

Introduction

This is a story about what happened in a big city I visited in America. The city is a large place where people work, in offices, on the streets, in schools and perhaps as security guards in large government buildings. Ahem. In a non-government building down the street a little girl called Sarah plays with her doll, while uptown a boy called John is putting on his pyjamas. Perhaps they have just said goodnight to their fathers, Paul Rivera and JACK Tramery. Perhaps they watch the cars drive past, some slowly some and some more quickly. Fast cars fleeing a robbery, startling street children who crouch down before hiding in the local park, where they may feel safe and fall asleep with their cider. Asleep until that is, they are rudely awoken by the police, perhaps detectives Winter and Sanchez are responsible. Sanchez a grumpy little fellow, who probably will have a longer day ahead of him, what with the Muscat building having been robbed. He will probably suspect his nemesis James Murdock or Jimmy, as his friends know him. Jimmy has many friends, including Paul Rivera, Jack Tramery and Michael Darcy the District Attorney. He works in St. Michael's Precinct, and has offices in the Muscat building, that great big building in the centre of the city where homeless children sometimes sleep, like Peter Jones perhaps. Not only the young people but older folks, like William Blanco, also a one time friend of Jimmy's sleep there. Sometimes he likes to sleep in the Park, near the River, where the bodies of the boys in the David Waters case washed up. It was indeed lucky that they found the man who committed that crime, Thatcher I think his name was. Thanks to the skilled detectives, the little children can now sleep safely in their beds. Or at least that is what I thought, until one night I happened upon the city again. I would tell you what I saw, but you can see if for yourself, when you have met these good folks for yourself.

VMJ Miller

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CHAPTER ONE

The walk Begins

William Blanco's reflection was green and yellow and smudged with mucked fingerprints on the sides of his liquor bottle. The old man wiped the last drops of whiskey from the edges of his crusty yellowed beard before settling down for the night in an alleyway. He could hear the hum and buzz of the TV sets in the window of the electrical store nearby and as they sent him to sleep like a lullaby. The street beside where he lay was silent and empty save the rattle of a beat up car filled with kids cruising through the city. They drove down dark streets, speeding past a nearby coffee shop, which was filled with coffied cops taking a break from being on the take. The uniforms were talking about tomorrow and eating yesterday's donuts that a chubby lady behind the counter kept especially for them. Around the back of the shop she threw the crusts to the rats crows and clawed creatures of the night scrounging for dinner as they scampered beside the old man sleeping in the alley. One crow, with crusts in its beak flew high above the grey-faced buildings leaving the flock behind as it flew through the foggied air past office workers who were working late at their desks. It startled moon-faced dreamers sat staring out windows trying to send away their souls into the stars. A little girl watched silent from behind the glass clutching an old worn doll unaware of the crow's presence, unaware of the people outside, unable to hear the sirens screaming outside. She was unable to hear them, unable to see, smell or touch them, but it rained a small comfort on her that when she opened her window somebody else was crying shouting and smiling outside in the moonlit city.

Sarah squeezed the doll against her chest as tightly as she could, until the glass eyes of the doll made hollow imprints and raised red bruises on her skin. Sarah was shaking her head furiously, kneeling down in front of the window, beside the little altar made last May on top of her locker. It had a little grey vase with dead bluebells hanging their drowned heads in the stagnant water and a small statue of Mary beside the vase. Sarah shook her head again and gritted her teeth as the wind chime on top of her window rung out hollow sounds in sympathy with her prayers as she laid the doll on the floor. Carefully she placed a slipper under its head as a pillow. Sarah smudged

the tears that dropped on its worn face with her fingertips and placed her jumper over its body as a pillow before kissing it goodnight. Downstairs she could hear them calling her name, calling her, with voices that were cutting through her thoughts, through the still air of her room like a disease. Their words spread like a virus, scrambling her thoughts of peace, of forgiveness, like razor blades of reason. Her mother's voice was calling her once, then twice to come to the table for her dinner. Sarah bent down and softly smoothed the woollen hair off Delilah's face and shut the eyes that never seemed to close. Delilah never worked like it had said on the box exactly two Christmases when Sarah had gotten the doll as a present from Santa Claus, when she was still young, when she still... Sarah shook her head again, and tied her hair up with an old bobbin. She rubbed her hands furiously over her face, wasn't going to let them see she was crying, wasn't going to let them see her tears. She blessed herself again, and then left the room.

"I don't know what we're going to do with her"

Looking down the stairs Sarah edged her eyes carefully over each precipice with the eyes of an experienced negotiator surveying the territory ahead while listening to every word said behind the kitchen door. She sidled slowly down the carpeted stairs, trying carefully not to hit the steps that creaked, so that they wouldn't know she could hear them.

"Humph" a deep voice replied.

Hearing her father's voice Sarah shivered momentarily. Under her feet, the carpet was blue with spirals of green and yellow that had darkened; suddenly shadowed by her silhouette cast by the lights above her head. It was as though she was standing in a valley suddenly sunlit during a tempest on fields covered with shadows from storm clouds. Carefully Sarah stepped down the stairs, breathing slowly and soundlessly trying to hear him trying to understand if he was losing his temper or pretending to listen to her mother.

"Did you hear what I said?" her mother repeated.

Sarah placed her hand on the cool rounded knob of the kitchen door and reluctantly entered the room. Her stomach felt stiff and her eyes were sore from crying. She held her head downcast to the lino, indicative of sorrow, and avoided their eyes. She felt suffocated by the hot air of the kitchen, and the stench of rotted carrots and cabbage.

Her stomach churned as she took a seat at the table opposite *him*, still unable to look either of them in the eye, desperately wishing she could control it, could control herself. Her mother was busy scrubbing charcoaled pots and pans at the sink, never ate dinner with them, only cooked it. He was looking at her; she could feel he was looking at her,

“Well?” he asked, placing both knife and fork down on the table alongside his empty plate before picking up a newspaper.

He smiled at her, as she shifted uneasily in her seat. She could sense it in his voice; he was going to be friendly. She preferred it when he was angry; at least it was over quickly then. Sarah kept her eyes to her plate and kept chewing and chewing. Carrots weren't meant to be chewy she thought to herself. Across the table, he put his paper down, and neatly folded it onto the table. He always did that, seemed to spend half his time folding and unfolding newspapers. Noise noise noise, she could never hear what was on the television trying to distract her in the background, only the noise of the paper rustling. Sarah could feel her skin getting stiff and sticky on her face, he was looking at her waiting. She couldn't swallow.

“So why did we get a letter from your school today? You want to tell me about it?”

Silence; she couldn't form the words to answer his question. The carrots were beginning to taste sweet in her mouth. She still couldn't swallow. He jerked his hand over the table and grabbed the fork out of her hand, eyes pulsing with red veined rage.

“You think that you're not going to answer me? Think you can just sit there and eat, and say nothing?” he shouted.

Sarah's jaws were tensing at the sides into little balls of sinew. She looked over asking for some help to her mother, who had picked up the paper and was busy unfolding it. But her mother had her face buried in the papers, unaware of what was happening.

“Answer me. Do you think that's funny?” he repeated slamming his fist on the table.

She looked him in the eye through the thick-rimmed glasses he always wore. Then she shook her head. He grabbed the plate from her and smashed it on the floor then sent her to her room saying he'd be upstairs to deal with her later.

“That's what I told him Del. I told him it was a joke,” Sarah whispered to her doll.

Sarah heard the click of the latch behind him. She picked Delilah up and started playing with the doll's hair; patting and pulling the same piece over and over again.

Outside she could hear the stairs creaking as he walked down to the kitchen, each step creaking shuddering in empathy with her, each creak sounding like the one before. Sarah patted the doll's hair again consoling herself that tomorrow everything would change; everything was always different tomorrow.

“Again. Again.”

“Listen kid that's the last time I can do this for you, I have to go do a show. The crowd will be waiting.”

Peter Jones squinted through the sunlight at the crescent faced man in front of him. Mr Jack Tramery, the great illusionist, his own private entertainer.

“Again, just show me one more trick. Go on, I'll bet I can figure it out this time.”

Tramery looked at the boy. Peter had fine brown hair, which kicked out at the sides in little curls framing his boyish face. Only his eyes showed that he was nearly in double figures with their defiant I'm almost a teenager look while his body was still in boyhood, still slim limbed and lithe. Mr Tramery grinned at Peter, sometimes it was almost too easy, he thought to himself as he patted Peter's head.

“Sorry kid, hadn't you better be going home now? I've gotta show to be doing and your parents will be looking for you.”

Peter kicked his other foot with a newly bought white trainer and scuffed it with muck in annoyance. Jesus it wasn't as though he'd get to see a side show like this again. Just one more time he thought to himself and he'd figure out how the trick was done. He frowned up at Tramery. Reluctantly Tramery took the cards out of his pocket and sprung them through his fingers with the dexterity of a baker caressing pizza dough. It was an easy trick but the kids loved it. Peter knew the drill by now. Peter took a card from Tramery's deck, while the man stared dead eyed at him, pretending not to notice where the boy had taken the card from him. Peter decided to even the odds, and took another card as well. He memorised both cards, the king of spades and jack of spades then placed both at different ends of the deck.

“Now find both of them.”

The deck was then cut in two, Peter chose the left half, it was cut again and again each time Peter choosing a different half of the deck to keep. Then Tramery took the remaining five cards and put them in his pocket.

“Seeing as you want to change the rules, why don’t you pick out your cards yourself?” Tramery said smiling.

Peter reached into Tramery’s deep trouser pocket and took out two of the cards face down. His hands were unusually small for a boy Tramery thought to himself. Tramery then took the two cards off the boy holding one in his right and one in his left. He flicked one to face Peter, and with all the pizzazz of a street showman proudly announced:

“A king of spades for a prince”

Peter looked at the other hand with nervous expectation Tramery never let him down. Then Tramery winked at Peter before putting the card into his other pocket.

“You’ll have to wait till next week to see if I got the card right kid,” he said knowing how the boy would react, “I’ve got a show to do tonight.” T

hen Tramery turned to get into his green beat up car and drove off into the night.

In the kitchen Nora was putting the dinner dishes into the sink, sliding the crockery into the bowl allowing sudden jolts of pottery to wake her husband up. He shifted slightly in the chair, and then yawned before settling down again. She was careful to make enough noise to wake him without angering him.

“Paul” she said quietly before repeating it again. “Paul we have to talk about Sarah. We can’t let this go on. I can’t cope with her. Not in my state.”

He cocked his head to one side,

“Can’t this wait, I’ve had a long day, can’t we discuss this in the morning. You know that I have to work tonight.”

She squirted some liquid into the bowl and turned the taps on full.

“Look I’m telling you I can’t cope, I can’t be the one all the time looking after her. She’s not normal, there is something wrong with her, she sits in her room all day, and doesn’t talk to anybody, its not right, and I don’t’ know what to do with her,” she said quietly.

Paul got up out of his chair.

“Well what do you expect me to do with her? You know we’ve tried all we can.”

“She sits up in that room of hers all day and won’t talk to anyone, and the school have had reports of her bullying the other children and now today that letter home from her

teacher saying that she never does her home-work? I don't know why she's like that, we buy her all the books she needs."

"Look you don't need to tell me that. I don't know what to do either, you're the one at home with her all day, its your problem" he replied turning in the chair, to sleep again.

"You can't keep sending her to her room, you have to help me, the little brat is driving me mad Paul"

"Well" he grunted.

"Look at me."

He looked up at her.

"Either she goes or I do".

Sarah crept back up the stairs. She didn't feel like a drink of milk anymore had heard all she needed to from her parents.

"You're not leaving. You don't know anything."

"I just. I just don't know what to do with her."

"We'll talk about this tomorrow, I have to go out to work"

Sarah crept under her bed. She pulled the sheet down over the wooden frame at one side so that the only gap she could see out from was a little gap at the end of the bed. In this little house, Del was covered in her jumper again, ready for sleep for the night. Sarah didn't want to disturb her. Sarah looked around under the bed and took out her torch. She started casting shadow shapes on the underneath of the bed to keep her company, trying to blot out their voices, his voice, her voice; either she goes or I do.

The next morning Paul reached his hand around the morning newspaper to pour a cup of coffee, didn't even need to look to see what he was doing. Sarah wondered what would happen if she moved the pot a little one morning. Then he'd have to reach around. Then he'd have to look at her. She fiddled about under the table tying the buckles on her black patent shoes listening to them chat above her head.

"They think that he might have run away. That's what they said on the radio earlier on" Nora said through gulps of milky coffee.

"Hmm?" he asked.

“That poor child from down the road Peter Jones, they’ve had an appeal out for him all day. His parents are devastated. They say that he ran away last night, but these days.”

Nora shook her head and stirred her coffee, mouth twitching at the sides ready with the names of crimes that had no name, that couldn’t be mentioned, not in front of children, not in front of her daughter.

“These days you never know what is going to meet you outside. You have to be careful, kids are so vulnerable” Paul replied without looking up from his paper.

On the school bus later that morning Sarah positioned herself somewhere about the middle of the aisle. She sat beside the window with her bag on the seat beside her so as to make it look like someone couldn’t sit beside her because there was no room. She smiled in vain at the others getting on the bus. Most of the kids, the older ones sat at the back. On her first day on the school bus she sat right at the back, thinking she’d be hidden there, not understanding why other girls kept looking over at her and giggling. The older kids sat beside her and smoked their way through countless magazines and problem pages, pausing every so often to glare at her for interloping their territory. The other girls in her class were giggling at her from their seats in the middle of the bus, so the next day she sat in the middle and giggled with them. On the radio in the bus, Sarah could hear news reports about some boy who had gone missing. At school, her teacher told them to be careful on their way home and to get on the bus and to be careful and countless other things that nobody paid any attention to because Sally Hughes had gotten a new pencil case from New York and was busy passing it around the class and telling tales of adventures and lost luggage in foreign countries. Sarah didn’t hear the rest because she was looking out the window at the clouds. Missing she thought to herself. Everyone was so worried about this boy. Parents would be devastated her mother said.

“Brown hair, blue jeans and a red t-shirt. His parents said he was on his way to the shops but never came back” the fuzzy haired teacher droned in the background, trying to catch their attention, but Sarah was lost in thought, looking out the window. Some of the clouds looked as though they had lights shining from inside of them. They looked like they were arguing against the light from the sun before casting spiteful shadows on each other and playfully pushing past.

“So don’t forget to keep your eyes open and tell your parents or guardians if you see a boy like this. And now open your books on page...”

Outside the black iron school gates all the kids were waiting for the bus. They were lined up against the wall, sitting and slouching on their schoolbags. One of the older kids said that the bus had broken down and that everyone would have to walk home. Sally came over to Sarah, ears pricked up and cheeks grinning full of self-importance, and imported pens and rarefied pokémon,

“You know they mightn’t have a bus for tomorrow, if they don’t have one now. And you know what that means?”

No buses, no bus drivers, no guessing which seat to sit in, having to squeeze in beside one of the fat kids nobody else would sit beside, having to walk into school, getting a lift with her parents. Which? How was she to know what that meant?

“Yeah” Sarah nodded.

“Yep no school for us tomorrow.” Sally agreed attempting to blow bubbles with her neon pink chewing gum.

Just then around the corner a fleet of mini-buses came one after another as though in a funeral procession, and all the kid’s faces dropped.

“Shit!” Sally shouted and then spat her gum through one of the bars of the school gates.

“You getting on?” she asked Sarah.

Mini-buses! Who was getting onto each one? Where did they go? And where was she supposed to sit? Was she going to get onto the wrong bus, the one with the kids that were always stinking, the kids with the strange clothes and the dirty nails? How did everyone else already know these things?

“I think I have to go to music practice today. My mother said she’d collect me.” Sarah found herself saying automatically, while Sally jumped onto the bus with a group of other kids.

As the bus drove off, Sarah found herself looking at the cars driving past wondering why she hadn’t just gotten on it like everyone else. She shook her head and looked around. Could see the teachers getting into their cars in the car park, could feel them looking at her, could feel all their eyes looking at her, they knew, she knew they knew and it was only a matter of time before they wanted to talk to her. They called her to

the office the day before, asked her if she wanted to talk, if there was anything she wanted to talk to them about. Talking, she shook her head, walking she could do walking talking was dangerous, but walking was safer. Sarah knew the way home. All those days looking out the window of the bus pretending to find the view interesting meant she knew every turn every tree every newly decorated porch like the back of her hand. Above her head the sky was patchy blue and yellow. Her eyes caught its brightness and milked every drop of sunshine out of it. She started smiling; it wasn't going to be too bad walking home in weather like this.

As Tramery walked past her, he was struck by the fact that she was smiling to herself and had a skip or something in her step. When she passed she didn't even seem to notice him. He had been careful not to leave the apartment until there was no-one around, had been looking up and down the street through the net curtains for the past few minutes watching the cars kick up dust on the roads. He lifted up the lid on the trashcan and dumped a bag into it then carefully replaced the lid and wiped his hands on his brown cord trousers. Then he turned around and looked up the street to see who was around. Further up the street was an electrical store, a pizza take away and an olde apothecary chemist shop front, newly built with a distressed front, to give the natives a little culture he laughed to himself. The footpath was sloping towards the buildings alongside it, which meant there were always stagnant stinking puddles on the street no matter how hot the weather got. A lonely mini rattled past. He was almost certain no one other than the girl had seen him. She was wearing a school uniform, grey skirt, blue blouse and a wine jumper on top, with the sleeves slightly rolled up. She had fair to brown hair, which was bouncing as she walked onwards. Tramery turned to the other direction to see if anyone in the garage nearby had seen him leave the flat, and then looked up and down the streetlights to check for security cameras he had to be certain. Then he looked up the path again, this time it was empty, not a soul on the street. Where had she gone? Had she gotten into a nearby car? Did she live in one of the apartments nearby? Had she told some one there. Calm down Tramery he told himself, and started walking in the same direction she had been. She was only a little schoolgirl.

“Such nice eyes, Miguel come back here and look at this kid. Doesn’t she remind you of Tanya, when she was a little girl. Doesn’t she? Look at the way she tilts her head. Yeah real cute.”

Miguel came out from the back and stood behind the counter, his hair gelled back and top button of his white shirt casually open at 45degrees. He looked at the little girl who was blushing.

“Ma you are embarrassing her. Hey kid, what can I do you for?”

“A chocolate bar, you come into our restaurant for a chocolate bar. I don’t know anymore. You kids have no respect for proper food. Hey kid, I’m only joking. Yeah we have chocolate bars. A real nice selection, you can have Snickers or a Snickers. Hmm yeah Snickers I thought so. Ma will you look after this guy?”

Sarah looked around her while she waited at one of the benches in the window of the pizza parlour. Above on a TV screen she could see pictures of places strewn with war and crumbling buildings and children with tear streaked eyes searching for food among the trash. Another day, and the same news stories, tomorrow never meant change, it only meant older and taller to Sarah; everything else was stagnant and still. She was reminded of the evenings spent watching the TV news with her mother as they ate their tea in peace, when her father was working late. When the famine and war she saw on the TV screen made her feel selfish and angry at allowing herself to be bitter, to be searching for blame. At nighttime she confessed her sins to the lifeless blue statues on her locker and called for forgiveness selling her to the myths and legends of faraway countries and distant dreams. The pizza parlour was almost a parody of those places, but it was the only place she had a chance to escape to, the only place she knew she could get to. Sarah had seen an old white bearded man come out of the place one day while she was watching all that passed as she travelled home on the school bus. The old man was holding a Snickers in his hand like it was Captain Cooke’s treasure map. Sarah could remember thinking it was strange that he had stumbled out of a pizza parlour with a chocolate bar of all things, and felt compelled as she walked past to find out what the place looked like inside. She wanted to check it out for herself. The walls above the counter that was just to high for her to see over were covered with signs in red and white advertising all the sandwiches baps mozzarella sticks french-fries all the food that she wasn’t allowed at home. She looked at the tall stranger dressed in brown cords, standing beside her at the counter. Tramery was ordering a plain pizza to go.

“There you go kid” Miguel hailed Sarah from behind the counter.

She started smiling and took out some change from her bag to pay him. Miguel looked at Sarah and nodded his head at his sister agreeing with her; Sarah did have the same eyes as Tanya.

“Naw you take this on the house”, he said as she offered him a dollar, much to Sarah’s surprise.

“Yeah take it on the house, on condition that next time you come back you get some proper food for you and your family.”

Then Miguel gave the tall man his Pizza grinning at him as he did so.

“At least you’re eating proper.”

The man gave him a note and bid him keep the change, then held the door open for Sarah as they both left the shop.

“Thank you”

“No problem kid.”

Sarah was about to start walking off quickly but stopped when she noticed him walking in the same direction. She was suddenly overcome with indecision. The same indecision that made her sit in the middle of the bus, and never answer questions in school, not because she wasn’t sure what the answer was, but because she wasn’t sure how other people would react to her if she had the right answers.

“You know kid, its not really safe to walk home on your own. Do you live around here?” he asked, slightly hunched down to talk to her.

Never tell where you live they told her. Never tell them your name, never take their sweets and never tell them where you live. Sarah looked up into Tramery’s wide brown eyes she felt uncomfortable lying to him, especially since he seemed like such a gentleman.

“Its not safe you’re right sir. There was a young boy taken from round these streets just yesterday,” she replied in her best diction, trying to avoid the question without offending him. The tone of her voice startled him a little.

“So that is why my school sent a group of us. A select few you know, to walk around on our way home to check and see if we could find him. My friends have already walked onwards, I stopped here to buy a bar of chocolate, I’ll have to go and catch up with them in a minute.”

A group of them indeed, Tramery had been watching the footpaths on South Street all day and not seen any uniforms other than hers.

“I see, so you are here to do a bit of detective work” he replied.

“Yes, um you haven’t seen a brown haired boy with a red t-shirt around here have you?” she asked, suddenly remembering the description that her teacher had called out in class earlier that day. Tramery placed his hands in his pockets wondering where she could have gotten a description that accurate from, surely Therese wouldn’t have gone to the cops already. He noticed the girl watching him expectantly waiting for a reply.

“No actually no I haven’t seen any kids like that around here sorry. But I’ll keep an eye out.”

“So are you out for a walk then sir?” she asked rather innocently, trying to make the kind of polite conversation she had heard people on TV make, trying to be sociable. Tramery cocked his head in her direction, smiling at her, for a reason that she couldn’t understand.

“Actually I just came to” then he looked in the window of a nearby electrical store and saw what looked like a familiar face on one of the TV screens, it was the face of Maria Thornton. He was struck by the fact that she was stood outside of the Muscat building, reporting a robbery, *the* robbery.

“I came to buy a new television in this shop, its for my son, perhaps you’d care to help me? You being around the same age as him?” he asked not turning his face from the TV screen as he noticed the shop assistant watching both of them at the window from inside the shop.

Sarah nodded her head slowly. Something inside made her think it might be rude to refuse the man such a simple request. She followed him into the shop and again he held the door open for her to walk through, just like the men in the black and white films that she watched in the afternoons, when her mother was still at work. Immediately they were both hit with a gust of cool air from the air conditioning vent. He went over to a television and stood and looked at the one with the news on. For some reason the voice of Maria Thornton was dubbed in Spanish, and he was having difficulty making out what was being said above the din of the other TV sets in the shop.

“This is the TV we have at home” Sarah shouted from the other side of the shop.

“I see yes that looks like a good one” he said without looking around.

Then he notice the shop assistant giving him funny looks, he didn't want to appear suspicious so he called Sarah over to him.

"Is that the kid you were looking for?" he asked her noticing a photograph of a young boy pop up on a nearby TV screen.

Sarah looked up at the photograph, brown haired boy with red t-shirt, bound to be. Then Sarah watched as an interview with a woman and man who appeared to be the boy's parents was shown on the TV next. But she couldn't make out what they were saying because some deep voiced Spanish person was speaking loudly and slowly on the TV that the tall man was watching. Sarah strained her ears to hear what was being said, only able to catch pieces of sentences.

"Deeply missed by all... hope he returns soon.. Information.. Please..." she couldn't catch what they were saying.

The parents looked worried and the mascara that the woman was wearing was dripping in heavy darkened drops about her cheeks as the man held his hand in hers and frowned into the camera lens. Sarah was suddenly reminded of her own parents. They still probably wished she wouldn't come home. *Either she goes or I do.*

"Last seen... man in late thirties. Moustache.Tall... brown hair" Tramery couldn't make out the rest his Spanish wasn't that good. He could order a takeaway, a drink, chat about films he had never seen, and books that they told him at school would expand his mind, but understanding a simple news report was beyond him. All he knew was that they had been seen, and that time was running out. As an assistant came over to help them out, he explained that they were just leaving and opened the shop door for Sarah to leave. It was only a matter of time before they got a photo fit of their suspect on television. Tramery could not risk that. He could not risk the cops finding him with the boy before he had a chance to escape.

As Tramery and Sarah left the shop and old man with sun leathered deep wrinkled skin jumped out of the gutter at them. He had pure white hair and a yellow-flecked beard framed his face. He grabbed at Tramery's arm and started shouting at him "Hook nosed Jew, I'll slit your throat."

Tramery made a motion and pushed the old man onto the ground as he shouted at him asking him for a cigarette. Sarah looked up at Tramery, a little puzzled. In the tall man's pocket she could see the outline of a box that looked like a carton of cigarettes,

she wondered why he didn't just give the old man one instead of pushing him around. She felt very uneasy as she watched the look of menace melt from his eyes into a half smile which she knew was intended to reassure her, but only made her feel scared.

"Its alright keep walking," he said to Sarah.

Then when she wasn't looking he turned to the old man,

"You stay right here Blanco" he said like an order and turned and walked back towards her. She held out her hand to him as he walked towards her,

"It was nice to meet you sir, but I had better be going on my way" she said shaking his hand.

"My pleasure, but I'm not too certain that I should be leaving you to walk home on your own, there are a lot of unsavoury people around. A young kid like you on your own well..."

Tramery looked up and down the road checking that there was nobody around and that Blanco was still in the gutter. He didn't want to leave her on her own, but he didn't like to leave the boy in his apartment for too long on his own. Didn't want anything to go wrong, the plans were already falling apart.

"But I'm not on my own" Sarah replied, "remember I am here with a group of people, they're up ahead, I'll catch up with them, you don't have to worry about me."

Tramery nodded and patted her on the head and said his goodbyes to her. She walked down the street in short schoolgirl steps skipping the cracks in the pavement, shrinking until she became less than a blot on the horizon, and when she had become less than a speck he stopped watching, that was all he could have done to protect her.

CHAPTER TWO

The detectives arrive

“Don’t fuck with me Blanco, I know it was you, what did you tell them?” a voice shouted furiously at him, waking Blanco from his coma-like stupor.

The old man looked bleary eyed at Tramery who was throwing him against the sidewall of the electrical store.

“I’ll cut your throat like a Jew” he spat back at him through a mouth full of stalk-like teeth stained with years of nicotine caffeine, eyes hungry from the lean mean streets.

“Don’t fuck with me I know who you are, don’t give me that 40 yrs in prison shit you just tell me what you saw last night and who you told.”

The old man looked, and looked again, then suddenly sobered up a little when he recognised who he was talking to.

“They offered me money. The said I just had to say if I was in Store Street last night and what I saw. I said I saw you with your cards. That’s it with your fuckin cards.”

The tall man lifted him so the back of Blanco’s head was cut against the brickwork of the shop, and he could hear the piped music ringing in his ears. Then he went to punch Blanco in the stomach before reefing out the bottle that was hidden in Blanco’s inside pocket. In one easy motion the lid was off. Tramery made as if to turn the bottle upside-down, much to the disgust of Blanco.

“Its gonna be a lonely night for you, unless you tell me right now what you said to the cops, I saw the report on TV, I know you said something, because they had a description of us and I know how you operate Blanco, so don’t even think about screwing me around” Tramery demanded, trying to keep his cool.

“Nothing, I told you already what I said.”

Tramery tilted the bottle to Blanco’s cheek, and let it dribble drop by drop along the old mans wrinkled face, letting it gather in the scars and scabs that lined the sides of his head. Then he pushed Blanco against the wall again, knocking the air out of the old man’s chest an stood face to face to Blanco, so that his eyes were inches away from Blanco’s. Tramery raised the bottle above Blanco’s head and made as if to smash it on the brickwork above his head.

“No. Stop. Christ, put it down, I’ll tell you what I said. Nothing right maybes I said I saw you talking to some man in a boiler suit and playing card tricks with a kid. Said

you got into your car and drove off at around eight. That's all nothing else. You gotta believe me Jack honest."

Tramery loosened his grip from Blanco's neck and stood back a little from him, not believing a word the old guy said.

"That's all you said hey Blanco?"

"Honest" Blanco replied, half smiling at Tramery, feeling a little more relaxed now.

"Still want the bottle old man?"

The old man nodded his head and seconds later slumped to the ground blood oozing from his head while the tall man strode off.

Down the road was a park and then two more corners and then she'd been on her own street Sarah thought to herself. She looked at her watch, already late perhaps if she cut through the park she'd save a few minutes. It was still bright outside. Sarah had always wondered what was in the park. With its great iron gates and grass peaking out in high tufts caressing the outside luring people in, shutting others out. The streets were stinking of melted tarmac bubbling in black on the sides of the road. The hot air rose in waves from the ground broken only by the steps of joggers prancing past her running into the park. Nobody would notice if she were to take a short cut through the park. Walking in she felt like she was entering another place, somewhere new and safe. Lining the pathway were great trunks of trees covered with branches that jumped out at odd tangled angles asking to be climbed. Through the trees deadened stark with no leaves she could see nests and hear birds shrieking for their mothers. Black flapping crashing and clapping just missing her face by inches she watched a raven soar behind her up and over the treetops. Around her people were walking past some with faces lowered, some in couples. So much to see, so much more than from her bus seat; she looked over a nearby tree. Its lowest branch was just about in reach for her. If she was to climb if she was to climb high how much more could she see? She walked over to where the lowest branch was leaving the path behind. Just as she was about to place her foot unsteadily on it she noticed something white underneath, a card of some description. She picked it up, and examined it carefully; it was the Jack of Spades. She placed it gingerly into her pocket and climbed up the tree. At her fingertips she noticed, crudely carved with a penknife were the names and dates of all the different kids that had climbed the tree. Sarah climbed a little higher in the

branches. At first she had been busy watching the people walk past. She noticed that they walked past each other pretending not to notice that anybody else was on the footpath. Noticed them change the pace of their stride quickening their steps, as they got closer to each other. She noticed the noise of half whispered conversations as old ladies grumbled about old age, and weather, the weather was always better years ago. She noticed wobbly thighed women run past, munching chocolate bars and sipping diet sodas. She heard their voices, watched them walk, and listened silently as they passed her, unaware they were being watched. Her thumb ran its way along the etchings on the wood as she strained to get a better view of the passengers in her park ride. Sarah jerked her hand away from the branch suddenly as a splinter tore its way into her skin. She sucked her thumb and glared at the offending etching. It wasn't even a name that had pained her, it was the start of a name that somebody had never gotten around to finishing. Pete 98 it said. Suddenly Sarah was pissed at Pete 98 and cursed him with a thousand flaws as she settled herself with making her own etchings on the branch beside it, using the rough edges of her hairclip as a tool.

The tricks of the trade, the tools that made him a man with a craft instead of a mug on the make; they never used guns, or knives on the job they didn't need to because they had skill. Him Angelo, Jimmy, all of them they knew how it worked and what they needed to do to make it pay. Tramery flicked his deck of cards through his fingertips as he walked back to his apartment. So they had some information that he was in Store street last night, that didn't mean that they had him that didn't mean he was going to be caught. Tonight everything would change, he was going to make his escape with the boy, and leave the city behind him, leave the memories, leave the past behind him. Get some money and leave simple as that, no more working the streets, no more tricks, he was going to be Jack Tramery, man about town, man, he was going to be a man. Tramery stopped outside his building and took the key to his apartment slowly and carefully out of his pocket. He looked up and down the street for what he hoped would be the last time. He soaked in all the memories, all of it in deep breaths and then exhaled blowing away all the cobwebs as he did so. He could picture the boy's face, could picture his face filled with excitement, and saw it all so clearly as though it was yesterday. Then he saw a group of kids walking down the street laughing and joking with each other. He remembered talking with Peter the night

before, remembered Peter asking him how he had ended up trading on card tricks for a living.

“Its not a proper job” Peter had said kicking the dirt with his new sneakers.

“Well if you don’t like it perhaps I won’t show you any more tricks” Tramery replied.

“That’s not what I mean. You do this for a job, but it’s not really a proper job is it? I mean its not like you work in an office and get up every morning to clock in.”

“I get up every morning”

“You know what I mean. You don’t get paid a wage you don’t have a title, you don’t have to wear a uniform and take orders from people.”

“Is that what your dad does?”

“I’ve seen people do that.”

Peter shuffled his feet, uncomfortable with the idea. His dad didn’t wear a uniform, the man who lived with his mother did, he worked in the local garage , wore a name tag and a blue uniform. He was a sucker, made Peter sick to see him straighten his shirt collar every morning before he left to go to work.

“ Its what we’re all supposed to do isn’t it?”

“Look kid, if we all did the same thing then life wouldn’t work out. We’d all be driving the same cars drinking the same drinks, wearing the same clothes and talking about the same news stories, because nothing would change. We’d end up with bigger and better versions of what we have, but no change. So you gotta have people like me, business men you could say, entrepreneurs, that’s what I am, an ideas guy. And you gotta have people wearing different clothes working different hours all night all morning anytime we need something, there have to be people ready to do it. Like take-away joints that stay open all night, you know what I’m saying kid?”

“But that’s different. I mean how come you don’t have a job at all. The people who do take-away; they do take-away, that’s their job.”

Tramery laughed to himself, believe me I do take-away he thought to himself.

“Yeah, but who keeps the people in the queue entertained while they wait for their take-away?” he laughed.

Peter played with the cards in his hands, seemed to be musing some question in his mind.

“So when you finish working do you go home to your family?”

Family what family did Tramery have now. He said nothing and then shuffled the deck of cards again.

“Hey when do I stop working? Now take the card from my pocket and tell me if I got the right one.”

Sarah put the playing card and her hairclip back in her pocket then jumped out of the tree. She landed right in front of a kid with sandy brown hair who jumped backwards in surprise.

“Hey little girl watch what you’re doing” he shouted as he regained his balance.

Sarah bristled; he was barely an inch taller than her. Little girl indeed.

“You watch where you’re going why don’t you. Now if you don’t mind”

Sarah made as if to walk past him, but couldn’t as he kept stepping in front of her, very amused at the cranky faced kid in front of him. She was wearing a school uniform, which meant that she had probably spent the day off school playing in the park.

“So what are you doing here then kid?” he asked.

Sarah was getting annoyed with this *boy* questioning her, as though he was her father.

“I’m hunting for a missing boy. My whole school is actually, and you are wasting valuable time” she replied tersely.

His ears pricked up when he heard this, he looked at her. Could she know? How could she know not yet? Better to humour her he thought.

“And do you have any clues as to where he might be, or perhaps you’re just going to climb every tree in the park to search for him, because that’s the kind of thing I’d do if I was your age?” he asked in his most patronising tone.

Sarah felt her cheeks flushing red in indignation and felt around in her pockets and then she had a sudden rush of inspiration,

“Actually I know the kid was here recently because he carved his name in the tree and dropped this playing card.”

She emptied everything out of her pockets to show to him. She handed him the hairclip and the card. The one she had found under the tree. He gave a start of recognition when he saw the design on the back of the playing card.

“I see, was this before or after he took the clip out of his hair?” he asked trying to mask his surprise.

Sarah bristled with annoyance.

“I’m in a hurry, so if that’s all you have to say.”

The boy looked at the little girl with her simulated serious face as she turned to leave him. It wasn't safe for her to be walking through the park on her own, but he didn't want to be seen in public and she might draw attention to him. Then again they would be looking for a single boy, and people may think that he and her were brother and sister.

"So tell me what does this boy look like?" he asked walking towards her.

She looked at him, and then squared up her shoulders till she was almost as tall as he.

"He's got brown hair and was wearing a red t-shirt and jeans" she replied quoting the description verbatim that her fuzzy haired schoolteacher had called out.

"Woho, that's a good description. Detective, what did you say your name was?"

Never tell them your real name she remembered, not even to kids.

"My name is Susan, and yours."

"Patrick. Yeah you can call me Patrick"

Tramery turned the lock in the door, he couldn't hear any music or any sound inside. He knew that was a bad sign, he should've been able to hear a TV radio or video game, something that said there was a some sign of life inside. He raced into the hallway scanning for the boy. The apartment was empty. On the floor were two futons, which were serving as a couch, some shelves, and a few empty bottles of beer in the sink. The boy had been slouching on them when Tramery left to get them some food and drop the bag into the garbage can. He opened one of the bedroom doors; the lamp was on in the corner, the curtains still shut and a magazine open on the mattress. Tramery's knuckles went white as he strode into the other bedroom. Empty. The room was empty. Now what to do? He reached his hand to his head and ran his fingers through his hair. This wasn't supposed to happen this wasn't part of the plan. He darted over to the window and glanced outside searching for the boy, hoping for some trace of him.

The preacher threw his hands in the air gesticulating to the heavens above and out of the corner of his eye spotted two children walking towards him. He was a balding fifty-year-old man, wearing a dark trench coat and baggy grey coloured trousers. There were about seven or eight people standing around him watching him as he

perched astride the park bench. Hovering in the background was his ordained apostle, or partner in crime, a young man who had nimble hands and a quick wit. If they were going to make any cash outta the motley crew gathered around him, he was going to need a distraction. Children would be the perfect foil for his Christian cravings. The kids never liked to be preached at. He nodded over at the youth who was standing under the shade of a willow tree, and then launched himself full speed ahead into his rhetoric.

“And that’s when I said to myself. Lord. Oh sweet lord in these cruel times that we live in. Where can I find hope where can I find some sweet hope to get me through the days? With all this violence the greed. Oh lord the greed its all around us, how can we rise above I say rise above it.”

He paused and took in the faces of the people around him,

“He said Joseph. Oh Joseph, you will find hope you will find it if you read your bible, but Joseph let you see it, let you see it in the eyes of the children. Here,”

He had it timed to perfection, as the two children oblivious to him walked past.

“Here,” he pointed to them and the crowd turned and watched, “children, my children do you believe in the lord Jesus Christ?”

Sarah looked up at the man, his trousers dusty and hair with unusually high cut sides and thick glasses.

“Who?”

“My child do you believe in the lord Jesus.”

The preacher turned to Patrick as he noticed the boy smirking to himself.

“Why?”

“My child we all need to believe we need the healing power of the lord, the hope the love, child you need the love of Jesus in life” the preacher replied as the youth stuffed his hands in and out of the crowds pockets wallets bags and baskets.

“Why?” Sarah asked.

“My child you are young now, but when you grow old, yessuh when you grow old you will need him, and the saviour, he is the only saviour will save you.”

“From what?”

“From evil, from the fires of hell, from eternal damnation of course my child.”

“You mean so I can go to heaven?”

“Yes my child, you believe in heaven don’t you?”

“All is good and forgiven in heaven?”

“Yes my child, with your father, the holy spirit and Jesus your saviour.”

Father the boy thought to himself, what did father mean?

“So why don’t we just kill ourselves now to get there if it’s that good?”

“Because that my child is a sin. It is a sin to waste the life on earth.”

“Even though it’s full of evilness and murder like you were talking about, its better that we become corrupted on earth so we can be forgiven in heaven. So we need to be sinners before we can get to heaven. But only Jesus who made us live on earth can forgive us for the sins we create here so he’s a bit of a charlatan isn’t he? After all its his fault we’re here” Patrick interrupted.

“My child Jesus is wise beyond your understanding, now as I was” the preacher decided he was losing the crowd’s attention.

“But I thought Jesus said children were most innocent, and the wisdom of children should be prized above all, was he wrong?”

The preacher turned his back on the children and thanked the crowd for his attention. Said that he had to go to attend to his flock elsewhere in the park. He dashed off, followed closely by the youth who had finished making friends with all of their wallets. Sarah watched him run off then noticed the crowd dissipate slowly down the pathway. Seconds later she could hear a woman screaming that she had been robbed.

