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For Liz, forever.

Angels Bleed

Max Hardy

Angels Bleed

Pigments of pain
scream scarlet.

A swelling stain
in the relief
of his tapestry,
where angels bleed
in the ignominy
of his seed.

His omnipotence cede's
impotence, portents
inked in blotches
left diseased,
as angels bleed
their last refrain.



11:54 pm

The crystal chandelier shimmered an iridescent pink from the blood spatter that coloured it. Above it, the ornate white ceiling rose was equally covered with a dark red dotted trail. The trail spread out in two directions over the ceiling, one down a large bay window wall, where its path was lost temporarily in the deep burgundy of the closed suede curtains before it reappeared on the plush white carpet. In the opposite direction, the arterial arc added a macabre lustre to the fruits on Cezanne's 'Basket Of Apples' original painting, before heading off into the carpet back to its source, the congealing pool of blood circled in halo around the battered head of the naked dead body in the centre of the room.

DI Saul knelt on his haunches, gently rocking to and fro just at the side of the body, an arm resting on his knee, the hand holding his chin. His brow was furrowed, a slight frown disturbing designer stubble. He sniffed a few times and murmured an audible 'Mmmm.' before taking the pen that was in his hand and poking a blood free spot on the corpses forearm.

'What's wrong with this picture?' he asked, rhetorically.

PC Buglass, a young skinny lad, uniform looking oversized on his small frame, was standing directly behind Saul, an open pad in his hands taking down notes as directed.

'You mean apart from the obvious dead body, gallons of blood and that huge crate in the middle of a drawing room?' Buglass replied.

'Just thinking out loud Buglass. The blood looks fresh. It's starting to congeal slightly around the edges but is still fluid where it's pooled. Above the overpowering scent of those candles, there is also a distinct odour of decomposition, which suggests to me that the body has been here for some time. It's fairly stiff as well. It feels like rigour has started to set in. Have we got an ETA for SOCO and the Duty Medical Officer arriving?' Saul asked.

'Should be here any minute, they said about midnight.' Buglass replied, sniffing the air furtively.

Saul stood up and looked around the room once more. Apart from the arterial spatter circling out from the body in two directions, there were no other visible signs of blood on the walls or furniture. There were no smear marks where the corpse had fallen and no sign of any disturbance or struggle at all. Even the white carpet was spotless save for the pool of blood around the body; not a single drop evident outside that area.

Every corner of the room contained wrought iron candelabras with six, recently lit foot tall candles flickering on each. In front of Saul was a wall with a large open fire, orange flames dancing on the burning logs in the grate. Insidious gargoyles chased playful, teasing cherubs around a gothic style black granite surround and mantle. Above this and looking slightly out of keeping with the rest of the room was a large plasma TV hung on the wall.

In an arc around the corpse and crate and facing the fire were three antique black leather Chesterfield sofas. Behind them was a Steinway grand piano and on the full length and height of the wall behind that, rosewood bookcases filled with old, leather bound books. There was an occasional table to the side of the window. On top of it was a white Bakelite telephone and a TV remote control.

'Were you running this weekend?' asked Buglass, doodling on his notepad.

Saul was still surveying the room and took a few seconds to answer. 'Yes, down in Manchester for the half marathon. I was just on my way back when I got the call about this.' he walked over to the Cezanne as he was talking. 'It was a good race. I managed to knock six seconds off my Personal Best.'

'You must be nearing world class now with the amount of running you do. How much did you raise?'

'Hardly world class. Hopefully about three thousand this time; as long as you tight bastards put your hands in your pockets and cough up. It all helps.' He turned around to face the room, then back to the picture again.

'The interesting thing about this picture Buglass, is its disjointed perspectives. Cezanne painted it from two different viewpoints. If you look at the table the left side is on a different plane to the right side. The tilt of the bottle and the incline of the basket are at different angles to the other items, so when you look at it closely, things don't seem quite right. I'm getting the exact same feeling about this scene.' He said, turning back to face Buglass. 'You have a large country house which to all intent and purpose is derelict apart from this one room: one room opulently decorated and full of very expensive and particular furnishings, a corpse and a crate. It feels like a Tracey Emin piece.'

'A what?' asked Buglass quizzically.

Saul shot a fleeting derogatory glance across to Buglass before taking in the room again. 'She's an artist: allegedly. She is the woman who put her piss and cum stained bed sheets, condoms, dirty knickers and other paraphernalia from her bedroom onto a bed in the middle of an art gallery.'

Just then Saul's mobile rang. He took it out of the inside pocket in his tuxedo jacket, looked at the screen and sighed heavily, frustration evident in the way he stabbed the 'Decline' button. He put it back into his pocket.

From outside the open door to the room Saul heard a resonating guffaw. 'Oh Christ, please tell me Darrie isn't on call tonight.'

'Based on that laugh, I would say he definitely is!' Buglass answered, a look of disdain crossing his face.

A short, rotund character appeared in the doorway. Candle shadows dancing over the food stained Onesie he was wearing beneath a creased and dirty Hacking jacket that was two sizes too small, accentuating the girth of his stomach that arrived before he did. The stylish garb was bottomed off by pink spotty Cath Kidston wellies. Candle light shone from the perspiration meandering down the brow of his bald head, which joined the droplets forming from the pores on his ruddy cheeks.

'Oh my word, what an absolutely sumptuous room. I wasn't expecting that. Saul!' Darrie exclaimed extrovertly. 'My good fellow, that Tuxedo looks dashing on you tonight. Have you dressed especially for this location, or have we dragged you from one of your high society occasions? Am I OK to come in and where can I walk?'

Behind Darrie a bespectacled head wearing a plastic PPE hat seemed to float from side to side, its body hidden behind his full figure. 'Hold up Darrie, you need your shoe covers on.' said the head, which belonged to Harris, the Scene of Crime Officer.

'Be a darling and slip them on for me would you Harris?' asked Darrie, lifting one of his feet backwards while holding onto the door frame coquettishly. The floating head rolled its eyes.

‘Good evening gentlemen. You are fine to walk from the door up to here, in front of the body. This side of the room seems clear. Harris, can you start taking a few pictures of the body. Darrie, I want you to take a look at it straight away, there are a few things I have seen that are troubling me at the minute. No, no social occasion tonight. I was supposed to be out with Sarah on our wedding anniversary.

‘In a Tux, my, aren’t you the gentleman. How are you Buglass, still enjoying life in the closet? I have the address of a lovely lithe Latino lothario if you are interested, loves cock; especially cock in denial.’ Darrie shared with a wicked glint in his eye as he walked across the room towards them.

‘Piss off you sad queen.’ Buglass retorted petulantly.

‘Darrie, stop winding him up and let’s focus on the body here, please.’ Saul stated sternly.

Harris came into the room too, dressed in blue plastic PPE overalls. He set down his bag onto one of the Chesterfields, took out a camera and began taking photographs of the body and the immediate vicinity.

‘Right Darrie, you’ll need to squat down here to see and specifically smell what I need you to, as the vanilla scent from the candles is masking the odour unless you are up close.’ advised Saul as he got down on his haunches again.

Darrie huffed, put one hand on Saul’s shoulder and eased himself down onto his knees. ‘You know, I really do wish more murderers would kill people on tables or benches. They just don’t consider the stress it puts on the heart of a portly fellow such as myself, having to go down like this.’

He sniffed, the playful expression he had on his face, hoping someone would bite at his innuendo, instantly turning intent. ‘That’s

decomposition. I wouldn't expect that so soon, not when you still have a pool of congealing blood.'

'I know. And look at this.' Saul responded, taking his pen again and poking the arm where he had previously. 'There is no give in the flesh at all. It feels like rigor has already set in.'

'That doesn't just look like rigor.' Mused Darrie. 'Harris, I'm going to touch the skin on this one part of the arm, can you take a photo please. There's dark colouring on the top of the exposed arm which suggests to me that's where the blood has settled in the corpse. The problem is it's on the top of the arm, not the bottom. This body has been turned over a while after death.' He put his hand on the forearm and sighed deeply. 'I can tell you now that the fresh pooling and blood spatter on these walls isn't from this body.'

'What do you mean?' asked Saul

'Well, if I'm not mistaken, and I rarely am, this guy has been frozen and is currently in the process of thawing. Put your hand here and you will feel the cold coming from the skin, that's why there is no give.'

Saul did as requested, a look of incredulity crossing his features. He looked at Darrie. 'So, we've got a body here that's not recently deceased, setup in a scenario to make it look as though he's just been killed?'

Harris interjected. 'I would second that. If you look at the arterial arc on the walls, the pattern is just too uniform. It also starts on the floor from around where the throat is. The body looks to have fallen face down. That type of spatter wouldn't happen. If anything, you would expect to see spatter in a circle of descent on the floor where the body has fallen. You wouldn't expect to see a blood trail then hitting the ceiling above it.'

'That may not be all.' said Darrie. He took a tissue out of his jacket pocket. 'Harris, I'm just going to wipe a little of the blood off this fellow's hairline, are you OK with that?'

