pm because after that, as it is a small pub, it becomes very crowded and not possible to find a seat, let alone a table.

A character called Ladroski used to frequent it, but I hadn't seen him for some months. I think that he was some kind of private detective and also had some connection with nearby Fetter Lane. Perhaps Nick had known him, but I doubt it.

It was nice to be alone in the pub, with no one to interrupt my thoughts. Just sitting there, drinking and thinking, think and drink, sipping Old Brewery again.

I was thinking about how I had joined the Civil Service, rather late in life in my late thirties. I had passed the executive exam and then the senior executive exam and been approved by their security checks. I had been assigned to a rather junior position in the Foreign Office in Whitehall. That's when I started going to the Clarence up the road from there with other junior members of staff.

Then someone realised that in my earlier life I had passed some accountancy exams – financial accounting – and it was considered that I may be useful in the jolly old Bank of England.

Maud Whiting was typical of what I think is referred to as a maiden aunt. She certainly had the appearance; in her early seventies, tall, erect, haughty, unsmiling and with demanding eyes. One who is used to and expecting to get her own way. Not to be argued with. Just like that geezer Marcias I once met in the Crown and Sugarloaf.

"Was it suicide?" she demanded of the Chief Inspector, purposely not addressing him by his title of office.

"Why do you ask that, Miss Whiting?" The Chief Inspector was used to dealing with Miss Whittings and also purposely returned her question with a question. In his office he asked the questions.

"Because he had money problems. Financial problems. He was a bit of a gambler; horses, casinos."

"I can confirm," Rose assured her, "that it was not suicide, definitely murder, as yet by person or persons unknown. The angle and penetration of the stabbing wound ruled it impossible to be self-inflicted. How do you know that he had money problems? You live some distance away."

"Because he told me so. In letters he wrote to me. Probably hoping to sponge some money off me."

"Do you still have those letters?"

"No. Why should I?"

Maud Whiting departed from the police station to a hotel, not very impressed with the two detectives she had met. She appeared to have a better knowledge of London than she had made apparent for she had chosen the attractive and very convenient Euro Hotel in Pinner Road, North Harrow, near to the Metropolitan tube station.

"He had money problems, according to his aunt. Maybe he owed money to bookies. Bookies and loan sharks. They have their enforcers," considered Williamson.

"They have their enforcers, but why kill the debtor before he has repaid you? Surely they would want to keep him alive until he has repaid them."

"Maybe it was meant to be a warning, but it went too far," pursued the sergeant.

"You wouldn't warn someone by stabbing them in the neck with a long blade and with great force." countered Rose, "No. There must be other motives. There must be more to Mr. Nick Fowler than the obvious."

Meanwhile I was at home thinking about the case. I had a lady friend who was a civilian member of the staff in the police station so I was being reasonably informed of developments. The police had found an old betting slip tucked away in a pair of Nick's trousers. It identified a bookie near Farringdon Road. The two detectives visited the betting shop and spoke to the manager there.

"There are prints on the betting slip, other than Mr. Fowler's," lied the Chief Inspector. "We just need to take your prints to eliminate you from our enquiries." This led to the betting shop manager being identified as the owner of one of the up to then two unidentified prints from Nick's apartment.

"So you have visited his flat, sir," demanded Rose, "Why?"

"A horse he backed was a non-runner, so his bet was void and his stake was to be returned to him... £100. So I returned it to him at his apartment."

"Really? Why do that? Surely you would just wait to give it to him on his next visit to your shop?"

"He was a good customer. By that I mean a regular loser. I wanted to encourage him to keep betting... and losing with us. So I thought it would be a nice gesture to take the £100 to him... to encourage him."

Rose was inclined to believe the manager's version. It sounded blunt enough to be true and there was no apparent motive to kill Fowler. However, there was still another set of prints not yet identified.

Some of you may remember when the Hippodrome, on the corner of Leicester Square and Charing Cross Road, was a theatre. Then it became the Talk of the Town with stars such as Howard Keel, Matt Monro and Sandie Shaw. It had since returned to being the Hippodrome, not as a theatre, but as a casino. There is a faro dealer there called Jean Caron-Godard – French? (actually Bill Holden from Hackney). Detective Chief Inspector Rose had received an anonymous tip-off to question him about the murder of Nick Fowler. The 'Frenchman's' finger prints matched those of the final set of prints in Nick's apartment.

"What were you doing in Mr. Fowler's apartment?"

Jean Caron-Godard remained silent for some time. Eventually he replied, "Looking for money. He owed me £5,000."

"So what happened? You broke into his apartment. He came home and caught you there, so you killed him."

"You don't kill someone who owes you money. You want them to stay alive in the hope that one day they will repay you. He was already home when I arrived there. I rang the bell, he answered and let me in. We sat down and had a couple of drinks – half a bottle of Scotch was all he had. He gave me £1,000 on account. Now he's dead, I expect that's all I'll get."

"We'll need to examine the clothing you were wearing when you called on him."

"Don't know what I was wearing then, but you can come to my digs and examine everything. I didn't kill him. I wanted him to stay alive and repay me the other £4,000. But there are others who may have thought differently."

"Who d'you mean? What d'you mean?"

"Among other things Nick was a blackmailer. Needed to be to finance his gambling. Have you ever heard of two flies crawling up a window pane? Which one will win? That was Nick."

"Do you believe him?" asked Sergeant Williamson on their return to the nick.

"Dunno. Let's try that assistant in the Bank of England again. See if he knows anything. What was his name?"

"Hugh Browne-Wilson."

When questioned, I responded, "Well, you surprise me there. I wouldn't have thought Nick would know of anything to blackmail anyone with. And I don't think he would have had the courage to do so."

The two detectives left me and my apartment and made their way to the Mile End tube station to return to their police station.

"We're getting nowhere," complained Rose. "The bank assistant who wasn't really a friend, the aunt who lived up north and never really saw much of him, the bookie, the faro dealer. Let's talk to the cleaning lady again and try to find who phoned that tip-off about the faro dealer."

"It was a pay as you go mobile," Williamson explained.

"Had to be," growled the Chief Inspector.

The two detectives visited Mrs. Barnes, the cleaning lady at her home in Bermondsey. "I was only there in the mornings," she explained. "From 8.00 pm for three hours. So I didn't see anyone who calls after that. The only person I've seen there is that man from the bank. He's called a few times, but he doesn't stay for very long because they go off together to a pub and the bank man doesn't come back after that."

"This is not looking good," declared Rose on their return to Holborn Station. "No suspect, no motive, no opportunity, just method. We have an aunt who says he has money problems, a bookie who says he is a losing gambler, a pseudo Frenchman who says he may be a blackmailer, a bank assistant who says he couldn't be a blackmailer. But do you know, Williamson, I'm thinking it must be one of those four, but what motive? What opportunity? The aunt was miles away in Wilmslow, unless she'd been down here before."

"Yes, sir, I'm inclined to agree, but I think we should keep an open mind and watch out or try to find other suspects. How about the cleaning lady?"

"They're never the murderer, they just find the body. But, yes, you're right, Sergeant. We need to keep an open mind and maybe look elsewhere, if we can find an elsewhere. Let's have another look at the crime scene."

Whilst they were at Nick's apartment, the door-bell rang. It was a delivery van from a furniture store.

"Mr. Fowler?" the delivery man asked.

"No. He's not here at the moment. What are you delivering?"

"A desk, sir."

"Well, you can bring it in."

"I'll need a signature, sir."

"I can do better," Rose said and showed his warrant card.

The next stop for the detectives was the furniture store, A.J.Simpsons, in St. Anne's Road, Harrow.

"It's a very good quality desk," the manager explained. "Our very best. Solid English oak. Just under a thousand pounds. We only sell one occasionally. And the gentleman paid by cash. Very, very rare that. People pay by credit card or on credit."

"What form was the cash in?"

"All those twenty pound notes. We wouldn't take fifties."

"Used notes?"

"Yes, as far as I recall. Yes, they were."

They were back at the station. "What a confusing case. How can Fowler afford to spend a thousand pounds on a desk when he's supposed to have financial problems? And what would he want the desk for anyway? He's a clerk in a barristers' chambers."

"Search me," the sergeant responded. "Back to the chambers again now, sir?"

"Yes."

They were escorted into the office of Sir Robert Bowater KC, Head of Chambers. After the preliminary introductions and explanations, Detective Chief Inspector Rose explained that they would need to check the e-mails on the computer used by Nick Fowler.

"That's not possible," insisted Sir Robert. "There may be confidential information concerning our clients and our barristers."

“No problem,” countered Rose. “The detective sergeant here will obtain a search warrant. Then we will look at everything on the premises, not just Mr. Fowler’s computer. And I may also consider charging you with obstructing the police in their murder enquiries. However, in the spirit of co-operation, if you can assure me that you or one of your senior colleagues will go through Mr. Fowler’s e-mails and print off any personal e-mails of Mr. Fowler – we’re only interested in any of his personal correspondence, then we will forget any search warrant. Will you arrange this right now, please, Sir Robert?”

Sir Robert nodded in agreement.

“Thank you, Sir Robert. We will go across to the Strand for a coffee in the Nero. Be back in an hour. All his personal e-mails, Sir Robert.”

It was one of the smaller Nero coffee houses. They sat outside with large lattes and apricot croissants.

“You handled Sir Robert very well, sir.”

“Thank you, Williamson. You have to be firm with barristers. When they are in their environment of the court room, defence barristers can be pretty tough on police, but just now we were in our environment of asking the questions. That’s the difference.”

All but one of the e-mails revealed nothing of interest, but the one that did was to a police sergeant in the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, based in Exeter. It simply read ‘See you next Tuesday.’

Chapter Three

They were in the Ship Inn in the narrow Martins Lane, a turning off the High Street in the Devon capital. Rose thought it looked very much like a traditional London pub, but then it was Greene King and accepted CAMRA vouchers. There were three of them; Rose, Williamson and Sergeant Tyler of the Devon and Cornwall police.

“He was asking questions on behalf of a client,” Tyler explained

“A client in the chambers where he worked?”

“Yes.”

“It’s not down to a clerk to ask questions on behalf of a client. That’s the job of their barrister.”

“Yes, I know. I couldn’t tell him anything, even if I wanted to. I didn’t know what he was talking about.”

“Did he accept that?”

“I think so, but he didn’t look happy; looked disappointed.”

They caught the train back to Paddington and then the tube to Holborn.

“Another dead-end enquiry,” complained Rose. “But we’ll still stick his name with the others on the incident board. What did you make of his so-called explanation?”

“He was lying somewhere. Certainly not telling all the truth. Can’t trust a police colleague now.”

Rose nodded in agreement. “All the names on our board. All possible suspects, I suppose, but all rather weak. Time to call it a day, sergeant, and get home. Get some rest and start again tomorrow. Something will come up; maybe happen... some time. It always does. Just got to be patient. Someone will make a slip and we’ll be ready... waiting.”

