

Chapter 1

The man settled more comfortably in his seat. He was a creature of routine. It helped him to cope with the early start to every working day. It was now ten minutes to seven and the bus, on time, was pulling away from its stop in Birmingham town centre. It was the second bus the man took on his journey to work. The first carried him from home, Erdington, one of the city's inner suburbs, into the city centre. During this twenty-minute ride he read the sports section of the Daily Mirror, whilst sat upstairs.

A short walk between bus stops usually left him with ten minutes to wait for the second bus. He continued to read the sports news and hoped the other earlier buses arrived on time. If they did, it meant that most of the commuters who were heading in the same general direction would have been picked up before his bus appeared. This then allowed him to get 'his' seat, downstairs, on the 63, and he could relax more on the half hour journey to the very edge of the urban sprawl.

Even now, the man was stretching his legs into the increased leg room of his favoured seat. He was meant to give it up if the elderly or infirm suddenly ascended onto the bus. But it was too early, and expensive for them. He had finished the article he had been reading as the bus approached. Then he had read the cartoons, chuckling quietly to himself. Folding the paper, he had put it away in his work bag which lay on the seat beside him. Now he was letting his hands rest at the top of his thighs, he closed his eyes and tilted his head slightly forward. Many years of routine had perfected just the right position to allow him to drift away into a light sleep. Occasionally, as the driver swung the bus around the roundabouts, he would stir slightly, he would barely open his eyes, checking their whereabouts and then close them again.

Sometimes he did not sleep but just relaxed with his eyes shut, thinking of what needed to be done at work that day. He rarely took any notice of the passengers who got off and on at the various stops. He was aware that sometimes he slipped sideways in his seat, also, when particularly tired, he would sometimes rouse himself from his slumbers with a start and a snort - noticeable to anyone observing him at the time. However, he had never missed his stop, yet. There had been some close calls when he had had to screw himself more awake and get off the bus at his proper stop.

But today was going to be different. So different in fact that many lives, not just his, would never be the same again.

The man knew he was not going to 'drop off' today. He had glanced at the front pages of the paper as he had left the newsagent shop back in Erdington. Now his mind ran over the main headlines: Americans bombing in Afghanistan again; the British and other forces still fighting with the Americans in Saudi; terrorist cells discovered and locked up all around the world - there were more Guantanamos around now; protests against the wars/police actions from within Europe; Africa still in turmoil...and so it went on.

The bombings in London and Manchester were still fresh in everyone's minds. They had become used to seeing more police on the streets; armed as well. However, this had not prevented some violent reactions against Moslem communities in some parts of the country. Some said the Police had not done enough to stop this, others, that not enough attacks had taken place. Finally, the Government had fast-tracked some law changes and expelled the awkward mullahs; their inflammatory rhetoric had so incensed many of the British public. This included the clear majority of law-abiding Moslems who wanted to be left alone. There were dark mutterings in the liberal press about civil liberties and rights. Often an ugly atmosphere permeated the streets and the Police, often caught between two sides, were

becoming less tolerant and more nervous. Even more than usual the man thought it best to stay out of their way and let them get on with it, after all they were there to protect them.

He was musing on the recent spate of convictions against people who had tried to protect themselves from burglars and muggers when he realised that the bus had stopped for a little longer than normal. Through barely open eyes he could see two figures talking to the driver. He did not need the audible hiss of "bloody Arabs" from the black girls behind him to identify them. They seemed to be having difficulty explaining where they wanted to go. A series of "tuts" and mutters of exasperation grew from the passengers.

The driver sensed the atmosphere in the bus and pulled away. The man looked out of the window; they were passing the University on the Bristol Road. Glancing back to the front of the bus the man noticed that both Arabs were carrying what seemed to be fishing rod cases. Or perhaps they were snooker cues. One of them was now facing the rest of the passengers while he began to open his case. He smiled rather wildly at them; seemingly oblivious to the hatred being directed towards him. The other was also rummaging inside his case as he stood alongside the driver's cab.

The man closed his eyes once more and gave a soft sigh.

Suddenly, loud shouts and screams erupted around him.

The man's eyes sprang open.

He could hear the driver swearing.

The bus swerved across the road.

The Arab facing them had produced a gun - a rifle - he pointed it at the seats on the other side of the bus. He screamed some words - the man thought he heard the word 'Allah' - then he fired.

The screams and shouts of the passengers filled the bus. But the sound of the gun firing was like a scythe cutting through grass. It rent the very air.

The man completely froze. He was dimly aware of people moving as some tried to get up; some fell down; some slid off their seats, they turned and squirmed. Always the screaming. Bits of seats and passengers seemed to be in the air and the man could see the bodies being thrown around by the impact of the bullets.

Still rigid with shock, the man slid right off his seat on to the floor. He had just time to notice the other Arab rushing up the stairs as the first one sprayed bullets into his side of the bus.

It had seemed to have taken minutes to happen, but rather it was seconds, like something in the movies, but this was physically and bloodily real. The man's body on hitting the floor, as if released from a spell, folded up. But he was not released from fear. He cowered under the seats, he tried to hush his breathing and he closed his eyes as if to think that if he could not see, then in turn he would not be seen. But his ears would not complete his hopeless isolation.

He could hear the carnage upstairs. The shouts, the screams, the shots. He felt the bus hit something and stop. Then, as his heart beat so violently, he thought it would escape the confines of his ribs, he heard a little laugh. Gentle it seemed but with an edge to it. Mocking.

Then a few footsteps. A pause. Some shots. A thud.

More steps. Another pause. Then a whimpering sound. Some shots. No thud.

More steps. Getting closer. Pause. A begging whimper. That light laugh. Some shots.

The man opened his eyes to see the body of a fellow passenger roll over; not more than three metres away across the floor; large patches of blood were merging over his body; his face was missing.

The man could see the feet of the killer approaching. Nearer. Suddenly, something seemed to snap inside him. A calm descended on him. With a fatalistic clarity of mind, he formed a plan and shifted his position quietly. No bastard was going to shoot him like a...

like a... like a dog he thought. As the killer made the step past the seat in front of him, he pounced. Grabbing his work bag, he flung it at the Arab, as he sprang from the ground.

The man felt something hammer into his side and shoulder, his body spun half round. The killer had got a few rounds off before the bag hit him full in the face. The man's momentum carried him forward, sideways and he lashed out with his hands at the gun and the Arab. The gunman, caught off-balance, staggered backwards a step, slipped and fell to the floor. He still gripped the gun as he fell and was swinging it towards the man as he hit the floor. But the man rushed forward and standing over the killer he stamped down heavily with his shoe. It felt like his shoe was going right through his neck. The gunman writhed violently for a second or two, and then was still.

The man, heart in orbit and lungs breaking records, stood with his full weight on the dead man's throat for what seemed an age. But then the sound of firing and screaming upstairs snapped him back to reality. He stepped off the gunman and picked up his rifle. Looking at it, almost curiously, he hoped all you had to do was point and pull the trigger. It was heavier than he imagined and the gunman's sweat glistened where he had held the weapon.

A shout came from upstairs. The other gunman was calling his comrade. The man moved quickly to the foot of the stairs. He was vaguely aware of some pain in his side. The gunman above called out again, some concern in the voice now. The man crept up the steps as noiselessly as he could, the gun held before him and level with his eyes. As he peered cautiously round the top of the steps he could see along the top floor of the bus.

There was the same carnage and destruction as below with bits of the seats and broken, bloody bodies lying scattered on the floor. Then he caught movement. He could see the feet of the second gunman slowly heading towards the steps. Remembering something he had seen in films, the man thought he could roll out over the floor and shoot up at the unexpected

gunman. But when he came to do it, all he managed was to poke the rifle out and without looking fired aimlessly down the aisle.

The gun jumped about in his hands and the shots seemed to be going everywhere but right down the aisle towards his target. As the gun tried to escape his grasp completely, he stopped firing and pulled the rifle back in. Then immediately he quickly glanced round. He heard a slumping sound and saw that the second gunman had fallen to his knees, his gun had fallen, several feet in front of him.

A rush of adrenaline pumped through the man and he leapt up the last steps and charged down the bus. The other gunman watched him approach but did not move. To the man he seemed to be sitting, as if in some yoga position. As he reached him, he could see the mess his shots had made of the man's legs; they were a ruined red heap beneath him.

The gunman looked shocked, perhaps he had not imagined being shot himself. The stunned look in his eyes took in the man in front of him as if he could not accept what had happened to him. Belatedly he made to reach for his gun. Instinctively the man kicked it away from him.

"Shoot the bastard!" the man jumped. On the seat beside the gunman a badly shot passenger lay on his side, blood pouring from bullet wounds in his head and neck. He closed his eyes and gathered what little remained of his strength.

"Go on! Shoot the bastard!"

The man turned his gun onto the wounded gunman. They gazed into each other's eyes. The shocked look in the gunman's eyes had been replaced by one of contempt, between his grimaces of pain.

"Do it! Shoot him!" the passenger's voice was losing more of its intensity. The man stared at the gunman. He seemed to be in a lot of pain. Perhaps it would be worse to let him

suffer and die slowly. The passenger gasped; the man remembered the people shot downstairs. So, another martyr. So, what!

He fired until there were no more bullets left - there were not that many left - the gunman's body was propelled onto its back.

"Good. Thank you." The passenger gave a final gasp and his eyes closed, he lolled slightly on the seat but did not fall off.

The man dropped the rifle onto the floor and turned back to the steps. Before he reached them, he was staggering, needing to steady himself on the shot-up seats. He slid down the stairs trying to control his descent, but his one hand was covered in his blood. His shoulder and side hurt badly where he had been shot and he dropped to his knees as he landed heavily on the bus floor. He was swooning now. His head was thumping. He could feel a sweat on his brow. His shot side gave him the sensation of something leaking from his body and he felt he was burning and cold at the same time. The pain made him yell out. He could vaguely hear voices. He slipped onto his side. The floor was littered with bits of glass and parts of seats, and pools of blood and bodies. As he slipped out of consciousness, he realised that his body was now one of them.

Chapter 2

The man was only vaguely aware of the short journey to the hospital as he continued to slip in and out of consciousness. The paramedic tried to keep him awake, whilst trying to do his best for the injured man. He applied pressure to his wounds and tried to control the bleeding. Selly Oak Hospital was only a mile away so once the calls began to arrive, they were soon on their way to scene of the atrocity. Those calls had been made mainly by motorists who had witnessed the bus crash and then realised something more horrific was taking place.

When the ambulance got to the scene some firemen from the local station were already there and doing their best. They had checked for the living and the dead; most were dead. A couple of passengers had somehow survived with relatively minor injuries; but were in shock. One woman, who had been sitting upstairs at the back, had come through the ordeal completely undamaged, physically, but she was utterly traumatised. She stared forward, wide eyed, not able to move in any way, slightly ruffled hair and a smattering of someone else's blood across one of her cheeks were the only visible signs of her involvement.

Obviously the most seriously wounded and the most in need of immediate treatment, the man was put in the ambulance and taken to the hospital. Once there he was wheeled to a room where he was prepared for surgery. Throughout he tried to control his moaning, but the pain was quite something and he found himself trying to remember things to take his mind off the pain... Good things... Nice things... Pleasant experiences... It was not really working.

"I'll see where those Surgeons are," the Sister told the nurse. The other continued preparing the man. He rolled his head away from her, unintelligible words coming from him.

"Now, come on, Sir," the nurse coaxed him. "Hang in there. We're going to have you in surgery in no time." The man moaned something.

"Keep it up, Sir and we'll soon have you fixed up." The nurse encouraged him. Another nurse arrived and began checking his vital signs.

"He's in a bad way," she said rather obviously.

"There's a lot of blood loss," the original nurse confirmed. "Trauma and bullet wounds. I hope he's a tough one. He's going to need to be." The other nurse nodded her agreement, a worried look now sitting on her face as she monitored his condition.

The man was vaguely aware of them talking, he had shut his eyes again, but then he felt something through his eyelids. He forced them open. Was it the water in his eyes? Or was there a faint blurry shape of light next to him? He tried to focus his eyes, but it did not work. The blurry light touched him on his side with something. Was it a finger or a thin tube? He tried to shift and mumbled aloud some incoherent sounds.

"Try to take it easy, Sir," one of the nurses calmed him. But the man suddenly found the pain more bearable and his eyes cleared. There was no one there.

"Thank you, nurse," he said to the missing blur.

"We're over here, Sir," one of the nurses said. He turned his head. They watched him frown.

"Not you, the nurse here," he said quietly and rolled his head back. He tried to motion with his arm.

"There's no one else here, Sir." The nurse said firmly.

"His signs have just settled down," the monitoring nurse exclaimed. "Pulse, blood pressure, everything coming down," she added a little excitedly.

At that moment the Sister returned leading two Surgeons. There was a quick consultation.

"His condition has just this minute improved," the nurse told them. Indeed, the man looked quite calm, his face had lost much of that taut with pain expression, and an almost

serene smile had formed on his features. As the Surgeons examined the damage to his body, he neither moaned nor squirmed in pain.

"Right, let's get him into surgery," the senior Surgeon said and issued instructions as they wheeled him out of the room.

.....

"The patient's name is Haydn Gerrard." The Matron informed the nurses as she shuffled around the room checking everything was in order. "He will be kept in this room until he has sufficiently recovered; not just out of intensive care." She added meaningfully. "He will need to be monitored constantly at first. The Surgeons claim the operation was a great success and that he should recover completely, with proper care and time." There was a tone to her voice that suggested 'woe betide anyone who inferred he would receive anything less while under her supervision'. "But although the Doctors are happy, he will recover physically." She paused and surveyed her staff. "The mental and emotional recovery may be more difficult to achieve." She again eyed her nurses. "May I remind you to report any concerns, or incidents, to myself or Sister immediately." She made her way to the door and was almost through it when she spun around, remembering one more thing.

"Oh. I have told the Police that he is not to be disturbed AT ALL for the next two days." With that she swept out.

"I bet he'll be a bit cut up from what the papers say happened," one nurse said.

"Did you see the state of the bus on the telly?" the other asked.

"What a mess," the first one agreed. "So many dead."

"At least the terrorists were killed too," the second whispered, as if afraid she would be overheard. The second nurse nodded in earnest agreement. "We have..." she read the chart,

"Mr. Haydn Gerrard to thank for that. Let's hope he makes a full recovery." She stressed the word full.

On queue Mr. Haydn Gerrard stirred himself and came around. It was the first time since the seven-hour operation. He looked at the two nurses who smiled encouragingly at him. He returned their smile, although a little awkwardly.

"I'll go get the Doctor," the first nurse told him and left the room. The second nurse began to check his signs again. The man Haydn gazed slowly round the room. He felt little pain, in fact, he felt quite numb. As if she had read his mind the nurse said, "We have you under heavy sedation now, Mr. Gerrard."

But Haydn was barely listening. "Your operation was a success."

But Haydn's attention was elsewhere. "The Doctor will be able to tell you more when he comes."

But Haydn could see something else coming now. A blurry shape of light had been hovering by the wall of the room and now it was moving towards him.

"Thank you, nurse," he said to the advancing shape.

"I'm over here, Mr. Gerrard," the nurse gently touched him. But he was facing away from her, a strange look to him. She saw him raise his hand slightly, as if in response to someone. But she could see nothing or anyone.

"Thank you, nurse," Haydn repeated to the empty space before him. The nurse had noticed a slight increase in pulse and blood pressure, but now his signs had settled down once more. He turned to face her. It seemed to her that he was trying to make sense of something.

"And thank you, too, nurse," he finally spoke.

"I'm the only one here, Mr. Gerrard," the nurse answered him clearly. A pained expression flashed across his face.

"Has the other one left already?" he asked.

"She left a few minutes ago, Sir." The nurse told him.

"No. I mean the other nurse," he turned his face to the other side again, his arm moved slightly. "The other one." He repeated a few more times.

"Yes, her as well, Mr. Gerrard." The nurse decided to humour him. "Try to get some rest now. Don't trouble yourself. You are going to be alright." He had slipped back to sleep; a serene calm had spread across his face.

The first nurse returned with the Doctor who examined the patient carefully. "How long was he awake for nurse?"

"About five minutes, Doctor."

"Did he say anything?"

"Not really, Doctor. He did think another nurse was in the room with me." She recounted his actions.

"Have you given him his dose already nurse?" the Doctor looked sharply at her.

"Of course, not Doctor. You said wait until I tell you." The Doctor checked the chart and the medicine bottle.

"He seems to be really relaxed now." But the Doctor did not appear unduly concerned. "Leave the next dose until he wakes up again. Or his condition changes," he instructed her. "I still want to speak to him when he comes around," he told them both. He left the room shutting the door quietly behind him.

"Fancy thinking that!" the second nurse snorted angrily.

"Oh, forget it. He's alright that one. Really." The second nurse assured her.

.....

A barricade of sorts had been thrown across the narrow pass. It consisted mostly of several lines of burnt out vehicles and discarded containers, some roughly fashioned poles of wood

and metal were loosely held together in the semblance of a fence at one point. Behind every line, men and women huddled, waiting. All eyes were on the road ahead. It meandered along the pass between great walls of rock. They could see, at most, only fifty metres of the road in front of them, before it swung behind one of the outcrops of rock. Smoke. Black smoke flecked with red orange sparks rose away in the distance. It spoke of a great burning, beyond, where the pass began to drop into the next valley.

It was quiet now. Earlier a great din had filled the pass, the noise of battle from beyond: cries and screams carried back to them, the clash of material on material; the sounds of destruction and death echoed along the pass to them; the different tones of many vehicles, scraping and bumping against each other; explosive bangs. But there had been no sound for about an hour. Not one person manning this next line of defence felt better for the silence. An atmosphere of doom and disaster was growing.

Haydn stared at the people around him. Some seemed grimly resolute, a few smiled openly, trying to raise everyone's spirits, particularly the officers. But most showed fear and uncertainty in their eyes. Their faces were drawn with anxiety, sweaty beads ran down their brows and into their eyes. Their hands clutched at their weapons tightly while they chewed their lips and their feet moved to some unheard, but nervous music.

Fear had been growing inside Haydn's stomach, ever since the sound of battle had disappeared. All around him he saw people, men and women, fighting with their fears. No person looked another in the eye for long. They would be coming soon. Over the pass. How could they stop them? But they had to stop them. If they didn't then they would be free to roam their lands; the enemy pillaging, burning, raping and killing.

The sudden cackle of radio static made them jump. Haydn smiled nervously at his nearest neighbours: one blonde woman with a scar above one eye; a young man, his red hair matted with dirt and sweat, clumps of what looked like dried blood down one side; an older man

with faraway eyes, as if remembering better times. They resumed their waiting and watching. The quiet had now become oppressive and any slight sound drew instant attention from all. A small stone trundled down a scree slope and they all turned to analyse the threat. Fingers twitched near triggers. People gulped their breaths. Perhaps knowing they were going to be their last.

Haydn's fear was now a gaping hole in his stomach. A void around which his body uncomfortably hung; muscles achingly clenched. His fingers tapped relentlessly. His feet and legs vibrated nervously. The sweat was running off his head and down his neck. He had not realised that he had bitten through his lower lip.

Then with a suddenness that took their breath away a great shout rose up before them. It bounced off the rock faces, seemingly, increasing in intensity. A great crashing noise joined it and then they came. Haydn could see the enemy rushing around the bend in the road, an onslaught of men and uncommonly loud vehicles. There was a cry from the defences, and a volley of fire met the oncoming horde. Many fell. But they did not stop. More came. If one fell, then two took that one's place. There was loud yelling and blood curdling screams. Haydn could see the light of hate in their eyes, even from his place on the third line. How could they hope to beat the enemy? He was so strong. So fierce.

The first line had been overrun, a hole had been smashed in it and the enemy poured through in vehicles and on foot. Now the people around Haydn shouted out. Was it defiance or despair? They fired over the second line at the fast-moving mass of the enemy. Then the foe was upon the second line. Some rushed to join the defence of the line, but others were running away, fleeing back towards them. Officers bellowed for people to hold their positions. Haydn could feel his fear now becoming more whole, a terror now gripped his entire body. He watched the fighting in front of him. The two men and the woman next to him were firing. He had not used his weapon yet.

A grunt nearby and he was just in time to see the red-haired man slump to the ground. The woman cried out but kept firing. Still Haydn did not fire. The older man glanced at him curiously. Then a fighter leapt into their position, but instead of stopping, he ran on, away from the fight. Panic was all over his face.

More shouts echoed around them. Haydn looked up. The very cliffs seemed to be crawling with the enemy. The sounds of fighting and screaming filled his ears. Everywhere he looked he saw people dying. The injured were lying, moaning, all around. The enemy had taken the second line. They came on. Relentless and remorseless. Bullets flew about him. Haydn let the scream loose. It had been building in his body for a few minutes. Now he could hold it no longer.

The woman jumped with fright and when she looked, Haydn had gone. He was heading off away from the line, away from the fighting, his weapon lay discarded where he had stood. She called after him. The older man just stared at the fleeing figure. They turned back to the fight. Haydn only looked back once. He could see the enemy killing the woman and the man. He screamed aloud and tried to run even faster away from the defeat; he had not fired one shot.

Haydn awoke. He was not fleeing for his life down a mountain pass. He was not running away in terror, and disgrace. He looked around him. He recognised the hospital room. Two nurses came over to him, smiling. He realised he was not in any physical state of distress. His body was lying calmly, and his mind was at ease.

"Everything OK?" one nurse asked him.

"Yes, thank you," he replied. He did feel relaxed. "I've just had a hell of a dream."

"Have you?" the nurse seemed concerned. He noticed that the other one had left. "Do you feel quite awake now?" she asked.

"Yes, I do." He was glancing around the room. "Has the other nurse gone again?" he asked.

"Yes. She'll be back with the Doctor."

"No, I meant the other one," he insisted, "you know the one who stood here." He indicated with his arm. The nurse looked concerned once more.

"There has been no one else here, Mr. Gerrard. No other nurses." She assured him. "The Doctor has popped in once or twice. That's all." Haydn looked around the room once more.

"Ah! Mr. Gerrard, you are awake." The Doctor had entered the room. The other nurse alongside him. He began to examine Haydn. He asked him several questions about how he felt. Did this hurt? Could he...? Then he asked, "Do you remember how you got here, Mr. Gerrard?"

"Bloody bus!" Haydn replied without hesitation. "Those bastard Arabs." He closed his eyes briefly. "Dead people, everywhere." He looked at each of them in turn. "But I'm alive. Am I going to make it Doctor?"

In turn, the Doctor did not hesitate, "I'm sure you will." They all smiled.

Chapter 3

Haydn Gerrard rested. He was still not able to move much at all. He could turn slightly in his bed - twist a little really. He was connected to many tubes; tubes going into different parts of his body, and tubes coming out of different parts of his body. His life support machine hummed gently behind him, somewhere, he could not see it directly. He could see most of the room from his position. It was sparsely furnished: two chairs and a table. The lighting was generally dimmed. One window was hidden by a closed blind.

One nurse had stayed with him always, at least he thought so; every time he woke a nurse was there by his side to check his condition. The medication made him drowsy and he had slept most of the time. He had no real idea how long he had been there. One day? Two days? Three or more? It had to be more than one. Could it be more than three?

"Nurse?" he called out to the room.

"Yes, Mr. Gerrard?" a now familiar face appeared in front of him.

"How long have I been here now?"

"It's now two days since you were brought in, Sir." She studied him carefully and checked his signs.

"How are you feeling?" she asked him.

"OK," he answered, a little uncertainly. The nurse raised a curious eyebrow at him. "Well I'm feeling a bit sore, to be honest." He indicated his shot side. "But I feel less sleepy. And a bit thirsty too."

"Doctor says you can come off the drips and feeds very soon," she told him. "As long as you continue to make progress." She moved and sat down at the table. He could see her

adding to his chart. He stared at the ceiling and felt quite relaxed. His head was clearing slowly from that heaviness you get when you wake from a deep sleep and a deep dream.

"Did you have another dream?" the nurse asked him suddenly. Uncanny these nurses, he thought.

"Actually, I did, too." He thought about it again. He could remember it all without any problem.

It was like a pithead building he had seen when he was young. Long gone now of course. But it was fortified. The actual pithead structure was there: the winding gear set on a tower of interlocking steel; the giant wheels resting atop; but the brick buildings around it were linked by thick walls of stone. These walls were twenty metres high and had a parapet running along their outer edges. There were occasional turrets which rather bleakly broke the monotony of the walls.

Haydn was sat at a table inside one of these turrets. One of four people, they were silent. Nobody spoke. Other people lay in various degrees of comfort around them and beside the walls. Food, uneaten, lay on the table. A fire was slowly running out of fuel in one corner. On every dirty face was etched the frowns of worried men. No one talked, and no one looked at another. The only sound was the running of the river below them, outside the walls. A young and feisty flow of water that daily ate away at the rock that flanked it.

The silent dread in the turret began to manifest itself in fidgeting. It had been so long since they had heard news. The enemy were close. That much they knew. Approaching fast. What were their scouts doing? Where were their lookouts? They seemed locked away in this guardroom, detached from the world. Perhaps it had passed them by. Perhaps they had been missed, spared from the fight. The cycle of fear and death deciding to overlook them this time.

Haydn was not sure what came first. The earth juddering rocking of the turret. Or the deafening clang of the gate being smashed. They all jumped to their feet and gabbling at each other they rushed out onto the battlements. The people ran along the walls, looking out to see their foe. But Haydn was watching the gate. It was mangled long past repair. It lay in a misshapen heap which, somehow, was still attached to the gatehouse wall at one point.

People lay wounded or dying on the ground. Others were preparing to defend the breach. They called out to the walls for support. A blonde woman brandishing her weapon above her shouted out loud. As she turned Haydn could see a mark above her eye. Then a great roar of sound poured in from outside. A fusillade of gunfire tore through the fighters. Many fell. Haydn saw the woman knocked off her feet. She fell on a comrade, then a man fell on her. His red hair set against her blonde.

"Don't you think it's time you went?" Haydn leapt in surprise to the quiet voice behind him. He wheeled around. An older man gazed at him knowingly. He seemed to see through Haydn into the distance.

"What do you mean?" Haydn found himself edging past the man.

"This is no place for anyone who is not ready to die," the man said and added, "or anyone not willing to die," he paused, "for any reason." Haydn backed away along the parapet. The man watched him slinking away. Then Haydn broke into a run as he headed for the far wall. The furthest from the fighting - where the means of his escape could lie - if it was still there.

As he ran the noise of battle rose all around him. People fell screaming off the walls. Bullets chipped pieces off the stones. He had to jump over bodies. He almost slipped in someone's blood turning one corner. Everywhere people shouted out to him, but he did not stop or look back, until, that is, he reached the point on the far wall he had been aiming for.

First, he looked over the wall. It was still there! He could see the raised conveyor belt that normally carried away the coal to the stockpiles. It had been disconnected and shoved

hurriedly out of position. If the attack had, for any unlikely reason, come from this side it would have been easy for the enemy to use it to reach the top of the wall. As it was, Haydn could jump from the wall onto the now still belt. Now he looked back. The older man seemed to be watching him with only passing interest. Everyone else were busy fighting; killing and dying. A few flying chips of stone about his head galvanized him into action. He clambered on top of the parapet. The belt seemed far away and far below him. He wavered. He looked back once more. The older man was still watching him. But then he caught one and his head jerked back, and his body fell. Haydn's resolve hardened. He jumped.

During his leap it suddenly occurred to him that the belt might not hold him. He hit it and with a shout of 'Whoa!' he managed to grab hold with his hands and arms. Which was just as well because his legs and feet slipped as they tried to grip the belt surface. The belt was at a slight gradient, so he slid a small distance before he could stop himself. He waited for the bouncing produced by his landing to subside. Gingerly he got to his feet, and crouching somewhat, he began to run up the conveyor belt.

People were firing at him, but he kept going. At the top he did not hesitate and jumped right off the belt onto the nearest stockpile. As he landed his feet sank into the coal. His lower foot sank further, and this coupled with his un-arrested forward momentum meant he lost balance and toppled over. He slid down the stockpile turning over a few times. His feet scouring sporadic grooves in the surface of the pile.

The pile was as high as the walls. It took Haydn a few seconds to arrive at the bottom where he was dumped, heavily, on his back. More than a little breathless he lay there staring at the sky. But shouts from above roused him. He got to his feet and ran quickly around the bottom of the stockpile where he hoped to be out of sight. He now discovered his boots had bits of coal in them. He ran on but knew quickly that he could not go far like this. Finding a low concrete bunker, he stopped to remove the offending lumps.

When he was set again, he raised his head cautiously out of the bunker. He could see the enemy on the walls looking out. Taking a deep breath, he rushed forward. Immediately shouts came from behind him. He began to change direction as he ran, weaving between anything that might provide cover: fences; bunkers; walls; huts and small buildings. He did not look back, he ran for as long as he could before his thumping heart, jumping lungs and aching limbs begged him to stop. By then he was clear of the old pit complex.

Hiding behind a tree he looked for the pursuit. On the walls he could see figures, but they were employed in other matters. There were a few people moving around the stockpiles. If they were after him then they were taking their time. Moving extra cautiously, stooping as low as he could while still running, Haydn pushed on, heading through the thickening undergrowth and trees towards the river.

At the river the decision was easy to make. He followed it downstream away from the debacle of the fort. He kept to the thick growth on the banks, hiding from any sudden noises. He kept going, even as darkness fell, he kept on trying to get as far away as he could. At one point the thought suddenly came into his mind; he had not even picked his weapon up from the turret table.

"So, you got away again." The nurse said as he finished his account of the dream.

"Yes, you live to fight again," the other nurse had come in halfway through. The trouble was, Haydn thought, he had not done any fighting yet. Just a lot of running away! He felt a little tired and his eyes were misting up. The nurses were at the table, he looked away from them. There was the blurry shape of light again, it was moving towards him. He thought about calling the nurses, but they had frowned whenever he mentioned 'the other nurse'. So instead he concentrated on trying to see through the blur.

The shape came to his side and again took his arm. He could see the outline of a figure, humanoid, within. It placed something to his arm. Immediately he felt a sensation of calm and peace spread through his body.

"The Doctor will be here any minute, Mr. Gerrard," he could not tell which nurse had spoken.

"OK," he replied. They were completely unaware. The shape moved away and gradually the light faded from his view.

"I think he's asleep again," the first nurse told the other.

"It's for the best," the second one said. "He's been through the wars, shot twice and such a lot of blood lost. The Doctor said if it had not happened so close to the hospital, he would be dead."