'As long as it's a little, it's OK with me.' Harris answered quizzically, bending over the body with Saul and Darrie. Buglass also joined them, not wanting to be left out. Four shadows weaved a flickering dance on the walls, intertwining as they got closer to the body. Darrie rubbed away a patch of blood around an inch square from the hairline, revealing a row of neat stitching.

'Harris, can we turn this fellow over gently please, I have a feeling, either he has had a god awful facelift, or....'

Harris nodded and helped Darrie with the body, being careful not to disrupt the vicinity. It was fairly easy to do as the corpse was indeed still frozen. As they lifted, they noticed that the carpet below was still white, suggesting that it had been placed and then the blood poured around it.

On its back, they could now see the almost blood free face of a youngish man. His eyes were closed. A dark shadow of eyeliner was visible on the bottom lid with mascara accentuating the lashes. The pallid cheeks looked to be made up with foundation, a slight blush of rouge giving them colour. It was apparent now that there was no cut to the throat which could have caused the spatter in the room. What was also evident, on the naked torso, were tramlines of stitching in a 'Y' shape, from each shoulder to the middle of the chest, then from the chest down to the stomach.

'Or he has had an autopsy.' Darrie began. 'Which suggests he has been dead for a very long time. Not only that, the make up on his face smacks of funeral parlour glam, suggesting he has already been buried: and given that he is here, presumably exhumed!'



12:20 am

The little finger of each hand was tapping out an indelible litany on the arms of the chair, syncopated with the slow turning of her wrists forcefully against the leather straps that bound them to it. The wrists oozed blood and puss from the lesions caused by the friction of the motion. On her exposed forearms, before another strap tying down the elbows, hundreds of scars, burns, cuts and gouges were visible: a battlefield of harm, a litany of war.

'Day 15 Rebecca, how are you feeling?' The nebulous voice echoed around the padded cell, the tinny tincture produced by the ceiling speaker it came out of not diminishing the deep resonance of the man speaking.

Above the elbows, yet more straps were wrapped tightly over her chest. Two more secured both her neck and her bald head to the back of the chair. Similar weals to those on her wrists were visible where she gently gyrated her head against the bindings. Her eyes were closed. The only thing she wore was a green hospital theatre gown which hung limply from her emaciated body.

A stuttering giggle escaped from her mouth. 'Feeling!' she slurred, partly due to the plastic contraption in her mouth that stopped it from fully biting closed and partly due to the gnawed and withered stump that used to be a tongue. It was too small now to reach the front teeth or top of the mouth to round her words.

'I try hard not to feel. The pain helps. It distracts my mind. There's not enough of it though, not nearly enough of it since you started to

take me off my medication.’ Her body tensed as she visibly pushed it wherever possible against her restraints, forcing the point home. ‘No, not nearly enough!’

‘I’m sorry about that, but we have to get you to a place where we can talk, off the medication. You and I both know what you would try and do if you weren’t restrained.’

She began shaking furiously and screamed. ‘Then why don’t you let me! Why don’t you fucking let me end this miserable desolation? I am beyond redemption, beyond saving, beyond repair!’ She stopped shaking just as suddenly as she had started, slight sobs emanating from her open mouth. ‘What good does any of this do? It doesn’t change a thing....’

Her fingers started their litany again, the wrists circling against the restraints. Her head was bald, pock marked with craters where large clumps of hair had been ripped out, taking the scalp with it. There were more cuts and burns visible here too. Her legs were damaged in a similar fashion and also bound tight. Underneath the wooden chair, which was bolted to the floor, was a bucket from which the smell of stale urine and faeces emanated. An cannula was secured to her left arm, the drip tube going off to a stand that had three different solutions feeding into it, feeding her. There was nothing else in the cell, save for a camera on the ceiling.

‘Your lips are whispering Rebecca. Your fingers are tapping. Is there music that helps distract you?’ he asked.

Her eyes had been closed, but she opened them and stared directly at the camera and looked at it for a full minute before replying. ‘Can you remember the first time that you kissed a girl?’ She asked.

There was a few seconds delay before he answered ‘1974. I was 7. It was a sunny summer’s day in July, just before we were due to break up for the holidays. Our school was a mixed school but at breaks the girls

and boys would play in separate playgrounds. The teachers would stop us from mingling with each other. However, if you went down to the railings at the bottom of the yard, they couldn't see you. I had fancied Carolyn for what seemed like aeons but was probably only since Maths that morning. Both sets of our friends dared us all morning to have a snog and at lunchtime we sneaked to the bottom of the fence and did it. We kissed through the fence. I even slipped her a bit of tongue. I'd like to say it was romantic and special, but 7 year olds really haven't got a clue. To prove how much we didn't have a clue, I remember coming back to my mates who were waiting in the dinner queue, all pumped up with adrenaline, all excited from carrying out the clandestine deed. I think my exact words to them were 'I didn't just kiss her; I fucked her as well!' My seven year old peers had told me that's what putting your tongue into a girl's mouth was. How about you?'

She was still staring at the camera, wrists, head and ankles all straining against the restraints, inflicting the maximum possible pain.

'Aren't boy's monsters. Taking something so pure, so innocent and wrapping sex around it.'

'I don't think that's just boys, I think it's what you hear, what you learn about relationships as you grow up. People tell you things and as a child you don't have the mechanisms in place to challenge if what you are being told is the truth or not. I think it was my seven ear old girlfriends who told me that. I would imagine you believed you could get pregnant from a toilet seat well into your teens. Tell me about your first kiss.' He asked again.

'When Doves Cry. The song is 'When Doves Cry'.' she whispered, looking intently into the camera. 'Dig if you will a picture, of you and I engaged in a kiss.' Her body started to shake ever so slightly, eyes dilating as she appeared to be losing control, but then this subsided and she returned to the rhythmic infliction of pain.

'The first time I kissed a girl was in 1984. I had no plans to kiss her. She was called Hannah Matthews and we had been good friends since primary school. I liked her a lot but the thought of kissing a girl had never even crossed my mind. We both loved Prince and it was the year Purple Rain was out at the pictures. Our other friends weren't really that into him, but we were purple through and through. It's funny what you remember.' She paused, drifting off into her memory for a few seconds before continuing. 'We went to the Regal Picture Hall in Blyth on the first night it was out. It was a fleapit and we were the only ones in there, so we sat right at the back in worn and ripped red faux suede seats. There were bits of popcorn all over the floor and your feet stuck to the syrup of spilt drinks. That didn't matter though. It would be a massive understatement to say we were excited. We talked about nothing else for weeks leading up to it and all through the trailers and adverts we were giggling and screeching out the songs at the top of our voices. There was no one in there, so the ushers didn't care. All that pent up excitement was there, ready and waiting for the start, and in all innocence we were holding hands, trying to keep each other calm enough to be able to enjoy the movie. That's 14 year old girls and hormones for you. The movie started and for whatever reason our hands just stayed entwined.'

She paused and the rhythmic circling against the restraints ceased. Her sunken, bloodshot eyes, the irises a faded green, looked down from the camera and what might have been warmth tried to break out in the contours and curves of her gaunt, haunted face as she retreated into the memory.

'The raking guitar of the first bars of 'When Doves Cry' screamed out. We were so engrossed in the movie I don't think either of us realised that the handholding had turned into stroking, the delicate tips of Hannah's fingers gently meandering up and down the inside of my arm. It was the static tingling born in the depths of my stomach that made me look, the growing glow of joy that began to consume every

bit of me, made my skin shine and spark with the essence of her touch. The lyrics started, 'Dig if you will a picture, of you and I engaged in a kiss' and we looked at each other. We looked beyond the touch, beyond the skin, deep into the feelings that were curving her beautiful smile to radiance, deep into the emotions that were cascading from her eyes, from my every pore. It was undeniable, unequivocal. In that moment we were being consumed by love. We both leaned towards each other at exactly the same time and, eyes wide open, our lips tenderly touched. Within my veins, her essence beat, my heart palpitating with the absolute clarity of being loved, of being in love. It is the only time in my life that I have been absolutely sure of every single feeling, emotion and thought that passed through my soul. Our lips parted, and for the remainder of the song we just watched the enormity of that moment paint itself onto our faces.'

She fell silent again, her body still in the confines of her restraints, in the confines of the chair, in the confines of the cell, spirit free in her minds tapestry.

'Your son. Tell me about the first time you kissed your son.' crackled his voice over the speaker, breaking the moment.

Suddenly her body tensed and she glared up at the camera, the placation gone in an instant. The circling of her limbs against the straps intensified and the obvious veins on her bald head began to throb with the exertion of her movements. She started to shake within her confines and spittle dribbled from the sides of her wedged open mouth.

'He was sweet.' she whispered, her breathing frantic, the words full of venom.

'Sweet?' he asked.

'His tasted so, so sweet.' her words were sneered now, sibilant, yet low and full of menace 'As I sat astride, taking every inch of him inside me,

laughing manically as I tore his chest open with my bare hands, ripped his still pumping heart from its home and ate it as he died in front of my eyes, yes: he was sweet!