“Do you believe in god?” she asked the boy.

“Sometimes” he replied reluctant to tell her the truth.

He noticed her face was troubled, that she looked very worried and very frustrated at the same time.

“But for now we should go looking for this boy you said you are here for.”

Out of the corner of his eye he spotted a middle-aged woman with curly brown hair and some man holding what looked like a camera walking along the pathway further ahead towards them. TV reporters were all that he needed. He took Sarah by the hand, a brother and sister, they would look just like a normal brother and sister taking a walk in the park.

“I think that if we are going to follow the clues to find the boy then we should look in the forest, seeing as you found such excellent clues in the trees already” he said knowing that this would flatter her ego and also knowing that less people would see them through the wood of the forest.

Tramery frantically looked around the apartment for any clues as to where the boy had gone. He tossed up the futons, searching, not knowing what he was looking for, and knowing that he had to look all the same. Couldn't just sit and wait until the boy returned. He had to keep his mind off the fact that the boy wouldn't return, that he had gone home to her again. Tramery tried to comfort himself with happier thoughts, perhaps he just went to the local shop, or the take-away place, even though that's where Tramery told him he was going to get their food. While he was in the doorway of the bedroom, the doorbell rang. Tramery's heart lifted, the boy, he had returned. He ran to the door and was about to thrust it open when something inside stopped him, some instinct that told him to be cautious. He peered out through the spy hole and could see to his surprise and dismay a well dressed slightly built shorthaired woman and a taller thinish man stood. Police had to be police; salesmen never came to the doorway in his neighbourhood, and nobody else wore such cheap ugly suits. How could they have known he had the boy? They'd need a warrant he told himself. They couldn't search the place without a warrant.

"So what are we looking for?" the boy asked as both children hacked their way through the long grass of the forest.

"Um maybe his bag. They said he ran away from home most. So maybe he's hiding out in the forest. That's what I'd do if I ran away" she said unconsciously adding the part about if she ran away.

Peter lifted his head up from the bushes covered in empty beer cans. She would live in the forest if she ran away, what could a little kid possibly have to run away from.

"If you ran away you'd go live in a forest. What would you live on? Become the wild girl of the forest and steal money off the tourists? Or maybe speak in broken English and hope to be discovered like Nell?" he sneered.

"I never said I was going to run away, I just said that if I did, and I was in the neighbourhood, I'd probably run to the park and hide out here for a while, you wouldn't be found for days and besides its dry isn't it? Better than sleeping on the streets, much safer I would imagine."

"Yeah and plenty of paedophiles waiting in the bushes for young kids on their own" he blurted out.

"Plenty of what?" she asked.

He looked at her bright intelligent eyes. She reminded him of how he used to be before his father left.. He didn't want to answer the question; she had time enough to find these things out for herself.

“You know social services, waiting to put you in homes.”

“Oh paediatrics.” She said with all the assurance a six year old can muster, “I thought they waited in hospitals?”

A phone call from the hospital, or a report on the radio, or a call at the door from the police, Tramery remembered all the things that he used to fear when he still lived with Jack and Therese; all of the things that filled him with parental fear. Years ago he would have been anxious that something had happened to Jack, he would have immediately jumped to the worst possible conclusion, but now things were different. Now he had other worries, other problems to consider.

“Sorry to disturb you in your own home like this Mr Tramery but we needed to ask you a few questions. It is Mr. Tramery isn't it. I think we met before. You don't mind if we come in do you?” the shorthaired woman asked.

They hadn't shown a search warrant, he didn't have to let them in. If Tramery was difficult however, it might arouse their suspicion.

“Why yes come in, I can't imagine what you could want. You'll have to excuse the lack of furniture; this isn't my permanent house you know. Can I offer either of you tea or coffee?” he said while walking both of the cops into his living room.

“No thank you. My name is Det. Inspector Winter and this is my colleague Det. Sanchez” at this point the sleepy-eyed Sanchez nodded his head.

“We would like to discuss some information we received concerning a missing boy.”

Tramery glanced at both of the officers in the eye; they were being very formal about the whole thing all things considered. He was somewhat relieved that they were there about the boy and not on any other business but Therese sure was showing some initiative getting the cops involved.

“I see, and how may I be of assistance?” he enquired.

“You are acquainted with a Peter Jones are you not?” Det. Winter asked.

Tramery was momentarily perplexed. The name ran through his mind for a few seconds searching for a link, a memory, and a face. Jones, Jones Jones did he know a

Jones, he began shaking his head, then stopped to look her in her eyes; unless they meant that kid round the block.

“I know a Peter Jones yes” he replied eventually.

“It has been reported that you were seen with him yesterday evening at approximately seven o’clock.”

Perhaps this officer knew more than she was going to let on, but how much more? Could she have known about him and Jimmy, about the package? Why was she trying to tie him to Store Street last night? Has she been speaking to Blanco, did she know more than she was letting on. Tramery shifted uncomfortably squatted on a cushion, regretting letting them in without a warrant.

“I can’t be sure what time but I did talk to Peter yesterday evening” Tramery replied casually.

“I see. For how long did this conversation last?”

Winter said the word conversation slowly and carefully sounding out every consonant as though searching for a deeper meaning in the word.

“I’m not sure what you’re getting at but I’d say a few minutes. What are all the questions about Peter for?” Tramery asked anxiously.

“Peter Jones has been missing from his house since yesterday evening. His last known whereabouts was with you yesterday evening. Did he get into the car with you after your conversation with him Mr Tramery?”

“Look I don’t know what you’re trying to say, but he did not get into the car with me.” Tramery replied not liking where the conversation was going.

Then the sleepy eyed Sanchez sat upright in his chair.

“At around midnight last night you were spotted with a boy matching Peter’s description in your car. How exactly do you explain that Mr. Tramery?” Sanchez fired at him.

Tramery was silent.

“If that wasn’t Peter who was it?”

No reply from Tramery.

“Do you normally offer lifts in your car in the middle of the night to young boys Mister Tramery?”

Silence.

CHAPTER THREE

Strange noises in the forest

Brown and mucky. Everything was sticky and humid and the day's heat was stealing the moisture out of every growing thing and letting it hang in the air in front of them. The ground levelled itself in humps and bumps between the trees. Every now and then allowed itself to sleepily subside into great hollows lined with nettles and litter. There were mud tracks through the deep green grass, made by early morning joggers and kids riding bikes with summertime on their feet. Sarah put one of her hands in her pockets and appeared to be taking in the view, the murky leaves that were poking out of every space calling her to go deeper in the forest, to come see the treasures they were hiding. Suddenly she startled into thought by one of the hollows in front of them where an entrance lay, and it looked like an old woman was sleeping. Sarah looked over at Peter quizzically.

"The hollows are formed where the old storm drains used to be, they're like underground tunnels. You know, for the river, in case it would flood. They were dug out years ago. Some parts of the roof has caved in and that's why the ground goes into dips like that," he answered before she said anything.

"Jesus, everyone knows that" Sarah mumbled in surprise.

Storm drains, why storm drains, it never rained that much around her neighbourhood. "I'll bet they're full of rats and snakes" he said, eyes glimmering in the evening sun. Sarah said nothing but put her other hand in her pocket.

"I'm not afraid of rats."

"Well then you wouldn't be afraid to search these storm tunnels for your boy then?"

She looked at the hummocks and bumps; they had to be at least five foot under. Rats, rats with their clawed feet scampering through the shadows, climbing over her feet, she shuddered at the thought of them.

"Fine, I was going to suggest we look there anyway."

"Yearghh getta outta my house think you can just god damn you think you kids own the god damn place can't you see I live here. Goddamn you look at me again go on look at me. Yeah that's right back off kids you kids just back off."

Sarah jumped back behind Patrick while the woman swiped her coat at them letting fly a hail of soft drink cans in a metallic snowstorm.

“Sorry. I didn’t know there was anyone here,” Patrick said backing off away from the old lady, beginning to regret looking in the tunnels.

The old woman was wearing a woolly hat, her ankles thicker than his arms, her teeth sticking out at odd angles from her mouth and her hair was thick tangled with grey curls that were never washed. Sarah was looking at her half fearful half amused at Patrick backing away from the old lady. He wasn’t so brave now.

“You think its funny bringing your god damned tours around here like I’m a tourist attraction, wanna poke and prod at me. You know I live here. You know I’ve always lived here. And every evening you come and look and stare and prod. Look at me, look at my home. Aw the days the days I’ve spent, just when it was looking good. Whatdya goin to do about it then hmm?” she spat at him coming face-to-face with him, so he could smell her rancid breath.

“Listen lady I’m sorry, we’ll leave now” Patrick replied though gulps of fresh air as he tried to back off from her.

“Leave, leave, yeah they all leave in the end smile, brown eyes yeah I saw you smiling at me and at her, two weeks they said two weeks while away the hours sew, do I sew? I couldn’t she helped me yeah helped me. We’ll make a quilt a family quilt, huh quick enough and fast and faster and running and stitches sticky stitches sewing Sold me out to her would you would you? Wasn’t good enough was it. Was it?” she asked Patrick who was staying very still, hoping that if he didn’t move she wouldn’t be able to see him.

“Yeah silent stopped straight, straight and narrow. Two weeks you had to go leave me for two weeks. They said they’d help me. Help you help yourself and Mrs Smith like I had a name, I had a name and a house and could have had children. Good children. Not like you, little bastards, coming into a lady’s home. Yeah lady,” she fixed her coat, and rubbed under her eyes where traces of some time’s past mascara muddied memories still lay.

Then she fluffed her hair with fingers filthy with sewer muck.

“Children, that’s what he wanted. A Kodak ad running dancing beaches waves hello bright yellow blue and clouds and ribbons of stars. Beautiful stars, so pretty, he took my hand and told me that. Two weeks that’s what she said too. Had to go. Said they’d be back for me. Said they would return. Said they wouldn’t leave me. Gone me left

where? Everywhere? Hah I didn't have to stay. They thought I'd stay there in that place and wait for them" she lowered her voice to a whisper, "cause that's what they didn't want me to know, you don't have to stay, you see, do you see? Yeah you do. Don't have to stay. Huh. Flowers and a card saying one week that's not how it started. He gave me a daisy chain, said I could be queen that we could be happy, no flowers and chocolates, I'm not that type of girl you know."

"No you're a lady" Sarah interrupted.

The old woman was a little startled and peered down at the little girl in front of her half hidden in the winding weeds and long grass of the forest.

"A lady. Yeah kid a lady. Say kid you have nice eyes. A good heart. What you doing round here?"

"We were looking for some-one, a boy, thought he might be hiding down in these storm drains. He had jeans and a red t-shirt on."

The old woman stepped a little closer to Sarah as though inspecting her, looking at her uniform then she looked at Patrick. She seemed to have calmed down momentarily.

"There's always lots of kids round here. Always running around and shouting. Can't ever get to sleep, not even when it's dark. You would think its always dark down here wouldn't you? Huh. Yeah, you like this do you kid, do you like these?" she asked Sarah while taking some faded photos from her pocket.

She showed Sarah pictures of some model cut out of vogue. They looked like recent photographs as far as Patrick could see, far too recent to be of the old lady.

"They're very pretty she's a very pretty girl" Sarah commented in a soft voice.

"Yeah, she was wasn't she." The woman sighed and ran her fingers through her hair, before looking at Sarah, her eyes a little softer now "Well you looking for a kid then?"

"Yes m'am. I think that, we think that he was here yesterday. Do you remember seeing a boy around here yesterday evening?" Sarah asked in a slow careful voice.

The old lady said nothing and busied herself with taking out more photographs from a pile of rubbish on the ground at the one of the holes in the roof of the drain. She was looking for a navy button she had picked up last night. There had been a lot of traffic through there yesterday. Patrick edged over to Sarah and beckoned her to come away and leave the woman to it. Just as he did so, the woman caught his eye and the meaning behind his glance at Sarah.

“You think I’m crazy huh? You think its funny come over here and ruin a poor lady’s home and then just leave without apologising?”

She bent over and picked up one of the soft drink cans and very dexterously ripped it in half to give a raw edge to it, then began slashing it at Patrick’s face. Her face was suddenly a rage of fury.

“Think you’re going to steal from me, hah? Think you can come over here and steal from me do you. Yeah I know how it works, think you can distract me do you? Know how long I’ve been living here, and they thought they could steal from me. Yeah thought that they could kick me outta here. Tried to move a lady on, hah as if I’m going to leave this place after all this time, in their navy suits like they could scare me. Like a lady can’t defend herself. Then you kids come over here and think you can scare me? Think you can live here, huh. Think you get this place, you get to see what I see, you get to know what I know if you stay here. Hah you think I’m going to tell you my secrets, going to tell you what I know. Hah that startled you. Think a lady doesn’t know anything. Hah. You think you can just leave and I don’t know what’s going on, that I can’t see through you and her, that I don’t know you’re not coming back think that that’s all I’m worth, flowers at Christmas and chocolates”

“Some Snickers?” a voice half whispered came behind her as Patrick dived away from her flailing arms.

The old lady spun around and looked at Sarah.

“Would you like some snickers?” Sarah asked again in a gentle voice.

The old lady’s eyes lit up and she took the bar from Sarah’s hand, and slavered over sweet mouthfuls of it.

“A good heart, that’s what I said when I saw you” she mumbled while munching on the chocolate treat.

“You must know a lot,” Sarah said leadingly.

“Yeah” the old lady answered through slow careful chews.

“Like last night, when that kid ran past you and woke you up”

“Yeah he woke me up, but” both Sarah and Patrick looked expectantly “but he wasn’t a god damned kid, acted like one, though.”

Then the old lady started coughing on the bar, she went back to the storm entrance and sat down busying herself with the wrapper of the bar. Patrick nodded over at Sarah again, this time careful not to let the old lady see and both of them left her to her treasures in her house full of shine plastic wrappers and weeds. Sarah smiled over

at Patrick as they rushed off through the tall trees and winding leaves relieved to have gotten away from the lady. Then they both leant against a nearby tree trunk to catch their breath while Sarah put her hand in her pocket to search for a tissue to wipe her head with, breathless with excitement. Meanwhile the old lady settled back into her hovel and began to carefully press the wrapper of the bar against the brick walls of the tunnel where many more were already stuck like crinkled wallpaper. On the other side of the wall were photographs of a younger woman that she had ripped from magazines taken off park benches and beside them almost like an altar to times past, a broken lipstick that still had some red to spread and a mirror from a compact that they had smashed last night when they ran into her. She picked up a piece of it, careful not to cut her fingers which were as twisted and bony as the roots that were creeping their way into her hovel. She could see part of her face in the mirror and began wiping some of the dirt away, then smiled at her reflection, what did they know about the park, what did they know about her? She was a lady a real lady. Her pupils grew rounded and dark as the shadows of the tunnel while she stared in the evening shade at her eyes in the mirror.

The detective's pupils were tight ovals of inquisition, staring at him intensely before flitting around the room, diverting his attention from what she was asking him. Tramery was trying to get the story straight in his head. They wanted to know about him and that boy Peter, wanted to know the last time Tramery had spoken to him. Unconsciously he began flicking an imaginary deck of cards through his fingers. He found himself back on the street back talking to Peter again all of a sudden.

"Pick a card" Tramery had said to Peter, who didn't move towards him.

"Why don't you go home to your family in the evenings. Don't they miss you?" Peter repeated.

"I don't go home, I told you, guys like me, we got to work all the time, only the wicked concern themselves with rest, wise-guys stay awake. We gotta keep our eyes open you know."

Peter wasn't buying any of it. Tramery could tell by the way he was looking at him, looking as though he was just going to bide his time before asking Tramery again about his family. Down the path further, he could see what looked like a bundle of old clothes in a doorway propping up a whiskey bottle and some girls skipping ropes and

calling out children's names alphabetically beside where he lay. Multicultural neighbourhoods were making the game much easier than it was when he was growing up. Zacs, Tamicas, Treys and Wandas. They'd be skipping rope all night. He shuffled the deck in his hand.

"I had a family once. I had a job, and went to work as you said Pete. However, it just didn't work out you know. Some of us just weren't meant to end up in families I guess. But hey if it did you wouldn't have me to entertain you, for free I might add"

"And you wouldn't have me as your protégé. You know how much that last three-card trick earned me in school the other day. More than lunch money, that's for sure," Peter said as he flicked one of his new trainers and Tramery nodded his appreciation, "Okay okay, lemme pick a card then. I'll figure this trick out if it kills me."

If it kills me.

Tramery remembered Peter shouting at him in the Park, later that night, shouting that he had figured out the trick. Peter's words rang out like a church bell, reverbing in his mind as he tried to figure out how much to tell the detective. He wanted to help her find Peter, but if he helped too much he'd only be digging himself a deeper grave.

"So tell me Mr. Tramery when exactly was the last time that you saw Peter Jones, and what time did you last see him at" the detective repeated, each word pricking his consciousness like paper cuts on his fingertips.

Pete would be okay he thought to himself. Pete was a smart kid he could look after himself, no need to tell them everything.

"It was yesterday evening, about seven-thirty I talked to Pete, Peter, for about ten minutes. He didn't get into my car though. I drove off at about 7.45."

Tramery said about but knew it was precisely 7.45: Jimmy couldn't tolerate lateness.

"Where did you go after leaving Peter Mr. Tramery?" Winter asked him, while Sanchez surveyed the apartment.

Tramery kept an eye on him, the bedroom door was closed, and Sanchez wouldn't be able to see anything. They weren't allowed to search so he wouldn't find any of the photographs that Tramery had cut out of that woman. On the floor, something had caught Sanchez's eye and Tramery noticed him stare intently at it.

"I left to go to a bar. I was supposed to meet a woman there. It's a kind of delicate situation."

Tramery looked at Sanchez who was taking a little too much interest in Tramery's apartment for his liking. He decided to try to distract him and directed the conversation at him and not Winter.

"You know how it is detective, I don't think her husband would appreciate me mentioning any names."

Det. Insp. Winter looked at him, her eyes slitted with inquisitions.

"Fine Mr. Tramery that's enough for now I think, Det. Sanchez?"

Sanchez nodded his head reluctantly at her, and both got up to leave. Tramery shut the door behind him and took a deep breath of air. He was relieved that they had left and weren't asking any more questions. He placed his hands flat against the false wooden façade of the door to steady himself.

Sarah caught her breath stood against a tree trunk, as she bent over to get rid of the stitch. The stitch was from their run through the bushes branches brambles and rows of weeds that clung to her ankles as they made their escape from the bag lady.

"Sorry about that kid, should've known that some one like that would be down there, didn't mean to scare you like that," Patrick said to her trying to reassure her.

"Scare me?"

Sarah was still shaking.

"No problem I wasn't scared, we should keep looking I think we're getting somewhere don't you?" she asked hesitantly.

"Perhaps you'd like for us to go down beside the river banks?" he asked her, but got no reply, she was peering through the lines of haphazardly planted pines ahead of them. She was unwilling to have to make her way all they way through them to get to the river.

"But we'd have to go back on the path to get to the river if you don't mind?" he repeated the question to her in a softer voice, sensing that she was still a little shaken up the bag lady incident.

"Well if we must go back to the path, then we must," she replied, breathing out slowly, relieved to be stepping back onto the pathway again, and out into the sunlight and noise of the park. Sarah followed him as he held branches up from the bottom of a nearby pine tree, then both stepped out into the bright light both momentarily stunned the glare of the sun outside the forest.

Outside the apartment Sanchez and Winter slowly shuffled to their car. Sanchez was squinting at her through the late sunlight. He felt a little uneasy, felt that they had left Tramery off lightly with the questions. They had left it in the air that Tramery had been spotted with a kid in his car at around midnight the night before. They hadn't asked him enough questions, hadn't rattled him enough. Winter looked at Sanchez, able to read his mind after all the months they had been working together.

"We had to scare him a little, give him time to make mistakes. I've met his kind before, low-grade hustler, with cheap suits and expensive tastes. He's not usually involved in tricks like this. He'll panic if he thinks that we know enough not to ask too many questions. That is if he's guilty," she said to Sanchez who was resting his arm on the roof of the car.

"I don't trust him, we shouldn't have let him go. You know what I saw on the ground in the apartment: Spiderman comics in a pile in the corner. Don't tell me a grown man like him, hustling on the streets still reads comics."

Winter said nothing; she always followed her instincts in these cases, and something told her to wait. But she also knew she hadn't as much to lose as Sanchez. Not after the last time.

"We'll just leave it and keep a watch on this place see where he goes, and check out that old guy's story about seeing the boy get into his car. We can't stick with this lead only in case we're missing something obvious."

Sanchez avoided her eye in the car as they drove off. Obvious. He knew what exactly she was referring to. Nothing more was said between the two as Sanchez's mind wandered back to the Murdock case.

Between his finger and thumb Jimmy struck a match from a book, taken off the bar at the hotel they had met in the night before. Slowly he oozed out smoke between his lips. His office was lined with paintings, mostly oils of the countryside, and middle European hilltops, and olive groves. He tapped the cigar on the empty plate in front of him.

"Forget about it. There's no way they know anything" Jimmy replied, much to the amusement of the younger man sitting opposite him. His name was Angelo Deville, Jimmy's new protégé.

“But they were here they questioned me about my whereabouts last night. They were looking for some kid who has run away, and they knew I was in Store Street last night. I think Blanco told them that. They knew what time I was there at” Tramery repeated.

He lifted the net curtains of his apartment window and watched Winter and Sanchez get into their dusty car.

“I think we’d better lie low for a while Jimmy.”

“Listen to me Tramery, you’re over-reacting” Jimmy replied while taking an envelope out of his oak desk drawer to give to the navy sharp suited man who smirked back at him. The younger man laughed aloud when he heard Jimmy say that it was Tramery on the phone.

“I’ll tell you what we’re going to do Tramery, you’re going to meet me here tonight, and you and Angelo are going to go get the goods together. Then you can do what you like after that. But you’re going to keep your head until then. Got it?”

“Yeah. Yeah Jimmy, I was just a little spooked by the cops calling around. One of them had me on her rap before. But I don’t think she remembered me. I don’t want any trouble you know what I mean?”

Jimmy tapped a little more ash onto the plate then nodded at the man to leave his office. Angelo was slightly younger than Jimmy and had jet-black hair and sideburns that carved straight lines into his high cheekbones.

“Don’t worry about it Tramery, just keep your cool” Jimmy replied then put the receiver down as Angelo left his office nodding his leave. Jimmy smirked to himself with satisfaction his plan was coming together.

Tramery put his mobile back in his pocket. How much did Jimmy know? Tramery hadn’t much time left before they were supposed to meet to get the goods, and the cops were on his trail. Not to mention the boy had gone from his apartment. Tramery started breathing slowly and deeply. Blanco had spoken to Det. Winter and told her he was talking to Peter last night. That was all they had on him. Pete would turn up sooner or later; all he had to do was keep calm. He started chewing on a cold piece of the Pizza, he didn’t even like pizza, and it was the boy’s choice. Tramery was wondering what move to make next. He looked on the floor over to where Sanchez’s eyes had been distracted during the interview. And contented himself that all Sanchez had seen was the puddle of soda that was meandering itself winding along the wooden floor into the cracks and divots of the floorboards.

Little ripples of waves and water flowing through the city. The river, Sarah had dreamt often of the river. She walked in the slow stilted steps of some-one eager to overtake their guide behind Patrick. Delilah and her were supposed to escape there one night. Sarah had it all planned out, had a little carrier bag for Del to hide in on their way in case it rained and some bread taken from the press in the kitchen. She could hear their mumbled moaning voices downstairs in the kitchen as she planned their escape that night. From the window of her room she could almost see the river, at nighttime only, illuminated by street yellows and the reflection of boxed neon lights of the office blocks. At nighttime she could see everything from her room. She noticed that Patrick was looking over his shoulder as they were walking along the path.

“Have you been to the river before?” Sarah asked him.

“Once with my father, we came to skim stones. That was a long time ago” he replied not looking at her.

Momentarily the wind lifted the leaves around them so they shimmered green shadows that threw out fierce winged feathered demons from their branches.

“Rats with wings” Patrick laughed to comfort Sarah who had been startled.

“There’s a lot of things you don’t expect in this place isn’t there? Perhaps you wanna get back home hey kid?” he asked to needle her.

“No. I was just startled that’s all” she replied.

“They were only birds, you know birds live in trees, you shouldn’t be afraid when they fly out of them. Weren’t expecting a fire-breathing dragon were you” he sneered half-heartedly.

“ I know now dragons live in the storm drains not trees,” Sarah answered.

Patrick laughed to himself, so she thought she was smart hey?

“Not to mention the bears that live in the caves near the dump, don’t forget them,” he replied to see if she would take the bait.

He saw her ears prick up but she didn’t reply, she wasn’t smiling then.

“Yeah it’s the bears that you have to look out for. The dragons, you can tell they’re bad, they look bad, they fly around spitting fire, stealing children and all that shit. They keep it real. But the bears, they’re the bad guys. You know in cartoons, you’ve got Yogi Bear and Booboo living in the park being all nice and friendly stealing hampers, and then you’ve got the bad guys, you see them on TV, mauling families out for the day with their kids. They wait till you trust them then.”

She waited for him to continue.

“Then they pounce!”

He jumped at her and she fell backwards as he laughed.

“I know about bears and dragons” she sniffed at him, “but there is not such a thing as dragons, and I like bears. So tough luck.”

Patrick bent over to help her up again, out of the way of a passing group of roller-bladers who seemed oblivious to her lying on the pathway, were more concerned with attempting to skate with the beat of the music on their radio.

Det. Winter put the receiver of her radio down, as Sanchez steered the car onto the footpath of the stony grey road. Blanco had been found bludgeoned in an alleyway. Winter wasn't sure why but it bothered her. They were always picking up old dipsos off the pavements in different states of decay. But she had only been speaking to Blanco the night before in Café Ole. He had stirred four sachets of sugar into his coffee, adding a sachet at a time then stirring then another then stir then another. No milk. Winter had been questioning him about what he had seen on the streets earlier on that day. Sanchez wasn't there, he didn't trust Blanco, didn't think him reliable. Every means possible was what Winter had always said, but after last time after the Murdock case, Sanchez wasn't going to take any risks. Blanco said he had seen some of the local kids playing jump rope, while he had been resting on the pavement earlier that day. Tired after a long walk, not sleeping only resting on the pavement. She knew what he meant, not passed out drunk; only resting. He wasn't going to incriminate himself. Winter knew that Blanco would have been in the area when Peter had gone missing, because that was his usual hangout. She had spent the early hours of the morning talking to street cleaners and late night shop assistants, anyone that might have seen the kid. Blanco told her he had seen Tramery standing against a wall further down the street talking to a man who looked like he was dressed in a boiler suit. Could he describe the man, no he was too far away to for Blanco to see his face clearly. Then Blanco watched Tramery walk on down the street, and meet a kid coming out of an apartment block. Winter showed Blanco a photograph of Peter to look at. He peered across the coffee shop counter and then nodded his head.

“Yeah that's the boy.”

Then Blanco told her that they had been talking for about ten minutes; Tramery taking cards out of his pocket, then showing the kid, who every now and then stood back and shook his head. Blanco added some more milk to his coffee cup. He filled it to the rim and stirred the mixture. There was almost no coffee left in the cup when he did this. Milking it for all it was worth Winter thought to herself, living up to his name that was for sure. Blanco looked her directly in the eye, eyes cobwebbed with red streaks. Then the boy got in the car with Tramery. Was he sure Winter asked. Blanco nodded his head and then stirred the coffee again. He never liked Tramery, never liked his attitude, and was determined to screw him over as well as he could. Winter tapped her fingers on the steering wheel. Blanco was after being attacked. She wasn't sure but something didn't add up.

"We need to talk to Blanco again. See if you can get him to talk see if he's well enough to bring down to the station, I'm going to go back to Tramery's apartment and see what else he didn't tell us" Winter ordered.

Then she got out of the car to swap places with Sanchez. He was grumbling to himself about having to catch the T to the precinct as she got into the driver's seat. As the car pulled around the corner onto Tramery's block, she saw him leave the building. He made as if to get into his car and then looked down the path towards the park, and seemed to change his mind. She drove her car further down the street where he couldn't see her and got out to follow him.

"What's your father like then?" Sarah asked as they strolled down the bank towards the water.

"My dad. He's an all right kinda guy I guess. We don't see much of each other" Patrick replied.

Sarah was a little confused; perhaps Patrick's parents were divorced.

"You live with your mam?" she asked.

"No, I live with my aunt."

Sarah looked at him, his head tilted towards the ground eyes darting around as though looking for something.

"I'm sorry" she said, not quite sure what else to say.

How did other people always know what to say? He bent down and picked up a flat rounded stone.

“She’s not dead or anything,” he said as he turned the stone around in his fingertips, “I don’t exactly know what she is like. I only met her once and that was when I was born. My memory isn’t what it used to be you know,” he said with a twinkle in his eye.

“I don’t know where she is now. I know she’s alive, but I’m not sure what she’s doing. I never met her so I don’t miss her. I’m sure she’s not a bad woman really. What is your mother like then Detective?”

“She’s got brown hair. Lives at home with my dad.” Sarah replied looking at Patrick’s hands his knuckles white from his tight grasp on the stone. Knuckles white like her father’s were. *Either she goes or I do.*

“You’re lucky then. A real regular kid, with a stay at home mom hey?”

“Yeah I guess so” Sarah replied reluctantly.

“I guess so, listen kid not a lot of people have one parent never mind two.”

“I thought you said you didn’t miss your mam?”

“Alright smartass. I guess you have all the information you need. Now see what you can do with this then” he said and handed her one of the stones.

He crouched down beside her just on the edge of the bank, took his hand back and flung the stone across the top of a still part of the brown river water. Two hops and then splash into the water. Click, she could hear the latch closing behind her. She watched the ripples breeze bigger circles outwards. Perfect circles each one of them so simple so free. Didn’t seem too hard. She took the stone in her hand, grappling her fingers around it like he had, then reached back and let it fly. It flew loose through the air too soon, and rolled on the ground, before bludgeoning the bank of the river then hopping into the water.

“That’s a trick throw you know. Anyone can make it skip on the water” Sarah explained before trying again to skim the stone.

Patrick shook his head in recognition.

‘flick your wrist when you let go’ he remembered his dad saying.

It was a sunny day and the park had been full of families spending quality time with each other. That day had been the first time, the only time come to think of it that they had been able to spend a full day together. Patrick looked across the water, able to seem him stood tall; his dad dressed in grey slacks and a white shirt. The sleeves on his shirts buttoned and collar closed even though it was such a hot day.

“Flick it Jack flick it” he said to him, motioning with his arm how to throw the stone. All the other kid’s dads had t-shirts tucked into jeans. They wore brilliant white trainers that he could tell were only worn in the park, and cleaned before each outing with the same cloth that was used to clean the dust off windscreens while driving to the park. But his dad, his dad looked real smart: like he could have been a businessman who had stopped off from work to chuck a few stones in the lake on the way to an important meeting. Patrick looked at his fingers now garbled with pebble dirt from the path, his dad’s had always been immaculately clean.

“Lets the punters trust you more, they see that you have clean fingernails, they expect you come from a good home, then they think that you have no need for the money. I learned that lesson years ago. Remember that Jack” his dad used to call him Jack when he was little, “Remembering the little things will make you into a man Jack.”

The Jack, he turned around to look at the girl, the funny little girl with the Jack of spades in her pocket. There must be hundreds of playing cards like that in the city. Didn’t mean they belonged to his dad. Splash pause splash longer pause, then after hanging in the air for a second, Slosh into the water with the grace of a kingfisher diving for treasure.

“Just like that?” Sarah grinned at him.

“Are you certain?”

“We’re certain it was just like that” the woman’s voice replied.

Sanchez couldn’t believe what he was hearing. He held the radio a little closer to his ear, while he continued watching the report on the TV in the window of the electrical store down the road from Tramery’s apartment. There was a woman reporter, stood outside of what looked like a museum building. He couldn’t hear what was being said through the glass shop front, but had been attracted to the window by the reconstruction that the station had done of what looked like a robbery of some sort. Evidently from the raising of the eyebrow and defiantly set chin of the woman with curly hair she was trying to justify herself to the camera. Then the next footage showed the police trying to prevent her from giving her report, must have been earlier on, and stopping the actors from reconstructing the crime. One thing struck him besides the fact that in the corner of the screen just beside the TV stations logo the word *live* in bold letters was omnipresent, was that the actors in the film were wearing

boiler suits. He remembered that the ever-reliable Blanco had mentioned that Tramery had been spotted talking to some man in a boiler suit before he met with Peter. And then he remembered Tramery's jaw unclenching when they started questioning him about the boy, like he had been expecting something else.

"So the suspects were wearing Boiler Suits?" he repeated, "And all this happened last night, approximately 12.00 pm."

"We're certain, we have witness who were watching the security camera of the bank next door," Marge replied on the radio.

Sanchez put his radio back on his belt. Question Blanco, Winter had told him. He had more than one question for Blanco, no need for Winter to know about this yet. He kept walking towards the T station. No need at all.

No need to worry, no need to panic yet, no need at all. Just one more day Tramery was thinking, one more day, all he had to do was keep his head down for one day. The both of them, all they had to do was stay in that apartment keep their heads down for the day, act like everything was normal and then hit the road. That's what Tramery would have done right now with or without the goods, but the boy, the boy had to leave the place, couldn't sit still for a few hours. Tramery turned his way into the park, the river. That's where he'd find John. As he was walking through the gates of the park, he noticed a curly haired woman about to exit, and stood back to let her through, smiling at her as he did.

"Why thank you," she said half recognising him.

"Anytime Maria" he replied, grinning at the brown haired woman.

A younger man with fair hair was walking behind her. She turned to him and then nodded over at Tramery.

"Mike I must introduce to this charming man, Mr. Jack Tramery" she said with an air of intimacy.

Both of the men shook hands, Tramery keeping eye contact with Maria.

"I had the pleasure of meeting Maria while she was filming last year" he said by way of explanation.

"Less of being pleased and more a case of being had as I remember Jack."

Tramery tilted his head to the ground, giving her a coy look as he did. Then turned to the blond haired man,

“Maria was making a documentary about people who make their money off the streets, I gave her a few contacts. Showed her a few tricks.”

“But you wouldn’t star in it. And I told him, he had a face made for TV, wouldn’t you agree Mike?”

The young man shrugged his shoulders not quite sure what to make of Tramery. There ensued a pause in the conversation. Tramery noticed the camera in his hand.

“You always bring your tools with you?” Tramery asked.

“We’ve just finished filming a story. It was a little more serious than street tricks” Mike said pointedly, “apparently some-one broke in to the Muscat building last night and stole some things from the assistant D.A’s office. So we’ve just been filming a filler for the station outside of the building, its just on the other side of the park.”

“So what happened your face? I thought the lens was supposed to break when things get ugly, not the camera man?” Tramery asked, noticing the scrape on the side of Mike’s cheek.

“We were making a reconstruction of the crime, and the cops didn’t like it, didn’t like us looking like we know more than them I guess” Mike replied.

Tramery nodded his head in a pseudo-disinterested fashion. Reconstruction. Know more than the cops?

“Ah, inside information hey? The things people will do for money? Sell their souls to cable TV in a second and they say that people like me are the parasites” Tramery stated leadingly.

How much did they know? How much did the cops know?

“Actually, a friend of mine is a security guard in the bank across the road from the Muscat building, and he saw everything last night. Saw the guys go in and out in their boiler suits. Four of them there were” Mike replied with the authority of one who knows less than he says.

Very helpful Tramery thought to himself as Maria touched Tramery on the arm,

“I’ve gotta love and leave you now.”

“Bigger fish to fry I know” he replied

“Well it is Friday what can I say?” she said while walking away with the young man.

“Yes, you’re still a good catholic girl” he laughed to himself and then walked on into the park. So they knew how many of them were at the robbery last night. They had them on camera. It was only a matter of time now before the cops caught up with them. He had to find John quickly.

CHAPTER FOUR

White lies

Thirty years ago they wouldn't even have known his name. But twenty years ago and he was king, he had the fucking game. Five years ago and he would've been springing some other poor mug outta that joint. Just five years ago, he still had it, still had the clothes had the car maybe not so much respect, but people still knew who he was. Billy boy they called him when he was younger. Billy the brute, Billy the name to fear. Guns, guns, he heard them at night time driving past waving their metal out the window like it was a badge, like they were some kinda cowboys. Guns, he didn't use guns. Real butcher's job, real pieces of meat cutting cleavers, knives huh guns. Four years ago and he had somewhere to live he had friends. Now, now he was talking to some piece of shit spic asking him questions. Looking at me like you think I'm drunk, like I'm gonna talk. Some bum off the street. No respect, that's what he got, no fucking respect. Think I'll talk to a jumped up piece of shit spic. Giving me coffee? Hah goddamned paper cup cop coffee. Hah. Wasn't paid enough for this. Said all Jimmy said to say, and I gave them some more. Jimmy better pay some more for that. Yeah spic yeah just keep the questions rolling. I'm drunken whattafuck do I know anyway?

Sanchez watched Blanco stir the coffee, adding sachet after sachet of sugar, then stir again. Round and round the liquid flowed, just like the inside of a tape recorder round and round whirring stirring recording it all. Every word, every accusation every breath, each time Murdock had spun a little in his chair, making it squeak every noise was recorded on the tape. He could remember every detail, every breath, every pause, when he had tried to think of questions to trap Murdock. Thought he was so smart back then. It was one of the biggest cases the district had had for years and Sanchez had it in his grasp. For a few months afterwards it was all Sanchez could do to blank out the noise of Murdock's voice before he fell asleep each night. On the news at six and again in the evening, during the court case, back in the office with his Super, Murdock's voice, smug and sincere at the same time, all that Sanchez could hear. His

trusted informant. How could Sanchez have been so blind, it had all been so obvious? Blanco stopped stirring his coffee and looked him in the eye.

“I told your lady friend all I saw already” he replied, and then took a gulp of the coffee, “You still not found that boy yet?”

Sanchez watched him, gnarled and bony fingers grasping the paper cup like it was his meal ticket for the week. Blanco’s eyes uncontrollably half shut every few words he spoke. Was Sanchez wasting his time interviewing this bum he wondered to himself?

“I wanted to go over a few details with you. You said that you saw Tramery talking to the boy Peter Jones, and that a few minutes later the boy got into Tramery’s car with him and drove off.”

Blanco reached for the milk and nodded his head. Then thought of Jimmy again, Jimmy was a punk, he would never have thought of fitting Tramery up so neatly, Blanco was getting him fitted from both sides this way. Neat, just like a tailor’s dummy this guy was going to take all the pricks they cared to needle him with.

“Yeah,” Blanco mumbled.

“Just Tramery and the boy? Nobody else got into the car with them?” Sanchez asked again.

“Just Tramery and the boy no-one else, like I says already to your lady friend. I saw him talking to some guy in a boiler suit, a green boiler suit before he was talking to the boy you said what was his name, Peter, Pete, Pat, but that guy left before Tramery met the boy.” Blanco replied.

Sanchez looked at him, very obliging he thought to himself. A green boiler suit, Winter hadn’t mentioned to him that it was a green suit. She mustn’t have thought anything of it. Green: he thought of the news report, the men in the report were wearing navy boiler suits, but then again they were always making mistakes on TV. He stood up, and made as if to shake Blanco’s hand, then thought better of it when he saw the blood stains on it. Instead he nodded to the old bum. Then Sanchez left the interview room, and went over to the front desk to ask Marge about the boiler suits. Blanco sipped his coffee allowing himself a little grin in between each gulp. Yeah Billy still had it. Still had it he thought to himself before shuffling out of the room. Blanco walked down the corridor past the spic that was talking to some lady cop at the front desk. Snippets of their conversation caught his ear, as Blanco slowly

stumbled past, a little more slowly than usually, not that either of the two cops noticed.

“So there were four guys involved last night,” Sanchez asked Marge who was sitting behind her desk at the front of the precinct.