Holborn Police Station... eight o’clock the following morning. Rose was starting to bite his fingernails, a clear sign of his frustration. “Method we have. Opportunity? Those who visited his apartment – the cleaner, bookie, casino man, the banker and maybe the aunt. Motive? The casino man suggested blackmail, but the banker discounted this. Killing a blackmailer would be a powerful motive. Let’s talk to the faro dealer and find out what makes him think of blackmail.”

“What makes you think he was a blackmailer, Mr. Holden?”

“Because he tried it on with me. When I was a teenager I did a few things back in Hackney. He seemed to know this and threatened to tell my boss if I didn’t pay him £1,000. I told him ‘be my guest’ and I took him to my boss who told him to get stuffed. My boss knew all about my background and it’s not easy to get a good faro dealer.”

“Better do DBS checks on the cleaner, the banker and the bookie... and the aunt.” The Criminal Records Bureau had merged with the Independent Safeguarding Authority to become the Disclosure and Barring Service, so CRB checks had become DBS checks.

“All completely clean and the banker also went through security checks when he joined the Civil Service.”

“Well, there goes our motive for them.”

Police Constable Veronica Jones (not WPC now – equality and all that) came up to them. Williamson, in his thirties, married for some years and with two children was feeling a little jaded. He thought how fetching P.C. Jones was in her uniform. He knew that she was ambitious and wanted to be transferred to the MET CID. Williamson tried to imagine her in civilian attire; a tight fitting white blouse and a mini-skirt. No, she wouldn’t wear that. He noticed that she always smiled to everyone of a higher rank. The higher the rank, the broader and sweeter her smile.

“We did a trawl of the hotels in Harrow,” Veronica explained. “We could only find one, all the others, four or five, have been demolished to make way for apartment blocks – more lucrative. The one we found was the Hindes Hotel opposite the Tesco in Hindes Road. Maud Whiting stayed there four weeks ago.”

“Thank you, constable,” said Rose. “Well done. Right, sergeant, let’s go and talk to Miss Whiting at the Euro.”

They caught the tube to North Harrow. The hotel was just around the corner.

“She left yesterday,” the receptionist told them. “Gone back to – ah – Wilmslow.”

As they were talking, an elderly man dressed in a smart suit and carrying a folio case and wearing a baseball cap with the inscription ‘Mind the Gap’ exited his room and passed by them.

“Everything okay, Mr. Warren?” the receptionist asked him.

"Yes, thank you," he smiled back and opened the front door and went out of the hotel.

"One of our regulars," explained the receptionist. "He loves London pubs."

"We definitely need to talk to Miss Whiting again," Rose said. "Contact the local police. Wilmslow. Where is it?"

"Is it in Cheshire with the Cheshire police?" replied Williamson, "but it's probably in Greater Manchester now. I know that Stockport is and that's nearby."

Rose was thinking about something that the faro dealer had said. Who's the first person a client or a client's solicitor contacts when they approach a chamber, in person, by phone, e-mail, text. It's the chamber's clerk. He gets to know all sorts of things. Maybe a good position to be in for a blackmailer.

"There was nothing in Fowler's apartment," explained Williamson. "No computer, lap-top, ipad, smart phone. Maybe he just relied on using the computer in the office."

"But people want to have an ipad, mobile phone or lap-top or something at home and about. Look at them all on the tube and in the street; nearly walk into you sometimes, looking at their phones or ipads. What about his answer phone messages?"

"All deleted."

"He tried to blackmail the casino man. Who else could he be blackmailing? Not the bookie, I'm thinking. The banker and the police sergeant in Exeter? The aunt? Who'd have the courage to blackmail that formidable woman? What was she doing down here four weeks ago? Get the Manchester boys to ask her." Rose hesitated. "There must have been some equipment in his flat. Someone must have taken it, to prevent anything being discovered."

Chapter Four

It was about three hours later that Detective Sergeant Williamson received a call back from the Manchester police.

"They've been to Maud Whiting's house in Wilmslow. They found her there. She's been murdered... with a kitchen knife stabbed in her throat. Same method as Nick Fowler, but about two hundred miles away." He hesitated then continued. "The police up there report that they have a lap-top and ipad with Fowler's name on it. Everything on it has been deleted, but their tech boys are seeing if they can find anything on the hard drive."

Rose was thinking aloud. "It looks as if on Miss Whiting's first visit down here that Fowler gave her his lap-top and ipad to take back to Wilmslow for safe keeping. He must have suspected that someone would enter his flat and steal them because of incriminating evidence they may contain."

"Do you think that the tech boys up north will find anything on the hard drive, sir?"

"Not of any use to us. Why would the culprit wipe and leave the lap-top and ipad at Miss Whiting's house, taking time to do that. Much easier and quicker to take the lap-top and the ipad with him, wouldn't you think?"

"Yes, sir."

P.C. Veronica Jones entered the office. "The Manchester people have found something on Mr. Fowler's lap-top hard drive."

"Really, constable?" Rose looked up with a faint smile. "And what would that be?"

"Twelve nursery rhymes and an episode of Midsomer Murders, sir."

Rose laughed out loud. "This killer has got a horrible sense of humour. What I call a wretched silly bugger. He took Fowler's lap-top and ipad as I would have expected and replaced them with those of his own with his idea of a joke on the hard drive – taking the mick. The episode of Midsomer Murders, whichever one it was, he may have a point there. How many do they average, three of four? We've got two so far; let's hope there's not a third."

It was early next morning when P.C. Veronica Jones came into the office again. We've (note the royal 'we') been doing a trawl of departures from Euston Station for Manchester Piccadilly. Someone who paid by credit card and with a National rail card is of interest – Richard Nigel Connolly, betting shop manager of this parish, on a train to Manchester."

"Really, constable? Well done. Thank you," Rose congratulated her." She smiled broadly, turned around and left the office and did a little skip and dance when she was out of sight.

"Give a ring to the betting shop. See if he's back yet."

It was later that afternoon that Richard Connolly appeared at Holborn Police Station. He seemed shocked to have been brought there. "I was visiting my mother in Altrincham. She's not well and she had a bad turn. I was alarmed for her."

"How is she?" Rose asked considerately.

"So so. A bit better. I've got a nurse calling on her each morning. I wanted to stay, but I had to get back to the betting shop. I am arranging for her to be in a care home, but we'll have to sell her house to pay for it. She won't like that."

"Who can confirm all this?"

"Her doctor... and the nurse."

"Right. Thank you Mr. Connolly for coming in."

"Did I have any choice?"

"We had to interview you sir. You knew Mr. Fowler, been to his apartment and you go to Manchester near to where Mr. Fowler's mother lived. I can tell you now that she was murdered inside her home in Wilmslow – same method in which her son was murdered and you were up there close by when the murder occurred. You are free to go, Mr. Connolly. One of our drivers will take you home... or to the betting shop."

After his departure, the two detectives were staring intently at nothing in particular, trying to think of something positive, some inspiration. Williamson changed the subject. "Detective Chief Inspector," he commenced very formally. "Police Constable Jones... she's done some good detective work. I know that it did not lead anywhere this time, but it could have done and she's shown good ability and initiative. We could do with another one in CID and it may be useful to have a female opinion at times."

"I agree, Detective Sergeant. I will arrange for her to be Acting Detective Constable Jones immediately and then have it confirmed completely. And she has got a nice smile... not that that influenced us, of course."

"Of course not, sir."

Acting Detective Constable Veronica Jones did not wear a tight fitting white blouse and a very short mini skirt. Instead she wore an attractive dark trouser suit, perhaps a little out of fashion.

Another day had passed. Rose was saying, "I think we can again rule out Richard Connolly again. That leaves the banker, the casino man and the cleaner and, of course, someone entirely different that we haven't got to know yet."

The phone on Rose's desk rang. He picked up the receiver, announced his rank and name and then listened intently. "That was Greater Manchester Police," he told Williamson. "Detective Inspector Thompson. A neighbour of Miss Whiting – she lives just across the road – says she saw a woman, thirtieth, blonde hair, wearing a red sweater and blue jeans, go into Miss Whiting's house on the morning of her murder. This woman must have rung the door-bell because Miss Whiting opened the door and invited her in."

"Interesting," commented Williamson. "Could be our someone entirely different that we haven't known as you said, sir. Doesn't seem to be our cleaning lady, but I'll get Jones to check where Mrs. Barnes was that morning."

About an hour later Veronica Jones entered to say that Mrs. Barnes was definitely in London that morning. "She just didn't clean for Mr. Fowler. She had other clients and they confirmed that she was at their place that morning."

It was late afternoon, near the end of the working day, when Acting Detective Constable Jones approached Detective Sergeant Williamson.

"May I have a word please, sir."

"Of course, Jones."

"This may not mean anything, sir, but I feel that you and the Detective Chief Inspector should know about it. I was told this by an ex-boyfriend who is a constable with the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary. This is difficult, sir. It concerns Sergeant Tyler, the one that you both spoke to in Exeter. Well, according to the ex, it seems it's an open secret in the Devon and Cornwall police that Sergeant Tyler committed perjury in obtaining a conviction, but that he was never prosecuted. Could be knowledge for a blackmailer if they found out and apparently, sir, it was fairly common knowledge down there."

"Right, Jones. Let's both of us go and repeat this to the chief right now. You've done well again, by the way."

The next day they were travelling down to Exeter again, this time by car. Rose decided that on this second occasion they would not talk to Tyler in a pub. They would conduct a formal interview of him at the Devon and Cornwall Police

Headquarters at a place called Middlemoor in Exeter. That would put more pressure on him, especially with his colleagues around.

On the drive down, Williamson could not resist asking Veronica about her ex. "Some time ago now, sir," she said. "He's married now with a three year old son."

"The one that got away?" laughed the sergeant.

"No. The one that I let go," was Veronica's quick and spirited reply.

The three detectives had a surprise when they arrived at the Devon and Cornwall Police Headquarters and asked to see Sergeant Tyler. "He's been suspended from duty," they were told. "He's been charged with committing perjury." However they were invited to stay whilst Tyler was collected from his home so that they could question him about Fowler.

"I should have phoned and checked first, sirs, before dragging you down on a wild goose trip. I'm sorry." Jones apologised.

"The sergeant and I could also have phoned. But it's no problem. This is still a genuine line of enquiry, so don't feel bad about it."

"Yes, he was blackmailing me," Tyler admitted. "I paid him £1,000 to keep quiet about it."

"Blackmailers don't stop there," Rose pronounced. "They come back for more, again and again."

"This one won't," smirked Tyler. "But it was a thousand pound down the drain because it's all come out in the open away. I didn't kill him, but I'll most probably end up in prison. Not the best place for a cop."