12:45 am

Saul walked out of the Drawing Room into the dark, stuffy corridor, the inane banter and joviality between Darrie and Buglass receding as he retreated to a safe enough distance not to be overheard. The flickering candlelight from the partly open door caressed the darkness in the corridor into penetrable shadows, which congregated around his person, consuming his abrupt features as he leant against the dusty wall. He took out his mobile, its screen chasing the shadows from his face as he dialled a number.

'Hey Jess, I didn't wake you did I?' he asked gently, his features noticeably softening as the call was answered almost immediately.

'No, just had a long luscious bath. I'm trying hard to relax! I didn't expect to hear from you this early, have you told her already?' asked the low sultry voice at the other end of the phone.

'Not yet, I got a shout about ten minutes from home, possible murder so I've been at the Crime Scene for the past hour. I think she's pissed off with me. I've had a dozen missed calls and about the same number of texts containing an escalating number of expletives.'

'Oh John, that's bad. Didn't you call her and let her know?' she asked reproachfully.

'Yes, it went to voicemail, and I sent her a text. I'm not that callous. I am putting off speaking to her now.' He said, sighing heavily. 'I know I have to and more importantly, I really, really want to, but...'

She gently interrupted 'I know how hard this is for you and I'm truly aware of everything that you will be sacrificing for me. If you aren't one hundred percent sure, you do know I will understand that too, don't you?'

His face broke into an obvious smile, casting circling shadows to flight as his eyes brightened. 'I do, and I know you will be there for me and Jacob. I guess I just have to man up. This crime scene is looking a lot like someone playing silly buggers rather than a real murder, so I'll be home in the next hour or so. I'll give you a call after that. I had such a wonderful weekend and I cannot wait to be with you all the time; love you baby.'

'Et tu, my darling, Et tu,' she finished.

He hung up, the smile immediately disappearing from his face. Still looking at his phone, he opened the last text message received, from Sarah and replied 'Sorry, this should be wrapped up soon, see you in about an hour J x'. He lifted the phone pensively to his lips once he sent it and stared into flickering shadows for a few moments in silence.

As he leaned away from the wall, he heard a ripping sound as his jacket arm caught on a loose nail. He looked down to see a tear in the sleeve which was also covered in dust. 'Shit, there goes the deposit.' he moaned as he walked back towards the Drawing Room, the banality of the conversations going on in there invading his ears once more.

'Right.' stated Saul, walking back into the room. 'We've all got homes to go to tonight, so unless you can show me some compelling evidence that we have a fresh, bona fide murder to investigate, I suggest we wrap for this evening and let the day shift pick this one up. Darrie, have you seen anything more to suggest that this guy wasn't already dead?'

'Oh, I do like it when you are this forceful and direct, speaks to my submissive tendencies...' Darrie started.

'For fuck's sake will you give it a rest! It's getting very late and I am really not in the mood.' Cut in Saul. 'Is there anything else?' he finished abruptly, staring at Darrie in frustration.

Darrie postured and pulled a handbag face, but then answered calmly. 'No, everything suggests that the cadaver has been dead for quite a while and placed here recently. It was definitely frozen after exhumation. The only thing, as we saw, was the slight scratch on the head which could be as the result of a knock and the stitching around the chest area which may or may not be to do with the autopsy. I will know more once he's back on the slab, but there is nothing that stands out for an urgent chase up. What's more urgent, in my humble opinion, is that you find a sense of humour in that uptight arsehole you've got!' he finished with a challenging smirk back at Saul.

Saul just sighed. 'Harris, have you seen anything else significant at this stage?'

'The significant things really are what's absent to be honest. There are no finger prints on any of the surfaces, not one, anywhere; not even on the crate. Lord knows how anyone got that in here without leaving some kind of print. Even the candles and the fire which have only recently been lit have none. That suggests the room was cleaned thoroughly after the body was staged. I can confirm that the blood around the room is not human. It is some kind of animal and tests in the lab will tell us what. The only thing I have found that may be of any significance so far is what looks like a hair and some dried blood on the corner of the fireplace. It has been there a while and is human so we can do a trace on that. I've taken swabs and samples from the body too. I still have quite a bit of processing to do, but you can leave me doing that if Buglass is OK to hang around for an hour. I want to check out the main corridor and the entrances too. After that I'll get back to the lab to run DNA tests and try and work out who this guy is.'

'Buglass, are you OK with that?' asked Saul.

'Yes that's fine with me. I'm on shift until 6 anyway and will probably need to stay here until the day shift come on. I'll do another recce around the rest of the building, although there was nothing obvious first time.'

Just as Buglass finished his sentence, the Bakelite phone on the table started to ring, an old fashioned brring, brring. Buglass, who was closest to it, looked down at the phone, then up to Saul with a quizzical expression. 'Should I get that?' he asked.

'Yes, get it!' said Saul, obvious annoyance in his tone.

Buglass picked the ringing phone up and said 'Hello.' Into the handset. He looked up at Saul again, surprised, holding the phone away from his ear. 'It's someone asking for you?' he said, proffering the phone over to Saul.

'For me?' Saul asked, perplexed as he walked towards Buglass. He took the phone from him and said 'Who is this?' into the receiver.

'Do I have your attention, Mr Saul.' asked a male voice, clipped and precise in intonation into Saul's ear.

'Pardon, who is this?' Saul reiterated. Harris and Darrie came closer to the phone too, picking up on the confusion in Saul's tone.

'Who I am is irrelevant. Why you are here is not irrelevant. Why the body is here is not irrelevant. Why the container is here is not irrelevant. So, I ask you again, do I have your attention, Mr Saul?' the voice reiterated, calm and measured.

'You have my attention, what can I help you with?' asked Saul while acting out a writing mime in the direction of Buglass and then mouthing 'Take notes!' to him silently once he finished the sentence.

'I was really hoping you could help me Mr Saul. You see, I am in a bit of a predicament. I have certain information which relates to the

murder of the gentleman lying on the floor in front of you, but have reason to believe that you will not act on that information willingly.'

Saul's eyes were darting between the men in the room in front of him, a dozen questions visible in them all at once. He plumped for 'Why don't you think we would act on the information willingly. If this is a murder, any information you may have that could assist our enquiries would be invaluable.'

'Oh it is most definitely a murder, it is just that someone has already been convicted and incarcerated for the crime. Unfortunately, it is the wrong person and a gross miscarriage of justice has taken place.'

Saul paused for a moment and put his hand over the receiver. 'Buglass, are you getting this?' he said quickly. Buglass nodded. 'Darrie, can you quickly ring HQ, give them this address and see if they can get a trace on the call?' Darrie nodded and backed off out of the room.

'So, just to be clear in my mind. Did you set this scene up to attract our attention so that we would listen to the information you have?'

'Just to be clear Mr Saul; I wanted to attract *your* attention, but yes, I set this up. I have it on good authority that you are an excellent detective, fastidious in the detail with an unwavering moral compass. I believe that while the information I have is important, if I were to simply visit the station and offer it openly, it would just be disregarded. To be honest, I do not have sufficient evidence to back up what I know. Now you, on the other hand, given the right encouragement, have the skills to be able to gather that evidence.'

'Sir, I would like to inform you at this point that your actions in setting this scenario up could in themselves be considered a criminal act and may lead to prosecution, you are aware of that?'

A humorous, resonating laugh broke out of the phone, startling Saul to move the phone from his ear. Buglass and Harris heard it too, their expressions becoming even more bemused.

'My dear, dear Mr Saul, please be assured that I fully understand the implications of my actions. Thank you for your candour in pointing them out. Equally, I am also aware that you have sent one of your colleagues off to try and get a trace on this line, that rotund bumbling character with the sewer mind, Darrie I think you called him. Could you do me a favour please, and switch the TV on? The remote control is next to the telephone. You only need to press the red on/off button at the top.'

Saul bent down and picked up the remote and did as requested. After a second, the blank screen burst into life and he found that he was looking at himself looking at the TV. Half the screen was taken up showing the room they were in. He turned and looked toward the bookcase, and his image on the screen did the same. The other half of the screen showed what appeared to be a blanket with an arm slightly visible. The aspect looked confined and the lighting was fairly low. Overlaid in the top corner of this part of the screen was a heart rate monitor, with a solitary rhythmic beep coming from the speakers of the TV.

'On the left screen, Mr Saul, is a real time video stream of this room. I have been watching you since you arrived and know that you have already gathered a great deal of evidence that will be crucial in identifying our poor friend's real killer. So yes, I know that Mr Darrie is currently calling Headquarters to ask them to put a trace on this line. It will do no good, but let him try.'

Saul had an agitated expression on his face as he looked between the TV, the bookcase, the body and the nonplussed expressions of his colleagues.

'Sir, I don't quite understand the necessity for these theatrics. Surely if you just give me the information you have we can see how it pertains to the murder. I'm not at all sure what you gain from this.' Saul finished, casting an expressive arm in an arc taking in the room and looking directly into where he thought the camera was.

'Mr Saul, let me cut to the quick and get you focused on what you need to do. You are the detective. In this room, there are enough clues to allow you to progress your investigation. You have a body. You have a crime scene, and within a few hours you will have the identity of that body and who was convicted of killing him. From there, you will have all of the transcripts from the investigations and the subsequent trial. I am giving you most of this on a plate. My challenge to you is that I want you to bring the real murderer back to this room by midnight tonight.'