“Yeah well you can’t believe everything you see on TV. But this time, I gotta say they got some good information. They got the colour of the suits wrong, but the number of the guys and how they got into the building was exactly as was done according to our information” she replied and then lowered her head a little.

Sanchez was intrigued.

“Done exactly as far as that’s how many entered the front part of the building, but we think now that they were a decoy for some-one on the side of the building getting in. The way that old building was laid out it would have taken those guys more than three minutes to get the goods and leave again. We think that it was a just a ploy so as to distract us from where the action took place. The side entrance has no cameras on it, blackened because the street light above it was broken last night by a group of kids. One of the windows had been left open on the first floor last night. One of the cleaners told us he saw it open last night but left it, assumed that it was open to let fresh air in to allow the paintwork in the office to dry. He said this kinda thing was normal, because the office staffs always complain about the fumes whenever decorating is done in the building. The way I see it that’s where the professionals got in.”

Paintwork, boiler suits, Sanchez tapped his fingers on the desk. They had gotten past the security guards because they had painters uniforms on. But they couldn’t get onto the floor where the goods were because the paintwork was on a different floor. So they must have just taken the lift for a ride. While the security was distracted some one could easily have broken in through a different door. Any alarms tripped and the security guards would have just thought that it was the painters trying to get out on the wrong floor and thought nothing of it. But the window on the first floor, that didn’t make sense. Not if the painters already could get on to the first floor. Sanchez knew that the assistant D.A’s office was on the second floor.

“Which window was left open?” he asked Marge.

“Oh, let me see,” she looked through some papers on he desk for the witness statement attached to the incident report, “The window on the south facing side of the building, near the toilets.”

Near the toilets, he retrieved a picture of the building in his mind. Sanchez had been there before once a few years ago; there had been an incident with a group of workers who had gotten trapped in a lift. Apparently it had stalled in between floors. The building in the centre of the city opposite the government buildings was old and had been built back in the twenties. The lifts in it were always getting jammed in between floors momentarily. Usually one of the guards at the desk in the lobby opened the lift box on the ground floor wall and pulled the switch to bring the broken one, usually that nearest the main door back down to the ground. The lights would flicker off for a second and then on again when the emergency power came on inside the lift. The cops were never usually called for this reason, but one time a man had freaked out when the lift stalled and started getting violent with the other workers. One of them had claimed he punched her in the face, so Sanchez had been called out to take statements off both of them and the other workers who had been in the lift. Tough life for a rookie Sanchez mused.

“The lifts in the Muscat building are on card access aren’t they” he recalled as Marge nodded at him.

This meant that the security guards would have signed in the painters, and then swiped their own i.d. pass in front of the box, and pressed the floor number the painters were working on. The lift would only then have stopped at the floor number pressed by the guard. The window near the toilets. He remembered using the bathroom on the first floor, and opening the wrong door. The door led him out onto a fire-escape staircase. Sanchez slammed his fingers on the desk that was it that was how they did it. To get in through the toilet window, nip out on the fire escape then up the stairs and with the help of a little lock picking skills because the fire escape door only had one key lock that could easily be picked, onto the floor with the goods on it: easy to break into. Not to mention the handy distraction that if any alarms were accidentally tripped while entering the fire escape doors on the first floor to gain access upstairs, the painters would take the blame for this. So easy so ‘obvious’ Sanchez thought to himself, well he hadn’t missed it this time. Would Winter have known this? Not likely he thought to himself, she was after Tramery, trailing him through the park like a lost puppy. Tramery with his tall good looks, she wouldn’t have a clue. Sanchez tapped his fingers in satisfaction on the desk. This time this time he was ahead of her, he was the one with the cards. See how good she was now with him in control.

“It does it looks like a remote control,” Sarah repeated to Patrick who was keeping his head low down.

“It’s a radio, he’s talking into a radio dummy. Must be on a break from work or something,” he laughed.

A remote control indeed! Patrick took a sideways glance over at the white shirted man in shades sitting on one of the park benches nearby. The guy was twirling his radio in his hands expertly like it was a baton or something. He seemed to be agitated.

“It’s a two way radio, they have a frequency of about two miles I think. Most buildings are wired to their own wavelength, and each security outfit has its own radio frequency,” Patrick continued with the air of an expert.

All those early evening seventies murder shows were paying off despite what his aunt said.

“Yeah, I’d say that guy is on his break. From the bags under his eyes I’d say he was a shift worker” Patrick continued.

Sarah twitched her neck in recognition. Shift worker. Late hours early hours time to come time to go doors opening and closing, it wasn’t shifts it was a constant movement of work around her, always coming and going and never being in the house. Except sometimes he was there after teatime. Click. She could hear the latch close behind her.

“He looks like he’s waiting for someone to come over and talk with him” Sarah mused.

“Sometimes people come to the park to watch people going past they’re not always waiting for someone to find them. One time I saw a woman with an easel painting the roof tops of the buildings over there, can you see the way the sun hits them. She was painting them purple and yellow, like a comic strip. Sometimes you see older people taking a rest from their walk. That’s what older people do isn’t it? They always seem to be walking somewhere without going anywhere. Round and round in circles. Over the other side of the park there’s a group of older kids drinking cider out of paper bags, huddled in a gang where the old playground used to be. I’m not sure that when they built the park that’s what they intended it to be used for.”

“The park was built a long time ago?” Sarah enquired.

“Yeah before TV before computers” he laughed emulating the old voices that whispered past in old overcoats, grumbling about the weather, “Notice they don’t build parks anymore. My dad said they built it so that people had something to do,

somewhere else in the city they could go to like a little holiday because it took so long to get out into the country for a day trip. Not like now with the motorways planes trains trams and buses. I'll bet the people who built these things built them so that they'd have somewhere to circle when they were older and had nothing to do and nowhere to do it in. So they wouldn't feel left out, they could circle here every day, like those ducks over there, uninterrupted. Just like vultures circling the young to kill them with their conversation."

Old people Sarah mused. She liked old people, they always said hello to her, and she felt safe smiling and saying hello back to them. They had warmth in their eyes, she didn't have to worry she was making too much noise or saying the wrong thing when she smiled at them as they passed.

"So why did you come here then if you didn't want to be harassed by the old people?" she asked him.

"I was passing through, thought I'd get myself a soda in the shop on the other side of the park. And then I got distracted by you young lady" he replied looking out onto the lake.

She noticed the white shirted man get up and greet a man with triangular sideburns and then the two of them sit down again.

"I was right, he was waiting for some-one, look over there."

"Jimmy was very pleased with your work today." Angelo said looking around noticing the kids throwing stones in the river on his right.

"Its always a pleasure doing business with you folks. Perhaps in future you think that Jimmy might be a little more pleased with his wallet and not with his fists?" the security guard said gruffly.

"Listen, you owed Jimmy a favour, you're lucky this is all he asked of you. So tell me why did the News on TV show us wearing Navy suits when you saw green on the camera? You gone colour-blind now or something?" Angelo had an eye for detail.

"Naw the programme was too cheap to get the green suits. They already had the navy ones in my building for the engineers, so they borrowed them. That Maria Thornton chick is a nice woman let me tell you. Real charming, real smooth, she managed to talk my boss outta the uniforms. Normally he's as tight as a nuns hymen"

“Yeah well. You just remember to keep your mouth equally as tight. You got the tape?”

The guard took out a paper bag with the videotape of the night before’s activities and handed it to Angelo who slipped it into the newspaper he was carrying. Angelo got up and put on his sunglasses,

“You can go back to eating donuts and twiddling your radio like a cheerleader” he said and then got up to leave.

Angelo then strode up the hill in the park in long clean steps like a cheetah eager to pounce. Tramery was in for it now. The cops must have found out about the boiler suits from Blanco. Tramery was already on their books for breaking and entering, all that was needed was a few witnesses and Tramery was going to take the fall for the job. Nice Angelo thought to himself, a simple plan. It had all come together in Jimmy’s office a few weeks ago when they had heard that the exhibition of paintings by Jade Nix was coming to the city hall. A friend of Jimmy’s, then again who wasn’t a friend of Jimmy, had said that the exhibition was being put on as a favour to the assistant district attorney who was trying to impress the liberal voters of the city by getting back in with the arts crowd. This was after the massive failure of his speech at the annual David Waters benefit dinner. The assistant D.A who was a very ambitious man by all accounts had mad an unfortunate comment about being tickled pink to be at the dinner, which a few of the not so liberal Liberals present took offence to. His name was Eric Fitzgerald, Angelo remembered. In order to offset this PR failure, he had organised the exhibition of Jade Nix’s paintings along with a few other chosen artists from the community. Given her rising notoriety and stature there was sure to be great media attention at the opening, which could only be in his favour, or at least that’s what his spinners were telling him. Now after the events of the night before it seemed he was about to become tangled in a bigger stickier web of words than any of his spinners could have envisaged, namely, Stolen, Thousands and Why? Why were Nix’s paintings not stored with the rest of the collection, why had they been in a safe in his office? And why was it apparently so easy for them to be stolen? Angelo’s stride changed to a smug slow pace. The assistant D.A. had the paintings in his office for a private showing with some election friends, the kinda friends who shook hands and left a dollar imprint on your hand. Which was why they had been in his office safe. Why they had stolen them was another question. Jimmy wasn’t exactly a fan of modern art. It was Angelo’s idea. Angelo had never liked the assistant D.A. the man

hadn't a clue how to dress, forever wearing shirts unbuttoned at the sleeves, suits his dowdy wife had bought, and that accent please who did he think he was kidding. Angelo smoothed his hair; it was getting a little gusty out. In business, in any business you must look the part, otherwise no-body's gonna buy it. He remembered Tramery telling him that when Angelo was just starting out.

"Details, it's the details that make the man. Never forget the details Angelo" Tramery had told him.

Now he was the one sloppy with his brown cord jacket and slacks, now he was the one who was being left behind without all the details. Like last night, like how they had fitted him up. Jimmy thought that Tramery was getting sloppy, the way he was returning to his street tricks, he was going to get caught, going to bring them all down. Then Angelo, who was always eager to be a better man, had come up with the plan. Distract the security with the paint outfits, make sure no-body's face can be seen, let Tramery work his magic with the fire-escape locks, move with the camera's when they swept up and down the corridor, in and out easy job. Then let Blanco let it slip about Tramery having been seen with the Boiler suit men. The missing boy had just been the icing on the cake for Angelo. Nice and neat. Tramery wouldn't last the night and he wouldn't get a share of the goods, once he and the boys had retrieved them from the park that would be the last they'd see of Tramery.

Patrick watched as the man in the dark suit put on his sunglasses and moved like liquid mercury up the hill with long languid strides. He was reminded of the way his dad walked; his dad who was probably looking for him at home right now.

"Do you think they'll find that boy, Peter Jones?" he asked Sarah.

Sarah examined the stone in her hand, slowly and laboriously cleaning the dirt off it smoothing it so to allow the stone skip cleanly over the water's surface. She turned it over.

"I don't really know. His parents were on the TV looking for any information about where he might be."

She turned the stone over again.

"Devastated, I think that's what it said, they were devastated."

She recalled that's what her mother had said in the kitchen earlier on that day. Devastated. Sarah wondered if they had even noticed that she hadn't come home from school yet.

"Peter. I wonder if they'll find you Peter" Patrick said to no-one in particular.

"People go all the time don't they, and no-one notices. Nobody notices, just a name and a piece of paper that's all that's left of them. Maybe sometimes a photograph, some people even have memories, but a piece of paper. Date of birth, mother's name, father's name, maybe even both sometimes, and that's it."

He recalled the shoebox stuffed with papers in his aunt's house that he found one day. She came home from the café early and walked in on him in her wardrobe, went hysterical, told him not to be looking in her things, not to be reading her things. Didn't want him to see what was in the box. He had been bored in the flat, noticed a spider whose legs spread out almost the size of the palm of his hands, never seen one that big before. It made him feel like his veins were made of quicksilver and his stomach full of McDonalds chip fat to watch it, but he couldn't help it. He watched as it crawled over and under all the little obstacles he set up, pieces of paper to slide down, combs, stacks of pennies it just kept crawling along the floor. Then it crept under one of the cracks in the wood panelling on his wall. He watched the crack for a few minutes and then decided the spider had made its way through the wall into his aunt's bedroom. She had left her door open. He surveyed the wall, the distance from door to the spider crack and estimated it should have come out somewhere near the wardrobe in her room. Like lilac, or rose water, the air in her room always smelt sweet, like old ladies clothes stores. When he was in the room he crawled along the ground looking to see if there was a hole between her room and his and that's when he noticed an old newspaper sticking out from under the wardrobe. Something about Kuwait, or arms or some kinda war was on the front cover; the paper was yellowed and faded. He pulled it out from the wardrobe and noticed as he did that the bottom of the wardrobe was lined with more old newspapers. His aunt's shoes stood on top of them, the white rubber soled ones she wore to work and the sparkly heeled ones she wore at the weekends when he got sent around to her friend, who he was to call aunt Bernice, even though he knew she wasn't his aunt. Beside the shoes was a shoebox crammed full of all kinds of papers. He saw his own name written on one of them, the top most paper, a large rectangular sheet that had crease marks where it had been folded in two. It was his birth cert and on it was his date of birth, where he was born,

Father's name, Jack Tramery, Mother's name, Jennifer Tramery and his name, John Tramery. Nothing he didn't know already. And then underneath he saw a piece of paper, the piece of paper that changed everything.

"Leave that down" his aunt shrieked at him.

He should have noticed, should have realised when he saw the work shoes in the wardrobe that it was her day off. Without mentioning a word he put it down back in the box and placed the box back into the wardrobe. She lied, he lied, and Jack never mentioned it, never said a word.

"Patrick did you hear what I said?" he heard a girl's voice ask.

Patrick, who was Patrick, shit Patrick yeah he was Patrick that's what he told the girl when they had met not half an hour ago.

She lied he lied, and Jack was going to keep silent? Not anymore.

"Its all too fleeting isn't it? All way too short the amount of time we get to spend with each other?" he asked her.

"But we only just met" Sarah replied.

"I mean with the people in general. Not you and me. I mean it doesn't make sense does it? A few years ago when I was your age," immediately Sarah felt her skin bristling.

When I was your age indeed.

"When I was your age, I still measured my age in half years and I was proud of it. That kid Peter that you are looking for, I'll bet he did the same. And you know you meet other kids, and they all do the same. And then suddenly suddenly you're old but you're not. You find out things, and you think about them keep them to yourself secrets that the old people the adults have kept and you keep them too. So that makes you like them and you think you're mature because you can lie and pretend you know less than you do. But maybe it just makes them more like kids, just bigger versions of us. Only with more secrets and lies. So if that's all its about, people hiding from each other, like that kid Peter, like that old lady in the sewers, then the time we spend with each other is very short. The time between being a kid and not being a kid."

Sarah looked a little puzzled. He was a kid, just because he was a few years older than her. Was that what he meant, just because he could throw the stone on the river and make it bounce more than her did that make him an adult?

“I dunno. Sometimes I dunno” he said shaking his head, “Why do we have to tell so many lies? Why do the older people tell us lies, because they say they do it to protect us, but it doesn’t it just means that we grow up to be liars too”

“But I thought you said that grown-ups are just big kids too.”

“They are. See what I mean, I don’t know at all” he said, throwing one of the stones right in the middle of the water.

Sarah watched it splash straight into the water, no more skimming. It felt more satisfying just to fling the stones in without trying bouncing them or getting the angle right. Better with all the spray, the brown mucky spray of the river water shooting up as the stone landed. Maybe Patrick had a point; after all she had introduced herself to him as Susan because she had been told by the grownups to lie about her name, never to reveal it to strangers. Never to tell them your real name, never to tell them where you live. What difference could it make she wondered? Patrick looked at his watch and then appeared to nod his head in agreement with some silent decision.

“I’m going to go home now kid, so I’ll have to leave you now. You live round here, be able to get home safe?” he asked.

Sarah nodded her head.

“It was nice to meet you Susan” he said, proffering his hand to shake hers.

“Actually its Sarah” she replied shaking his hand, “It was nice to meet you too Patrick”.

The lies the lies, even in the simplest of conversations he thought.

“Actually its John.” He replied.

She started to walk away from him, and then called back,

“I preferred Patrick.”

CHAPTER FIVE

No smoke without a liar

The sun was beating down on Winter, the hot humid sun burning her skin even as she stood under the shade of a nearby tree. Dressed in a grey suit with her starched white blouse she felt especially conspicuous as scantily clad joggers pranced past pretty in pastels. She stood in the shade fumbling in her pockets for a lighter to play with or something to pass the time as she kept her eye on Tramery in the distance. Not that she smoked anymore, had given that up, for the time being anyhow. Up ahead she saw Tramery stop playing with a box of some sort in his hands. He didn't look the type; he just didn't look the type to go in for taking young boys off the streets. Then again, she knew now that there was no type. On Winter's first proper case on the job, that was what the other officers had warned her. To suspect every and anyone and never to fall for appearances. That and to have a strong stomach. It was during her first case that she started smoking again, her first time since leaving college. All those hours on surveillance sitting in that room smoking away the hours, it was that or eating and smoking was cheaper. Detective Winter remembered how the room had looked. The chair propped against the window ledge, dusty blinds half open, and a noisy air conditioner that made a lot noise but never made a bit of difference to the temperature of the room, except at night of course when it got unusually chilly and she couldn't turn the damn thing off. Her first case was a big one and, she had been surprised she was assigned to it, not having had much experience. One of the other officers, Frank had warned her to be careful. She remembered his name, he looked like father Christmas jolly cheeked with snow white hair and a beard, never told him that though, she imagined he got told that all the time. Frank told her they usually assigned women to those sorts of cases. To comfort the children, she had asked, assuming that even in these days they imagined that a woman would be best able to deal with children. He had stared her in the eye for a few uncomfortable seconds when she suggested that was the reason. She remembered his reply, couldn't forget that, "No" he said, "To hold the mother's hand when she has to identify her dead child's body." He had stated without changing the tone of his voice. She watched Tramery walk on a little, there was a young boy in the distance and Tramery was making a beeline for him. Not another one she thought, not another David Waters.

Tramery looked at John, walking towards him, looking him directly in the eye every inch the young man.

“Came out for a walk in the park?” he asked, wondering if the boy had changed his mind, if he wanted to stay with that woman Therese instead.

“Yeah, just wanted to skim a few stones. I was just coming back to the flat now” John replied by way of explanation.

“Skimming stones? We don’t have time for that John. I told you that last night, we have to be careful can’t let people see us in public yet. Not until we getaway,” Tramery told him, trying not to sound too stern.

He didn’t want to frighten the boy off. Not after all the time they had missed out on. John saw the cards in Tramery’s hands and took the deck off him. Started flicking the cards through his hands not really noticing what he was doing. They had drawings of Chinese style Dragons and flat faced men going to do battle against them holding wooden spears, wearing toga style outfits. John’s face looked a little downcast to Tramery. It was not like last night, when he was bright eyed and full of mischief. It had been around midnight, when Tramery pulled up at her house and rung the doorbell, hoping that she wasn’t in, that John would open the door. He knocked again on the door, twice in staccato motion. A sleepy eyed sandy haired kid in PJs opened the door looked Tramery in the eye, and gave a small start of surprise.

“Oh you meant tonight,” the boy had said to him.

Tumbling through his thoughts Tramery had started to panic caught with sudden indecision. Then he noticed the wine t-shirt under the kid’s pyjama top.

“Very cute very cute” he said while entering the door.

“Hey I gotta keep the old guy on his toes don’t I. Especially if we’re going to be on the run now.”

“On the run hey? Well Sundance what am I gonna call you then?”

The kid took off his top and revealed the t-shirt and crumpled jeans underneath, then put a cap on his head.

“You can call me Patrick. Patrick O’Reilly, a wee Irish boy” he said, copying one of their neighbour’s kid’s accents.

“Alright then Patrick, have you got your bags packed? Yep, well get in the car, I have to leave this for your aunt.”

The conversation felt like it happened oceans ago. Tramery wondered if John regretted leaving his aunt behind, if that was the reason for his downcast look. His

face was too young for that expression, Tramery began to regret taking him. Was he being selfish, maybe the boy was better off where he was?

“Why do we have to getaway?” John asked him suddenly, avoiding eye contact with his father.

“I told you, I’m going to have some money now. I can look after you properly; we’ll get a place somewhere, just the two of us. Somewhere near the sea, with boats, you can learn how to swim. You said you’d like that. You would like that wouldn’t you John, or should I say Patrick O’Reilly?”

John thought of the little girl he had just met. Susan she said her name was and then she said it was really Sarah. Why did they have to lie, why did they have to hide.

“Why don’t we stay here?” John asked quietly.

Tramery said nothing. So the boy did prefer to live with his aunt, he looked into the clouds, it had all been too easy, and he had taken the boy for granted.

“I don’t mean that I don’t want to live with you, I mean why do we have to run and hide. You are my dad. Why can’t I just live with you, here, with my father and not have to hide?”

Tramery thought of the events of the night before, it was impossible for them to stay in the city now. He shook his head.

“You never even considered it did you. I’ll bet if you had to have talked to aunt Theresa she would have let me go. You never even asked her did you?”

“You don’t understand Jack, there are things about me you don’t know. It’s just not possible for me to live in this city and be a proper Dad to you. That’s what I want to be. I’m not running away with you I’m taking you away, we’re going to have a proper family.”

“But why not here? I know what you are, Theresa told me what you do. That you cheat people out of money, with these” he flicked the deck.

“And I don’t care, that’s not what matters. You are my dad, and I want to live with you. But we have to stay here. No more lies”

Tramery was a little startled to receive an ultimatum from the boy. He looked at Jack, his fair hair was just like his mother’s, his eyes enquiring and defiant reminded him of how she looked at him that night, the night he left her. Maybe the boy was right; maybe he could still fix things. He reached out for Jack’s hand. The boy offered him the deck back and rubbed at his eyes with his fingers, wind must have blown grit into them.

“No Jack no more lies, not today, take my hand, we’ll go back to the flat. Gonna have to size it up for something a little more comfortable than a futon if you’re going to stay there.”

Winter watched at a distance, she had been monitoring the conversation between Tramery and the boy. Physical contact, that’s when she was able to step in under the law. Talking wasn’t in the book, but touching that was when she could step in. Winter put the lighter back in her pocket and walked quickly and purposely towards Tramery. “Nice evening for a walk detective” he said when he saw her coming towards them. She was a little taken back at his front.

“Allow me to introduce you to my son, John Tramery Junior. Don’t like being called junior do you?” he said and the boy offered his hand to shake Winter’s.

“It’s better than Patrick” he grinned half heartedly, wondering why did the detective want to talk to his dad.

The parents are always a winner with the viewers, nothing like a programme with a little heart before the evening movie to warm up the viewing figures Maria explained to Mike. The producers know that the 7 o’clock schedule is the best time for these kinds of programmes. Just after the family have eaten their evening meal, as the weekend is about to begin, before Saturday when the dads are guilted into bringing their family out to some game, or on a trip to some museum. On Friday evening, a little heart, with all the family watching, makes people feel good about themselves to see others suffering, she said while opening the door. Then she stopped suddenly outside the door to remove the neck scarf and tie her hair up with it. Out came the glasses next, intelligence with empathy she thought to herself.

“I am so sorry to hear about your boy” she said in a humbled hushed voice that Mike had never heard her use before.

“If there is anything we can do for you to make this easier for both of you. I know this must be difficult, we’ll try to make this as easy as we can.”

Peter’s mother looked a little tired, even though she looked to be wearing freshly applied lipstick, the man beside her looked straight through Maria. Maria noticed, couldn’t help but notice that his eyebrows were almost invisible despite the thick

black hair on his head. Dye job she recognised. Then she positioned herself on the chair alongside the couch nearest the mother.

“You think that this light is good?” the woman asked Maria.

“I haven’t been on television before, I don’t want to come across, well. I don’t want to look. Well I’m not sure do you think that the light is strong enough” she asked Mike.

Didn’t want to look old Maria thought. Then she explained in her sweetest voice that though they weren’t going to Vaseline the lens of the camera, even Doris Day would have a hard time complaining about the lighting in that room. Of course the cameras would be kind. Of course she would look fine. Looking good was not what Maria had in mind; it was better if the parents looked more dishevelled, going for that gritty realism look. The kind of realism that won awards.

“Tell me about Peter, what kind of a boy is he?” she asked, starting with the nice leader question. Had to make the kid real before people cared where he had gone. His mother said nothing, and then looked at the man beside her, then back at Maria, then at the camera.

“He is a good boy. He’s my only child. We love him very dearly” she replied in an almost rehearsed manner.

“I heard that he plays football on the local team.”

“Yeah, he’s a footballer, plays left back, on Saturdays, Mondays and Wednesdays. I bring him to all his games,” the man replied a little tersely.

“But not on a Thursday evening. Was this when you noticed he was missing, because he didn’t come home from school?” Maria asked placing her hand on the mother’s knee at the same time.

“Peter did come home yesterday. I sent him out to the shops to buy some” Peter’s mother paused, cigarettes, better not say that, didn’t want people thinking she was a bad mother, “to buy some milk, the shop is nearby. Its not far away, it wouldn’t have taken him two minutes,” she continued in a defensive manner.

“I thought he had met some friends and maybe gone to the park,” the man interrupted, leaving out the to drink cider with his itinerant friends bit.

“But we waited until after it had got dark, and he never turned up. Not a sign of him. Not for hours” the mother continued.

Actually it hadn’t seemed like hours, she had been watching soaps until ten, it was only then when she went to make her usual evening coffee and have a cigarette before

bedtime that she noticed that Peter hadn't come back from the shop. Little brat she had thought to herself.

"You were very worried I'm sure" Maria said soothingly, they didn't seem upset enough, no tears yet.

"We thought he'd come back. But we waited and waited and no Peter. I don't know what happened to him," the mother continued.

"It must be very difficult for you both not knowing where he is," Maria interrupted hoping the man would take the bait.

"Of course its difficult with the damn pigs trying to make out like Peter ran away. He didn't run away, he's a good kid, he knows we love him."

Been treating him like a son for the past three years he thought to himself.

"But you don't know where he is now," Maria stated in a voice empty of emotion.

"No we don't, that's why we are here, if anyone knows anything, or saw my son. If you saw my son," the mother looked into the lens, "if you saw my son please help us, tell us where he is, he could be hurt, or injured anywhere. Please, Peter come home," she appealed emphatically.

Not quite enough emotion Maria thought.

"Its important that you did this to help find your son. I know it must be difficult for you both, but its important to do these things quickly, not to waste time, because so much can happen in such a short period of time. So much danger a child can face, so much out there to frighten a child. We have to be careful," Maria touched the mother on the arm, "we have to be careful to protect our children, especially after the David Water's incident."

The killer blow! She watched as Peter's mother's face set stone like, her eyes hollowing out into their sockets. That case had driven fear into every parent's heart in the city. Instinctively the man placed his arm around her, as she started shaking, the David Water's case. She hadn't let herself think like that, couldn't let herself imagine a horror like that kept hoping that Peter had run away. The man looked directly at Maria,

"I think that's enough," he said flatly.

The camera kept whirring in the background capturing it all on tape.

Angelo handed Jimmy the tape.

“Maybe we can send it into that funniest home videos show?” he said, noticing Jimmy place one of the books he was writing in into a drawer in his desk out of Angelo’s sight. Jimmy still didn’t trust him yet.

“I guess we better take a look at it, to make sure it’s the right tape, don’t want to leave any loose ends when the job is done.”

Jimmy said and then placed the tape into the video machine on top of the mahogany cabinet beside him. The footage was very grainy, people walking past the building mostly. Sometimes it zoomed into a passing pretty woman; sometimes it scanned the front of the building following cars. Then at 23.45 according to the camera four men dressed in green boiler suits entered one of the glass front doors of the Muscat building. They went straight into the foyer. Angelo knew what happened next, that they had entered through the door on the left. That the guard at the desk had been eating a bap, and hidden the rest under the desk when they came in. Laboriously he took out the guest book and asked them to sign in the name of the company they were with, the floor they were visiting and the time they were to enter at. The guard had been given orders from the previous shift that Davidson’s Paint company, one of the largest in the district would be in at some stage to do some work on the second floor. Angelo remembered looking at him as he played with the keys on his belt while he signed the book. Dave Davids he had signed the book, but the guard never even noticed. Probably couldn’t read. Then they were walked over to the lift, and sent up to the first floor. A few moments later they had trouped out of the lift, explaining that they needed to bring up some more supplies with them and that they had to go get them outta the van round the back. The guard nodded his head, didn’t even ask them to sign out. It was that easy. Seconds later the alarm had gone off in the Assistant D.A.’s office and it was all alarms and flashing lights as they drove off empty handed. The van had been parked round the back, Tramery had used it to get in through the first floor window climbing up on the roof, while the security camera’s view was blocked by the Van. The moustaches had been Angelo’s idea. Two of the painter’s had pencil thin Picasso styled moustaches; he told the guard they were brothers. Not that the guard had even noticed. Tramery had one on too. Angelo had sold the idea to Tramery by telling him it would be a trademark and a fist in the face for the assistant D.A. given it was an art robbery they were carrying out, modern art, Picasso and all that. He knew Tramery’s pretensions would buy into it. He also knew that when their ‘witness’ said he spotted Tramery around the back of the building with his fake

moustache, even if they couldn't prove that he had broken in, the circumstantial evidence would frame him nicely. The cops might even think Tramery was the one who organised the whole thing. The video film showed the cops arrive at 00.10 and frantic conversations inside the building as they tried to get up to the D.A.'s floor but couldn't because the computer had over-ridden the card access system because the alarm on the floor had been tripped.

"They look like the Keystone cops." Jimmy laughed.

Not so foolish now Sanchez old boy, not so foolish now. He picked up the radio and called Winter's name. She walked a little on from Tramery and the boy, not wanting them to hear what was being said between them.

"I see. I see" she replied.

"Good work Sanchez."

Well that was going to change things wasn't it? She didn't want to arouse Tramery's suspicions and walked with him and the boy towards the gates of the park.

"I suppose that this was the boy you were seen with last night. The one who matched Peter's description" she said amiably to Tramery.

John's ears pricked up a little. Peter. Peter, that was the name of the boy who had gone missing. The name of the boy he and the girl had been looking for earlier on. Was that why the detective was talking to his dad? Was his father mixed up in that? He looked up at his father. They hadn't seen each other in years and then his dad turned up at the house two months ago. Said to Theresa that he wanted to see John again. John remembered looking at his dad the first time they saw each other again and thinking he was thinner and not as tall as he remembered. His face seemed a little bonier a little more sharp featured. Why was his dad in such a hurry for them to leave? Why did last night make a difference?

"But of course it was my son" Tramery replied.

"It's a difficult situation" he said in almost a whisper to her, "he's been living with his aunt for the past few years and" then he stopped talking all of a sudden when he saw what was waiting for him at the gates of the park.

Jimmy waited for an answer. He didn't like loose ends. He wanted an answer. He watched Angelo smooth his hair and sit back into the chair. How did Jimmy know about that Angelo wondered. He was sure that Paul would not have mentioned it. He would have known it would not have pleased Jimmy.

"We ditched the van, like you said to at the back of the shopping precinct. Then got out to cut into the park. We changed the suits there and left them in one of the old sewer drains. And then we packaged the paintings into the plastic bags weighed them, and left them in the stagnant part of the river. Gonna collect them tonight with the others" Angelo answered.

Jimmy bent over and opened the bottom drawer of his desk. In it he had a wooden box filled fat with thick Cuban cigars. Beside the wooden box was a little plastic bag; he took it out and a book of matches. He sat up in the chair and opened the bag, took out the battered cardboard box from inside.

"The first box of cigars I ever bought Angelo. The very first box I ever bought. I keep them for special occasions, like tonight."

Jimmy said this slowly and carefully watching Angelo's face as he did so. Angelo said nothing, special occasions, in their business they were few and far between. Jimmy slid out the paper tray of the box and inside Angelo could see six thin cigars. He took out two, offered Angelo one. Angelo never smoked, was too conscious of his health to do that.

"Thank you" he said and then watched as Jimmy placed his cigar in his mouth.

Jimmy then flicked one of the matches from the book alight, held between finger and thumb. He held it to the end of the cigar and took three deep puffs on it before lighting Angelo's cigar. Angelo copied Jimmy's motion and attempted to savour the flavour. Seconds later he was coughing, while Jimmy let the rancid smoke ooze out of his lips.

"Taste like shit don't they?" Jimmy asked rhetorically.

"They are made of all the cut off pieces of leaf that is left over after they make the good ones. Like the ones in my wooden box of fine cigars, Cuban cigars, Angelo, Cuban cigars, rolled on young maiden's thighs" he smiled.

Angelo said nothing and attempted another puff on the cigar.

"I remember the first one of these I had, coughed it up again just like you. But now after all my years of smoking, I don't notice it so much. The flavour of these, the

flavour of the Cubans, there's not so much in the difference. Not so much as you pay for that's for sure."

Jimmy noticed that Angelo was looking intently at him, expectantly.

"The thing is, that though I buy the Cubans, it doesn't make me a mug. I like to spend my money on the finer things in life. But I keep this box in my desk to remind me that they don't taste so different. I just don't accept any crap anymore," he said stubbing out the cigar.

"You understand what I'm saying Angelo?"

Angelo nodded his head; the movement caused some ash to fall on his suit.

"So I'm only going to ask you one more time. What exactly happened last night? And why when I got this back" he took out a gun from the bottom drawer, "why was there one bullet missing?"

Angelo sat a little straighter in his chair. No big deal no big deal he told himself. So why did his throat feel suddenly dry. Angelo gave a little cough and then motioned to Jimmy he needed the ashtray to extinguish the cigar, dabbing it along the glass bottom of the ashtray in tight small circles. Angelo wasn't sure how best to tell Jimmy what had happened without making him suspicious. Round and round he pushed the cigar down, until the smoke was extinguished and only grey tracks on the glass were left in inward spirals.

Round and round the lights shone, barely visible in the evening shade. The sirens made no noise, but the light atop of the car roof was on. Blue then white right into the back of his eyes leaving an imprint, making it difficult for him to see things when he focused on them directly. Like his father's face, which was now obscured from vision, as the car pulled off. He could sense what it looked like, could feel his father looking back at him could feel his eyes on his skin. John wasn't sure what to do now. His father had told him to go back and wait in the apartment, that he wouldn't be gone for long, but he also said to ring his aunt and tell her where he was. John looked down the road following the car with his eyes until it became nothing more than a blip dipping into the horizon. No noise. There had been a dark haired Spanish looking cop waiting for them at the gates of the park. They cuffed his dad. Never cuffed people they wanted to talk to, they only cuffed those they were done talking to and knew all they needed to know about. His dad went along with it, never even tried to talk to them,

never explained never complained just got in and sat in the back of the car with that Detective woman they met in the park. Was it about the missing boy? John found himself playing with the cards in his hands while he was thinking about it, unconsciously counting them. Forty-eight, his father arrested, Forty-nine, that little girl looking for some boy, Fifty, the detective had said his father had been spotted with a boy earlier, Fifty-one. Fifty-one and that was all.

“See you later Jack.” His dad said. See you later Jack. Why Jack of spades, why in the forest under the tree where the boy carved his name. He walked back to the apartment suddenly feeling very uncomfortable with the idea of spending the night there alone with his thoughts.

Angelo composed himself in the chair.

“You gave me the gun just in case anything went wrong. As a last resort right. Right. So it wasn’t fired during the robbery. I gave it to Paul so he could have me covered when I was talking to the security guard when we came into the lobby of the Muscat building just in case the guy got trigger happy or jumpy. Not that the gaurd suspected a thing. Guy was half asleep. I also warned Paul that Tramery was uncomfortable with the job and that we couldn’t trust him, to keep an eye on him. We went to the park after the job, like I told you. Then walked towards the river carrying the bags. We cut through the forest part and ditched the uniforms there like I said, and on the way, this crazy bag lady started shouting at us. Think we woke her up, she was drunk or something, but she grabbed at me when we went past. Gave Paul the spooks. I should have taken the piece off him then, but I didn’t want Tramery seeing that Paul had a piece on him in case he got suspicious you know,” Angelo looked at Jimmy.

No Jimmy didn’t know, he didn’t like where this story was going.

“So we went to the river bank, had all the paintings bagged and we attached some of the stones to the bags and dropped them into the river to collect them later tonight. While we were doing that Tramery started giving out to Paul for shouting at the old lady. Waking her up, saying that it wasn’t good business to have too many witnesses. I guess he was right. Then Paul started getting shirty saying that there was no way anyone would know about the job, there was no way we were going to get caught. That people like her were dirt came and went all the time, pieces of meat. Used confetti. It was real dark last night, real dark, and the park was empty as sin. Tramery

and I were tying up the bags and Paul was covering us, just in case anyone came along. So while Tramery is busy with that, I walk over to Paul quietly and ask him for the piece, just in case he gets jumpy. He took it out of his pocket and at that second the trees behind us seemed to lift, with a noise like a sneeze or a cough, and these birds just flew out straight in front of us. “Stupid ol lady” Paul shouted, “See how disturbed this makes you” and then he shot right over where the noise had come from I’m telling you Jimmy, Tramery’s a prick but this guy Paul, he’s a liability, not professional at all. I know he’s a friend of your sisters, but I don’t want to work with him again” Angelo concluded, trying to draw Jimmy to the conclusion it might be his own fault and not Angelo’s.

“You telling me that’s all there was to it. Paul taking pot-shots at scarecrows in the park?” Jimmy asked.

Angelo bent towards him,

“Jimmy I know you too well to lie to you.”

CHAPTER SIX

A body is found in the park

Crack! Like the sound of a whip only more broken, breaking the air into pieces, carrying the sound in shattered echoes into the air, up above the shooter and the shot. High higher above the treetops the streetlights the empty pathways, bounding off the lights in distant office blocks where silent workers typed numbers onto nameless pages and phoned faceless faxes across the world. Under the moonlight and through the nighttime dew, it awoke an old man from his drunken stupor outside of an electrical store. Onwards the sound travelled instinctively into the air of all the ears and eyes of dreamers who had not yet fallen prey to dreams. A second later and the branches were all movement, lifted by the sound as though by a gust of wind, taking each leaf and throwing it in a different direction, pointing undersides to the sky, pointing beaks to the air, cutting the sound with flapping wings, scattering it above the city. A moment and it brought ears higher on heads, turned the men to face each other in anger in fear, asking the eyes to notice notice the sound, to see the shot. Watching the reactions of everything the noise touched, from a brilliant short bullet of light, to a bang. It reached through the violet hue up and up through the night, but only for a moment. For that moment, that shattered picture that broken image and smoking barrel for that flash. A second that brought her out of her thoughts like a clap of thunder rattling around inside of her. In the distance she looked towards the park, where she thought she heard the noise coming from. Instinctively turned her head in that direction, as just as suddenly the noise dull thudded into some distant corner of her room, and she was just as alone as before holding a dead eyed doll in her arms. On the other side of the park it picked up speed with the wind, barely a millisecond after being flung from the gun and threw itself against the window where a boy dressed in his pyjamas was sat watching traffic pass. Watching waiting wondering if his father would turn up. The shot sang a solo dart of noise that passed him by like a distant lorry rumbling. He was already too lost in wondering to hear any noises. That single sound, that second, that moment, the time between the bullet leaving the gun and entering its target, in that time a thousand faces, a hundred thoughts and eyes, but only one pair of ears. One pair of ears that heard it for what it was, from head to toe, nothing but death.

Sarah looked up at the skies, saw the clouds clambering together, deadening the light, heavy bottomed with rain. It was beginning to get colder as the sun started to go down, making the tops of the buildings orange and gold. Time to go home she thought to herself, putting one foot obstinately in front of the other. She desperately wanted to stay there, wanted never to be found, never to have to leave, to have to have their eyes watching her, looking at her asking her questions. She always felt dizzy. Their voices echoing and echoing not sounding like words, just like accusations. Couldn't breath, couldn't think straight. Had to go home, because, because, she didn't know because. It was the same part of her that made her keep quiet when he shouted, and made her angry because she never tried to stop him, never laughed back at them when they laughed at her. Never frowned, except at night time when she could frown away in the dark, casting demons out with every breath, her and Delilah watching the stars and the smoke of night time, silent safe and cold. She felt a drop of rain on her face; it felt good after the humidity of the day. Plodding onwards, guessing her way out, hoping she was taking the right path. The more decided she became that she was going home, the quicker she walked and the colder she felt. It was beginning to rain hard now a sudden quick hail, lifting up grains of dirt with every swollen drop of rain that hit the ground.