"Well, Jones, don't be despondent. Our trip was worthwhile. We now know that Fowler blackmailed Tyler and took a thousand pounds from him and that Fowler tried to blackmail the faro dealer, so it's now definite that he was a blackmailer. Yet the banker, Hugh Browne-Wilson, is definite that Fowler was not a blackmailer. Does he genuinely believe that or is he trying to lead us away from that idea and why? There may be other people who were being blackmailed by Fowler and maybe Browne-Wilson was one of those and he doesn't want us to know that because it would give him a good motive for killing Fowler"

Rose stopped speaking for a few moments and then changed the subject: "Then there is this mystery woman calling on Aunt Maud and being admitted by her. I think we still keep Tyler, the faro dealer and the bookie on the board, but put them on the back burner for the moment. Let's promote the banker to the front burner."

Further investigation, however, revealed that Browne-Wilson was at the Bank of England all day on the day of the murder of Nick Fowler. This had been confirmed by the manager in charge of the bank assistants. Apparently there had been some sort of crisis at the bank throughout that day.

Chapter Five

Hello. I wonder, dear reader, if you remember me? I'm Hugh Browne-Wilson, the chap who started this narrative about the murder of Nick Fowler. I haven't heard from the police for a while now, but I'm sure they haven't forgotten me. Just kept me in the background of their investigations. I've not been able to give much thought to the case recently, because there have been some difficulties at the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street.

Our Governor is coming under some very severe attacks from some of the media, even the Daily Mail. He is being blamed for not taking action earlier to prevent the current very high inflation. It is said that the low interest rates prevalent for more than ten years, possibly the lowest ever interest rates, have fuelled inflation and upset the housing market. The availability of exceptional low mortgage rates has spurred the housing market and pushed house prices up to false levels, well above their true values. This has made it impossible for many people to join the housing market and will probably result in another bout of negative equity. Savers, especially pensioners, are complaining that they are subsidising mortgage borrowers through the low, almost zero, interest rates that they are receiving on their savings.

Pensioners have seen their savings almost wiped away on top of the removal of the triple lock, despite manifesto promises, and the freezing of allowances has increased income tax for lower earners. The increase in state pensions of 3.1% comes at a time when inflation is at least 20%. Value Added Tax at its highest ever level of 20% hits the lower earners much more than the highly paid – and some media suggesting over-paid – Governor of the Bank of England. One paper came up with the idea that VAT does not add value, it decreases value and should be renamed the Price Increase Tax – the PIT tax.

More pressure has been pressed onto us at the Bank with the US federal bank increasing interest rates to their highest level for years. The Bank is not an easy place to work at present so I will forget the case of the murder of my drinking companion Nick Fowler for the moment. I have my own problems.

I have to tell you, however, that my line manager called me over to his office and told me that Detective Sergeant Williamson had visited him and asked him to confirm my alibi that I was at the bank all the day on which Fowler was murdered. He was pleased to confirm that this was true.

Chapter Six

There was no CCTV anywhere near to Maud Whiting's house in Wilmslow and there seemed little hope that the Greater Manchester Police would track down her mystery caller. However, an appeal in the local media resulted in an attractive thirty-year old blonde woman visiting a police station to identify herself as the mystery woman.

Two detectives, one male and one female, questioned her in the only interview room in that particular station. The woman gave her name as Patricia Wood and explained that she was Miss Whiting's niece. As her aunt's murder had received considerable attention in the local press she was asked why she hadn't made contact with the police earlier. She explained that she had just returned from a ten day break in Paris, staying at the Moderne Palace Hotel in the Place de la Republique. She was devastated to discover on her return to Wilmslow that afternoon that her aunt, of whom she was very fond, had been murdered and on the day when she had left for Paris having visited her aunt that very morning. She was able to show the detectives a souvenir of the Eiffel Tower which she had brought back for her aunt. She also explained that she had visited her aunt because her aunt had invited her to do so, so that they could discuss the death of her cousin, Nick Fowler.

The news of this interview was swiftly conveyed down to Detective Chief Inspector Rose who found himself faced with another dead end.

Chapter Seven

Four weeks before the murder of Nick Fowler a meeting had taken place between two men in a pub in Bethnal Green, one in his fifties, the other in his thirties. They were casually dressed in jeans, tee shirts and light jackets. The older man wore a baseball cap promoting the 49ers and with the name Joe Montana inscribed on its side. However, his smart bow tie contrasted sharply with the rest of his apparel. The younger man was bare headed. They had exited the Bethnal Green tube station and turned immediately to the left into the Salmon and Ball on Bethnal Green Road.

The Salmon and Ball is a decent, traditional mid-nineteenth century pub in a grade two listed building and is frequented mainly by locals who are mainly middle-aged or older. A humorous sign just inside one of the entrances reads: 'Hot beer, lousy food, bad service. Welcome, have a nice day.' It is believed that its name dates back to when it first opened in 1733 and refers to two trades then in their heyday; the salmon for Billingsgate fish market and the ball for balls of yarn for Weavers Field where cottages housing people working in the silk weaving industry once stood.

It is a large pub and the two men selected a table tucked away in a far corner. It was obvious that they did not wish to be disturbed and, more so, did not want to be seen and recognised. They had chosen an area of London where they were not known.

"I don't know how he found out," said the younger man.

"Well he has done and now he wants us to pay him for his silence," replied the older man.

"So, do we pay?"

"No, this is blackmail. This will only be the first instalment. Blackmailers always come back for more and more until they have bled you dry and then they probably reveal your secret anyway."

"So what do we do?"

"There's only one thing that we can do. There's only one way to stop a blackmailer. Only one way to silence him."

Chapter Eight

Acting Detective Constable Jones came into the office and found a very subdued scene. Detective Chief Inspector Rose was sitting at his desk. He seemed to be biting his finger nails. Detective Sergeant Williamson was sitting on a chair alongside the desk. He was glancing through a sheath of witness statements from the case, but in an idle sort of way as if he didn't know what else to do.

Detective Sergeant Williamson, ever observant, noticed that Veronica Jones was wearing a skirt, a black one. Not a short mini, just above the knee. He considered that she had nice knees.

"Sir," Jones disturbed the scene. "There's a Miss Patricia Wood downstairs at the desk. She's asking to see you. She's Mr. Fowler's cousin from up north."

"My cousin Nick had a girlfriend called Linda. Thought you might like to know... if you didn't already do. They used to meet in a coffee house in Pinner. Nick liked Pinner. That's all I know. Though I do have a photograph of Linda which you can have."

"Thank you, Miss Wood. That will be very helpful," said Rose, accepting the photograph. Do you know Linda's surname?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't."

"Thank you, Miss Wood, for coming down to London to see us." Rose responded. "But surely did you come all this way down here to tell us. You could have told the Greater Manchester Police and they would have told us."

"No. I decided to spend a few days in London. I was very fond of Auntie Maud. I'm staying at the hotel she stayed at, in North Harrow. There's a nice old man there I've been speaking to. He used to speak to my aunt. He wears this funny baseball cap with 'Mind the Gap' on it, from the underground."

Once Miss Wood had departed, the two detectives were considering how they could locate the girlfriend, starting in Pinner. As they were about to leave, Rose's phone rang. It was the Deputy Assistant Commissioner wanting to know what progress had been made on the case. Rose was not a man to beat about the bush or to make excuses. "None," he replied.

They made their journey to Pinner by tube. Williamson was very familiar with Pinner and had advised against going by car because he did not know about available parking. "We'll end up on the Metropolitan Line," the sergeant explained. "Not the tube to Uxbridge, that doesn't pass through Pinner. We need one to Amersham, Watford or Chesham."

Once they had arrived in Pinner they went into the Nero coffee house in Love Lane and showed Linda's photo to the staff there. One of the staff immediately said, "That's Linda. She's a regular here, but haven't seen her recently. She lives here in Love Lane, along the road past the two churches. Don't know which number. Don't know her surname or anything about her really." The woman hesitated, then continued, "She had a man friend who sometimes came in with her."

Williamson showed Fowler's photo to the staff and they identified him as the man seen with Linda in their shop.

The detectives sat down at a table and had large lattes and apricot croissants. It was then that Williamson reported on his meeting with the manager at the Bank of England.

"According to the manager, a Mr. Edwards, the day of Fowler's murder had been a very difficult and unusual day at the Bank. They were all, including Hugh Browne-Wilson, stuck together in a room deep inside the Bank in quite a heated session from 8.00 am to 5.00 pm, surviving on sandwiches and coffee and the nearby bog."

"Browne- Wilson could have slipped out and taken a taxi from the Bank and soon be at Fetter Lane. He could even have gone by tube from the Bank station or even better from the short walk to the Mansion House tube and then not a very long walk from Blackfriars station to Fetter Lane, easy for a man of his age," Rose pointed out.

"I questioned Mr. Edwards about this," Williamson replied. "He said that he himself stayed in the room throughout the entire nine hours that day as did all of his staff. I asked about visits to the toilet. Edwards then hesitated for some time before replying to me. He said that the topic of their meeting was not only confidential, but also very sensitive. Very sensitive, he explained, to protect the pound. The discipline was that he timed each visit to the toilet and if any visit exceeded ten minutes he would send Bromley, his number one assistant to investigate. This had not been necessary. Nobody had left the room or the Bank until after 5.00 pm."

"Well, that puts Browne-Wilson in the clear," declared Rose. "Do you know, Williamson, that when we appealed for people who knew Fowler to contact us, he was the only person, apart from the cleaner who found the body, to come forward. That would indicate that he had nothing to hide, but strangely enough I can be suspicious of the first person to come forward. It seems as if they were waiting for us to summon them, as if they were trying to discover our line of enquiry and what progress we were making. However, this Edwards, a senior manager at the Bank of England, has confirmed his alibi for the day, so he is the one person we can rule out of our list of suspects."

Having dealt with Hugh Browne-Wilson, Rose returned to the search for the Linda girl. "What's the local police situation here in Pinner?"

"There is a local police station. I have quite a few friends in and around Pinner and we meet up in the Oddfellow's Arms at the start of Waxwell Lane at the top of Bridge Street, the hill here. The police station is opposite the pub, but every time I've been here, it has been closed."

They were still sitting in the Nero coffee house trying to determine how to find Linda without knowing her surname and whilst knowing that she lived in Love Lane, but not knowing the number at which she lived.

Rose said, "We could get uniform to do a door-to-door but, apart from being costly, she may not identify herself anyway. She may not want to be found. She did not respond to our appeal for people who knew Fowler to come forward."

There was a short silence then Williamson said, "I'm getting hooked on these apricot croissants. They're good."

"So am I," Rose admitted. "They're good."

"They say that apricots are good for you."

"I won't argue with that."

Silence again. There was a short, grey-haired woman in her late fifties or early sixties sitting at an adjoining table and who had been listening to the two detectives when they mentioned the name Linda. This lady alighted from her seat and passed by them on her way out. As she passed by them she slipped Rose a piece of paper. On it was written: 'Linda Gayle' and the number of the dwelling at which she lived in Love Lane.

They rang the doorbell and eventually a woman, tall, dark-haired, late twenties answered. The two detectives displayed their warrant cards. "Linda Gayle?" Rose asked.

"How did you find me?" Linda Gayle demanded.