"Well most of them are dead," the first one again. "Twenty dead. Well, including those terrorists that is." She shook her head in dismay. "Who would have thought it. Then those two who were so lucky! Downstairs on the bus. One shot in the leg, the other in the arm; but superficial really. So lucky! Mind you, all a bit shocking really. On your way to work and all."

"Talking about shock," the second one cut in. "Have you heard anything new about that woman from the upstairs?"

"No. Nothing new. They've got her on life support. It's like she's in a coma; but not." She shrugged. "You know, awake and more responsive, but still she has not said anything yet. They need to sedate her to get her to sleep. The family's a bit frantic."

"Well, that's one thing we don't have to worry about with Mr. Gerrard here, is it?" they raised their eyebrows at each other, almost in sadness.

"He has had some cards though," the first said more cheerily. "Let's put them out so he can see them when he wakes up."

"That's a good idea," the Doctor had just entered the room. "I also think we had better show him some of the papers and even the reports from the television. He's going to need to realise what a fuss this has all caused. It might take a bit of getting used to. All the press outside the hospital. It's driving everyone mad already." He paused at this point, "And the Police, of course, are keen to talk to him as soon as they can."

Haydn had heard it all and felt the Doctor's examination.

"It might be soon if he keeps up this progress," the Doctor told the nurses. "I'll tell the officer outside." Haydn heard the Doctor leave.

"Yes, our Mr. Gerrard is going to be quite the hero when he gets out of here." He heard the first nurse say.

"Well, it would be all too much for me, I'm afraid," nurse two responded. "I think I would rather be left alone."

"Well, I don't think you would get much choice."

Haydn's inner calm was losing its grip on him, he realised that recovery was only one of the ordeals he had to face.

Chapter 4

"Pat? Paul? You alright?" the man paused, "or can I get you one?" he pointed at their drinks, as if they had not known what he meant. Both men considered their half full pints and in almost perfect unison replied, "Go on then, John." They tapped their glasses and nodded at the barman as if to confirm the order.

"Good evening, John, and how are you today?" the cheery barman addressed the newcomer as he began to pull the pints.

"Same as, same as, Rich," John said in a way which often irritated people who did not know him. "Traffic's crap tonight." Pat and Paul both grunted in agreement.

"Your usual, John?" Rich asked him.

"Please, Rich." John had a quick look round the bar. He waved and nodded at most of the drinkers - usual crowd for early evening, weekday.

"What's the latest on our Haydn?" John asked aloud as he prepared to take a sip from his drink.

"Looks like he's going to be alright." Rich answered him as he went to serve another customer.

"Yeah?" John sought confirmation from Pat and Paul. They nodded.

"You just missed the news," Pat began. "The Doctors reckon the operation was a success and he's making good progress."

"Can't kill the old bastard, hey?" John said jokingly. But like the others he was glad Haydn was on the mend. He could be a funny bugger, but he was basically a good bloke.

"Course he can't do much at the moment," Pat continued, "must be a mess of tubes and stuff, I bet."

"Mind you," Paul spoke. "Surrounded by nurses." He made a suggestive face, "I bet he's not complaining." They chuckled quietly together.

"Had a bloke in earlier," Rich was back, "said he was in the bus right after Haydn's. Number 62, or something. Said they could see a bit of it happening. Their driver stopped sharp about fifty metres behind. They heard the firing and screaming. The screaming was terrible he said. They all pissed themselves. The bus driver tried to back up. He said there was a load of firing and screaming. People by the road ran and hid behind anything they could find. Cars zoomed away as fast as they could. Then there was a bit of quiet. Then a last bit of firing and it was all over."

"Fucking madness!" Pat said viciously. "We should go over there and shoot up their fucking buses, or mud huts, or whatever it is they live in." Paul and John eyed Pat warily. They shared knowing looks with Rich. But Pat was not finished. "Better still we could bomb one of their bazaars. That would do it." He looked pleased with his idea. Nobody wanted to get into it, there and then; an embarrassed silence filled the bar.

"My son's friend works for the buses," one of the older boys came to the rescue. He walked up to the bar. "Said the bus was like something out of a movie when the cops let it go back to the depot."

"Yeah," someone else joined in, "I heard the forensic lot took a hundred bullets out of the bus alone." He paused for some reaction, but none really came. "And that's not counting the ones they took out of the bodies." Pat fidgeted on his stool.

"I thought there was only two rifles found at the scene?" John asked slightly confused.

"Yeah, but they were those semi-automatic things," Paul informed him, "you know them Russian ones, been around for years."

"Oh, I see." But John did not see really. "Can they fire all those bullets?"

"Must be able to," Paul said with a sureness. There was a pause. Everybody drank. Then Rich spoke again, "Anyway, when it had all stopped nobody realised at first. Everybody was hiding and stuff. The firemen were the first to brave it and go into the bus. This bloke, this afternoon, said they could hear someone crying out to them. That must have been Haydn. This bloke said once the firemen went into the bus everyone else got out and some went to have a look." Rich paused for breath, and to check no one needed serving.

"He reckons he walked down the side of the bus and had a good look before the cops got there and kept everybody away." It was his turn to pause for effect now. A quick look around and he could see he had an audience. He went on to repeat what the bloke had witnessed: the bloodied bodies, great holes in them; heads no longer recognisable, too many parts missing; the floor awash in blood and some dripping down from upstairs; the incredible damage. But the thing that most interested them; the sight of Haydn having been laid on the pavement, crying with the pain.

There was another period of quiet where nobody really spoke. Finally, Rich began once more, "Well who hasn't sent a get-well card yet?" he turned quickly to John. "Well?" Rich raised an eyebrow, a sly smile on his face.

"Well, I, ..." John was a picture of discomfort.

"I have," Pat said loudly.

"Me too," Paul, not so loudly. A few other shouts joined in from around the bar. They all looked at John. He was famous for not quite getting there, in things. He would forget things. Like he owed someone some money. He never gave to any charities. It was just his way. They ribbed him about these things all the time. Now the entire bar stopped what it was doing to pile the pressure on him. He was now squirming.

"I suppose you'll do it tomorrow," Pat helped him, smiling.

"Yeah, there's that card shop near where you work," Paul was helping too.

"Yeah, yeah, I could do that," John did not sound convincing. Rich came to his rescue.

"It's alright, John, I've got a big card here from the regulars." He produced it from under the bar with a genuine flourish.

"Oh, that's good, I'll do that." The relief on John's face was palpable. The whole bar erupted into a roar of laughter.

"What! What!" John looked around at the laughing faces. A slight red tinge appeared on his cheeks. "What! What!"

"You're a case you are," Pat told him when the laughter had died down.

"Dunno' what you mean," John reacted. But he smiled with Pat and Paul as they ordered another round.

.....

Haydn had crossed something, he was not sure what, he thought it was a river. No. More like a wide stream. But he could not remember getting wet. Had there been a bridge of some kind? A wooden beam? Steppingstones? He could not remember. But it did not matter, he was where he needed to be, well-hidden in thick bushes on the bank. He was waiting.

Waiting for that large bank of cloud to obscure the bright full Moon. He estimated that it would give him about twenty minutes and in that time, he had to scale the wall in front of him. Then make his way through the village above and out into the countryside beyond.

This was the last place. Once he was clear he would be finally safe.

The Moon went into the cloud. He started to climb. Study of the wall had made him sure he could manage it easily. It was not smooth; it was made of rough sections that did not fit well together. There were occasional plants that grew out from the cracks, some were strong

enough to support him - it was just as well because Haydn was no climber. Yet, inside five minutes he made it to the top.

He quietly slipped over and lay on the ground. In front of him was a pathway between two houses, single storey. The door of the one on his left was wide open and a swathe of light spread from the doorway. He could hear voices inside. He looked over to the right-hand house. No lights. No sounds. He moved as silently as he could to the right-hand side and began to crawl alongside the house. He was opposite the open door when his worst fear happened. Someone appeared in the doorway.

It happened so quickly all he could do was lie flat on his face. He hid his hands under his body and hoped no part of his face was showing; they might show up against the dark. He tried to slow his breathing down, but it was difficult. His whole attention was given to listening. If the man spotted him or came too close, he would have to make a run for it. God! He hoped the man was not armed.

His back felt like it was going into paralysis, his stomach had tightened, his chest felt remarkably empty, yet his mouth struggled to prevent his lungs from forcing a sound out of it. His ears were straining, they tried to filter out the sounds from inside the house. The man had taken one more step. He seemed to be listening too. A voice called from within. He answered it. But Haydn could feel he had not gone back. Haydn felt the man's eyes boring into his patch of darkness. Haydn tried to stop breathing completely. His whole being was now stretched to breaking point and he was ready for a shout that would release him like an arrow from a bow, fleeing for his life, again. Or would it be the noise of a shot and his body being shook by the bullet. Or perhaps it would be the slow deliberate penetration of a knife tickling the ribs of a barely moving chest.

He heard a slight movement. Then another. The person was checking either side of the doorway. Then a scraping sound, as he turned and calling out, he went back inside. Slowly

Haydn tried to relax. He let his breath out with the merest noise. The muscles in his body ached as he relaxed them. But he did not move. He kept listening. After a few minutes he slowly raised his head. He glanced towards the doorway. A sudden cry from within. He froze. But soon he was able to slowly crawl further and after a few more minutes he had reached the edge of the house. He looked up at the still cloud covered Moon - he had to move!

Haydn got to his feet and quickly walked down the path. He kept to any darker patches. He did not look back. It was too late; it was now or never he thought to himself. He walked straight through the village. Only once did he hear anything, someone opened a door behind him, but he ignored it and kept walking at a steady pace. Haydn did not stop when he reached the edge of the village, he just kept going, not once looking back. But the further away he got the bigger the smile grew on his face.

"You do wake up with a smile, Mr. Gerrard." Nurse one told him as he opened his eyes.

"Dreaming again?"

"Yes, but I think I'm in the clear now," he answered.

"Ah, ah," she smiled at him. "Good. Are you ready for some real food?"

"Certainly, you bet!" he gushed.

"Good." She repeated. "It's on the way. Sunday roast? How does that grab you?"

"Excellent." Haydn found he could sit up. All his tubes had been removed and he felt alright, still sore, but a lot better.

It was another twenty minutes before the second nurse brought the food; the Doctor was with her. In that time the first nurse had given Haydn a selection of newspapers and magazines to read. They all contained articles on the Bristol Road Bus atrocity and the nurse watched Haydn's reactions as he read. She made no attempt to hide her observation of him.

Generally, he had a neutral look to him. At one time he broke into a big grin, but he quickly got this under control. A few times his face scowled; he kept those looks for longer she noted. By the time his food arrived his neutral look had returned but she thought his brow was a little tense.

The Doctor quickly examined him and then let him eat in peace. They made small talk. The second nurse read his cards to him. She did not balk at some of the earthier comments. They had a giggle. Then to break the mood the Doctor told him that the Police would want to talk to him very soon. Haydn nodded his understanding, but in his stomach, something tightened.

Chapter 5

"The hospital switchboard says you have had lots of phone calls asking how you are." Nurse two was telling him. She was tidying up the room ready for the interview.

"We made a list of those who left their names," nurse one brandished a piece of paper. He held his hand out for it. He just gave it a quick glance and allowed himself a nod and a grunt. But kept hold of the sheet. The interview was about to begin. They were just waiting for the Police to arrive. It was now three days since the incident, and he had been watching the news on the television and had seen many paper columns. The terrible memories would never leave him. He was sure. He thought he could remember all that happened. He had gone over it, silently, to himself in preparation for the questioning... His stomach was tightening again.

Of course, it was worldwide news. The nurses had told him that there were press from all over the world, camped outside the hospital. But he was worried by some of the reporting; there had already been reprisals in Britain and America; some very unsavoury characters had been interviewed in the papers, given space to trumpet their hardline views. Attitudes were hardening and the distance between extremes was widening. Some of the letters and cards he had received, they had thrown straight in the bin.

Haydn had no regrets. He had thought about it. He would not have done anything different. He was alive, and he had his actions to thank for that and he was not sorry for killing the terrorists. But as he sat up in his bed waiting for the Police; he had a worry. Not just his stomach was telling him to be careful, he had to look after himself and watch what he said.

The door opened, and the Doctor walked in, he was accompanied by three people. The nurses left them. Some extra chairs had been brought in. They had been placed around his bed. The Doctor sat in the one that was nearest him. He spoke to Haydn, "I've told the officers that they can have a few minutes this time, Mr. Gerrard." Haydn nodded willingly. There were three of them.

The man sat at the foot of the bed was in charge, Haydn could tell. He guessed the man was in his early thirties, although he looked older. He was tall, sharp featured with high cheek bones, thin face that held a hollow smile with eyes that bored into you. Haydn did not hold his eyes for long, his stomach had screwed itself up a notch.

A woman sat near the Doctor. She was as tall as Haydn, about five ten, perhaps a little taller, smart, short hair and pretty eyes, a squarish face and very attentive. The man had looked only at Haydn since they had come in, but she had looked all around.

The third officer was another man. Older and shorter than the other two, he was Haydn's age, late forties, solid looking and balding. He seemed to carry an air of indifference with him. He had not sat down; he was reading Haydn's cards at the table. For some reason this irked Haydn slightly.

"I am Chief Inspector Dirk Rowe of the Terrorist Squad," the leader spoke to Haydn. He paused for a second, watching Haydn closely. Haydn nodded at him and smiled. "This is Sergeant Sue Price, also of the Terrorist Squad." She beamed a smile at him. He smiled back more warmly than before. "And this is Inspector Sam Willow, Area Liaison Officer." The man looked up from reading one of Haydn's cards and made hand gesture of some sort, a greeting. Haydn just nodded curtly at him. But Willow was not watching.

"Of course, this will not be the formal interview necessary for a full statement." Rowe began. "That will not happen until you have fully recovered and left the hospital, Mr. Gerrard." At this point he gave the Doctor a quick look. But the Doctor ignored him.

"The Sergeant will make some notes, if appropriate." She had pulled out a notepad from an inside pocket of the jacket she wore - none of them were in uniform. "The time of the attack we have well documented by eyewitnesses from outside the bus, people on the pavement and in cars." Was Haydn supposed to nod? He did anyway. "We obviously do not have much evidence from people on the bus." His face was expressionless.

"You catch that bus every morning, Mr. Gerrard?"

"Yes."

"It was on time?"

"Yes, more or less." Rowe's eyes widened slightly. "What I mean is that it arrived a minute or so early. But it left at ten to."

"Certain of that?"

"Certain. I looked at my watch." Rowe nodded.

"Were the Arab gentlemen on the bus when it left the city centre?"

"I don't think so." Arab gentlemen! Really! Funny way of putting it! But then what else could they call them, he thought.

"Don't think so? Mr. Gerrard, did you see them get on the bus at the city centre?"

"I didn't." He was sure. "As we moved off, I started to have my usual little nap." Rowe with the eyes again. "Well, you see I like to try to nod off on the journey down the Bristol Road," he explained. Rowe nodded. Price had not written anything yet.

"Did you actually see the men get on the bus?"

"No. I had not dropped off. I sleep only lightly anyway, and I usually wake up if anything happens. Like a sudden stop or something."

"So, when did you become aware of these men?"

"I could tell that the bus had not started again. I could hear some strange accents. You know different accents." They all nodded at him. "Then I heard some people around me making some comments, so I opened my eyes and saw the, the men."

"What sort of comments, Mr. Gerrard?" Haydn glanced around.

"Bloody Arabs, or something like that," he shrugged and looked back at them.

"I see," said Rowe, "anything else said? Anything said directly to the men?"

"No. I didn't see anyone say anything actually to them. But there was growing mumbles and such. The bus driver noticed it; I don't think the men did."

"What exactly were the men doing?"

"Well, it sounded like they were trying to tell the driver where they wanted to go? Anyway, he couldn't understand them, and he drove on, still talking to them."

"The guns were inside the fishing cases?"

"Yeah. I had closed my eyes again and I heard the shouts. One of them had already got his gun out." Haydn visibly shuddered. The Doctor and Price looked at him closely.

"What happened then, Mr. Gerrard?" Rowe continued. Now Price seemed to be ready.

"He started firing down the one side of the bus."

"What was the other one doing?"

"He was still with the driver."

"Go on, Mr. Gerrard."

"Well, the one fired down the one side and then he turned to our side and started on us."

"What did you do?"

"I just sort of slipped off the seat. Just as he opened up on us."

"What was the other one doing?"

"Well, just as I slid, I saw him run up the stairs. The bus was going across the road at that point I think."

"Were you shot at that time, Mr. Gerrard."

"No. I must have been lucky. I hit the floor and I, ... well I tried to curl up." He paused. They waited. "I was really scared. The firing kept on." He paused again.

"But then the firing stopped, yes?"

"Yes. I opened my eyes and I could see the bloke's feet. He was coming up the bus and shooting people one by one. He was getting closer and I thought I'm going to die here."

"But you did not, Mr. Gerrard. What happened?" Rowe had no expression still.

"Well, I waited until he came level with me, and I threw my bag at him and jumped at him. That's when he shot me. But I managed to knock him over." Haydn's tone of voice had become more excited, they all noticed him clutching the paper in his hand fiercely.

"What did you do then?" Haydn looked right at Rowe.

"He was pointing the gun at me, so I stamped on his neck. I really put my weight on it." Haydn could see again the man's eyes rolling and his tongue coming out of his mouth. The eyes stared up at him and then he pressed down again. There was a gurgle sort of sound and the man died.

"Then you took the gun?" Rowe had not blinked, Price was writing, Willow was watching him now. The Doctor appeared unmoved.

"Yeah. I got the gun off him. I could hear the other one still shooting upstairs."

"So, you decided to get him, did you?" Rowe's eyes bored into him.

"Well yes, I did," Haydn answered. "I thought it was for the best."

Rowe allowed him a slight nod, "Go on."

"I went up the stairs, really carefully. The bloke had stopped shooting. He was calling to his mate."

"You said nothing?" Rowe interrupted.

"No. I got to the top of the stairs and I poked the gun around the, the thingy, the, ..." "Go on." "Well I just fired aimlessly really. Just tried to keep it pointed down the gap between the seats. I could see his feet as I came up the steps." A pause. "Bloody gun, almost dropped it." He gave them a wry sort of smile. Only Willow responded with the smallest of smiles.

"That killed him?"

"I saw, from under the seats, that he had kind of slumped onto the floor. So, I got a rush of blood, or something, I charged up the bus. I think I was shouting."

"Was he dead when you reached him?"

"Well, ...Well..." He tried not to look away from Rowe's eyes. But! Too late! The tiniest movement. He stared back at Rowe. But Rowe did not seem to notice, his face showed nothing, he waited for Haydn.

"Well, he was in a right mess. Just sort of stuck on his knees. His eyes were open but..." He glanced around them. "I just sort of prodded him with the gun and he fell backwards."

"You did not fire again?" Haydn did not answer. "You know? To finish him off?" Haydn stared at Rowe. Something inside him was worrying him, his brain seemed to be stuck, he was struggling to think clearly. Rowe still watched him, unblinking and stone like.

"No, I didn't." Haydn suddenly heard himself say. He looked away from them. There was another pause. Haydn looked meaningfully at the Doctor who stirred under his glance. But Rowe spoke first.

"Alright Mr. Gerrard, that will do for now. Thank you very much. Get completely well soon. We will need to more formally interview you, I remind you, in the future." He rose from his chair. "Thank you, Doctor," they shook hands. Price smiled warmly at Haydn before she left. Willow was indifferent again. The Doctor shut the door after them.

"Well, that was not too bad, was it?" the Doctor asked him.

"No. Not too bad." Haydn agreed with him trying to sound relieved. He was studying the piece of paper in his hand.

"Doctor? Could you do something for me?" Haydn asked him.

"I'll try. What do you want?"

"Can you get in touch with this this woman, here," he indicated a name on the sheet. "Ask her to come and visit me as soon as possible. The switchboard will have the number by the sound of it."

"I can handle that." He checked Haydn once more, then left. Outside Haydn heard him give the job to one of the nurses. It did not matter who did it, Haydn thought, he was going to need some help; his stomach was telling him.

Chapter 6

The improvement in Haydn's physical condition continued at a pace. For a man of his age the Doctors were mildly surprised; nevertheless delighted. The nurses were enjoying his company. He was quite funny and was in no way difficult and always considerate to them. He had made a few phone calls to friends and seemed to be in good spirits. One of his friends had visited.

The woman was a little older than Haydn the nurses thought. They were obviously good friends. Old friends. The woman gave him quick peck on his cheek when she entered. She held his hand briefly and they talked a little about how Haydn felt. Haydn asked how her family was: partner and a son quickly growing. To his friends pretend annoyance her son was 'into' football. Haydn smiled at her.

Haydn asked the nurse if they would leave them alone for a few minutes. She left to join the policeman still on guard outside his room. His friend had been searched before being allowed in to see him. Haydn was quick, he explained what he needed, and his friend understood.

"You don't want to tell me exactly what's worrying you, do you?" she asked, knowing the answer.

"No. I don't want you put into any difficult positions in the future." He told her and put one of his 'I'm serious faces' on.

"OK."

The door opened, and the policeman came in. He looked embarrassed.

"I've just checked with the Chief Inspector, Mr. Gerrard. He does not want you left alone with anyone." He held his palms out to them - it's out of my hands he was saying to them.

"That's OK officer, my friend is just leaving." Haydn said pleasantly. He did not say he understood though. His friend gave him a last knowing smile and wished him well. She left. The policeman was about to follow her.

"I hope you're not in trouble?" Haydn asked him kindly.

"I'm not sure, to be honest," the man turned to reply. "When the nurse said you had asked to be alone, I just thought I'd check with the Chief Inspector. He did say I was to inform him of anything that you got up to." At this he looked a little awkward again.

Haydn smiled at him and said, "Oh dear." It suggested that he had done something else that the policeman should know about.

"What?" the policeman sensed something was up.

"I think it's best you don't know," Haydn shrugged, his face rueful.

They stared at each other for a short while then Haydn went back to his reading of the papers.

The nurse breezed back into the room, "Everything OK?" she looked from one to the other.

"Yeah." Haydn shook his head without looking up.

"I think so," the policeman sounded less sure. He returned to his post. It was no great surprise when an hour later he saw someone approaching. The man, so obviously a lawyer, greeted him and explained what he was doing. The policeman allowed him into Haydn's room. As the nurse again left at Haydn's bidding, she listened to the policeman telling the Chief Inspector about this development.

After a hasty exchange Haydn and his lawyer waited for the inevitable arrival of Chief Inspector Rowe. He gave a perfunctory check of the lawyer's credentials; they had obviously checked up on him already. Rowe was on his own. He stared at Haydn in that piercing way. There was, though, the vaguest hint of amusement in his face.

"This is an unexpected development, Mr. Gerrard?" but Haydn felt he didn't believe him. He didn't answer him.

"My client feels it would be in his best interests if he refrained from saying any more at this time." Haydn listened to the cool professional tones of the lawyer his friend had arranged for him. He was sure that, had he been in Rowe's shoes, he would be intensely irritated by that voice. However, Rowe was also a professional and with his usual dead pan face he dealt with the lawyer. They quickly established the ground rules. Haydn was very pleased with the way the lawyer intimated that his client would be selling the story of his ordeal. That Haydn was obviously committed to helping in every way with the investigation. The Doctor was called and asked to say when Haydn would be released from the hospital. Then Rowe and the lawyer agreed a time for the formal interview. The venue would be a Police Station local to Haydn's home.

Rowe nodded curtly at Haydn and gave him another look before he left. Haydn felt the man was re-examining him, perhaps he was even now remembering everything Haydn had said at that previous encounter. Haydn could not control a slight shiver as he watched the door close behind the Chief Inspector.

"Do you think he bought it?" he asked the lawyer hastily.

"I'm not sure." The lawyer was thoughtful. "Not come across him before." He stood thinking still. "But I do think I've heard about him. I'll check up on him when I get back to the office." Turning and sitting by Haydn's bed he smiled encouragingly and opening his briefcase, he took out what he needed, "Now you must tell me everything Mr. Gerrard. Do not leave anything out at all. Not a thing." He reiterated. "Do you understand?" he looked gravely at his client.

"OK." Haydn was a little breathless. He took a deep breath, then he began. He described in as much detail as possible what happened on the bus. The lawyer quizzed him as if he was Rowe himself. Haydn explained his worries and the lawyer advised him what to do and what to say to anybody from now on, how to protect himself from any slips or unnecessary

comments and actions. At the end Haydn felt reassured, as the lawyer rose to leave, they shook hands. Haydn held onto his hand and looking him in the eye, he could not stop himself asking. "Am I doing the right thing? It's not going to make things worse is it?" the lawyer smiled back at him and endured his tight grip, "What do you expect me to say?" but seeing the concern that flashed onto Haydn's face, he quickly became serious.

"Of course, you have Mr. Gerrard. As you quite rightly say the situation could be turned in such a way as to threaten you. I know that, if I was on the other side, I would try to make it stick. You are a hero to most people, but that might not help you in some quarters." His face was grimmer now. "Rest easy. You've done the right thing to protect yourself. But remember what I've told you and watch what you say! Do not say anything! That would be the best."

At the door he looked back at Haydn. He did appear more relaxed. "I'll be in touch about leaving hospital. Be careful!" he reminded him once more. After a while the nurses returned, and Haydn noted their curious looks at him.

"Everything's fine." He pre-empted their queries.

Chapter 7

Chief Inspector Rowe rejoined his colleagues. Sergeant Price started the car and pulled out of the hospital car park. She glanced at Rowe next to her, Willow was rather vacantly staring out of the side window behind her.

"Well?" she asked in exasperation. "What is going on?"

"Our Mr. Gerrard has taken a brief." Rowe replied without looking at her. "Seems he does not want to talk to us without his legal aid."

"Really?" Price only sounded a little surprised. "So, what's he playing at?"

"It's no real surprise these days, is it?" Willow stirred in the back.

"What do you mean Sam?" Price glanced at him in the mirror.

"Well, I expect some little bird has told him he can make a fortune out of all this. Perhaps he got the idea off the papers, or TV."

"So, he's sold his story you reckon?" a shrug from the back.

"That was what I was supposed to think," Rowe spoke. But he stopped there.

"But what do you think?" Price, again in exasperation. She should be used to it by now, she waited and controlled her frustration. Willow had lost interest, reading his paper now.

"He seemed worried. Scared even," Rowe finally answered. "There's something bothering him. He did not strike me as a man who was contemplating his fiscal future."

"So, what can he be worried about?" Price once more. "What would he want a brief for?" No answers. She continued, "A brief to protect him from what? Or just to advise him?"

"A brief to watch what we ask him, would be the reason," Willow turned a page.

"But what could we ask him that worries him?" Price swung the car around a junction.

"It's a pretty straight forward case, isn't it? Two terrorists go on the rampage on a city bus.

They kill almost all of the passengers. But one passenger survives and manages to kill them - perhaps luckily - and is badly injured in the process." Willow grunted encouragingly from behind. "Mitigating circumstances, self defence, whatever you call it. Case closed."

"Perhaps Mr. Gerrard did not tell us exactly what happened." Rowe volunteered.

"Perhaps there's more to the story. Something he would rather we did not know about. Something he would need legal assistance with, if we did find out."

"Like what?" Price accelerated past another car. In the back Willow had folded his paper. But he looked completely uninterested.

"I think we will do some more probing." Rowe was about to issue instructions. Price realised that was why Willow had stopped reading. She should know by now that the old dog knew Rowe inside out.

"Sam?" Rowe did not turn around.

"Sir?" no life in the voice.

"I want you to bring in the eyewitnesses again. Tell them we just want to run through things one more time."

"I'll get one of the local boys onto it right away." Willow was probably bored.

"No, Sam." Rowe was quietly insistent. "I want you to do it. And individually too." A lazy groan from over Rowe's shoulder. "You can use your legendary charm and warmth, Sam, if you can find some." Rowe's voice was barely sardonic. Price smiled at Willow in the mirror. He gave her a hurt look, but there was a vestige of a grin around his eyes.

Price waited for her orders. She glanced at Rowe again. God! He was a pain at times! They were almost at their destination.

"Sue, I want you to stick around the hospital." He turned to face her as she brought the car to a stop. "Keep a guard on Haydn to stop the press getting to him. But keep a close watch on the traumatised woman. When, if, she comes back to normal we need to talk to her as

soon as possible." He got out of the car and left them to get on with it. They watched him disappear into the building.

"Charm and warmth from the master," Willow burst out with a wry smile across his face. Price laughed out loud. "How long have you been with him Sam?"

"A lifetime, Sue, a lifetime." They giggled as Price drove away.

"I thought this was going to be over without any fuss," Willow said to her.

"Do you think there's anything in it? Really?" Price was also rearranging her plans, mentally. "Surely there's no funny stuff?"

"I don't know, do I? Perhaps Haydn shot one of the passengers by mistake, or something?"

.....

"Well, I don't blame him!" Pat was in danger of getting wound up again. He had turned to John to make his point more forcefully. "You can't be too careful these days, that's for sure. I mean it started with that farmer bloke," he paused to take a pull from his drink. "You know, a few years back." He did not wait for any acknowledgement. "Then you had those guys in their homes, families and all." Another sip - he drank more often when he was making a point. "Then worst of all that woman only recently. Being raped and about to be killed. You telling me she should have just let it happen? I'd have more than stabbed the bastards!" he glared at John, daring him to disagree. "And what did they do? They did her for assault." His frustration gathered agreeing nods and likewise comments from around the bar. John said nothing, he took a sip from his drink. Pat looked from John to Paul. Paul stood up, reached for some money in his back pocket, ordered another round. Still feeling Pat's eyes on

him he said, "Look we've been through all this before. You know I'm on your side." Rich handed them their drinks.

"Still," the barman began again. Paul flashed him a frown. "Still, it is a bit funny, Haydn getting himself a top lawyer."

"It's not, if you want to make sure the cops don't stitch you up for something," Pat reacted again.

"Or, if you are going to sell your story for loads of money," John relished the point. "There must be something in those reports."

"Yeah, but Haydn isn't the type to make money out of this. Isn't he?" Rich was probing again, he looked at him.

John raised an eyebrow and his face said, 'who wouldn't'.

Pat and Paul shrugged together and stared uncomfortably into their pints. "I don't know, Rich." Paul offered, "It's likely to be a lot of money. You know Haydn is always going on about having a nice amount of money, enough to do something with."

"It's a temptation. That's for sure," Pat agreed. "But I still think he's just taking care of himself."

"But from what, Pat?" John demanded.

"Yeah," joined in Rich, "has he got something to hide? Did he do something we haven't heard about?"

"I don't know, do I!" Pat's voice was rising. "I wasn't bloody well there, was I!"

"We've been through this once," Paul sounded weary.