Saul looked from the TV back to the camera. He held his arms out in exasperation before he put the phone back to his ear. 'Well, I am sure that we can start to look at the evidence we find in this room, but I think you are being unrealistic in your expectations of getting any conclusions in a day. There are processes to go through if new evidence is brought to light for previous convictions.'

'I am well aware of that. That is why I mentioned earlier that you may need a little encouragement. Please take note of the image on the right side of the TV. That is a real time video feed as well. A real time video feed of a real person. A real person currently ensconced in that container you see in front of you. Don't worry, they are perfectly safe: for now. They are sedated and blissfully unaware of the predicament they are in. However, if you do not bring the real murderer into this room before midnight tonight, that will be a different matter entirely.'

Saul's face fell, 'Look, I'm sure if we talk through this, understand what information you have and see what we can...' Saul was interrupted.

'Mr Saul. I understand how the system works. You also need to be aware that the container in front of you is lined with Semtex. Do not attempt to open it, or it will explode. Do not try and disrupt the video stream coming from it or it will explode. Do not try to tamper with the casing in any way, shape or form or it will explode. Do I make myself clear?'

'Crystal.' rumbled Saul staring in anger at the bookcase.

'Just so we are crystal, Mr Saul and you fully understand what I *need* from *you*.' the voice continued. 'If you do not bring the person responsible for his murder into this room before midnight tonight, the container will explode. Now Mr Saul, I ask you again, do I have your attention?'



1:30 am

The slightly wavering barrel of a gun appeared through the frame of an open door, pointing towards Saul's head. As it moved forward, slim, elegant fingers with immaculately manicured and painted nails came into view wrapped around the handle. The index finger was wavering over the trigger, its false nail missing, underneath, the real one bitten back to the skin which was red raw and angry. Not quite as angry as she was.

'Bastard!' she slurred and pulled the trigger.

A jet of water shot out of the plastic gun in a spectacular arc, splatting straight into a photograph of Saul and Sarah on the far wall of their minimalist living room. Sarah shuffled through the door into the room, waving the water pistol in front of her.

'Gotcha you knob jockey!' she exclaimed while raising the half empty bottle of wine she had in the other hand to her lips, guzzling down the contents voraciously.

There was a point, earlier in the evening, when she had looked stunning: dressed elegantly, her hair and make-up professionally done, having spent two hours in a beauty salon getting ready for their anniversary dinner. Now, that perfect porcelain facade, which accentuated her elfin features, was gone, replaced by a tirade of tears and smears. Bright rouge lipstick now adorned her chin and cheeks, mascara flowing in torrents with earlier tears, carving black shadows into her beauty. Hazel shoulder length hair had been straight and pristine. Now it was tousled and tangled, the ends caked with running

make-up. She still wore the fitted scarlet YSL dress, cut low at the front, accentuating the gentle swell of her cleavage, highlighting the slender curves of her hips, her long legs still wearing black stockings. Sparkling Jimmy Choo high heels had been kicked off long ago and replaced with a pair of tatty Uggs. Over her dress, she was wearing a thick cotton dressing gown which was stained with, and stank heavily of a child's milky vomit, slightly overpowering the subtle odour of the Chanel perfume she was wearing.

Gently swaying, mumbling curses under her breath, she stared at the photo of the two of them, their heads inclined in and cheeks brushing. They were smiling from their eyes, a tacit intimacy evident in the glow from them, not just from the jet of water that she had sprayed. There was a time when they had been happy. Her gaze moved right, to a large canvas portrait over the wall mounted fire.

A fleeting smile wiled its way onto her lips, stopping the grumbles for a moment as she took in the image. The canvas was a pencil sketch drawing of her. She was draped seductively over a table on her back, long tousled tresses of hair cascading over the edge as her head tipped backwards looking out of the picture. Her beckoning eyes were suggestively following those of whoever was taking in the image. She was naked, the sensual placement of an arm here, the bend of a leg there discreetly covering her modesty. She adored the sketch both for what it was and for the moment it captured: the moment she met John, the moment he exposed her soul bare.

That moment was the 3:00pm on Thursday the 2nd May 1996. She was in the last week of the last year on her Performing Arts degree at Newcastle University and was putting together her final portfolio of photographs and images. She needed something alluring to complete the collection so had agreed to be a nude model for the Art class. There had been a fleeting moment of concern about the idea of 30 plus testosterone loaded Art student's perving over her. Very fleeting, before her naturally extroverted tendencies kicked in and reminded

her if she ever wanted to be an actress, this was the type of thing that you needed to be comfortable with: or at least act like you were comfortable with it.

She was attracted to John immediately. Yes, he was handsome, with an angular profile which could be soft or sharp depending on his mood. He was tall, well over 6ft with a toned physique honed by hours spent playing football and at the gym. But it was his eyes that drew her to him. Most of the other students were looking her up and down, lust in their actions as they were sketching. John hardly ever veered away from her face and there was an obvious intensity in his gaze as he looked deep into *her* eyes. Rooms in the recesses of her memories opened, proffering up personal thoughts and feelings willingly through the dilating pools of the facade she was trying to portray, straight into the resonating emerald of his irises and out of his dextrous fingers onto the canvas.

During the sitting she had been on a chair, legs crossed to cover her lady garden, breasts exposed. Most of the sketches took the pose verbatim, with varying degrees of caricature and accentuation of her assets. John's didn't. The physical nudity of his sketch was discreet, the pose totally different, with attention drawn away from the luscious form of her body to her face. A face which conveyed the naked truth of her innocence, insecurities, beauty, temper, avarice and wanton soul breathing from every stroke of his pencil on the canvas.

'Why aren't you like that now, why can't you see inside me, why can't you read me anymore?' she blubbered out as she raised the gun again and shot a jet of water at the sketch. The droplets started to trickle down, smudging the pencil in trails that mirrored the current state of her mind and body, blurring the clarity of what had made their relationship so special.

On the coffee table in the middle of the lounge stood an empty wine glass lipstick kissed, an already empty bottle next to it, sitting on top

of a weighty tome on Renaissance Art along with her mobile phone and a brown envelope with the ear of a photograph sticking out. She shuffled into the room and put the current bottle down on the table, picked up the phone and dialled a number at the top of the recent call list. It went to voicemail, and she collapsed back into the brilliant white leather sofa behind her in disappointment.

'Hi Rob, just me again.' she stuttered with a determined expression on her drawn features. 'Guess you are probably out on a call or in bed: probably with your girlfriend! Ha, Ha, HA!' She burst out laughing and then shushed herself.

'Sorry didn't mean that. You might have got my other messages about being sorry for making a pass at you earlier. Well, I'm not!' she proclaimed while raising the water pistol and taking another pot shot at a different picture of Saul on the wall.

'Cunt.' she announced.

'No, not you!' she apologised quickly into the phone 'My git of a husband. He has no idea, no bloody idea what I go through every day trying to keep some normality and perspective in this bubble world with Jacob. You seem to understand, you seem to have a lot of empathy for our situation, a lot of feelings for me...and you are hot, god you are hot!'

She flushed, a look of pained embarrassment replacing her determination. She started to nibble on the nail less index finger as she carried on. 'Shit, did I just say that! Sorry, Jesus I'm so, so sorry! Oh fuck!' she finished and hung up, dropping the phone on the sofa.

'Silly bitch.' she whispered, chastising under her breath while leaning forward, grabbing the wine and taking another huge swig of the contents.

Rob was Jacob's consultant paediatrician. He had been working with Sarah full time for 3 months now, carrying out research along with other specialists into the neurological disease Jacob had suffered since birth, 4 short years ago. Although suffered was probably too strong a word given that he seemed to be in a permanently comatose state, oblivious of the world, not even seeing it unless you physically opened his eyelids. The only general reaction his body gave to any kind of stimulus was his eyes dilating under light. They had a daily cleaning and massage regime to keep his body supple and exercised, and the water pistol was a tool they used to see if the gentle sprays would shock his muscles into action. It had never worked, but they kept trying. His body would spasm involuntarily into fits, at least a dozen times a day. He had a mouth guard in place to hold the tongue down so he wouldn't choke, but the spasms would invariably induce vomiting. Feeding was done via a tube that was fitted directly into his stomach. Full time supervision was a necessity, but most of the time this was generally at the end of a baby monitor now. He wore a motion activated alarm on his wrist which looked like a watch, a picture of Pinocchio on the face.

The only occasion he had ever looked like he had a body movement under his own volition was when he was three. Sarah still tried to do all the usual things you would do with a young child as routine, right down to reading him a bedtime story, closing the blackout blinds and kissing his delicate forehead goodnight. On this occasion, she was reading him Pinocchio and had just reached the part in the story where Pinocchio was being tempted by the 'lame fox and the blind cat', to plant his coins under the magic tree. A huge grin surfaced on Jacob's face right at that point and the slightest of noises which she convinced herself was a laugh came out between his lips. The utter exhilaration that overtook her in that moment at the idea of her son coming to life, her son becoming a real boy was equally matched by the devastating anguish that consumed her when, after days of testing,

the doctors concluded that he had just had his first wind smile. From that day, they named his condition Pinocchio Paralysis.