As usual Rose answered a question with a question. "Why did you not answer our appeal for people who knew Mr. Fowler to come forward to us?"

"Because I didn't want to. I didn't want to be involved." She hesitated then, "You'd better come inside, I suppose."

They followed her into a large, attractive and very neat and tidy lounge at the front of the house. "Sit down," she invited them.

"I was thinking of ending it with Nick," she said without any emotion.

"Why?"

"For a number of reasons. He was starting to get very moody at times. And I couldn't understand and didn't like the way he would be broke one week and then flushed with cash the next week. I went off him and that's why I didn't want to be involved in his murder investigation."

"You're being very frank," Rose commented, having decided not to condemn her for her previous lack of co-operation. He wanted to get information from her, not confront her.

"I always am," she replied, crossing her legs and displaying quite a length of thigh, much appreciated by Williamson.

"You went off him?" Rose asked.

"I was becoming scared when he was around. The moods, yes. But mainly the money situation. Up one week, down the next. There must have been something dodgy, drugs, gambling, but I think that it was more than that. Something much more dangerous and I didn't want him here when something happened... which it did. He was murdered."

The two detectives remained silent. It was the best way to learn something. Linda uncrossed her legs and said very definitely, "He was a blackmailer, I'm sure of it." She was thinking, trying to make sense of things. "Up one week when a blackmail victim paid him, down next week when he lost it on gambling. I didn't want to be involved in a relationship like that. No way!"

"Did you meet or see anyone who might have been a blackmail victim?" It was Williamson asking the question.

"No. What does a blackmail victim look like anyway?"

They were back in the office. "We're finding all these people who knew and were involved with Fowler, but we're still getting nowhere," complained Rose.

"I don't think the Linda woman would have killed him, so we can rule her out of the list of suspects," suggested Williamson.

"Agreed. So who have we got left? We're ruled out the banker and maybe the faro dealer. That leaves the cleaner, the bookie, the aunt, the cousin, I'm not convinced. I think we can decide now that he was a blackmailer. He failed with the faro dealer. If Linda is right about him being flushed with cash some weeks means he could have been successful in some of his blackmailing activities and

could also mean that he had other victims which we don't know about and would also have a motive to kill him. There must be more of his victims in addition to the names we have. Just need to find them. Just need to keep searching and digging. There have been a few surprise arrivals on the scene so far; the aunt, the cousin, the girlfriend. Some more may turn up."

Chapter Nine

William Alphonse Boyd, whose luxurious pad was situated on Fifth Avenue near Central Park, owned and ran an advertising agency in Madison Avenue. His private plane landed at the City Airport by the Thames in London where a stretched limo awaited to transport him to Claridge's, his favourite bedding and watering hole in the English capital. Charles, the renowned concierge, ready to greet him in the lobby and accept a Benjamin Franklin, would obtain elusive theatre tickets for him and open exclusive club doors for him. His first action would be to summon a taxi to take the Russian American to the Holborn Police Station. The concierge had exchanged some dollars into pounds for him. Boyd admired the £5 bill with its portrait of Churchill on the reverse, but soon learnt that it wasn't worth anything. "Couldn't even get a beer for it where I go to," he complained.

Boyd had replaced his Russian Jewish surname of Baline and acquired two new Christian names or, rather in his case, two first names. Having risen from the impoverished Jewish quarter on New York's Lower East Side, he had taken the name William Boyd from the film star who played Clarence E. Mulford's Hopalong Cassidy and Alphonse from his imagination.

Once inside the Detective Chief Inspector's office, Boyd gave Rose his business card. Not to be outdone, Rose gave him his Metropolitan Police card with his name and rank.

"I've come all the way across the pond to see you about my godson's murder. Another stabbing in your London. You've overtaken the Big Apple for knife killings. I feel safer in the Lower East Side and the South Bronx than here."

"You are Mr. Nick Fowler's godfather?" enquired Rose.

"That's what I said. I promised his mother that I would look after him just before she died of cancer stateside. I'm afraid I let them both down. I neglected him and now look what's happened. I looked after his mother – I was very fond of her... but I failed her son. I was too much occupied with my work, I guess. And also I was across the pond. Was it a drug gang killing?"

"No, it was not to do with drugs," Rose said, not with the intention of consoling the American, but just answering his question.

"What was it then?"

"We're still investigating. What can you tell us about your godson that might help us with our investigation?"

“Well, he was always a bit of a strange kid. I once offered him a good position in my advertising agency, but he wasn’t interested. No get and go in him. Not like that cousin of his, the girl up Manchester way. She’s got get up and go. I’m going to extend my agency over to London and I want her to manage it here. I’m told that New Bond Street is a good address. Some guy over here told me that when I visit New Bond Street I should sit between Roosevelt and Churchill. What did he mean by that?”

Boyd glanced around the office, noticing the filing cabinets, the stacks of papers and folders and the unwashed coffee mugs. “Thanks Chief Inspector for all you’re doing. I really appreciate it. If I can be of any help in any way, let me know. I’m staying at Claridge’s for a few weeks until I get everything sorted for Nick. I’ll have to organise the funeral, I guess. I expect you won’t be able to release the body yet. I don’t expect Nicholas made a will. He was never any good on financial things or planning or looking ahead.”

The taxi had waited for Boyd. His next stop would be Simpsons in the Savoy complex in the Strand, but before that he intended to visit the Coal Hole alongside the Savoy where he reckoned he could still buy a pint of Nicholson’s pale ale with a fiver bill; brewed in Cornwall apparently.

Apart from the excellent St. Austell brewed ale there was another reason that attracted Boyd to the Coal Hole. Boyd was in his mid-fifties. The Coal Hole is long and L shaped. When Boyd reached the apex of the L he turned left into a smaller, darker and more concealed part of the pub and there waiting for him at the far table was a woman, English, in her early forties, blonde and quite attractive.

“I’ve booked Simpsons,” Boyd explained, “for a week. We’ve got the sofa seats on the right. Apparently Simpsons was a sort of chess club years ago, in Victorian times, and the sofas were where they played.”

If Williamson had known of this meeting he would probably have thought ‘checkmate’.

After Boyd had departed, Rose remained sitting in his office considering the latest arrival, another surprise in this confusing case. Another one out of the woodwork, he thought, how many more? When Williamson came in, he related the latest development to the sergeant.

The next day Detective Chief Inspector Rose was summoned to the office of the Assistant Deputy Commissioner in New Scotland Yard down on the Embankment. He had taken the tube, starting at Holborn on the Piccadilly, changed at Covent Garden onto the Northern line down to the Embankment station. The summons was obviously about the Fowler case so he was preparing in his mind A.D.C Carson’s likely questions and his likely answers. He was not bothered. He was

that sort of unique character who was not afraid of anyone or anything. Having reached the age of forty-five he could claim that he was not even afraid of death, but did admit that sometimes he was scared of living.

Walking east along the Embankment he avoided the southern pavement alongside the Thames and kept to the northern pavement which was the side on which New Scotland Yard is situated. But his main reason for avoiding the southern pavement was that this was the domain of the hundreds of joggers who expected mere walking pedestrians to jump out of their path.

The A.D.C's office was on the third floor and fortunately the lift was working that day. Rose was surprised and pleased to find his superior in a receptive mood.

"This is a confusing case, Rose," the A.D.C. commenced. "I cannot make any sense out of it at all. Any more suspects turned up?"

"Not really, sir. Just his godfather from New York City."

"Not Marlon Brando was it?" The A.D.C. thought he had a sense of humour.

"I don't think so, sir."

"Can he throw any light upon his godson's death?"

"No. He just confirmed that Mr. Fowler was not good moneywise, sir. We are convinced now that he was a blackmailer and disposing of a blackmailer is a powerful motive."

"Yes. Agreed. That's the direction to concentrate on."

There was a knock on the door. A uniformed sergeant entered. "Sorry to disturb, sir, but there's a young woman at the desk asking to see the officer in charge of the Fowler case."

A woman constable led Rose to interview room 4, opened the door for him and then turned to go away. Rose beckoned her to remain and to join him at the interview table. She looked surprised, but did as she was directed.

The visitor was a girl in her mid-twenties, dark hair, fairly tall with a slim figure, a pretty face. She was very anxious, nervous, almost scared. The three of them were sitting at the table. She looked at Rose and then at the uniformed constable. The woman constable smiled at her and this seemed to relax the girl a little. The constable introduced her to Rose as Penny Bishop, Miss Penny Bishop.

Miss Bishop was still remaining silent and Rose took note of her twitching fingers. "You wanted to see me. I'm Detective Chief Inspector Rose, in charge of the Fowler murder case. Can you help us?"

Miss Bishop stared at him. There was moisture building up around her brown eyes and she was shaking a little. "I was being blackmailed by Fowler," she said, almost in a whisper.

The constable scribbled something on a piece of paper and passed it to Rose. It simply stated that the duty sergeant had taken Miss Bishop's name and address upon her arrival in the station.

Penny Bishop spoke again. She seemed a bit more composed. "I didn't kill him," she said.

"What was he blackmailing you for?"

Penny's composure left her. She was shaking again. "The Hon. Vincent Seagrave. He's the second son of some duke. He has an office in the City on Cheapside. He's an investment adviser, manages clients' portfolios. I started working for him as a secretary there. Then I became his P.A. We eventually fell in love. We're engaged. I... I have a sort of history." Penny stopped speaking for several minutes. The woman constable tried an encouraging smile. Penny continued. "Years ago... years ago I was involved in a fraud scam... in Oxford, affected a college there. Somehow Fowler found out. He said he would tell Vincent if I didn't pay him £1,000."

"Did you pay him?"

"I didn't have to. He was killed before I could."

Rose could have said to her then that that was very convenient for you, but decided not to. In his mind he had already decided she wasn't the killer, but her photo would be added to the incident board and he still asked her the next question.

"Did you kill him?"

"No! I just said I didn't," she pleaded.

"Right, Penny. We're going to need a written statement from you. I'm not interested in the scam years ago. I want everything, every detail, written down about what took place between you and Fowler." Now it was Rose's turn to hesitate, then he continued. "Thank you, Miss Bishop, for coming in to see us. It must have taken some courage on your part and also your wish to do the right thing. Just please go now with the constable here and make your statement."

Just before the two women left the room, Rose thanked the constable for her assistance.

On his return to the Holborn nick Rose related to Williamson what had taken place at his meeting with the ADC and then the interview with Miss Penny Bishop.

"She lives in Brentwood in Oliver Road. Comes into the City on the new Elizabeth line from Shenfield to Liverpool Street and then the Central to Bank."

Next morning Acting Detective Constable Veronica Jones tapped rather tentatively on Rose's office door.

"Come in."

Jones entered, displayed a faint smile and spoke in an apologetic tone. "Sir, I'm booked for four days leave next week, but if it's inconvenient I can cancel it."

"No, you don't have to. Things seem to be very quiet and not leading anywhere with the case at the moment. You take your four days and come back refreshed to re-join the fray. Doing anything or going anywhere interesting?"