"Well, I bet Haydn never did anything we wouldn't have done in his place," Pat said and that seemed to be that. Rich walked along the bar.

"Do we know when he's coming out of hospital?" John changed the subject slightly.

"The news said tomorrow," Paul informed him.

"Anyone going around to see him?" John asked jovially.

"Are you crazy?" Pat turned on him. "The place will be crawling with the press. They 're all over it already. Someone went down the road and seen all the vans and people. The girls next door, I heard, reported them trying to get in around the back, through other people's houses, cheeky bastards!"

"Someone could ring him, I suppose, when he gets back," Paul suggested. "But I bet he won't want to be bothered for a bit." There were nods all round.

"Best if we wait until he comes in, I reckon." Rich made sense. "He'll be back in when he's ready."

"Yeah, it's going to be hard to cope with it all," Paul spoke quietly. Heads nodded grimly.

"Especially if you have to count all that money from the papers!" John said gleefully.

"I hope, when he does surface, that it brings extra trade for the bar." Rich had a wicked glint in his eyes and mischief in his face. Paul and Pat looked at each other and with a tired sigh, "twats," they uttered. Rich and John laughed together.

.....

"So, no new developments from your end, Sergeant?" Rowe was speaking to a small gathering of officers in a local Police Station conference room.

"No, Sir." Price answered. "The upstairs woman is eating by herself. She knows her family but is unapproachable about the incident. She just freezes whenever anyone mentions it." She paused. "The nurses report Mr. Gerrard has recovered very well; the Doctors are really pleased with him. However, he does drift off at times just stares into the distance, slightly wide eyed. He tells them he's just dreaming, but they think he's reliving his experiences, often he shivers and mutters to himself."

"Signs of some strain, you think Price?" Rowe enquired.

"Definitely, Sir." Price concurred. "I talked to the Psychologist. She seems to think he is bearing up well, under the circumstances, but she thinks he has not completely come to terms with it yet. She feels he is holding back when he talks about the incident, not letting it all out yet. She thinks that perhaps a part of him is not facing up to everything that happened - blocking some of it out."

"How often has the Psychologist talked with him?" Rowe asked her.

"Only twice, Sir, she thinks that once Gerrard gets home, away from all the attention, left more to his own thoughts, he may need more help then." She looked directly at the Chief Inspector. "She has arranged to visit Gerrard on the day after he leaves hospital."

"Right, this is what I want you to do, Sergeant." Rowe nodded in anticipation. "You have been talking to Mr. Gerrard? Getting on with him?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I will suggest to Mr. Gerrard's solicitor that you accompany them from the hospital to his home. A low-key Police presence, just to reassure them; a larger presence will be outside the hospital for Mr. Gerrard's statement to the press. Also, some officers will be waiting at Mr. Gerrard's house to stop any interference from the media. We will keep a uniformed presence outside his house for one day, I think, after his arrival home. Mr. Gerrard's brief has told me that the statement should put paid to any future intrusion from the press."

A mixture of reactions from those gathered there, some general guffaws.

"Fat chance," one said.

"Sold out, has he," another merely stated.

"He'd better get his story out quick to stop the vultures."

"But he can't do that very easily," Rowe told them with his expressionless face. "He has to be very careful what he says. He has not given us a proper statement yet. The Public

Prosecutor would not be very happy if Mr. Gerrard compromised our enquiry, in any way." He now paused for a little effect. "Especially in light of the latest developments."

There was a sudden hush, all eyes were on Rowe. It was common knowledge that the Chief Inspector was concerned about some aspects of the case. The concerns were supposedly secret; yet the whole station was talking about it. Rowe was happily aware of this. There was talk, but nobody knew the details of the actual concern, until now, perhaps.

"Inspector," Rowe turned to Willow, "will you inform the team what you have discovered." Willow smiled as blankly at Rowe as he could.

"As you know we have only four witnesses, excluding Haydn Gerrard, who were close enough to see, or hear anything worth having as evidence." He took a breath. "The two survivors on the bottom floor of the bus, the still traumatised lady upstairs, the man who hid behind the tree alongside the bus when it stopped." Another breath. "I questioned these people further, yesterday, except of course Mrs. Field," he added hastily.

"The two people who survived downstairs continue to corroborate Haydn's preliminary statement. The early firing. The first gunman then walking up the bus and picking the passengers off. They did not see Haydn's actions but heard him attacking the gunman. One of them particularly remembers seeing Gerrard's stamp on the gunman's neck. They are both sure he did no firing downstairs.

"However, when he went upstairs, they disagree a little on what happened. They both say they heard firing but do not tally on what happened after. One says there was another burst later, only seconds later. The other cannot recall any further firing.

"The man behind the tree saw nothing of what happened downstairs. He braved a look and saw Gerrard go up the stairs. He did not know if he was a good guy or a bad guy then. His words not mine." A few chuckles. "He heard the firing upstairs. Saw the gunman fall out of his view. Then saw Gerrard charge down the bus. There were a few seconds pause.

Gerrard seemed to turn to one of the seats. Then a last burst of gunfire. Gerrard then made his way back down the stairs and collapsed on the floor. The man did not rush to help Gerrard as he was still not sure what had happened, even though Gerrard had left the rifle upstairs."

A few murmurs from the group. Rowe spoke again.

"The Public Prosecutor has been told and wants us to try to get to the bottom of it all. Of course, the whole affair is more than a little sensitive. We all know that. There will be a public outcry if we were to bring charges against Mr. Gerrard." More sounds of general agreement. "However, we do need to know exactly what happened. If we find that Mr. Gerrard was not acting completely in self defence then the Public Prosecutor's office may want to," he paused to choose the right words. "Take the appropriate action." There was grumbling in the ranks.

"I doubt that Mr. Gerrard will be charged with murder," Rowe suggested to continued grumbling. "If necessary, a manslaughter charge of some kind." He dismissed the group.

"It will not go down well, sir, if the Public Prosecutor interferes too much in this case." Price told Rowe.

"I am quite aware of public opinion, Sergeant." Rowe looked at her with his unfeeling eyes. "But I am also aware that we have not had the absolute truth from Mr. Gerrard, yet. Once we get that then we will know exactly where we are." Only Willow and Price were left now. "Look, I do not want to see Mr. Gerrard go to prison. But we do need the truth AND to be seen to be upholding the law properly. Especially from outside the country." They looked unconvinced. "The worst I can see happening is that Mr. Gerrard gets a slap on the wrist for using excessive force to defend himself."

He left them to carry on. When they were alone Willow turned to Price. "I'd like to see him try that on in the bars and pubs."

"Never mind them, most of the houses in the country, I'd say." Price retorted. "What planet are these people on?" they were still alone in the room. She whispered, "I feel like warning Gerrard."

"I think he's ahead of you there," Willow also whispered.

"Yes, I think you're right."

.....

Haydn had reached that position again. He had skied down the run many times before. It was marked as a blue that became a red as it narrowed. Now, as he stood on the lip, Haydn could see the part that was a black, lying below him, steeper and lumpy with moguls. Some people were making their way ahead of him. Some of them without any fear and with consummate ease. Other people passed close behind him, taking the narrow track that was the get-out 'clause' for this bit of the run. It hugged the slope for about twenty metres, did a couple of still, tricky turns, then, with a gentler slope, skirted the steeper piste until it reached the flat run-out below.

But Haydn was perched on the lip, his skis gripping against the gradient. He had been down the black bit before, twice. But not in recent years. Lately he had chickened out and taken the track. True he had rejoined the piste lower down, usually, but he had missed the hard bit out. He knew exactly why. He had lost some of his confidence over the years. He knew he would never be a very good skier: he lacked the physical strength, especially in the knees; but more importantly he lacked the courage. He could do blacks; he had done some good ones in his time. Mind you, most of them he had scrambled down; on his backside sometimes - he was not the most stylish.

A fall, a few years ago, had knocked his confidence. He had fallen fifty metres down a black. Luckily it was wide and long, as well as steep and he had had time to stop himself. A

friend rolled his skis down to him. He had caught them, but it was too steep to put on the skis at that point, so, he controlled a slide until the slope eased off and he could put his skis on and get away.

Now he stood on the verge of the drop, his legs were complaining, his breath came fast. He heard other skiers arriving behind him, waiting for him to move. One could not wait. She skied right past him and straight over the edge. Envy mingled with his fear as he watched her go down. He glanced behind - not always a wise thing to do - the others were waiting for him. He was holding things up.

Haydn was back in the hospital room. He was wide awake and staring at the wall. He realised he had not been sleeping and dreaming. He was having one of the daydreams again. He was standing in the room, he looked out the window but did not move otherwise.

"Are you OK, Mr. Gerrard?" nurse one asked him.

"Yes, fine, thank you." He walked to the window and gripped the sill, lightly, he thought. Nurse one gave nurse two a knowing look.

"It will not be long now, Mr. Gerrard, and you will be on your way home." Haydn mumbled a reply.

"Once you get past the mob outside, that is," nurse two added in an audible aside.

But Haydn was back on the lip. He had to get down it. He screwed his courage up and stared just a few metres in front of him. Easing the pressure on his downhill ski he dropped off the lip and headed slowly across the piste. An encouraging noise came from behind him. He had never gone straight down this piste and he knew he never would, he just did not have it in him: physically and courageously. He could hear no one following him, which was good because when he was nervous, he hated other skiers near him.

He had gone about three metres. He knew he must make a turn soon. If he left it too long, as he often did, he would pick up pace and be at the edge of the piste before he knew it. Then

he would have to make a turn, which usually lacked control and meant that he headed back across the piste going too fast. But this time he cleared his mind and tried to think only about what he had to do.

He rode another bump then he plonked his pole down and leaned out, pressing hard on his uphill ski. It looked like he was trying to jump off the slope. But his skis turned in the gap between two bumps - he did not care if this was the right thing to do or not - and he set off across the piste again. His breathing was heavy, and his knees creaked, he could feel his heart thumping in his chest. Then before he could build up too much speed he turned again.

This went well. Now he heard another skier drop off above him, heard the scrape of the skis following him. He went a bit too far and this time the turn was less smooth. He wobbled as one ski tried to slide away from him. He came to a stop and shoved his poles into the slope to keep him upright as his legs strained against the slope. He glanced up. The other skier had stopped and was watching him again. Haydn knew stopping was not a good thing; it gave time for the fear to set in. He had to keep going what ever happened. If he slid, so be it. If he stayed, he would just freeze and end up trying to step down or slink off to the side. Where, like a beginner he could lie down, swing his legs over and turn that way.

Haydn pushed himself forward and controlled a sideslip. He managed to get past some large lumps and drop a few metres at the same time. Then he made a few ragged turns and let himself run out a little to the side. He was past the worst now; the slope was less steep and smoother. The other skier came smoothly, expertly past him, right down the middle, tearing down the piste. Haydn pointed his skis straighter down the slope. As he picked up speed, he made some sharp turns and then in a halfhearted tuck he schussed the rest of the way.

There was a run out at the bottom which led to a group of lifts. Haydn allowed himself to slowly come to a stop. He could see the girl who shot off before him. She was talking to the

skier who had followed and passed him. A third person was with them. As Haydn bent over to get his breath back, his legs tingled with exertion. He could feel his muscles tightening up. But there was also that great feeling of elation. He looked back at the slope. 'I've just got down that,' he said to himself. He grinned in delight. He had beaten his fear, this time.

Voices made him look up. The skiers had taken their hats and goggles off. A red mark hung over the girl's eye, her blonde hair failing to mask it. The red hair of her companion was swept back by young hands. The third person was older, and his eyes seemed to be looking into the distance.

"It's time, Mr. Gerrard," nurse two was talking to him.

"Sorry, miles away," he smiled as brightly as he could at her. His lawyer was waiting.

"Ready, Haydn?" he looked eager himself.

"Ready." But Haydn's face was now grim. He thanked the nurses and shook their hands. They said their goodbyes. Outside, the Doctor waited with Sergeant Price. Haydn thanked him, shook his hand and said goodbye. Price was talking to the lawyer; she smiled encouragingly at Haydn. They set off. In the lift Price warned Haydn about the number of people waiting for them outside. "It going to be a bit of a scrum, especially after your statement when we try to get to the car." Haydn nodded. He looked at his lawyer. The man was steady, confident and with the air of a man about to enjoy himself. Haydn was not going to say anything at all. He would hide behind his lawyer and Sergeant Price. The lawyer would do all the talking, read the statement and answer a few select questions. Then they would push their way to the Sergeant's car and be off.

While his lawyer spoke, it did resemble a scrum, Haydn thought. There was equilibrium between his party, the other policemen shielding them and the press corps. But once they tried to make their move to the car it became more of a maul, or a ruck at the sides.

Reporters tried to get close to Haydn to ask questions - they were shoved out of the way. At

the fringes people, including the crowd who had come to see the show, were tripping over each other.

Eventually they made the car. Haydn and his lawyer were bundled into the back. Price started up the engine and with a last cordon in place they drove away, a marked car led the way, and another took position behind them. Soon they were through the city and on the express way.

"Well, that went well, I thought," the lawyer was pleased. He gave Haydn a gentle pat. "What do you think?"

"Yes, fine." Haydn answered. But in the mirror Price saw a very thoughtful Mr. Gerrard who stared out at the world as it passed by. Haydn did indeed have a lot to think about. Not least of which were some people he had seen on the edge of the crowd, staring at him as he fought to get into the car: an older man with faraway eyes, a young red-haired man and a woman with blonde hair and a scar above one eye. Looking back as Price drove them away, Haydn saw them staring after him; and he was not dreaming!

Chapter 8

The early evening news had finished. The small knot of people, who had been clustered in front of the TV, broke up. There was some discourse between them. Rich, who must have seen the news, on various channels, ten times already that day, waited. John, Paul and Pat returned to their stools and each took a sip from their drinks.

"Well? What do you reckon?" Rich asked generally.

"Looked worried to me," someone shouted from behind.

"He looked better than I thought he would," another called.

"I reckon we'll see him soon," someone else.

"What do you three think?" Rich was more specific now. He looked at the three friends wondering if he had gauged their reactions correctly.

"Paul?" Rich put him on the spot.

"Well, it was interesting," Paul replied in a non-committal way. He was still trying to collect his thoughts, Rich realised.

"Well, I think you see I've been proved right." Pat sounded pleased with himself.

"Right about what?" John challenged him.

"Well, he's obviously not got that lawyer just to handle the money dealings. Has he?" it was clear, was it not? His face told them.

"Now, explain that to me one more time. What exactly is going to happen when he sells or tells his story?" John asked. "Is he doing it for the money, or what?"

"Of course, he's not." Pat was adamant.

"Well not exactly," Paul butted in. Pat glanced at him quickly.

"Well, true, not exactly," he conceded.

"So, if I'm right, here," John went on. "He's not going to say anything until after the enquiry is over. He can't anyway." Paul and Pat nodded in agreement. "But he and his lawyer have signed a contract with the Press Association. Not with any particular paper or channel." He waited for nods. He got them. "This means that all the press will get equal access to his story and at the same time. So, no scoop for anyone. But also, no big payment to Haydn."

"And whatever he's getting he's putting into the fund for victims' families," Rich now. "Remember that."

"Yes." John again.

"But he is keeping some of it," Paul insisted.

"Well, it doesn't sound like much, does it?" Rich argued.

"You don't begrudge him some money, do you, Paul?" Pat asked him. Paul hesitated.

"Do you?" John joined in. Rich smelt a little blood too. He leaned closer. A few other heads turned and listened more carefully.

"No." Paul was feeling the pressure. "No, of course not. I'm sure he's going to need it for expenses and paying that lawyer." But he did not sound convincing. "He did not look very happy, did he?" Paul changed the subject. Pat gave him a look that suggested he knew what he was doing.

"Well, I don't blame him for taking some money," Pat came back.

"He could have taken a lot more," Rich chipped in.

"That's for sure," John added his bit.

"But he did look a bit put out didn't he," Pat began again. "He looked like he was trying to hide behind that woman copper."

"Well it must have been quite scary, really, with all the press and public pushing in on you." Paul offered.

"Everyone wanting a piece of you," John this time.

"You should see some of the other coverage," Rich informed them. "It was more like a riot. People tripping up and all that pushing and shoving."

"And that was just the cops," Joked John. Rich laughed with him.

"But you see, there's my point again," Pat told them. "Notice how Haydn never said anything. He's not going to either 'till after the proper interview thing." He looked pleased with himself.

"What are you trying to say Pat?" John asked the question.

"Well, I reckon he looked worried, not because of the crowd. I mean he could have seen them out the hospital window. He knew what that was going to be like." He had a sip. They waited. "No, I tell you he's worried about that interview. Doesn't want to say anything that will give those bastards a chance to stitch him up."

"So, you say, so you keep saying," John came back at him. "But what? What could he have done to be worried about?" he looked at Rich for some back-up.

"The whole country's behind him, Pat," Rich helped. "What could be the problem?"

"Well, ..."

"Did you catch that little snippet at the end of the news?" Paul reminded them. "Just a throw away comment at the end about going over the forensic evidence again. The eyewitnesses had been questioned further. The inference that details needed to be checked." He sounded more conspiratorial now. "That perhaps something did not fit or was wrong."

"You're getting as bad as Pat, you are," John laughed.

A voice from behind spoke. "No, he might have something. I know a bloke who knows a bloke that works at one of the cop shops."

"Here we go," John was sarcastic.

"No, go on, mate." Rich encouraged him.

"Well, they reckon that the officers on the case have been told to get to the bottom of it. Because," he paused, "get this, something's not quite right with what Haydn told them in the hospital."

"Pahh! Rubbish!" John was scathing.

"It doesn't match up with what the other eyewitnesses have said," the man continued regardless.

"Really?" Rich was interested.

"Yeah. And apparently a lot of the cops aren't happy about it. They say Haydn should be left alone."

"Well, what do you think?" Rich sounded convinced. But then part of his job was to believe everything people said to him, well, at least at first.

John scoffed again, "But we still don't know what it's all about."

Paul and Pat looked concerned.

"You don't believe all this do you?" John asked them, not sounding so sure of himself for the first time.

"I tell you, John," Pat spoke slowly, "there's something up. I don't like it. If I'm any judge, then by the look of Haydn today. I'd say he knows it." He turned to Paul. "What do you think Paul?"

Paul considered the drink in front of him then replied. "I think you're right Pat. Haydn did not look happy today. It was more than the attention and all that. I can't get over why he thinks he needs the lawyer. He hates them. He would only use one if it was important."

"The cops are waiting on that woman from upstairs on the bus," the voice behind, "she's really important. Other than Haydn, she's the only one who knows what happened up there." A pause as he rose to leave. "But she's out of it at the moment."

"Well, I suppose we'll soon find out all about it." Rich was now cheerful.

"What do you mean?" they demanded.

"Well, one night soon Haydn's going to come through that door and then we'll hear it right from the horse's mouth." He was rubbing his hands in expectation and glee. Paul and Pat looked at each other, but it was catching.

"Yeah. I can't wait to find out what it was like to shoot someone," John suddenly gushed, "and what it was like to be shot."

"Yes, indeed," Rich was rocking slightly on his heels now. "Word will get out and we'll have a bumper crowd in. Everyone will want to be here." His eyes were glinting.

"Are you stupid or something?" Pat yelled at him. "Didn't you get what that lawyer was saying? He's not allowed to talk about it. To anyone! Not until he's done the formal statement thing. And even then, he might not be allowed. If, and I mean if he comes in here, he shouldn't tell us anything."

"And we shouldn't ask!" Paul joined in. "Anyway, I don't think we'll see him until after that interview statement thing."

Rich looked crestfallen. But he recovered. "Well, we'll just have to wait until then, wont we." He was undeterred.

"Useless twats." Paul and Pat said together.

.....

Sergeant Price shut the front door; she had given the local Police some instructions. She followed Gerrard and his lawyer along the narrow hallway to the back room which was Gerrard's living room. She doubted Gerrard knew but they had been in his house already. When his neighbours had reported the press trying to get into his back garden, they had used this as an excuse to check his house over. Without causing any suspicion they had gone through all the rooms in the house; a typical semi-detached house of its era, Price thought.

The lawyer was sitting down. Gerrard had turned the TV on for him and he was beginning to scan the news channels using the remote. Gerrard was checking his kitchen. The food he had asked for had been brought in, he re-positioned some of it and filled the kettle.

"Anyone want a drink?" he asked.

"Coffee please," the lawyer answered.

"Sergeant?" Haydn thought she's probably had too many cups today already.

"A tea, please," she replied.

"I'm just going to have a quick look around." Haydn walked out the room.

"Good idea," the lawyer.

"I'll come with you," Price followed him. He went to the front room.

"Who closed the curtains?" he asked her.

"I'm not sure," she answered. "Your neighbours or one of our officers I expect." The curtains were thin, and it was the middle of the day, there was enough light for Haydn to see that nothing had changed in the room. He could hear activity outside on the street. He opened the curtains slightly and poked his head through. Many cameras flashed almost instantly and there was a surge of people towards his house from across the street. He could see the TV vans parked opposite and all along the road, up and down; the sound of people all shouting at once reached him. He pulled his head back and closed the curtains.

"Hmmm. I bet the neighbours are happy," Price was not sure if he wanted a response from her.

"I think they probably think it's a bit of fun, just now," she offered. "But I expect the novelty will soon rub off, if they're all still there two days from now."

"Well, they shouldn't be. Should they?" Haydn demanded of her. "Our statement means they should leave me alone and wait for things to take their course. Yes?"

"Let's hope so, Mr. Gerrard." She did not sound too hopeful. Haydn looked at her for a while and she found herself fidgeting slightly under his gaze. This annoyed her. "There is little we can do about the press on the street, Mr. Gerrard." She told him.

"Well, good job I'm not intending to go out much then isn't it."

"You're not going out at all!" the lawyer called out. "I told you, Haydn, the best thing is to stay here, keep out of the way, at least until after the interview." A pause. Price gave Gerrard a look that agreed with the lawyer. "Even after that." The lawyer finished.

Haydn next entered the middle room where he rarely opened the thick curtains. This room he used when he was on the computer: reading his emails; using the internet. It had the most comfortable and dearest chair in the house, yet it was rarely used. A bookcase full of videos and books, flanked by hi-fi equipment, lined one wall. A bedroom cupboard and banks of record cases lined another. Price knew that the speakers on either side of the bookcase, sat on cabinets full of CDs. Haydn had a lot of music and it was very varied too; she had quickly looked through them before.

Haydn switched on the computer. He scanned the medium-sized table near the window. Price knew that it was a mess: there were piles of paper, cards and envelopes; pens and pencils were strewn around; there were neat piles of loose change and even a collection of badges - most of them small and from ski resorts in Europe. The money lay on a sheet of A4 that had a lot of numbers and letters written on it. These were obviously needed to access various internet sites; Willow had taken a photograph of them while Rowe and she had distracted the neighbours. Rowe had told her that they all checked out alright including all the web addresses that were marked on the many scraps of paper surrounding the computer keyboard.

Haydn left the computer to boot up. Under the stairs was a little storage space - Haydn checked the wine he had stored there in cardboard boxes - the kettle was boiling. Haydn

returned to the kitchen. Price sat down next to the lawyer on the two-person settee. He smiled at her with very little feeling and Price was reminded of Rowe. Haydn emerged from the kitchen and rather gingerly handed the drinks out with a warning about how hot they were. He sat at the table next to the window. The chair was one of those you could turn around in. He now twirled gently in the seat, first one way then the other, at most he was moving through an angle of about forty degrees.

They watched one of the news channels. They watched the lawyer read out the statement. Experienced the press scrum from the TV cameraman's perspective. Then followed the journey home and finally saw themselves go into Haydn's house. The reporter then began to discuss the investigation with the presenter in the studio. Price sensed the interest of Gerrard and his lawyer, they sneaked a couple of looks at each other, but Price, not catching them, missed the meaning behind them.

When the news started to repeat Haydn, stirred himself, "Upstairs I think, now." He left his mug on the table, "Coming?" he asked Price. They climbed the stairs. Haydn went straight to the front bedroom where two narrow windows looked onto the road. A round of washing lay on a clothes horse by one window and more clothes were draped over the radiator under the window. They stood by the long since dry clothes. Whether it was because they were a step back from the window, or because of the nets, it took the outside world several minutes to spot them, this time. Haydn left the curtains open.

His bedroom looked out to the back. Large trees obscured the view and gave a high level of privacy. Effectively, from next door only, to the side, where the girls lived, could he be observed easily. He lifted the net in his bedroom window, so he could see more easily into next door. The girls were not in. Don't blame them he thought with all this carry on outside. His garden was a mess. He told himself that he had let it go because he wanted a more natural look, but, in truth, he had grown lazy. He had tried to plant some flower seeds, on

more than one occasion, but they had mostly failed. The back of the house was in the way, but the other side of his back garden was completely ruled by buttercups. Pretty enough. Some daffodils also showed themselves earlier in the year. There was bush, he did not know what, that produced nice white flowers and at the very back a rose bush. He never pruned it and it produced flowers quite regularly during the year. Last of all there was a run-down shed. He kept nothing of value in it because of robbers. Recently he had removed a sapling that had taken root in the roof.

Haydn opened the window in the bathroom, otherwise he moved on to the back bedroom. Price knew that calling it a bedroom was a loose use of the word. There was no carpet and there were signs that things had been ripped out of it. The small window was covered by curtains that Price thought were very rarely opened. This window was very obviously nailed shut; all the other windows in the house, except the modern double-glazed ones, were similarly nailed shut. Against the window wall a lawnmower and strimmer stood, and in one corner a pile of decorating equipment, most of it unused. The airing cupboard and tank lay on the side wall next to the boiler, which was fixed to the wall.

Haydn stood in the room as if listening for something. After a while Price asked him if anything was wrong. He did not answer her immediately.

"Has the heating been on recently?" he asked, finally.

"I don't know," Price told him. She touched the boiler. "Doesn't feel like it's been on. Is it on a timer?"

"It is. But the thermostat stops it working this time of year - unless it goes really cold." He stopped. "It wasn't really cold this morning, was it?"

"No." She replied. Gerrard stood there for a while longer. She thought he was trying to see something in the room. He stared intently around him. Suddenly aware of her watching

him, he seemed to shake himself and headed out of the room, but she noticed he gave it one last look.

"Do you want to tell me about the windows being nailed shut," she asked him as they descended the stairs.

"Oh, I inherited them from the last people. The only time I took the nail out of a window," he indicated the kitchen window, "and forgot to put it back. I was broken into." He shook his head in annoyance. "The fucking bastard was about to come into my bedroom when I finally woke up!" the sudden vehemence in his voice made the lawyer look up at him.

"Did they get much?" Price asked.

"Microwave, TV-video combo, hundred pounds cash, I never leave windows open, even on hot summer nights. The girls were done around the same time. We took measures and touch wood," he touched the door, "we've been alright since."

"Sergeant?" the lawyer enquired. "How long do you intend to stay here?"

"Just until Mr. Gerrard is settled back in, Sir."

"I think he's settled in now," he gave Haydn a questioning look.

"Yes, I am," Haydn confirmed.

"I need to talk to my client alone, you do understand, Sergeant?"

"Of course, Sir." They exchanged smiles of little warmth.

"Thank you, Sergeant Price." Haydn meant it. They smiled at each other with more sincerity.

"See you both soon," Price said deliberately. She left.

The lawyer turned to Haydn, "Don't forget she could be the enemy. Don't let your guard down!" Haydn nodded seriously. "I mean it too, about not going out or talking to anyone. If you need anything, anything at all, give me a ring and one of my people will get it and bring it round to you."

He gave his client a long look. "Now, you are going to be alright, yes?"

"I'll be fine. Don't worry."

"When is that Psychologist coming, tomorrow?"

"In the morning, about eleven."

"Right, well, be careful with her too, alright?"

"Alright. Thanks again." They were at the door.

"It has not started yet, Haydn." Seeing the doubt in his eyes, "Believe me. The most difficult times are yet to come. Leave me, I'll let myself out."

Haydn walked back to the living room. He heard the door shut; his mind quickly returned to what was bothering him; the blurry light shape he had seen in the back bedroom. Not for the last time that day he ran up the stairs and opening the door, peered inside.

Chapter 9

Half an hour, at least, had passed - Haydn had made two trips to the back bedroom in that time - when he realised the computer was on. A lull in the TV volume and he heard its low rumble. Haydn snapped out of another far too real daydream. He logged on to his email connection and waited for it to download his mail, considering how long he had been in hospital there should be quite a few. They would mostly be scientific and technical, he subscribed to various journals and magazines. He expected the usual spam type emails and messages from sites like the football team he supported. He switched on the TV he kept in the room and switched to the music channels.

As usual most of it was that black rap style music. He was not into it; it was not his culture. He glanced back at the screen, the emails were coming in. Eventually he found a repeat of 'Stargate' on Sky One; that would do. He heard the computer ring that tone to tell him it had finished receiving emails. He swung round in his chair and looked at the number in his inbox.

He stared at it for a few seconds. 84 messages! 84 messages! What was going on here? He quickly scanned down the list. He immediately noticed the expected ones: 'Spacealert'; 'Nature'; 'Sci. American'; Aston Villa F.C. and so on. There were also a few from friends asking how he was - the rubbish advertisements were also in there. But many of the emails he did not recognise at all. As he read through them, one by one, a feeling of dread grew inside him, a hollowness seemed to have entered him, his head soon began to ache down one side and he had to consciously try to relax his forehead. He tried to massage the frown away.

A horde of very strange and very worrying people had somehow got onto his email address. There was a consensus: what a great job he had done; death to the Islamic scum; the

murdering bastards; throw them all out of the country; send them back; true Brits should rise up and rid the homeland of the terrorist threat; kill yourself an Arab today. He had become an honorary member of some extremely dubious organisations. In one case a photograph of him had been incorporated into their home page. Haydn had to admit, it was very good, it really looked like he was there with them.

Haydn deleted all the unsavoury messages. He removed them completely from his computer. How had this happened? Well he knew that all sorts of things could be done these days, now, here was the proof. Or rather was. He began to wonder if his phone line had been similarly compromised. As he mused over this, he felt someone behind him, or perhaps something. He swiveled quickly around. There was the blurry light patch, hovering in the air in the middle of the room. He stared at it, rubbed his eyes, bashed the side of his head with a fist and shook his head violently. But it did not go away, it must have been reading the emails with him, he thought.

Yes, he thought. A blurry patch of light that no one else could see had been sharing his emails with him. It happened every day of course. He lunged at it with his arm - the patch swayed a little, as if a gentle breeze had wafted it – he had missed. Standing up, he was about to walk towards it, when it disappeared; not with a pouf, or any sound. Haydn inspected the area and the rest of the room, he could find no trace of it, just the vague sensation of a little extra heat. He went back to the computer and quickly fired off replies to his friends, he just told them, briefly, how well he felt. But he could not help turning around occasionally to check for his 'ghost'.