She walked onwards past a rockery that had built itself into a hill between bushes and trees on one side of the path. The rocks were pink and grey, faded in places with the sunlight, and in the shaded bits she could see moss growing and coke cans lodged. The rain water was gathering in little puddles in cracks and crevices in the stones, she watched as it trickled happily down onto the path where she stood, getting wetter and wetter. She couldn't remember when it had rained like that before, but then again she was usually indoors most of the time, not like the other kids, they played sports with each other, went out to the cinema. Went out, left their buildings into the sunlight, during the daytime. Not just during school, she knew they saw each other more often than that. She stayed in, did her homework, knew that her mother didn't want kids hanging around their place. Making noise. Disrupting them. She felt uncomfortable around the kids in her class, didn't know what to say to them, she didn't think she knew what to say to invite them to her house in any case what would they do there? All she had was Del and her books. The water twisted and turned down and down the

little rock hill. As she watched she noticed all the colour, all the little pieces of life scurrying around the rocks, landing flying off, carrying pieces of leaves, throwing petals to the sunlight hoping to catch the eye of a passing insect. Then she noticed something odd, over the rocks to her left she could see a trickle of water, which looked a different colour. Darker, thicker than the other trickles, maybe a little pool of mud or an old coke can she thought to herself, and climbed up the rocks to investigate. The colour of the liquid grew more intense, more alive as she grew closer. Her breathing became more loudly she wasn't used to exercise. She was panting, squinting trying to see what it was. The colour all the time stronger and brighter, looking less like water less like mud more like. She stood on top of the rock and looked downwards. Her little body stark shocked and violently still. Her heart rang chilling beats through her body. But she kept looking. Couldn't stop looking. Would never be able to scratch that from her mind. Silence, no noise. Raindrops stopped splashing in the background but the water kept on flowing down the rocks in waves carrying his blood over them staining every stone it touched with his death. Peter Jones was dead at her feet.

The rain clouds passed over the city, cleaning, wetting, and showing that the weather if nothing else could change. Tramery watched the window-wipers move forward, backward and back again, leaving a semi-circle untouched in the centre of the windscreen, smeared with muck. They had arrested him on suspicion of robbery had witnesses Sanchez sneered at him, before reading him his rights. The right to remain silent. In the car all that could be heard was the creak and turn of the window wipers. Tramery's face was as downcast as the sky above. Thinking, he was thinking, had to get a story straight for the interview. He knew he'd have to answer some questions but he also knew that he had too little time and too much that he was unable to say. He watched the raindrops dribble down the centre of the window, trying to cleans the dirt, to take the dust away as they trickled downwards.

The windowpane rattled with rain as John looked outside from his father's apartment window. His face was riddled with questions. He watched the puddles that formed in the hollows of the path spread out and become charged with colour as the oil smears

that once lay on the stagnant water became emancipated with the rain, creating little slicks of colour. They had taken his father away. He did not know why, he only knew they had taken his father away. How had the cops known he was there? Why were they after his father? Why couldn't he have a day without any worries? Just one day. The rain drummed on the window outside. He was going to end up with his aunt again. John knew it was only a matter of time before she came to collect him. He walked over to the bedroom door of the apartment and picked up his bag and his Spiderman comics. He packed everything into his rucksack. It was time for John to think for himself, time for John to leave by his own decision. He picked up the half empty soda can from the ground and drained the last few drops of liquid from it, before taking one last look around the room. It was as empty as it had been last night. Then John checked his watch to see how much time he would have to escape there were only a few hours of daylight left.

4.45 pm her digital watch told her from its place on the window-ledge beeping as Nora continued washing the dishes in the sink. She could hear the tinkle of the wind-chime in Sarah's bedroom as it was bombarded with breeze from the rains outside. The sound of it made her feel angry and tired. Her hands were dry and hard from the lather of the dishwater. She had working all day washing dishes, feeding people, serving people smiling at people, hated people. On the kitchen table was the remains of the last meal he had eaten and a note scrawled to say he had gone out to work. When she arrived home, she was always greeted with the remains of the supper or breakfast or tea. They always expected the place to magically transform itself when she got home, never asked if she needed help. Not to mention the fact that Sarah still was not home from school yet. Nora was beginning to get worried. She continued scrubbing the same plate that had been in her hands for the past ten minutes. Outside she could see the people scurrying through the streets like rats, shaking and dancing over muddy puddles and standing in rain soaked huddles waiting for buses, trying to keep dry under brightly coloured umbrellas.

“Angelo my boy you never fail me. Your timing was immaculate” Jimmy smiled, all the tensions from their earlier conversation having evaporated.

“You were right about that shipment of umbrellas. All those folks coming home from work who were hoping to enjoy a walk in the sunshine, all of them \$5 a pop going to go to each and every stand in town each and every one of our stands, and going to buy themselves an umbrella. Nice thinking my boy nice thinking.”

Jimmy smiled again; he was smoking a Cuban cigar now. They were going to be able clean a lot of money with the umbrella business.

“I’d say we’ll sell oh around the cost of one of those Jade Nix paintings today wouldn’t you Jimmy?” Angelo replied, glad to have Jimmy relaxed again.

Always the little things got people. Angelo knew that the rains were coming, that there were going to be storms tonight. Angelo was counting on it, which was why he had suggested that they dump the paintings in the river. Maybe it rains a lot more than they expect tonight. Maybe the river is not as stagnant as they thought. Maybe the river will have washed the paintings away by the time they got there later that night. Angelo grinned to himself; the simplest things were the making of the man. Then he looked at Jimmy who had grown chunky over the years, sucking on a cigar, telling him he didn’t take any crap anymore. For how much longer Angelo asked himself, for how much longer.

For how much longer, Tramery thought to himself, for how much longer were they going to leave him stuck in that room, with nothing but a stale cup of coffee and a tape-recorder for company. They had started questioning him about having been on Store Street, about talking to a man in a boiler suit. Tramery had explained he was a lost electrician, looking for building 157. Which was not unusual Tramery explained, given that there had been some mistake on his block and there was no number 156 and people were always getting confused about where the other buildings were and if they had the right one or not. Tramery knew he was babbling, but as long as he said nothing that could convict him, he was going to bluff his way through their questions. They could not have any definitive evidence to link him to the Muscat robbery. The door opened and Sanchez entered the room, his face buried in papers. Winter had drawn the short straw and she was the one going to have to face the press. Sanchez was going to have to make a damn good job of this interview on his own. After what had just happened, Sanchez knew the department would expect nothing less than a

full conviction as soon as possible. There could be no mistakes this time. He took a seat in the chair opposite Tramery and turned on the tape recorder.

Detective Winter was stood outside in the corridor; she walked past a little girl wearing a school uniform sitting on a chair on her own, towards the blue room at the end of the corridor. All the words, all language escaped her, she didn't know what to say. Did not know what she was supposed to say. Her throat felt dry and the palms of her hands were getting sticky with sweat. She placed her hand on the handle of the door and detective Winter stepped into the lime-light for the first time in her career. Instantly she was faced with a barrage of lights and lenses and faces and hands holding microphones. One of the faces stood out from the others, she recognised it as the woman that Tramery had been talking to earlier on in the park. There was a buzz of noise around her ears and then it all began.

“Officer could you state your name”

“Detective Inspector Winter” she replied.

Keep your chin up, try to look strong, try to look confident she told herself.

“What is your part in the Peter Jones case?”

“I have been investigating his disappearance along with Det. Sanchez”

“You and Det. Sanchez? Sanchez am I correct Detective Winter?”

No reply, she knew they were needling her by addressing her with half her title. Somewhere in the back of the room a younger man was enquiring how Sanchez was spelt.

“Where were you and Det. Sanchez conducting your inquiries regarding Peter Jones’ disappearance?” a voice asked her.

“We had some sightings of the boy with a man yesterday evening. We knew his last whereabouts were on Store Street. We have been conducting our enquiries in that area” Winter replied.

She reached her hand as though to run her fingers through her hair and then placed it flat against the side of her body. All those lessons in psychology came back to her, never touch your head they said, it is a sign of weakness a sign of indecision. Now was not a time that she could afford to appear weak or indecisive, she had to look like she believed in what she was doing.

“Officer Winter is it true that the reason that you have taken so long to get to this press conference is because you were interviewing a suspect on suspicion of robbery when you should have been investigating Peter Jones’s disappearance?”

How did they know this Winter wondered to herself?

“As officers of the law we are never off duty” she replied brusquely.

“Is it true that you were not giving your full attention to the O’Brien case Officer Winter” this question came from the curly haired woman.

Winter stayed silent as she remembered where she had seen her before. It was Maria Thornton; she was an up and coming reporter with Channel Three.

“Is that true detective Winter, that you and your partner Officer Sanchez. I am correct; officer Sanchez wasn’t it, the same officer Sanchez who was involved in the Jimmy Murdock fiasco? Isn’t it true that you and he care more about getting results than serving the public?” Maria asked.

What did she mean by that? Winter was not sure where the questions were leading, but decided that she did not like it.

“The job of a police-officer encompasses many different tasks, most of which are extremely unpleasant” like today she thought to herself.

“You had been for a walk in the park today Det. Winter”

“It wasn’t exactly a walk, but I was conducting investigations in the park today.”

“You entered through the gates off South Street?”

“That’s correct.”

“And proceeded to follow a gentleman around the park towards the old playground near the river.”

How could they have known this?

“I was conducting investigations in the Park, I was following a lead.”

“The same *lead* that you have under suspicion and were questioning only moments ago. The same *lead* that made you late for this conference?”

The other journalists in the room had stopped firing questions at Winter and were listening to Maria Thornton. Winter said nothing.

“The same gentleman who is under suspicion of stealing certain items from the assistant D.A’s office. The assistant district attorney’s office that is Detective Winter.”

“The details of our investigations need to be kept within the precinct until such time as a conviction can be made.”

“But you were assigned Peter O’Brien’s case Ms Winter.”

“Yes and I was investigating his disappearance.”

“In the park?”

“Yes in the park.”

“Near the Store street entrance?”

“That is correct.”

“You walked past the playground?”

“That is correct.”

“You do know that the Peter Jones’ dead body lay in the ditch alongside the stretch of park that you have just described.”

Winter said nothing, barely able to blink blinded by the flashlights of the cameras.

“His body was discovered inches from where you say you were following a lead through the park, discovered by a six-year-old girl detective. Tell me detective is that what you consider giving the case your full attention?”

A six-year-old girl; the words lodged in Winter’s mind. She took a deep breath, they never told her the body was found by a six-year-old girl. She steadied herself and then tried to appear unphased by their questions.

“As I said sometimes these cases get unpleasant but we have to”

“Unpleasant Detective Winter. Unpleasant? What about corrupt. Perhaps it’s more profitable in your office to please the assistant D.A. than find a missing boy. Children go missing all the time don’t they Detective Winter?”

“The is no question of police resources being diverted from the Jones case.”

“So you agree with me then detective inspector Winter. You agree that a painting is not more valuable than a boy’s life.”

Painting what was she talking about painting. From each corner of the room she could see flashes of light, glass reflecting her face in lenses, microphones padded with sponge, sharp jawed men and big haired woman looking at her watching her. She was suddenly filled with an intense desire to leave the room, to escape all their questions.

“Perhaps you might think that it’s more important to waste valuable police time with rumours of police fallibility. Right now, right here, we should be concerning ourselves with the facts. Those facts are that, a boy, the son of grieving and loving parents is dead. He was found in Pentworth Park, we know that he was there for up to ten hours before was found,” she looked over at Maria who was about to start her barrage of questions again; fortune hunters the lot of them.

Winter raised her voice above the clicking and whirring,
“We need anybody who was in the park in and around that time to come forward. We need information; some-body out there knows how this terrible crime was done, and who is responsible. It is only a matter of time before we find out. We will bring justice to this boy, we will find his killers but we need your help.”

Winter pleaded looking directly into the camera lens.

Maria watched the tape again with her editor back in the studio. She was impressed by the performance that Winter had given in the press conference. Winter’s eyes had the same haunted guilt ridden look that the boy’s mother had when she pleaded for Peter to come home. Perfect, she thought to herself perfect linking moments. Seven o’clock, and after that the awards and the plaudits would be hers.

Winter steadied herself against the back of the door as she closed it behind her. It had gone worse than she expected. They were going to report the case to make her and Sanchez look like promotion hungry corrupt cops unable to do a simple job like find a missing kid. Going to make it look like if they had to have spent more time looking for the kid and less time catching robbers, Peter would still be alive. Sanchez knew how that felt already after the Murdock case, but this time she knew he’d have more to lose than her. She put her hand behind her back feeling the cool glass of the door behind her and started breathing slowly and deeply. It wasn’t over yet it wasn’t over just yet. She started tapping her fingers on the door behind her, there had to be something she was missing. In the background, she could hear some-one else tapping. It sounded like the leg of a chair tapping the ground. Further up the corridor she saw a fair haired girl in a school uniform distractedly kicking the leg of her chair looking blank faced at the people walking past her. A six-year-old girl Winter remembered Maria had said. Her heart sank, Christ they were right it was a six year old.

“My name is Elaine, Elaine Winter, I am a police officer,” she said gently to the little girl.

“You can call me Sarah” the little girl replied, her voice sounded shaky, like as though English wasn’t her first language.

“You have already been speaking to other officers?” Winter asked, taking a seat beside the girl.

“Um. I was talking to a man. I told him, I spoke to him. He asked me questions. I should be going home. I should be at home now. I was walking home from school.” She said quietly then looked up at Winter suddenly afraid.

“They told me to wait here. The man told me, that I should sit here and my mother would be along soon. I wasn’t making too much noise was I?” she asked.

Poor little kid Winter thought, how was she going to deal with it and who had left her sitting on the corridor on her own. Outside a room full of journalists for Christ’s sake.

“Come with me, and I’ll take you into a room, its nice and big and you can make all the noise you want to there until your mom comes to collect you okay?” Winter said and took the little girl by the hand.

They walked down the corridor; the girl’s head hung low to the ground. They passed a vending machine, as they did Winter noticed the girl’s eyes being drawn towards it. Something in a shiny wrapper on the second shelf from the bottom attracted her attention. Winter rattled her fingers in her pockets, no change only the silver lighter. She knocked on the door adjacent to the machine and entered the room. Sanchez looked a little surprised, he was trying to work, and how was it going to sound on the tape. Det. Winter has entered the room to borrow a dollar it was hardly professional. He frowned at her. She whispered in his ear and nodded over at the little girl whose face could just be seen through a crack in the door. Sanchez’ expression changed, his eyes became opened fully so that for once they no longer looked sleepy and he obligingly gave Winter a dollar. The door closed on the interview room. Sanchez noted on the tape that Winter had left the room and then settled in to start interviewing Tramery again.

“Why was the little girl in the corridor?” Tramery enquired sounding as though he was genuinely concerned, he recognised her from earlier on in the day.

This surprised Sanchez. He decided to tell Tramery the truth, thinking that it might jolt him into divulging something, make him lose his concentration.

“She just discovered the body of a boy in the park. The body of Peter O’Brien.”

Tramery said nothing. Pete was dead. His mouth felt full of rancid saliva, and he suddenly lost consciousness of where he was. Pete, little Peter from down the block was dead. Flashes of conversation came back to him.

“There was a young boy taken from round these streets just yesterday” “So that is why my school sent a group of us. A select few you know, to walk around on our way home to check and see if we could find him” the little girl had said. “You are

acquainted with a Peter Jones are you not?” Winter had said. Missing the report on the television said, missing not dead. Runaway, gone, not dead. Tramery suddenly thought of his own son, in the apartment on his own.

“I want to make a phone-call, I am allowed to make a phone-call amn’t I?” he demanded.

Sanchez sat back in his chair. So Tramery had been rattled.

“Yeah you get to make a phone-call but after you answer my questions.” Sanchez replied gruffly.

Tramery never heard a word he was saying. Wouldn’t have me for a protégé Pete had said to him, asked him where he went did he have a family. Did he have a family to go home to?

“I met that little girl earlier on. She said that she was looking for Peter. Said her whole school were out looking for the boy. And you, you want to fit me up for some fucking robbery while school kids are out doing your job?” Tramery stood up, “I know my rights and I’m going to make a phone-call right now detective, right now. You’re gonna respect my rights, even if you don’t respect your job.”

“Goddamned respectable woman can’t get any god-damned respect in this place” Taking a lady from her home god damned pigs, no god damned respect for a lady. They’re gonna be in my home right now, damn kids breaking in taking what they can get. Running around making fun of a lady. Can’t even get any sleep, No respect. Asking me questions. I ain’t done anything.”

She wrestled their arms off her. Always asking questions, never listened to what she had to say, always voices and noise and kids shouting. She straightened the hat on her head. God damned suits just like last night. No peace. Know who she was, they hadn’t a clue who she was, Mrs Smith, Mrs Doe, whatever they wanted, never took the trouble to listen to her. Always asking her to move on. Want to ask a few questions, she patted her hair. Wanted to ask her a few questions the woman with short hair had said. That’s what the doctors said her first day in the place. Two weeks they told her two weeks and she could go home.

“You can’t keep me here, I know my rights” she said, spitting as she spoke.

Winter brushed the front of her suit. This was going to be more difficult than she thought. Whatever means necessary. She was going to use whatever means necessary

to get the people that did this. The face of the little girl in the corridor came back to mind, if she had to interview everybody that had ever set foot in the Park she was going to find out who did this to Peter. The old lady patted her hair again. Winter took out her handbag to get a mint, the stench in the interview room was making her eyes water, but there was no A/C because the department was that cheap. She noticed the old lady's eyes light up; she must want something from the bag. Pretending not to notice the woman's interest she started fingering through her belongings in the bag until she could see the woman leaning towards her. The compact, she was looking at the compact.

"Perhaps you'd like to look in the mirror while you fix your hair?" Winter said in her sweetest voice, offering the woman her compact.

The woman clawed it from her and popped the lid, looking at herself in the mirror, much like a child copying an adult applying make-up. Her eyes looked like they were clouded with cataracts or some infection. Great witness she was going to make. But the old lady was the only person that they could get hold of who was in the park last night for definite. The lady then started rustling in her pockets, looking for the photographs.

"Last night you had a lot of people going past your home waking you up?" Winter asked while the woman was distracted with the compact.

"Had a group of men in suits running around like a bunch of kids. Tried to come into my home, but I sent them packing I told them where to go" she replied, tilting her cheek towards the compact and then lifting her chin upwards.

She started smudging the dirt away from the crevices in the deep grooved bags under her eyes.

"That must have been very disruptive for you. Those men waking you up. Can you remember what they looked like?" Winter continued.

"Suits they were dressed in suits."

Winter's ears pricked up. Suits!

"You mean Boiler suits, perhaps they were sewerage workers?" Winter asked, trying to keep the woman's attention.

Dumb broad the old woman thought to herself. What would sewerage workers be doing in the park in the middle of the night?

"Suits. As in they were dressed in suits like businessmen. One of them had a navy suit on."

The old lady rummaged in her pockets again looking for something else. Winter took a deep breath; this was not getting her anywhere. The old woman had probably just seen a group of men out for a quick bit of fun in the bushes. That part of the river was known locally as a pick up joint for the distinguished elder man, looking for a quick fumble in the bushes with some of the local boys. Everyone in the precinct knew about it, but they were under orders from Darcy not to arrest the boys. He told them that the local kids deserved a break after the David Waters case.

“There!” the woman exclaimed proudly taking out one of many treasures hidden in the layers of clothes, she wore.

She offered it to Winter who reluctantly took it off the woman.

“I took that off the man without the moustache’s suit when he tried to push past me.”

Moustache Winter remembered the moustaches from the witness report. The men at the robbery had moustaches; perhaps the woman would be useful to them.

“How many of them had moustaches?” she asked slowly and clearly so the woman would be clear in her reply.

“Two of them had. They were kinda weird looking moustaches, like some-one had drawn them on with a pencil or something. I think they were funny fellows if you know what I mean” the old lady said.

The men involved in the robbery were in the park last night. Peter Jones had gotten shot in the park. Something was making her feel that Tramery knew more than he was telling them. Winter got up to leave, and the old lady folded up her compact,

“No thanks you keep it.” Winter replied “In exchange for the button.”

CHAPTER SEVEN.

Who is that girl?

The doors opened before she got to them. Two men in tandem walked over just a little quicker than she did, to get to the doors in time just so they could stand a little closer to her as she walked past. The hallway sounded out the clicks of her heels as she left the office. All eyes were on her, watching her. She had ice blond short hair styled for that just woke up look. Her eyes were outlined in fine kohl pencil, drawing attention to them, their green colour that so many of the magazines were so fascinated by. Did she wear lenses? Why were they so unnaturally green? She was dressed in tight dark trousers with a sequined thin belt looped loosely over her slim hips. The hips caught his eye as she left, swaying down the corridor. Bangles on her wrists making soothing clinking sounds. Had she been any easier on the eye, his contact lenses would have slipped right out. She turned her head just before she was out of sight and gave him the smile, her trademark smile that he had seen on the posters advertising the show; bright full lipped and fresh. He shook his head when they closed the door after her. For a few seconds she had reduced the assistant D.A. and his colleagues to a bunch of dribbling schoolboys. It had all been so different a few minutes beforehand when she entered the room, eyes shaded in sunglasses, jaw defiantly set, he wasn't sure what to expect, wasn't sure he was going to like her. She took her seat opposite him at the desk, arm casually resting on the seat rest, glasses propped on her delicate nose, legs uncrossed.

"I understand that we've had a little accident," she said taking the shades off, lips curling into a grin.

"Yes. Um well it would appear that I had a break-in last night. My safe was broken into, and the thieves got lucky, they took some of your paintings with them" he explained jangling his knees up and down nervously.

She surveyed the office with a few cursory glances.

"They haven't ransacked the place. So I'm going to assume they knew what they were looking for when they broke in?" she asked.

The assistant D.A. grinned, she was smarter than she looked.

"What I'm wondering, Michael, that is your name isn't it?" she said directly to him, leaning towards the desk, he was enraptured, "What I'm wondering is why my

paintings were in your office and not with the others in government hall? I didn't realise you were such a fan of mine," she enquired flickering another smile at him.

He stared back spellbound, not having heard a word she had said, gazing at her beautiful eyes. One of the assistant D.A.'s aids came to his rescue at that point.

"What can happen is that sometimes when we have a great deal of valuable goods in government hall is that people find out about it and it just leads to greater risks. So we take elements, the more valuable elements of the collections and house them in safe houses until after the show" the thin-lipped man explained.

"You mean safe-houses like this little office?" she enquired in a sweet voice.

Safe houses as if. She knew exactly what was going on in the office.

"Yes, thank you for explaining that Derek" the assistant D.A. interrupted.

"I have one more question before I leave you gentlemen. I'm going to assume that my collection was insured to be in Government hall. So I want to know if that insurance is covered by the D.A.'s office. If you know what I mean."

He grinned again, definitely smarter than she looked, he could tell she wasn't going to cause any trouble as long as she got her money's worth.

"Don't worry Ms Nix, you'll be fully compensated for it" he replied.

Then she got up to leave the office, thanking them for their time as she left. He looked around the office at the other men who still had their eyes fixated on the door as it closed, what a waste he thought,

"Alright, you can put your tongues back in, and Derek, see what those bozo's at St. Michael's are doing about that boy. It doesn't do to have another child homicide, not at this time of year."

He tried to imply that it was around the time of the David Water's case from last year. They knew he meant that the elections were drawing near.

Marge looked at the blond haired woman across from her desk. She was barely in her late twenties, had model good looks. She handed the woman a pen to fill in the incident report and watched her closely, dye job she thought to herself, convinced herself she could see roots in the young head bent down in front of her. And those eyes, every-one knew that she wore tinted contacts, no-body had eyes that green.

“Do you need a description of each of the paintings or just the number and size of them. I’m not sure how to fill out the form,” she asked, giving a sweet smile to Marge.

Dumb blonde could not even fill out a simple form, making thousands, and could not even fill out a form.

“Just write modern art. Yeah your name and address just there. Thank you and the value of the goods that are missing.”

Marge’s eyes nearly popped out of her head. Who did this chick think she was kidding? Four million? She shook her head as she tried to spot flaws on Jade’s porcelain perfect skin. Marge noticed that the door behind Ms Nix where they had been keeping the media sweating was opening. The journalists would have a field day if they saw Jade Nix stood at the front desk filling in stolen goods forms. Marge was not in the mood to be in the background of any of the shots they would take of Jade at her desk, not when she was having a bad hair day.

“Sorry Ms Nix you’ll have to finish filling in those forms in the room on the right at the end of the corridor. I’ve a lot of work to finish here,” she ordered nodding at one of the officers to show ‘*the artist*’ to the waiting room.

As the officer and Jade walked down the corridor the journalists piled out of the blue room. They looked like a bunch of ants tumbling out with leaves of information piled high in their hands. The queen of the tribe came over to Marge’s desk before she left.

“I look forward to working with you again in the future” Maria Thornton said to her and then touched her on the arm before walking out with the rest of them.

Look forward to working with you again, working with her, Marge, the shift supervisor. Perfect for Thornton’s new docu-drama about police officers Maria had told her when she came in not an hour ago. Then they got talking, such a nice woman Marge thought to herself. So chatty, it wasn’t often that anyone took any interest in her. Maria told her she wanted to hear all about her day, and what she had been up to and what had been going on in the station. She was very interested in what had been happening in the station, interested in all the paper work that Marge had been processing. Wanted to read all her reports and Marge gladly obliged, as Maria flattered her ego, telling her what great bone structure she had. A docu-drama all about her that would show them how much she was needed at the precinct.

A little girl seated in the furthest corner of the room raised her head and watched Jade enter the room then busied herself playing with some crayons pretending not to have seen her. The room looked like a doctors waiting room, had *that* smell. It was of disinfectant, or cheap cleaning fluid and always in those rooms. The rest of the station smelt like the inside of a police car. Jade Nix took a seat near the girl and bent over onto the little table in the centre of the room that had magazines on it to continue filling in the forms. They were so beaucroatic making her fill in forms about her paintings. Stolen goods, not really more like stolen commodities. One good thing had come out of the robbery, aside from the oceans of free publicity, the insurance money, which would come in useful, was that the few paintings left untouched back home, would rocket in price. Jade suddenly noticed the girl seated beside her looking over every few seconds.

“So kid what have they you in for? Robbing banks? Car jacking?” she asked while continuing writing filling in the police incident form.

Description; art nouveau with a smidgen of Paris in the twenties and a dash of her in her teens. The little girl carried on colouring the page nearby.

“I found a missing boy” Sarah replied quietly and continued rubbing the crayon over the page, trying to stop her hands from shaking.

“Well that makes you a heroine?” the lady asked her.

Sarah kept scratching the page with her crayon.

“He was dead. I found a dead boy. So I don’t think that makes me a heroine.”

The lady beside her put her pen down and looked over at the girl.

“You remember what he looked like?” she asked the girl who mumbled something then nodded her head.

“I saw my first dead body when I was around your age. Walked into the room and found my uncle on the floor. His face was blue he was lying on the ground hands touching his toes. First bit of exercise I’d say he got in years” Jade said trying to make the kid laugh.

“He was missing earlier on. I was in the park, I said I was looking for him I was just walking home but. They think I was looking for him. I didn’t want to find him, I didn’t care about finding Peter” Sarah said lifting her voice at the end of the sentence.

“You found him that’s the main thing, that’s what makes you a heroine. It doesn’t matter what you were doing when you found him,” Jade said trying to comfort the child who was visibly shaking.

“He had blood over him. I could smell it. I didn’t know blood had a smell. I thought it would just be like paint or something. But he was covered in it.”

Sarah was holding the crayon in her right hand and rubbing her knuckles with the left hand as though trying to get rid of some invisible stain. The woman on her left felt very uncomfortable and angry all of a sudden. Why was the kid left in the room on her own in that state?

“You were very brave to come here and tell the police officers what you saw, your parents will be proud of you” she said, putting the papers down from her hand and moving along the seats a little closer to the girl.

Parents will be proud Sarah heard her say. Parents will be devastated she remembered her mother say earlier that day.

“He didn’t move, he looked like an animal, you know like the dead cats that you see on the side of the road. His eyes were still open, the rain made little puddles in the sockets. It looked like he was crying but he wasn’t. He didn’t move. He was dead. Dead. Lying there. Dead” Sarah repeated.

Death was hanging in the tensed muscles of her jaws as Jade remembered what it was like seeing a dead body for the first time, how it didn’t make sense to see some-one not moving not breathing, when once they had been alive.

“You believe in heaven?” Sarah asked the woman all of a sudden looking at her wide-eyed.

The question came out of no-where.

“Sometimes” Jade answered, and then thought better of it.

“I believe that we don’t die, I believe in heaven yeah you could say that.”

Jade bent over and took up one of the crayons off the table and a piece of paper.

“You believe in heaven kid?”

“I go to mass with my mother on Saturday evenings. They say that if we’re good we go to heaven. You think it exists? I don’t understand how it can.”

Sarah remembered how the Peter’s body had lain on the ground with his limbs unnaturally sprawled. How could a soul go to heaven and leave a body in that state? Parents would be devastated she remembered her mother said. Jade considered the question for a second.

“That boy you found, was the kid who was missing? The one on the TV? Yeah, I thought so. I saw his parents on the television, they looked upset” she waited.

The little girl nodded her head.

“They’ll be even more upset now that they know that their boy has died.”

She continued sketching. The little girl looked up at the woman, she had funny bangles on her wrists and rings on her fingers.

“The feelings stay there, even though the person dies. That’s because love runs stronger than death. You understand?”

The girl kept watching her in perfect silence.

“That’s how we cheat it, and that’s what makes us human. We can love what’s not there to love, and it feels real to us. That’s how I know heaven exists, if it didn’t we wouldn’t love people who weren’t there anymore.”

Then she showed the little girl the drawing she had done. The little girl smiled when she recognised the face, it was of herself.

“You’ve got a pretty smile kid,” the lady said to her and Sarah blushed. Then she reached out her hand,

“My name is Sarah” she said.

The young woman took her hand,

“Mine is Jennifer” the lady replied.

Sarah looked at the picture at the scrawled signature in the corner of the picture.

“But you’ve signed it Jade” Sarah enquired.

“Sorry Sarah bad habit. That’s my trade name, my real name is Jennifer. My manager decided on Jade, on account of me having green eyes. Said it would draw attention to me, make me stand out from all the rest. A selling point.”

“Ah I see” said the kid in a wise sounding voice.

Then Jennifer picked up the etchings Sarah had done.

“You know in a couple of years you could sell these for millions kid” she mused.

Millions and millions, he was going to make millions out of the robbery. Just for him. Jimmy and Tramery were taken care of, would net themselves a catch in the station very soon. So that only left the other goons, and they were sure to buy the story that the river water had gotten higher and faster than usual because of all the *unexpected* rains and washed the paintings clean away. They would believe that it was an accident, they would not know any better. Angelo had been watching the weather forecasts for some months now. He had told Jimmy that Friday night was the best night for the job because he knew that there would be a storm on Saturday morning,

and that he could use that as a cover for keeping the paintings for himself. Selling the umbrellas was a decoy to make Jimmy feel like he owed him a favour. With Tramery out of the way Angelo would be left then to take care of the business with every-one's support and a cool million in the bank just for himself. Easy business. Or it would have been if some-body hadn't have been taking him for a mug. Angelo flicked the blade of his razor in the park light, and then flicked it back into his pocket.

"So Paolo, no sign of the paintings."

Paul waded a little further into the rushing water, it was getting dark, and he could not see anything. Couldn't see any sign of the bags they had tied there last night. Why was Angelo calling him Paolo?

"No boss, no sign of them."

"And why do you think that is Paolo?" Angelo asked.

"Maybe they got washed on, the water is running pretty quickly down here boss. Maybe the current swept them under" Paul replied, shivering.

Angelo shook his head. Weighting objects in the water had been his speciality when he started in the business. He knew exactly how to do it so as to say keep a body down for four days, for four months or forever. He knew the currents in the local harbour and in the local river as well as the other's knew the traffic on the roads. His father had been a fisherman. Back in the old days, Angelo used to go out on the boats with him gutting fish. That was how he met Jimmy. Jimmy had been on his father's boat for a game of poker. Angelo remembered it, his suits, the tie pin, the cufflinks, the slim doubled breasted suits, his manner of speaking, the respect everyone had for him; so much the opposite of his father. Angelo knew right then he wasn't going to be gutting fish for a living. Not that what he was doing when he started in the business was so different from gutting fish, it just had a little more class. They always wore suits when they did it. He flicked the razor out again.

"You think I would have left the goods where the currents could get at them?" Angelo shouted.

Paul could see something in Angelo's hand, could sense Angelo was getting mad at him. He trudged through the slimy mud on the riverbed, wasn't going to end up with his pants around his knees face down in the muck.

"What are you saying Angelo?"

“I’m saying that we had words last night Paul. I’m saying that I made you look like a mug last night after you fucked with that old woman and shot your gun off at some dumb fucking kid in the woods. I’m saying that maybe that wasn’t the end of it.”

“Look, the pictures are gone, they must have been washed away in the storm water. Ways I see it I’m not pissing about in the mud any longer. I have to get home to my wife and kid.”

“How is your wife? And a young daughter too? I hear that she’s a very pretty kid, but then again I guess *you* already are well aware of that Paul” Angelo sneered cleaning his nails with the tip of the razor.

“Look don’t play games with me Angelo. How do I know you didn’t come back and take the pictures?” he asked.

Stupid fuck, how did Paul know that? He knew that because he was stood unarmed with Angelo, barefoot covered in muck looking for them that is how he knew.

“Stupid fucking wop” Paul mumbled under his breath.

Angelo’s ear pricked up. No respect. That was Paul’s problem no respect. He never knew when to keep his mouth shut. Angelo pulled the blade out to its full length while Paul bent down to roll down his trousers over his bare legs.

“I don’t like bears, and that doesn’t even look like one. I thought you said you were an artist,” Sarah said looking at the drawing.

Everyone is a critic, Jennifer thought.

“So what’s wrong with bears then?” she asked.

“You can’t trust bears, they’re not what they seem” Sarah replied.

“You can’t trust bears? I don’t think I know any bears. Who told you you couldn’t trust bears?” Jennifer asked again.

Sarah looked slightly scornfully at her; sometimes adults could be so vacant.

“John told me. He said that you couldn’t trust bears, because they seem nice, and you think that they are nice, and you trust them because of that. But just when you trust them and let them be near you they pounce maul and pummel you, and you are not prepared because you thought you could trust them. Dragons do the same but you can trust them, because they look mean, and you know to be careful. But bears look friendly when they’re not” Sarah explained to the woman.

Smart kid Jennifer thought.

“So you like dragons then?” she asked.

“Not really, I’m not sure I know any dragons” Sarah replied smiling thinking of the old woman in the park.

“So maybe you’d like to draw something for me instead. A picture of your family perhaps?” she noticed that Sarah started to shake again.

Where was her mother and father anyhow?

“Or maybe you could draw a picture of your bedroom? Your toys?”

“I could draw Delilah. My doll?” she asked.

“Yeah sure draw Del.” Jennifer said soothingly, moving over to draw on the same piece of paper spread out on the little table. Then she decided it better to sit on the floor when she noticed the girl sidle away a little on the seat.

“I’ll draw my old teddy Barney then” Jade said and took out a blue crayon.

“Barney’s a stupid name for a teddy,” the girl laughed.

“And Delilah is a good name for a doll?” Jennifer enquired.

The little girl looked a little surprised,

“I got it from the bible.”

“Christ Theresa how many times can I say I’m sorry. I was stupid, really stupid, but can you just pick up Jack from my place and make sure that he’s safe. You know the address, 157 off east Store Street, the name’s on the buzzer number 78, have you got that number 78 the name’s on the buzzer. He’s there on his own. I know, I know it was stupid, no. Yes... I am at the station. No I’ll bet you’re not surprised, look can you just forget about me and collect him. Thank you.”

Tramery hung up the phone feeling a little more relieved now, and Sanchez brought him back into the interview room. Sanchez had been stood in the corridor listening to every word. Well they couldn’t convict him for being a bad father. Tramery took his seat on the side of the table with his back to the window. He knew they made the rooms like that so you had to face the interviewer, wouldn’t be distracted by the outside world. And they never had clocks in the rooms. He knew all the tricks they used. Solicitor, he didn’t need a solicitor. If he had to wait for their guy to come along it would be too late. The trash would be taken out by then, best to hope that he could talk his way out and collect the goods before morning. Winter came into the room this

time holding a piece of paper in her hand; she showed it to Sanchez and then both of them sat down.

“I’ve got the results of the autopsy on Peter O’Brien in my hand. You knew the boy didn’t you Mr Tramery?” she asked abruptly.

“That’s right I knew him. He lives. Lived on my block. He was a decent kid. How come you got the results so quickly? How did he die?” Tramery asked.

Just like the man with the died black hair had asked moments earlier on in the DA’s office upstairs. The man’s face was pale, his eyes rimmed with unspeakable troubles and crimes that he would not bring himself to name around her. Peter’s mother’s face was streaked with mascara, haggard and angry. They had only got the news moments beforehand that their son had been found dead in the park. After all the interviews and her fifteen minutes of fame, after all that had been asked of her, after they tried to make out like Peter had run away from them, had left them because of something they had done, after all the accusations, she had almost wished for a second that he had been taken, so that the press would stop hounding them trying to make out like they were bad parents. Then while they were waiting in the office for the D.A. to come speak with them, a little woman with short hair came in. The woman did not look them in the eyes, another journalist come to prise the past away from them. The woman was holding a piece of paper in her hands.

“You are Peter Jones’ mother” she had asked, and then looked at Sam, “and you”

“I am the boy’s guardian” he had replied impatiently, how many times had he had to say that today. Why were they so concerned about the good for nothing father. Been treating Peter like his own son for the past three years. Which was more than Peter’s father ever did.

“I’m sorry to have to tell you this,” Winter looked the mother in the eye, it never got easier. Frank’s words echoed in her ears, *“No” he said, “To hold the mother’s hand when she has to identify her dead child’s body.”*

“I have to tell you that your son’s body has been found” she started to say, and found all of a sudden that no words would bring themselves to her rescue as the woman jumped up and started grabbing at the papers in Winter’s hands.

“What do you mean what does it mean? How can you stand there and tell me his body was found, he was found, he was found, not his body *he* was found, he’s not a body, he’s a boy, he’s my little boy Peter” she kept repeating while the man pulled her into his arms, trying to control her whispering in her ear. They stood like that for several

moments. Winter couldn't stop watching as they tried to get a handle on death. Those moments felt like forever. She noticed the dried flowers hung behind them above the leather couch and clenched her jaw trying to block out any feelings trying to be strong like she was supposed to be in situations like that. Except it never got easier, and she never stopped feeling a terrible burn of acid anger for every dead body that turned its angel eyes to her. After a time Sam turned to face Winter, eyes piercing though her, spiking her conscience with their anger and hurt. Softly like the whisper of a caged animal, he asked one word, how. In that word she knew were a thousand emotions. In that one word a lifetime of difference in how they were going to cope with the loss, a lifetime of grief and suffering. It would all be made so much different depending on how she answered the question.

“How” he demanded.

The ballistics report was in her hands, and underneath was a picture of the body, the body that his mother said was not his. Winter hid it from them; they did not need to see that.

“He died of a single bullet wound to the chest.”

She left out the fact that the bullet wound wasn't enough to kill him and that he had lain there for several hours bleeding to death before finally dying sometime that morning. She left out the fact that the pain was the only thing that would have kept him company in the tiny long hours between dying and being dead. She left out the fact that somebody had left him on the ground bleeding to death, knowing that he would never get up. The man looked relieved, glad with the horrible kind of gladness that only death understands. He was relieved that some pervert had not messed with his boy.