"I've got a ticket for a music festival down in Gloucestershire."

"That should be exciting," Rose smiled. "I haven't been to one of those for years. Have a good time and enjoy it."

"Thank you, sir."

Veronica and a girl-friend, Sheila, also from London had their tickets for the festival and a couple of bus tickets. They caught a train from Paddington to Temple Meads, Bristol. The bus was waiting for them at the station. It was a very old Bedford mini-bus with a fairly old driver. He collected fifteen passengers from the railway station and drove them to the site of the festival. They arrived there at mid-afternoon; it was a nice, sunny, warm day in August and everything looked very promising for an enjoyable four days.

The first task for the two girls was to find a piece of ground which they could claim and where they could pitch their tent. They had good experience of selecting a good, rain and waterproof tent and how to assemble it.

The two girls were awakened early next morning by the sound of torrential rain plummeting down upon their tent which, fortunately, had proved its rain-proof properties. The ground outside was a swamp, puddles several inches deep. Everywhere around were rain-soaked young and not so young festival attendees. One of these was a young man in his late twenties. He was standing, hair and clothes drenched and saturated, about ten yards from the two girls.

It was Sheila who spoke to him first. "Have you been out all night like this?"

"Yes," he laughed. "Ridiculous, isn't it? And I've just heard that the two main acts have cancelled, packed up and gone home. Reckon I'm going to do the same. How about you two?"

Veronica looked at Sheila and they both nodded.

"I'm David," said the young man. "Have you come far?"

"London," answered Veronica, "and I've just realised that our return train tickets back to Paddington are dated for three day's time. We'll have to get them changed if we're going home today. How do we get back to Temple Meads now? That mini-bus won't be coming here until Friday."

"I'll take you there," David volunteered, "if you don't mind going in my old banger."

"Can't be any worse than that Bedford we came here in," Sheila replied.

The old banger was a fifteen year old Malaysian Proton.

"David," it was Veronica speaking. "Change of plan. We're decided that there's no point in rushing back to London today. We want to find somewhere not too expensive to stay the night, freshen up and go home tomorrow. Do you know of anywhere?"

David parked his car alongside a farm gate in the narrow country lane. "I live in Chipping Sodbury," he explained. "Goldcrest Road. My local is the Cross Hands in Old Sodbury. They do accommodation. I'll phone them."

They were sitting in the dining room of the Cross Hands. The two girls had booked in for the night and David had insisted on treating them to dinner. "It will cheer me up a bit," he said.

"Why do you need cheering up?" Veronica asked.

"Next week is going to be difficult for me," he replied. "My elder brother Ed died a year ago next Thursday. It's the first anniversary of his death. We were very close."

"We're sorry," the two girls said in unison. "He couldn't have been very old. How did he die?"

"He killed himself. An overdose." There was a lengthy pause. David took a big sip of his wine. "He left me a lengthy letter. A suicide letter I suppose. He was being blackmailed by a man in London."

At the mention of the word 'suicide' Veronica stiffened. "What man?" she asked.

"I don't know," David answered. "The man arranged for Ed to meet him in a pub somewhere in the West End. I don't know where. Ed paid him £1,000, but the man kept coming back demanding more and more. He was bleeding Ed. I never knew that this was happening. Ed kept it quiet all to himself. He should have come to me. I would have helped. I don't even know what he was blackmailing Ed about."

When Acting Detective Constable Jones returned to the Holborn nick she was greeted by Detective Sergeant Williamson. "You're back early, aren't you, Jones? I thought you were not due back from your leave for another day or two."

"The festival was washed out, Sergeant, but I need to see the Chief with you urgently. I've learnt of another person who has been blackmailed, maybe by Fowler."

Detective Chief Inspector Rose also expressed surprise at Jones's early return, but when the three of them were seated in his office he listened intently and with interest to what she had been told by the young man in Gloucestershire. It was decided that whilst it wasn't definite, it was still very likely that David's brother Ed had been blackmailed by Fowler. However, as Ed was now deceased he could not identify Fowler or tell what he was being blackmailed for.

However, it was another piece in the jigsaw that was convincing Rose that Fowler was a blackmailer and that blackmailing was the motive for his murder. The only problem was that they could not determine which of the blackmail victims had killed him and how many more victims there were and would they become known.

Rose told Jones not to deduct the couple of days she had been away from her leave entitlement. "You were working on the case," he explained. Then as she got to leave his office he handed her an envelope. "A letter for you," he said.

She stared at the envelope. The first thing she saw was the Metropolitan Police crest at the top of the envelope. The second was her name on the envelope: Detective Constable Veronica A. Jones. The word 'acting' was missing. She tore open the envelope and read the confirmation of her appointment. Tomorrow she would celebrate and wear a very short mini-skirt. Then she decided she wouldn't. She didn't want to upset the sergeant's blood pressure.

The next morning Rose was again joined in his office by Williamson and Jones. "This case is going nowhere," he said. "We've always had method. We're very certain we've got motive. Opportunity is the problem. Those who have opportunity do not appear to have motive. There must be someone with motive who appears not to have opportunity, but actually does have opportunity. We

need to check all our suspects again to see if we've missed anything. Interview them again, put them under pressure. Arrange it Sergeant. Meanwhile I have an appointment with the ADC at ten o'clock tomorrow morning to ask him if we continue the investigation or shelve it. When I saw him the other day he seemed to be understanding... positive about the difficulties of the case."

Chapter Ten

The two men were sitting at a far corner of the Salmon and Ball, one with a pint of John Smith's, the other with a pint of Carling.

"It looks like we're getting away with it," the younger one said.

"It's early days yet," replied the older one. "That Rose fellow never gives up, but perhaps they may have to relegate it to the unsolved crimes shelf along with so many other knife crimes here in London. The Daily Mail was saying the other day that the Met has lost control of the streets."

"Maybe they'll bring in UCOS," laughed the younger man.

"Good series that," replied the older man. "Pity about Denis."

"Have we got time for one in the Tavern along the road?"

"I don't think they open until three on weekdays."

"Another one here then?"

"Why not? It's your turn."

Chapter Eleven

Veronica and her friend Sheila both lived in Leyton in one of the side roads turning off High Road near the Os' stadium. They had met as neighbours and soon became friends being around the same age group. At 23 Veronica was still very much single, but not by choice. It was just the way her life had panned out. There was no shortage of attentive young men as she was very attractive, even sexy. But once boyfriends became aware of her occupation, they drifted away. There was something awesome about dating a Metropolitan police officer, even more so when she had become a detective.

They had met as usual in the Coach and Horses, a large 1860s traditional Victorian London pub on High Road. The pub was always crowded on a Saturday afternoon when the Os were at home, but at Wednesday lunchtime it was quieter.

"I'm going out with Michael on Friday evening. He's got a nice friend, Simon. How about making up a foursome?" Sheila, always trying to be a matchmaker, asked Veronica.

"Okay," Veronica replied, "but my relationships never seem to blossom; never seem to last. I'm almost giving up on it; giving up on love. Tell me about this Simon. Your Mike seems a nice guy so maybe his friend will be too. I could do with a bit of encouragement and affection. Tender loving care!" She laughed at her closing words.

They were in Veeraslamys off Regent Street that Friday evening. As usual the Indian cuisine was superb. Veronica was beginning to like Simon. They were very much being left to their own devices, Sheila and Michael being very much engaged with each other.

"What do you do workwise," Veronica finally got to ask Simon.

"I'm a civil servant. I work at the Bank of England. How about you Veronica?"

Veronica hesitated, then replied, "I'm a police constable, with the Met." There, she had said it, but then she noticed that Simon's reaction was different from those of most boys. He seemed to be intrigued and genuinely pleased.

"That must be interesting and exciting. Not like my job which is routine and rather stuffy. Although we did have an incident a couple of weeks ago. Hey, I bet you look good in uniform."

"I'm not in uniform."

"No?"

"No, I'm a detective."

"What at Scotland Yard?"

"No. In Holborn nick," she laughed. "What was your incident a couple of weeks ago?"

"There was a crisis at the Bank. All about inflation rates, interest rates, the pound dropping against the dollar. There was a panic. Bankers aren't supposed to panic, but they do. We were all shut in this room... locked in for this meeting. All very secretive and sensitive info. I was only a junior... tea and coffee boy. Do you know we even had to be escorted to the toilets. They soon stopped that. Mr. Edwards, the top manager got fed up with the interruption and stopped it, thank goodness. Not a man to argue with, Mr. Edwards. Hey, why am I telling you all this. I must be boring you. Sorry."

Veronica was enjoying herself so much and she was becoming interested in Simon, the best date that she'd had for some time, that she did not fully appreciate the significance of what Simon had just told her and how it may throw some light on the Fowler case. It wasn't until she was back home in Leyton that she started to think about it. To think about Hugh Browne-Wilson at the Bank.

It was Saturday morning. Veronica had spent a restless night thinking about Browne-Wilson and the Bank. Should she contact the Chief or the Sergeant, even though it was the weekend. She went to phone the Station, but then stopped. Her information so far, such as that from Gloucestershire, had not led anywhere on the case. Perhaps she had better wait until Monday and she did.

It was Monday morning and the three detectives were in the Chief's office. It was Williamson speaking: "Edwards may have just been covering for breaking a rather silly rule when he lied to be about sticking to the toilet routine. You know what these civil servants are like. Always programmed to be secretive, they can't help themselves, it's their nature. It's them that run the country not the politicians. Politicians come and go, civil servants stay."

"My opinion," Rose insisted, "is that he purposely lied to you, Sergeant, to cover something. As you've just said these people are secretive. Even if there is nothing to hide, they still want to conceal it. And remember that Hugh Browne-Wilson was at that meeting in that room. That's his alibi. You did the right thing by reporting this, constable. We may need to speak to your friend Simon, only briefly, to see if he noticed any movement by Hugh Browne-Wilson. We have to speak to Edwards. He will probably automatically invoke the Official Secrets Act, which he will have signed of course. We will have to be very careful how we deal with him. If he refuses to co-operate with us I will caution him and charge him with obstructing our murder investigation and have him brought to the station... in handcuffs. That should be a nice sight, him being led out of the Bank like that."

A uniform constable brought three mugs of coffee for them. Veronica smiled at this. This used to be her job.

“Now let’s put our three heads together. This may be the the best lead we’ve had so far. Probably the only real lead.” Rose continued. He smiled at Veronica. “It just shows that a detective is never off duty, even on a date. Is there any way that Browne-Wilson... I hate these double-barrelled names they’re so egoistic... could have exited the Bank via those toilets? Two questions, no three. Did he go to the toilets? Did he leave the building before the meeting ended? If so, did he return to the meeting before it ended?”

Chapter Twelve

Veronica met Simon in the Coach and Horses. He was a very happy guy not only because he was seeing Veronica again, but also because on Saturday the Os, top of Division Two, had won two nil away to Barrow who had been in second place.