Haydn shut the computer down and went back into the living room. It was a close call, but he resisted the urge to check the back bedroom again, part of him was sure it did not want to find blurry patches of light 'dancing' about in there. His stomach was telling him two

things: he was hungry; he was scared. He decided to act on the former, and he would eat, no doubt while the latter ate away at him.

Later, he was channel hopping when the first call came.

"Oh! Mr. Gerrard! (It's him! It's him!)" To someone beside them. "We'd just like to say how wonderful you are. We do hope you get completely well again."

The next one was a mere, "Good on ya, mate!"

The third one more sinister, "The boys here would really appreciate it if you could come and give us a talk. You know, how it felt to shoot those fucking wop bastards."

Haydn debated with himself what to do for the best. It was going to be very difficult to maintain a facade of politeness if it carried on like this. He had an answer service on his phone. Time to use it. He let it handle all the calls after that; there were many and Haydn soon stopped playing them back. He thought about ringing Rowe, the Chief Inspector had given him his number. But he decided against it, perhaps it would all stop soon, a temporary blight and then things would return to normal. He would leave it. Any way he was pretty sure he would see Price in the morning, he could mention it then.

.....

Haydn was sitting up in bed. He felt like he had slept very little. The light of dawn was slipping past the edges of his curtains. He had become tired and gone to bed at a reasonable time. He was glad that he had been able to call over his thanks to the girls, when they finally came home. They had talked about all the fuss outside on the street and Haydn had warned them not to expect it to die down soon. Then the girls went to bed as normal.

Haydn stayed up for a short while, then with a final glance into the back bedroom he too retired. But he soon realised he was not going to get to sleep quickly, he tossed and turned.

Always in his mind he could see the email messages and hear those happy, but bigoted voices on the phone; his mind continually revisited the photograph with his doctored presence. He decided to lie on his back and keep his eyes open - he often found that when he could not get to sleep, if he tried to keep his eyes open then it worked the opposite way - he soon fell asleep. It also helped because he could not so easily see the images his brain was bombarding him with, it usually worked particularly well if he tried to keep his eyes focused on the numbers of his bedside clock.

But this had not worked tonight; Haydn was in a hypersensitive state. Any little sound: be it the creaks of his own house; or the bumps of next door; or any scrapes from outside. He was fully awake, and his senses concentrated on any stray noises he could not immediately identify. He had been like this before, in the weeks after the break-in he had often had nights like this. If he had not gone to sleep quickly, then he had been kept up by the noises of the night. Often, he had wandered the rooms of the house with a walking stick at the ready. Expecting to find villains loose in his property again.

Haydn should have got up and made a mug of tea. Watched the TV for a while. But he didn't. Now it was too late. They were here, and he could not move, he could not get away. When the first blurry shape appeared in his room, out of nowhere, he froze as he lay there. It hovered at the foot of his bed. He tried to press himself deeper into the mattress hoping the duvet would fold over and hide him. But it did not. Then his nerve returned, and he sat up. He adjusted the pillow behind his back, without taking his eyes off the blurry light.

Haydn was not really surprised when two more shapes suddenly appeared on either side of his bed. But when he tried to move and found he could not, then the fear surged through his body. In flashes he found himself running down a path, then jumping off a high wall, then struggling to grip a steep slope with his skis. All this and more flashed before him, then as

one shape to his side moved closer, he controlled his fears and managed to turn his head to face the shape.

Inside the blurry light he could see the figure once more. It held out the tube to him. He offered his arm; he had lifted it before he had even thought about it. As he received his medicine he looked to the other blurs. Now he could see the outline of shapes within, but they certainly were not humanoid. He stared and stared. But recognition eluded him.

How long ago that was, Haydn could not tell, he seemed to have been staring into nothing all night. He was not sure, but he seemed to remember going to the toilet at one point. The blurry lights had gone; but he could not remember when. He was not tired. His eyes were itchy. He clawed at them. It did not help. Some cold water would help, he thought. Getting out of bed he noticed the time was 6.16 and he knew he was not going to sleep anymore. Perhaps he had been sleeping with his eyes open. Or he had just slept but not registered it. He decided to go to the bathroom, then get dressed and go downstairs. If he felt sleepy at all later, then he would just nap on the settee.

As the cold water hit his face, he remembered the Psychologist was coming to see him today. Then, as he used the towel it hit him, a stream of images raced through his brain and he realised where he had been that night. The smells, the sounds, the touch, it all flooded his mind. He stood still, looking deep into his eyes in the mirror. He stood and stared. His hands gripped the towel. Then the sudden song of a bird outside snapped him back to the present. As he hung the towel on the rail, he knew that this was not good.

Chapter 10

Sergeant Sue Price parked the car outside Gerrard's house. The space had been kept by the local police. They were keeping the press in their place across the road. Price received only a cursory interest from the gathered media. She approached the sentry at Gerrard's front door.

"Anything to report?" she asked him pleasantly.

"No, Sir. It's pretty quiet."

"Is Mr. Gerrard up?"

"Got up around six, Sir. Offered us some tea," this with a smile to the Sergeant.

"How is he?" Price noticed the used mugs on the doorstep.

"OK, Sir. A bit tired looking. If you ask me, I don't think he got much sleep."

"Right, thank you." Price turned to go.

"You're not going in, Sir?" the sentry called after her.

"Not yet." Price got back into the car. She was soon reporting to Rowe. Then she waited.

Half an hour later another car pulled up behind her car. The hospital Psychologist got out and was immediately challenged by a policewoman, who was walking across the road towards her. Price left her car and strode up to the two women.

"It's OK, officer, the Psychologist here is making a routine visit to Mr. Gerrard." Price spoke loud enough for the press to hear. There was a short blitz of camera action and the TV cameras followed the Psychologist to Gerrard's front door. Price accompanied her. As they both entered, the Psychologist gave Price a curious look.

"I did not realise you were invited as well, Sergeant?" the Psychologist raised her eyebrows.

"Just a routine check. Making sure Mr. Gerrard is fine." Price smiled innocently.

Gerrard had opened the door slightly when they had rung the bell. He was on his way back to his living room. The Psychologist followed him. Price closed the front door and quickly joined them.

"I must say Mr. Gerrard that there is no need for the police to be here." She looked coolly at Price who was appearing to ignore her while looking round the room. Nothing had changed. She could see that Gerrard was looking a little tired.

"You look tired, Mr. Gerrard," the Psychologist noticed too. "I can come back at another time, if you wish."

"No, that's not necessary." He indicated the settee, "Sit down please. I just didn't have a good night. That's all."

"Couldn't sleep?" Price suggested.

Gerrard looked at her as if he was making his mind up about something, she thought. He's going to throw me out.

"Yes," he finally replied, "too many things on my mind. That's why I'm quite glad to see you, Sergeant, really." He turned back to the Psychologist. "You might be interested as well."

"Please Mr. Gerrard, can I call you Haydn?"

"That's fine...?" he gestured to her in turn.

"Please call me Holly." She smiled. First stage reached.

"And you, Sergeant, call me Haydn as well will you."

"Thank you, Sir, I will when the Chief Inspector's not around. If that's alright with you."

Haydn accepted with shared conspiratorial smiles all round.

"I'm having some tea," Haydn declared. "You, too?" he asked them. They both nodded and told him how they liked it. "Sergeant," Haydn was still going to refer to her in this way, "I'd appreciate it if someone could get me more milk."

"I'll see to it, Haydn." Straight away she went to the front door. As she came back, she could hear Holly and Haydn talking quietly in the kitchen. They did not appear unduly suspicious as she poked her head around the door. "Sorted." She told him.

"Thank you, Sergeant, now I was just telling Holly what I found last night. What has disturbed me. Unpleasant things, I think you'll agree. And uncalled for too, I must stress." Price was interested.

While the kettle boiled Haydn explained about the emails and the phone calls. He described some of them in detail. Holly shook her head in resignation. Price did not seem surprised. Haydn told Price how to work the answer phone service. She and Holly listened to a few recordings while Haydn made the tea and handed out the mugs. They went into the computer room, Haydn let Price click onto his email and they watched as more dubious messages appeared on the screen.

"I'm afraid Chief Inspector Rowe will need to see all this, Haydn." Price concluded. "The technical teams will have to be called in - there's too much here for us to ignore."

"I thought so," Haydn agreed. Even Holly was nodding her head as she turned her face up in disgust at one email. "But there shouldn't be any need to bother us in the other room," he indicated Holly, "should there?"

"I don't think so," Price said, "mind you, the phones." She reminded him. "I'll call the Chief Inspector now." She left and went out the front door.

"I'm afraid it's hardly ideal, Holly."

"True," she smiled. "But we'll manage." She smiled encouragingly and led him back to the living room. A brief discussion and they decided to wait for the arrival of the other

policemen. Holly asked if she could have a look around before they were swamped. Haydn told her to carry on. While she got a feel for how he lived, Haydn read the paper, another thing the police had delivered for him.

Soon voices at the front door alerted him to the arrival of Rowe and Willow. Haydn waved a hello at them. Price showed them the emails. Then she brought them through to listen to some of the phone calls. Rowe was completely expressionless, as usual. Willow made appropriate grunts and nodded. From their discussions it was clear that many of the names, of individuals and organisations, were known to them. Eventually the technical teams arrived. Willow met them and began to organise their work: one group started with Haydn's phone; another tackled his computer.

"You have probably gathered," Rowe was speaking. "That we are not surprised by these developments." He talked to Haydn. Not once did he say anything to the Psychologist. "Thank you for alerting us Mr. Gerrard and allowing us into your home to access this material. We will be able to collect useful information and evidence to help us with other enquiries." He gave one of his curt nods. "We would like to put a tap on your phone and make a few adjustments to your computer." Holly glanced at Haydn. "Routine surveillance methods, Mr. Gerrard," Rowe spoke briskly. "It would help us a great deal."

"Go ahead," Haydn gave it little thought. Holly studied him this time. Haydn wondered what his lawyer would say. Never mind, it was done now. He wanted to be seen to be helpful. He hoped it would go down well with Rowe.

"Thank you, Mr. Gerrard," the faintest of smiles from Rowe. "That will be most helpful." He shouted a go ahead to someone in the other room. "Right we will leave you in peace and get on with our job." He barely acknowledged the Psychologist. Rowe and Price left.

"He's a cold one," Holly remarked.

"Mmmm, yes he is, isn't he?" Haydn was thoughtful.

However, they were not left in peace. Various people, from time to time, came in and fiddled with the phone and its connection. Holly became irritated and complained to Rowe. He suggested that, if Sergeant Price stayed in the room with them, she would be able to handle anything else that had to be done. Holly was not happy. She hoped that Haydn would be equally unhappy. But he was not, in fact, he seemed to drift away often and not be aware of what was happening around him. Holly only had this time to talk to Haydn. She was far too busy the rest of the week, so, if she was to write her report then she would have to make the best of it. With another sigh she began again; but on a different tack.

"Tell me about your family, Haydn." The silence made Price look up. Haydn had shifted uncomfortably in the rotating chair at the table.

"They're dead." His voice was suddenly cold.

"How did it happen?"

"Accident. Cars travelling too fast on the motorway." A stiff shrug.

"How exactly did it happen?" Haydn was staring at his feet. He said nothing.

"Describe to me what happened." Holly persisted. A shuffle on his chair.

"Is it too painful for you?" Holly in a softer tone. "I would understand if ..."

"No, I can do it," Haydn interrupted. "I've done it before." He had, too. He put his hands together. "The family were on their way home from here," his thumb jerked to mean his house. "They were in two cars, travelling close to each other." He paused, a slight sniff. "Mam and Dad and one sister in front, my other sister and her children, my nieces, following behind." He rocked a little on the seat. "Some ... he made a throw away gesture with one hand ... "some joker jumped lanes ahead of them. There was a pile up." His hands clenched. "A lot of people died." He rubbed the tip of his nose with the side of a finger. Price could feel the effort in his control.

"How many people died that day?" Holly asked him.

"Sixteen on the road and another four at the hospital after," he answered quickly.

"So, twenty then. The same number as on the bus." Holly stated calmly. For an instant Haydn stared at her, confused, then he nodded.

"How long ago was it?"

"Five years and three months and ..." he looked to his watch, then he just stared at Holly. Price realised he knew it to the nearest day.

"And you know exactly how many days too." Holly pursed her lips slightly. Haydn's stare had a chill to it.

"Have you talked to anyone about it? The accident and losing your family, I mean." She kept her eyes on him.

"Yeah, loads of times." He tried to sound matter of fact.

"I don't mean with your mates down the pub. Although that has its uses," she conceded. "I mean to a professional, like myself."

"Well, there's not much point in there," he told her. "It happened. Nothing you can do about it. Life goes on, and all that." He rubbed his thigh quite vigorously Price observed.

"You now there is a support group specifically for that particular accident. Have you had anything to do with them?"

"No, not really." Holly waited and watched him.

"I did meet someone, once," he admitted. "She had lost people too."

"Did you talk?" a pause while Haydn moved on his seat. He stared at the floor.

"Yes, we did, briefly." His fingers were tapping on the other leg. "But it was very upsetting. For us both." He added. He looked up and Price could see his eyes were filling up.

"Too distressing still?" Holly asked him. "Too much hurt?" Haydn said something, but it was lost as he produced a tissue from a pocket and blew his nose quite loudly. He dabbed at

his eyes and blew his nose again. The tissue was put back in the pocket. Price could see that he had recovered his composure, although he resumed tapping his leg. He did not look Holly in the eye. But she kept her eyes on him. There was a silence that was becoming uncomfortable when Holly finally spoke.

"You are going to have to let it go, someday, Haydn." She said gently and leaned forward a little to try to see eye to eye with him. He lowered his head more and held his hands together in his lap. He said nothing. Holly dragged the silence out again.

Suddenly she asked, "Can you make another drink please, Sergeant?" Price was concentrating on Haydn so much she started at her mention.

"Sure. Same again?" Holly nodded her head. Haydn rocked his body from the waist up. As she made the drinks Price peeped out occasionally. Holly had reached out her hands to Haydn, placing them above each knee. She squeezed gently. Haydn responded by putting his hands, on top of hers. They were in this position when Price brought the drinks in. Holly indicated the table with her eyes and smiled warmly at Price. Haydn did not look up. It was a few more minutes before he broke the spell and lifted his hands. He blew his nose once more and wiped his eyes, then he lifted the mug and drank. His eyes met Price's eyes; his expression was uncertain.

"How do you feel today?" Holly started again. Haydn looked at her, uncertain what she meant. "How do you feel today, when you've been hurt and through a terrible trauma? No family to take an interest in you and to look after you. How do you feel? Do you feel lonely?"

Price noted that at the mention of being lonely Haydn's body visibly stiffened and he stared into Holly's eyes. "I have some friends. They'll take an interest. The police are keen," he smiled mischievously at Price. She could not help but grin back. "Besides, I'm on the mend and I've got to look after myself - nobody else will do it for me."

"I can tell you have had many friends, Haydn," Holly gestured, "looking around you can tell." He agreed with a vigorous nod. "But most of them are gone now. Lost touch, have you?" she seemed concerned.

"Well, you know, you move on. People move on. People get married, have kids." He shrugged, "Sometimes it's too easy to let people go." He looked at her. "And people change of course."

"Have you changed, Haydn?" they stared at each other. She pushed him, "For better or worse?"

He sucked on his teeth and then said, "Oh, I've changed alright and probably not for the best. I don't know." He seemed uncertain. "I've become more selfish, more insular if you like. I like to do exactly what I want to do." Holly nodded along to him. Price remembered looking at his bank records, they did not suggest he was selfish with his money; giving regularly to various charities.

"So, you are not a lonely man then?" Holly went back to it. Price felt Haydn bristle, his eyes narrowed.

"No, Holly. I am alone, yes, but not lonely. They're not the same." She did not respond this time. He continued, "If I want some company then I go out. I go out at regular times anyway. There's also the football. I go to the odd concert here and there." He smiled at her. "What's this all about?" his tone told Price he had had enough.

"Patients, whatever, heal quicker and better when there is family support, or active friends, to help," Holly told him. "People need other people to talk to, to get things out of their system with. To be happy with. To be sad with. To share things with, like their grief, their fears and hopes too. I am just a little concerned that your apparent isolation may be detrimental to a complete recovery."

Haydn gave a sceptical sigh. Holly was undeterred, "So as soon as it makes sense," a meaningful look at Price, "I would like to see you out and about. Being with people," she stressed.

"I don't think there'll be a problem," Haydn assured her.

"You may have to do all that in the glare of the press," Price asserted, "especially if the interest in this case does not die down."

"Which brings us to the business on the bus." Holly quickly glanced from Haydn to the Sergeant. Price did not try to hide her heightened interest, Holly noticed. "Are you ready to talk about it?" Holly tried to convey her concerns about Price's presence to Haydn. But he seemed to have drifted away again. Holly considered. This was the important part. She really did not want to leave without talking to Haydn about the incident. But it might be tricky if the Sergeant stayed and reported what Haydn said to cold Rowe. She wanted to get Haydn to talk about his feelings on that day and now.

"Wouldn't it be better if just you and I talked from now on?" she tried again. Haydn seemed to wake up. He looked over at Price. He was sure that it would be better if Price left. But then it was difficult to come to a decision immediately as a blurry shape of light was hovering right above Price's head. He stared at it.

The Sergeant could tell that Haydn was transfixed by something that seemed to be above her. She turned her head to look above. She could see nothing. Holly had also noticed where his attention was directed. She could not see what he was interested in. Price and Holly exchanged unaware looks. Holly thought it significant that at the mention of the incident Haydn had drifted off again. Then she remembered something from the hospital.

"Are you seeing the other nurse again?" she asked quietly. Haydn shot her a look, his face serious. He stared at Holly. Eventually he asked her, "Can you see something? Above the Sergeant's head?" Holly and Price looked again.

"No, Haydn," Holly replied, "can you?" he could still see the blurry shape. It was not the one who had appeared at the hospital. Holly and Price snatched another look at each other.

"Do you believe in ghosts, Holly?" Haydn suddenly asked. There was a silence. Haydn kept looking at the blur.

Taken aback Holly struggled to respond. She tried to answer a couple of times but did not finish what she was saying. Then the blur disappeared, and Haydn snapped out of it. He gave a deep, loud sigh. "It doesn't matter Holly." He smiled at her. Holly could see his attention had returned and keeping her attention on him she began to talk to him about the incident.

"What did you think when you saw the Arabs talking to the driver?" Holly had been given a rough idea of the events on the bus by Rowe, in fact.

"Well, I just thought, 'why have we stopped?' at first. I don't like it when we get delayed. Or, if we're late to start with. It's alright if the driver makes it up by the end. But they don't always do."

"But you have plenty of time in the morning. Don't you get to work an hour before you have to?"

"Yeah I do. But that's because it's much easier travelling at that time. Only quarter of an hour later and the bus has lots more people on it. I like to have my nap in comfort." He smiled. "And if I get to work early, I can usually leave earlier."

"So, did you feel annoyed with these men?"

"No, not really. As soon as the driver pulled off again, I was quite happy."

"How about the other passengers? How did they feel?"

"Oh, there was lots of comments. The black people don't like the Asians and Arabs much."

"What do you think about them?"

"Well, I hate the extremist bastards! Who doesn't?" it was the first time his language had slipped, Price thought.

"So, relaxed again."

"Yeah. But not for long!"

"The shooting started?"

"First, the shouting and yelling. Screaming really. I nearly jumped out of my skin. The woman behind me shrieked right in my earhole." He stopped. A shadow passed over his face.

"Then the shooting started," Holly reminded him. She leaned forward, closer to him.

"It was terrible. The noise of the gun." He raised his hands as if to ward off something.

"More screaming, much worse than before." He stared into nowhere.

"What can you see Haydn?" a quiet voice. Silence. Then he shifted his position again.

"The passengers, bullets tearing into them. Bodies bouncing around on the seats ... Bits of seats ... And bits of people flying through the air. The screaming. That bastard shouting and laughing." His voice hardened. "Fucking bastard!" Price saw Haydn clench his fists tightly. His body was quite rigid.

"What did you do?"

A strained laugh, "I fell off the seat. I tried to hide, you know, curl up into a ball."

Nervous laugh. His face had become drawn and he frowned. As if he was struggling to see himself.

"Then what happened?"

"Well the firing stopped. I thought I had made it. I stayed curled up. I couldn't open my eyes." He stopped. "But then I heard him walking, then shooting. Walking, then shooting." He looked at Holly. He was slightly breathless and his eyes wide. "It was the sly laugh that did it, I think. Something snapped inside. I opened my eyes. I could see him getting closer.

Suddenly, I knew what to do," he spoke faster, "I timed it right, chucked my bag at him and knocked him over." He shuddered as he felt the bullets ripping into him, knocking him sideways. He remembered feeling like someone had poked him hard with something nasty. He had cried out. Something, he could not remember. Price watched as he clutched his injured side. Holly kept looking at him.

"What happened next?"

"He hit the floor. He was going to shoot me. I could see his face and neck. I stamped down hard on his neck. He wriggled a bit and made a funny sound." He tried to mimic it for them, a rasping noise. "Then I stamped down even harder." He remembered the crunch as his shoe went through some bones. Then there was a pop sound. The man wriggled madly. His eyes were wild and gagging sounds came from him. "I pressed down with all my weight. I watched him die." Price could see his foot pressing into the carpet, a grim smile on his face.

"How did you feel?" Holly was barely audible to Price.

"It felt great!" Haydn's face was flushed. "He had dropped the gun at last and I gave him a kick in the side." He paused, "I shouted 'Bastard' at him."

"What did you do then?"

He paused once more. As if he did not want to leave that memory. A frown appeared then almost immediately it came to him. "The other one was still firing upstairs. I picked up the gun and moved to the stairs."

"You did not think about running away?" Haydn looked suddenly perplexed. It seemed to be the first time the thought had occurred to him. Confused, he stared at Holly.

"I didn't think about it," he sounded incredulous. "I heard the other bastard shout for his mate." A sly satisfied smile here. "I crept up the stairs. I could see him from under the seats, you know, his feet." He was speaking quickly now as if he wanted to finish the story. "I just pointed the gun, out from round the seats and fired down the aisle at him." He had another

grin to himself. "I didn't know what I was doing. I almost dropped the bloody gun!" he shook his head in disbelief. He did not wait for Holly, "I stopped firing and ducked back down a step or two. There was no sound from him. I peeped around and could see him slumped on the ground. I felt a great rush. I had got the bastard! I didn't think, I jumped up and charged down the bus towards him. I was screaming, I think."

Price caught him give her a quick glance. His chest was heaving as if he had just made the charge again. But he said no more. Holly waited.

"Was he dead?"

"Uhhh?" Haydn seemed to have drifted off once more. Price watched him very closely.

"What was that?"

"Was the second gunman dead?" Holly clarified.

"More or less." Haydn stared back at her. "He soon fell over ..." Holly was about to ask something ... "I gave him a good prod with the gun!" Haydn showed them with an action. He kept his eyes on Holly.

"How did you feel then?"

"Oh! At first, I was very happy. Then the pain hit me. I could see the blood running down my hands. I think I was a bit giddy. I dropped the gun and tried to get back down the stairs. But the blood made my hands slip. I couldn't grip. My side was really hurting. I could feel the sweat running off my forehead. I fell down the stairs and landed in a heap." He was clutching his side again. "That really hurt. I think I screamed out really loud." He stopped and suddenly Price saw that his face had a queer look on it. His shoulders hunched up and his head sank between them.

Holly had also noticed the change. "What is it?" she leaned forward, closer to him. His face was hidden, but she could hear muffled sobs, his shoulders shook. She put her hands onto his shoulders, "What is it Haydn?"

Price found herself leaning closer. Slowly he lifted his head. The tears streamed down his face; his eyes were awash.

"I pissed myself," he said in a breaking voice.

"I know, it must have been very frightening."

"No, I mean I pissed myself." She stared at him. "I was all wet and I could smell my piss." He stared into her eyes. "Piss and blood. I might have shit myself too. I don't know."

Chapter 11

Chief Inspector Rowe sat quietly in the chair. Price had just finished reporting Haydn's meeting with the Psychologist. There were only three of them in the room; Willow's head was buried in another newspaper. He was apparently uninterested in what Price had to recount. Rowe knew better, of course. Rowe steepled his fingers as he considered the information.

"What were your final impressions, Sergeant?" he asked.

Price shook her head uncertainly, "I'm not sure, Sir. I think all that business to do with his family was quite genuine. He was upset." She pondered again Haydn's performance with Holly. "It was that quick look he gave me, as if he was checking I was listening. He sounded very much like he was reliving it with her. He did not deny stamping more heavily on the first one. Quite relished telling us really. But there is something to do with the second one. Something not quite right. He did not elaborate about his death." She run out of meaningful things to say.

"He could be a brilliant actor," Willow's voice emerged from the depths of his paper.

"He could be," Price agreed. "He put his whole body into it if that's the case." She shook her head as if to deny something. "No, I just don't think it was an act. At least up to the point when he charges down the bus. That's the point when I think he was careful. Careful what he said and how he acted."

"Yes, I agree," Rowe sat forward. "That's the key point. What actually happened when he reached the gunman? I think we are all agreed that Gerrard is not telling the complete truth at that point." Price nodded while Willow made an unintelligible grunt.

"The latest from the hospital on the upstairs lady is a little encouraging. She is talking more to her family and the doctors. But has still not said anything about the shooting. I doubt we will have anything useful from her before the interview with Mr. Gerrard and his lawyer." He thought for a few minutes. Price waited patiently. Willow was apparently engrossed in the TV section of the paper.

"We need some more background on Mr. Gerrard," Rowe eventually stated. "I know that there is nothing untoward in his life, no connections with any dubious organisations, nothing to link him with any of the recent traffic on his phones and computer. He is not a known member of, or associate of, any criminal outfits. He does not smoke, and that includes dope, but he does enjoy a drink. The only vaguely dodgy things found in his house were a few bootleg videos of films and a soft porn video."

"Very soft porn," Willow interrupted Rowe. Price could not help but smile. Willow was an expert on porn.

"Thank you, inspector," Rowe continued. "Once he hooked into a fairly routine Japanese site showing half naked girls, and this was done through an oddball, but otherwise legitimate, alternative news web site in America."

"You would see as much in 'The Sun' or 'The Star' every day." Willow again.

"So, he is clean and inoffensive. Although he is known to be emotional at times." Rowe looked at Price. "Go to his local and talk to his friends, see if you can dig up anything interesting."

"Sir, can't the inspector do this one," she moaned. "I was hoping to get home early for a change." Willow tutted loudly. Rowe produced the thinnest of smiles and added, "Inspector Willow will accompany you, Sergeant." Willow stopped folding his paper, it was his turn to moan as he dropped the paper onto a table.

"You know you work well together." Rowe was firmly insistent. "It will not take all night." He rose and left the room. Willow and Price sighed deeply at each other.

"Come on partner, let's saddle up," Willow put on a mock American cop accent.

"I'm driving," Price told him.

"Hey! You always drive." He followed her out of the room.

.....

"You take the old ones," Price ordered Willow as they entered the bar.

"Yes maam!" Willow pulled at a nonexistent forelock. At the counter Willow asked for two cokes, one with ice, one without. They split up. Willow took a seat with the older men who laughed a little at his ID and joked with him. Price headed towards the three men stood at the end of the counter.

"Look out lads, cops!" one of them called out loudly as she neared them. Some people on a table behind them looked up and watched Price as she approached. She held her hands up in the, 'I give up', gesture. "It's a fair cop," she smiled pleasantly at them. They grinned at her.

"How could you tell? Am I that obvious?" she put her drink on the bar.

"Well, you do stand out a bit," a different one spoke. "But we were forewarned."

"Oh. Who by?" she looked around.

"Rich, here, spotted you," he pointed at the barman. Rich offered his hand and said, "Nice to meet you, I'm Rich the head barman." The man who had spoken up originally gave Rich a funny look. A few scurrilous comments were made by the group. Ignoring them, "I've seen you on the telly going into Haydn's house. That's how I knew you."

"I see," Price nodded. "I am Sergeant Sue Price," she introduced herself. "And you all are?" Rich did the honours.

"So, you are not the local cops, who are you?" the first man to speak, Pat demanded.

"Terrorist squad," Price told them gravely. Pat and Paul nodded as if they knew as much. John and Rich looked suitably impressed she thought.

"So, you've come to ask us about Haydn, have you?" Pat again. She just smiled.

"Want us to dish the dirt, huh?" John winked at her. Her smile widened, and she raised curious eyebrows.

"You mean there's dirt to dish then? Tell me about it." She smiled sweetly at John. He became a little flustered, especially under the glare that Pat and Paul gave him. Price laughed lightly.

"I doubt there's much dirt, is there?" she said. "We have investigated Mr. Gerrard quite thoroughly." The men settled for a nod in answer. "No, we've just come to find a bit more about the man. It will help us when we take the full statement from him." She knew that this did not sound convincing; the men exchanged dark looks.

"Come on!" she decided to press on, "he doesn't have a dark secret, does he?" she put more emphasis on the question this time. "You know, anything that has escaped the police? Or having an affair with someone else's wife? You know, that sort of thing."

"Definitely not," Pat was adamant.

"Can't see Haydn having an affair with someone else's wife," John was considering the possibility.

"Naah!" Rich shook his head. "Not Haydn. He wouldn't do anything like that." Paul gave them both a sorry look and shook his head in dismay. Beside him Pat could not contain a snort of derision.

"He's a good bloke, is Haydn," people behind agreed with him. "He's not done anything wrong that I know about." He insisted. "Help you out he would if he could. Nice steady bloke."

"Mind you, he can be a bit funny sometimes," John broke in. Paul and Pat turned to him, incredulous looks on their faces.

"What do you mean, John?" Price asked him.

"Well, you can wind him up over a few things," John warmed to the topic, oblivious to the hostility he was generating around him. "One time we had him going over whether men landed on the Moon ..."

"He's no different than any of us," Pat interrupted John. "We all have our foibles and things we're funny about. Don't we, John?" he said, heavy on hidden meaning.

"What's that Pat?" John was not quite with him.

"Well, you know perhaps you want to tell the Sergeant about that time we had you going over your tax returns." Paul, Pat and Rich combined to stare knowingly at him. Price saw the realisation dawn on John's face. His mouth fell open, but he snapped it shut. He gave Price a feeble smile and took refuge in his drink. Price smiled and glanced around to see how Willow was doing.