“He wasn't involved in any gangs you know” he said still hugging the woman who seemed driven unconscious with grief, oblivious to anything that was being said between the two.

“We think it might have been an accident. We don't suspect that there was any gang involvement” Winter replied, but could see the man whispering in his wife's ear again, could tell that she had said all they need to hear. She shut the door quietly behind her.

Once the door to the apartment was closed John put his bag on his back and zipped up his jacket, it was raining heavily now. He drained the last bit of liquid from the soda bottle and looked for a bin. There were trashcans all along the sidewalk; it was bin-day the next day. He popped up the lid and dropped in the bottle, and noticed that the trashcan was empty save a canvas bag. The solo canvas bag struck him as an oddity given that every other trashcan on the sidewalk was filled to burst with rubbish. The canvas bag had a label on it with; he bent over for a closer look, with something written on it. John Tramery. John yanked the bag out, why had his father dumped the bag in an empty trashcan. He peered inside and saw a plastic bag, with some papers inside. Papers folded and creased like the one's he found in the box in his aunt's wardrobe. He was going to take out the papers and examine them but the rain was making him impatient. He stuffed the canvas bag into his rucksack and walked down the street, it was starting to hail heavily now, so he took shelter in the doorway of an electrical store beside a tall man dressed in a navy suit. The man was talking into a mobile phone. The noise of the rain was so loud that John couldn't make out what he was saying, so he concerned himself with watching the silent TV's in the window of the shop waiting for the sudden shower to end.

Angelo held the phone a little closer to his head, and continued speaking loudly into it. His throat was beginning to hurt a little from Jimmy's cigars but he knew it was the last time he'd be playing those games with the old man. Only moments beforehand Angelo was contemplating throwing his hand in. The mess with Paul that was going to be a hard thing to explain and still keep Jimmy on his side. The paintings were gone, he still hadn't figured that one out, right to the end Paul screamed his denials at taking them, which meant he was either very brave or just plain crazy, Angelo didn't perceive Paul to have the wit to use or lose. He had been walking down the street when it started to hail, wouldn't do to get the suit wet, not after all the care Angelo had taken not to get any stains on himself after dealing with Paul. In the distance, he could hear sirens racing towards the Park, and the sound brought a sly grin to his lips. Idly he was looking at the flickering TV screens watching a good-looking reporter. She was talking about some missing kid, who had been found dead, earlier that day by a girl, then it cut to outside the front of the park gates just up the road. He peered down the path at that point, almost jumped out of his skin, before realising that the

word *live* was permanently on screen and they wouldn't be showing him walking through the gates of the park. All he needed was to be filmed coming out of the park after what happened with Paul only minutes beforehand. Then the reporter said the boy had been shot the night before. The police had placed the time of the shooting at 01.15 precisely because as the boy fell on the rocks his watch had gotten smashed at that exact moment. A broad bright-toothed grin filled Angelo's face when he saw the report and began fitting it all together in his mind. Say Jimmy had double-crossed his hoods, say Paul never recovered, and then there was only Angelo left to take over the business. The paintings were missing blame Jimmy. Tramery was already in the station. Just one more thing now to send them all home. He picked up his mobile phone and dialled the help-line that appeared under the pretty looking cop's face at the end of the report.

"I have some information you might be interested in," he said in a gruff voice.

A taxicab drove past, he hailed it down and jumped in, had to see Jimmy's face when they walked in. Had to see Jimmy's face.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Tramery Must Die!

Nora slammed the phone down on the table in the corridor. She picked up her mack off the hook on the wall and grabbed her handbag off the ground where she had dropped it seconds before. The lift in her building still wasn't working so she had to run down the stairs. All five flights of them. She was cursing the old woman on the third floor who had complained about the lift doors last week and gotten the handy man to fix them. Evidently he wasn't so handy. She sped down the last few steps and ran out of the front door of the building. Hadn't time to put on her coat so she threw it over her head to protect herself from the rain as she flagged down a taxi. Where to? The driver asked her, good question. He turned to face her, "Where you wanna go lady?" he asked again.

The hospital, she had to go to the hospital and make sure Paul was okay, and then she thought of Sarah in the police station. They had rung up just before the hospital had, to tell her they had her daughter. Didn't say why, just that she was to collect Sarah. Christ what a day, what had Sarah been taken into the Police station for? Surely, the school could have dealt with her, without calling the cops. Could not leave Sarah in the station; better to go collect her on the way to the hospital.

"I need to go to St. Michael's Precinct" she said, not sure how to get there, but the driver just nodded his head and set the meter. He was used to taking people from that area to the precinct.

Inside of the cab was sticky, they always were, and the glass between Angelo and the driver was smeared with greasy fingerprints. The driver turned up some jangly Spanish music on the radio and started humming and tapping his fingers to the music. Good day today he thought to himself, the rains were bringing the cab drivers good fortune.

"Could you turn that down?" Angelo asked impatiently he was trying to think.

"No problem sir. I'll put on the radio for you if you like. That's my wife's tape."

The Taxi man started into his usual patter to while away the journey. Started telling Angelo the most inane pieces of tittle-tattle. Then the news came on the radio.

“And that’s when I said to my son. I said, I’m not driving this all day just so you can sit at home all day watching MTV. That’s when I told him to getta job.”

He continued looking in the rear-view mirror every few moments in between honking at passing cars watching to see that Angelo was listening. He wasn’t of course; he was picturing himself seated in Jimmy’s leather seats. Real leather not like the sticky plastic inside the cab.

Gangster’s moll, gangster’s mother, gangster’s other, cop’s wife, cop’s lover, Lady of the night, lawyer, lifter, pusher, prostitute, pimp, Madam? He wasn’t sure what she wanted to go to the cop shop for. He wasn’t going to ask any questions about it, wasn’t part of his job. They were stopped at traffic lights, she watching the raindrops wind down the window, like little globules of light mirroring the outside world, winding around her worries about Paul about Sarah.

“Sure is a shame isn’t it?” the driver said loudly.

She gave a little jump in the car.

“What, sorry?”

“Sure is a shame about that little boy they found earlier on. Found in the park. Barely twelve years old” he continued.

She didn’t reply. Paul was in hospital, he had been found in the park. On the critical list the receptionist at the hospital said on the phone had lost a lot of blood.

“Yep things aren’t what they used to be these days.”

“No you don’t know what to expect sometimes. Don’t know what’s going to happen next” she replied.

“Damn straight lady. Not like the old days, I remember when this was a quiet neighbourhood” he said and then cut himself short, reminding himself he still didn’t know why the lady wanted to go to the precinct. Better not start giving out about the criminal element, he still wanted a tip.

Angelo was getting annoyed in the back of his taxicab; it was taking too long to get to Jimmy's and for some reason he had been cursed with a driver that knew everything about everything, talk talk talk. Angelo couldn't concentrate.

“So that's when I says to the ol' lady, it's just going to be like the David Water's case. Just all going to happen all over again. I still don't think they got the right man for that job. There were too many bodies found for one man to have done it on his own. You know what I think, I think there was a cop involved, and that's why they kept it quiet. You remember the David Water's case Sir?”

Oh they were good days, during the David Water's case Angelo remembered. It had been a long hot summer and the streets empty save a newly uniformed cop patrolling the neighbourhoods. The cops spent so much money that year getting bodies on the streets to find the bodies of the kids that they hadn't the time to go after Angelo and his buddies. Those days were rich pickings, not that Angelo liked what had been happening, people like *that* were scum as far as he was concerned, they weren't criminals, they were scum, no honour in that messing with children. Angelo viewed his work as a business and the David Water's case had helped it grow. But he was just as sickened as every-one else when the details of the case became unravelled during the trial.

“Because you know they couldn't identify most of the bodies cause they were in such a state of decay. They say that he held some of them captive in his house for two months, starving them taking photographs of them. Making them eat all the rancid muck and filth he dredged from the river. Some of the kids were found with worms coming out of their bodies, I read it in his book, or at least the one they wrote about him” the driver announced with ghoulish pride, “*Hymenolepis nana*, was the scientific name for them. Dwarf tapeworm it means, thousands and thousands of them were found in the first kid. They had some expert on forensic entomology discover the name of it, think the guy's name was Goff. Entomology, you know what that is? Naw me neither until I read this book, its when they can use the different type of insects found in a corpse to find out how and when a body was killed, use species of insects like *Lucilla* and *Phaenicia* Stupid names aren't they, just like the one that they called David Waters. It said in the book that the cops gave him the name David because he was found with the Star of David cut into his stomach. The Water's part of the name came from the fact that the killer had been fascinated by water, that's why he fed the kids river-water, said it would cleans them. But the infection with the worms caused,

vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, and dizziness and the killer assumed this was because the boy was impure. That was when he started. He trapped them, said that he was going to help them, said that he knew some-where safe for them to stay. Used to work as a schoolteacher before he came to the city. Worked out West as a science teacher I think that's what the book said. Well here we are, that'll be \$6 thanks sir. You have a nice day then sir, thank you."

Nora closed the doors of the cab and walked up the stony steep steps of St. Michael's precinct. In the corridor she noticed some old bum talking to a bag lady and a line of empty plastic chairs. She went over to the desk to talk to the officer on duty,

"I'm looking for my daughter, you have her here?" she asked slightly nervously.

Marge didn't even look up from her papers, still caught up in the idea that Maria Thornton had asked her to be in a documentary.

"Name?" she blurted out.

"Sarah, Sarah Rivera" Nora replied and watched the woman behind the desk rummage through her forms. Marge scanned the names on top of all the forms, no sign of anyone of that name.

"Sorry we have no-body of the name Sarah Rivera here" she replied still not looking up at Nora.

"But I was just phoned and told to come here and collect her. Detective Winter she phoned me." Nora said exasperatedly.

Marge raised an eyebrow, that Winter woman was always causing her trouble. She beckoned one of the street patrol officers to get Winter from the interview room.

"She'll be out in a moment, you wait over there on one of those chairs."

Angelo could barely stop himself from running up the stairs of the office-block, he was like a small child on Christmas morning, didn't want to be too late, didn't want to miss the fun. He burst in the door of Jimmy's office,

"Jimmy the paintings are gone. They're not in the river. Paul and I went to get them and they're gone. I think that some-one is trying to set us up" he blurted out, and came behind Jimmy's desk right up face to face with him.

“I think that Paul was trying to set us up, with the gun and all that shit last night and then the paintings gone today” he whispered.

Jimmy said nothing. He knew already that Paul was in hospital; he had eyes and ears on every street in town. Everyone was Jimmy’s friend.

“So you had some words with Paul.”

“Jimmy, Jimmy I’m sorry but I lost it, the guy was making fun of us, he was laughing at us. I had to do something about it.” Angelo said in a fevered voice.

The door of the office crashed open, and both of the men jumped.

“We have a warrant Murdock. You, and you step outside, and Murdock, don’t forget your wallet, you’ll be coming for a ride with us for a long time.” Sanchez ordered in a smug voice enjoying every second. He had waited a long time for this moment.

Winter finished explaining what had happened to the little girl’s mother, Nora she said her name was. Throughout their brief conversation the woman had nodded silently every so often raising her eyes to Winter’s in surprise in shock and in disbelief.

“So you see Mrs. Rivera, your daughter isn’t in any trouble, she’s been very brave today” Winter said, while opening the door of the waiting room.

Nora was surprised to see a good-looking woman in the corner of the room talking to Sarah. She was too young and sophisticated looking to be a cop. Nora raised her eyebrows at Winter who was equally mystified. Why was Jade Nix there? That was all they needed. Then she heard Marge hailing her from her desk at the end of the corridor and left the room. Nora walked over to Sarah and as she did so the woman got up to greet her. She looked familiar; Nora had seen that face before.

“Your daughter has been very brave today” Jade said in a hushed voice.

Sarah still had not looked up from her drawing. She was still picturing Peter’s face staring up at her, mud splashed and blue cheeked.

“I heard. They told me what happened” Nora said, chilled to the bone at the sight of her stony faced little girl playing in the corner of the room pretending not to notice her. When had it happened, she asked herself, when had she lost the little girl who used to chatter non-stop and tell her stories of her day at playschool, and the films that she had been watching in the afternoon with the old lady who lived on the fifth floor.

When had she changed, why had she changed, and why hadn't she noticed before now? Jade looked at the woman, Nora looked more upset than proud.

"You are going to be okay to take her home? Alright to drive" Jade enquired.

Nora looked at her little girl. Always so quiet these days. Never talked.

"We're not going home. I have to take her to the hospital" Nora replied reluctantly.

The woman bent her face closer to Nora's.

"Your girl wasn't hurt you know, she was okay. I don't think it was that kind of a case" she whispered not wanting Sarah to know what they were talking about.

Nora shook her head and sighed softly.

"That's not it. Her father was injured in an accident. I was just on my way out of the apartment to come here and collect Sarah, when the hospital phoned. I have to go there next."

Jade could sense that the woman really didn't want to have to bring her daughter to the hospital. Then she felt the woman staring at her,

"Do I know you from some-where?" Nora asked with a sudden recognition.

"She's an artist" Sarah piped up from the corner of the room, still colouring the picture, without making any shapes on the page.

Spiralling the brown crayon round and round. Devastated she remembered. Either she goes or I do.

"Jade Nix" the young woman introduced herself to Nora who was slightly awed by her.

"I've been talking to your daughter already about what happened."

Both the woman looked over at Sarah in sudden hidden glances so she would not notice that they were worried about her, both for different reasons. Nora was still struck that she was talking to *the Jade Nix*.

"I'm not sure what to do with her" Nora said in a half whisper that carried itself over to Sarah's ears.

The little girl was reminded of last night, sitting on the stairs, "*You can't keep sending her to her room. The little brat is driving me mad*"

"Well"

"*Either she goes or I do*".

Why hadn't her mother come over to her yet, why was she whispering to Jennifer at the door. Didn't they want her back? Even that kid Peter's parents wanted him back. His face came back again to haunt her, eyes grinning, highlighted in neon yellow, like

jets of lightening heightening her fears as they danced in and out of her view. His eyes stood out from the rest of them, their taunts, and their hands on her. She was back again, back on the ground looking up at them, their voices, couldn't hear what they were saying, but she remembered she was on the ground with dark bodies, truncated below the knee and dark haloed faces twitching moving itching under her skin when she tried to sleep at night. In the dark dead silent night.

The rubber soles of Winter's shoes made no noise as she padded down the corridor past the waiting room, having misplaced the mother and daughter in her mind, overcome as she was with the thrill of being so near to a catch. She turned the latch on the interview room and pulled the chair from behind the table, switched on the lamp on the desk, then plugged in the tape-recorder. Tramery stood up when she came in, such a charmer she thought to herself and then noticed something on his trouser leg as he sat down again.

"This is Detective Inspector Winter. The time is now 6.45 pm I am in interview room three with the suspect Mr. John Tramery. Could you state your name and current address for the tape please."

"John Tramery, apartment 78 east Store Street" he replied.

She waited for a few moments watching him watching her, then looking behind his head outside above the shop roofs in the distance where the tiles were catching the last of the sun's ray's as it set for the night.

"Mr John Tramery we are arresting you on suspicion of robbery, and of being an accessory to murder."

All that could be heard was the click of the tape recorder. Tramery stayed silent.

"You are not required to say anything, but anything you do mention and may later rely upon as evidence in court can and will be used as evidence in court against you" she said conclusively.

Tramery was silent, looking right through her.

"On Thursday 12th of August we know that Peter O'Brien was shot dead in Pentworth Park. We have a confirmed sighting of you in the park at 12.45am. We also have a sighting of you outside the Muscat building at the time of the robbery. You cannot confirm your whereabouts on Thursday evening am I correct in assuming you have no alibi?" she asked.

Tramery said nothing; it was all circumstantial they had nothing on him. A description that matched his, a couple of witnesses perhaps, but that meant nothing. They'd never get a conviction.

“We have traced the bullet found in the boy's body to a gun belonging to a Mr James Murdock. A business associate of yours?”

A bullet, they traced a bullet to Jimmy's gun, what the hell was going on? Tramery took slow silent breaths, say nothing, they were trying to rattle him, say nothing. They might have Jimmy but not him. Jimmy wouldn't say anything. Unless, then it all came back to him, that playing card from his lucky deck. Did Peter still have it on him? Had they found his playing card on the body? His mind travelled back to the night before.

At around half past seven he had left Pete on the corner of South Street, he was still pleading with Tramery to show the him the card, so as Tramery was driving off he threw it out the window at the boy, who picked it up and winked at him. Peter had tried to get into the car with him, but Tramery wouldn't let him. Tramery then drove down the road turned the radio on Tony Bennet was singing 'I left my heart in San Francisco'. He didn't notice the boy trailing after him on the sidewalk as he was stuck in the slow moving early evening traffic. Rush hour always started on Thursday evening. San Francisco, high on a hill it calls to me, he sung along, maybe he and Jack could go to San Francisco, he could take him sailing in the bay, “to be where little cable cars climb halfway to the stars” he hummed the tune. It was still in his head when he pulled up his car around the back of the shopping precinct. Jimmy, Paul Angelo and two guys met him in the Van they were already dressed in their suits, except for Jimmy. Jimmy was there to supervise the meet, but he never got involved in the action. Not anymore, he didn't need to get his hands dirty he was only there to supervise, then he was going to leave and have a drink in the club. Now they had Jimmy.

“Are you acquainted with James Murdock?”

“I have heard the name mentioned before think I read it in the newspaper, in relation to your colleague Sanchez?”

“Angelo De Ville?”

“I don't recollect that name.”

“Can you state your whereabouts on Thursday 12 August between 8 pm and 1am Mr. Tramery?”

“I went to the metropolis bar at around eight o’clock to meet a lady, I can’t tell you her name, it would be indiscrete, but that’s not important, I waited in the bar for about an hour but she never showed.”

The Metropolis bar Winter knew the Metropolis bar, it was one of those super bars that were being built all around the city, could house up to five thousand revellers at a time. Smart choice, she knew there was no way that the doormen would be able to remember the face of every person that had come into the bar. That alibi could neither be confirmed nor denied. Smart choice.

“And after that Mr. Tramery?”

“After that Det. Insp Winter I was quite upset as you can imagine. So I drove around aimlessly for a couple of hours.”

“I see, I can only presume that in your *upset* state you neglected to pick up a few witnesses along the way, none in Rosewood Street perhaps?”

Tramery smiled, Rosewood had nothing but strip joints and bondage shops, with the occasional lady of the night peddling her wares to every passing tourist.

“No I wasn’t in that area.”

He laughed, knowing she was trying to get him to relax so he would let something slip.

“I drove along the highway towards Memorial square,” then he stopped the tune of Tony Bennet came to mind again. He was thinking of Jack, had to protect him wasn’t going to drag him into it. Don’t mention Jack. He remembered that there was a tribute to Tony Bennet on one of the easy listening channels on the radio station, and that the programme had been interrupted by a traffic report. There was a jack-knifed juggernaut on the turn off to Pagent street, after Memorial square, and that the traffic had been held up there for at least an hour as the fire-crews tried to remove the pieces of debris.

“And I was held up in traffic for at least an hour there. There was some kinda accident up ahead, I couldn’t make it out.”

What a happy co-incidence, again no witnesses Winter mused.

“And after your unhappy sojourn on the highway Mr. Tramery where next?”

“Then.” Tramery looked around the bare walled room searching for ideas, but all he could see was Jack’s face. He just wanted to leave, to return to him, didn’t want him involved. Don’t mention Jack he thought to himself. Then an idea came to mind,

maybe he was playing Blackjack at the club, nobody would deny he was there that night; he had too many friends there.

“Then I went to the pink Flamingo to play a few rounds of Black-Jack at the tables, old habits die hard you know detective. I was there till around one o’clock.”

“Even though we have a sighting of you outside the Muscat building at 12.50. How do you explain that?”

“I’m not entirely sure it is my place to explain. After all I have explained my whereabouts for last night Detective. Perhaps your witness was mistaken.”

“You mean because it was so dark last night?”

“Yes exactly plus the lighting around the back of those old buildings is very poor.”

“Around the back of the building Mr Tramery? I’m sure I never said that you were spotted around the back of the building. Why would you assume that I meant the back of the building?”

Tramery said nothing. It was just a slip they couldn’t get him on a slip.

“Well,” he began, “On any of the public service programmes on TV, they always say that break-ins usually take place around the back of buildings, you know out of sight.”

“Out of sight of any witnesses Tramery?” she sat back in her chair. “You know a painting company named Davidson’s?”

“I’ve heard of it. They’re one of the biggest in the district.”

“Your cousin works for them doesn’t he”

“I think so.”

“You ever worked for that company?”

“No.”

“You ever had them do work for your house?”

“You have been inside my place detective, did it look like it had been professionally decorated” he replied not liking where the questions were going.

“Any reason you went into the Davidson paint headquarters last week Mr Tramery?”

“I wanted to buy some paint.”

“You know they had a break-in last week.”

“Some-one stole some paint?”

“No. They stole some uniforms and id. Cards.”

Tramery was silent; some one was fitting him up. They knew too much, even the cops couldn’t work that quickly.

“Know a man named Paul Rivera Mr. Tramery?”

“I drink with him sometimes?”

“In the metropolis bar perhaps”

Tramery was silent again, what was Winter trying to get at.

“You and Paul Rivera are friends then. Business associates perhaps?”

“No we don’t work together, we have a drink some-nights. We went to school together. He’s an old friend of mine.”

“Remind me what you do for a living Mr. Tramery.”

“I’m a children’s entertainer. I do magic tricks for them, put on shows.”

“Like the show you’re putting on now.”

“There’s no need to be rude detective.”

“You know a man named William Blanco? Mr. Tramery”

“There is some guy called Blanco who lives on the street outside my building if that’s who you mean.”

The room was beginning to get shaded, all that was visible was Winter’s face and the top of the desk.

“He was found beaten in an alleyway earlier on today. You were spotted talking to him beforehand.”

“Poor old man” Tramery replied.

“Paul Rivera, another friend of yours also found covered in blood in the park earlier today. He’s in hospital, going to need to be sewn up like a rag doll.”

Paul had been cut. Tramery tried to process this information. Paul had been cut. Why Paul, and how did they know about Blanco, if they knew it was he who hit the man why didn’t they just charge him and be done with it.

“It would seem like I’m bringing bad luck with me.”

“You interested in art Mr. Tramery?”

“I’m a man of the world, a lot of different things interest me.”

“That why you have cuttings about the Jade Nix exhibition in your flat?”

“Well she’s a pretty woman you know.”

Winter mused; Tramery certainly wasn’t going to make it easy.

“You weren’t in the park last night Mr. Tramery?”

“No detective I wasn’t.”

“It’s a funny time of year this year Mr. Tramery isn’t it. August, everything decaying leaves falling off trees. Makes the park look very shabby doesn’t it.” Winter mused.

“So Autumn isn’t your favourite season, I can only guess what is.”

“You haven’t been doing any painting recently?”

“No I told you already, I was only thinking about it.”

“You don’t do any landscapes, own any paints?”

“No I don’t.”

“No that’s right, we didn’t find any paints in your apartment. You are just interested in looking at art.”

“That’s right.”

“It was very dark last night wasn’t it Mr. Tramery.”

“You said that already.”

“Would you care to stand up for a second Mr. Tramery?”

“Anything for a lady.”

“You weren’t in the Muscat building last night?” she fired at him as he stood up.

“No.”

“You weren’t painting?”

“No,”

“So how do you explain that?” she pointed at his trousers.

He looked down at them, could see a patch of orange coloured paint. His face dropped, the details it was always the little things that made the man. He said nothing.

“Funny colour isn’t it. Exactly the same colour that the window ledge is being painted on the first floor of the Muscat building Mr. Tramery. It was very dark last night wasn’t it? Would you care to add anything to your statement Mr. Tramery?”

“I’d like a lawyer.”

“Thought you might” she replied then motioned him to sit down again, “This is detective Winter ending the interview with John Tramery, the time now is 7 pm.”

Winter opened the door of the interview room to walk down the corridor and ask Marge who was still on the desk to assign a duty lawyer to Tramery. As she did the little girl whom she had sent to the waiting room was walking down the corridor eating a snickers bar with her mother Nora and the artist Jade Nix. The girl peaked into the interview room while Winter thanked her mother for all of Sarah’s help that day. Sarah spotted Tramery sitting in the half light and waved hello at him,

“You still eating that bar?” he called back at her.

She nodded her head as Winter shut the door on him ending their conversation. She was a little startled at Sarah knowing Tramery.

“How do you know that man?” Winter enquired, curiosity getting the better of her.

“We met earlier on today, he was buying his son a television. I showed him which one was the best in the shop” she announced proudly, and then looked up at Winter whose face was full of wonder, “He’s a nice man, you should treat him better” she replied, indicating that Winter shouldn’t have closed the door on their conversation like that.

The three women looked at each other and then at the little girl and then continued walking down the corridor. Nora bent down to her as she walked,

“I don’t think that he’s a good man Sarah, otherwise the police wouldn’t have arrested him,” she said in a hushed voice.

Sarah remembered him opening the door for her in the electrical store, shaking her hand, introducing himself to her like a real gentleman. None of the police men had done that. They had asked her questions, sent her into a room to sit on her own, whispered in the corridor when she went past. Treated he like a kid, only that Elaine Winter lady had introduced herself to Sarah, and she left right afterwards. He had been arrested so that meant he had broken the law. So he was in trouble and must be a bad man, that’s what they said in church. Bears and Dragons she thought to herself. He seemed nice; maybe he was a bad man in disguise.

The disguises, the fake moustaches, the painter’s uniforms, they were all Angelo’s idea. Said it would add a touch of class to the robbery, said that they would be remembered for it, just like in the old days. Tramery never liked Angelo, thought the guy had his head in the clouds, had been watching too many of those old gangster movies. Angelo hadn’t a clue about work, he never grafted on the streets to earn some money like Tramery had to. Angelo just fell into it, virtually been adopted by Jimmy. He was always looking to be better than the next man. Angelo De Ville he called himself adopting the correct poise for a man about town. Wasn’t happy with what he had, Angelo Devrais Tramery thought to himself, always talking about what he would do, who he would be. They had been acquaintances at the start, when Jimmy had told him to take Angelo under his wing, teach him what he knew, how to work the streets, how to dress, who to talk to and how to talk to them. One night they went to McDaid’s pub to collect some money off Dermot. It was the usual story, Dermot didn’t know

they were coming that night, hadn't got the keys to the safe on him, thought he left them in his girl-friend's car, wasn't sure that the timer on the safe would work. He did that every month, trying to get out of paying his rent. But Tramery was used to that, he knew it was the Irish guy's way of showing that he wasn't going to be beaten by them, that he still had some pride. He didn't want them thinking he was just going to *give* them his money. They went outside round the back of the pub to help Dermot get the keys out of the girl friend's car, didn't want him running off, then he says that he's locked out of the girl friend's car and she has gone out to work for the night so they would have to come back another night. Tramery knew that if the guy really wanted to cause some hassle, if he really didn't want to pay Jimmy his dues he would have had a couple of heavies waiting for them around the back. He was only trying to get his money's worth by trying every trick he had to delay the payment. At this point in the conversation Angelo started getting agitated.

"Jack" he said to Tramery.

"Jack take out your cards, I think this guy thinks he has a few tricks we haven't seen. So take out your cards, show him how its really done."

His voice didn't sound angry, just real cool. Tramery thought he was playing around, so he took out the deck. Then Angelo turned to Dermot and told him to pick a card from Tramery's deck, cracking a joke as he did about stealing all of Tramery's lines, maybe they could be a double act he said. Dermot obliged and picked out a card from Tramery's deck, held it so that neither of the men could see it.

"Now show me the card," Angelo ordered.

Jack had started laughing,

"Angelo you'll never make it on the streets with an act like that. You gotta not look at the card and then find it."

Tramery remembered Angelo smiling back at him, all teeth and pointed jaw, but his eyes, his eyes stone cold.

"Now show me the card," Angelo repeated to Dermot his voice had a hard edge to it now.

Dermot turned the card in his fingertips and held it up to Angelo. It was the Ace of Spades.

"Tell me something Jack, do we play Aces high or Aces low?"

Tramery said nothing. He had a sick feeling in his stomach. Dermot shouted out that it was Aces low, everyone knew that, only little kids and old ladies played Aces High.

“I see how unfortunate” replied Angelo.

Then took what looked like a pen out of his breast pocket. It was small flat and shiny.

“Aces low?” he enquired off Tramery, who silently nodded his head and looked over at Dermot who was grinning like an idiot. His dull-eyed expression belied the fact that he believed that he was going to get off paying his dues that month. Thought he had made a friend or something in Angelo.

“You know what that means. That means that Ace is only worth one. Most unlucky and you know what that means Mick.” Angelo said as he flicked the blade of the razor out.

“That means that you have exactly one second to get the keys out of that fucking car before I gut you like an eel.”

Unfortunately, Dermot never slipped out of it. Made the papers the next day, and made Jimmy very impressed with his new boy. Impressed very impressed, but as he said to Tramery,

“As long as he’s on our team treat him like a brother. Only for as long as he’s on our team.”

Perhaps Angelo was thinking of doing it on his own. Perhaps Angelo wasn’t on their team any longer. The night before Angelo had met up with Tramery on Store Street. Angelo said that he was on his way to Jimmy’s with the suits and he wanted to check that Tramery knew that they were going to meet in the shopping precinct. He also told him about the idea of them wearing the Picasso moustaches. He was in an excited state like a pimp on new years day, waiting for the teens to come spend daddy’s crisp dollar bills. Angelo was dressed in one of the boiler suits, said he liked dressing up made him feel like he was a little boy. Never got to do it on Halloween he said to Tramery by way of explanation. Tramery remembered thinking it was strange that Angelo was being so friendly at the time. Now it was obvious he only wanted to be seen wearing the boiler suit talking to Tramery before the robbery. And for all his talk about the moustaches, Angelo never wore one himself. Said that since he was the one going to be talking to the guard he’d not be able to wear one, the guard might get suspicious. Didn’t want to make any mistakes on his part of the job did he. And now Paul had been found all cut up in the Park. He had probably gone with Angelo to collect the paintings. Something must have gone wrong. Maybe Angelo had tried to take them before Paul got there; the job had his prints all over it. Tramery started thinking about his son Jack on his way back to Theresa’s flat. He had to think of a

way out, there had to be some kind of a deal that could be made. If only Tramery had the goods with him. Then he could have made a deal. Maybe he could bluff his way out without having to show his hand.

Their hands were intertwined like the gnarled and twisted roots of an old oak tree. Winter Nora and Sarah watched as the unlikely couple of an old white haired bearded man and some bag lady wheedled their way outta St. Michael's precinct, mumbling to each other something about respect. Winter couldn't help but laugh. She had brought Blanco in for questioning and had left him outside in the hallway waiting for a spare moment to interview him, was running out of manpower seeing as Sanchez had insisted that he himself go to pick up Murdock. It was unnecessary but Winter knew how much it meant to him and let him ride along. She had no need for Blanco or the old bag lady any longer and let them both leave the building, for some reason the unusual couple brought a smile to her face, made her feel warm and Christmassy inside. She patted the little girl on the head and shook hand's with her mother, couldn't remember the mother's name, she met so many new characters everyday. Then she turned to Marge,

"Get the duty lawyer to come down here immediately" she said curtly, couldn't stand Marge.

"No can do detective. George won't be in today, he's not well," then she read something from the note scribbled down earlier while she had been chatting with George's wife, "Myocardial infarction" she repeated, and then waited.

"You mean that he had a stroke. Well get me the duty lawyer from 35th street, just get me a lawyer ASAP" Winter replied, knowing how Marge liked to test her.

Outside the precinct, Winter could hear the flicker and click of newspaper camera's shutters. Must be the arrival of the notorious James Murdock. The steps were cluttered with cameras and microphones and people in shabby suits trying to get a good angle on Mr. Murdock. He was dressed in a charcoal single-breasted suit, hand tailored, wearing leather loafers, jacket buttoned up, and cufflinks gleaming in the streetlight.

"Mr. Murdock can you tell me why you have been arrested"

"Mr Murdock, is it anything to do with the Land Deals cases from last year."

"Can you say how long they are going to keep you here?"

“Mr. Murdock is this case in connection with the shooting of Peter Jones last night.”

“Mr. Murdock could you look at the camera?”

“Mr Murdock over here, could you say a few words to the camera.”

“Mr Murdock, Murdock over here”

“James is that suit Italian?” Maria Thornton shouted above the throng.

Jimmy cocked his head in her direction and smiled.

“But of course it is. Now if you don’t mind my old friend Detective Sanchez and I are going to go inside and reminisce about old times.”

Behind him was a hail of lightening lenses and spotlights.

There wasn’t even a light in the room. Tramery sat still surrounded in darkness and his own thoughts. No more lies that’s what Jack said to him. No more lies, I just want you to be my dad. It was so long ago since he had left the boy. Maybe he was right, maybe Jack had the right to know everything, and maybe it wasn’t Jack he was protecting all those years ago. At the time though, at the time it all seemed so different. Tramery left because he had to, couldn’t be around the boy was bringing bad luck with him. The day before he left Jack, a representative of the home that Jennifer had been staying in phoned. She said there had been a fire, said the building had been in flames, said that there had only been two survivors and that Jennifer wasn’t one of them. Jennifer had been resting in the Nalin Institute for six years in all. She went there before Jack was even born. It was meant to be a short stay he remembered, a short stay until her will grew strong again, until she could recover again. Tramery remembered the long drive to the Nalin Institute. In the sunshine, just him, Therese and Jennifer in the car, they were listening to the beach boys singing about summertime feeling bright, and breezy. Tramery hated the summertime now, the hot sticky air, and blue unforgiving skies. The first day at the institute, the nurses were kind to him and to her. And when he was on his way out of the building, they gave him sympathetic looks and held Jennifer’s hand as they brought her to her room. She looked relaxed, a little less tired than usual. He went with her to check out the room when they arrived, it was on the second floor, simply decorated, very white looking with a bed and a desk, and a place to hang her clothes. The room had a view of the gardens of the building, could see the sprinklers working in the distance, watering the dry grasses. A colleague of Therese had recommended the place. She

said that it had a good reputation, and said that the people there would treat Jennifer well. The brochures for the institute made it look like a holiday resort, with the redcoats wearing white uniforms instead of a holiday rep's jacket. It said there was a twenty-metre swimming pool, exercise room, activities every day to get the guests into a routine, and then of course counselling services and medical attendants. Those places, those places, that's what he remembered thinking, how could he send his wife to one of those places. He had imagined it all the way there, while Therese was telling Jennifer stories about work. He imagined it looking grey, cold, empty, with hollow faced ghostlike people walking the corridors like nomads. Remembered thinking that it would look like a prison or a mental institution. Not that it was of course, it was a care-centre, or a rest home, or a place of recovery, somewhere she could get out of, some-where they could get her back from. Jennifer was motionless beside him in the passenger seat, her face expressionless. Tramery had touched her gently on the knee while he drove her there, it wouldn't be for long he told himself, and she'd be back soon. She turned her head to him, looked straight though like as though they never met before and gave a vague glassy eyed smile. Her eyes, just like Jack's were now, blue deep blue. That was the first thing that attracted him to her when they met all those years ago. Blue eyes, he had never seen eyes so blue before. She was a niece of one of his work colleagues, so she knew what the score was already, knew what he did for a living. They used to go out drinking, dancing, anything that they wanted. He had the money and she was always ready for an adventure. Drinking whiskey and soda that was her drink and his, maybe with a twist of lime if they had gone somewhere nice and she wanted to wind up some barmen. They always were always at a new club, new racetrack, and some-ones house playing card games smiling laughing. She didn't need to work he told her; he was going to provide for her, give her everything she needed. They had a home, they had a house, and she was looked after. She looked after him when he came home from work on his own or with friends she always looked after him. Shouldn't have left her alone. Shouldn't have left her on her own. He looked into her glassy eyes again. Should have seen it coming. He remembered that morning when he had come home early from a job. He was trying to be quiet and crept up the stairs not wanting to wake her. Took out one of the bracelets that he kept for her from their job. Got undressed as he was walking down the corridor, opened their bedroom door and was about to get in, but through the slits of street light that came in through the blinds he noticed that their bed was empty. He

saw the light on in the bathroom, must be just going to bed now he mused to himself, then took the bracelet in his hands, watching the stones glimmer in the half light. Jennifer he called out. He remembered calling her name twice. Such a fine piece of jewellery, how well it would sit on her delicate wrists. He knocked on the door but there was no reply. Then he entered the bathroom, still holding the bracelet in his fingertips. He opened the door slightly, didn't want to scare her, only surprise her. That was when he saw her. She was slumped naked on the ground. A mirror was shattered in diamond-sized pieces tiles beside her. Motionless he stood watching, let the bracelet slip down beside them, tinkling against the pieces of glass as they landed. The glass, he remembered the little piece of glass in her fingers, it left straight lines on his conscience, ramrod straight lines cutting through his thoughts, even then when he was driving her to that place, and even right now as he sat nursing his memories in the lonely interview room. She had cuts along her wrists, tiny straight cuts, with blood barely dribbling out of them, was looking at the ground at the tiny pieces of glass, barely conscious of him in the room. They never talked about it. The next morning when he got up the mess was cleaned, and she joked at breakfast about the seven years of bad luck that was going to follow them. Seven years. Tramery tapped his hand on the desk, seven years she said, and that was twelve years ago. The curse still hadn't lifted.

They gave her pills a few weeks after she arrived. His doctor said they would help her, make her happier, that she would be normal again. They made her happy, the doctors were right. First time he visited her again after the three weeks cold turkey that they said to observe, tough love they said it was called, she did seem better. She was smiling talking telling him little stories of going for walks, of talking to the other guests. First time in a long time that she seemed normal, walking talking like she was human again. They said not to be too anxious not to expect too much too soon. Tramery was so glad when he saw her, it was like the cloud of sadness had lifted. They went for walks in the dry grasses of the garden outside her room, picked flowers, and watched birds feeding on the nearby cornfields. They told him in counselling that she was depressed, manically depressed. She had a chemical disruption or imbalance in the brain, it was a medical condition he was not to blame. Why would he be to blame, why did they think he blamed himself. He visited her

again after another three weeks she seemed better again her spirits lifted the shadows from the back of her eyes. Though she was still a little hazy about who he was and where she was from, but she was talking, smiling. It had been such a long time since he had seen her smile. Jennifer had one of those 180-degree smiles that turned his face inside out with a sudden joy every time he saw it. She had the best smile, which filled her face, with a heavenly beauty, and she kept it just for him. Tramery tapped his fingers on the plastic desk in the interview room. The doctors took him into one of the side rooms away from her, for a little chat one day. They asked him how he thought she was doing. Told him it would be a few months before the tablets worked to bring her back again, told him to be patient, and he was patient. Wanted her back again whatever it took, whatever the cost, he was going to do whatever it took. That was around the same time that he started working for Uncle Jimmy, started taking more work from him Tramery needed the money to pay for the bills at the institute and Jimmy said it would help him take his mind off her. Except Tramery didn't want to take his mind off her, she was with him everywhere he went, was in the face of every cheap hooker they set him up with. She was beside him in the morning when his sight wasn't straight, and through the hazy dawn saw her eyes saw her sleeping face beside him. Even if he wanted to he could not forget her, she was as much a part of him as he was of her, he needed her more than food or oxygen or anything that could be replaced. He was going to do whatever it took to get her back. They sat him down in the room and told him there was one more thing that he had to know; Jennifer was pregnant. Tramery left the institute feeling elated, she was getting better, and they were going to have a family. Family he remembered Peter asking, why didn't he go home to his family after work. Tramery looked around the empty darkened room and shivered. He tried to shake the unfinished memories from his head. Had to keep his mind clear, had to keep focussed for the boy. Why were they taking so long to get a lawyer, why were they making him wait on his own?