Once a month Jacob would go to a private paediatric unit in Newcastle to give Sarah some respite from the demands of his disease. Rob had taken him there yesterday afternoon so that she could get ready for her anniversary evening with John. It was as he leant in to peck her cheek in a friendly goodbye that she had turned her head and kissed him fully on the lips. At first he responded but then after a second pulled away, very apologetic, fumbling back from her, being very clear that while he liked her, he couldn't get involved in that way. Her face flushed red with the embarrassment of the moment as it swirled through her drunken fume.

'Twat Face!' she shouted, another stream of water flying from the pistol, smacking into a photo of John with Jacob in his arms on the day he was born. She clumsily managed to stand up, glugged the last of the wine, dropped the bottle on the floor, picked up her phone and rang John. Her fury was evident as it went to voicemail and she scowled into the handset.

'You are a piece of work John, you really are!'

Shuffling toward the photo, she fired again.

You have been gone all bloody weekend. I know. I know, you are the big I am. Look at me! Away supporting my son, raising money to pay for research into his illness!'

Closer still she moved, to within a few feet, where another shot was dispatched.

'You are a cock. A bona fide one hundred percent knob. You can't even make time for our wedding anniversary. Our fucking wedding anniversary John! What is it? Why not! Are you scared? Or just bloody bored!'

She was right up to the photo now, the muzzle of the pistol in John's face, where she forced it hard into the glass with an obvious vitriol.

'Or are you just avoiding me, so we don't have to continue the conversation you started the other day. And where did that come from, how the hell did that curve ball pop into your head? What warped world does your mind live in that thinks it's OK to consider killing our son!'



2:15 am

After more than an hour in silence, the insidious glare on her face abated, the prolonged straining of every sinew against the restraints dissipating in a second as Rebecca figuratively slumped back into the chair. A huge sigh escaped through caged lips as she spoke. 'That wasn't the first time I kissed him. It was the last.'

She fell silent again.

'Well done Rebecca, it may have taken a while, but that's the first time in two weeks you have been able to answer that question and remain rational.'

She burst out laughing, a further release of pent up tension apparent. 'Doc, for the things I can explain, my mind has always been rational. It's the things I can't explain that test my lucidity. I don't think it's insane to want to kill myself for the things that I have done. I am sure if you went out and canvassed opinion, asking people if a multiple murderer should be allowed to commit suicide, they would consider it reasonable. They would probably offer to help!'

'Multiple?' he questioned.

Silence again, then after a moment, in which she resumed the slow grinding of her wrists against restraints, Rebecca continued.

'The first time I kissed my son. Hannah was in labour, more than eight centimetres dilated with contractions coming every two minutes, well into the second stage. We had wanted a home birth, fully natural, just

the two of us. The pain was getting too much for Hannah though and I thought that the baby was breach, so I decided to take her into hospital, which was only a ten minute ride away.'

'She was lying on the back seat of the car, panting through the contractions and swearing profusely at me for letting her do the hard bit. It's the only time in our relationship that I ever felt like the man. It was only for the briefest of moments though, as through her controlled breathing rose the most gut wrenching scream. I was trying to concentrate on the road, with my left hand swapping between changing gears and seeking out to hold hers with what little comfort I could offer in the circumstances. The scream reached a crescendo and she started to shout 'He's coming, he's coming, he's coming!' at the top of her voice.'

'Cross your legs you silly bitch, he's nowhere near yet.' I sympathetically said, my attempt to keep the mood light while trying to quickly turn around and see how far on Hannah really was. She was fully dilated now, and I could just make out a little vernix as I had a glimpse of the baby's scalp. That told me he wasn't breach but that he was fully engaged and on his way.'

'As I turned back to look at the road I just caught out of the side of my right eye a lorry heading straight for the car, the rising drone of its blaring horn drowning out Hannah's groans. Ironically, the words 'We Deliver Your Promises.' flashed passed my startled eyes as I realised I had just gone through a 'Give Way.' sign at a crossroads, straight into the path of the lorry. I put my foot on the accelerator, not panicking but realising I had a better chance of driving past it now. I was too late.'

'Huge plumes of acrid black smoke began to rise from the braking delivery lorry as its front end slammed into the rear wing on the driver's side of the car. It was sent spinning with a wrenching screech of metal on metal. I tried hard to steer into the skid as the impact

buffeted me in my seat, braking now as well. Panic overtook me as I heard Hannah screaming my name, felt her arms slap into my side, as without a seatbelt on, she was ungraciously thrown around the back seat.'

'In that panic, I still managed to count four complete spins of the car, right across the crossroads, as my gaze agonisingly darted from the windscreen, to the side windows, then behind me, trying to see what we were going to hit next.'

'What we hit next was the trunk of an old and wizened Oak tree that stood in an open playing field at the far side of the crossroads. The rear of the passenger side slammed into it, glass shattering as the back door was crushed on impact, stopping the car dead. I could see Hannah being hurled back as the glass flew in, her head banging into the bark of the tree. She screamed. My god did she scream, not just with the impact of the crash but as the next contraction overwhelmed her. There was very little damage to the driver's area and apart from a few scratches from flying glass I was relatively unscathed. I tried to jump over to help her but my seatbelt was locked tight. I quickly fumbled and released it and started to scramble into the back seat just as Hannah's contraction reached its crescendo, just as a fountain of blood spurted from an open wound visible on her neck where the glass had severed an artery.'

'She was jabbering, shaking in shock, in agony, in the last stages of bloody labour, with cuts all over her head and blood seeping down her face, mingling with tears and sweat. She was awake though and in her next breath she screamed at me 'The baby Becca, the baby!', a look of terrified concern consuming her.'

'I didn't know what to do first, find something to stop the oozing from her neck, which had eased off as the contraction passed, or to check between her still open thighs. I froze in absolute shock and did nothing until she slapped me a split second later and said in a calm yet

purposeful tone 'Becca, please check our baby. I'm OK, I will be OK and you need to see if he looks alright, please?'

'That's my Hannah, in a nutshell: absolute clarity in her purpose, absolute courage in her convictions. I finished scrambling over into the back seat, gently positioning myself as best I could between her thighs. She was fully dilated now with the baby's head crowning. I couldn't see any abrasions on his visible skull, or any injuries to her vaginal area. 'He looks OK.' I said, obvious relief in my voice, which echoed in her otherwise pained face. 'But I don't think we will be making it to hospital for delivery!'

'It was then I heard a voice from outside. It was the lorry driver in his bland brown delivery livery. He was frantic and blubbering. I let him know that we were both alive but did need an ambulance urgently. I later found out he was called Colin. He ran back to his cab to call it in on his C.B. radio. God, what did we do before mobile phones? Hannah was panting again, the next contraction starting. With her left hand, she had the collar of her blouse pushed into the wound on her neck, slowing the flow of blood from it. With her right, she held mine tightly, anxiously. 'Becca baby, when has anything in our life ever been normal.' Hannah said, raising our entwined hands to her lips and kissing my fingers gently. 'It's always been you and me against the world. It looks like we will be bringing our son into it the same way, just as we wanted.' With that, I could see the tension of the next contraction begin to contort her features, I could hear the low guttural growl start deep in her lungs and I could feel the pain as she crushed the bones in my hand.'

'She pushed. She pushed hard, banshee wails assailing the confined space in the car. As she pushed, blood started to pour profusely from the neck wound, even through the pressure she was applying to keep it in check. 'Stop pushing Hannah, stop pushing!' I shouted, hollow consuming my stomach at the sudden realisation of what was happening to her. 'Hannah listen to me. I know this will be hard, but

you have to stop pushing until we can get that wound sorted or you will lose too much blood.’ The contraction started to subside but the next one was only a minute away.’

“Becca, I have to push.’ She told me, a look of inevitable realisation visible in her eyes. ‘He won’t be able to breathe for long in the canal, you know that. We have to get him out while I have the energy. The more blood I lose the less chance we have of that happening.’ She was right. I knew she was right. Colin appeared back at the car, letting us know the ambulance was on its way and asking what he could do to help. I directed him to Hannah and he took off his brown jacket, scrunched it up and pushed it hard into her neck, taking over that duty. He was wearing a ‘Fields Of The Nephilim.’ tour t-shirt underneath. I remember the image vividly, an angel sitting cross legged, naked on the ground, her wings battered, feathers broken and falling out.’

‘I was sobbing uncontrollably now, my chest wracked with taut pain as my own breathing became laboured under the intensity of the emotions. My words came out, but they were broken and high pitched as I groaned. ‘No Hannah, I can’t let you, I can’t.....’ She interrupted me, grabbing both my hands with hers and staring straight into my eyes with a fiery, defiant determination. ‘It’s my choice; it’s what I have to dooooo....’ The sentence ended in a scream as the next contraction kicked in. I could see every vein and sinew pumping in her face, forehead and neck with the ferocity she was forcing into the push, blood streaming from her wound through the makeshift bandage. I looked down and saw the whole of his head crowned as the wave abated.’