He was smiling and joking with the older men. There did not seem to be any tension between them. She turned back to her group. In the mirror she caught Willow sneak a drink from a half that was hiding amongst a group in the middle of the table. Sly old dog, she thought.

"So, Haydn's a decent enough bloke," she began to say. The man Paul shot her a curious glance. She realised what she had said. "He asked me to call him that when I was around his house this morning." She explained.

"That was when that Psychologist woman visited him?" Rich asked. The others seemed to have relaxed a little she sensed.

"Yes, that's right." She confirmed.

"How is Haydn?" Paul asked her. "We've only had a quick chat on the phone. He seemed alright." They concentrated on her.

"Well physically he's recovering really well." She assured them. "He came out of hospital a few days earlier than the doctors expected. The bullet wounds are healing, I think there's still a lot of soreness, of course, and stiffness." They nodded understanding. "He lost a lot of blood and the doctors have told him to take it easy for quite a few weeks. He's supposed to build himself up and just take it easy." She smiled reassuringly at them.

"From the sound of it," Rich said, "he's had most of the blood he's donated over the years, pumped back into him." Price thought a lot less than half, but she did not correct him.

"I bet he's glad he gave all that blood, I bet!" John announced.

"Somehow, I bet, he wished he didn't have to go through it at all." Pat told him pointedly. No one spoke for a minute.

"How about mentally?" Paul finally asked. "How is he doing?"

"Well, it's hard to say," Price was cautious. "It's been a terrible shock of course. And ordeal really!" they mumbled their awareness. "The nurses at the hospital said he drifted away at times. You know, as if he was lost in a daydream."

Some concern from them. "Have you noticed it?" Pat asked her. She nodded her head but did not give any details.

"Some daydreams, I bet!" Pat said with worry.

"I bet he goes over it time and time again." There seemed an obscene fascination in the way Rich said it. They all stared at him for a second.

"You don't get that sort of thing out of your mind," Paul spoke quietly and ominously. Nods all round. Price felt them watching her again. What did they want from her?

"What does the Psychologist say about him?" Pat asked her straight.

"Can you tell us?" Paul added. Price was aware of a sudden rise in interest behind her.

"Well, I don't know exactly what she thinks; I haven't seen a report yet." She would not be able to tell them anyway, she thought. "But I know that she's concerned because Haydn's suffered with the loss of his family before."

"I keep telling you he's never got over it! I told you!" Rich leapt in excitedly.

"Shut up Rich!" Pat snapped at him.

"What you're saying is that this, on top of his family ..." Paul said calmly but did not finish.

"I can't say anything." Price corrected him hastily. "The Psychologist just seemed concerned about both ..." She decided she had said too much.

"We're going to have to watch him," Pat told them. They all agreed.

"The Psychologist did say that the sooner he got out and mixed with his friends," she made a circular movement with her hand, "the better it would be for him." They almost all puffed themselves up with a kind of pride.

"But it's going to be hard for a while with all the press interest in the case." She informed them. "He's probably better off staying inside his house." They grumbled a little. Price looked at them, "You could go and visit him." But although they were friends, none of them had ever been in any of the other's homes. They were pub friends. Friends, nevertheless, but pub friends. After another quiet period Pat spoke again.

"Of course, you could help there, couldn't you? You, coppers." John and Rich looked uneasily at each other; Paul merely stared at his drink.

"What do you mean?" Price responded innocently.

"Well you could stop all these enquiries for a start and just leave him alone. It's clear to everyone what happened."

"Is it?" Price looked right at him, "What do you mean?"

"Well, it's an open and shut case of self defence, isn't?"

"I see." Price kept watching him.

"Haydn only did what anyone would have done to stay alive." A chorus of approval from the others in the bar. "You shouldn't be worrying yourselves about the finer points. Or every little detail. The fact is those Arab bastards shot up a load of our people and Haydn managed to stop them. God bless him! There isn't a man here who wouldn't have done the same. Or anywhere in the country for that matter." Some cheers in the room. Price looked slowly around the room. Most of the people met her eyes. Willow smiled mischievously back. "So why don't you lot just say that's that and let people get on with their lives," Pat had not finished. "It's only two bloody Arabs! Who cares! Fuck 'em! What about the people who lost their loved ones? They don't want a big fuss and investigation. They're just glad the bastards got what they deserved! You should just leave it now." Pat took a drink. Price said nothing, but she kept watching Pat.

"Then if you did all that the press would go away, wouldn't they!" Pat continued. "There'd be no story anymore. They would just piss off and leave Haydn alone. Then he could stop worrying."

"Do you think he's worrying?" Price was straight in there. "What do you think he's worrying about?" Pat gave Paul a quick glance. They sipped their drinks in unison she noted. A little tension was in the air, she felt it. They had talked about this before, she could tell.

"Have you spoken to Haydn about his worry?" she pressed Pat.

"No, I bloody haven't!" he shouted. His face was reddening.

"But you think you know what it is. Don't you?" she pushed again. Pat pulled himself up off his stool.

"Take it easy, Pat," Paul tried to calm him down. "Sit down." Price stared at Pat wondering if he would get violent, or would he be all shouting and 'I'm bigger than you'

intimidation. Pat did not sit down. However, he did bring himself under control, his face was still red though.

"Perhaps Haydn's worried that in this politically correct age, where robbers and rapists can do what they bloody well like." He spat the words out. "Perhaps he's worried that some fucking do-gooder is going to try and stick him for killing those fuckers." He was trying hard to control his voice. "I bet that's why he's got some fancy 'arse' lawyer. To stop him saying or doing something that others could pull him up over."

Pat seemed to have stopped. There were murmurs of agreement from the bar. Price finished her coke. The men were all drinking up and ordering more beer. She had to ask it.

"Does Haydn share your opinions Pat?" he turned back to her and smiled grimly.

"I'm the only racist here. If that's what you mean?" he answered honestly. "I'd like to see the back of the lot of 'em." Paul gave an embarrassed cough. Rich's look said, 'what can you do?'

"They're not all bad, Pat." John said quietly.

"And we're not all 'fucking do-gooders'." Price turned and left. Willow soon joined her.

"You say I'm a case!" John laughed at Pat. The others laughed as well. Paul shook his head. "I swear you'll get dragged away one day."

Outside, Willow climbed into the car, "How did you get on?" Price looked at him sarcastically. "No, really, did you get anywhere?"

"Some people have strong opinions," she said as they drove away.

"Yes, we are not going to be flavour of the month with the common people, if we find anything on Haydn." She knew he was serious.

Chapter 12

Haydn sat rigid on the settee. He stared out through the nets at next door. The lights had just come on. He could hear the cat flap moving in and out - the cats knew the girls were home. Haydn had decided that the flashes of light he had been experiencing were due to tiredness. He had had them before. The occasional burst of light right on the edge of his vision, out of the corners of his eye. Then there were the lapses in focus. It was as if his eye lens muscles just slackened now and then. It caused his near sight to blur while the outer fringes of his vision remained clear. He only had to blink and concentrate, and his view became clear once more. It did not worry him, in fact, after a while he went with the blurred vision, let it happen and enjoyed, if that was the word, the odd sight it offered him.

Haydn was less at ease with the muscle twitching. It was happening in the muscles surrounding his left eye and it felt that his eye was on a bid to break a world blinking record. But without the eyelid movement. He could feel the rhythmic spasms with his fingers. But when he looked in the mirror, he could only see the vaguest vibration in his upper cheek. But it had been going on for too long; it was annoying him now.

His appreciation of the passage of time was also disconcerting him. It only seemed minutes since he had sat down, but a glance at the clock and it told him an hour had passed. He struggled to remember what he had done that afternoon. He thought that he had listened to some music and watched a film on the TV; he could see some CDs on the table, so it made sense. Haydn felt he should get up and do something, what, he was not sure.

Suddenly he was somewhere else. It was dark. Lines of barbed wire stretched out in front of him. He was standing on a firing platform built into the trench. Either side of him the trench snaked away into the distance. He could see faint reflections of light bouncing off

helmets and guns. Troops stood waiting in the trench. He was one of the line of soldiers who stood on the firing platforms, their rifles at the ready pointed out from the trench, their eyes peering from under helmets that barely broke the surface of the trench. They waited. They knew the enemy was coming.

In front of them lines and lines of infantry were making their way towards them. At a signal they stopped and crouched down. Haydn had been watching them. He made a hand signal and it was immediately passed down the line both sides. The troops below him crouched into the very depth of the trench. A minute passed. Haydn realised his throat was dry. He tried to produce some saliva.

They heard the shells before they landed. The barrage lasted about ten minutes; Haydn estimated. He did not have a watch. The troops were used to being shelled, the ground shaking, the thunderous noise, the sound of shrapnel zipping past their ears, the smoke and dust blowing everywhere, the explosive flashes, the smell of the firing and the cries of the wounded and dying. Regularly, around them there was the dull thud of a body falling to the ground - a straight kill - no cry from the struck soldier - he was dead before he hit the dirt. As men were hit on the firing platform they were replaced from below.

Then it stopped and Haydn could hear the advance of the enemy infantry. The sound of their running reached them through the smoke, and they felt the vibrations in the ground. But they made no other sound. They did not cry out, nor did the troops around Haydn. They aimed their weapons into the smoky gloom. Great holes had been blown in the barbed wire and through these the enemy poured. As soon as he could see them clearly Haydn fired. All along the line the sound of rifle and machine gun fire greeted the foe.

Haydn was very deliberate. He took aim at one soldier and shot him. He did not waste a shot; every time he dropped one of them. He was calmly reloading when the sound of hand to hand fighting came from the trench to the left. Glancing around Haydn noticed new faces

had taken the places beside them; young kids, the light of fear in their eyes glinted from sweaty faces, they looked to him for leadership.

"Ignore the fighting in the trench, for now." He told them. "We keep firing to the front, for now." As he said this, he could see troops running below them to reinforce the breach. He aimed and fired. The new lads followed suit. The advancing soldiers in front of them fired back; they still uttered no sound, even as the defensive salvos cut them down; they kept coming.

Bullets punched into the top of the trench. Haydn ignored them. Except when a bullet threw out some dust or dirt that got into his face. Then he wiped his eyes, or he snorted or spat. The enemy was getting closer to their position. A bullet ricocheted off his helmet and his head jerked back suddenly. Next to him the new lad took one in the throat. Haydn heard that distinctive sound of a bullet cutting through flesh. A strangled scream accompanied the body as it fell off the platform.

Haydn continued firing slowly and accurately. A murderous burst of machine gun fire came at them from an angle. Haydn ducked under the parapet. But the other lad was not quick enough, and several bullets caught him in the face. Haydn could only see the bloody mess that was once his face as he was thrown backwards. Haydn noticed his helmet was knocked off his head by the bullets that had travelled through his face.

Haydn raised his head dangerously high above the trench and searched for the machine gunner. Finding him and his re-loader, he took careful aim. He felt two more people take the places either side of him. As they fired, Haydn coolly shot both his targets. Then he quickly ducked back as more bullets were fired at him. One took a small bite out of the material in his shoulder pad. The sound of fighting in the trench was getting closer. Haydn noted that there were no more soldiers left in the trench.

Facing front, once more, he took careful aim. The enemy in front of them had thinned out considerably. He fired all his bullets and was reloading when he glanced either side of him. A red-haired lad, without a helmet, fired too quickly and without careful aim on one side. A blond-haired woman kept her helmeted head well below the parapet on his other side. Haydn looked out. There were very few enemy left before them. He reached out and held the redhead's rifle.

"Hold it!" he shouted. The woman poked her head over the parapet.

"Take careful aim and fire," Haydn instructed them. Another of his targets fell. Either side they copied him. Soon no more enemy were moving in front of them. Haydn's fellow soldiers cried out joyfully. Haydn's sharp hand movement stopped them dead; the sound of fighting in the trench had reached them. Haydn jumped down as a melee of bodies almost fell around the nearest bend in the trench. A group of the enemy broke out and headed towards them.

The remaining troops on the firing platforms returned fire and joined Haydn on the attack. There was some indiscriminate shooting from both sides, bullets flew past Haydn but none of them hit him. However, a grunt from behind told him one of them had found a mark. The red head was hit in the leg. He stumbled to the ground. Haydn fired his remaining rounds into the enemy numbers. The blond stood beside him.

The clash of rifle on rifle, and bayonets clanging, resounded through the trench. Haydn smashed a woman in the face with his rifle butt - she fell like a stone. He dodged a lunge from a soldier, then bayoneted him in the side. A couple more rushed them and pushed against them. The blond slipped and was pushed aside. Fending off another stabbing lunge from his flank, Haydn took a couple of steps back. The blond was struggling with one of them on top of her. Haydn plunged his bayonet into the enemy's back; he stiffened as he was skewered.

A cry behind him and Haydn pulled his bayonet out with the help of a foot on the dead soldier's bum. The red head was frantically fighting off two of them. Haydn blocked one lunge with his rifle. He forced the rifle back over the man's head. As he did this the blond jabbed her bayonet into his side. She pushed it further, up, inside the ribs. But as Haydn felt the man's force lessen, he watched the other enemy push her bayonet right through the red head's body. He could see the metal emerge out of his back: bloody and glinting.

Haydn slashed at the woman. His bayonet cut across her throat. Her blood gushed out. Haydn heard another strangled sound and the blond stabbed at the woman to make sure she died. They both turned around and surveyed the trench. The fighting had stopped, there were no more enemy. Shouts and a whistle blew in the distance and then more of their own troops came running. Haydn and the blond took deep breaths.

A frothing noise came from behind them. They dropped either side of the red head. Blood was bubbling out of his mouth, his face was very pale, he managed a weak smile then died. Haydn stared at him. The blond took her helmet off.

"Well done! Well done troops!" an officer shouted as he moved amongst them. "Good job! The enemy will think twice before attacking again." Haydn watched the man - he was older than him - as he moved amongst the survivors, Haydn noticed that his eyes were dull and distant. He looked no man, dead or alive, in the eye.

"Thank you," a voice spoke. "You saved my life." The blond was grateful. A scar above her eye caught a ray of light. Haydn stared at her. He knew her from somewhere.

It was getting dark. Haydn could barely make out the clock on the wall. He got off the settee and switched the light on. He had lost another period of time and he realised he was hungry and thirsty. He went into the kitchen and began to prepare some food. After a few minutes, he noticed that his side was throbbing, it was still sore. He went around the house closing the curtains. The front room curtains had not been opened since his return from

hospital. He was about to sit down and eat when the phone rang. The police had advised him not to answer, let the system handle it. He could check afterwards and then return the call if he wanted to.

However, on an impulse he picked up the receiver. It was his lawyer. No, he had not checked his messages all day, to be honest, he told him. They had a short conversation. The lawyer reminded him that the cops would be listening, he just wanted to check Haydn was feeling OK and he would visit him soon. They had to run over a few things before they went to the formal interview and he gave his statement.

Haydn ate his meal and considered what to do for the rest of the evening. He was tired; however, he did not want to go to bed yet. He was not keen to go to bed, full stop, he thought. While he wondered what to do, he went to check on the back bedroom. He'd only done it twice today, as far as he could remember. Still undecided what to do when he came back downstairs, he peeped through the front curtains. He thought there were less vans and people out there. Hopefully all the fuss was dying down.

Opening the front door, a fraction, "Anyone want a drink?" he asked the policeman. He took orders for two teas and two coffees. It would give him something to do, he thought. Sitting still was not an option he would choose currently.

Chapter 13

Haydn had been restless again in the night. The officers outside his front door reported that he had been downstairs on two occasions. They had heard him wandering around rather aimlessly and muttering to himself. He had made no contact with them. They had not talked to him. Each time he appeared to go back to bed.

The big shock for Haydn that night occurred the first time he woke up. He seemed to have turned over in his sleep. More asleep than awake he barely opened his eyes and saw a face inches from his. It was old and familiar. The shock snapped him awake. His heart stopped, and he stared wildly at where the apparition had been. He freed an arm from under him and reached out to touch where it had been. It took him a while to settle down after that. He had to get up and check out the room. The face he recognised was that of an old friend who had been dead for a few years.

While making a cup of tea to help calm him down he became convinced that something was out in the back garden. He only just remembered that he was naked before he walked out of the back door. He rushed upstairs and quickly put some shorts on. The security lights had been on. He was certain of that. But a quick look around revealed nothing; just cats he concluded. The click as the kettle switched off halted his futile attempt to see the stars; it was too cloudy that night. He went inside and locked the back door.

A few biscuits with his tea helped return some calm to his emotions. There was nothing interesting on the TV and he was feeling sleepy once more, so, he went back to bed. Trouble was, he knew that as soon as his head hit the pillow the sleepiness would desert him. As he lay there, he wished the blurry shapes would appear. It would give him something to

concentrate on at least. But they did not come, and he took to trying to keep his eyes open and watching the clock.

He was not aware of when the change happened. The clock was not by his bed anymore. It was now part of an impressive control panel that hung in front of him like a ghostly projection. He knew that the actual working parts were in the cockpit somewhere, but to control his fighter all he had to do was touch the holographic projections shimmering before him. He constantly switched his focus from the near controls to the long distance view out of the windows. His eyes made the adjustment easily and instantly with the help of his space adaptive surround sense helmet. Very 'sassy' he joked to himself, a chuckle escaped his lips.

"What's that, Wing Leader?" an eager young voice in his ear.

"Take it easy," he answered immediately. Then added automatically, "red head."

"Another dream memory, Leader?" a woman's voice asked.

"Something like that, blond scar," he instinctively replied. "It was their turn to laugh.

"May I remind you, Leader, that we are meant to maintain minimal radio contact." A testy voice chided them.

"You are correct, old man." Haydn agreed. They cut their radios.

Haydn made a flight adjustment, his tightly gloved fingers touched some of the ethereal controls in front of him, his space fighter banked and headed towards an orange-red smudge in the distance. The other fighters of his squadron followed him. At the speed they were going it would not take long to reach the nebula. The onboard computer gave him an exact time in response to the request he had made on their synaptic link. Haydn flashed the data to the other fighters; his machine was the only one fitted with the synaptic link to the ship's computer.

Using the link, he flashed a reminder to the other fighters that they could see on their display panels, a reminder of the plan that they were to follow. He received

acknowledgements on his panel from them. The nebula now filled their entire view forward. They could now discern other colours amidst the orange red, there were slashes of yellow and blue, and darker blobs were streaming from the centre; not quite uniformly. Where they ploughed through the various expanding gas pockets, the shock wave produced rings of white. There were faint spokes of green that radiated out from the centre. The centre itself was largely hidden by clouds of dust; inside which was a pulsing neutron star.

The whole nebula was just over a light year in diameter, relatively small and relatively recent, therefore. At one edge hidden behind more thick dust clouds were two newly formed massive stars. Their youthful exuberance pumped out fatal levels of radiation; too much even for their fighters to cope with; but also, too much for their quarry. Anyone with any sense would stay clear of that part of the nebula. Haydn checked his course was matching the last known heading of the evacuation transport. He flashed another message to check all weapons systems. Inside the nebula normal communication links by radio were likely to be compromised. His synaptic link should hold up and the infrared connection they were currently employing. It would hopefully be a telling advantage for them. They needed it because they were going to be outnumbered.

Inside the nebula the structure and colour was no longer apparent, nearby there seemed to be vague wispy streams and only in the distance, clumps of dust stood out. But sensors had managed to identify what could only be rocky bodies. Perhaps too small to be called planetesimals; they were what they were seeking for. Then, there they were, the computer had put them on a screen for him. Haydn could see the signature of the evacuation transport. It was intact. Intelligence advised that the nebula raiders would want the transport in one piece. They had dragged it back to their base to make sure they had the time to break in without causing too much damage. They knew that the hunt for them was closing in and they aimed to use the transport to help them remove to another system.

Haydn's squadron needed to engage them before they realised that the transport was a decoy. It was not filled with evacuees from the Epsilon 6 planet split; just a voluntary crew of their co-fighters. Haydn flashed the order to accelerate to attack. The squadron altered positions so that now Haydn was at the base of a flying V formation. It would be his job to coordinate the attack. He would not be expected to indulge in the combat unless it got ugly.

Fortunately, they had taken the raiders completely by surprise. The first attack destroyed half their ships. Haydn noted that two of his fighters had strayed too close to the rocky body, the raiders had installed some guns on its surface which blew his fighters up. The squadron regrouped around Haydn and swung round for another pass. Haydn had flashed a message to the transport captain to make his escape, also, to prepare his special surprise package for the raiders. To help him do this the second assault concentrated on flushing out all the enemy ships near the transporter and the rocky body.

Unfortunately, this resulted in the loss of three more of Haydn's squadron. But the transporter had broken free and was making good speed away from the battle. As the squadron regrouped for the second time Haydn's computer alerted him to the fact that more enemy ships had taken off from the uneven surface of the lump of rock. They were massing on the far side. Haydn noted their large numbers. It was about to get ugly, he thought. He gave an order to the transport captain.

"Blond scar, I want you to take your flight and engage the enemy beyond the rocky body." He flashed the order to their panels.

"Red head and old man I want you to wait for blond scar to fall back to this side of the rock. Then you will go to their aid." The order was acknowledged. "When we have all their ships in action around the rock the transport will blow it. Be ready to withdraw." As his link silently informed them of the plan, blond scar's flight raced towards the rock. Haydn knew they understood it was a high-risk strategy - many of them would not come back from this.

But they knew the odds at the outset of the mission. The raiders had to be destroyed, utterly. If necessary, none of them would come back.

Blond scar and her flight were accomplished fighters. They flew right into the middle of the enemy ships. There was a tremendous fire fight. The lasers of both sides illuminated the rocky lump. Despite the weight of numbers against them they were blowing up three to four of the enemy for each one of theirs destroyed.

Eventually Haydn flashed the order to retreat and what was left of the flight flew around the rock and formed up again. The raiders pursued them, but Haydn noticed that only half the raiders' ships took up the chase. The others were held back. Haydn flashed to red head and old man. Their flights went to the rescue of blond scar. For a very short while the numbers were almost equal. Then when the raiders could see very few fighters were left at Haydn's position the rest of their ships were thrown into the battle.

Haydn let the fight continue for a while then the orders were flashed. His fighters disengaged and headed back as fast as they could. At the same time the ignored transport fired a plasma bomb from a disguised weapon's port. When it impacted on the rocky body the bomb initially burrowed through the surface. Then it detonated. The resulting explosion destroyed the rocky body completely and with it, every ship nearby. The fleeing fighters raced the shock wave; it overtook some, smashing them in the process. Haydn and the few fighters clustered around him were prepared for the buffeting of the now weakening wave front. They rode it out safely.

Haydn's computer showed him the aftermath of the wreck of the rocky body and highlighted the presence of a few raider's ships that had somehow survived the explosion. Obviously damaged they were limping away in the opposite direction. Haydn flashed signals. Immediately the remaining fighters in his squadron responded. They flew in a great

loop over the plane of destruction and in pairs hunted down the enemy. Not one ship would escape. The raiders would be utterly destroyed.

The cost was high. Haydn would have to find new flight leaders: blond scar had been finally blown up before the bomb was released; red head did not survive an ambush as he raced to the rescue; old man had not managed to outrun the shockwave in time. But the loss of these brave fighters would be offset by the huge numbers of settlers that would not now be preyed on by the raiders. Also, it would hopefully deter others who might consider behaving in the same way.

"There is a lot of good life in the galaxy; much more than bad life. Sometimes the good has to be expended to eradicate the bad." Haydn found himself saying aloud. He was aware of his room again. Blimey that was an off-world excursion he thought. Then he went into the computer room and opened the bedroom cupboard. Inside he kept his documents and his magazine collections. He began to search through the piles of astronomy magazines. He was sure that he could find a picture of that nebula.

Chapter 14

When Haydn finally went back to bed, he slept little. Eventually as he drifted in and out of sleep the shapes returned. Once more they took positions alongside his bed. As he became more aware of their presence, he noticed that he could see the forms inside the blurry outline more clearly. There was the humanoid to his right; on his other side a shape that was geometric, at its centre was a cube which continually changed into a sphere, this was the throbbing heart of the shape and out of it a series of regular polygonal discs revolved and gyrated; the shape at the foot of his bed at best resembled a jelly fish, a throbbing dome and dangling tentacles.

As the spectral blurs hovered and presumably conversed Haydn felt incredibly calm. He thought it was probably because he was now familiar with them. At one point his brain suddenly experienced a series of images ripping through his consciousness, just like in those films where they flash images very quickly in front of you. The pictures he saw were of alien worlds.

In one he was drifting inside an ocean. It completely covered the planet's surface. From his depth he could see the stars overhead, twinkling refractively. In another world he was one of many millions of similar pulsing geometric shapes, all gathered together, stacked in three dimensions for as far as he could make out. These images arrived in his brain in microseconds. The deluge of information produced a momentary stab of pain in the middle of his head. The shapes instantly stopped whatever they were doing, Haydn watched as they moved closer to him. He could feel their approach.

The blur with the humanoid shape within took his arm. Haydn succumbed to the relaxing effect. As he slipped into sleep, he sensed some concern from the shapes: the dome pulsed at

a higher frequency; the cube-sphere produced decagonal and even higher number sided discs which whirled around after each other. Haydn slept for a short while. When he woke, he knew he had to get up again. A walk around the house would help his mind clear, he was sure.

The failure of Haydn to show more than his head poking through the front curtains, or at the side of a barely open front door, along with the announcement of when and where the formal interview would take place, as well as the relentless march of world news, all these things meant that few press were left outside Haydn's house when his lawyer arrived. He did notice the police surveillance van, in position still. They were having their work cut out with all the cranks trying to reach Haydn. But he suspected they were enjoying it.

He reported to the officer in charge. He was expected, and Haydn opened the door and let him in. His first impression was how tired Haydn appeared. There were heavy bags beneath his eyes and his face was paler than when he had left the hospital. The lawyer noticed that Haydn rubbed his side from time to time as if it bothered him a little. However, his eyes were alert. He made them tea and the lawyer settled himself into the settee, making small talk.

He had prepared some documents for Haydn to read. These included possible statements Haydn could make after the interview. Which one they used would depend on the outcome of the meeting. The lawyer took Haydn through the events on the bus and together they tried to anticipate the questions Chief Inspector Rowe might ask. It was while they were doing this that the lawyer became aware that Haydn's concentration span was erratic. He often drifted away, eyes open and staring into the distance. He said nothing when he did this, but his fingers twitched and sometimes drummed on the tabletop.

"Are you having trouble sleeping at night, Haydn?" the lawyer asked him.

"Yeah," Haydn replied. "Not sleeping much at all really."

"Is it the things that happened on the bus?" the lawyer asked. But Haydn looked a bit vague again.

"Do you relive it or something like that?" the lawyer spoke softly, "all that killing."

"No, it's not that. I do think of that but not when I'm trying to get to sleep. No, it's these quite weird dreams I'm having. They're so graphic, so real, you know." Haydn looked intently at the lawyer. Should he mention the ghostly blurs? No, perhaps not, he would think he's mad.

The lawyer thought Haydn was going to say more but had then decided not to. "Do you want to tell me about these dreams, Haydn?" Haydn pondered the request, looking rather wildly at the lawyer. "It might help to tell someone, get them off your chest." It might also help him judge the state of his client's mind.

"Alright then," Haydn agreed. "Get ready for this." He then went into impressive detail about every dream; it took some time, but the lawyer listened carefully. He asked few questions, but he could tell that Haydn was holding something back. He occasionally made references to it but managed to stop himself saying too much. As he related his dreams the lawyer watched him very closely. He became more concerned the longer it went on.

"Haydn, you're keeping something from me." The lawyer told him after he had finished his recounting. They locked eyes briefly. But Haydn soon looked away. Now the lawyer noted that all the nervousness that was hiding just beneath the surface of Haydn showed itself - a tic appeared in his cheek, he wrung his hands. He tried to escape to the kitchen on a feeble excuse, but the lawyer followed him and continued to pester him.

"I must know everything that has happened to you, Haydn." He had him trapped by the fridge. "And everything that is happening to you." They stared at each other for a few moments; Haydn, a trapped creature. "You know Rowe is going to put pressure on you. I

need to know you can handle it, Haydn. Don't worry about what I might think," he softened his voice, "tell me."

"I keep seeing ghosts, or something," Haydn blurted out. "They're these blurry shapes of light really." They eyed each other. A desperation filled Haydn's eyes. It poured out and washed over the lawyer. "I've been seeing them since I first got to the hospital." The lawyer nodded at him. He remembered the imaginary nurse that Haydn had said he could see, according to the other nurses. "Tell me all about it." He took Haydn back into the living room.

Before he left Haydn, the lawyer explained his concerns to him. He was going to get the doctor to visit him and try to get the Psychologist back to see him. He would talk to the police, perhaps they could postpone the interview for a few days. But he did not hold out much hope of this, unless the Doctor or the Psychologist considered him unfit to be interviewed. This would also leave him exposed to the police sending their own experts to check his condition. The lawyer did not think that would help them.

Haydn agreed with him. He felt better for telling his lawyer. However, he could tell from the man's reaction - even though he tried hard to hide it - that he was worried about his client. A tension was rising in Haydn's body, his gut had tightened, his neck muscles were next. Haydn raised a probing hand to his nape as he watched the lawyer leaving.

Outside Haydn's front door the lawyer spoke to the guarding policeman who made a call on his radio and gave the lawyer an idea of how long he had to wait. The lawyer sat in his car and called the hospital. Luckily the doctor was available to make a call on his currently most famous patient and he would be there in an hour or so, he told the lawyer.

Inspector Price parked right in front of Haydn's front door. She got out and had a brief discussion with the policeman on guard. The lawyer opened his passenger door and

beckoned her to join him. A mildly amused look graced her face as she accepted his invitation and got into his car.

"Thank you for coming so promptly, Sergeant," he began. She nodded curiously. "I have just spent the best part of the day with my client," he informed her. Price seemed to look idly out at the remaining press. "I am concerned about his condition." Price's interest was there. "He is not sleeping well, and he seems to be very distracted. Not concentrating very well." He gestured to help him explain, "Keeps touching his side where he was shot." The lawyer, of course, would not say anything about Haydn's hallucinations, as he considered them to be. "I have asked the Doctor to come and have a look at him. He says he will be here in," he checked his watch, "about thirty minutes. I have also left a message for the Psychologist to see if she can visit him again." Price was now considering the lawyer very carefully. "But her secretary tells me she is very busy and cannot come for a few days, at least." He paused and then added as nonchalantly as possible, "Unless it is an emergency."

Price kept him waiting for a reply. "Is he having nightmares?"