CHAPTER NINE

A death on Friday 13th

John sat in the back of his aunt Therese's brown Datsun as she drove to her workplace. She could not get the time off at that hour of night to take him home. Her shift was too busy, so she was going to bring John to wait at work until she finished. Then she would bring him home, back to her place. John had nearly gotten away from her and from his father. He was so close from leaving it all behind; just started walking down the street again after the rains had eased off, when she had driven around the corner, picked him up in her car. He had seen the reports on the news that the little boy they had been looking for was dead. Had been shot. It showed pictures of police cordoning off an area of land in the park. They had his father arrested in the station for some robbery; his dad, the great Jack Tramery, the entertainer the illusionist. The man he used to look up to, the man he used to boast about to his friends. His dad. Jack Tramery. John fingered the name on the outside of the canvas bag. The radio was on in the background, some old crooner that his aunt seemed to be oblivious to. She always turned the radio on in the car, instinctively the first thing she did, and then drove in silence to wherever they needed to go to. He spent his time looking outside through the dull evening light. They passed through the leafier suburbs; he watched waves of leaves laughing in the wind walling him in. Keeping him trapped inside the car. Couldn't look at his aunt, couldn't face her. She said nothing about his dad taking him, nothing about him not telling her he was going to leave. She always said nothing. He opened the bag and looked at the papers folded and creased inside. Was that why his dad had been arrested? For robbing some papers on the night that they were supposed to be stealing away together. They were yellowed and thick-leaved like the ones he had found in the box in the bottom of his aunt's wardrobe. He could hear the wind howling almost as loud as the crooner on the radio. No other voices, no other sounds, the void never lifted until they reached the hospital.

Two plastic doors swished the silence away from outside world. As they entered, John could hear shouts, sirens, beeping clicking noise all around him. His aunt strode over

to another lady at the front desk who smiled at her when she came in. The woman was in her forties, jolly cheeks and yellowed hair wearing a nurse's uniform just like his aunt's.

"So the wanderer has returned, well Therese I told you not to be worried about him. Told you Jack wouldn't fail to let you down" she said in a comforting voice.

"I've got to finish my shift out. Dr. Wormwood is on the ward, and you know how she is. Never misses a trick that woman," his aunt said to the woman.

Nervously John played with the cards in his pocket.

"Don't you worry about a thing honey, I'll make sure that he's well looked after down here. You just make sure you get upstairs before that dragon-lady notices that you're missing."

Therese turned around to John,

"You stay here for a few hours. Mind what that lady says to you, and for christ's sake try and stay out of trouble if you can manage that. Right. I'll see you at ten."

Then she walked down the corridor past all the beds and railings. The woman at the desk smiled down at the glum faced boy in front of her.

"Its not so bad here kid. You want to keep yourself amused for a while, maybe go down to paediatrics play with some of the other kids?"

"I'm not a kid."

"No sorry I forgot. Well you want to stay here and wait over there on the chairs?" she reached behind the desk fumbling for something.

"Here you can read this while you wait" she was proffering him a magazine.

It looked like one of those glossy pink fonted ones that his aunt read, loaded with articles on how to lose weight and recipes for chocolate cake.

"Um its alright," he took out the deck of cards, "I'll just play solitaire with these."

The woman behind the counter started to laugh,

"Well just as long as you remember that the people coming in here are sick. But that doesn't mean stupid, so don't go trying any of your father's tricks trying to scam them out of money."

Then she went back to filling in forms on her desk.

John sat on one of the orange plastic chairs; it had the same look as the chairs in his school and the ones in the dentist's waiting room. He slowly and carefully laid the

playing cards out in seven piles, counting them out slowly placing each card neatly on top of each other. He didn't know any card tricks, his dad had never shown him any. John was too young to have learned them while his father still lived with he and his aunt; his mother's sister, Therese. It had been about five years ago that his dad had left. One afternoon after school he found out his dad had left. John could still remember how the room looked while he sat on the bed on his own, nothing but the musty smell of smoke to keep him company. The dark wooden wardrobe in the corner, sun shining white light through the net curtains, bedclothes neatly folded, turned at the corners. His dad never made the bed like that, always folded the sheets up to the top of the bed, never folded his sheets down, that was something his aunt did. John remembered thinking it strange his aunt making his dad's bed, seeing as they didn't get on. The room looked strangely clean, not that his father was messy; it was just that it looked very clean. No shirts hanging off the chair at the desk in the corner of the room, no pieces of paper on the floor. Even the bin was empty. He remembered standing there and could smell the lavender sweet smell hanging in the air. Then his aunt came into the room, sat down on the bed, and told him to sit too. She put her arm on his shoulder, and bent over to talk with him. Her eyes were looking at his, facing them so he could see the little flecks of yellow that outlined her pupils in her green eyes. He remembered that they were stained with black lines underneath and ringed with grey circles. He remembered she was wearing jeans and a blouse, wasn't wearing her work uniform, and wasn't going to be going into work that day. She started patting his hair pushing it down at the sides over his ears. He didn't feel comfortable sitting on the bed with her in his dad's room, kept thinking his dad would think that he was being a traitor for talking to *her* in his room. Knew they didn't get along, they never spoke and she was always giving out to Tramery for leaving the house at odd hours of the night. Then maybe some evenings he'd come home with a watch for her or a new TV for the house and take the three of them out to dinner, maybe even some of his aunt's friends with them and things would be fine in the house, for a while. On the sides of his aunt's face just above the cheekbone before the socket of the eye he could see little swollen blotches of red, as though some one had punched her in the face. She started telling him how much she and his dad cared about him, how they wanted the best for him and nothing but the best for him, but that it wasn't easy seeing as his mother was still away. That's what she said his mother was still away. Therese kept her hand on his head, telling him how they were trying

their best to do their best for him. He felt queasy; his stomach in knots didn't feel comfortable at all, his aunt never talked to him like that. His eye turned around the room and noticed again how clean it looked. No trace of his dad's piles of shoes in the corner of the room. No watch ticking on the desk. He remembered his aunt's voice in the background but couldn't hear what she was saying, remembered her hand felt heavy on his head. Remembered wishing that she would take it off. Then one word he heard out of all the others. Gone. She told him that Jack had gone for a few days on business but that he would return next week. She never called his dad Jack. Then he noticed that her other hand was shaking and she gave him a hug, then closed the door behind herself leaving him in his dad's empty room. He could smell the dry smell of smoke coming from the kitchen a little later. Every evening then every second evening then once a week and then only at Christmas he would ask her, while she sat having a cigarette after dinner, he would ask her when his father was coming back. At first she used to say that it was the business trip, that he had to leave the country. That he'd be back at Christmas, but Christmas came and went, he got a card and a gift voucher in the mail. After that he stopped asking his aunt when he was coming back. His dad. Jack Tramery the illusionist.

In the lobby of the hospital John could see people coming and going, white-coats swishing past shouting orders, looking angry, looking tired. He had gotten bored playing solitaire and settled himself with watching the comings and goings of the hospital. Saw children coming in squealing with their parents. He saw broken bones, broken noses, noises of crying noises of pain. He watched the plastic doors swishing open and closed, watched the people come and go. Out of the corner of his eye a tallish woman dressed in a mackintosh talking to the jolly-cheeked lady at the desk caught his eye, or his ear rather. She was shouting at the jolly-cheeked woman asking her where her husband was demanding that she answer. John could tell the woman behind the desk didn't know what the lady in the mack wanted. By the way she was shaking her head she was clearly losing her patience with the mack lady. John wondered if they would have a fight. He eyed up the jolly-cheeked woman, she had a large build like a tank. Then he looked at the mack lady. The woman at the desk was in her early thirties, had fair brown hair, her brown mack drenched with rain, and had a pair of jeans and a jumper underneath. Her hair looked as though it was scraped up

in seconds and was held up in a bun at the crest of her head. She looked tired, her face drained and cheeks hollowed out. She raised her voice even louder, John was able to hear every-word along with the rest of the lobby,

“I don’t care if you have to read every single paper on that desk. I don’t care who you have to ring, or how busy you are, you will tell me right now what room my husband is in.” Nora said.

“Look sweetheart, I’m doing my best, but we are very busy tonight as you can see. If you would just take a seat over there I’ll find out for you” the jolly-cheeked lady replied, but the mack lady was having none of it.

“Listen *sweetheart* you get me my husbands room right now or all the equipment they’ve got in this place isn’t going to save you once I’m through with you.”

Both of the ladies eyeballed each other for a moment. John watched in anticipation.

“Tell me your husband’s name again” the jolly-cheeked lady replied looking at the files in front of her.

“Its Paul, Paul Rivera” she said, and then spoke in a quieter voice to the jolly-cheeked woman, looked apologetically at her.

John stopped watching them, they were not shouting at each other any more. Then just as soon as he started laying out the playing cards the two plastic doors swished open again. This time a stretcher surrounded by navy shirted and green trousered men and women holding tubes canisters and pieces of bandage came rolling through, in a panicked parade, followed at length by an old lady in a hat hobbling through the doors after it. On the stretcher John could see a leathery skinned old man with a white beard. He was screaming his head off at the people around him,

“Get yer fucking hands off me. Don’t you touch me? Slit your throat like a Jew, you hear me getta offa me,. No fucking respect, don’t put those tubes in my arm, you fucking screws, forty years I spent in there. You know what that means, slit your throat like a Jew, you fucking hear me?” he was shouting at the nurses and the ambulance men.

The old lady behind him also mumbling something about respect followed him in these phrases. John peered at her as she hobbled onto a seat at the other end of the room, she looked familiar, her woolly hat, he had seen it before. Christ he thought to himself when he remembered where from. It was the old dragon lady from the park. He buried his head in his chest not wanting to be stuck talking to her again.

John settled into playing with the cards again. This time building little card houses waiting for the time to pass until his aunt would bring him home. He kept building the cards up to the second layer and then the plastic doors would open or somebody walk past and his house of cards fall down. His dad had said that if he wanted to build the house tall he needed a strong base, that way even if one of the upper floors fell down there was no reason for the rest of them to fall. John picked up two of the cards and propped them slowly and carefully against each other then just as slowly and carefully withdrew his hands and left the two cards standing. Then he started building around them, adding card after card, one layer built, then the second layer with not quite so many cards. Then he picked up two more cards between his finger and thumbs and slowly ever so slowly began to put them together, when another gust of wind blew the whole thing down from underneath. John was definitely getting bored now. He looked above the jolly-cheeked woman to the clock above her head it was still barely half past eight. He noticed that the day's date was underneath it. Friday 13th it read. Friday 13th August 1998. He kicked the canvas bag at his feet. It was exactly the same date that read on the piece of paper in his Aunt's box on the floor on the wardrobe. Only the year was different. Almost five years ago, almost five years to the very day. The newspaper article from the box came back to him, inked letters jumping out at him at intervals. Discovered at Nalin home in Nebraska, discovered, she had a home, house flat garden, neighbours, witnesses reports, incident, accident, from, home help screams shout alert gone family notified numbed nullified, Nebraska cold empty Nebraska Alaska don't ask her, the names meant nothing, her face, the place, her name in the paper holding up the printed headlines with her face, her beautiful face so young and on that paper folded and refolded and smudged in places with teardrops and the corners ripped around the edges where they had been pulled from the paper, pulled from the morning pulled from the evening pulled from the building pulled in pulled out big shouts, neighbours nothing Nebraska new life, new rooms empty, void, no parents, new voices, new school no uniforms, police stations interviews father arrested missing boy, last seen last known whereabouts last sight last night silent tight, light dark shade and prayed painted round over her face tainted with her voice hanging under her face in that place raised to the ground no trace praised for their actions the brave fire-fighters, the brave little boy the boy on his own no parents, father missing, mother left, not dead they said gone not dead, her face hanging under the newspaper banner with dead beautiful eyes looking at him on his own in that new

place new face new moment new moment. He sat up straight in his chair awoke from the hazy memories. One sudden moment and it all made sense. One moment and it all came together for the first time. Then just as suddenly a gust of wind knocked his house of cards down and took away his odyssey.

CHAPTER TEN.

Peter's Friends?

"You're coming with me," Jade said.

Jangling and crashing against each other in rhythm with the rock music on the radio, the glittery bangles moved up and down her slim wrists. She was humming and tapping along with it. Told Sarah to roll down the window of the car, let little air in, and let a little rain in. No point breathing stale air she said. Jade was nodding her head in time to the rhythm, took out a packet of chewing gum from the side pocket of the drawer and chucked it over to her, told her to help herself. Chewing gum that was bad for your teeth, bad for the stomach her mother had always said. Thanks Sarah replied to Jade, before helping herself to some gum. Sarah looked around the car, saw the cassettes littered on the dashboard, saw the collection of pens and memento's of the places that Sarah imagined Jade had been. Her car was a navy blue saloon, polished to perfection with tinted windows. She motioned to Sarah to put her hands out of the window feel the rush of air through her fingertips.

"Can't beat it can you?" she asked Sarah not looking at her.

Sarah wasn't sure what to say, she usually sat in the back of the car. Wasn't allowed in the front, was too young. She nodded her head.

"You live around here Sarah? That your school over there?" she asked as they drove past the iron gates of her school.

She would have been home hours ago if the school bus had to have come on time, if she had gotten on the mini bus, if she hadn't have taken the shortcut through the park. Sarah mumbled a reply.

"Yeah looks a lot like my old school. They always paint the iron gates black don't they? Like fencing around a graveyard. Trying to keep the kids in. Never much like school myself. You like your school Sarah?"

"Um I don't mind" it never occurred to Sarah to like or dislike it.

School was somewhere she went to, it wasn't home she knew that.

"Yeah I never really liked it either. Thought I did, but it was just because I got so bored at home that school seemed interesting. But I grew up in the country; it must be different in the city hey? Much more to do here?" she enquired, got no reply and then turned the radio up a little more, started singing along to some song on the radio,

desperately trying to lift the little girl's mood, get her mind of the fact she had just seen a dead body.

Jade looked down at her watch when she parked the car.

"What time is it" Sarah enquired.

Jade looked at her watch again,

"8.05" she replied and then asked if they had a phone in Sarah's house much to the little girl's amusement.

"You just looked at your watch twice. You're a real dumb blond" she said without thinking, and then was suddenly silent, afraid she offended the woman.

Then just as quickly she realised there was no one around who would point this out and carried on laughing.

"Right I did, but I wasn't looking at the time, I was looking to see who called. I had a beeper installed in the watch, tiny little thing. Absolutely useless, it vibrates when some one beeps me. I suppose they should call it something else since it doesn't beep at all. Maybe not vibrator, don't think the women's institute would do me any favours advertising something like that. Don't worry about it kid. Anyway I digress my agent just buzzed, probably going crazy; I'm supposed to be on a radio show at the moment. You like? I got it free from the company, they pay me to wear it" she said flicking her wrist at Sarah before getting out of the car, and then she walked to the other side,

"All right Madam. You may now alight."

"Is this your room?" Jade enquired, looking around, under the bed, outside the window, like an ant exploring a new piece of grass. Sarah was a little uncomfortable; she was the only person, just her and Del, the only people who came into her room. It was her private space. She didn't like the way that Jade had followed her in. Didn't appreciate Jade bend down to lift up the sheets that were covering the underneath of Sarah's bed, that she was touching everything looking at everything.

"Would you like a cup of coffee" Sarah asked, remembering this was what her mother said anytime anybody came to the flat.

Jade was surprised, little girl couldn't possibly make coffee, surely her mother wouldn't let her use the kettle, wouldn't want her daughter in hot water.

“We’ll go into the kitchen then? You can bring your dolly in too if you like?” she said then went over to the window to close it, but on seeing the child’s face changed her mind.

She decided to leave it open. She felt very aware that this was one frightened child beside her, but couldn’t put her finger on why. Was it seeing the body that made Sarah so jumpy? Surely the child must know that they dead don’t come back that she was safe at home. Outside on the street Jade could hear the siren going off in a nearby building and peered out the window to see where it was coming from. She looked funny, dressed like an adult, looked pretty, but she was hung out the window like a gangly little kid Sarah observed.

“Its probably the liquor store around the corner, its always getting broke into” Sarah said in her wisest sounding voice, as she went over to the window to point it out to Jade.

On the corner of Chapel St and Belleview a liquor store window had just been smashed in. There was an old man with a beard standing in front of it looking proudly at his work; he turned around to the lady beside him. She was propped against the brick wall nearby and gave him an appreciative smile. Such a gentleman not like the others, such a nice man she thought to herself. They were having such a pleasant evening, met only hours ago waiting in the hallway for the damn cops to come and talk to her. He touched his head when he first saw her walking down the corridor, giving her a mock salute; she nodded back at him and sat opposite him in the corridor. They were so rude, she remembered thinking and placed the compact into her pocket. Then a group of people with cameras and microphones and suits bundled past her, tripped on her foot, walked on, never so much as a word of an apology.

“No god damned respect” she uttered in their direction.

“Sure are right lady” the man across from her agreed.

Then he proffered his hand to shake hers,

“William Blanco” he said through his yellowed and rotting teeth.

“Catherine Harvey” she said shaking hands smeared with sewer dirt with the man who kissed hers when he took hold of it.

Such manner, that was what was missing, people had no manners these days. Not like when she was growing up, when men knew how to treat a lady, not like those pigs in the police station. Always moving her on, always poking prodding shouting at her.

“They dragged me in to help them with their enquiries. I’ve been waiting out here for two hours. And me with things to do, I’m a busy man you know.”

Blanco said by way of pleasant conversation.

“They took me out of my house, without even asking. Walked straight in, never even knocked. Said they wanted my help too” she agreed.

“And this is how they treat us. Leave us sitting out here, like we’re dirt or something. I offered them my services you know. I said I could help them, said I’d tell them what I’d seen. They’d be lost without knowing what I have seen. Damn cops.”

“That’s right, they wanted to know what I’ve seen too. So nosey, so noisy, always asking good honest decent folks questions. Wanting to know what we know, where we go, what we do. Makes it impossible for a lady to live in peace you know?”

“Never even said thank you. Just assume that I have nothing better to do than sit here and wait for them to come to me.”

“Damn right, excuse my language William, damn right though. Left me sitting in the room, came in asked me questions, like they have a right to my life, to know what I know. Lady’s gotta have her secrets, nothing without your secrets. Because that’s what they want, they want to know what’s going on in your head,” her voice was getting louder, and she lifted the hat off her head and ran her dirty fingers through her hair, “they want to know what’s up here all of them.”

“No respect. No respect for old age. Think they can treat us like fools and that we don’t know. Think we’re good for nothing. Don’t believe what we see, don’t believe our eyes, just because my sight is going doesn’t mean I don’t know what I see. I know what I see, I know who I saw. Trying to trick me with their questions trying to get me to change my mind. After I helped them. Not a word of thank you. And me a busy man with places to go.”

“And people to see” she replied conclusively.

They watched as the room opened and that detective woman went in to a flurry of noise and clicking. Catherine reached into her pocket and took out some pictures, showed them to Blanco. He gazed at them slowly, peering at the pictures and peering at her. Then he handed them back to her complimenting her on how well she had aged.

“They don’t even notice that we’re here” he said as seconds later the journalists all left the room, tripping and turning their noses up at the tramp and the bag lady.

“Think where they would be without us. Without people like us, because its people like us who built this country.”

“Damn right” Catherine replied, fixing the hat on her head, using the compact that Winter had given her to check her reflection, she was a lady.

“We shouldn’t put up with it.” he said gruffly.

“Damn right” she replied.

“So we’ll leave,” Blanco said decisively then stood up to leave the room, tired of being interrogated by the cops, seeing as he hadn’t done anything, had come in of his own free will to talk with them.

He proffered his arm to the lady,

“Care to join me for a stroll in the evening.”

She stood up too and straightened her coats,

“Enchanted.”

While they were walking along the streets, the empty evening streets, he told her about himself, about all the crimes he had committed, about how he was once king of the streets. The now desolate streets, sloshing with rain. No-body else ever came out in the rain, afraid of getting their clothes wet he sneered. Then began to get thirsty,

“Could I buy you a drink Catherine?” he asked.

She nodded her head, her hand still clutching onto his arm to steady her as she walked. He was filled with a sudden desire to prove them wrong, to prove to them he still had it and picked up a used umbrella from the ground. They walked past a liquor store and he stopped to look in the window as they passed,

“What would madam care for tonight?” he enquired.

She pointed a grubby finger at the bottle of whiskey in the centre of the window.

“An excellent choice Madam” he said, and then bid her to stand back from the window.

With all the might he could muster he lifted the wooden handle of the umbrella with his yellowed fingers and smashed it against the window. It shattered into thousands of tiny shards of glass, and he reached in the window to proudly take out his prize, cutting his hands on the glass as he did. From her place on the ground the old lady clapped her hands in anticipation, as he brought the bottle over to her for them to share. Then the alarm of the liquor store rung in the cops from a nearby station. When

they arrived some fifteen minutes later they saw the broken glass, put it down to another victim in the local gang wars. Those kids who drank cider in the park, probably marking their turf. Some moments later the fresh faced cop noticed two hobos sitting on the ground a little up from the liquor store shivering in the rain holding each other to keep warm. He saw that one of them was bleeding, those damn kids he thought to himself and phoned for an ambulance for the old man. Those bloody kids never gave it a rest even for one night.

Across the city, at a window ledge on the fifth floor, two heads were peering out into the darkness tracking the siren with their ears.

“You know the sounds of the street very well.” Jade intoned below the sound of the siren.

Sarah was silent by her side, gazing up at the stars, edging ever so slowly away from Jade.

“I know them as well as they know me and Del” she replied and then stood back from the window and went over to pick up Delilah from under the bed.

“You can see the big plough from here, straight above” she said after watching Jade look up at the stars, and edged back towards the window. “I sit here sometimes and look out the window, it looks nice and safe. Quiet I mean.”

“Except you can’t see as many stars in the city as you can in the countryside. I used to look up at the skies at nighttime. Used to climb out my bedroom window, creep around the back of the house and climb up onto the roof, used to do it really quietly so that I wouldn’t wake up any of the others inside of the house, while they were asleep you know. When it was *quiet*.”

Sarah was looking at her intently, but Jade pretended not to notice her.

“I used to lie back on the sloping part of the roof put my arms behind my head as a cushion, didn’t want all the night crawlers getting in my hair. From where I lay I could see thousands of stars covering the sky. Sometimes a cloud would pass covering the stars for a few seconds, and if I was looking intently at the sky it felt as though the stars and I were moving, the clouds, and the rest of the world were staying still. I remember on frosted nights everything glistening and the wind wish whispering in the evergreen trees beside the roof. It wasn’t always starry out, but I always felt better, could sleep easier after having been out on the roof.”

Sarah said nothing she was patting the hair on her doll's head.

"I can hear all sorts of noises when I sit at my window at night" she said finally.

Jade continued looking up at the stars, staying very still and very silent, as though trying not to frighten a kitten starved of affection.

"I can hear them shouting at each other. They think I can't but I can. I bet that boy I found; his parents don't shout at each other" she said.

"Your parents argue, all parents argue. It doesn't mean that they are arguing about you."

"She said that she was going to leave, she said either she goes or I do" Sarah said, shaking again.

"Everyone says things that they don't mean when they get upset, it doesn't mean anything. Your mother cares for you; she came to pick you up from the police station didn't she? If they didn't want you back they would have left you there. I'm sure detective Winter could have found you a nice comfortable cell to live in," she smiled at the child who was stubbornly still pulling at the same piece of hair on the doll's head.

"Then why did she leave without me?"

Tramery pulled at a piece of hair behind his ear. Why did she have to leave him, why did she have to go like that? He would have preferred her dead, or to have left him for another man, at least then he had something to fight against, he would have had something to hate. But sat looking at him lost to him, lost in herself staring at him like he was nothing more to her than the nurses, that killed him. Lost like that, like a blank canvas where once the most beautiful painting had been. Why did she leave? They told him it would only be a matter of months. Spent the first three months getting her on the drugs, then getting her off them when she was pregnant. When Jack was born, oh happy day when Jack was born, and he got to leave the hospital with baby Jack, when he was born it started off again. Jennifer held Jack in her arms, minutes after he was born, kissed him on the cheeks, held his tiny pink fat fingers in hers and looked up at him. Both of them did, both of them, Jennifer and Jack with their blue shining eyes. The next day he walked into the hospital holding flowers and chocolates and all the trappings of hospital shops. Jennifer was laying on the bed, baby Jack on a little green glass tray beside her, making tiny infant noises. She never said a word, never

held him in her arms again. Didn't know who he was, didn't know who Jack was. The doctors in the institute told him it would take time, take time for the drugs to work. Tramery hit his fist on the desk in the interview room, as long as he was paying the bills, they would have told him anything. Her still in that little sparse room emptied of all the cards and letters people sent because she never kept anything they brought when they visited. Her lifeless, smiling passive and hollow, like a living corpse. Why did she have to leave them like that? The day that she died, he felt a guilty sense of relief, guilty because he was glad he didn't have to watch her grow away from him more each day, because he didn't have to watch her turn into a living Kodak add. He was guilty because it took away his responsibility and that made him feel free. He had only meant to leave to go to Nebraska to identify the body, didn't want to fly it back. Tramery never made it to Nebraska, could not bring himself to go identify the body, because she wasn't a body, she was Jennifer, his lover, his wife, his friend, she was his soul, everything he did. Tramery never made it back home. It was better that he left, better to let Therese bring Jack up. He couldn't go back, he couldn't go forward, without the weight of Jennifer on his mind, he realised that nothing else was keeping him going. Couldn't look Jack in his eyes without seeing her, couldn't bear the thoughts that Jack might be lost too.

The lost boys, a real regular recruitment add for gangs are us, the fresh-faced cop thought to himself as they drove into the park, on their way to pick up some of the kids who drank cider in the park playground. He knew what to look out for, their faces all looked the same, bony, stubborn and old for their age. He knew they'd be wearing baggy jeans, loose t-shirts and black baseball caps. He knew that they'd be drinking there, they always did. They had stopped moving the boys on from the park, stopped chasing after them during the David Water's case. They had instructions not to take the boys into the cells, but to give them warnings, and send them home, ring their parents if they had any, but not to give them too much hassle. The cops had enough to do without chasing underage drinkers. He turned the flashlights on on the roof of the vehicle and flashed the spotlight on a few white-faced youngsters. Some of the gang bolted, those who didn't were either too out of it, or too defiant to leave. Knew they were underage, knew they couldn't be arrested. He got out of the vehicle and started rounding them up to get their autographs at the station.

Back at the station, Tramery was signing his statement. He had finally gotten to talk to his brief. Outside in the corridor he could hear the noise of excited chatter, his brief explained that it was the arrival of Jimmy Murdock that was causing all the noise. Tramery took a deep breath when he heard that Jimmy was at the station, then he told his brief what had happened, what the cops knew, what they had been questioning him about. He told her that they had witnesses who had seen him around the Muscat building at the time of the robbery. That Blanco had seen him talking to a man wearing one of the boiler suits only hours before the gang entered the Muscat building wearing the same uniforms, that they knew about his *visit* to the Davidson building, that they knew he knew Jimmy Paul and Angelo. He didn't mention that he thought Angelo was trying to fit him up or whether he was guilty or innocent. That didn't come into it. Then he explained to his lawyer who was taking notes on a yellow pad that he said he was in the Metropolis bar, that he was stuck in traffic on the highway because of the Jack-knifed juggernaut, and that at the time of the robbery he was playing Blackjack, told her everything except about Jack, except about Peter. She nodded her head.

"The Metropolis bar is a busy bar isn't it Mr. Tramery? I haven't been there myself. Your son will confirm you were with him at the time of the robbery? Good good. So all they seem to have is circumstantial evidence, the word of a drunken bum, and the fact that you consort with some unsavoury gentlemen. Can't hang a man for that. Anything else that you have left out Mr. Tramery?" she enquired.

"Just this," he pointed at the paint stain on his knee, "It's the paint off the window-ledge of the Muscat building, where they say I broke into last night. That detective Winter lady noticed it."

"She interviewed you on her own, nobody other than the tape recorder in the room. Did she mention the stain on tape?" his brief enquired, "The actual words, there is a stain on your trousers that matches the paint on the first floor window-ledge of the Muscat building."

Tramery thought for a while and then shook his head.

"It is very dark in here Mr. Tramery isn't it? The light can play tricks with your eyes can't it?" she said and then rooted in her handbag before presenting him with a tiny bottle of nail varnish remover.

"I think your main concern should be the other men who have been arrested. If you all stay silent, I can't see that they have a case against you. You weren't filmed in the

security tape. The others were. They might want to frame you for the robbery, say that you organised it, seeing as you were the one who robbed the goods around the back of the building, and they were merely a distraction. That is what the police may be working on. I don't expect you to confirm or deny this, you keep silent and bide your time. They can only hold you for another 20 hours on suspicion after that they have to press charges. Think you can wait that long?"

He could wait that long, but could the others? Angelo could have him fitted up cut and dried in twenty seconds never mind twenty hours, the paintings gone and sold in that time. Assuming he had the paintings assuming that Paul hadn't taken them. Who could Tramery trust? He remembered the bag of papers that he had dumped in the trashcan outside of his flat; they'd be emptying it the next day. Did he need to use them as a bargaining tool. Did Jimmy know that he had the papers. Could Tramery wait twenty hours? In twenty hours his plans would be done for. The risks that he took the night before would be worthless.

Priceless as the paintings they had stolen, and worthless as the canvas they were painted in, Winter knew their words were worth nothing, but the fact that it was Sanchez who got to interview him was invaluable. Sanchez had waited too long to let him go. Winter walked down the corridor, went into the interview room where Sanchez, and James Murdock were having a cosy chat.

"Warm night isn't it?"

"I'd say it would get a lot hotter Sanchez"

"So nice to have you back in my company Mr. Murdock"

"Anything to help an old friend Detective. So what can I tell you?"

"How do you explain the gun being in your office?"

"What gun?"

Sanchez held up a plastic bag marked people's exhibit number four and showed it to Murdock.

"How do you explain this gun being in your possession Mr. Murdock."

"I don't carry guns."

"It was found in your office."

"By one of your anxious rookies Sanchez? I know they're not beyond planting evidence if they want to get their man."

“It was found in the drawer of your office desk. Mahogany wasn’t it?”

“Not like this plastic crap that’s for sure Sanchez.”

Murdock had his arms folded on his lap, sitting upright maintaining constant eye contact on Sanchez who looked over his head, at him, through him and finally just a little to the left of his eye, to try and intimidate Murdock.

“This gun was used in a shooting last night in Pentworth Park. A 12year old boy was shot dead. One bullet to the chest. The bullet that came from your gun Mr. Murdock.”

“I never said it was my gun detective.”

“We have sent it off for prints, so it’s only a matter of time before we match them with yours. You going to make this easier on yourself Mr. Murdock?”

“Make it easy for you you mean.”

“Its only a matter of time before its over Murdock.”

“That’s no way to speak to an old friend Sanchez.”

Winter walked over to Sanchez and whispered in his ear and as she did his face relaxed almost into a smile.

“We have information that you organised the robbery last night, we know how you did it, we know about the uniforms, we know about the paintings, we know it was you Murdock. What happened, little kid gets in the way? Saw you and your goons running through the park. Getting old now Murdock hey? Wouldn’t give chase to a twelve year old boy, that why you shot him?”

“You know nothing. You know what was on television. You’re not going to frame me for this one.”

“You think you’ve been framed Murdock. Why would some-one want to frame you?”

“You can’t make a case out of conjecture.”

“That’s not all we have Mr. Murdock. You like to go to the movies?”

“I like to be entertained if that’s what you mean.”

“Funny me too. Saw a video today, of four guys running into a building and running out ten minutes later, looked like the Marx brothers.”

“Very interesting detective.”

“Found it in your office Murdock. I found the security tape that the guard said was wiped in your office. How do you explain that one?”

Jimmy said nothing.

“I’d like to make a phone-call.”

“Thought you’d be wanting to phone some-one Murdock.”

“And I’d like to talk to a lawyer.”

“You’ll need more than some stuffed over paid wise-cracking lawyer this time Murdock. Who you going to get this time?”

“I want to speak with Michael Darcy Detective.”

Sanchez’s mouth dropped open a little. Under the table, he clenched his hands into fists. The assistant D.A. Jimmy Murdock wanted to speak with the assistant D.A. No deals, no deals not this time. He wasn’t going to let go of Murdock this time. Winter stood up and left the room, she didn’t like where it was going. Didn’t trust the assistant D.A. he was far too interested in politics for her liking. She went over to the desk and told Marge to notify Darcy that they had James Murdock in custody that Murdock wanted to talk with him. Then she noticed the group of kids sitting on the plastic chairs in the corridor and a fresh-faced cop take down their names in his newly bound leather note-book. Looking for gold-stars she thought to herself.

“What are they in for?” Winter asked.

“Found them in the park, drinking, think they may have done over a liquor store, you know the one off the corner of Chapel St and Bellevue.”

Winter looked at young boys sprawled on the plastic chairs in the corridor, eyes reddened with tiredness, with drink and whatever else they were on. Could only have been aged ten or more, the oldest was thirteen at most. The fresh-faced cop was eager to make a good impression and hurried over to talk to Winter and tell her all the good work he had been doing that day.

“They’re regulars in here. Always causing trouble in the streets, vandalism, boarding the usual. I knew they would be in the park because that is their hangout. The playground in the park.”

Winter sighed and shook her head. She was sick of dragging kids off the streets, sick of the decay, sick of their eyes looking at her trying to look tough. Most of the kids she knew were homeless; she never liked sending them back out to the streets. It would be better if they were over sixteen, at least then she could arrest them, give them a cell to sleep in. She knew that her hands were tied; the department did not have the resources to deal with the street kids. The other boys were the ones that really got under her skin. The kids who just wanted to cause trouble, went out after dark, and went out after dinner, after kissing good night to their parents. They were the ones that angered her the most, the ones who could go home at night. The ones who would grow out of it, and never look back, the kids who had a choice and were

taking it for all they could get. Those were the dangerous kids, because they had the least to risk, they knew they'd get bailed out, they knew they could get fed in the evening, could chose to go to school. They had homes to go to, and they did not care what trouble they got into because there was always a way out for them. They were not like the street kids, for whom running away was the only way out. The kids nobody cared about, the kids with no names and loud voices. Winter went over to one of the little boys, he had blond hair, was wearing ripped jeans and a hooded top which was far too big for him, looked like one of the sports jersey's from the local high school.

"You have some-where to sleep tonight kid?" she asked.

He stared back at her and said nothing.

"I could find you somewhere for the night if you like" she said.

He looked up at her again through eyes he was barely able to open.

"Screw you lady. Screw you and your fucking somewhere for the night, fucking whore. That's what you fuckers always say, for the night. And that's all it is, for one fuckin night. I don't need it don't need you. I have somewhere to stay."

"You need somewhere safe. You shouldn't be sleeping on the streets" she replied, unphased by his response, she was used to it by now while the fresh faced cop stared in amazement at her.

"I have somewhere to stay, me and my brothers, we have somewhere to stay. We've got the park, and you can't move us out, we know that place better than you. Think you can send me to a home, stupid whore."

Then he spat at her much to the amusement of the other kids. She took a tissue from her pocket and slowly and carefully wiped her face.

"I'll look after them m'am" the fresh-faced cop interjected and tried to put the boy back into his seat. She reached over, took his hands off the boy and bent down to talk to him.

"You think you can look after yourself? You think you know it all. Spit on me all you like, but I'm still dry. Look at me ."

Winter stood up then right in front of the child.

"You know a kid was shot last night. Shot in the park near where you and your *brothers* stay. And if you think that you are safe then you have a lot to learn kid."

The boy squinted his eyes into slits of silence, threatening her with his stare.

“You think you have it all don’t you? That kid that was shot was no older than you are. He had a home and a family who’ll miss him. You think that you’ll be missed if you get shot? He was a good kid, his family will miss him, you think anyone will notice if you got shot? I’m offering you a chance that’s all, there’s no need to throw it back at me.”

The kid snorted and looked at the other boys all were sitting straight on their chairs.

“You think you know it all cop?” he sneered, then tilted his head up at her.

“She thinks she knows it all” he said to the other kids.

“You stupid fuckers know nothing. Good kid was he? Good kid Peter Jones? Did his homework in the evening and go to school did he? Play on the local football team did he? Stupid fuckin cops think they have it all worked out don’t they? You don’t know me and you didn’t know Peter. So keep your fuckin nose outta my business whore.”

“You knew Peter Jones?”

“Course I fuckin did, he’s one of my *brothers*.”

“You were in the park last night?” Winter asked breathlessly.

“No I was at the fuckin opera, dumb bitch.”

“You were talking to Peter last night?” she demanded.

“Yeah”

“What time?”

“Late, real late, ain’t got no curfew in our hotel lady.”

“Its important what time did you see him at?”

“Say maybe half twelve”

Winter’s ears pricked up.

“Where did he go then?”

“Went to follow a group of guys. Real fuckin weirdoes wearing these suits like clown suits, fuckin weird green clown suits.”

“What next.”

“That’s what I’m telling you cop. You don’t have a fucking clue. You want me to tell you what next, you want me to help you hah! You pigs know nothing. You didn’t know Peter Jones at all. I’ll tell you what really fucking happened last night.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Great Battle

Talking was dangerous the wrong words could be enough to kill a man. Tramery knew that well enough. His mouth was motionless, not a single word whispered to his brief, as they sat waiting for Winter to come back into the room. His thoughts lay on Jack, resting on his face wondering what he was doing where he was. As if by habit his fingers moved shuffling an invisible deck. Across the city Jack had built his house of cards to the third level, had discovered endless possibilities permutations and combinations of arranging the cards, all with a little help from a bit of saliva to stick it together. He was busy in thought wondering what to say to his aunt, wondering if she would still be angry with him, wondering if she would tell him the truth about his mother if he asked, wondering if he wanted her to tell him. They never spoke about his mother. When his father left they never mentioned it. Therese brought him out for pizza and for ice creams, they talked about her work, his friends the weather, anything but not everything, not what mattered. But if he were to ask her questions she would have to answer wouldn't she? Jack felt uneasy, didn't want to lose who he was, didn't want to be confronted with a different identity. He placed another card on the house; it had a picture of a slain dragon and an oriental warrior stood small in the background. It was an unusual card. In Sarah's hand the battle had not yet been fought and won, hers depicted the flat-faced man, lance in hand, dragon poised for action ready to strike. As she looked at it she remembered picking it off the ground in the park, just below the tree where Peter had carved his name. Sarah could still see his face, his eyes in her mind. Jade was asking her questions about her room, about her school about her friends, all the time talking in the background. Words sounds, explanations, she nodded her head in answers, not wanting to give to much away, not wanting to tell her secrets. Talking would mean losing them, talking would mean losing herself to the people around her. Talking would mean trust and that was dangerous. Jade made mumbled noises in the background as the sounds and sights that held Sarah in her room, in her dreams when she held Del asleep at night wandered in to her mind.