‘In between the tears I let out a squeak of delight at the thought that he was almost out, the thought that one more big effort would see him born and that Hannah just might not bleed to death. ‘He’s almost there, one more huge push and he will be out. You are doing so well, so, so well.’ I said on autopilot. Hannah, lying there in the most

exposed way, life force ebbing from her, exertion evident in every fibre of her being, fatigue apparent in the wry smile that formed on her lips, said to me as only she could. 'Becca, I know you are a midwife, but that has to be the most condescending line you could say to any pregnant mother under normal circumstances, let alone these!'

'Her face suddenly turned hard again. 'It's coming. He's coming!' she said as the next contraction began to bubble. 'Get your hands on your knees and be ready to let rip.' I instructed, positioning myself to deliver our son.'

"Dig If you will a picture...'. She started to randomly shout between panting as the tidal force of this last, all-consuming contraction overwhelmed her. His head edged her cervix further apart, the top of an ear popping into view.'

"Of you and I engaged in a kiss...'. She continued. Colin was pressing as hard as he could on her wound, but it wasn't stopping the flow of blood at all. 'Nearly there Hannah, keep this push up and he will be out!' I screamed over her tirade.'

"Can you my darling, can you picture this...'. She finished, with a monumental wail, hands pulling her knees up with the effort, head forced forward looking down towards the delivery as, with a final gasp, she forced our son out.'

'His head was free, and his bloody blue body slithered out into my shaking hands. Seeing I had nothing to wrap him in, Colin took off his t-shirt and passed it over to me. I wrapped the baby up, wiping the vernix, blood and slime from his head and face, quickly checking his throat.'

'In a second he began to wail, full, raucous screams as I lifted him up onto Hannah's chest. With an effort she was still holding her head up, tears biting clear streams through her blood stained face as she said

'He's OK. He's OK.', while leaning over to kiss his head, cuddling him into her chest.'

'I did the same, the first time I kissed my son, before reaching up and kissing Hannah full on the lips. The last time I kissed her. We pulled apart and she looked at me, the sheen covering her eyes not just due to the tears. She put one hand behind my head, pulled me in close to her face and whispered with her last breath 'Look after him. Now I know what it *really* sounds like, When The Doves Cry.'

'That was the first time I killed someone.'



3:30 am

Brilliant white light exploded from two tall arc lamps bursting into life, the monotone chatter of the diesel generators pre-empting the illumination of Featherstone Hall. Darkness was dispelled to reveal a bustle of uniformed Police Officers on various duties. Some were staking out lines from the edge of the house and erecting 'Police – Do Not Enter.' Tape. Some were chatting to their SOCO colleagues who were carrying items to the property. Some were transporting boxes from several vehicles to the large Major Incident Unit parked up on a grassy field about a hundred metres to the front of the building, the arc lamps flanking either end of it.

The house itself was built in 1801 in a castellated Tudor style. A rotund tower on the left rose beyond the height of the main building by about twenty feet and was topped with ramparts. Fake Arrow Slits were visible down the side along with many small shuttered windows. The central body of the house was over three storeys, the entrance flanked by two pillars that framed a large oak door which was distressed and rotting with age. A balcony jutted out from the central structure above the oak door, supported on the pillars, the large windows leading out onto it also shuttered, along with every window in the property.

A gravel driveway, overrun with weeds and blurring with unkempt lawns at its edges, meandered through woods from the left of the property to a large open expanse at the front of the house. In the centre of this was a dilapidated fountain, an early Greek statue of Eros

that was meant to be standing proud on a plinth in the middle missing its wings, arms and head, the remainder of it lichen stained.

A Range Rover rolled sedately down the drive, circling the fountain, the driver taking in the scene and the Hall before he drove up to the side of the Major Incident Unit. The car door opened, tan brogues coming into view, followed by the Moleskin suited DCI Jeremiah Strange as he stepped out of the vehicle. He was a tall, very slight man, his dark leathery skin especially noticeable in the sunken cheeks and around gaunt, haunted eyes. He still sported an Afro on his head, only with age it was now a shock of grey. Vapour wraiths escaped his mouth in the early morning chill as he blew through his hands.

PC Buglass was waiting for him outside the entrance of the Unit with a steaming cup of black coffee. 'Chief, here's a wake me up for you.' Buglass said, proffering the drink.

'Thank you son.' Strange answered, with a slight Jamaican twang evident in his gentle timbre. He took a huge gulp of the coffee and asked 'Who's managed to get their behinds out of bed so far?'

'Saul is still here, he's inside with Munro and Saxon. No other Detectives yet. Harris and Darrie have headed back to HQ with the body and the initial forensic evidence. They should be there by now. There are three more SOCO's on site and they are checking over the rest of the house. We've got half a dozen PC's just securing the perimeter and Tech are outback setting up Comms and IT. There's an Army Bomb Squad Unit on their way from Otterburn, they shouldn't be long arriving. That's about it.' briefed Buglass.

'Not a bad turnout considering the time.' said Strange, pleasantly surprised as he climbed the steps into the MIU, coffee in hand. 'I guess you are designated scribe until admin turn up. Are you OK with that?'

Buglass shrugged. 'It beats real work.' he said, a cheeky look on his young, still spotty face.

The unit was decorated an industrial, lifeless grey. On the farthest, shorter wall was a bank of clean whiteboards. Along the entire length of the back wall of the unit ran a bench loaded with computers, monitors, telephones and a percolating coffee machine. Above these and secured to the wall was a horizontal bank of 10 plasma screens. There were windows in the front wall of the unit and these looked out over the house. In the middle of the room was a rectangular table around which were squeezed half a dozen chairs, three of them occupied by the DI's, who were all drinking coffee, Munro and Saxon listening intently to Saul.

'Morning chaps, thanks for coming out so quickly this morning, not the best start for a Monday, I know.' He placed a hand on Saul's shoulder as he passed, squeezing it gently. 'And John, thanks for leading on this so far. Like the tux by the way. Hopefully the coffee will kick in quickly and our brains just might start working.' he continued light heartedly as he made his way to the whiteboards. Buglass followed him in and sat down next to Saul.

'Right guys, the chain of command for the incident is as follows at the moment. I am Bronze Control; Super is Silver/Gold and will be in the loop once the Video Conferencing is up to HQ. Saul, as the first on the scene with the most information on this, are you OK to be lead Detective?' asked Strange. Saul nodded while drinking his coffee. 'Saxon, Munro you are supporting and at the moment Buglass is scribe. We will have more support turning up soon but given the time pressures we appear to be under, I would suggest we get started. Is everyone OK with that?'

Everyone nodded in acknowledgement, and they started, Buglass relaying details of the initial 999 call that had sparked the incident, which had come through at 11:00am the previous night. As he spoke,

DCI Strange began to jot down salient points in a timeline on one whiteboard, while mapping out relationships with questions underneath on the next. Buglass finished his notes and then Saul brought them up to speed with the events since he arrived at the house.

'So, the upshot is, we have an ultimatum from an unknown caller to deliver the unknown real killer of their unknown victim, to the drawing room of this house by midnight or our unknown live captive will be blown up. That is a frightening number of unknowns to discover in 24 hours.' finished Saul, shaking his head.

'It is, but as our 'Unknown Caller' points out, we have a lot of evidence already and will have more as soon as we identify the body. So let's do what we always do. Get all the things we know on the table and the right resource focused on investigating the things we think, based on our collective experience, will get us a result. I can't promise this will be easy. We have a person's life at stake here but what we can't do is panic, or procrastinate, or lose our focus, and it's my job to make sure that we don't. So sup up your coffee and let's get focused.'

'Right, as I see it, there's three primary lines of enquiry we need to start down. Firstly, who is the dead person, who has been convicted of killing them and why is our 'Unknown Caller' so convinced they didn't do it? The 'who' bit will hopefully be incoming soon, and from there we need to try and figure out the 'why'. I see this as the main area of the investigation and John, I would like you to pick that up.' Strange started.

'Secondly, who the hell is the guy who set this elaborate honey pot up? Does he own this house, is it as simple as that? I doubt it, so if he doesn't, then who does? It's empty apart from that one room, so we need door to door co-ordinated with the surrounding farms and neighbours, see if they have seen any activity here recently. We need to be checking the data from the phone lines into the house, calls

received over and above the one we managed to record the end of. We also need to be analysing that call to see if it's the same person as the 999 caller and if we can get any audio forensic from either of them. Get the Tech Forensics checking out the AV setup and connectivity into that room too. Finding out where those feeds are coming from should help us find this guy. Leigh, could you pick that up please?' he asked DI Saxon.

'On it Chief.' She said, obvious enthusiasm in her animated response.

'Thirdly, we have an unidentified person whose life is at risk in all of this. Have we had any missing person's calls in the last 24 hours from around this area? We might need to look back further than that. See if the Tech Forensics can glean any more from the feed into that crate. Any distinguishing features on the little we can see of the person that might help identify them. Mick, just you left, are you OK with that?' Strange finished.

'It's going to be like finding piss in the ocean, but yes, I'm on it.' DI Munro moaned, a surly look on his haggard face.

'Start with finding piss in the puddle, then the pond, then the lake before you start on the ocean. You know it's more likely to be a local, so let's maintain that focus.' Strange firmly directed.