"No!" the lawyer responded very quickly. "No, not nightmares. And certainly not about the incident on the bus." He looked at the Sergeant who did not look convinced. "I asked him about that, but he assures me that is not the case. But he is preoccupied by other things." The lawyer explained. "I feel he might need some extra help and time to get back to his best."

"Some people never get over this kind of trauma," Price said in a matter of fact tone. "Being shot and shooting other people is not a normal day, even for those of us likely to be more exposed to that kind of thing." The lawyer nodded. "Are you asking us to delay Mr. Gerrard's interview? Because that would be very difficult to do."

"I think we should see what the doctor has to say, and perhaps the Psychologist." The lawyer said. "It might prove to be advisable to wait for Mr. Gerrard to recover his strength more."

"Well, let's wait and see what he has to say shall we," Price told him, "and then we will take it from there." She got out of the car and before she returned to her own, "You might like to know that the lady who survived upstairs continues to improve."

"That's good news," the lawyer lied. "Her family are no doubt relieved."

"Yes, I believe so," Price walked away. Perhaps, much more than you and Gerrard she thought.

The doctor was late. But eventually he was entering Haydn's front door behind the lawyer and Price. Haydn looked better to the lawyer. An improvement in the last hour or so. Price thought Gerrard looked a man under strain, more tired and wan than when she had last seen him. The Doctor thought he looked OK. Compared to some of those in the hospital Haydn looked fine. He gave him an examination. Price and the lawyer watched. The doctor changed both Haydn's dressings while he was there.

As he examined him the doctor talked, asking Haydn various questions. He was aware of the different tensions in the room. He could tell that Haydn was holding back. He finished the physical side of his examination and insisted on the lawyer and the Sergeant leaving him alone with Haydn; they left grumbling together. The doctor escorted them to the front door. They waited outside for him to finish. He took his time.

Finally, he emerged and consulted with them. He thought that Haydn looked a little tired and drained. He had given him something to help him sleep. His wounds continued to heal and were no cause for concern. He did show typical signs of suffering some post-traumatic stress disorder. However, he did not feel that Haydn was incapable of undergoing the interview, if it was not too long or intensive, he could not see a problem. He did feel that the

Psychologist should have another session with Haydn, and he would urge her to visit him as soon as she could. Then he left them standing on the pavement.

"Of course, if you still feel Mr. Gerrard is not fit to be interviewed," Price informed him.

"Then we would have to bring in our own people before we could sanction that."

"No, I do not see the need for that," The lawyer replied. "Well, I will just have a last word with my client, and I will see you at the interview no doubt, Sergeant."

"No doubt." Price headed to her car. She soon informed Rowe of the doctor's verdict.

Chapter 15

What did he dread the most? Haydn could not decide. Lying in bed waiting for sleep. Knowing that the dreams would engulf him when sleep came. Or the sudden realisation that he had lost another hour as he 'woke' from a daydream; usually as he sat in the living room. The pills the doctor left for him had been no use at all. The funny thing was that he really did not feel very tired - he looked it, no doubt about that. Every time he looked at himself in a mirror, he appeared more drawn and bleary eyed with monstrous bags, the highlight of his face. But despite looking sleep deprived he was not tired in his brain. He yawned and stretched a lot, but his brain was buzzing.

The computer room floor was almost covered with magazines, all of them opened at a page where he had found a significant photograph or image. There were nebulas, star patterns, galaxies and imagined planets and their attendant moons. Many of them close approximations to the images from his dreams, waking or not. His recent dreams had all taken place away from the Earth; in them he had wandered the galaxy, always fighting an enemy. There had been losses and he had been injured, but many lives had been saved and much good had been achieved. He felt quite proud.

"Jesus!" he shouted out aloud. These dreams were really getting to him. He was beginning to believe they had actually happened. "I'm a nutter." He added to himself. Shaking his head, he went to the kitchen to make more tea. As he listened to the kettle heating up, his mind roamed again and he could see various space vessels: fighters, troop ships, transporters, battle cruisers, cargo caravans, research clippers and so on. He could fly every one of them. He saw their control panels clearly. Then he could see the equipment:

weapons, lasers, blasters, analyzers, translators, repair tools and so on. He knew how to use them; he could feel them in his hands.

The steaming kettle brought him out of it. He made a mug of tea and sat back down in the living room. There must be something worth watching on the TV. He was despairing of finding anything worthwhile when once again they returned. All three blurs suddenly appeared in the air before him. Haydn lunged out at them with his arms - it had become a game to him - he tried to feel if they had any substance. Normally the blurs merely evaded his grasp, but this time they did not move. Haydn had slashed through two of them before he realised what had happened, then more carefully he probed all three blurry light shapes.

It looked like he was poking his hands through some smoke. But each time he did it, it felt a lot different: he felt a sensation of static, the hairs on his hands stood up, the tips of his fingers tingled, and a faint glow shone out of them. He could see the shapes inside again. But his hands were prevented from reaching that far in to be able to touch them. It was all quite weird. However, the wondrous thing was he could sense them. He was receiving their thoughts, or was it memories?

He felt himself effortlessly moving in a shallow ocean, staring up at a starry sky above the surface; he was going to break that surface one day. Then he was in a great throbbing mass of blocks, all pulsing vibrations and gyrations; he was passing a message on with his changing discs. The more humanoid shape showed him a world darkened in ruin. Great damage had been done to its surface, its cities were flattened, their blackened remains smoking. The ground itself had been scoured clean of any soil, leaving bare, ravaged rock exposed and the atmosphere was dying, choked by the debris of destruction.

Each sensation Haydn felt produced a response in him. Eventually he withdrew his hands. He stared at the fingertips as they gradually lost their glow. The blurs seemed to be conversing. Haydn thought he could sense some of their communication.

"As I feared the process has advanced too far, too soon." Humanoid.

"It is very unusual." Cube-sphere.

"But not unknown," Humanoid. "He is even beginning to understand us."

A pause while they verified Haydn's awareness.

"He has glimpsed the ancient cube stacks." Cube-sphere.

"And the end of my home world." Humanoid.

"And the ocean and star longing of my kind." Jellyfish confirmed.

"We must make sure that the process is slowed," Humanoid. "Until after this interview. If he is detained elsewhere, for whatever reason, we cannot hope to complete the transfer."

"A number of situations have yet to be experienced," Cube-sphere. "He must be placed in these predicaments before he can be judged worthy of the offer."

"We will restore a little to him. Enough to enable him to survive this pressing problem on this world," Jellyfish. "Then we must press on with the process. I feel he will join us when the time comes."

Haydn was aware of them considering him, assessing, rating him. Then they were gone. He immediately fell asleep. He slept properly for the first time in quite a while. No dreams. No waking up regularly. Just a long, deep, forgetful slumber. Finally, the persistent ring of his phone woke him. Why wasn't the answer service working?

.....

"We rang him. Well Paul rang him, and I listened." Pat was holding forth. John and Rich were keen to hear what he had to report. Paul contented himself with a noise of endorsement. "I think we woke him up. He was a bit ratty to start with." Pat chuckled. "Kept saying that we'd spoiled the best sleep he's had in ages." More chuckles from Pat.

"He wasn't kidding," Paul told them seriously.

"Any way he kept going on about not having any funny dreams for once," Pat continued quickly. "We let him sort himself out and then he was fine after that. He says the wounds are healing really well." Murmurs all around welcomed the news. "I don't think he's looking forward to the interview much."

"No, he seemed a bit worried about it," Paul agreed.

"But it seems this lawyer bloke's very good, so he thinks there shouldn't be too much trouble." Pat told them.

"Did he say anything about what happened on the bus, Pat?" John asked. "You know, did you talk about the shooting and the killing?"

"No. He said he didn't want to, and he couldn't anyway." Pat answered.

"I said, 'is that what your lawyer says?'" Paul recounted. "And he said 'Yeah, and you never know who's listening these days do you!'"

"We reckon the phone's tapped," Pat said knowingly.

"Well that's obvious from what the cops said." Rich shook his head at them. "You know when they said he had been receiving calls from nutters and that they would trace them in the future."

"Anyway, he wasn't saying much," Pat ignored Rich. "We got him to promise to come in after the interview business is out of the way. He sounded tired but he's alright I reckon." Pat sipped his drink.

"I told him to take care of himself," Paul said. "He said 'that's what the lawyer's for'."

"I told him that everyone's behind him," Pat added. "He's not to worry there'll be a bloody riot if they try to stick him with something." Sounds of approval from the others.

"Well, we'll see how he gets on, it's tomorrow isn't it?" John knew the answer.

"Yeah, I'll be watching in 'ere." Rich was quite looking forward to it. "Another round?"
He pointed to their drinks hopefully.

.....

"Everything ready for tomorrow, Sir?" Price poked her head around Rowe's open office door.

"I believe so, Sergeant." Rowe was standing by the window, staring out. "We have the statements of the witnesses, signed up to date. The latest forensic evidence, as you know, is quite revealing. You believe Mr. Gerrard to be feeling the strain. I think we can put some pressure on him, then he might tell us the complete story." Rowe did not sound triumphant in any way, as usual his face betrayed no emotion.

"What happens then, Sir?" they had been over this before. Rowe turned and walked back to his desk.

"Sergeant, you know very well that I can only present our evidence to the Prosecutor and advise on a course of action. The decision is his."

"Yes, Sir." Price did not feel that Rowe was out to get Haydn. He just wanted the truth from him. Although not immune to political sensitivities, Rowe was his own man.

"Good night, Sir."

"One last thing, Sergeant. You are sure that the Psychologist will not see Haydn before the interview?"

"Pretty sure, Sir, but I will check in the morning."

"Good. Well good night Sergeant."

There would be another media scrum outside the station and then after that they would have Haydn and his lawyer to themselves.

Chapter 16

The day of the formal interview had arrived. The press had returned in numbers and were waiting across the road from Haydn's house. His lawyer had decided that they would accept the offer of the Chief Inspector, they would be driven to the local station in a police vehicle. He reasoned they would be better protected from the media crush that way. They would be able to drive straight into the station compound and avoid the heaving mass of reporters and camera crews camped at the station's main entrance. The lawyer had prepared a short statement that he would read out once Haydn was inside the station.

The lawyer parked his car close to Haydn's house. He walked slowly to his client's door, answering some of the questions shouted at him from across the road. The policeman had rung Haydn's bell and the door opened as he reached it. He slipped inside. He was pleasantly surprised by Haydn's appearance. Obviously, he had managed to sleep properly since he had last seen him. Haydn looked less drawn, there was more colour in his face and he seemed more 'with it'. The lawyer was happy. It would be better if Haydn appeared rested and relaxed. Also, he needed to have the strength to face down the enquiry. The lawyer beamed a fresh feeling of confidence at Haydn. For his part Haydn projected a determined attitude. The lawyer quickly went over, again, the key points with Haydn. His client nodded, his eyes clearly conveying his understanding.

The doorbell rang. They shook hands as if to cement their resolution. Then they made their way out of the house. Haydn left a spare key with the policeman. They were going to restock his kitchen while he was away. Sergeant Price was waiting for them. The same car had brought them from the hospital. A flurry of press activity accompanied their departure. Soon Price was driving through the station side gates. The reporters and cameras were kept

at a distance. Haydn and the lawyer walked purposefully behind Price into the station. They did not acknowledge the shouts of the press or the crowd of bystanders.

Price led them to a small room. "If Mr. Gerrard would wait here, I will take you to the front door, Sir."

"Thank you, Sergeant," Haydn said. "Will you be taking us back too?" Price smiled and replied, "More than likely, Mr. Gerrard." She ushered the lawyer out of the room. A female officer entered. "If you need anything, Mr. Gerrard, just ask the officer." Price was gone. Haydn had deliberately not drunk many cups of tea or coffee at home. He had decided that having a cup to hold during the interview would give his hands something to do.

"Would you like a cup of something Sir?" the officer asked.

"A cup of tea would do nicely, thank you," he smiled at her.

"Coming right up, Sir." She left. Seconds later Inspector Willow entered and checked the equipment on the table in the middle of the room.

"And how are you feeling today, Mr. Gerrard?" he asked Haydn as he tested the recording apparatus.

"Much better, thank you, Inspector." Haydn smiled again.

"Recovering from those bullets? Wounds healing?" Willow looked concerned. Haydn had not remembered the man looking directly at him before.

"The doctor's happy. So, I'm happy." Haydn tried to sound cheerful. Willow grunted something. "Of course, it's still sore, you now, here." Haydn touched his side. Willow watched him. Then staring right into Haydn's eyes, he said, "I expect it is, you're very lucky to be alive, Mr. Gerrard." Haydn smiled almost ruefully back at him. He said nothing but thought, 'yes if I had not fought back, the doctors would have had no one to save.' Willow left the room when the officer returned with Haydn's tea.

At the front door the lawyer read the brief statement. His client was very happy to give his evidence to the enquiry. They hoped that once this was concluded, today, then he would be left to complete his recovery. It had been a dreadful and frightening ordeal. His client wished to express his condolences to those families who had lost loved ones. They knew that it would take time to fully recover, if indeed it would ever be possible to make a complete recovery. He asked again that the media would give Haydn some latitude. He reminded them of their commitment to give only one press interview. The money from which would be donated to the victims' association that had been founded recently. His client wanted to thank all the kind people who had expressed their best wishes to him, in whatever form.

He was then happy to answer a few questions. Yes, it was true that Mr. Gerrard had found it difficult to settle at home. But this was to be expected. The doctors were happy with his progress. Yes, a Psychologist had met with him on two occasions. This was typical treatment for people who had survived terrible traumatic events. Yes, the process was ongoing. He expected Mr. Gerrard to have many more meetings in the future. No, his client did not sympathise with the extreme views being purported by some people. Mr. Gerrard did not wish to get involved in any kind of political or philosophical discussion to do with the atrocity.

Then he came back inside the station. Chief Inspector Rowe refused to say anything at this juncture. But he did say that a statement from the Prosecutor's office was very likely after today's interview with Mr. Gerrard. Rowe and Price led the lawyer back to the room.

"Everything's fine," the lawyer assured Haydn as he sat down beside him. He began to produce the papers he would need. Haydn smiled a little grimly. The female officer remained in the room. Soon Rowe and Willow sat down opposite them, Price took up a position where she could monitor the recording equipment. Rowe and Willow laid many files and documents on the table before them.

Rowe cleared his throat and began proceedings. He handled all the formal introduction that was necessary before the questioning could begin. Haydn and the lawyer answered a few questions identifying themselves. Haydn could feel a nervousness growing in him. The lawyer gave him a quick smile. He had told him that it would be an edgy affair. It was something that they had to get through. Then Rowe began in earnest.

"Mr. Gerrard can you tell us when you first became aware of the gunmen on the bus?" Haydn noted that they were no longer gentlemen. He suppressed a smile. He started to give his evidence. Occasionally Rowe interrupted him, seeking clarification. Haydn described what happened up to the point where he had jumped out at the gunman.

"You claim you were shot at that point, Mr. Gerrard?" Rowe's voice never carried any emotion. But there was something about the question which irked Haydn. Of course, he had been shot then. When else had it happened?! but he replied calmly.

"Yes, at that point. Here and here." Haydn indicated his wounds.

"Why were you not knocked over Mr. Gerrard?"

"I'm sorry?"

"People shot at such close range would be knocked backwards by the force of the bullets." Rowe explained.

"Oh, I see. Well, I don't know why." Haydn shook his head gently. "Perhaps it was because I was moving forward at him. It did spin me round a bit." He tried to demonstrate, sitting in the seat. Rowe and Willow watched impassively. In fact, Haydn thought, Willow had gone back to his completely uninterested in everything face.

"You say that you threw your bag at the gunman and that knocked him over?" Rowe had opened one of his files.

"I don't think the bag knocked him over. My momentum carried me forward and I barged into him. My shoulder hit him because the bullets had spun me round." He demonstrated

again, in his seat. Only Willow was watching. Haydn glanced at Price. She hardly smiled back at him. Haydn felt her gaze all the way through the questioning, rarely did she look elsewhere.

"Can you remember where your bag hit the gunman?" Rowe asked.

"Yes, I can, it hit him in the face. The edge of the bag, I think caught him just here." He ran his fingers across his forehead, above one eye, and down the side of the eye.

"There, would you say?" Rowe showed him a photo of the gunman. His finger touched a bruise clearly visible around the man's eye.

"Ah. Yes, I'd say that was it." Haydn studied the photo. The man was laid out on a table somewhere - the morgue Haydn thought. The man was naked. Haydn thought how pale the body looked; despite its natural colour. The face was particularly colourless, except for the bruise around the eye. Then Haydn saw another uglier looking bruise on the other side of the man's face. It spread from the chin along and under the jawbone.

Haydn looked to the man's neck and saw the damage his stamping had produced there. He also noted the bruising of the ribs where he had kicked him after he was dead. The gunman looked quite thin and puny laid out on the table. But Haydn knew that deep inside he was glad he had killed this man and he could not contain the smile that was in his eyes. However, he had not given the man this other bruise.

"Yes, forensic confirm traces of the man's skin on the edge of your bag." Rowe showed Haydn a picture of his bag. The lawyer had leaned forward to get a better view of the photos. He nodded at Haydn.

"You say, Mr. Gerrard, that the gunman fell to the ground, but still kept hold of his weapon?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"As he lay on the ground, he pointed the rifle at you?"

"Well, as he fell, he turned it towards me actually."

"You were able to notice that, Mr. Gerrard?"

"Yes, I did." Haydn stared at Rowe and Willow and, as if to back himself up, he nodded vigorously.

"What did you do then, Mr. Gerrard?"

"I stamped down on his neck." Price noticed that Haydn again tensed his body and pressed his foot into floor.

"Did you stamp just the once Mr. Gerrard?" Haydn flashed a look at Price. She stared right back at him. She had heard him describe to the Psychologist the sound the gunman made.

"No, I stamped twice, really hard." The lawyer gave Haydn a warning look. Haydn saw it and barely moved his head in acknowledgement; Rowe and Willow also saw it.

"Was it your intention to kill the gunman, or just disable him?" Rowe asked evenly. Haydn did not reply immediately. Out of the corner of his eye he saw his lawyer fiddle with his pencil, but he was careful not to look at Haydn. Rowe and Willow were both eyeing him. Neither face expressed any emotion. To his side he sensed the intensity of Price's stare.

"I'm sure I didn't think about it like that." He replied. "I saw him point the gun at me and I just lashed out. I was sure he was going to shoot me. I stamped as hard as I could." He stared back at Rowe.

"Forensics, having examined your footwear, can confirm that. The mark or print of your shoe can be seen on the man's face." Haydn looked more closely at the photo. The lawyer joined him. "Also, they confirm that you made two stamps with a great deal of pressure each time." Haydn and his lawyer merely stared at Rowe. Neither of them made any kind of gesture.

"Did you realise that the man was dead?"

"I was pretty sure. He made some awful noises."

"You did not check his condition?" Haydn looked unsure.

"You did not check his pulse or breathing?"

"No, I didn't," Haydn could not hide the disdain in his voice. "I gave the bastard a good kick. In the ribs there." He pointed to the photo. But then it hit him, what he had said, he tried not to look at his lawyer. Rowe was impassive as ever while a brief smile raced across Willow's face. Price and the other officer shuffled about slightly, but they did not seem unduly concerned.

"I'm sorry Chief Inspector but I'm not sorry the man is dead." He shrugged his shoulders.

"What about the other bruise on the gunman's face? Another of your kicks?"

"No. I didn't do that." Haydn was definite. "The one in the ribs yes, but not that one."

"You are sure, Mr. Gerrard."

"Quite sure, Chief Inspector."

"Surely your forensic examination of my client's footwear will show this, Chief Inspector?" the lawyer spoke up. Rowe eyed him calmly.

"It is not entirely clear whether the bruise is the result of a kick or a punch of some kind."

"I see." The lawyer's eyes smiled at Haydn.

"Either way, I didn't do it." Rowe put the photos back into the file.

"Who did do it, then?" Haydn asked Rowe.

"No need to concern yourself, Mr. Gerrard." Rowe produced a rare smile. Haydn said, "OK" and let it go.

"The gunman lay dead at your feet. What did you do next, Mr. Gerrard?" Haydn described how he heard the gunman firing upstairs. He took the rifle from the dead man. Very carefully he crept up the stairs. He demonstrated how he held the gun as he climbed the stairs.

"The gunman had stopped firing at this point?" Rowe had swapped his files around, Haydn noticed.

"Yes. By the time I got to the bottom of the stairs he had stopped." Haydn paused, for the first time Price thought he had slipped back and was experiencing it for real again. Everyone turned their eyes to him. He was sat in the seat with his hands before him, as if he was holding the gun still. The lawyer touched his arm gently. Haydn glanced quickly at the lawyer; he was back.

"What was the other gunman doing?"

"I don't know." Haydn answered. "He was shouting something. Shouting for his friend. I'm pretty sure of that."

"Was he moving?"

"I didn't hear him."

"You moved up the stairs, what did you do when you reached the top?"

"I took a deep breath and looked around under the seats. I could see the gunman's feet further up the bus."

"How did he not see you, Mr. Gerrard?"

"Well, the seats were in the way, obviously, good thing, too, I expect!" Haydn failed to get any response from them.

"What did you do then, Mr. Gerrard?"

"It seemed very quiet. The gunman still hadn't moved. I think he was listening, wondering what was happening downstairs. I just thought 'you've got to go for it'. I was going to roll across the floor like they do in the movies. You know and shoot up at him." Rowe and Willow just stared at him. Haydn gave a shrug.

"But you didn't do that. What did you do, Mr. Gerrard?"

"I just poked the gun around the seats and fired down the aisle at him." Haydn sounded disappointed in himself.

"Let me get this right, Mr. Gerrard. You were still on the stairs. The gun was, what? About half a foot, say, off the floor?" he held his hand out over the table to illustrate the distance. "You fired more or less down the aisle, between the seats, at the gunman?"

"Yes, that's right."

"How long did you fire for, Mr. Gerrard?"

"Oh, I don't know. Must have been a few seconds."

"How many? Roughly." Haydn went through the motions, acting it out with his hands. He was counting under his breath.

"About three seconds. I didn't think I had it under control, so I stopped."

"Have you any idea how many bullets you fired in that time?"

"No. It seemed a lot."

"Did you not think you might hit some of the passengers?"

"I ... I ..." Haydn hesitated.

"Did you notice any of the passengers when you looked out?"

"I saw people on the floor. It was just like downstairs."

"Did you notice if any were sat in their seats before you started firing?"

"I ... I can't say I did." Haydn was shaking his head, bowed slightly. "I just saw the gunman's feet and knew I had to shoot him."

"How did you know they were his feet?"

"Well, they were the only feet in the aisle, standing in the aisle. I mean anyone else would have done what we did downstairs and hit the deck." He looked at them for support. But they watched him curiously. Price realised that Haydn had made no mention of the upstairs lady at any time. Had he just not noticed her?

"What happened when you stopped firing?"

"I ducked back behind the top of the stairs. Then I heard a slumping sound and a low moan." Price concentrated on Haydn again. "So, I chanced a quick look. I could see the gunman had fallen to his knees. And I could see he had dropped his gun. I got a rush of blood," he sneaked a look at Price. She was watching him closely. "I charged down the bus. Shouting as I went, I think." He gave them a rueful grin. No response. Even Price's face was stony.

"You did not fire as you charged, Mr. Gerrard?"

"No, I didn't."

"Why not?"

"Well, the gunman's head was down, on his chest," he demonstrated again. "His gun was on the floor. I just didn't." There was a pause. "I don't know why." The lawyer looked sharply at Haydn. This was the important part coming up. Was Haydn up for it? They exchanged meaningful looks. It appeared that he was.

"What did you do then, Sir?" Rowe switched to 'Sir' for some reason.

"I stopped in front of him. His hand was moving towards his gun, so I kicked it away under the seats." Haydn stopped. They looked at him, but he did not say any more.

"Then what did you do, Sir?"

"Well, he looked up at me and spat something out at me. No! No! Spat words out at me I mean." They nodded their heads. "I could see he was shot up bad. I shouted, 'fucking bastard!' then I pushed him with the gun, and he fell over. That was it really." He hoped it didn't sound too rehearsed. He resisted the temptation to check with his lawyer. Rowe and Willow were considering him coldly, he thought. Another sneaky glance at Price confirmed their attitude. This was it. This was what his lawyer had warned him against, hopefully

prepared him for. Now he would have to stonewall it from here, whatever happened. He could feel his stomach tightening again. He tried to be calm and alert.

"Sir, are you saying that you did not fire again?"

"Yes."

"You are quite sure about that?"

"Yes." Now was the time to be businesslike.

"We are having some problems with that statement, Sir. Here are the sworn statements of two witnesses to the events upstairs on the bus." He passed the documents to Haydn's lawyer. He avidly read them.

"In these statements one of the survivors downstairs clearly remembers two bursts of gunfire upstairs," the lawyer looked up about to speak, "after you were seen picking the gun up and going up the stairs." The lawyer went back to the statements.

"Another witness, from outside the bus, remembers seeing you charge down the bus - there was a pause - he thought you were talking to someone. Then you fired again." Rowe stared at Haydn.

Haydn said nothing and looked at the statement that his lawyer passed him.

"Have you anything to say to that, Sir?"

"My client has nothing further to add at this time," the lawyer interjected. "There was a third witness, is that their statement?" he pointed to another document in the file. "Can I see that please." He was not asking. Rowe passed the third statement over to him.

"You do not want to change your statement, Sir?" Haydn merely shook his head as he read the statements.

"Next, if you can look at these photos, please. This is the second gunman. The other people are some of the victims." Haydn was drawn to the photos. Taken at the same table as the earlier photo. He gasped quietly as he recognised the faces; where there was enough left

of them. They were all the same. Horribly pale in appearance, except for the cleaned-up bullet holes surrounded by reds and purples, Haydn's heart sank at the sight of them. Price saw him slump a little in his seat as he looked at the dead passengers.

"Now, if you will look at these close-ups of some of the bullet wounds. Notice the difference between these: this is someone downstairs shot in the legs; someone upstairs shot in the legs; the second gunman's leg wounds. All very similar as you can see. Now look at these other ones showing many stomach and chest wounds from people downstairs and up. Compare them with these taken of the second gunman's body wounds." Haydn could see a difference and he sensed the lawyer beside him did also.

"Forensic tell us two things. That the second gunman's wounds show that the gun was very close to his body when it fired; larger wound, typical appearance, chemicals present on the skin." He let that settle in with them. Then he continued, "But also they find that whilst the bullet wounds in the second gunman's legs correspond with a gun being fired level with them or below; upwards trajectory. His wounds in the body result from a gun being fired level, or more often, fired downwards."

Willow then went through the photos showing them exactly how they had come to their conclusions. He explained it clearly and without any feeling whatsoever. As he spoke Haydn felt as if a great weight had been placed on his shoulders and it was squeezing the breath out of him. When Willow had finished, he left the photos in front of them.

"I notice that the third witness contradicts the others in her statement," The lawyer proclaimed. He gave the document to Haydn to look at. It was a scrap of hope to cling to.

"The forensic evidence is quite explicit, Sir." Rowe was very unexcited. "While there may be some mileage in the contradictions of witness statements, it will be very difficult to refute the forensics." Rowe looked to Haydn. The man was teetering, he could tell.

"I believe there is a great deal of sympathy, in this room even, for the position Mr. Gerrard found himself in, on that terrible day." Haydn and his lawyer listened to him. "But I think hiding the truth will not help Mr. Gerrard's position. When I am sure we have the truth, I will make a suitable recommendation to the Prosecutor." Rowe did not smile. He was as impassive as ever. He waited for a response.

"I need to talk to my client in private," the lawyer stated. "If we could do that now then I think we can give you an answer quite soon."

"Good! We will leave you ..." But he was cut off by the sudden entrance of a plain clothes officer, who hurriedly whispered in Rowe's ear. They looked directly at Haydn at one point. The new man was obviously a little agitated, however, Rowe was as straight as usual. Rowe got up to leave.

"I hope there's nothing my client needs to know about, happening here?" the lawyer inquired. He stood up in turn. Rowe considered him for a moment.

"You had better come with me. Once we know what's happened exactly, you can inform Mr. Gerrard here. Willow, Price with me." They left. Haydn stared around at the empty room. Only the female officer remained with him. Haydn gave a big sigh. "What now?" he asked out loud.

"I've no idea, Sir. Would you like another tea Sir?" she asked.

"Go on then," Haydn smiled at her. You go and find out what's happened, he thought to himself. When she had not returned in ten minutes Haydn considered she would get a rocket from Rowe if he knew she had left him that long on his own.

Finally, the officer returned. She handed Haydn his tea. She looked at him in a funny way, he could not make it out: it was not anger or contempt, neither was it concern for him, it was almost a wariness of him. Haydn was feeling tired now and that worrying tightness had spread to his chest. They waited and spoke little.

Eventually his lawyer came back into the room. Price told the officer to leave them alone. Haydn could not see her, but her voice sounded different. The lawyer was grave, he told Haydn the news that was sweeping the country, never mind the police station. Incredibly there were reports of a suicide bomber attack. Incredible, because it had occurred in Pakistan in a crowded bazaar in Peshawar. Incredible, because the bomber appeared to be a white backpacker. But the worrying thing for Haydn was the announcement soon after by a white extremist group claiming responsibility in the name of Haydn Gerrard, and others, prepared to fight the good fight against the Islamic swine.

Haydn read a copy of their communique. He was totally stunned. He staggered slightly, and the lawyer helped him into a seat.

"This is not good," Haydn said in a low voice.

"No, it isn't," the lawyer agreed. "I don't know how this will affect the way people look at you, or how it will affect the Prosecutor's decision on your case. There is going to be a lot of public reaction to this flying about in the next few days."

"And world reaction, too," Haydn suggested.

"You're right," the lawyer agreed. "Now I was going to suggest that we admit the truth about the second gunman." Haydn nodded resignedly. "We will then look for some acceptance of using unnecessary force but expect you to be given a suitable suspended sentence. Not for you to be put away." Haydn nodded again. "I think that's our best option whatever happens. But now I think we should hold out on that for a while and see what happens. It could go either way. Do you understand?"

"I could be lauded as a hero and an inspiration or strung up as an example to the people and an appeasement to the Islamic world." Haydn was in despair.

"Exactly."

There was a knock on the door. Rowe and his team entered and sat down as before.

"I have a few more pressing questions to ask Mr. Gerrard. Your cooperation would be appreciated." Rowe was still expressionless, although Haydn did notice that his brow was somewhat furrowed.

"Certainly." The lawyer responded. "My client is aware of the situation."