All at once in a glance out the window to the park Sarah was transformed into a shadow faced ghost standing outside of their apartment block, standing angry and defiantly. He had been shouting at her; she was causing trouble, making too much noise, could never get any peace, told her to get out told her to leave the house. Had walked down the five flights of stairs and was standing outside of the building watching the traffic kick up dust on the roads, horribly happy not to have him in her room standing over her. The air hung heavy on her shoulders, making the back of her neck sticky, making her throat dry with words she never had the chance to shout back at him. Overhead she could hear the cawed cooing of pigeons breaking the dead air with their cries taking her with them on their flight. Down, down on the ground she could see blocks of buildings with flat fronted faces, and places where children walked with their parents, places where people paused, places where they laughed, places with traces of all kinds of humanity, and in the midst of it, a fair haired girl stood alone outside a building. Onwards she flew with the bird's eye view, over the rooftops, settling on a black plastic drainpipe in an alleyway. Underneath where she was perched, voices travelled upwards, voices of boys, young boys blaming each other for their boredom. Their voices sounded like those of underwater swimmers, slow and bulbous, filling her ears, drenching them with noise. Down below were trashcans with no lids spilling empty coke cans, used nappies, pieces of food and newspapers onto the street. The print on the papers was muddied the words didn't look like they were in English, only the headlines stood out. They said something about corruption, something about politics. One of the trashcans was on its side. I stood motionless as though frozen in time by the sunlight. Inside she could see all the flies landing and feeding on its rotting contents, could see rats scampering in and clawing searching looking for something to tear at, to take. She could hear them scrambling, etching their sharpened claws on her mind inside her ears. She could see waves of heat enriched with the stench of decay rising up from the rubbish on the ground. The noise of the boys was all the time hovering in the background, stopping her from flying away. They were dressed in shapeless jeans and t-shirts that looked like togas, their heads crowned with caps. They were moving laughing shouting they were still they were silent they were loud they were angry. She couldn't see their faces from where she was perched, only the tops of their heads, only the sunlight catching on their uncapped hair, giving them sudden golden haloes, and just as fast dark shadowed skulls when they moved out of the light. She watched as they kicked

an empty beer can from one side of the alley to the other. Passed it with ferocious bouts of energy, through the trashcans over the rats by the flies, piercing the sticky hot air. She watched as it flew upwards, spiralling and shining in the evening sun. Metal and movement catching her eyes, demanding attention before it fell crashing onto the ground and lay beside a pair of battered trainers on the ground. They had white laces dotted with dried in muck stains, the soles flattened at the edges from wear. They had blue stripes on one side, three blue stripes no more no less. That was what she could see lying on the ground face down on the muck. Laying stomach flat to the mud, the side of her head on the ground in the alley, feeling the heat of his eyes on her back. Burning into her, like rays of angry sunlight chasing her thoughts. The eyes that danced and called her out of dreams and left her shaking clutching her knees seated on her bed in the dead of night. Their eyes that darted glances at each other while she lay on the ground, hearing nothing but their voices. Only this time she knew what to expect. It started with laughter, she could hear them laughing at her, who she was, what she was wearing, couldn't remember, but the voices, the laughter, that rung in her ears like a stifled siren, like a warning. Couldn't move, trapped like a caged songbird, silent, suffocated, their bodies walling her in, hands keeping her trapped on the ground, hand's she couldn't remove, couldn't take off, they were under her skin, saturated patches of her arms, shoulders, on her back below her neck, could feel them smiling sticky grins at her. Older faces younger faces, eyes that turned eyes that rolled all around her spiralling out and down. Black shadowed sockets trapping her but he, he had a face he had a voice that rang out clearer than the others, saw her, saw what they were doing to her, turned his back on her and watched for people passing by. She remembered his eyes, clear blue eyes, void of expression or regret that bore holes into hers, she remembered calling for help. She remembered the pain. Remembered the smells of the alley. Remembered the concrete ground beneath her head. Watched them leave, him turn his face to glance at her before they left and shake his head. His eye sockets ridden with shadows, suddenly sodden with rain. Paul's face replaced by Peter Jones. Peter Jones, who had lain dead at her feet in the park.

“Do you want to talk about it” Jade enquired again, still using her softest voice, looking at the wide-eyed little girl peering out the window beside her.

Jade reached out her hand to brush the girl's hair out of her eyes, before noticing tiny invisible movements away from her.

"Maybe you'd like to have something to eat. I know I haven't eaten today. Sarah is that what you would like. I could get us a takeaway if you like?" Jade asked waiting patiently for Sarah to reply.

A take-away, like a pizza perhaps, they never let her eat pizza. Sarah remembered the pizza place she had been in earlier on in the day, when she met that tall man who was buying a television for his son, the man who had been arrested. He ordered a plain pizza, she bought snickers, but the man behind the counter wouldn't let her pay for it. It all seemed like it happened oceans ago. Then she noticed Jade playing with her watch rubbing her wrist.

"You have another phone-call? You have to leave me?" she asked in a voice that she seemed to make without moving her mouth, forcing the sound out almost without breathing.

"No just scratchin cooties." Jade laughed.

"Damn thing, sorry, excuse my French, don't tell your mother I said damn. I've done it again. Sorry. But this thing just goes off all on its own, buzzing away on my wrist, feels like an insect or something crawling on my arm. Ughh" she shivered.

Sarah smiled up at her; the lady was a loon she thought to herself.

"Yeah I guess pizza would be fine. If that's what you were going to get. Thank you" Sarah replied standing up; as she did the playing card on her knees fell to the ground. Jade spotted it and noticed the unusual design she picked it up and handed it back to Sarah. Then had an idea of how to kill a little time, until her mother phoned from the hospital, or at least until the food arrived,

"Maybe you'd like to play a game of cards while we wait for the food?" she enquired tilting her face up at the child's.

"Yeah but I'm not sure that we have any cards."

Jade looked at the card in the girl's hand,

"And you are holding what in your hand?"

Sarah started laughing again; sometimes the wrinkled ones could be so stupid,

"You need more than one card to play a game with some-one. How are we going to play snap with one card" Sarah asked shaking her head.

“Really quickly” Jade fired back at her while grinning, “Hey its not my fault you folks is too poah to bie yo’selvn a full deck of cards. Just one card hey? Getting the others on hire purchase?”

“Least I know how to spell my name properly Jennifer? Was that one ‘d’ or two on your so called pictures?” Sarah replied grinning before leaving the room.

They walked into the kitchen. Automatically Sarah reached up and turned the television on as she entered the room and took a seat at the kitchen table while Jade dialled for their take-away. It was had just turned nine o’clock and the evening news on channel three was starting. There was a skinny blonde and a overly large shouldered man sitting behind a well lit desk that seemed to have no function other than to hide the bottom half of the presenters which the camera never dared to show in any case. It was almost like they were interviewing the public for their suitability to receive the nuggets of information being thrown at them, their ability to digest the news while the readers sat at their pseudodesks struggling to pronounce the names of Balkan countries. A case of the blonde reading the bland. In the corner just above either presenter was a box filled momentarily with moving pictures, of wars, of jungles, of famine of suits in rooms behind mahogany desks signing treaties of wars that they never admitted to being involved in, and then came a familiar face. It was of a young woman, well dressed, attending formal events, then dressed like a rock star partying, being abusive to the cameras and then posing for photographs at shoots.

“Jennifer” she called, “Jennifer look look you’re on the television!” Sarah shouted, it was exciting, there was a photo of Jennifer on television, and there she was in her kitchen making a phone-call.

On the phone Sarah’s mother had sounded worried. Nora said that it would be better for Sarah to come and visit her father tonight just in case anything happened to her father. She sounded upset. Jennifer had not let know that she was phoning Sarah’s mother so as not to worry the child, Sarah had enough on her plate.

“I hope they’re not showing those photographs from last year at the movie awards. Those lights did me no favour, honest it was the lights, and they pick up every thing. The dress wasn’t so short, just that they blew up all the bits that were in the papers, cleavage was worth every penny don’t you think? Got a lot more inches coverage in more ways than one after that night!” Jennifer replied, before telling Nora in a whisper that she would drive Sarah around after they had eaten.

Nora told her that she appreciated what she was doing; still house-proud having some one like Jade Nix in her house, in *her* house. She said not to tell Sarah too much about her father. The same little Sarah who was sat in the kitchen enthralled by what she saw on the television This was the first time she was ever interested in the news, not that she was usually up so late, they sent her up to her room at eight o'clock normally.

“So kid,” Jade said startling Sarah, “This one of the dragons you were talking about earlier on? Nice card! This guy looks a little scary though, don’t think that I would trust him, what do you think?”

Sarah looked over at her from her chair. Jade was flipping the card in the fingers gingerly, then pausing momentarily to examine it in detail. Sarah raised her eyebrows in reply and continued munching her slice of pizza. Jade looked around the kitchen; it was decorated with stencils of flowers on the corners of the walls, stencils of roses winding their way into the shadows. Wooden panels covered the outside of the presses to give the kitchen a rustic feel, while cups branched out from a plastic tree, cups with the names of towns they visited, Boston, New York, names that she wasn’t familiar with, names she knew better than her own. There were tea towels folded neatly beside the sink, and dishes left to dry on a beige plastic rack. The window had blinds on it and miniature cactus plants that looked as though they were never watered on the window ledge. The fridge was hidden by one of the same wooden panels that covered the faces of the presses, and was situated right beside the oven, on the left side of the sole window in the room.

“That’s bad karma having the fridge beside the cooker. You should tell your mother that, its not good for the room having two conflicting energies beside each other,” Jade said without thinking.

“Hmm what do you mean karma? What’s Karma?” Sarah asked.

“What’s karma? Um its sorta like when you have the idea that you have say two sides to everything,” Jade flipped the card in her hand showing the girl the two faces, “you need both for a person or a body to be whole. The universe is made up of equal amounts of both forces or energy, like hot and cold and light and dark, and both pools of the resources need to be kept constant for the universe to be in order. If they are forced into opposition then that will create negative energy, lead to a bad atmosphere.”

“That sounds kinda silly.” Sarah replied dismissively, her mother had told her about those weird hippies before.

“Maybe, or maybe I’m just explaining it badly, you said before your family are religious, you go to mass, Christians?”

“Yeah we go on Saturday evenings.”

“Okay well you remember some teachings of Jesus, like love one another as I have loved you, and love thy neighbour”

Sarah nodded her head. Honour thy father and mother. She shivered slightly.

“Well that means that you treat other people well and they will treat you well. You get out what you put out there. So you send out good deeds and good thoughts and you should get them back. You already know that, yes? Yes, well that’s kinda like what the idea of karma is like, you put out good thoughts into the universe, and keep it at peace and you will get the same back. I can see you frowning Sarah. I’m not a daft hippie.”

“My mam was telling me that hippies say they believe in things like that, but its just and excuse not to go to mass cause they don’t want to put their money where their mouth is because they are lazy, they don’t want to give donations to the collection box.”

“Maybe, but its not all just empty talk, one of the simplest most important laws in science is the first law of thermo dynamics which says that the energy of the universe is conserved, which means that energy cannot be made or destroyed. That’s kind of like when you turn on a light and the electricity is changed to light energy, which can be changed to food energy by plants. Which we then consume, and then use their energy to plant and sow more plants and the chain continues. Karma states that if you put good out you should get good out.”

“It sounds kinda stupid, like what a kid would say.”

Jade started laughing, smart girl she thought to herself.

“Most things adults do, we do it in disguise, we’re all still kids with old faces really I suppose.”

“So if I do good things, then good things should happen to me. If I do bad things bad things should happen to me?”

“Yep that’s about the size of it, within a reasonable margin of error of course.”

“But you said the energy of the earth remains constant.”

“That’s right.”

“So if I do a lot of good deeds then somewhere else in the world somebody else is doing bad deeds, but that’s alright because its balanced.”

“Um I’m not quite sure,”

“But that’s what you said. So in that case, if I was really good, then somebody else would be really bad somewhere else, in order for things to be balanced” Sarah interrupted.

“I wouldn’t have,”

“So if that’s the case then the really good people like priests and nuns and monks, because they are so *good* they are kinda causing normal people to turn bad to balance the karma.”

“Well that’s what I always thought.” Jade laughed, “But not like you mean. That’s the second law of thermodynamics, it gives us hippies room to manoeuvre, says that some of the energy escapes, is dissipated into disorder, entropy, which is always increasing, so this means that however good you are it doesn’t mean some-one else will turn bad, maybe just a little peculiar, maybe just into hippies, seeing as we like the idea and that entropy can be decreased locally by doing work, which as you said we avoid like the plague, work isn’t good karma. Hmm all right I think that your mom won’t appreciate me saying that to you. Better if you stick with Jesus maybe?”

“Where is mom?”

The question threw Jade off balance a little, it wasn’t time yet to take her to the hospital, Nora had said to wait a while yet, just until they had cleaned Sarah’s father up a little, wiped the blood from his face.

“Your mom will be back soon, she had to go out and do some things. What am I not entertaining you? All right... we could play a game of cards but seeing as you only have one, I’ll have to think of something else.”

“I only have one card, because I found it in the park earlier on. It’s not mine. We don’t have cards in the house, Mam says that gambling is wrong.”

Jade was on the verge of disagreeing but thought better of it decided she had said enough already. She started jangling the bracelets on her wrists playing with them, gathering Sarah’s attention as she did.

“Why do you wear so many Bangles” Sarah asked innocently.

Jade placed her forefinger in between one of the silver bangles and ran it along the smooth soft skin, which was criss crossed with tiny white raised lines that only she knew were there. A long time ago she recalled sitting on her bed in her bedroom with the door closed and the lights off, moon shining in through her window creating blue shadows on the wooden floor beside her. In her hand a broken picture frame from one of the pictures she had painted a few months previously. The picture was painted in acrylics, was of a desert scene with rolling blue skies and yellow hills fading to the distance the colours emancipated with details of sketched stark trees with no leaves and a sand carved hut in the distance. She had thrown it against the wall in anger and frustration wanting to see it break, and then just as angry to see it destroyed in her hands. At her side on the little table by her bed lay a few pieces of plastic and a little piece of metal barely visible in the moonlight. She picked up between finger and thumb touching gently caressing her fingertips, testing its sharpness, trying to see if it would cut, carving little pieces of skin from the hands that would not create, would not punch back, the numb hands. She shook her head clouded with tears with a sudden desperate anger that held her prisoner. It usually left her empty but filled her right then right there alone seated in that room. She held her left wrist in her right hand squeezed it pressed it to bruise the skin make it realise what it was to feel, trying to make it real all the time trying to make it real. But nothing happened, void empty still silent, blue faced, not even the shadows were dark. She slowly and carefully slid it across like a scientist dissecting a lab rat, dissecting herself with the rusty razor blade. Nothing happened. Again pushing a little harder on the skin she slid it in straight lines, this time feeling what was like the scratch of a thorn from a rose bush but no blood. Again again again slash frantic quick then slow but without pressure, as though dancing with the blade in front of her veins to the beat of her heart. Anger that she couldn't do it, anger that she wanted to, anger that even the blade was without function without meaning she dragged it deep across her skin, trembling with pain, shaking with a sudden burst of euphoria, over make it over, she held it in her hands like a paint brush, creation filling her with desire to make it over, filling her with power to make her life her own by taking it. Again, and then in one diagonal line through the stripes she already cut she felt the pain. Then she watched as the sickening blood oozed its way from the straight lines dribbling down her arm. Before they woke up she put the bed sheets in the washing machine and washed the clothes she had been wearing. Tied the wrist up with a shoelace, stopped the flow of blood,

and dripped white salty tears on the wound. Couldn't even do that right. Every now and then she thanked the empty solitude for letting her go, for stopping her from doing it, and absentmindedly in interviews on TV could be seen touching her wrist where the white lines lay, just as she was doing right then in the kitchen through the bangles, seated with Sarah.

“Why do I wear the bangles Sarah? I would have thought that was obvious” Jade replied leadingly while the little girl took a few seconds to ponder the enigmatic woman.

“Well you heard the noise they made in the car, the jingle jangle? And you know I am a blond, well geography was never my middle name, so tending as I do to get lost in shows, at openings and what not, my agent, who is always fond of talent spotting for photo shoots decided I should wear a bell, so he could find me where-ever I go, but a bell is just so passé this year, so I'm working with the bangles. They're a little more discrete don't you think. Say kid would you like one? Go on try one on. Although they are probably a little big for you.”

Sarah shook her head, she didn't like to wear jewellery didn't see the point of it she didn't like too much clutter.

“Maybe sometime when I'm older. Think I'm a little young to be wearing bracelets? Where did mam go to?”

“She'll be back soon don't worry. In the meantime how about we play a game, all we need is some paper and pencils. You have some in your room? Good, well you go get them and I'll make myself a cup of coffee like you suggested earlier on.”

Sarah scampered off to her room while Jade went over to phone her mother to check if she could bring the little girl to the hospital. Jade could feel something bordering on resentment or anger exuding from the little girl every time she said the word mam. Jade had just replaced the receiver on the phone when Sarah returned holding markers and sheets of pure white paper almost as large as she was. Sarah jumped up onto one of the wooden chairs and spread the paper out all over the kitchen table. Then instructed Jade that it would help to make coffee if she plugged the kettle in. Sarah took the markers out of the packet where they were arranged in the colours of the rainbow, then looked up proudly at Jade when the table was laid. Jade walked over to her, and was careful not to stand too near as she explained they were going to draw

people they knew, but only a bit of the body each. Both would draw the head then fold over that part, making it hidden, before swapping the papers to draw in the body and swap and so on until the drawing was finished. For a few quiet minutes the sketching and swapping continued, every now and then the silence broken by giggles from Sarah. Finally the drawings were completed, and swapped and returned to their owners. Jade opened hers, it was entitled, Mrs Menton, after her old English teacher she explained, before laughing at just how accurate it was, then Sarah opened hers, and Jade started laughing,

“Its hideous isn’t it, I tell you that head better not be mine. I forgot to tell you to put a title on that monster. Ughh”

“Its not a monster, that’s my dad’s head.” Sarah said indignantly, Jade suddenly fell silent.

“I see where you get your looks” she said finally, before smirking at the child.

“And speaking of your dad, there is something I have to tell you” she began before noticing and almost unperceivable shudder of Sarah for whom a thousand meanings were running through her mind, something I have to tell you, how many times at night had she wished some-one would come in like something out of a sitcom or a cardboard soap opera and tell her that, and tell her he was dead, wasn’t coming back, wouldn’t be in her room again. Then people would love her, they’d have to, they’d have to feel sorry for her, how many times had she wished she never had to see him again, before cursing herself in her prayers then later that night, honour thy father and mother they told her at mass fifth commandment, the book of Exodus. Click and she could hear the latch turn again, not the first time, not from the last time but from every time. Sarah all of a sudden was trapped in that room all over again; a sudden uncontrollable anger came over her. She started grinding her teeth, and pressing her fingernails into her hands, keep control she told herself.

“Sarah are you okay? Listen honey its not bad news, its about your father, he was involved in an accident earlier on today, was in hospital when your mother was phoned to say that you were in the police station, so she had to collect you and then go to the hospital,” already Jade could see Sarah’s cheeks becoming redder.

Gone to the hospital, left her on her own, gone to the hospital to visit *him* left her at home with a stranger, some loon of a woman, someone she never met before.

“Sarah, listen to me its alright, your mom just phoned up to say for you to come visit in the hospital, that your dad is going to be alright, she was trying to protect you

didn't want you getting upset after the day that you had today" Jade said trying to calm Sarah down.

She reached over to put her hand on the girl's arm, immediately Sarah jumped back in her chair and stood back shaking with anger, staring bullets of hate into Jade's eyes. Trying to protect her, where was she when he was when he was in her room. When he smiled at her and came into her room, she didn't want to think about it, didn't want to give him the satisfaction that she might remember that he might win because he was stuck lodged like a virus in her thoughts. Where was she when Sarah lay silent in her room clutching Del praying for forgiveness? Where was she? Sarah could feel an angry burning pain in her stomach wanted to escape, but something was making her stand still, stopping her from going into her room. Something, the same something, that made her say nothing. Something that made her dull, and stole the crunch out of each thought and the thud out of each heartbeat. The same something, some called it honour, the same something that made her stand still, made her silent. Jade watched the anger dull in the dry air-conditioned air, and shakes turn to a tremor, she saw something in Sarah's eyes that made her feel distinctly uncomfortable. Something very old, something in those eyes, that otherwise made them beautiful for that moment made them seem horribly old, horribly dead and glassy like a doll's all knowing all seeing dead eyed stare. She walked over to where Sarah was, and as she got nearer she could sense the girl back off by inches.

"You don't have to go see him if you don't want to. It's all right, your mother will understand. She just wanted you to come in now because he is doing better, didn't want you to see him before in case it upset you."

Jade could see the knuckles in Sarah's fingers whitening and her jaw tense and untense momentarily as though she was fighting against herself.

"Is it the boy, is it seeing his face, is that upsetting you, you can talk about it, he's dead. He can't hurt you."

Jade said searching for the words to pull the child out of the girl. The boy, Peter Jones, his eyes dancing like headlights flooding her thoughts, their hands on her body, Paul closing the door behind him, Paul in the hospital with her, and he was going to be as alright as Peter was dead. He can't hurt you Jade was saying, can't hurt you; the words were cutting her concentration as she struggled to tame the wild anger. Wasn't going to be like them, wasn't going to end up like them, love one another, honour thy father and mother, honour thy father. Angry tears started to dribble down her cheeks

burning them while her jaw stayed clenched. Couldn't hurt you., what would Jade know about that, what would any of them know, why couldn't she tell them. Once, a sudden flash, just once in the hallway she remembered talking to Nora her mother trying to tell her something, while she knelt over the toilet scrubbing it clean and she remembered the look that her mother gave her and the words she fired back, called her vulgar, called her ungrateful, a little troublemaker. Either she goes or I do, the words came back and back in her head with every tear that escaped from her eyes. She never cried in public, never not even that day at school when she slipped on a piece of orange peel in the playground and slit open her knees, so brave they called her. But the cuts healed, the thoughts wouldn't leave her, wouldn't let her sleep at night. She started shaking her head,

"Its not the boy its not him its not him" she said through sobs trying to make the words come out, trying to get control of her little body. Jade could feel her chest grow heavy with anger with the slow pain of one who is completely helpless to aid another in distress. Part of her knew she had to tease it gently out of the little girl whatever it was, part of her just wanted to give her a hug and tell her the world was full of Christmas and summer time and bright days and all the things that six year olds should expect.

"You don't have to be afraid. You can say what is wrong with you, I won't tell anyone, no-body just you and me, you can trust me Sarah. Tell me what is wrong with you," Jade said in the quietest voice she could manage, like a hymn or a prayer to a loved one, barely audible to Sarah.

All the time unable to reach out and touch her.

"He, its not them, I don't want to see him I don't want to see him. I want him to stay in the hospital, both of them she never helped, never. Sat here reading the papers, sat here. Reading. He was, he came upstairs," the tears were coming thick and fast, as she rubbed at her eyes again and again, trying to stop the flow, in a manner that suggested she was used to it.

Her words had a dreamlike quality as though she had practised telling some one before, but couldn't.

"You don't have to come to the hospital to see your father that's alright. They're not going to be angry," Jade said and immediately regretted it watching the girl's reaction, watching her lurch.

What had that prick done to her, she was angry, wanted to tear the words out of Sarah take them right to her father in the hospital and choke both parents, but couldn't.

"At the night time, he sends me to my room all the time, I try to be quiet I do,. I turn the television down when he comes home, I never have friends around, I do my homework, I get good grades you know, I try I do, but sometimes, I drop things I run he hears me he shouts they shout, and he sends me to my room and then" the words were coming out in stifled gasps of air, in anger in fear and then she suddenly stopped talking. Remembering the sound of his footsteps in the corridor, she always sensed when he was near, before she could even hear him, there was a loose floorboard just outside. Could hear him breathing, stood on the yellow and blue patterned carpet outside. Sometimes Nora came to the rescue, said to leave it, to leave Sarah, sometimes she'd wait till he got home and tell him and tell him, it all came back again, either she goes or I do. Sarah slumped to the floor unable to say anymore, unwilling to get trapped in those thoughts again, started scratching at her arms on her legs, leaving red raised lines on her limbs again and again. Jade darted over to her had seen enough, and grabbed her flailing arms and held her close and rocked her as she cried and coughed up angry tears. In a whisper she started telling her not to be afraid, telling her to calm down, trying not to cry herself. Then her watch started to buzz again, Sarah was startled and felt it against her skin and she jumped up. Suddenly aware again of where she was, and wiped under her eyes and pushed and patted the hair from her eyes.

"That's probably my mother, we should go now, they'll be waiting for us at the hospital" she said in a voice that almost sounded normal again.

Then Sarah looked across the tablet at the pictures they had drawn, till her eyes rested on the pizza box on the sideboard.

"You wanna bring the end of the pizza with us to eat in the car?" Jade asked treading carefully around the little girl.

"We can eat in your car" Sarah enquired ears pricked up.

"Sure eat drink," she was about to say smoke etc but cut herself off, "do whatever we want, its not my car, I got it free, sponsored to drive it around town. Imagine they think people see me drive it and everyone else will want to too!" she said trying to lift the mood and watched as a smile as beautiful as any she could ever hope to paint passed over the little girl's face, like rays of sunlight passing though fast moving clouds.

“Just like the buzzing watch? But not the bangles, I think they’re a bit what was the word you said, *Passé* even a six year old knows that!” Sarah smirked before packing up the pizza to take in the car to the hospital.

Driving to the hospital Jade took a glance in her rear view mirror and saw what looked like a perfectly normal six-year old girl munching on some slices of cold margherita. She was lost in thought, looking out the window pausing momentarily to stick her sticky fingers out of the window and feel the breeze just as Jade had told her to on the drive to the apartment. Jade was thinking all the time thinking, driving on autopilot wondering what to say. What to say to Nora, and how to say what she wanted to say. It was all too eerie for her liking. She recollected telling Sarah about good karma, put good in you’ll get good out, she remembered believing like Sarah in heaven and hell and every god damn thing they told her. Seen and not heard, silent or not believed. What was she going to tell Nora? Maybe it was just the shock of seeing that dead boy, perhaps the grief, the shock was manifesting itself in the outburst she had just witnessed. In the back of the car it was hard to imagine the sweet-faced kid was out of control with rage a few minutes previous. The first dead body the kid had ever seen perhaps that was all there was to it, first time Jade had seen a dead body it freaked her out for a few days. Well not the first time, not the very first time, but when her uncle’s body had grown stiff and waxy, when they went in with the rest of the family to send him off and kiss him goodnight one final time, that’s when it hit her he was dead. That she was going to be safe. Before then she didn’t think of him as being dead, only stopped, only still and covered in blood. Jade crept quickly and silently back up to her bed that night all those years ago, before everyone else was awoken by the shot, came into the other part of the house, and started calling all the alarms. Jade was asleep when they came into her room the next day to tell that her uncle was dead. Told her it was an accident. Accident! Jade took another glance at Sarah; she looked so familiar, her mannerisms, her silence. Accident her parents told the children in the farmhouse, just like the accident that happened to Sarah’s father perhaps. Perhaps. Who can really tell? Just keeping the world in harmony, only trying to appease the forces of Mother Nature.

CHAPTER 12

Honour among thieves

The front of St. Michael's precinct looked like a gothic church, grey with pointed arches, and too many windows. There were stone steps leading up to the main entrance, and camped outside were clusters of people with cameras and mobile phones, waiting for some action, waiting to see what was going to happen to James Murdock, to see why he had been arrested, or if the cops had even managed to arrest him this time. The last time they had Murdock in custody, it was for a different reason. Detective Sanchez, a rising star in the department was making a case against some local hoods for drug pushing. It was hinted at in leaks to the newspapers that he had a supergrass in his corner, and that some of the major players in the city would be going under. Murdock, who Sanchez had mistakenly thought was just another hood, had been feeding him all kinds of information, when robberies would take place, which would be involved, who they knew where they went. Sanchez was making arrests almost on a daily basis, and as a by-product making a name for himself in the papers. His supergrass's name was not released to the press, it was a private deal between himself and Murdock, arranged some month's previously when Murdock had been found to be in possession of more coke than Cyrano De Bergerac could hope to powder his nose with. In return for not being arrested Murdock told Sanchez all he knew about the deals of the city, who the main players were and who they liked to play with. He was somebody that Sanchez at times pitied and at other times held in contempt, some bum of the street with no morals and no mind. An easy target. Then as one by one the bigger fish in the city got reeled in by the force, Sanchez and the rest of the media couldn't help but notice, that the banks were still getting done over and the kids were still getting their teenage kicks at the weekend. There was something missing somebody that Sanchez had missed. He had given Murdock immunity in return for his help, which at the time he thought necessary because it would be more than Murdock's life was worth if they found out who was grassing them up. Sanchez figured Murdock wouldn't live long once they found out. And yet still after all the months that Murdock had been feeding him information no attempts had been made on his life. Then one day, Sanchez remembered opening the newspapers and saw Murdock making the front pages. He was at the opening of a

hotel he had just purchased, was wearing a tailored suit, and talking to all the heads of the city. Murdock, the same Murdock that shuffled into Sanchez's office every Monday evening, wearing Nike tracksuit bottoms and an old red sweater, and some battered trainers, stinking of whiskey. His face was grinning out at Sanchez's holding up the scissors to cut the ribbon of a new hotel with gambling facilities, the Pink Flamingo it was called. Sanchez's face dropped when he saw that picture, as everything fell into place, Murdock was using him, wanted to be caught, wanted to feed him information so he could take about the local bosses because it meant that all of his opposition was effectively taken out by the police. Murdock didn't have to waste one of his lowlife hoods putting the spooks on them. Sanchez had helped him do it, had even given him immunity from prosecution. The headlines on the papers the next day tore Sanchez apart, for his incompetence, Murdock even had the nerve to sell his story or person "x"'s story of how he fooled the cops and got them to do his bidding to the tabloids, just to rub his nose in it. Sanchez's star got shot down in no time, he was the joke on every talk show, the name became a by word for sucker in the coming weeks, and Sanchez ended up with a desk job. This Peter Jones case, the search for a missing child was his first breaker back into real detective work, and he had Murdock in his custody, this time he wasn't letting him go, this time he wasn't going to lose.

Winter and Sanchez were having a conference in the hallway, as Michael Darcy strode past into the interview room to have a chat with Murdock. Winter was just after talking to one of the kids about Peter Jones, she had been filled in on exactly what kind of a boy he was. She told Sanchez how he spent his evenings drinking cider with a gang of other boys in the park, that he had been suspended from his school on several occasions, that he used to teach them card tricks and was suspended for taking money off kids in the playground during doing what he called magic on them. For a little extra drinking money they used to steal bags, purses, anything and everything that they could get their hands on. Used to knock windows in when they got bored, mug joggers for their stereos and walkmans, they were the kings of the park, and Peter was a prince among them. Winter explained these details to Sanchez and then told him that this must explain why Peter was in the park so late that night, but why he had gotten shot, was still a mystery. She had been sat listening to the child in front

of her telling her of all his crimes and misdemeanours in glorious detail, as though he expected to be graded on it. The boy took out cigarettes and started smoking as she listened, knowing he was waiting for the shock reaction from her. She decided it was better to let him talk than get on the wrong side of him; he didn't look like he needed parenting any longer.

“So after me an’ Pete sorted it out, he says he’s goin home to his mam and dad. Cause he always did never stayed out the night. Didn’t want them getting suspicious or nuttin. Then we sees on the news today about this little saint of a kid getting shot in the park. That was Peter our peter, “ he said voice a little shaky, masked with false confidence, “ and he got shot.”

Then he looked wistful for a second,

“got shot. Yeah, nobody else got shot. Peter was cool.”

Real cool Winter thought real cool six foot under. Then she stood up, and asked for Marge to arrange a place to stay for the night, and sent the rest of the boys into the waiting room till she could find some-where for them to stay. Moment’s later she walked down the corridor to tell them the bad news, but the room was empty, even the magazines on the table were vanished.

Sanchez had a brown envelope in his hands and opened it as Winter was telling him all she had learned about Peter. It was the ballistics report, he skimmed through it, the make and mark of the gun, the bullet entry wound, the powder that matched both gun to bullet and gun to victim and then finally the fingerprints that were found on the gun. There were two sets of prints, both of which matched two previous offenders on the police records. One a man in his thirties, previous conviction for possession of stolen goods, served six months years ago, brown hair, medium build, went by the name of Andrew Paul Rivera. Sanchez skimmed through the report to the description of whom the other prints belonged to. Made a match to some one who had been picked up for petty larceny before, and aggravated burglary, was aged in late twenties, Sanchez’s face fell when he read this. He took out the picture and showed it to Winter, it was of a handsome sharp jawed man with jet black hair and ears that rose in points framing high cheek bones.

“You see who the prints match?” he asked Winter frowning with anger.

She shook her head, it wasn't Murdock, and so what were they going to do now? Send somebody off to pick up this guy Angelo Deville and see what he knew. She could feel the case slipping through their fingertips. Michael Darcy the assistant DA was talking to Murdock right now, probably selling his soul, for a chance at the candidacy and some brownie points with the local businessmen.

"They got these back quick smart didn't they" Sanchez mused in a conspiratory voice as he leaned against the wall, one hand on the side of his face.

Winter stood beside him not making eye contact.

"You mean?" she asked.

"You know what I mean, haven't seen Darcy move so quickly since the Waters dinner, when he backed outta that room quicker than a rat from a sinking ship."

He said this in slow angry words, still rubbing the sides of his jaw with his hand. Winter knew exactly what he meant, they had gotten the prints back much faster than expected, with no sign of Murdock on the gun and Darcy in talking with him as they spoke, she knew it was looking like a cover-up. There was just no way that he would not have left a trace on the gun, it was found in his office drawer. She started absently mindedly playing with the button that the old lady had given her earlier on that day and kept focussed looking down the corridor as she tried to work out what their next move would be. The two glass reinforced doors of St. Michael's opened, letting in a gust of flashbulbs and a flurry of questions, and through the doors a tall man with dark hair and a well tailored navy suit walked in smooth comfortable steps. Winter looked at the photograph in her hands, nudged at Sanchez and both looked up at the man who had walked over to talk with Marge at the reception desk. Both of them stared at him and Winter's eyes widened before she decided to go over to the desk to talk with Angelo.

"I have come here to bail out a Mr. James Murdock m'am. I believe you have him in your custody?" Angelo said to Marge while smiling at her, making eye contact, and generally distracting her, while he leant over the counter.

Angelo was in a very good mood. He knew Tramery was being arrested for the robbery, and was hoping maybe they were going to rope Jimmy in on that one too. He knew that their code, and the fact that he was practically family to Jimmy would mean that his name would not be mentioned, so he was going to be free to take the reins

from Jimmy who would have to lay low even if they were letting him out on bail. Angelo started playing with one of the cufflinks on his suit while waiting for Marge to check through her files. The cufflinks on his suit were silver, and had a simple design cut into their flat faces. The design was of three interwoven circles, had been given to him by Jimmy. He told Angelo they meant he had been taken into the business had joined their inner circle. The fact that two of the circles on the cuff links were slightly bigger than one in the middle was because they stood for the father mother and child. Paul had a similar pair except his cuff links had three interwoven circles, and Jimmy hadn't given them, some old boss of Paul's had sometime the year before. Paul never mentioned what his cuff links stood for, said that it was an old family tradition, something that was not important for Angelo to understand. But now Angelo knew that he was part of a family, and should look after the other members as though they were his own blood, and in return expect nothing less from all the others. A lopsided grin crept over Angelo's face as he remembered how earnest Jimmy was when he told him this. Even Jack hadn't been given the cuff-links and he really was family to Jimmy, maybe not through blood but he was Jimmy's nephew in law, thanks to having married Jimmy's niece. Angelo didn't know what had happened, but he knew better than to mention Jimmy's niece in his or Jack's company. He also knew that Jimmy didn't respect Tramery any longer. Two weeks beforehand when they had been plotting the robbery and Angelo mentioned that it would be more secure if they knew that they could pin the robbery on some-body else. Jimmy had laughed while he was sitting on his leather chair, said that there was no way he could cry wolf at the station again, not after what had happened with Sanchez. So Angelo started naming off some other local hoods that had fallen out of favour for Jimmy to nail the job on. He named one guy who was dealing on their streets, and who was turning card tricks at the club, cheating the black jack tables. Jimmy nodded his head in agreement; he didn't mind the kids who were trying to muscle their way into his turf, hell that was how he came into power. The wise guys who thought they could swindle him, thought *they* could cheat Jimmy Murdock, well he had no time for them.

"Forget about those guys Angelo, I've got them taken care of. There are some things that you just can't trust the boys in blue to do for you, know what I'm saying Angelo?"

Jimmy was going to take care of that business, but Angelo also picked up on the fact that Jimmy was worried that it was his own nephew Jack Tramery who could be

behind the Blackjack fraud, and he didn't want anyone else involved. Jimmy was maybe beginning to distrust Jack, which was where Angelo stepped in.

“And what about Jack... Jimmy what about Jack, that guy is getting sloppy in his work,” Angelo had enquired.

Then had told Jimmy how it might be good for Jack, might make him wise up a little, take a little more responsibility for his actions if he thought there might be repercussions for his actions. Like if they got caught. Like if he took the fall for job. At first he didn't think that Jimmy would like the plan, but after looking at Angelo with a strange almost fatherly look in his eye he finally decided that it would be best to go along with it. It was that easy Angelo remembered.

“I like your suit Mr...” Winter commented as she walked over to the reception desk, much to Marge's discontent, who was trying to drag out finding Murdock's file for as long as possible, and was claiming not to be able to find it, even though it was the first one through her fingertips. Marge wanted to keep the handsome young man in front of her to herself for as long as humanly possible. Angelo turned his gaze from Marge to Det. Winter.

“Mr. Angelo Deville at your service m'am” he replied proffering his hand for her to take, “Thank you for your complement, its most kind, most kind indeed. I got this suit made for me recently.”

Winter looked up and down appreciatively at him while he grinned back, then she nodded her head, as though in awe.

“Sure looks like it was hand tailored Mr. Deville” she said finally, and placed one of her hand's in the pocket of her suit as she stood back and played with the button in her pocket.

“Call me Angelo Ms... it is indeed hand tailored. An original from top to toe, nothing else like it in this city. Had it hand made and sent over here from Italy. Glad you like it, Ms. What did you say your name was?” he asked her.

“You can call me detective inspector Winter, and” she proffered her hand out to him which he took, even though he was a little surprised, “and I am arresting you on suspicion of robbery, and of being an accomplice to murder and of obstructing police business. Mr. Deville”.

Then she cuffed him, while he stood shell-shocked and he was led by one of the fresh-faced cops to his cell after being printed and searched. Sanchez had been watching all of this with great interest, he was happy to have made another arrest, but the prints on a gun weren't enough for a conviction, and there was no way they could prove he was involved in the robbery. At that moment Winter took out a navy button from her pocket and held it up to the light for Sanchez to see,

“It's a one of a kind. Only five like it in the country, one, that you see in my hand, and the other four on Mr. Deville's jacket. I got it off that old bag lady, Catherine, who ripped it off Mr. Deville's jacket while he and three other men dressed in green boiler suits ran through the park at roughly half past twelve last night. I'd say we're on our way to a conviction now Sanchez!” then she left to find a plastic bag in which to place the button and proudly mark it people's exhibit number five.

In the meantime the assistant district attorney and Murdock were having an animated discussion in the interview room across the hall. Sanchez watched the outside of the door, trying to imagine what was going on inside, what the two men had to say to each other. On the other side of the doorway, Murdock was stood propped against the wall while Michael Darcy was seated on the edge of the table; there was silence in the room.

“Listen Darcy, I thought we had an arrangement. Your boys leave me alone, and I turn the heat down until after the elections, that way everyone is a winner. That was the deal wasn't it? So why all this tonight. Why you and your boys drag me down here, I'm a busy man you know. You want to start something is that it?”

Murdock was looking at Darcy who had his eyes on the ground. The room was full of hidden tensions and mistrust.

“Listen to me Murdock, you're not making this easy for me. Not making this easy at all. You are here because somebody phoned up this station and said that you were behind the robbery, and you left your fuckin gun in the office. They're not going to find any prints on the gun okay? Maybe the other guy's prints will be found but not your prints. That's the best I can do for you. We don't have much of a case, but you are getting sloppy. And I'm not going to have you making a fool outta this department.”

“Michael Michael Michael, is that any way to talk to an old friend?” Murdock said in a friendly voice, while walking over to where Darcy was sitting.

He put his hand on Darcy’s shoulder. Darcy bristled,

“Look, I don’t like being made to look a mug. You were supposed to take those paintings and leave them some-where, fit the guy up and let us string him up for the media to find. That was the deal, nothing else. So maybe I take a little heat while the media start witch-hunting, but then we find the paintings and bring them back nothing else happens right? I’m the hero and the people are happy with their police force again. That was the deal Murdock that was what we arranged.”

“Listen to me Michael, that is still the deal. I have always appreciated the kindness of strangers and you are no exception. You know how easy it is for me to get somebody fitted up for a crime, haven’t forgotten that Thatcher guy have you? We stole the paintings, I have them in my possession and I even have a guy who you can fit up for the job so there is no problem Michael, the deal stands.”