"Are you free on Friday?" he asked her. When she said 'yes' he asked her if she would like to try the Criterion in Piccadilly Circus. "It's changed recently," he explained. Not like it used to be, which is a pity, but I thought we could try it. Have you ever read any Sherlock Holmes books?"

"That's an unexpected change of subject," she smiled.

"In the very first Holmes story, Doctor Watson meets a friend in the Criterion bar and this man introduces Watson to Holmes. Not many people know that," he laughed.

"Does anyone want to? Now, shall we go Dutch. You paid last time, it's my turn now."

"An independent woman, eh? We'll see. Next time we'll go to the Savoy. You can pay then... if you still wish to go out with me."

"We'll see," she smiled.

Eventually Veronica asked the difficult question. "Simon, there's something I need to ask you. It's police work and very confidential so I need you to promise that you won't mention it to anyone, especially at the Bank. When you were in that closed meeting, did you notice a colleague called Hugh Browne-Wilson?"

Simon thought for a while. "Oh, that snobby character," he said after a while. "Yes, I saw him. He was there. I'm afraid I don't like him very much. What did you want to know about him?"

Veronica blushed, maybe flushed a little before answering. "Did you see him go to the toilet?"

Again Simon thought for a while, then replied. "No. I can't say that I did, but then I wasn't really looking in that direction. I was making the tea and coffee most of the time and passing around sandwiches."

"Okay," said Veronica, not really too disappointed. "Let's forget work. It's about time you kissed me."

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Thirteen

There were two men sitting in the Salmon and Ball, but not the same two as before. The older man was there, but not the younger one. Instead there was another man, younger still. This time they were both drinking pints of Carling.

“What did she want to know?” demanded the older man.

“She wanted to know if Browne-Wilson had visited the toilets.”

“And what did you say?”

“I said that I hadn’t noticed. I was too busy with the tea and coffee and sandwiches.”

“You’d better get back,” the older said.

The younger man finished his lager, got up and exited the pub by the right exit and turned around the corner to the nearby tube station. After he had gone, the older man finished his pint and went to the bar and glanced at the row of shelves behind it. He spotted the bottle of Glenmorangie and ordered a double, neat. He returned to his table at the far corner and sipped the malt, appreciating its distinct flavour.

“Browne-Wilson has become a liability,” he whispered to himself.

Two days later the police were called to an address in Bow. There they found the body of Hugh Browne-Wilson, deceased. Shot through the back of the head.

Chapter Fourteen

Rose and Williamson were in the grand office of Vernon Edwards, a senior manager at the Bank of England.

"We're investigating a double murder, sir. One in Fetter Lane here in London and one in Altrincham in Greater Manchester."

"I'm sure that can have no connection with the Bank," smirked Edwards. When standing he was tall and upright and very commanding. When seated behind the castle of his large mahogany desk he still looked commanding. He had the habit of joining his hands and fingers together and staring, almost glaring, at those seated opposite him, those he invariably regarded as being inferior to him.

"The man who was murdered in Fetter Lane," Rose continued, unperturbed by Edward's manner, "had a friend (he purposely said 'friend' instead of acquaintance) a Hugh Browne-Wilson who works for you, that is comes under your command. You were both present at a very important meeting here at the Bank. We need to know if Browne-Wilson left the meeting at any time whilst it was still in progress... for the purposes of confirming his alibi and eliminating him from our enquiries."

"I can't tell you anything about that particular meeting. It was very confidential and sensitive. If I did so, I'm afraid that I would be contravening the Official Secrets Act which I have signed." Edwards smirked again. He had practiced that smirk over a number of years when dealing with the likes of these two policemen.

"No problem, sir," Rose smiled back. "I'll just caution you and charge you will obstructing our murder enquiry. We have two uniformed officers outside who will escort you in handcuffs to Holborn Police Station. Also Mr. Edwards you told my sergeant here that you had a rule in force at that meeting that required anyone wishing to visit the toilets had to be escorted there by your top assistant. We know that you abandoned that rule during the course of the meeting."

Suddenly Edward's desk did not seem so large and no longer a castle. There was a prompt reaction from him.

"It was a stupid rule, inconvenient. Caused a lot of interruption. I didn't see any harm in stopping it. Browne-Wilson?" Edwards took some time to gather his thoughts. "Yes. I think he visited the toilet twice during the meeting. I think he returned okay on both occasions."

"How can you be sure of that, sir?"

It was a weaker smirk this time, then he actually smiled. "I always notice Browne-Wilson," he confided. "He has this detestable superiority complex. Always

considers himself above his station. I won't tolerate that amongst my subordinates. I keep a special eye on him. If he steps out of line, I will put him back in his place, but he's a good and reliable member of the team. And I don't see any reasons why he should be connected with your enquiries. Although I do not approve of him personally, I would certainly vouch for him. I am pretty sure that he was with us throughout that day and did not leave at any time before the meeting concluded."

"Do you know this man?" Williamson asked and passed a photo of Fowler to Edwards who held it up and stared at it. "No," he replied. "I don't think I'd want to."

"Thank you, sir," said Rose and the two detectives left the room leaving Edwards reaching for a desk drawer where he had concealed a flask of Glenmorangie.

As Rose and Williamson left the Bank of England building an officer from the City Police was waiting to tell them that Hugh Browne-Wilson had been found murdered. Up until then Browne-Wilson was beginning to become their prime suspect for the murder of Nicholas Fowler.

On the way back on the tube to the Holborn nick, Rose was again thinking aloud. "Three murders. How are they connected? Maude Whiting was the aunt of Nicholas Fowler whilst Hugh Browne-Wilson knew Fowler, but claimed to be only an acquaintance, a drinking buddy."

It was Friday and Simon was waiting for Veronica outside the Criterion in Piccadilly Circus. He was idly glancing at the photos displayed outside the theatre next door. They were photos of the stars in the current show there: Felix Scott, Laura Whitmore, Tamsin Carroll and Matt Willis, all unknown to him. The show was 'A Ghost Story'. "Not my thing," he thought. "I prefer living people."

As soon as he saw Veronica he dashed forward to greet her, embraced her and kissed her.

"Gosh!" she exclaimed. "What a greeting. And right in public."

"I'm falling in love with you," he whispered, but very emphatically.

He clasped her hand and led her into the restaurant. Once they were inside and seated at their table, "Have you heard the news," he cried out. "About Hugh Browne-Wilson?" When she nodded he continued, "Old Edwards is putting on a brave face, stiff upper lip, but he was really very concerned about it. Not because of Browne-Wilson, but because he's worried about any scandal his murder may bring upon the Bank. He doesn't like bad publicity, in fact he doesn't like any publicity."

Once they were seated in the restaurant and had placed their orders, Simon asked, "Veronica, why did you ask me about Browne-Wilson, if I noticed him at that meeting?"

She smiled. "It was just a thought I had, but it turned out wrong. I guess I've still got a lot to learn about detective work. Better leave it to my superiors."

Simon was lying on Veronica's bed. It was the following morning. She was beside him still asleep, lying on her side with her back to him. It was six o'clock in the morning. They had made love three times that night. He was a little exhausted, but relaxed. He was staring at the light dawn sunlight filtering through the window curtains. He looked at her naked back and admired the white silk of her skin and ran his hand gently along it. She gave a slight sigh.

Things had not gone to plan. When he first saw her he knew that he would fancy her. She was petite and vivacious, with dark hair and smiling brown eyes. Simon was a leg and bottom man rather than a boob man; he disliked big boobs on a girl. Veronica had gorgeous legs and a cute bottom and her boobs were small, but round and firm and good to hold.

He glanced up at the ceiling where the sunlight was dancing flickering patterns. That plan had been to make her acquaintance and get him accepted by her and so to learn the progress of the police in their investigation of the murder of Nicholas Fowler. Now that Browne-Wilson was dead, all this didn't seem relevant. He was more interested now in being with Veronica... to be with her forever, for he knew that he had fallen in love with her.

Simon also knew who had killed Nicholas Fowler and Hugh Browne-Wilson. This was dangerous knowledge to have.

Half-an-hour later they were both fully awake. Veronica had gripped and pinched his naked bottom to announce that she was awake. Now they were standing beside the bed and holding each other in their arms. They kissed and he thrust his tongue deep into her mouth and their two tongues battled furiously for control of her throat.

When they had subsided, she spoke for the first time that morning, "Let's share a shower," she invited.

With the water cascading down upon them, soaking their hair and flowing down their bodies they kissed and kissed again.

Chapter Fifteen

Jonathon Steiner was in his early forties, six foot tall, slim and athletic with blonde hair that had turned grey and was now starting to bald. Jokingly, he explained his theory of relativity as: "I used to worry about going grey until I found I was going bald."

He was sitting in the large garden at the rear of the Woodmans pub. He had caught the tube to Northwood Hills on the Metropolitan line, turned left out of the exit and walked the few yards to the stop for the 482 bus to Ealing Hospital which stopped at the Wiltshire Lane stop just across the road from the pub.

Steiner was smoking a cigar in the smoking area of the garden – strange because he had given up smoking many years ago. He was trying a little experiment. He had known a colleague who had been an expert at blowing smoke rings with a cigar. After several failed attempts, Steiner gave up the exercise, stubbed out the cigar and deposited it in an ash-tray and returned to his pint of Timothy Taylor Landlord.

Steiner liked this pub and its large garden. It provided an opportunity to relax in a different world to his base near the Elephant and Castle.

Tomorrow he was due in Plymouth. He would take the car. From Northolt it would be the A40, M40, M25, M3, A303, A30, M5, A38 and eventually the Plymouth Parkway to the Manadon Roundabout to join the A386 northbound (the road to Tavistock) to Roborough on the northern end of the city. A journey of about four hours all told he reckoned. In the Lopes Arms (family name of Lord Roborough) he would meet his long-standing colleague Julian Sinclair.

Steiner was a friend of Detective Chief Inspector George Rose of the Metropolitan Police in London and they had worked before on difficult cases which appeared to be unsolvable.

The pub had a good car-park and an attractive lounge. Sinclair was sitting at a far table. As soon as he saw Steiner he went to the bar and ordered two beers, not noticing what they were, probably Tribute from St. Austell.

"It was ten years ago," Sinclair explained once they were seated and had sipped their beers. "Here in Plymouth. Known as the paper bag fraud. In one of the department stores in the city centre. About 80 grand. The local press had the headline 'They couldn't punch themselves out of a paper bag!'"

"One of the fraudsters?" asked Steiner.

"Oswald Channing," replied Sinclair. He even allowed himself a faint smile. "Later known as Hugh Browne-Wilson, now deceased."

They sipped their beers. Sinclair allowed himself a small grin. "The chain of department stores were quite happily paying invoices for paper bags," he explained, "until they realised that they had switched over to plastic bags six months before." They both took a larger sip at their beers.

D.C.I. Rose was sitting in the A.D.C.'s office on the third floor of New Scotland Yard. He had been relieved to find that the lift was still working.