For the next ten minutes Haydn was asked if he identified several people. He was given photos and video film to watch. He was asked about organisations and places. But he recognised none of the faces or the places. He had heard of the organisations because they had already contacted him via his email, and Rowe knew this. During this latest round of questioning Haydn felt his face reddening and his temperature rising. His chest continued to feel tight and he struggled to keep the strain out of his voice - Price noticed that the nervous drumming fingers had returned - Haydn felt his throat was dry and he was short of breath.

The others saw the change in him. Rowe stopped his questioning. He decided not to ask Gerrard if he wanted to change his statement, it would wait for another day. Just as well because Haydn collapsed at that moment. He soon revived with the attention of a doctor, but it was clear he was not fit to carry on. He was put in Price's car and his lawyer accompanied him back home.

There were even more reporters and cameras than before, waiting for them. The police struggled to get Haydn safely inside. His lawyer stood at the front door and gave a short statement. He would talk to them as soon as they had heard the statement from the Prosecutor's office concerning the day's developments. Rowe had told him before they left the station that a statement would be released, and it would deal with the concerns over Haydn's evidence.

Inside his house Haydn felt immediately better. His collapse had been preceded by the appearance of humanoid blurry light shape. Even as he lost consciousness, temporarily,

Haydn had the distinct feeling that he would be safe, blurry humanoid had always looked after him.

Chapter 17

Haydn and his lawyer sat side by side on the settee. Haydn held a can of lager in one hand. The lawyer had wondered if that was wise, but Haydn assured him the doctor said the odd can or drink would be alright. They had just watched Chief Inspector Rowe facing the media. He had been his usual cold, expressionless self. Inspector Willow, standing behind him, had given a matchless display of ennui. They had not seen Sergeant Price.

"Well, nothing unexpected in there," the lawyer finally said.

"No, I suppose not," Haydn agreed. Rowe had read the brief statement. Haydn had been questioned about what had happened on the bus; particularly the sequence of events leading up to the death of the gunmen. The death of the first gunman was fully understood and all accounts tallied in that case. However, there were some inconsistencies in Haydn's account of the death of the second gunman. Some details did not match available evidence given by other witnesses and the forensics. After a deliberate pause for effect Rowe continued to say that he felt the matter could be resolved, soon, with the further cooperation of Haydn. Finally, they were certain that Haydn had nothing to do with the most recent atrocity. They were satisfied that he knew none of the people claiming responsibility and they were also sure that he would join them in utterly condemning the bombing. Then he took questions under the proviso that he would refuse outright to answer any delicate ones concerning both enquiries.

Haydn marvelled that Rowe did not change in any way under the pressure from the media. He maintained the same attitude in poise and voice. The lawyer mumbled that he was very good. Yes, he did feel that they knew exactly what happened on the bus that day. No, Haydn was not obstructing the enquiry, he was merely a little uncertain about one or two things.

Yes, he did feel that Haydn would confirm the final pieces. No, they had not arranged another meeting yet. Events had rather run away from them, but they expected to talk to Haydn very soon, perhaps tomorrow. Yes, extensive forensic investigation had been undertaken. Yes, the forensic evidence was very conclusive; he did not elaborate. Yes, if the lady upstairs was able to give evidence it would also help to confirm their understanding of events. No, he did not feel her evidence to be essential. Yes, he could confirm that Haydn had been very upset by news of the bombing. The claims that it was done in his name had caused him further distress. Yes, there was some substance in the rumours that Haydn had collapsed at the end of the questioning, but he had been treated by a doctor and was considered fit enough to return home. No, Haydn had not been questioned too soon into his recovery. The doctors had considered him strong enough to cope and indeed, he was coping well, until the news broke of this latest tragedy.

Then the theme of the questions turned to the international arena. Haydn was tired, he stared into nowhere, occasionally he took a drink from the can. The lawyer was preparing their response at the table. He looked over to his client regularly. The man had recovered some colour in his face. His nervous actions had not returned once he had come around in the police station. The lawyer was convinced it had been right to get him out of there and back home. He had decided that the final, he hoped final, meeting with Rowe should take place at Haydn's home. Haydn had concentrated on Rowe's performance while it had lasted. But now he seemed to be slipping away again. He watched as Haydn grabbed in front of him at thin air.

"Are you OK?" the lawyer asked him.

"Oh, sure," Haydn sounded drowsy. The lawyer looked closely at him.

"What were you doing, then?" the lawyer studied the air in the room. Perhaps Haydn had been trying to catch a fly or something.

"Oh, nothing." Haydn shook his head. Then he rubbed his eyes roughly and sat back in the settee. The lawyer considered him carefully.

"You must be tired. How are you feeling? Really?" they looked at each other. "Are you worried about all this?" he waved his arms. But Haydn's eyes had glazed over. Had he heard what he had said?

"Haydn?" the lawyer's voice was stronger.

"What? Oh sorry. I just drifted off there, then." He looked around the room as if searching for something. "What did you want?" he asked almost by the way.

"Are you sure you are alright?" the lawyer stressed. "Do you want me to call the doctor?"

"No. It's alright. I'm just tired, suddenly." He looked around again. "I can't do anything about it, so I think I'd just better let it happen." He smiled, wistfully, he thought, but it felt wimpy. The lawyer stared at him, examining him. He was certain that Haydn was talking about something else.

"OK, if you are sure." He made his mind up to contact the doctor and the Psychologist again. He read the statement he had prepared to Haydn. His client managed to pay attention and even suggested a little amendment. But as he left Haydn to talk to the waiting press, he noticed that he had relapsed into a faraway expression. Well it was to be expected he conceded to himself; let's hope he can get to grip with all this business in the future. He closed the front door behind him and faced the blaze of the media attention. He hoped he could put on half as good a performance as Chief Inspector Rowe.

.....

"I'm telling you! There's something wrong with him." Rich was insisting.

"Yeah, he's just had some terrible news and he's had a bit of a collapse. What a surprise!"

Pat was just as insistent.

"It's probably just a funny turn or something," John joined in. "Nothing to worry about."

But he did not sound convinced himself. They were watching a tape of the news bulletins.

Rich had recorded it during the day on the pub system. They had rounded on him at first, but had been curiously fascinated as he replayed it, pausing and pointing out things on the way.

"Look again, look how good Haydn looks going into the station. See the steady walk, purposeful I'd say, but not cocky or anything." Rich had forgotten about the bar. He worked the remote. "Now compare that with how bad he looks now, when they put him into the car." Agreeing noises came from the small crowd gathered around the set. "See here!" he was getting excited. "The TV crew get a good picture of him as the car stops at the gates. There! Look at the state of him! You're telling me he looks alright there!" the watching group shook their heads and agreed with him.

"Looks very pale and drawn, don't he?"

"He looked better when he came out of hospital."

"Looks really scared, like a cornered animal."

"Yeah, a bit mad looking, all wide eyed."

"Now you can't see much of him when they get back to his house," Rich continued. "The cops do a good job of hiding him." They watched the tape. "I've got that copper talking to the press and Haydn's lawyer's statement. Do you want to watch 'em?" they told him to carry on. A person at the bar gave up and joined them watching the TV. Eventually the group broke up and Rich switched back to a sports channel. Paul, Pat and John went back to the corner of the bar; Rich finally served his waiting customers.

The three friends drank from their drinks.

"He did look haunted," Paul spoke quietly.

"Well, it must have been a terrible shock, the news about the bombing," Pat also spoke quietly.

"Another shock on top of everything else," John spoke normally.

"Yeah, it must have been bad enough in the interview without all that as well," Pat added. Rich came towards them. "He's enjoying this too much, for my liking."

"Yeah," Paul agreed.

"Now, come on boys," Rich was grinning, "you can't deny Haydn does not look well." He misunderstood their frosty faces. They conceded his point with the barest of nods. Rich was whistling happily to himself. John tried to warn him. But he failed.

"I don't know what you're so bloody happy about!" Pat exploded at Rich. The smile vanished from Rich's face.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, one of our friends is in trouble and you're loving every minute of it!" Pat was reddening.

"Look, all I was saying is that he's not well and you kept saying he was OK." They stared at each other. "Look, Pat, you got to expect Haydn to be suffering. You just don't jump up from this kind of thing as if nothing happened, not unless you're a machine or something."

"And we know Haydn is not like that," John backed him up.

"It's going to take time." Pat continued to stare at him. "Look, I don't want anything to happen to Haydn either. He's got enough trouble getting over being shot. But there's more to it, I'd say, and Haydn knows it. And that lawyer too."

"What do you mean?" Pat simmered.

"Oh, come on Pat!" it was Rich's turn to shout. "It's obvious! Haydn's not told them everything about what happened. They know that. Haydn and his lawyer know they know that." Rich was exasperated. Pat said nothing, he drank.

"You could tell from the way that copper talked about the forensic evidence," John said, "they've got something on Haydn."

"Yeah, but the good news is they're not out to get him," Rich told them.

"How do you make that out?" Pat was not angry anymore.

"Well, they know he's not told them everything yet. But they haven't charged him or kept him in for more questioning. No, they just say that Haydn has not 'confirmed' some things for them, yet. But they are giving him time to come clean, aren't they?" he looked around for more backing. "I reckon that once he does that he'll be in the clear." He cast a triumphant look about him.

"If Haydn was so sure he would be in the clear, why hasn't he told them already?" Pat countered.

"I don't know," Rich shrugged, "but I tell you the coppers are on his side. They backed him on this bombing, didn't they?"

"Oh, come off it, Rich!" Pat was a little louder again. "That's obviously got nothing to do with him."

"Well, I tell you, this is how I read it, whether you like it or not." Rich spoke firmly. "Haydn did something that perhaps he shouldn't of. Now I know we all probably would have done the same," he quelled Pat's outrage. "But nevertheless, he's done something. The cops know it. What they're saying is if he admits it, they can move on."

"But that would mean they charge him," Pat concluded.

"Yeah, but it doesn't mean he goes to jail." Rich moved off to serve someone. Pat was unhappy, but he said nothing for a while. Eventually he turned to Paul.

"I think Rich has got a point," Paul intercepted him. "I can't get over how Haydn looked in that car: haunted and hunted."

"That's what I think too, Pat," John said. Pat snorted. They talked no more about it. Two drinks later Pat was celebrating the suicide bombing; despite being chided by most people, he was suggesting more targets.

.....

Elsewhere, the Psychologist Holly also watched the news with growing concern. This extra pressure would not help Haydn at all. She rang the doctor at the hospital; he had talked to the doctor who had treated Haydn in the police station. He confirmed that the attack was brought on by the stress of the situation with the news of the suicide attack being the final straw, almost certainly. The doctor said it was more of a faint than anything else and Haydn had recovered enough to be sent home without any worries about his condition.

"Do you think it was an anxiety attack, doctor?" Holly asked.

"Yes, it sounds like it." The doctor agreed.

"Well, I suppose Haydn's got some things to be anxious about," Holly said.

"Mmm, I suppose so," the doctor's voice tailed off.

"Can we speak confidentially, doctor?" Holly found herself almost whispering.

"Certainly," the doctor paused. "I was hoping we could talk about Haydn's case ... in more detail, shall I say."

Holly then confided her concern about aspects of Haydn's version of events on the bus - the police were right; he was not telling them everything. She felt that this denial was eating away at Haydn. He and his lawyer obviously thought they were better off taking this course of action, but the strain was telling on Haydn; she had not liked the look of him in the news. They traded examples of his lack of concentration and erratic behaviour. People often were scarred for life after tragedies like this. It was very important, they agreed, that Haydn told

the full story. Only then could they really start the job of restoring Haydn's state of mind.

The doctor suggested they paid a visit to Haydn in the morning and together they would try to help him. They agreed a time. The doctor would pick Holly up, she would have to cancel some appointments; Haydn had become a priority.

Chapter 18

In the living room of his house Haydn was besieged by the dreams; they came quickly, no sooner was one finished than another started. He barely had time to realise they had changed. All the time he sat motionless on the settee - the TV was ignored and the phone calls. He was aware of the blurs floating in the air. They occasionally communicated in a way he could understand, but most of the time he could not follow their discourse.

When it started again the now familiar humanoid blur had given him a dose of the tube medicine - as he thought of it. Before he drifted away for the first time, he heard them talking.

"You did well to prevent any more damage to him," Jellyfish to humanoid.

"His body will hold up for only a short period, then the deterioration will accelerate, he will not last many more days," Humanoid told them.

"It is now time to push him to the climax of the process," Jellyfish.

"We will see what happens now. If he ..." But then Haydn found himself in a dark passage. Muted lighting marked the walls. He was following a group of figures who were twenty metres ahead of him. He realised someone was beside him. He glanced into the helmet of the similarly suited person next to him; it was red head, their eyes met.

"Sensors show a pursuit of five or six, closing fast, Captain," red's voice sounded in his earphones.

"Got you, red. We'll make a stand at the next suitable point. Let's get back to the others." They hurried along the passage. They had entered the pyramid-like structure in secret but had soon been detected by the guardians. They had fought twice already, Haydn and red were securing the rear as the others sought out the entrance to the inner sanctum. The fabled

room known as, 'the chamber of answers', or as it was known to the inhabitants of this planet, 'the hall of conquest'. This was where the keys to controlling planets were kept.

As they followed, they frequently came across the remains of many other species of sentient life. They had all, in turn, perished here in the passages. All, like themselves, had been seeking the chamber, in which they hoped to find the means to save their planet. But all the failures they came across were old. No one had tried to enter the pyramid for generations.

Running along they stared at the markings and motifs that lined the walls. Haydn recognised many of them. Here was the evidence of contact with many worlds in this part of the galaxy. A contact that had not been benign. The ancient race of this planet had enslaved the peoples and creatures of alien systems. They had advanced more quickly than other life in this sector and their science and technology had allowed them to spread through space. Wherever they went they conquered and altered. Among their many crimes were interference in the genetic make-up of whole species. But just as long lasting was the alterations they made to certain planets and especially their biospheres.

However, a truth about the Universe is that nothing persists, nothing lasts forever, the Universe continually changes, stars are born and die, galaxies crash into each other as they spin away into the voids, life dies, new life is born, species become extinct; they die out or are destroyed. But always life returns somewhere in the Universe. The race that built this wondrous building twenty centuries ago, destroyed themselves ten centuries after that. None of the intelligences knew how. One suggestion was that they had become totally reliant on their computer technology. So much so that when it suffered a catastrophic failure they did not recover, and their world went into a decline that left the survivors living a pre-industrial existence. They lived on the planet surrounded by the achievements of their ancestors, but completely ignorant of how to utilise them. They protected the remnants of their past and treated them like temples.

Haydn knew that the locals in this area believed that the pyramid had been built by the gods. They believed that they would return one day and restore their world. Many expeditions in previous centuries had played on this emotion. Some had succeeded in obtaining useful technology from the ruins. Some had managed to find a way into the pyramid and find the entrance to the chamber. The surviving records spoke of a great hall where the secrets of conquered worlds were kept, thus enabling control to be exerted when necessary. Such was their power that they could destroy a world from within or outside. They could change atmospheric, climatic and surface conditions almost at will.

However, no one had managed to gain entry to the chamber. Over the years the locals realised what was happening and became hostile. But this left them woefully outgunned. Many of them had been killed by species who found it ironic, that the same weapons that had suppressed their forebears were now wiping out the remnants of the species that had developed them. But Haydn and his group were not here to indulge in genocide, although they expected to meet some resistance and would deal with it appropriately. They had to find a way into the chamber. A home planet was suffering under the effects of a rogue climate. Not realising that the planet had been controlled from cloaked satellites and hidden underground facilities, since the original power had first landed there, when, eventually, they started to malfunction, the planet began to experience climate stress.

That had been over ten years ago. It had taken that long for the combined species to uncover the information needed. The records of many worlds had been studied. Myths and claims examined. Experiments performed, and expeditions mounted. The resulting data had allowed them to penetrate the pyramid and find their way through the passages. So far, Haydn thought, their guide had identified and neutralised every obstacle they had encountered. Haydn could see that the group ahead of them had stopped.

When Haydn and red caught up they found the other members of their group huddled in conference. They were discussing what to do next. From time to time they scanned the dead end to the passage. Haydn noticed blond scar and far away eyes busy with their sensors. In charge was the jellyfish in the liquid filled suit. The cube-sphere, excitedly flashing discs, lit in different colours, hovered nearby. No suit was needed, it did not breathe, atmospheres were irrelevant.

"Captain Haydn, hostiles closing fast," red informed him.

"OK red, let's sort them out," Haydn responded. "Roll out vibrabombs, lasers at the ready, maintain settings." The lasers were set to kill. This was not a mission where they could spare lives. Haydn and red walked back along the passage a short while. Red rolled a couple of small black balls along the floor. They leaned against the walls, taking advantage of the shadows between the emergency lighting that was still on, centuries after it had been activated. They waited.

They heard the locals before they saw them clearly. Their weapons were primitive. There was very little chance that they could penetrate Haydn's and red's protective suits. The vibrabombs exploded and lit up the passage. Haydn and red quickly and methodically killed all the locals. Their lasers shone in different colours in this atmosphere. Red had already remarked how pretty they looked.

"Check for more hostiles, red," Haydn ordered him. He returned to the others.

"I trust that's the last disturbance we're going to get, Captain," blond scar was speaking.

"Hopefully, for a while," he told her. "But, because we have to keep the pyramid entrance open, we can expect more activity." Not one expedition that had shut the pyramid entrance behind them, had emerged again. They had walked through their remains. It was a good thing that the locals had no means of shutting the entrance. But they may well be waiting for them outside.

"Area clear up to the range of sensors, Captain." Red spoke in his ears.

"Good, red. Come back and keep monitoring."

"On my way."

Haydn looked at the dead end. It was a wall with many panels. It appeared to be entirely made of stone, nothing electrical or electronic showed in it. He watched blond scar, old man far away eyes, jellyfish and cube-sphere as they tried to make any impression on the wall. Their sensors revealed little. The prods and touches they gave it, with various implements, produced nothing. After a frustrating period, they regrouped to bounce ideas off each other. Haydn listened to them. They were getting nowhere fast. Their various breathing supplies would last a long time, but not forever. His primary duty was to protect the others and get them off the planet safely. If matters got tight the priority was to keep the party intact; they could always come back.

"What information do you have on this stage?" Haydn asked them. They gave him several exasperated looks.

"There is a large amount of data concerning what to do when the entrance is reached," Jellyfish explained.

"I see," Haydn continued, "and is there any particular information that crops up regularly?"

"Many matters are referred to many times," jellyfish replied.

"What do you mean exactly?" blond scar asked Haydn.

"Well, I know you have information from many worlds and from many species," Haydn replied. "Is there anything that appears in all their records? Or at least in a high number of them."

The cube-sphere indicated that he understood what he was saying. It began a check with its internal computer. Soon it provided them with an answer. The key element was that it was essential to have a being from the relevant world. Entry was impossible without one.

"Well, that told us something we didn't know already." Blond scar was sarcastic. Haydn ignored her; he was studying the panels again.

"The panels represent every world conquered or settled by the original power," he reminded them. "Each panel has a distinctive set of symbols that allow you to tell which world it refers to." Haydn then pointed out the details of a few he recognised: planetary features, numbers of planets in the system, positions of moons, type of star, all were symbolised in the panels. He identified several home worlds for them.

"Yes, Captain, we know all this," jellyfish told him. "What's your point?"

"My point is that the panels contain all this various information for each planet. But they all have one thing in common." Cube-sphere flashed almost frantically for a few seconds. Every panel has a part that represents the planet's surface and the view from it.

"But how does it help us?" blond scar was looking closely at a few panels.

"You think there's a link with having a being from the planet and the fact there is always a planet symbol on the panel?" old man was jumping ahead of Haydn.

"Yes," Haydn agreed. "Jelly fish here must do something to his home world panel."

"Like what exactly?" blond scar demanded.

"I would say he has to touch it. I'm betting it will sense his genetic info. and match it to the panel. Then something will happen."

Jellyfish agreed and touched his home world panel with an outstretched tentacle. He touched the symbol for his planet, obviously aquatic in design. Nothing happened. Cube-sphere flashed some discs at them. Perhaps it would not work through the suit.

With difficulty they exposed one tentacle. It had to be done quickly. The suit began losing liquid immediately and the atmosphere was noxious. Jellyfish stabbed out his tentacle and pressed the symbol. At once the panel reacted. Jellyfish's tentacle changed colour briefly and the end smoked. The tentacle was hastily removed and returned inside the suit. Jellyfish painfully informed them the tentacle was damaged beyond repair.

But it had been worth it. The panel had also changed colour. The symbols that represented the various moons and planets had taken on the colour of those bodies. One of the moons of the home world, however, did not become coloured. It now revealed a numerical display. It was clear that a code or a series of numbers had to be inputted. If done correctly it would probably open the entrance to the chamber.

"Now what?" blond scar asked the panel.

"Must be something to do with that particular moon," old man offered.

Cube-sphere pointed out that only numbers were available, no lettering.

"So, something numerical about the third moon," jellyfish wondered aloud. "Perhaps the mass, or diameter, or radius."

"Or gravitational field strength, or orbital period," Haydn contributed.

"Do you think how many numbers available on the display is significant?" old man asked them. Cube-sphere began a check to match the known moon data with the amount of numbers available; the most promising was the orbital period to three decimal places. They all looked at jellyfish. They suspected he would have to input the numbers. He agreed with them. Out came the damaged tentacle and he tapped out the number cube-sphere provided for him.

But nothing happened. Jellyfish's tentacle was so badly damaged that he discarded it completely, it fell to the floor. Slowly, the atmosphere reduced it to ugly heavy fumes.

"What now?" blond scar cried out, annoyed with their failure. The others considered the panel. Haydn thought the secret was definitely to do with the kind of data that could only be obtained by a technologically advanced, space-faring species. It had to be the orbital period, none of the other options allowed enough precision with the numbers available. Then it came to him.

"Is that data the most up to date on the moon," he enquired of cube-sphere. The pulsing shape confirmed that. "Has the orbital period changed over the years since the pyramid was constructed?" the cube-sphere was ahead of him. It soon produced the new number. It differed only in the third decimal place. Jellyfish made a comment about having to regrow two tentacles as he tapped out the new number with a fresh tentacle. But, again, it was worth it.

The whole wall suddenly emitted a blue light, then slowly, it rose into the ceiling. Haydn called red to join them.

"Wow! This is something else!" he exclaimed as they followed the others inside. The chamber was not as big as they had expected. But the sight of apparently functioning workplaces; all flashing lights and quiet hums, delighted them. Haydn and red quickly checked out the chamber. There were no obvious dangers.

"Must be one hell of a power supply tucked away somewhere," red said in amazement. "Still producing after all this time."

"Yeah." Haydn concurred.

"What's the matter, Captain?" red recognised that look.

"I don't know, it seems to be a bit easy." He stared vaguely around as if he expected a last-minute attack from a final line of defence. Here was the storehouse of the original power's might. From here they could control the fate of actual planets and moons. Were they

just going to take the information they needed and leave? Would it be that easy? The entrance was still open. He sent red to guard it.

Haydn watched the others examining the different controls and workplaces. Many screens were set into the walls and ceilings. He was familiar with the symbolic language of the original power. He could see that they had found the correct controls for jellyfish's world. Cube-sphere interfaced physically with it. The old man and blond scar were monitoring the read outs on a few screens. From time to time detailed schematics appeared, Haydn assumed these were of the climate control systems now malfunctioning on the jellyfish home world. Then he could tell the download had begun. Cube-sphere became a whirling coloured disc, his solidity a blur.

But as soon as the download was complete the entrance closed. Red jumped back out of the descending panel's way. They all stared at the wall. On this side it was utterly smooth. It looked more metallic in nature. There were no markings on it.

"What now?" red called from the wall. "Shall we blast it?"

"No!" Haydn, jellyfish and cube-sphere all warned against it, simultaneously.

"I'm guessing there's a directional rebound system in it," Haydn advised. Cube-sphere told them that his information did indeed say that any weapons fire inside the chamber would result in the demise of the perpetrators.

"Great! What do we do know?" red repeated. As he said it, he must have tripped a sensor, the blue light returned. Shining from the wall, it covered him. Then a red line passed down through the blue and back up. There was a slight delay and then the entrance opened.

"Hey!" red shouted, and before Haydn could tell him otherwise, he walked out into the passage.

"It's OK," he waved at them. Blond scar walked up to the entrance. But it closed again. The blue light covered her, and the red line scanned her. The entrance opened and through

she walked. Jellyfish approached next. The same sequence occurred. But the entrance did not open. Haydn and cube-sphere joined jellyfish. There was no response from the entrance. They looked at each other, the implication was clear. Jellyfish backed away. Immediately the blue light returned, and Haydn and cube-sphere were scanned. The entrance opened, and they moved through.

"I don't want to risk another try," jellyfish told them. "The entrance might never open again." They agreed with him. Cube-sphere flashed his opinion. Haydn felt the same. It would be in keeping with what they knew about the original power. The cruelty and vindictiveness that characterised their rule was still well known today. Countless sayings on many worlds were testament to this. It would be typical that they would design a system in this manner. A being from an alien world could retrieve information but at a cost; they could not leave.

"It is a final stroke of malice," jellyfish told them. They said nothing. "You must take the information we have obtained and save my home world." They all nodded. There was an uncomfortable silence. Finally, cube-sphere flashed an instruction. It was in charge now. They had to leave and get back to the ship.

"Can you stay a moment, Haydn?" jellyfish asked as the others were led along the passage by red. Jellyfish waited until they had moved out of sight in the murky passage. "You must kill me, Haydn. I do not want the slow death intended for me." He was quite calm. Haydn understood. He raised his laser. "I know that I have saved my species. The information that cube-sphere now carries will save my home world. The climate controls will be accessed, and the temperature of our ocean will drop. My species will survive. There will be no exodus." He finished. Haydn looked into the pulsing colourful dome of his friend. He changed the setting on his laser to full strength.

"You will be long remembered, my friend." He fired. The energy tore through the helmet and incinerated the dome. The liquid steamed out of the suit. Haydn stepped quickly out of the entrance. The wall came sliding down. He ran after the others. When he reached them, he took up position at the front with red. They might meet more opposition at the pyramid entrance. Nobody talked. Haydn had done the right thing.

Sat on his settee Haydn lurched from one dream to another. In everyone he was required to serve and protect. Often, he had to make difficult decisions. Often, he had to sacrifice people under his command. The end was always the priority. They needed to save the good and defenceless. To do this the bad had to be eradicated; sometimes at a cost. Haydn was always the cool commander, respected by all. He made the hard calls; he did the hard jobs. Haydn thrived in this deadly and serious world.

Chapter 19

"I don't think he's moved all night; you know." One of Haydn's neighbours peered out between the curtains.

"He must have." The other one was doubtful. "He must have got up at some point. You only looked over there a few times."

"Yes, I suppose so," she conceded. "It's just looks like he hasn't budged a bit." She came away from the curtains. "He didn't go to bed anyway. He's still in the same clothes."

"He's alright," the other one assured. "If he needs something, he'll tell us."

"Well I hope he looks better today, compared to what he did yesterday." She went over to the front window. All those reporters and cameramen. They had hoped they would be gone by now. But the suicide bomber had put paid to that. They had been bombarded with questions about Haydn as they tried to get into their house, yesterday evening. What a nuisance it all was. None of their friends could come and visit. Poor Haydn had looked a wreck on the TV coverage. The latest news had been a big shock and she was sure he was nowhere near recovered from the shooting.

"Looks like Haydn's got visitors," she called to her friend.

"Who is it? The police again?"

"No. I think it's the doctor and that Psychologist lady." She watched the discussion between the policemen and the visitors.

"No, officer, we have not arranged a visit with Mr. Gerrard or the Chief Inspector," Holly told him. "I was not aware that I needed the Chief Inspector's permission to visit my patient," the doctor added.

"Is there a problem with Mr. Gerrard?" the policeman eyed them suspiciously.

"No, not a serious one, I'm sure," Holly reassured him. "We just felt that it would be a good thing to check on Mr. Gerrard."

"Especially after the little scare yesterday," the doctor, "you understand, officer."

"Oh, I understand, Sir. Only the Chief Inspector wants to know immediately there is any change in Mr. Gerrard's condition."

"We will tell you if there is cause for concern, officer." Holly moved to the door and rung the bell. Nothing happened. She rung again. Nothing.

"I know that he left the TV on all night," the policeman informed them. "But he had a quiet night otherwise, no walking about." Holly rung once more. Still nothing. The policeman opened the letterbox. They could hear the TV.

"Mr. Gerrard!" the officer yelled through the letterbox. But there was no reaction. The door to the living room was closed to. The officer yelled again. When still nothing happened, he produced a key, "Mr. Gerrard has given us a spare. In case of emergencies." Under his breath they heard him say, 'hopefully this is not one', as he opened the door. A few cameras flashed from across the road as Holly and the doctor followed the officer inside.

"Mr. Gerrard!" the policeman shouted as he opened the living room door. "Ah! There you are, Sir. Didn't you hear me shouting?" but Haydn did not react. He kept staring into space. His hands were folded across his stomach. Holly and the doctor moved quickly past the officer and stood in front of Haydn. They noticed a faint smile on his face, but his eyes were glazed over.

"Haydn," the doctor spoke, "can you hear me?" they watched his face. Slowly it changed as his awareness came back, the focus arrived back in his eyes, then he moved his head about as if to check where he was.

"Haydn, how are you this morning?" Holly asked him. At the sound of her voice he was right back with them. There was life in his eyes, he yawned loudly and stretched his arms over his head.

"I was far away, then," he smiled at them, "miles away." He looked at his watch, then out of the window. "Morning? God, I must have fallen asleep here last night." Then seeing them still looking curiously at him he asked, "What are you all doing here?"

"The doctor and the Psychologist have come to see you, Mr. Gerrard. You didn't answer so I opened the door," the officer told him. "I'll leave you to it," he nodded at Holly and the doctor, "Mr. Gerrard, anything you need, Sir?"

"Thank you, officer, I don't think so. How are you off for tea out there?"

"We're fine for now, Sir." He left the door open and returned to the front. He stood in the doorway and radioed the Chief inspector. He listened carefully to his orders.

In the living room Holly closed the door after the officer. The doctor began to examine Haydn.

"Are you taking the sleeping tablets I gave you?" the doctor listened to his breathing.

"Yes doctor." Haydn sat up to help the doctor.

"Did you take one last night?"

"I don't know. Can't remember." Haydn sounded cheerful. "I seemed to have slept though." He smiled at Holly.

"Why didn't you go to bed?" Holly asked him.

"I don't know. I was watching the TV and then the blurs came and ..." he tailed off and looked away sharply. The doctor was taking his pulse and looked at him.

"The blurs?" Holly asked him, a quizzical look to her. Haydn tried ignoring her. "The blurs? You said." Holly noted he avoided eye contact with her.