'Right, do we all know what we are doing?' Asked Strange. Nods of affirmation were forthcoming. 'Leigh, Mick, you can crack on. Buglass could you give Leigh a hand organising the door to door? John, you wait until we hear from HQ. We will catch up at 06:30 hours either here or on the conference bridge. We have 21 hours to find a killer, or to stop a killer. So let's get going.'

Saxon was straight up, barking instructions to Buglass immediately as they left. Munro slouched out of his seat lethargically, taking time to finish off his coffee before buttoning up his overcoat and leaving. Strange sat down next to Saul at the table.

'How are you doing John? I know you've been up a while but you are looking troubled. Personal or Professional?' asked Strange empathetically.

Saul had a nonplussed expression on his face for a second before he answered, a little tersely. 'Professional of course.'

Strange stared Saul out for a few seconds, a wry smile spreading over his face, shaking his head slightly as he said. 'Okay, if you don't want to discuss what you are doing here dressed up to the nines, on your wedding anniversary, when you should be with your wife, that is entirely your own business. If you don't want to tell me why you asked to be on call tonight, I'm not going to push it. I am here to listen, when you are ready to talk. So, professionally, what's up?'

'He wanted to attract *my* attention. He was very particular about wanting *me* to investigate this. I'm wracking my brains to think if I recognise the voice or if there's anyone I've dealt with in the recent past who would have hatched this. I can't think of anyone at the moment and that troubles me.' Saul paused and let out an ironic laugh, then continued, 'This is professional but someone is trying to make it personal and I don't understand why. How the hell would he know it would be me turning up to investigate tonight? How does he know what I am like as a Detective and why has that got any relevance?'

'Keep thinking those things, as we get more facts on the table, run those questions past each and every bit of information we gather. He has the advantage, for now, but he is right on one thing, you are an excellent detective. Recognise your blindside John and make sure he's not trying to exploit it. Professional and Personal can never, ever be kept totally separate. No matter how hard you try, they bleed into one another. Just think on that.' advised Strange.

Just then, a low thrum burst from the bank of plasma's behind them a second before two of them powered on, one displaying the ruddy hue of Buglass stood behind the shimmering silver of an autopsy bench, his green gloved hands delving into the open chested cadaver of their John Doe. The second screen showed an empty office with a small sign saying Path Lab on the wall behind a desk.

'Georgie, how's it hanging my friend? Have you got any news for us yet?' asked Strange, turning in his seat to face the screens.

'Jerry! To the left you cheeky sod, always to the left. It's not often you are out of your boudoir and away from your harem of honeys this early in the day.' Buglass retorted jovially.

'They be waiting for me, gives me a break to recover, my body's not as young as my mind thinks it is. Do we know who he is yet?' Strange responded, entertaining the banter.

'I think Harris should be along any minute with some news, he's just running the DNA now. What I can tell you is that our JD had his heart ripped out. If you look along the line of the Y incision, you can see the uniformity of the cut.' He started, taking his hands out of the chest and pointing to the edge of the skin, moving up from the stomach. 'But when you get to this area of the chest, quite literally the skin has been ripped open. You can see the tear. The ribs around the cavity have been snapped outwards, lung pushed to one side, and all that's left of where the heart should be are the remaining ends of riven arteries. It's some ferocious effort that's been exerted to do this. Ripping skin is not an easy thing to do.'

Harris sidled into view on the second screen, consciously positioning himself in front of the camera at his end. 'Can you see me?' He asked, squinting into his monitor.

'Yes, we can Ian. What's the news? Have you got a match yet?' Asked Strange.

'We have, and you aren't going to like it. Our JD is one Michael Colin Angus. Born 14th September 1989. Died, or should I say murdered on the 1st January 2012 at the age of 22 by his mother's hand in her flat on the Crombie Estate, Edinburgh.' Divulged Harris.

'His mother's hand?' asked Buglass quizzically. 'Are you sure? I can't imagine a woman causing the damage I can see?'

'Definitely. Rebecca Angus confessed to his murder under caution on the 2nd January 2012. She called the police to her flat on the 1st saying she had killed her son. They arrived, found her naked and covered in blood, gibbering and incoherent. He was on her bed with his chest ripped open. Forensic examination found that sexual intercourse had taken place between the two of them. She had bits of his heart in her teeth and chunks of it in her stomach. She was formally charged with his murder on the 3rd January.' Harris continued.

'Jesus H, that is sick.' Pitched in Saul, his words conveying the feelings evident in everyone's expressions as Harris continued to relay the facts of the case to them.

'More than you know. He was wearing a black full body rubber suit with holes exposing the genitals and anus. A gimp mask, mouth bit and reins were by the bed along with numerous used sex toys.'

'That in itself is not sick.' piped in Darrie. 'Just playful.'

'Darrie, not appropriate at this point.' rebuked Strange. 'Let's focus. Carry on Harris.'

'Rebecca Angus was deemed unfit to plead due to mental illness but was convicted of his murder by a trial of facts on the 1st April 2012 as a result of the overwhelming forensic evidence. She was committed to a mental institution indefinitely. Open and shut case.' Finished Harris.

'Shit.' sighed Saul, scratching his hands through his hair. 'How the hell does that tie up with our man making out a gross miscarriage of justice has taken place?'

'I said you wouldn't like it.' added Harris. 'The thing that's going to flip your lid even more is where she is incarcerated.'

'Why?' shot back Saul, staring at the screen.

'She's in the Fielding Institute, in Morpeth, under the authority of Dr Ennis. The same Dr Ennis that you collared for two deaths caused during Face Down restraint incidents. The same Dr Ennis that was acquitted last month.'

Strange took a deep breath and looked over to Saul, who was staring incredulously at Harris. 'Professional and Personal John, there's your starting point.'



4:15 am

A quizzical expression found its way onto Rebecca's restrained face as she saw a handle in one of the cells padded sections in front of her turn and a door open up in the wall. Through it walked a tall, broad man, hunched in the shoulders and limping lightly on his left leg as he entered the cell. He wore beige polyester slacks, a tan gingham shirt under an angora cardigan that was stretched in the pocket and sandals over white socks. He looked old, furrows sculpted into a brow tickled by the odd grey hair combed over his bald scalp.

Behind him, he pulled a metal chair which emitted a bone tingling screech as it was dragged over the tiled corridor, the sound stopping on the padded cell floor.

'You look a lot older than I thought you would be.' Said Rebecca, her eyes not leaving him as he positioned the seat directly in front of her.

'I get that a lot. It's the soft Irish lilt in my accent, so they tell me.' He answered as he turned to her and began to loosen the mouth guard she was wearing. 'If we are going to have a proper conversation, let's get this thing out. Do you promise me that you won't try and bite your tongue?'

'I promise I will try hard not to, but I can't promise I won't. It depends on what questions you ask me. I thought you were about forty six. You first kissed a girl in 1974 when you were seven? Was that a lie?' she finished, wiggling her jaw as the guard was removed.

'I can see being insane hasn't impacted your cognitive abilities.' he smiled wryly as he sat down in the chair in front of her. He reached out and took her bound hand, shaking it.

'Hello Rebecca, it's nice to meet you face to face, it's nice to talk to you without your mind being in a drugged fug. Yes, it was a lie. I'm Dr Hanlon and I am here to help.'

Rebecca's eyes looked down to his hand which was holding hers, then shot a startled glare back at him. 'Are you sure? You haven't just come in for your *Kit-Kat*, have you?' harsh invective emphasised in every word.

'Kit-Kat? I don't know what you mean. I'm sorry, I should have asked if I could shake your hand.' He replied, removing his hand from hers, appreciating the distress that the contact had initiated.

As much as it could, her head tilted to one side, eyes darting over his face, trying to glean any sign that he might be lying again. 'You don't know what I mean, do you. It's what the staff call me, well, most of the staff. It's also what they do when they *'Have a break'*: come into my cell and slip two fingers into my cunt and frig me until I come. They think I don't remember. I mean, why would I, being dosed up on Diazepam and Haloperidol. I remember *every, single, time.*' She finished the last three words slowly, her stubby tongue trying to lick her lips lewdly. It looked grotesque.

Dr Hanlon leant forward in his seat, white knuckles evident as he clasped his hands together tightly. Shaking his head, eyes alive with anger he said, 'Rebecca, I am genuinely sorry for every single violation that has been exacted upon you under your care. Please believe me, I am here to help. I am here to understand the care, or lack of care that you have been given. I am here to understand your version of events and get to the truth of why you are here. I am here to let you know that I do not think you are insane. I think you have had a tremendous

amount of trauma to cope with and that has caused you to behave extraordinarily. I believe I can help you believe again.'

He held her gaze intently in silence, then looked over her body at the lesions, bruises and burns. 'Were any of these wounds inflicted by the staff?'

Her wrists were turning again, and she was biting the corner of her bottom lip so much a drop of blood oozed out of the broken skin. She saw him look at it and frown, immediately stopping the action.