"Well, you made an astonishing find there, Rose," the ADC congratulated him. "A fraudster convicted ten years ago now working in the Bank with an assumed name. So much for security checks."

"Yes, sir." Rose was thinking that it was essential to have good contacts in the detective game. Steiner had done a good turn for him.

"What's the thoughts now, Rose? Fowler must have somehow discovered Browne-Wilson's, I mean Channing's background, probably from his job at the Temple and then blackmailed him and so Channing killed him. It's very possible too that he killed Miss Whiting. But who killed him and for what reason? Channing was a victim, not a blackmailer. However this seems to close the Fowler and Whiting cases. You've done well, Chief Inspector. Now it's just who killed Browne-Wilson come Channing. We're looking for the murderer of a murderer – a double murderer."

That evening when George Rose was at home – he was a bachelor living alone – he received an email from Jonathon Steiner. It said that Julian Sinclair maintained that Channing had an accomplice in the ten year old fraud. The police in the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary at the time did not believe that there was an accomplice and they never traced anyone who might have been, but because they didn't believe there was one, they didn't look very hard. They had charged Channing with the fraud so that was that. Sinclair insists there was an accomplice and that his name was Philip Anderson.

"Sinclair is not in the habit of being wrong," thought Rose.

It occurred to Rose that this Anderson, if he existed and as Sinclair said that he did then he must, may be the person who killed Browne-Wilson/Oswald Channing for some reason yet unknown. What had become of the £80K? Did Oswald Channing still have it and had he been killed for it?

Vernon Edwards received another visit from New Scotland Yard. This time it wasn't a Chief Inspector and a Sergeant. It was a Deputy Assistant Commissioner with the Detective Chief Inspector.

ADC Carson had no intention of being polite or respectful to the senior Bank manager. "What do you know about Browne-Wilson, now deceased," he demanded.

"In what way do I know about him?" Edwards countered.

Another one who answers a question with a question, Rose thought.

"First we want to see his personnel record right from when he was appointed. His application form and C.V. to start with."

"Can't do that. All confidential to the Bank."

"Detective Chief Inspector," Carson turned to Rose who immediately produced a search warrant and placed it in front of Edwards.

"We also require other information about your recruitment policies," Rose continued. "Security vetting, entry examinations, interview records, etc."

"I assure you that anything you examine here will be well in order," Edwards replied. "I shall phone our Personnel Manager and advise her that you will be coming to see her and what you require to examine. One of my assistants will take you now to our personnel department. I hope that this will be the last time I have to see you."

"So do we," commented the ADC.

Rose was surprised to find Mrs. Gilmour, the personnel manageress, very co-operative and helpful.

It seemed that Browne-Wilson, which was the name that appeared on all the records, had not been directly recruited by the Bank, but transferred to it. He had passed both Civil Service Executive and Senior Executive exams in Plymouth, been interviewed in Salisbury, been subjected to the Civil Service security checks, again under the name of Hugh Browne-Wilson, and at first been allocated to a VAT office in Essex. From there he had been transferred to a junior post at the Foreign Office in Whitehall which he had presumed to be a small promotion. From Whitehall he had finally been transferred to the Bank.

When all his had been revealed, Rose realised why Mrs. Gilmour had been so co-operative and helpful. As Browne-Wilson had been recruited elsewhere and had already worked for the Revenue and Customs and at the Foreign Office, no criticism could be attached to the bank for any failure in the system.

Rose had also noted the certificate mounted on the wall behind Gilmour's desk. It stated that she was a member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Nothing but the best for the grand old Bank.

After the two detectives had left his office, Edwards buzzed his secretary and told her to have Simon Mitchell sent up to his office. Simon stood in front of the large mahogany desk, somewhat apprehensive.

"Now that Browne-Wilson has left us," said Edwards, a faint smirk on his lips, "we need to replace him. Do you think you can handle it?"

Simon was speechless and simply nodded.

"Well, do you?" Edwards demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"Good. I'll arrange for you to start on Monday. You'll have a letter of confirmation from Personnel."

That evening Simon told Veronica the news. "I'll have my own office," he said. "Not very big, but my own and my name plaque on the door."

"Congrats, darling. Champers tonight?"

Next morning Veronica told the news to her chief. But before that, after some champagne, they found another way to celebrate. Simon was lying on the bed covered by the bed clothes. Veronica was naked, coming out of the shower. He admired her gorgeous body. She came beside the bed. "What are you wearing under the bed clothes," she demanded.

"Just pubic hair," he smiled.

She tore away the bed clothes and flung them to the floor. She was teasing him; holding, stroking and pulling his penis until it was erect and then she jumped away from him, frustrating him.

"I ought to put you across my knee and give you a good, sound spanking."

She looked at him sharply. "I think men spanking women is degrading, humiliating." Then she smiled; "But it may be sensual, sexy, if it didn't hurt too much." She came around the bed and placed herself over and across his knee. "Not too hard," she said. "Remember I have to sit down at my desk tomorrow morning."

Simon had moved into Veronica's flat in Leyton. They had become an item. He hoped that they would marry one day, but there shouldn't be any secrets on their wedding day and he had a big secret. He was worried, terrified because he knew who had killed Browne-Wilson, but not why.

Why had Vernon Edwards been so keen on asking him about the police progress on the Fowler case when they had met in the pub in Bethnal Green at Edward's invitation? Why had Veronica wanted to know about Browne-Wilson's movements at that meeting?

Next day, during the afternoon, Simon sneaked away from his small office and made his way to the part of the building where the big meeting room was located. He tried the handle on its door, but it was locked. He turned away, about to give up when he noticed another corridor leading alongside the room. He followed along this and came across a door on the left-hand side. He tried this. It was not locked. He opened it and found himself in the toilets at the back of the meeting room. At the other end there was another door. This was locked when he tried it, but it obviously led right into the meeting room.

So if Browne-Wilson, if it was unlocked or if he had a key, could have left the meeting via the toilets, gone to Fetter Lane and killed Fowler and returned to the meeting again via the toilets. So much for his alibi.

Simon left the toilets and returned to the corridor. He was starting to walk along this when Vernon Edwards came around the corner. There was no way of escape.

"What are you doing here, Mitchell?" the manager demanded.

"It's my lunchtime. I thought I would explore the building. I've never done so before." Simon explained rather weakly.

"These are the corridors of power," Edwards smirked. "Right. Well you'd better return to your office. Do you know the way?"

When Simon hesitated, he motioned him to turn around. "Just go down those stairs and along the corridor at the bottom."

Edwards, on his return to his office, was reading an email which informed him that a former Bank of England Governor Mark Carney had accused the Government of "undercutting" the UK's key economic institutions. Carney said that the Government's tax-cutting measures were "working at some cross-purposes" with the Bank. Edwards was not in total agreement. Those tax-cutting measures would save him about £50,000 in income tax.

The next day, whilst they were sitting in their favourite coffee house in the main street of Leyton, Simon told Veronica what he had discovered at work the previous day. Later that day Veronica related this to her chief and her sergeant.

"That confirms things as much as we can," said Rose. "I'll do a full report to the ADC on the murder of Fowler and recommend that the case now be closed. Also on our findings on Miss Whiting. That should close these cases. Just the Browne-Wilson killing now. Well done again, Veronica."

This was the first time that Rose had addressed his detective constable by her first name. It brought a faint smile to the face of Detective Sergeant Williamson and a slightly wider smile to that of Detective Constable Jones.

This was the first time that DCI Rose had addressed his detective constable by her first name. It brought a faint smile to the face of Sergeant Williamson and a slightly wider smile to the face of Detective Constable Jones.

Rose was saying, "People such as Browne-Wilson have dark secrets which they want to keep concealed and if revealed or discovered can fuel blackmail. Blackmailers can never resist coming back again and again for more until they have bled their victims dry. Some victims decide not to tolerate this and decide that the only way to stop it is to kill the blackmailer. Thus Browne-Wilson/Channing killed Nicholas Fowler. But who and why did someone kill Browne-Wilson?"

"To shut him up," said Williamson.

"I think you could be right," Rose agreed. "But to shut him up from what?"

Chapter Sixteen

There were five of them in the office in Holborn Police Station. Present were DCI George Rose, DS Bill Williamson and Dc Veronica Jones. These three had been joined by Jonathon Steiner and Julian Sinclair, known in some quarters as the Terrible Twins.

All eyes were focussed on Sinclair who leaned forward and started to speak in a quiet controlled voice that demanded full attention. "There was a wholesaler of paper bags in Bristol, in Brislington. They had a warehouse opposite the crematorium there," he said. "When department stores and other shops switched from paper bags to plastic ones, it went bust. Its owner, it was a small set-up, was a thirty-old man who went by the name of Vincent Edmonds."

"What became of Edmonds," Williamson asked.

"He disappeared," Sinclair answered. "Evaporated. Meanwhile, Channing, now known as Browne-Wilson, said he did not have an accomplice, his barrister was feeble and not very interested in the case which he regarded had an obvious conclusion and the police certainly were not going to look for an accomplice whom they reckoned did not exist. They had Channing and were satisfied with that."

Rose confirmed that the finger prints taken from the body of Browne-Wilson matched those of Channing taken by the Devon and Cornwall Police when he had been charged by them.

"What became of the £80K," asked Rose.

"That also disappeared. It was never traced in any bank account or in cash anywhere."

"Well if the police didn't find it anywhere, it means that Channing had it stashed away somewhere or someone else got to it; maybe the accomplice, if he exists," said Rose.

"He exists alright," insisted Sinclair.

"The chain of department stores?" This time it was Veronica asking the question.

"Bennett and Westlake," replied Sinclair. "They were having some financial problems at the time, not just because of the bag fraud. They were starting to have cash flow problems. They were vastly overstocked in merchandise they couldn't sell, their stock-turn rate was dropping and their prices were becoming too high in an increasingly competitive environment. Their cash flow problem was not £80K, it was a million. They also eventually went bust."

“We must still keep in mind,” said Rose, “the paper bag man, Edmonds.”

Sinclair continued speaking, “What our associates maintain,” Sinclair had emphasised the word ‘associates’. This brought a wry smile from Steiner. The four men in the room, but not the woman, knew what was meant by ‘associates’, but would not mention their name. “is that Channing had an accomplice, it was Edmonds of the paper bag supplier. However, our associates also maintain that there was another twist to the fraud. Channing and Edmonds submitted £80K in false invoices, but only received £40K. This was their agreement with Westlake in order to get the invoices paid, but Westlake claimed from and was paid £80K by his insurers North Eastern Insurance Company. He kept the remaining £40K. The other £40K was split between Edmonds and Channing. You, DCI Rose are investigating murders. It is not your concern about the insurance fraud. That is up to others. Can you identify and find Edmonds?”

“What happened to Marcias?” Williamson asked.

“He died. People do.”

The meeting concluded. D.C Jones was a little confused about the reference to associates and Marcias, but didn’t feel like questioning it.”

Chapter Seventeen

Previously Simon had met Vernon Edwards in the Salmon and Ball on Bethnal Green Road. Had Edwards met anyone else there, he wondered, such as the late Browne-Wilson?