"Umm, well, you know." He seemed evasive. "You know, when you get tired and your eyes go out of focus a bit. You know?" she nodded her head at him. "Well it was like that. You know, grey fuzzy patches everywhere. I must have closed my eyes and that must have been it." He smiled falsely. The doctor shot Holly a glance. But she knew he was not telling the truth.

"Did you dream?" she asked.

"Did I dream!" Haydn erupted. "You bet!" he was suddenly excited. "Some brilliant ones." He was grinning at them. The doctor checked his blood pressure.

"Good dreams?" Holly raised an eyebrow. "Tell us about them."

"Have you got half a day?" he almost gushed at her. "I've been all over the galaxy in spaceships." He shook his head at the memory of it.

"What were you doing?"

"Oh, there was a lot of fighting, again. I had to shoot people. Sometimes my friends, you know. Sacrifices had to be made. We had to beat the enemy, they're evil, you know." He stared into the distance and said, "I was very important." Then he stopped and stole quick glances at them. Holly was watching him closely. The doctor was checking on his wounds. There was a little blood on the dressing. Haydn grimaced as the doctor touched his side.

"It's very sore doctor." The doctor grunted that he could see that. He put a fresh dressing on.

"You need to take it easy, Haydn. No more excitement," he ordered him. "I want you to stay at home and ... well, try to avoid stressful situations, if you can." He looked at Holly. Haydn noticed their unspoken communication.

"Well, doctor, I don't have much control, unfortunately." His cheerfulness had deserted him. "How are the wounds, doctor?"

"They are alright. You've stretched the sutures and one has come loose." Haydn was concerned. "No, do not worry. It's not a problem. The wound is closing underneath. There's no point in messing with the odd stitch. Just don't get over excited and put strain on the area."

"Right, good." His smile was grim. "I need a drink. Tea or coffee?" he asked them. Picking up the empty can from yesterday, he went into the kitchen. Holly pointed to her side and looked worryingly at the doctor. He gave her an, 'it's alright' gesture. He nodded vigorously to reinforce his opinion. She then pointed to her heart and held her wrist. This time the doctor gave an unhappy response. Too high, he indicated. Holly showed him she understood. They did not talk, which was suspicious, Haydn thought as he prepared the drinks.

Holly had a determined face when Haydn returned with their drinks. She sat in the chair at the table. Haydn sat beside the doctor on the settee. Nobody said anything while they sipped at their teas. The TV was still on but none of them appeared to be listening to it. Eventually the doctor turned to Haydn. "Nice cup of tea." He said.

"Really?" Haydn was amused.

"Haydn, we would like to ask you about yesterday." Holly exclaimed. She turned in the chair to face him. She leaned forward. "OK?" Haydn sensed it was a rhetorical question. Asked more to prepare him than to give him an option. They noticed that he folded his arms on his stomach as he answered, "Go on then," in a far from certain voice. He looked from one to the other.

"How did you feel when you heard the news of the bombing?" she began.

"The bombing did not bother me at first. I just thought, bloody mad world!" he shook his head in disbelief. "But when my lawyer told me the bastards were saying it was in my name! I just went numb. Numb. I could not believe it! What are they playing at? Fucking

nutters!" his voice had risen in volume. "And just when Rowe was putting the pressure ..."
He stopped speaking and failed to hide the guilty look that crossed his face.

Holly ignored it, "So you were angry at these extremists?"

"Of course. I'm never going to get any peace if they carry on like this." He sounded resigned.

"Do you think you will be blamed, in any way?" Holly shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, it looks like it, doesn't it?" Haydn sounded aggrieved. She watched him fidget nervously.

"You don't really think that, do you?" she looked as if she knew he didn't. He made some uncertain noises. "Did you feel unwell after you heard the news? Or were you already feeling uncomfortable?" she pressed him. Haydn stared at her. He seemed unsure to her.

"Wasn't the pressure Rowe was putting on you," she echoed, "making you feel, bad?" she chose the word on purpose. Haydn's eyes had narrowed as he stared at her.

"You know, Haydn, we have all sorts of words in my field for feelings of guilt and the effects they can have on a person." Haydn could sense the intense gaze of the doctor on him, but he stared at Holly. "The doctor and I are convinced that you have not told the ..." she paused locking eyes with him, "the full story yet. Except to your lawyer." She watched his reaction. He was tense. The nervous drumming had returned. He looked to be wondering what to say.

"You mean about what happened on the bus?" he was uncertain.

"Of course." What else could he mean? Then she frowned as she saw a look of relief on his face, momentarily.

"Yeah. You're right," he told her. "We, my lawyer and me, had decided to come clean when the news broke about the suicide bombing. Then we were not so sure what to do." He shrugged at them. "I don't want to be made some kind of scapegoat for this bombing."

"That's very unlikely, Haydn." The doctor was convinced.

"But you don't mind being some kind of hero?" Holly enquired of Haydn. He smiled unguardedly for an instant. Then he rather ruefully pursed his lips. He sighed and replied, "I did at first. I'm not so sure now."

"What did you do on the bus with the second gunman?" Holly asked the question.

"I shot the bastard a second time," he admitted to them. "He was on his knees; I'd kicked his gun away. He was all shot up in the legs. He wasn't going anywhere." He paused, and Holly could feel the emotion in him. "But he sneered, and I emptied the gun into him." There was a silence in the room. "I enjoyed it." Haydn added.

"But it was unnecessary," Holly commented quietly. Haydn merely held his hands out as if he was not sure.

"So, you were worried that the police might take a dim view of it and decided to not say anything," the doctor suggested.

"Yeah, that's it basically. But it was a waste of time because Rowe has got the evidence to prove what I did. There's no point denying it."

"So, when are you going to tell him?" Holly wanted to know.

"The next time I see him." Holly looked pleased.

"Are you glad you've told other people? It is important to admit when you have done a bad thing, otherwise it can fester and cause problems, especially when you are a good person to start with." She smiled at Haydn. But he looked strangely at her.

"I don't think it was a bad thing to have shot that man," he told her coldly. "Just not telling Rowe in the beginning was the problem."

At that point the front doorbell rang, and they heard someone coming towards them. There was a knock on the door and the policeman came into the living room.

"Message from the Chief Inspector, Mr. Gerrard. I am to tell you that the lady, upstairs on the bus, has just given a statement. The Chief Inspector is on his way here. Your lawyer has been notified. I am to stay inside with you until he arrives."

"Well, we had better leave," Holly said.

"The Chief would like you both to stay. He would like a word with you later."

"I see." Holly and the doctor had stood up. They sat back down.

"The Chief will not be long," the officer assured them. While they waited, they watched the news channel. Rowe and his team were shown going into the hospital. Then later leaving; Rowe did not speak to the media. The report speculated that Rowe was on the way to see Haydn. The report claimed that the lady had reacted to seeing pictures of Haydn on the TV news. Realising that she had remembered the incident, the hospital staff alerted the police. Unconfirmed reports implied that the lady had referred to Haydn as a hero.

Holly looked to see Haydn's reaction. But he was not listening. She watched as he seemed to stare into the distance. He reached out with his hands to grab at the air. She watched him do this twice. The second time, both the doctor and the officer noticed. All three of them watched Haydn intently, but he did not repeat the action again. Holly spoke to him, but he was, 'away with the fairies' as the officer quietly commented. The doctor watched him closely but did not try to disturb him.

However, when the front doorbell rang, Haydn instantly 'came around'. He looked around at them. Seeing their puzzled faces, he realised what had happened.

"Went missing, again did I?"

"Where were you this time?" Holly asked him.

"A bit of trouble in a globular cluster," he replied. "It's incredibly bright inside; the stars are closer together. We were damaged by a supernova."

"Casualties?" Holly enquired.

"Yes, and I've been badly injured." He touched his side gingerly. He had lost more colour in his face.

Rowe and his team entered the room. Inspector Willow immediately began assembling recording equipment. Haydn's lawyer had been picked up by Rowe on route. He took Haydn out into the back garden. Holly and Sergeant Price watched as the lawyer explained what had happened. Haydn listened, said nothing, only nodded occasionally.

"It will soon be over," Price told Holly.

"Do you think so?" Holly responded. "The investigation might be over, but Haydn has a long way to go yet. Will he be arrested and charged?"

"No. He will be allowed to remain at home. His passport will be taken, obviously. We will recommend a suspended sentence under mitigating circumstances." They were whispering.

"Will Haydn recover?" Price asked.

"Physically, yes. But mentally, I'm not at all sure."

Haydn and his lawyer came back in. Willow had finished setting up the equipment. The room was crowded. Rowe, Willow and Price stood by one side of the table. The officer was by the door. The doctor and Holly sat on the settee. Haydn sat down in the chair by the table, his lawyer stood behind him.

"I would like Mr. Gerrard to hear the lady's testimony before we go any further," Rowe told them. Willow then played back the tape. The lady spoke in a firm voice. She told how she had frozen in fear as the gunman opened fire upstairs. She saw people shot and had felt the bullets flying past her. But, miraculously, she had not been hit. Then she described how the gunman stopped firing and shouted to someone. She watched as he was hit by gunfire himself and slumped to the floor. She had not seen where the shots had come from. At first, she had thought they had come from outside. Then she saw Haydn rush up to the stricken

gunman. She heard the dying man urge Haydn to kill the gunman. At this point Holly fired Haydn a piercing look. Why had he not mentioned this? He had still not told the complete truth. Why was this? But Haydn was oblivious to her. He was back on the bus again. The gun was in his hand. He was about to wipe the sneer off a bastard's face.

The lady described Haydn's hesitancy. Then, in glowing tones, she told how Haydn shot the man. She expressed her gratitude to Haydn. The lady hoped to be able to tell him herself in the future. The tape finished. Willow set up another tape ready for Haydn. Everyone looked at Haydn. He was smiling. Holly was sure he had drifted off once more.

"Mr. Gerrard can you confirm the accuracy of the lady's testimony?"

Haydn merely replied, "yes."

"You did fire twice upstairs?"

"Yes."

"You shot the second gunman, from close range, when he was unarmed?"

"Why did you do this?"

Haydn sighed heavily. "He, they, had killed so many. He had to die. The bloke wanted me to kill him. I wanted to do it. He couldn't be allowed to live. If he had got hold of his gun, he would have shot more people. Once he was dead, there'd be no more worries." Then, in front of their eyes, he slipped away again. His eyes glazed over. He folded his arms on his stomach. A vague smile was on his face. There was the snatch at the air in front of him. Willow switched the recorder off. The others were still staring at Haydn. The concern showed on most of their faces.

"Doctor, Psychologist, can I speak to you please," Rowe told them. They rose off the settee. "In the front room please," and he led the way.

"I think I need to be party to this meeting," the lawyer called after Rowe and followed them out. Price and Willow stared at Haydn.

"Where do you think he is Sam?" he shrugged.

"Wherever the guilty go to hide?" he suggested. She scowled at him, but he just shrugged again.

Chapter 20

The blurs, visible only to Haydn, danced around him. He was engaged in another adventure. Haydn had command of an escort. A line of supply ships was being escorted through tenuously held frontier star systems. A beleaguered outpost was in dire need of the supplies. Once they were through this system the convoy would be within fighter support range of the outpost. So, he reasoned that if they were going to be attacked, the strike would have to be soon.

Intense fighting, during the last conflict, had destroyed the only life-bearing planet in this system. The planet and its moons had been reduced to a widespread debris field; ideal place to spring an ambush from. As they passed Haydn ordered the escort to be on full alert, but there is very little that can be done if a city-sized chunk of space rock is coming at you at hundreds of kph. Haydn ordered his ships to take evasive action. There was no point in trying to blast it, the resulting pieces would cause more damage over a larger area.

Their attempts to avoid colliding with the rock meant that the tight formation of the convoy was lost. This made them easier targets for the enemy. Having, somehow, sent the rock at them the enemy now attacked from the debris field. Haydn soon realised that this was not a raid designed to disrupt their progress, but rather the smaller part of a full-scale invasion fleet. One by one the supply ships and the escorting warships were destroyed. They were knocking out some of the opposition, but the weight of numbers was quickly extinguishing Haydn's command. Then discipline broke down and some ships tried to make a break for it. All of them were ruined by destructive fire.

Haydn had no more supply ships to protect. He took refuge in the debris field, dodging the pursuit and the lumps of rock. The situation was hopeless. Haydn gave a coded signal to

the crew. If they wished, the escape pods were at their disposal, there was no need for everyone to go down with the ship and the captain. Haydn noted very few pods were used; the enemy did not take prisoners. It was very unlikely any of them would survive. Haydn concentrated on flying the ship. They were taking hits as he flew between the planetary debris. Then Haydn saw a suitable mark. Flying as fast as it would go, he directed the ship into the nearest battleship. Lurking amongst the debris the battleship had thought itself safe from the escort. But it now helped to contribute more debris.

"Blimey!" Haydn started to life in the chair. He looked wide eyed around the room. "That was a turn up for the books!"

"What do you mean Mr. Gerrard?" Price asked him.

"That's the first time I've died," he told her. Seeing her face become concerned, "In these dreams I'm having, I mean." He added. Willow was clearly uninterested. Price nodded at him rather doubtfully. She looked pityingly at him.

"I must sound bloody weird to you," he said to her and felt a certain unease. "Don't worry I'm not going mad." He joked and gave a nervous laugh. Willow was inert. Price smiled the thinnest of smiles. Haydn went into the kitchen and busied himself washing up. If the blurs would just leave him alone for a while, he might not be carted off to the funny farm, he thought grimly.

In the front room Rowe wanted considered, professional advice.

"How is Mr. Gerrard's state of health doctor?"

"On the whole, physically he is doing fine considering what he's been through. The strain is showing, and I would like him to take it easy. Easier than he's been doing so far."

"So, physically alright, needs rest," Rowe echoed the doctor. "How about mentally? How do you think he's bearing up?"

"Mentally the picture is not so clear. I think Haydn is going to need a lot of help to recover. A lot of therapy. I don't think he's come to terms with things yet." The doctor looked to Holly.

"Do you agree with the doctor?" Rowe asked her.

"Yes. On some levels Haydn appears to be coping; he can talk about the incident for instance. But this slipping off into daydreams I believe this is a way of escaping. His brain does not want to face all the consequences and it just goes off to another place. He's going to need a lot of work."

"Have you any problems with his present state of mind? Can his last statement be accepted?" Rowe looked searchingly at them. The doctor and Holly looked at each other. "I want to know if there could be any cause to doubt his mental fitness at this moment in time?" Rowe reiterated. He ignored the lawyer's look.

"I do not believe Haydn is mentally unfit," Holly told him. "The last statement he gave can be accepted without any problems, Chief Inspector."

"I agree," the doctor said. "He's not mad, or not in control of his faculties. Distracted at times, yes. A little erratic perhaps in his behaviour." Holly nodded in agreement. "But he's not lost it." As if to prove a point there came an outburst of laughter from the other room. Haydn had apparently said something funny.

"So, you do not believe it is necessary to move Mr. Gerrard and keep him under observation?" Rowe asked them.

"No, that would not be appropriate at the moment," Holly replied, the doctor agreed. "But I want to visit him regularly and keep an eye on him. The sooner he is able to be out and about his usual business, the better it will be for him."

"I am afraid there is little chance of that happening in the short term," Rowe told her. "Once the media find out about the charges, they will be even keener to talk to Mr. Gerrard

and anyone who knows him. It will not calm down. There is also the possibility of extremists causing trouble of some kind. Officers will be kept here to protect Mr. Gerrard and to keep an eye on him."

Rowe then showed the doctor and Holly out. Holly shouted to Haydn that she would visit him in the morning. Then Rowe and Haydn's lawyer began to work out the details of his case and the charges. They also had to agree a joint statement to give to the media. They thought Haydn would want to be involved but he declined. He felt tired again and decided to go to bed despite the daylight. Price soon reported that he had fallen asleep, properly.

Chapter 21

The Prosecutor's office allowed Chief Inspector Rowe to give few details to the media. The exact nature of the charges that Haydn would face had to be discussed at the highest level. To the small crowd gathered in front of the pub TV, the meaning was clear. Their friend Haydn, the hero of the bus atrocity, was going to be charged. His future imprisonment was unlikely; all the media observers agreed on that, although the obvious implication of a political involvement was not lost on them. Would they make an example of Haydn? Would they be afraid to do it? Already there were reports of discontent around the country: attacks on mosques and Muslims had begun; well-known flash points of racist unrest were boiling over; racists, and troublemakers generally, were on the streets and the police were stretched. If Haydn received drastic punishment in the future, the consequences for civil peace looked bleak.

On the continent similarly, dangerous opinions had been let loose - copycat attacks on Muslims and mosques had taken place. French, Italian and German fascists were calling for all Muslims to be removed from their countries; if not the entire continent. Then the breaking news confirmed the perilous state of the world. More suicide bomb attacks by Westerners; Israeli collusion was hinted at by Arabic news sources. The world seemed to be caught up in a cycle of violence once more, but this time white, western extremists were in the vanguard.

"Well, now we know, for sure," John told the friends. They were back at the bar.

"Rich was right all along," Pat conceded.

"We knew he was, didn't we?" Paul looked at the friends either side of him. They nodded and shrugged resignedly. Rich had the good sense not to gloat. He was busy at the other end of the bar.

"What do you think happened?" Pat asked aloud. "He shot the second one unnecessarily, it sounds like. Do you think they'll try to do him for it?" there was a trace of despair in his voice.

"Oh, Haydn's definitely not done the second one in self-defence," John spoke. "But whether they will want to push it under the circumstances, I don't know."

"The reporters seem to think they won't." Paul was trying to sound confident. "But all this other trouble doesn't help. People could be forced into making decisions for other reasons. I mean the lady upstairs thinks Haydn's a hero. But will the do-gooders in the government think the same?"

"They better had," Pat was adamant, "or, if they think this is trouble, then they ain't seen nothing yet." He made an angry gesture with his arm. Rich approached warily; he was gauging Pat's mood.

"I know you didn't think much of it but my idea of making a killing out of Haydn seems to be off now." He said gloomily.

"What do you mean?" Pat asked him.

"Well, I was hoping he would come in and then we would have a big crowd in to see him." Rich explained. "But it doesn't look like he'll be leaving his house now, especially with all this shit happening everywhere."

"Oh, I see." Pat was not angry, just a bit down, he drank thoughtfully. They did not say anything for a while. The TV news kept telling them bad tidings and the mood of the place slumped into depression. Eventually Paul spoke, "I hope Haydn gets the time to fully recover. He needs it by the sound of it." They murmured agreement.

.....

"Despite all these disturbances," Chief Inspector Rowe was briefing his team. "I am confident that the Prosecutor will follow my recommendation. Mr. Gerrard will receive a suspended sentence. He will be free to go. Why he did not tell us the truth from the beginning, I do not know?" no one offered him an answer. Price thought there was little point in explaining the fear people had of being prosecuted just because they were defending themselves. She suspected Rowe was aware of this any way.

"Unfortunately," Rowe continued, "because of this rise in loosely related problems we still need to give some protection to him. The surveillance team has spoken to me this morning. There has been a massive increase in phone calls and emails to Mr. Gerrard. We have decided to take his connections off the systems until things calm down."

"That might be some time, Sir," Willow made an unusual interruption.

"Indeed, Inspector, and at a time when we could be better used, pursuing the unsavoury characters that have come into the light, we have to tie up some resources with Mr. Gerrard." He sighed, "It cannot be helped. Hopefully Mr. Gerrard will make a swift recovery, even if he is a prisoner in his own home. How was he this morning, Sergeant Price?"

"Bit of a relapse I think, Sir. He did not react well to the latest outbreaks of violence. He could be blaming himself for it in some way. The Psychologist was concerned about him at first, but he picked up visibly as she worked with him." Price had been worried too. The officer at Haydn's door had heard him ranting and raving in the middle of the night; Haydn had woken up to be dismayed by the news. The officers on duty had managed to calm him at that time.

"I am afraid we cannot do much more for Mr. Gerrard, the doctors and the Psychologist are no doubt very competent, they will have to pull him through." Rowe was winding up their involvement in the case. "I believe we all have some work to finish before we can close

the book on this case for the time being. I want the team to be ready to move back to London in two days." He got up; the meeting was over.

.....

Haydn had spent the day poring over his many books and listening to a lot of music. He had banned himself from watching the TV. He spent hours finding and reading his favourite parts of novels and at the same time, he trawled his CD collection playing his favourite tracks. It was very intense, and his middle room was littered with books and CD cases. Once their jewels had been gleaned, he discarded them. The floor, tables, chairs, TV, computer were covered in a depth of books and CDs. Haydn found the familiarity of reading and hearing the best parts enjoyable, very soothing and reassuring. The time went quickly. He kept busy. The blurs had not disturbed him.

Haydn had eaten very little all day; he had drunk only water. Occasionally the officers at his door came in to check on him and see if he needed anything - but he was fine - they were under orders to report any strange behaviour. As she left that morning Holly had told them to keep a regular contact with Haydn. However, the officers had to handle the situation outside also, and there had been no decrease in the number of reporters and cameramen. More members of the public were gathered on the pavements. They had come to express their support for Haydn. They needed watching because if the front door opened then they would surge forward to try to catch a glimpse of Haydn. At one-point Haydn peeped out to study them, but he found the experience very disconcerting, one onlooker had spotted the curtain twitching and led a charge across the road. Haydn had recoiled in horror.

Haydn accepted the polite insistence of the senior officer to stay out of view. Before he went to bed, he told the police that he hoped to have a lie-in and did not plan to rise until late

in the morning. Holly was due to visit later in the afternoon. He felt tired, but more relaxed. He lay in bed and thought 'it's getting better'. But immediately he found himself in another dream.

Protecting senior members of the sector's government was a dangerous job. Haydn had been doing it for two average cycles. They were a multi-species organisation and had lost many operatives. Casualties were to be expected. Haydn and his team were covering an important trade delegation. A decoy was being employed. The real leader was disguised as one of the lesser delegates. But it was a perilous task against determined assassins. Inside the meeting chamber they were ambushed. The decoy had been eliminated by a few rogue cube-spheres who had blown themselves up, taking half the room with them.

Immediately his team had fallen back and surrounded the real leader. Having identified the leader by their actions, they came under heavy fire. The assassins were well-trained and well-armed. Soon, what was left of the meeting room, was illuminated with the stabbing light of power lasers. The leader was safe inside a shield for the moment. Both sides had taken losses. Haydn scanned the ruined room. Two of his best people were with the leader: blond scar and old man far away eyes. He could make out four assassins left. They had thrown some grenades, luckily their shields had held, but they would not last forever.

Haydn signalled blond and old man to stay close to the leader. They had to finish this quickly. He rushed to a more forward position. He signalled two of his team to lay down covering fire, two others he told to move around the flanks. Under the covering fire he ran forward. The team member on the left was killed but Haydn got the assassin who did it. On the other flank red head had got himself into a useful position. The remaining assassins were not aware of him. Haydn ordered the other two to move more to the left and keep the assassins occupied.

Then on a signal Haydn turned his shield to maximum and stormed straight at the assassins' position. They saw him coming but at first could not fire because red and the other two were laying down a withering crossfire. As Haydn reached the assassins, he saw two of them had been killed. The last one fired his laser right into Haydn. The shield held but Haydn was knocked off his feet. In fury the assassin kept firing into Haydn's shield. At maximum setting it would not last long, but the assassin revealed too much to red, who wounded him fatally. The assassins dying act was to detonate another grenade.

Haydn warned the others and flinched inside his shield; he did not have time to escape. His shield absorbed much of the blast. But not enough. The blast had found a weakness around his waist. Haydn knew he was finished. The initial pain soon went away and a glance at his shattered legs reinforced the feeling that his life was ebbing away. A growing pool of his blood was collecting on the floor. His strength was deserting him.

Red head was at his side. They looked at each other. Red grasped Haydn's arm. He held it until Haydn's eyes were lifeless. Haydn was aware he had died. He seemed to be suspended over his body. He watched as blond scar took over command. She led the rest of the team and the leader to safety. Then Haydn awoke, he thought, but it was not right, he was still floating above his body, but now it was in his bed at home. His face had a slight smile on it and his eyes were open. His body sat up in the bed with pillows supporting his back and he wondered how he had got into that position.

But then he realised that he was a blurry light shape. The other blurs were floating beside him. He could clearly see their inner form: there was jellyfish, humanoid and cube-sphere. Empathically he knew they were old man far away eyes, blond scar and red head; in that order. The jellyfish was communicating with him.

"Haydn, you have passed many tests. We are instructed to offer you the chance to join us."

"Who are you?" Haydn asked.

"We are what would be called immortal spirits by some in your world."

"I don't understand," Haydn said.

"In this galaxy, and we expect in every galaxy, there is a profusion of life. In every corner and at every time life has developed. By its nature some is good and some bad."

"There is such a thing as good and bad?" Haydn asked.

"Yes, as you know it, good and bad, good and evil is the best explanation we have for you."

"So, as life develops it becomes, or is, basically good or evil?"

"It's a fair way of looking at it."

"So, what are we, humans, are we good or bad?"

"It is not as clear as that. Within species there are good and bad. Only in a very few examples can a species claim to be wholly good. Likewise, only in an equally few species can it be said that they are evil through and through."

"So, what does evil life do?"

"Evil life upsets the balance in the galaxy. It prevents the proper evolution of all life. It imposes itself on and strangles the good. It must be thwarted wherever and whenever it is possible."

"What's the proper evolution of life?"

"It is not known." Haydn was thinking. They could anticipate him, but they waited for him. If the transition was to be successful Haydn had to remove all doubts.

"So, you are the good guys and you fight the bad guys?" a trace of scepticism was noticed in his feelings.

"Around this galaxy there resides a force for good. An energy that exists to give life a chance. This energy also pervades the galaxy. It surrounds everything. Whether it is living

cells or mere matter. It constantly strives with the corruption that you call evil. None of us is aware of the true nature of these competing forces and energies."

"So, are you real?" Haydn considered his blurry form. "Where do you come from?"

"You see us as we were, in life on our home worlds. But we exist now as energy, contained within these shapes only to enable you to comprehend us at this moment. When we died, we were asked to join the fight, as you are now being asked in turn."

"But why was I chosen? How do I qualify?"

"Sometimes a life will do something that resonates in our energy continuum. That alerts the energy to a possible recruit. You did that when you decided to fight on the bus. We were then sent to test you in what you call dreams. Now it has been decided to offer you the chance to join us."

"But how do you fight? What do you do?" Haydn considered himself merely a bundle of light energy.

"Your life force can be transferred to the energy continuum that surrounds everything. But when you are needed you can be placed inside the body of any lifeform. Then you can use that form until it is destroyed. Although you may use many bodies, once you are part of the energy you cannot lose your life energy. We inhabit the bodies, they can be destroyed, but our energy is used again and again. We are used to lead. We are used as sacrifices. We are used to alter the course of civilisations. We are used to preserve life. We are used to extinguish life. Always the energy is trying to achieve a perfect harmony in the galaxy."

Haydn liked the sound of it. A constant spiritual existence fighting for good. If it was like the dreams, and it had to be if they were tests, then it was going to be an endlessly exciting experience with a perfect future at the end of it.

"What happens if I refuse?" he was considering his earthly body in the bed.

"You have three options: to join us; to die now in your bed; to live on in an increasingly difficult existence on this world." Jellyfish knew the decision was close.

"What happens to people who really die?"

"It is not known with any certainty. It is believed that their life force becomes part of the energy in some way."

"But they do not get to fly spaceships and fire marvellous weapons?"

"There is more to our work than that." Jellyfish and the others were amused.

"How will I die?"

"It will be difficult for the people on this planet to find an answer. It will appear like you just stopped, gave up wanting to live, perhaps." They could sense Haydn's decision was made. "There is little to live for on this world. Come and join us. We will save the galaxy and secure life's future."

"I'm with you."

Then the blurs opened a portal, just like in the movies, Haydn thought. On the other side Haydn entered a dimension where everything was light.

.....

"How did this happen, Sergeant?" Chief Inspector Rowe was not a happy man. His car had just pulled up in front of Haydn's house. He and Willow had avoided the media and walked briskly into the house. Outside, the scent of a big story was palpable in the noses of the reporters and cameramen.

"The officers discovered him only half an hour ago, Sir." Price began to explain.

"Gerrard had told them last night that he intended to sleep in. He had seemed a little better.

They did not think anything was wrong. Then, at eleven, one of them thought they had better check. He's in his bedroom, Sir." Rowe peered into the middle room.

"What has happened here?" he asked.

"Gerrard spent most of yesterday in here, Sir, reading and listening to music. Apparently quite happy," Price told him. She noticed how the officers had managed to make themselves scarce now that Rowe had arrived.

"Anything untoward, downstairs, Sergeant?" Rowe looked into the living room.

"No, Sir, nothing amiss," she assured him. He indicated for her to lead the way; Willow followed. Price led them into the bedroom where some forensic staff were active in the room. The police doctor and the coroner were present. Rowe asked for a report. Between them they could tell him that time of death was probably early hours of the morning and there were no clear signs of the cause of death - an autopsy would be needed as soon as possible. Rowe told them to proceed as soon as they were ready.

Downstairs, Price turned to Rowe, "He was already cold when he was found, Sir. There was nothing anyone could have done."

"I can see that, Sergeant," Rowe responded. "Short of having someone in bed with him there's not much else we could have done. Any ideas?"

"He looked quite relaxed, Sir," Willow said, "a bit of a smile on his face even. So, he couldn't have been in any distress. No blood or any other indications. He just died. People do sometimes."

"Lost the will to live? Is that the answer, Sergeant?" Rowe asked.

"Perhaps, Sir. But he seemed quite happy when he went to bed."

"Well, it is just speculation for now. The autopsy will tell us more. I must notify the Prosecutor and deal with the media. Stay here and see it through this end." Then he left. Price looked at Willow.

"In a way, it tidies things up nicely," he offered. "Although it might make a martyr of him. He looked quite happy; you have to admit." She nodded reluctantly. "It was probably one of those dreams, I expect, got a bit out of hand." He winked at her. She shook her head at him.

.....

The pub was devastated. Some people had been on the street when they took the body away. Rich was very subdued. John could find nothing to say. Pat seemed to be coping. The drinks were going down. Some tears were shed and there was a lot of head shaking in disbelief. Gradually they began to talk. Finally, Pat snapped and threw an empty glass against a wall. The smashed glass seemed to break the mood. Paul, who had always felt it would end in tragedy, led the remembering. They had lost a friend and they could not understand why. But they would not forget him. Later, Pat was insisting they had a plaque made and then went on to suggest nuking the Arabs.