'No, not directly.' she started, calmness descending over her again. 'They are all my doing, either self-inflicted or from when they stopped me trying to kill myself. I believe I deserve every single one of them. It was only sex with the staff. They see me as a sexual deviant. I think I am complicit in that. I did nothing to discourage them, in fact, probably the opposite. It wasn't about pleasure though. It was about suffering, about pain, about living the hell I truly believe I deserve.'

'That doesn't excuse their actions Rebecca. You are not well and they have a duty of care to you, a legal obligation to look after your wellbeing. I won't let that lie. Why do you believe you deserve this hell?'

She burst out laughing, her chest wracking with the force of the guffaws, loud chortles able to escape her freed mouth now. 'Oh Doc, you are such a comedian, you remind me of Dave Allen with that accent. I think I like you, but you just might be deluding yourself if you think you can ever lead me to a path of redemption. Didn't you listen to how I killed Hannah? How I murdered Michael?'

'I did listen. What I need you to try and help me with now is to understand what happened, if you can. When you murdered your son...' he began before being interrupted.

'Michael.' She stated firmly, tension in her tone which quickly relaxed as she continued. 'Can you call him Michael please?'

'If that's what you want, I can. It may make it harder for you to talk about?' he suggested.

'Harder, it should be horrendous: it should be a living hell. They aren't once removed for me. They aren't a faceless fantasy that I have brought to life in their killing. They were the essence of me, my pulse, my breath, my being. 'Sorry Hannah', 'Sorry Michael' will be my litany until the last breath of life passes these lips. It's what I want.' A tear started to trickle from the corner of her eye as she finished. Her gaze didn't leave Dr Hanlon's questioning, concerned stare.

'Alright' he said, nodding gently in appreciation. 'So, when you murdered *Michael*, you said that you were sat astride *Michael*, *Michael* was inside you, you ripped *Michael's* heart out and ate it laughing as *Michael* died. Is that what you remember?' He asked.

'It's what happened.' she retorted brusquely, 'You can't deny the facts.' She finished abruptly.

'No, I guess you can't.' He conceded, pausing for a moment in contemplation before a quizzical look came over his face and he continued. 'Which rib did you break first?'

'What?' she replied, stunned disbelief evident in her voice. 'What's that got to do with anything? Aren't you going to ask me why?' She added, frustration entering the tone, oozing into her actions as she flexed against her restraints.

'At this point Rebecca why isn't significant. How is. Which of Michael's ribs did you break first?' He repeated firmly, sitting calmly in his seat, holding her confused gaze without blinking.

She started shaking, tension escalating in the pulsing veins of her forehead, in the rouge that flowed up her face, in the blood that started to drip from the lip she was now starting to chew.

'I...I...!' She stuttered. 'The...the...!' She continued, her eyes bulging now as she tried to hold his gaze.

'What T-shirt was Colin wearing in the car crash?' He said abruptly in a firm tone.

Within a split second, she answered. 'Fields of the Nephilim.' Surprise overtaking her frustration.

'What line was Prince singing when you kissed Hannah for the first time.' he asked just as sharply.

'Dig if you will a picture.' Her animation was slowing now as she answered.

'What was the picture hall called where you went to see Purple Rain?' He fired firmly.

'The Regal.'

'It's funny what you remember, isn't it.' He finished, leaving the statement hanging in the air.

Rebecca stopped biting her lip, stopped shaking and stopped forcing her limbs against the restraints. She didn't stop staring at him intently and said in a tone wavering with bubbling emotion, 'I don't know which rib I broke first. I can't remember. I can't remember how we got to the flat. I can't remember why he was on my bed. I can't remember how I did that to him, I honestly can't.'

'That's fine. Let's start with what you do remember.' He said, the gentle lilt of his voice whispering encouragement.

'Johnsons baby powder, rubber and copper. That was the mixture of smells that began to invade my senses as I was stuttering back into consciousness. I couldn't open my eyes initially. Jackhammers were pounding away at my temples and thoughts were nebulous things wafting into touching distance, then floating away the second I got anywhere close to making one coherent. I vaguely recalled lots of drink, lots of drugs, lots of dancing and lots of sex, but who with, where and how much all eluded me at that point.'

'I eventually managed to force one eye lid open and the vague blurriness ever so slowly began to focus. The side profile of a face started to coalesce into what looked like the serene, sleeping features of my son. At least that's what my mind saw. It also wondered what he was doing there, and I tried to speak his name but my mouth was far too parched to emit a noise, only a whispered breath escaping.'

'Some thoughts began to impress themselves upon me at that point as his image became clearer in front of me. Why is he looking so drawn and pallid? Has he been eating? Why does he smell of baby powder and rubber and what is that copper odour? He's got cuts to the corners of his mouth, what are they from? What are those red spots dotted over his face? I raised a thumb to my mouth and unsuccessfully tried to lick a bit of spittle onto it before reaching over to rub off the red spots. Mother's instinct? My hand and arm came into my line of vision as I did so, and it was red, it was all red. My sense of taste suddenly kicked in, enlightening my mind with the knowledge I had just licked blood off my thumb.'

'Every synapse fired, all at once, kicking a rush of adrenaline into my system. Both eyes shot open, and from a prone position I was on all fours next to Michael in a split second. I couldn't process all the information that was bombarding my brain in that moment. He was lying on his back, neck to toe in black rubber apart from two areas, one where his genitals were exposed, one where the latex was torn on his chest. Flaps of skin, bits of bone, trailing veins and rivers of blood

all encircled a gaping cavity where I knew his lungs and heart should be. I screamed, or tried to scream. There was not a drop of moisture in my throat so all that came out was a hoarse moan. I shot one hand up to his neck, foolishly feeling for a pulse. With the other hand I scrambled round in the pools of blood that were forming from the rivers flowing from his chest to see if I could find his heart. How stupid is that? My mind thought that if I could find it, I would be able to push it back in, and he would be fine!

“Michael! I screamed, over and over, the constant use of my throat making it moist, making the sounds come, making the screams real, making everything real as the crescendo echoed around the bedroom. I couldn’t find his heart, but that didn’t dissuade my mind. I forced all of the loose bits of bone and skin back into the gaping cavity and started pumping it to try and resuscitate him. One, two, three pumps on the chest, then one, two, three breaths into his mouth. ‘Breathe, Michael, breathe!’ I screamed in time with the beats.’

‘I counted three thousand. Three thousand pumps. Three thousand breaths. It was about an hour before I gave up, before I tried one last time to breathe life into him, ending it with the gentlest of kisses on his lips. The last time I kissed my son.’

‘I was in bits, tears streaming from my eyes, my whole body wracked with sobs as I stumbled from the bed in a daze, mumbling his name over and over again under my breath. I picked up the phone from the bedside table and dialled 999, turning back to look at the bed as it rang. It was only then I saw the bigger picture, saw the entire bed scarlet with his blood, even where I had been lying. I saw my own reflection then too, in the mirrored wardrobes opposite. I didn’t recognise it as me. I saw a naked woman, hunched and quivering in shock, her whole body painted in shades of blood, the worst being caked around her mouth as she began to speak into the phone.’

'I've killed him. I've killed my son. He's dead. Oh my god I've killed him. What have I done....' I started to wail down the phone as I collapsed into the corner, sliding down the wall and curling up into a gibbering ball on the floor.'

'That's all I remember until the police arrived.' she finished, tears shining brightly on her cheeks, her body still, calm.

'So, you can't remember laughing manically? You can't remember ripping his heart out? You can't remember eating it?' asked Dr Hanlon.

'I can't remember doing any of those things. They are the things I can't explain, the things that test my lucidity.'

'What about sitting astride him. Can you remember that?' He asked.

She tensed again. 'Do you mean did I fuck him?'

'Rebecca, I am using your words, all I want to do is know what you know. I am not trying to get a rise out of this, please believe me.' He encouraged.

'Sorry Doc.' she answered, sincerity in her tone. 'My moral compass is totally demagnetised and spinning like a dervish. I do remember my son fucking me, vividly. It wasn't at my flat. It was after a party the night before, after we left there and went back to someone's house.'

'You went back to someone else's house? They were with you and Michael before he died? Did the police know this? Did they visit the house, question who you were with?' he asked.

Rebecca laughed through her still trickling tears. 'Doc, if only it was that simple. I don't have a clue where the house is that we ended up at. All I remember is the room that we had sex in, all three of us. It had a black fire place with gargoyles chasing cherubs around it. We fucked all over, on the Chesterfield sofa's, on top of the Steinway

piano, on the plush carpets in front of a roaring fire, with huge candelabra's throwing flickering light onto passions shadows throughout. That's where I sat astride him.'

'So who was the other person? Surely they know where it is?' he pushed.

'You would think that, yes, she probably does. If you can find her, if she were ever real. I don't know where she came from. I met her in a particular kind of bar, and she introduced me to a world of pleasure I never knew existed. She became my dark disease, my fatal addiction. I never had a phone number, an address, any kind of contact information, just a name. I told the police everything I knew about her, which wasn't much and they checked at all the places we had met. Some people did recognise the description, but no one knew who she was, no one could recall the two of us being together and to be honest, that is the way those kind of places are. The police and Dr Ennis concluded that everything I told them about her and the house was all down to my psychosis, all just a figment of my imagination. I only knew her name: Madame Evangeline.'

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