Simon paid another visit to the pub. When he approached the bar and ordered a pint of John Smith's, the barman greeted him, "Back again, mate?"

"You recognise me?" Simon asked, surprised. "I've only be here once before."

"Yes, I do. You came in here with that posh looking geezer with the bow tie and the funeral director's suit."

Simon stayed at the bar, drinking his beer. "Have you seen that posh geezer here any time before, with someone else?"

"As a matter of fact I have," the barman replied. "With another posh geezer. Gosh! That other geezer! His photo was on the front page of the Standard, or maybe the Metro. He was the one who was murdered – shot - over Bow way."

"You certainly have an eye for faces," Simon complimented him.

"Aye. People say I have a photogenic memory."

"You certainly have."

Simon finished his pint and ordered another and invited the barman to join him. "I'll have a half, mate."

Chapter Eighteen

They were meeting again. Joining DCI Rose in his office were DS Williamson, DC Jones, Jonathan Steiner and Julian Sinclair.

Rose opened what was becoming a debate. "So Hugh Browne-Wilson also known to be Oswald Channing murdered Nicholas Fowler because Fowler was blackmailing him. Channing most likely also murdered Maude Whiting because she was hiding Fowler's computer or laptop or ipad which Channing did not want revealed because they might have content that would incriminate him in his murder of Fowler. Who murdered Hugh Browne-Wilson and why?"

Rose continued, "What has become of Westlake who was involved in the fraud with Channing. Did he kill Channing for more of the money? Then there is the accomplice whom Sinclair says definitely existed. Where is he now? Did he kill Channing also for more money? We need to find Westlake and the accomplice. We have confirmed that Browne-Wilson and Channing are the same man by his finger prints. Can we obtain Westlake's finger prints? What has happened to his store in Plymouth?"

"It was demolished to make way for a new shopping mall," said Sinclair.

"No finger prints there – in his office or elsewhere in that store. That's all gone."

"Gentlemen and lady," Rose continued. "I do not trust Vernon Edwards."

"Is that because you don't like him?" asked Steiner.

"No. Because his initials are the same as Vincent Edmonds."

There was a knock at the office door and a uniformed sergeant entered.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but..."

"What is it?" demanded Rose.

"There's been a murder in Devon, sir, near a town called Tavistock. The Devon and Cornwall police thought you may be interested."

"Really?" said Rose. "We've got enough murders of our own. And who has been murdered?"

"It's a man, sir. His name is Westlake. He once owned a department store in Plymouth city centre. He was found shot in a dairy yard on a farm at," the sergeant glanced at the note in his hand, "Heathfield, just north of Tavistock. On the fringe of Dartmoor National Park, sir."

"Thank you, Sergeant. We needed to know about this." Then Rose let out a small sigh. "That means that the accomplice is either the murderer or the next victim."

"Four murders now," considered Williamson. "We're in danger of overtaking Midsomer Murders."

"It's a pity we do not have finger prints for Vernon Edwards," said Rose.

"But we do, sir," answered Williamson.

"How and when?"

"From the photo of Fowler which I passed to Edwards and which he handled. It was a new and clean one."

"Well done, Bill."

Edwards's prints, when compared, did not match those taken from Westlake's body or for any others on police files.

Rose was facing the facts. "Everything seems to stem from the fraud in Plymouth ten years ago. It was triggered when Fowler identified Browne-Wilson as Channing and blackmailed him about the fraud. Channing murdered Fowler to stop him blackmailing him and then murdered Maude Whiting to steal and destroy Fowler's laptop etcetera in case the information on them would reveal him as the murderer. Who killed Channing the murderer? I think that he was shot and killed by his accomplice in the fraud, an accomplice as yet unidentified. Why was he killed? His accomplice felt that Channing would be identified and thus lead the police to him."

There was nodded agreement from the others and Rose continued, "Who killed Westlake? I believe that it was the accomplice again. Why? Because Westlake was involved in the fraud and again could lead us to the accomplice. If we identify and find the accomplice I believe we will completely solve the case. But where do we start? Where do we look?"

Again the uniformed sergeant entered the room and passed a slip of paper to Rose. It confirmed that both Channing and Westlake had been shot and killed by the same gun. It also revealed that the same gun had been used to shoot and kill a man in Kingston-upon-Hull, near to the Minerva pub where the River Hull enters the Humber.

"A hit-man?" suggested Williamson. "Do we have them over here?"

It was a Friday evening and Veronica and Simon were sitting side-by-side on the sofa in her small lounge, eating pizza and watching women's football on the telly.

It was Arsenal Ladies at home to Tottenham Hotspur Ladies and the Gunners were leading.

"The Arsenal girls have the better legs," Simon observed.

"That's because they have shorter shorts," replied Veronica.

"I need to talk something through with you Veron, something which I am concerned about." He sounded so serious that Veronica looked at him sharply, a little worried.

"A couple of weeks ago," Simon started. "Vernon Edwards invited me to join him for a drink. This in itself was very unheard of for a start. I expected that we would go across the road to the Royal Exchange and its central wine bar where he usually went. Instead we went to a more like working man's pub in Bethnal Green. I liked this pub, but it wasn't really where you would expect Edwards to go. Then we sat in a table in a far corner. I began to think that Edwards had selected a place where he wouldn't be known. It was then that he was asking me if I had found out anything from you about the police progress in the Fowler case."

"So the other day I revisited this pub in Bethnal Green and the barman, a very helpful guy, told me that Edwards had been there before with a man he identified as Browne-Wilson from a photo in the Standard with the report of his murder. Among other things, I thought this strange because I've always felt that Edwards disliked Browne-Wilson.

Veronica and Simon decided between them that Simon should speak to DCI Rose the next morning to tell the detective about the meetings in the Salmon and Ball pub in Bethnal Green. Although it would be a Saturday morning, it was common knowledge that the DCI often worked at weekends when investigating a serious crime. Being a bachelor it seemed that his work was his life. He was one of those characters who put off retirement for as long as he could.

So the next morning, Saturday, the three of them – George Rose, Veronica and Simon were in the office and Simon had explained that in addition to him meeting Edwards in the Salmon and Ball, in a rather secretive way, Browne-Wilson had also met Edwards there.

"Thank you for coming in Simon and giving me this information. It may well be important,"

After the young couple had departed Rose recalled how he and Williamson had formed the opinion from their interview with him that Edwards had disliked Browne-Wilson and yet here they were having a drink together in a pub in Bethnal Green.

Also after they had departed from the Holborn nick, Veronica suggested that they should go to a posh restaurant for lunch and mentioned one in Sloane Square called the Excelsior. "They've just been awarded a Michelin star or something," she explained.

"No thanks," Simon replied. "You know what happens when a restaurant receives an award. You get served on a slate instead of a plate, the prices go up and the quantity goes down. And what does a French tyre company know about food and cooking?"

In the next meeting of the three detectives, DCI Rose was holding court. "As I've said before, everything seems to stem from the fraud in Plymouth ten years ago. Fowler identified Browne-Wilson as Channing and blackmailed him about his involvement in the fraud. Channing murdered Fowler stop him blackmailing him or revealing his fraud to his employers at the Bank. Then he murdered Maude Whiting to steal and destroy the laptop etcetera in case the information on them would reveal him as the murderer of Fowler. Who killed Channing the murderer? I think that he was shot and killed by his accomplice in the fraud, an accomplice as yet unidentified. Why was he killed? His accomplice felt that Channing would be identified by us and thus lead us to him."

Rose stopped for a while to let this all sink in, then he continued, "Who killed Westlake. I believe it was the accomplice again. Why? Because Westlake was also involved in the fraud and again could lead us to the accomplice. He wanted to eliminate anyone who could lead us to him. If we identify and find he accomplice I believe we will solve the case. But where do we start? Where do we look?

Rose continued, "Same gun," he queried. "The same gun used to kill both Channing and Westlake I believe was used by the same person. The same gun when it was used to kill someone in Hull may have been used by another person – another killer with nothing to do with our cases, that is if the gun has been in circulation through the services of a gun dealer."

"Hull is a nice city and its old town is well worth a visit. Lots of good pubs there. My brother lives in Hull. It was awarded a culture city status in 2017. But I guess we won't be following our enquiries there."

"No," confirmed Rose. "We need to concentrate down here and find the accomplice in order to solve our case."

However, it would not come to that. At Rose's next meeting with the ADC, the latter told him that the investigation was to be suspended and retained on the shelves. The case concerning the murder of Fowler and Whiting had been successfully concluded, but at present there was very little likelihood that the one for the murder of Channing would be and resources could be better employed

elsewhere. Also the murder of Westlake, as it had taken place in Devon, was now in the hands of the Devon and Cornwall police.

The ADC had effectively pulled the plug on the investigation into the murder of Channing, but the DCI was not surprised and when he thought about it, even relieved. There is nothing more frustrating to a detective than to be on a case where they can see the end, but cannot find the way to reach it.

Rose was convinced that Vernon Edwards was Vincent Edmonds and that he had murdered Channing because Edmonds had also been involved in the murder of Browne-Wilson and he feared that if Channing were convicted it would lead to his arrest and conviction. He had murdered a murderer to save his own skin.

The case would remain on file, but not pursued at present unless any further evidence became available.

So that would appear to be the conclusion of this story. Or is it?

Chapter Nineteen

Sometimes when justice evades the long arm of the law it is dispensed from another direction, not legal, but just as effective.

Because he had been a manager at the Bank it was all kept very hush-hush; the media, the newspapers and the television never got a sniff at it. It was just briefly reported in two paragraphs in a small column at the bottom of a page in the Evening Standard. It was reported that a vagrant or tramp had been found dead in an alley in the City. It had been a gruesome killing – his throat had been slit by what was described as a small sharp knife such as a Spanish stiletto. There was no means of identification on him and the police did not regard as of any significance the brown paper bag found beneath his body. Although very faded, it was just possible to read upon it: 'Bennett and Westlake, Royal Parade, Plymouth, PL1.' As regards the masonic ring found on one of his fingers, the police decided that he must have found or stolen it, so no effort was made to contact any of the London lodges in an effort to identify him. Nor did they take any notice of the smart bow tie he was wearing which contrasted sharply with the rest of his attire which was shabby and worn.

The day after the discovery of the body, Jonathon Steiner and Julian Sinclair had crossed the Pond back to their base in New York City. That evening they were joined in a bar in Harlem by Black John Murray and were drinking very good Kentucky Bourbon.

A few weeks later Simon was again promoted and found himself sitting behind a large mahogany desk in his own large office. He even considered wearing a bow tie, but decided that it wasn't really him.

Two months later Veronica Jones and Simon Mitchell married in St. Joseph's Church on Grange Park Road in Leyton. Among the congregation were DCI George Rose and DS Bill Williamson. Also present was a well-dressed elderly man who on entering the church had removed his baseball cap with the slogan 'MIND THE GAP'.