Darcy jumped up off the table and started pacing around the office in an agitated manner, every so often running his fingers through his hair.

He was muttering to himself, and then he walked over back to where Murdock was stood,

“No problem you say no fucking problem, and what do you call a dead kid Murdock what do you call a dead fucking kid. I cannot have another investigation, what if they find out what really happened last year. They are going to lynch me for this, do you understand? They are going to bring me down for this, and if I go down you go down, you understand, no more gambling licences, no more turning a blind eye to you and your business dealings, you understand that Murdock, the deal does not stand any more, its as dead as that kid in the park”

Murdock stood up straight and reached his hand over to Darcy’s face, tilting his chin upwards so they were staring directly at each other.

“You are not a stupid man, and neither am I. You think that I would let this happen, after I’ve spent so long working to get this far ahead. After all I did for you during the David Water’s case. The deal stands, and it will continue to stand until I say so, do I make myself clear Mr. Darcy?”

Darcy started trembling, and reluctantly nodded his head while staying silent.

“Good I’m glad you agree. Now back to business, the boy is not a problem, he is a solution. The fact that he was in the park adds to the beauty of the deal. We get the

guy I've set up to take the fall for the shooting, you'll find his prints on the gun, you *will* find witnesses who will say they saw him at the scene. And you will find the paintings at his apartment block. I also know a young man who was involved in the proceedings, he's very loyal to the family, he will tell everything you need to know about it and will give evidence against my patsy. You understand that in return for this, he will receive a warning and of course be on a peace bond, nothing more. I will be released immediately, and you will tell the press that my reason for being here was to aid the investigations and to bail my nephew out. I believe you have him in the interview room next door, his name is Jack Tramery. You understand all of that Mr. Darcy?"

The assistant D.A. nodded his head while Murdock lifted both of his hands to Darcy's face and squeezed his cheeks.

"Who said you weren't a man of the people. Now go do your job and protect and serve Michael, protect and serve."

With that the assistant D.A. stood up and left the room. The first person he saw when he closed the door was Detective Sanchez.

Sanchez had been waiting anxiously outside the door. Darcy had been in there too long to be reading the guy his rights, he knew that something was up. Darcy started to lecture him, about spending too much time investigating the robbery, about not finding the boy until some girl happened upon him in the park, about bringing in suspects without enough evidence and about wasting valuable resources on a witch-hunt against Murdock. He told Sanchez he was lucky that Murdock wasn't bringing charges against him for harassment and said that they didn't have enough evidence against him to detain him any longer. Throughout this monologue Sanchez gritted his teeth and said nothing, he expected nothing less from a man who would be a candidate. Then Darcy enquired about the two other suspects they had detained, and told Sanchez he needed to have a word with one of them and that the other should be arrested. This surprised Sanchez, he wondered at how the Darcy knew about them and then remembered that Darcy had just come out of an interview with Murdock, doubtless to say this time the words would not be on tape. Then Darcy turned to leave and interview the other suspect, said he would do this on his own since Sanchez could not be trusted or so it seemed, finishing the diatribe by saying that,

“You just make sure you nail that bastard. Make sure we have a solid case against him. I have a feeling my guy will testify against him, and one last thing search his apartment, I have a feeling that the paintings will be there, you have his address? Get it off Marge at the desk, his full name is Angelo Deville”

Sanchez shook his head, so much for honour among thieves, so much for the family. He looked at the blazered and decorated men in the photographs in front of him that hung on the wall to celebrate their achievements, so much for the uniform. He took the car keys out of his pocket and prepared to open the two front doors of the precinct, aware of the army of cameras that were awaiting him, aware they were ready to pounce. As he closed the doors behind him another door at the end of the corridor inside the building opened.

Tramery looked up from where he was sat with his brief and to his surprise saw the assistant D.A. Michael Darcy walk in unaccompanied. Darcy smiled at him, and nodded good evening to his brief that stood up to shake his hand. He appeared to be calm and businesslike, Tramery was wondering what he wanted, why he was talking to a lowlife like himself. Did he know about the goods? Had somebody found the papers in the trashcan outside his house, had he found out about Tramery’s plans to blackmail him? Tramery turned to his brief and asked her to leave the room, said he could handle it, she whispered to him to remember to say nothing, that they could only hold him for a few more hours. Then she shook hands with Darcy again, evidently a little star struck at having met the up and coming assistant D.A. and left the room. Darcy walked over to the window behind Tramery and leant out the window ledge as he looked outside. He could see the lights of the city through the smoke rising in the distance from fires and industry, could hear traffic zoom past, hear alarms could hear the screech of police cars coming to the rescue, could hear the chatter of the journalists who were still camped outside waiting for titbits of information like parasites picking nits off larger animals.

“It really is a beautiful sight isn’t it? That’s what I used to think when I looked out my office window. Used to admire the beauty of the street lights, the sirens the sudden breaks of silence. Beautiful deep blue sky and twinkling flashing neon like shooting stars in the distance.”

Darcy walked back across the room slowly and carefully and sat on the edge of the desk furthest from Tramery.

“You’re a lucky man Mr. Tramery a very lucky man. A friend of yours I don’t need to say who do I? He has done you a favour, and if you play your cards right, you’ll be walking out of here tonight a free man. We have you for the robbery and for the shooting, correct.”

Tramery said nothing and nodded his head, very interested to hear where it was all going. He thought they had him set up, knew that Angelo was behind it, but couldn’t figure out what the assistant D.A. could want with him.

“We have a mutual friend, who we both owe favours to it would seem Mr. Tramery. In return for these favours, we have the benefit of making more friends and acquaintances. As of tonight Mr Tramery you are to become one of my new acquaintances, and as such will be able to introduce me to your other friends. Tell me all about yourselves, where you hang out what you do how you get your kicks and more specifically what you do in your spare time. I gather we are both art lovers Mr. Tramery. Yes I thought so. Yes you see already we have something in common.”

Darcy looked out at the window again; he barely seemed to be aware that Tramery was still in the room.

“You will of course be introducing me to your other friends. I imagine I might have quite a bit to learn from them, perhaps they too have an interest in art.”

Tramery didn’t reply but gave an almost imperceptible nod of the head.

“So tonight we are friends who shall be making new friends, and telling each other all about who we know, namely in your case a Mr. Angelo Deville, and namely what you both did last night. You understand Mr. Tramery?”

A sudden grin sprang up over Tramery’s face. Jimmy hadn’t been fitting him up he had been fitting Angelo up, Angelo wasn’t really family he was a business associate who was a little too ambitious it all made sense now. So concerned with details was he, he had missed the bigger picture. Now all Jimmy wanted from Tramery was a few right words and a little imagination. But first Tramery had to be sure they would not be bringing a case against him, did not want to end up in jail.

“Mr. Darcy I would not be one to refuse the hand of friendship, especially when you put it like that, but would that we were friends, I would most appreciate being in the position to also be able to watch the sky at night from my own home.”

“That goes without saying Mr. Tramery as I’m sure you can appreciate, has this conversation.”

With saying that the assistant D.A. took one last look out the window and walked out of the office, much to the delight of Tramery who now knew he was going to be a free man.

As Darcy walked down the corridor he nodded at detective Winter, and felt the chill of her gaze as he prepared to face the music outside of the precinct. She wasn’t happy at all, had been informed that Tramery was willing to talk about the robbery but only under the condition that he would not face prosecution. She tried to explain to Darcy that they had more than enough evidence to bring some sort of a case against Tramery but he would not listen. He said that she would have been better to mind her business and look into the Peter Jones case more thoroughly at the time, perhaps they wouldn’t have been in that situation if she had done her job properly. Winter opened the door of the interview room and nodded at Tramery’s brief to follow her in, and as she closed the door the two front doors of St. Michael’s precinct closed behind the assistant D.A. Outside the building Maria Thornton was stood shivering, angry at the turn that events had taken. Apparently it would be insensitive of the station to broadcast any of the material that she had been gathering because the little boy had turned up dead, and it was too soon for the interview with his parents. Too soon indeed, what did those old guys know about broadcasting. She noticed Michael Darcy walk out the door and signalled to Mike her cameraman to be at the ready. Darcy was standing at the top of the steps ready to fend off their questions. Everyone was silent, waiting with baited breath for some information.

“Today has been a very sad day for the officers of St. Michael’s precinct. Not since the David Waters case have we had such a gruesome murder of a child on our streets. The good men and women of this precinct have been working tirelessly to bring justice to the Jones family, and to find the man who did this deed.”

He paused just long enough to look dolefully into the lens of every camera he could catch his eye with. Then he looked wistfully into the distance,

“We take a lot of abuse on the chin, and this force has taken a lot of knocks in recent weeks, but it hasn’t stopped us doing the job, and working as hard as we can. I am happy to say that in spite of the negative media attention this hard work and diligence

has paid off. Right now in our custody we have the man responsible for the murder of Peter Jones, and for the robbery of the Jade Nix paintings from last night. His name I cannot release yet, but he is in his late twenties, dark haired and living in this district.”

There was a flurry of excitement; notebooks were taken out, editors phoned, and names taken down. Then came the questions,

“Do you mean that the two cases are linked, Mr. Darcy?”

He nodded his head, “Yes, the two cases are linked to each other, which means that though the force was criticised for not staying focussed on the Peter Jones case solely, it would seem that the initiative that certain officers showed in taking a more lateral approach to the case worked out.”

Darcy cocked his head at Maria Thornton when he said those words, both acknowledged what he meant by it. He didn’t want any more stories that the cops were trying to garner favour with the district attorney by only dealing with the bigger cases.

“Why have you arrested Mr. Murdock? Is he the man you have arrested for the murder?” a voice came from the back of the crowd.

“Mr. Murdock is not under arrest, he is merely at the station on family business, which I cannot delve into right now.”

“You mean he is aiding your investigations?”

There was a snigger through the crowd, the unsaid words being, like he aided Detective Sanchez.

“He is here of his own accord, I have no dealings with the man. He is here on family business not relating to this case.” Darcy replied, a little annoyed, “And if there are no more questions;”

The crowd started to bark questions that Darcy appeared to be oblivious to until Maria Thornton caught his eye again. They had a good working relationship; he knew he could trust her to get some good publicity.

“You seem to have solved the case of Peter Jones’ murder, and the robbery of the Jade Nix paintings in very quick time. Are we to assume that the paintings will turn up and you will be getting a conviction in such quick time. And that the fact the pace of your department seems to have picked up is not linked to the time of the year? The elections I’m sure are irrelevant Mr. Darcy.”

Darcy chuckled to himself, she was being intrusive, while still pointing out to the general public that he was a man who could get the job done, and might be running for office.

“All I can say is that an officer’s job is never done, and getting the job in hand done more quickly just leaves time on our hands to deal with other tasks. Thank you good night ladies and gentlemen.”

Then he walked down the stairs, pausing to touch Maria on the arm, in a gesture that meant if she wanted to keep getting information, there better be nice piece about him the next day. Then he got into a waiting police car and drove off. Seconds later all the cameras spun around from following Darcy’s car, to the front doors of the precinct where James Murdock was making his exit. On either side of him were two burly police officers to protect him; the sight was most unlike the assistant D.A.’s exit. Darcy had walked out of the precinct unguarded. The ripple of excitement present when Darcy had left the building was nothing compared to the wave of energy that swept of the crowd of journalists when Murdock was leaving the building.

“Were you arrested Mr. Murdock?”

“Were you speaking to Detective Sanchez?”

“Why were they questioning you Mr. Murdock?”

“Was it in relation to the Peter Jones case?”

“Were you involved in last night’s robbery?”

“Were you involved in the shooting?”

“Murdock why have you not been detained?”

“Do you feel that its police harassment to be pulled in for every major crime in the city?”

“Murdock are they revoking your licence for the Pink Flamingo?”

“Is it true Mr Murdock.”

“Over here, over here”

“Mr. Murdock turn over here to face the cameras over here Mr. Murdock.”

Murdock walked through the throng of lenses and local journos and paused just before he got into the car with darkened windows, which was waiting for him.

“I have been here to help out my family. As a decent law abiding citizen I am here to bail out a relation of mine who appears to have made a mistake and broken the law for the first time in his life,” Murdock assumed a doleful expression, “As you can imagine, this greatly upsets me that one of my family may have broken the law, and

he may bring shame onto my family,” the his face turned to a concerned expression, “But it is my duty as a loyal family man to forgive, and try to understand what has happened, and to do the best for my family and try to bail out my nephew. As you can understand I am greatly shocked and dismayed by his behaviour, and I cannot answer any more questions, thank you for your understanding.”

Murdock then got into the elegant black Mercedes and drove off into the night, leaving the journalists to fight over the rights to film him and his car. A scuffle ensued, with Mike who had been trying to break past the burly officers to get a better shot of Murdock getting his nose punched for the second time in one day. Maria threw her eyes to the heavens, wondering what had possessed her station to hire such an incompetent man and make her take him on. She took out some tissues from her handbag and then hailed a passing cab driver, instructing him to take both herself and Mike to the hospital, there was nothing else she would be able to do tonight.

It had been a long night and Tramery was still seated behind the desk in the interview room. Winter walked in for what she knew would be the last time that night and she was greeted with the smell of acetone in the air. She half-smiled at him then ran her tongue along the rough edges of her teeth then nodded at both the brief and Tramery. She placed a new tape into the recorder and went through the motions again. Ready to talk with Tramery and take his statement.

“So you have had time to discuss matters with your solicitor I take it?” she asked not waiting for a reply, then continued, “Last night between the hours of 10.30 and 1.30 this morning could you explain your whereabouts Mr. Tramery in detail if you please, try not to forget anything this time” she said with an air of frustration in her voice. Tramery’s brief looked surprised had he been listening to a word she had advised him? She frantically started whispering in his ear, telling him it was best to stay silent while he started to tell tales of nighttime capers dismissing her concerning with a wave of his hand and a cocky look in his eye.

“I drove along the highway to get to the back of the shopping precinct nearest the Muscat building, It was around half past eight, I met Angelo alone in the car park. He waiting for me in the van, he told me about the job he had planned and I told him I would drive him there. We drove around to the back of the Muscat building, it was dark, I think that some kids must have knocked out the light, been throwing stones at

it earlier on possibly. I parked the white van in front of the security camera in the laneway and Angelo climbed onto the roof of the van and used it to get up in through the window on the first floor of the building, we noticed it had been left open when we drove past earlier on that night.”

Tramery started tapping his fingers on the desk, trying to piece together a story that would be acceptable, but that would not result in any more casualties.

“Then Angelo climbed in the window, went through the fire escape doors up to the second floor where Darcy’s office is, and he picked the lock to get into the offices, knew that the paintings were in the safe so he didn’t take long to come back outside again.”

Winter and Tramery’s brief were watching him intently neither happy with what they were hearing.

“Interesting Mr. Tramery very interesting, and what about the four guys in the painter’s uniforms who were distracting the guards?” Winter asked.

Tramery feigned a surprised expression,

“I that is to say, myself and Angelo were at the back of the building, I have no knowledge of people getting in the front of the building perhaps that was Angelo’s doing. That’s the first I’ve heard of it Detective.”

“So what happened next Mr. Tramery?”

“We drove to the park, to dump the paintings in the river. Angelo was going to weight them with stones, so he could collect them later on tonight.”

“Why didn’t he just bring them home with him? Why the need to weight the paintings in the river, if there were only two of you involved surely there would be no problem splitting the difference?”

Tramery took his hands off the table and started rubbing his fingertips together under the table smiling through his eyes at Winter, she wasn’t going to make it easy for either of them.

“Well detective, we have such faith in your excellent department and their deduction skills, and as such were not willing to leave the valuable paintings where they could be found if either of us had our apartments searched today. Lucky that wasn’t it all things considered detective?”

Winter heard a knock on the door. She stood up and announced her leave to the tape recorder. The black spinning dots visible on the face of the recorder stopped moving. The little black circles in the centre of his eyes shrunk with concentration as Sanchez

explained to Winter that all the paintings had been discovered at Angelo's house, just as the assistant D.A. had anticipated. Then Winter squeezed his arm, could tell how disappointed Sanchez was. He had waited for so long for a chance to prove himself, and all he was being allowed to do was policing by numbers. She whispered something in his ear and then re-entered the interview room, breaking the volleys of abuse that Tramery's brief was giving him for not being able to keep quiet.

"You went into the park to dump the paintings am I correct Mr Tramery?"

"That's right"

"So can you explain why we have found all the paintings in Mr. Deville's apartment?"

"Can't trust anyone these days can you detective I'm sure you know that as well as I do. Perhaps he got a little greedy and decided to keep the paintings for himself."

"That why you are in here telling me all about the robbery he arranged Mr. Tramery?"

"Just doing my duty like any good citizen detective. Plus things are different seeing as like you pointed out there is the blood of a young boy to be accounted for."

Winter shifted uneasily in her chair then stood up and walked over to the window, wasn't looking out just wanted to stretch her legs, something was bothering her, she couldn't put her finger on it but something was bothering her. Darcy was Darcy, they were used to how he treated Murdock and the other reputable businessmen in the area, would expect nothing less from a would-be politician. Tonight he had been very quick to react to Murdock, very quick indeed, she wasn't able to piece together why time was of the essence, why the haste. Why was Murdock so valuable to Darcy, what did Darcy have on him, and how was it connected to the death of Peter Jones. She was lost in thought for a second, and then was startled by Tramery's voice from behind the table.

"So then as we were tying up the paintings Angelo heard a noise from the bushes, he was really jumpy that night, and he just shot the gun off right away, didn't even look to see what he was shooting. I can only guess that this was the bullet that hit that kid Peter Jones."

Then Tramery's voice changed, and sounded genuine for a second,

"if I had to have known then he had shot some-one, we would never have left that kid to bleed to death, wouldn't have left him die like that, shouldn't have had a gun with us didn't need a gun."

"So why did you take the gun then?"

“It wasn’t my idea, I didn’t even know they, Angelo that is had a gun till I heard the shot when I was sinking the bags”

“So you didn’t actually see either of the men shooting the gun.”

Tramery said nothing suddenly aware of his mistake.

“You said there was only you and Angelo in the Park tying up the bags, but now just now, and I have it on tape, just now you said I didn’t even know *they*. What did you mean by they?”

Tramery said nothing, he didn’t want to get Paul into trouble, not that he liked Paul, there was something that nobody could put their finger on, something dark about Paul that nobody liked, but he was part of their family.

“So there were only two of you in the park, just you and Angelo Deville, who you claimed not to know earlier on.”

“That’s because I don’t know him by that name we have a nickname for him, we call him” Tramery looked around the room for some inspiration, “ we usually call him” then he looked at the table tapped his fingers on it, “we usually call him woody” he said finally.

“Who is we Mr. Tramery?”

“Just me and my friends no-body in particular.”

“No-body you might have met last night perhaps.”

“That’s right.”

“Did you meet a Mr. Paul Rivera last night?”

“No I did not.”

“Really that does surprise me. I think you did meet him last night. I think that maybe you set the job up and you are trying to pin the blame on Angelo Deville, I think that the boy got in the way and you had Angelo shoot him I think you made your cousin Paul take the paintings back outta the river and that you were surprised by Angelo later that night, I think that you then had Angelo cut Paul up to deflect suspicion from you Mr. Tramery, your own family had him cut up like that and all with your son watching in the car Mr. Tramery, your own son.”

Tramery said nothing for a second then jumped out of his chair. What did she know about his son, what did she know about how he treated his family? His brief grabbed him made him sit down and started whispering in his ear again as he took slow deep and angry breaths.

“You have found the paintings at Angelo’s flat, I assume you will find the blade he used to cut Paul there too, and you will find Angelo’s fingerprints on the gun, I’m assuming you have the gun. I was only the driver last night nothing more. And there is no evidence to point otherwise detective,” Tramery said finally after recovering his disposition.

“You care about your family Mr. Tramery?”

“Of course I do.”

“You say you didn’t order the attack on Paul?”

“I did not detective.”

“If you care so much why have you not asked how he is then Jack?” Winter said conclusively knowing she had touched a nerve with Tramery and then turned the recorder off. The interview was finished for now.

CHAPTER 13

The sins of the father shall be revisited

While waiting for his aunt to finish his shift at the hospital Jack had grown tired of building houses of cards and had taken momentarily to trying to guess what the mute speakers on the television were trying to say. He started imagining the dialogue to put with the faces, imagining voices to put to the expression. There was another news report on, this time showing pictures and paintings drawn by some weird looking blond chick, then it showed the outside of what looked to be a cathedral or some official building, and cut to some well dressed man in a suit walking out of the building to get into his car. He was able to guess it was about the robbery that had happened the night before. He reached to the ground and fished out the plastic bag inside of the canvas one that had his dad's name on it. There were papers inside, Jack wondered if they were the ones from his aunt's house if his father had taken them the night before. He told Jack that he had only gone inside to write a note to his aunt, but perhaps he actually stole the papers from Therese's room, to hide the evidence. Jack pulled out the papers, with angry fingers and left them sitting in his lap, careful not to attract attention didn't want people to know what he was looking at. The two plastic doors of the emergency department swung open and unseen to him, the blond who had just been on his silent TV walked in holding the hand of the little girl Sarah he had spent the earlier part of the day.

Jade stood with Sarah at the desk and asked the friendly rosy-cheeked lady what room Paul was in. Jade was a little reluctant asking for him, wasn't sure it was the best idea but knew that Sarah had to see her father and that was a right that Jade couldn't take from her no matter how much she wanted to protect Sarah. Jade wanted to have a few choice words to Sarah's mother Nora. Sarah's eyes were open wide with trust, she was holding onto Jade's hands for all she was worth, trusting the lady that she had only just met with all of her private thoughts. In the car on the way to the hospital Sarah had been thinking about what Jade had been telling her about Karma, how if she did good maybe she would get good back. Sarah made up her mind that everything that her father did was not his fault maybe it was partly hers. She decided

to be a better person, said just as much to Jade who turned the radio down when Sarah started to talk to her.

“When you were talking about Karma, does that mean that we deserve what happens to us?” she asked innocently enough.

Jade tilted the rear view mirror to see Sarah’s eyes, bitterly regretting having started up the conversation at all with Sarah. She knew the little girl’s mind as well as her own, knew that she was trying to find some kind of logic some kind of reason to take away her anger, to let her take the blame to take the guilt.

“I think that we just try to do the best we can and at the end of the day hope that the good will win. Hope that justice of some description will happen.”

She cocked her head around to face Sarah in the back of the car, saw the expression in her eyes.

“ You don’t have to visit your father if you don’t want to.”

Jade didn’t know what to say, what answers to give. She never had to face up to it at Sarah’s age. Her uncle made the decision for her took his own reasons to get to hell and back. Jade remembered his face his brown slow moving eyes, and how happy she felt. Had seen him pull the trigger. He didn’t have time to blink. She remembered walking down the stairs, dressed in her white nightshirt that came just below her knees. It was a warm night; she remembered the heat was almost suffocating her as she tried to sleep under the heavy cotton sheets. She was a few years older than Sarah was now, had heard something downstairs and was frightened, because the rest of the family were on the other side of the house. The sitting room was full of old browned wooden furniture and ornaments; figurines of dancers startled mid-dance and animals feeding and grazing on coffee pot fields. His pipe was on a saucer balanced on one of the arms of the red cushioned chair. He was cleaning his gun with a pipe brush and a bottle of gin lay at his feet, was grumbling to himself. He didn’t notice her watching him. He held the gun to his face, looked down the metal barrel appeared to be trying to clean it with a little white wire brush. She remembered the look of intense concentration on his face. Remembered the lines that sagged under his jaw, the stubble that grew in grey patches of different lengths on his cheeks, and the thick hair on his head that framed his narrow face. His brow furrowed deep and his eyebrows thick and angry. In the half-light there were traces of lines under his eyes and at the sides of his face lines that crinkled when he smiled. Except he never smiled, only the first time, that first time when he came into her room. He peeped his head around the

door and smiled at her. He was holding a white jacketed book in his hands, told her he was going to read her a story to help her get to sleep. She remembered how he made her laugh, how he talked to her as though she was old, and not some kid. Only nowadays he looked a lot older and she didn't laugh anymore; could hear her mother and father talking to the neighbours, worrying about her, how quiet she was. They said she was strange, the neighbours told her parents it was a phase that all kids went through it. Then breaking the darkness of the still sitting room all of a sudden she let a gasp of air out of her lungs, unable to keep quite any longer. He jumped in the chair, aware of her watching him and the gun went off. Just like that he was slumped in the chair, and blood gushing out dripping onto the carpet, splattered on the bottle of gin that he had kicked over, mingling with the alcohol in a foul smelling pool at his feet. She remembered watching the sight, with an immense feeling of satisfaction, remembered that her face her eyes were the last he saw. Then just as slowly she had crept back up the stairs, and covered her face with the still warm sheets. When they came in to wake her the next morning, her father and mother, both with long faces holding her hand as they told her he was dead, she started crying, couldn't help it trembling with relief it wasn't a dream. They hugged and held her, and told her that her uncle would be watching down on her from heaven. Heaven hah! She knew exactly to where the bullet had shot him. They never found out what had really happened and never told her what they thought was the truth, that he had killed himself, said it had been an accident. An accident just like what had happened to Sarah's father. Did she believe in Karma? The little girl still hadn't answered if she wanted to visit her father or not, and the car pulled up outside of the hospital, it was too late now to make a decision.

The woman at the desk gave Jade directions to the second floor and told her that only family would be able to go and visit Paul that she would have to wait downstairs. Then she buzzed up to the second floor to get Sarah's mother to come downstairs and bring her up. It was for security reasons the cops did not want too many visitors, they were afraid that some-one else might make another attempt on Paul's life. Seconds later Nora came rushing down the stairs and took Sarah in her arms and hugged and kissed the little girl till she was breathless. Jade watched silent, and wished both of them the best while she went to take one of the plastic seats that was in the corridor.

Couldn't bring herself to say anything, maybe there was nothing to say; maybe she was jumping to conclusions. Nora looked so relieved to see Sarah, and was running up the corridor hand in hand with her like she was all she had in the world. Jade abstractedly looked around her and noticed a young boy reading some papers intently on her left. There was an old bag lady, who looked familiar for some strange reason on her right. Jade took out a pen from her pocket and picked up one of the old magazines scattered on the chairs beside her. Out of habit waiting for aeroplanes to take off, or to land in little lounges dotted around the world she had taken to sketching the people she saw, to keep her mind active, to keep herself active. She observed the comings and goings of the hospital and shook the ink in the pen causing it to slowly run in the cartridges into little ripples that she used to blot and colour in the shading of her picture. Slowly the ink oozed out in little droplets flowing through the glass plastic tube. Slowly it coloured their faces, just as slowly as the red blood flowing through the plastic tube to feed Paul was sucking the life out of his face leaving it empty and void of colour.

The rooms had the same smell as the waiting room in the police station, like bleach or chloroform or something to cover the stench of decay. The shiny grey floor felt sticky under her school shoes, as she tried to mask the rubbery squeaks that her soles were making as they quickly side stepped and shuffled past the rows of sleeping patients. Her mother walked eagerly head pointed forward as she led them both through a maze of stairs beds and curtains. Outside Sarah could see that night time had fallen, and could almost hear its silent tapping on the outside of her window, softly touching the wind chime above the sill soothing her and Del awake at night to come watch the stars, to sink into new blue dreams of nighttimes.

“You have to be brave now” Nora said to her, straightening Sarah's uniform before they entered the room. She let go of Sarah's hand, and opened the door, leading them from the dark corridor to the bright room full of noise movement, beeps blips blinds blooms of dead flowers, and machines to match the hours with their own ticks tocks and wires that connected Paul to his own heartbeat, which moved in silent green waves across a black flickering screen. The lights were dancing in front of her eyes, like incense burning in rays through her senses stopping her from seeing him completely. She was aware that her mother moved in silent steps across the room to

move plastic chairs with plastic holes cut in their plastic backs beside the bed. She could see the glint of metal bars at either side of the bed, like a baby's prison cot. Noticed the metal bracelets connecting his wrists to the bars peeking out from under the solo sheet that covered him. Little disks of plastic dotted his chest, which was bandaged in white cotton sided with tape with wires passing over the cotton like telegraph wires in a sky full of cloud. She took a seat by her mother and watched as she took his hand in hers in a motion that looked like she was searching for treasure. Nora touched his cheek with the other hand, as lightly as though caressing a falling leaf. At the feel of her hand on his face his eyes opened momentarily, and he gazed hazily in her direction, tried to say something but couldn't seem to open his mouth. Sarah felt a hand on her shoulder, a cold hand from above. There was a woman in a white uniform talking to her mother said something about the effect an aesthetic. She looked at the woman, didn't look like an artist, didn't look like she was there to paint a portrait, what did she mean aesthetics. Then her skin felt hot and heavy again she could feel he was looking at her. His eyes, hated eyes that hid from her behind newspapers, behind lights that were never switched on, his eyes were looking at her from where he lay. Above his head Sarah could pick out a tiny metal object glinting in the light backed on a wooden cross. Honour thy father and mother. She met his gaze, looked through his eyes until she could see herself at the other side and fought to keep control of herself and the unwelcome tears that were springing in suppressed wells under her eyelids. He didn't move an inch in the bed, and in one fluid movement changed his gaze to Nora again, whom was still holding his hand shaking. The hand on Sarah's shoulder was squeezing her skin, felt warm and heavy at the same time, and then suddenly a face was bent down in front of hers. She was suddenly aware of eyes that were lined with mascara with a funny blue sheen on the lids looking at her and mouthing words that for that moment didn't make sense. Then she was led out of the room again and Sarah heard the click of the latch behind them as they walked down the corridor.

The woman in the white uniform picked out a packet of chewy sweets and held them out to Sarah who shook her head, she didn't eat sweets they were bad for you that's what her mother said. Anyway she didn't really feel hungry. The woman put her hand on Sarah's head when she told her this, almost immediately Sarah stepped out of

reach over to where the magazine rack was pretending to be interested in them, so as not to let the woman see she was avoiding her touch.

“You want to read this?” the Nurse asked holding up a comic.

Sarah shook her head indignantly.

“I don’t read them anymore, comics are for kids,” she said to the woman whose mouth rose at the sides almost into a smile.

“So perhaps you would prefer a magazine?” she asked again.

Sarah shook her head, didn’t like the magazines, they were full of pictures of women with funny shaped heads and big fonted coloured writing that made her head sore to read.

“If they have any books. I can read books” she said quietly and then walked over to a basket, which was full of old books that were selling cheap.

She picked out a Nancy Drew mystery and shyly handed it to the woman in the white uniform.

“You can read very well for your age” she complemented Sarah.

“My dad taught me when I was little” Sarah replied almost automatically. She didn’t remember him teaching her, didn’t remember learning to read, but for some reason knew that he had taught her, and hated him for it. They waited at the counter to pay for the book, but were being held up by a well-dressed curly haired lady who was buying a bottle of diet coke. The woman who was working behind the counter was trying to find a pen for the curly haired lady to sign the receipt with.

“I can’t believe its really you Maria Thornton in my shop. Wait till I get home and tell my husband Tom, he’s always on about how good you are on the television, could you write to Tom love Maria for me, he’ll love that” she was saying excitedly to the curly haired lady who obliged and took the pen wearily from the woman at the till. Then the woman at the till much enthused by meeting Ms. Thornton bent over the counter in a conspiratory manner and whispered something to Maria who tried to suppress a grin.

“I’m sorry honey, but I can’t tell you why I’m here right now. You know how it is, story’s get leaked out faster than nuclear waste, so I have to keep any leads I have to myself.”

The woman behind the counter looked a little disappointed, before the curly haired woman continued in a soft voice, “you know how it is in the business, I’m sure you can appreciate the position I’m in.”

The woman at the counter started fumbling counting out the change before her ears suddenly pricked up,

“is it because of the guy who came in earlier on, Paul something or other, he came in with a police escort, was all cut up, does it have something to do with the robbery, oh my god did he do the robbery is that why you are here, to interview him, to confess” she asked excitedly eyes wide open.

The curly haired lady said nothing for a second, didn't even notice the change in her fingers almost dropping it on the floor as she put one of her hands into her suit pocket, then she smiled a white wide smile at the woman at the counter,

“Sorry but you know I can't tell you that. Tell your husband I was asking for him, and to keep watching channel three.”

Then she left the shop heels clicking into the distance. Maria walked past the pretty little girl who was waiting with a nurse at the counter, unaware of the expression on the little girl's face. Sarah heard the woman mention her father's name, and suddenly felt the need to find out what the curly haired lady wanted why she wanted to talk to her father. Sarah started down the corridor after the lady, started calling at her to come back but was restrained by the woman with the white uniform who was trying to hold her wouldn't let her go, wouldn't let her free.

Maria Thornton took a tissue from her pocket and started to wipe the orange plastic seat before she sat down. She looked at her watch it was a quarter to ten, and Mike had just been taken into casualty. They told her it looked like a broken nose that it wouldn't take long to fix. She hadn't intended on waiting for him, but had spotted somebody who looked distinctly like Jade Nix sitting in the foyer of the emergency department and was very intrigued to know what she was doing there. Feeling a little thirsty and in need of a better look at the woman she had walked past her to the lobby shop and bought a bottle of coke. Her mind was moving like wildfire. She was trying to figure out that was this man that had been brought into the hospital, if he was related to the robbery and why Ms. Nix was there. Was it an insurance scam, did she know the men who robbed her paintings? Out of the corner of her eye Maria could see some kid screaming her eyes out, damn kids always making noise she thought to herself and then opened the bottle of coke before taking slow careful sips out, tilting

her head just enough to get a good look at the blond haired woman seated opposite her.

Tenderly caressing the page with slow careful scratches of ink and colour Jade drew a face that she had drawn many times before. The eyes, wide open and surrounded with the spiralling lines that marked her work, her trademark that appeared in her signature on the bottom of every painting, the look before dying; his eyes were rearing their face in the midst of the sketches on the magazine. The eyes that never shut, never blinked again his eyes cold and brown as the earth they were buried in. She closed her own eyes momentarily, trying to lose his face, trying to forget what Sarah had been trying to say to her. She could hear Sarah's voice again, calling out. Then Jade jerked her head up and opened her eyes, she really could hear Sarah's voice, looked over to her right, could see Sarah being restrained by a nurse. She jumped up from her seat and ran over to the lobby shop.

"Take your hands off her right now" Jade ordered the nurse, who was taken aback at the stranger shouting at her.

"I'm trying to calm her down, who are you? Are you related to this girl?" the nurse asked.

"I'm a friend of the family" Jade replied, before bending down to talk to Sarah, "are you alright? You can wait down here if you like?" she asked quietly and then stood up again to talk to the nurse.

"Do have any idea what this girl has been through today?" she asked indignantly much to Sarah's surprise.

Then nurse nodded her head and said in a quiet voice,

"Times like these are always hard on families, but I can assure you that her father Paul is going to be alright, that we are doing the best we can for him. But you have to keep control of this kid, this is a hospital, we can't have her running around screaming waking up all the patients."

Jade stood up to her full height, never liked nurses, and never liked hospitals. She opened her eyes wide and looked a full eyed stare into the nurse's eyes till both were

silent each waiting for the other to speak. The nurse's lips pursed into thin lines of red on her face as she glowered back at the glamorous young woman in front of her.

"I asked if you knew what this girl has been through today."

Then Jade took a silent breath and smiled with her eyes at the woman, the kind of coy smile that she used on the cover shots of magazines and photo shoots knowing the effect it would have,

"I know that you are a busy woman, but surely it hasn't escaped your notice that a young boy was killed today as an accident during an art robbery last-night."

A light seemed to flicker in the back of the nurse's eyes, while in the background Maria Thornton was straining her ears to hear every word that was being said. Then the lines on the nurse's face that passed for lips curled into a smile,

"Oh you're *that* woman Jade Nix. I like your stuff, I was sorry to hear about the robbery. But in here it doesn't make a difference, we still are going to give your friend Paul our full attention, we treat all our patients the same regardless of who they are"

Jade stood a little closer to the woman, and said to her in a near whisper,

"You are very kind, that's not what I asked, I asked you did you know what this girl has been through. She was the one who found that boy's body earlier on. So I'd ask you to make damn sure you treat this girl differently, I don't expect candy and comics are the way to go do you?"

The nurse's face flashed crimson, as she looked at the tear-streaked eyes on the little face beside Jade. Then she put her hand to her waist where she could feel her beeper going off.

"Look we are very busy down here, perhaps you could look after Sarah for a while, until her mother comes downstairs for her again" she replied sympathetically touching Sarah on the arm as she said this.

Then she soft shoed down the corridor, checking the watch on her breast pocket as she did. The time read 9.55pm according to Maria Thornton's watch as she started speaking into a tiny Dictaphone, recording the snippets of conversation that she had overheard. Then she started describing the little girl in front of her. So this was the six-year-old who had discovered Peter Jones' body. And it was her father Paul in hospital. Paul Rivera who the lady in the lobby shop said was involved in the Muscat robbery. The same robbery that resulted in Peter Jones being shot. Maybe there was a chance for a news award afteral. She took out her mobile phone and dialled the number of her producer at Channel Three.

The dialling tone rang through the reception, along the wires shooting along white tiled corridors, basements, stairs, elevators up to the top of the building, into a room with glass windows at the front, and a lady in a chair seated behind the glass reading reports. She lifted up the receiver. It was James Murdock on the line.

“Listen to me Therese, I know you don’t want to do it, but the boy will be better off with Jack. He is the kid’s father; you know its what Jennifer would have wanted. You know that is what we agreed to the other night.”

Jimmy reclined in his leather seat again. Therese stood up from behind the desk and started agitatedly fiddling with the wire of the telephone.

“You know he was arrested, you know that I just had to pick up Jack from the station because his father was in custody. How can you tell me that is the best for the boy?”

“He is changing I can tell the man is changing. He didn’t want to do the job last night, I talked him into it made him to it, had to be sure he wanted out of the business do you see?”

“What do you mean Jimmy?”

“I mean Tramery isn’t going to be doing any more jobs. I had him fitted up last night, had him arrested, wanted to see if he would break if he would let the family down. Couldn’t let him away with the boy if I wasn’t sure he wasn’t able to take on responsibility. He was interviewed about the robbery all he had to do was give us up and take off with the boy. Just tell the pigs all he knew and getaway. But he didn’t he said nothing, phoned you up to tell you to collect the boy didn’t he? That shows that he is ready for responsibility.”

Therese was pacing up and down inside her little office, looked up at the white-faced clock above the door, it was nearly ten o’clock, she would be finished her shift very soon. Would be taking the boy home with her.

“So Jack phoned me up what difference does that make, he didn’t have a choice. Listen to me Jim, I know you think you run this city but did occur to you that the reason that Jack said nothing was because he was protecting himself and not you, ever think of that?”

Jimmy stubbed the cigar out on his ashtray.

“So even if he was just protecting himself, he wouldn’t have rung you, he would have taken off with the boy, would have left the city last night with the paintings, wouldn’t have been seen here for dust. That’s how I know that he has changed that’s how I know he is ready to take responsibility for the boy. You have to let go of him, he

belongs with his father and I think you know that. You'll still get your money if that's what worrying you Therese"

She picked her coat off the rack inside the door of the office, and looked up at the clock above the door, one minute left before the night was over.

"Fuck your money, you know that's not why I do it. Fuck your money, I only used it for the boy."

"Because that is all you were ever thinking about the boy and nothing else Therese?"

She slid the coat over her shoulders and looked down the corridor.

"Look we can't change the past, I'm making up for what happened amn't I. There was nobody to blame for what happened to Jennifer. So I don't know where you get off Jimmy!"

"Look Therese we all know why you wanted the boy to stay with you."

She watched the last seconds' tick past, and buttoned up her coat with one hand.

"Yeah Jimmy you know everything don't you?" then she slammed the phone down and rushed down the corridor.

Jack looked up and down the corridor before stuffing the papers back into the canvas bag. He then stood up to walk over to the rosey-cheeked lady behind the counter. His aunt had told him she would collect him at ten, would finish work then, he noticed it was just turning ten o'clock on the clock above her desk. As he walked towards the desk, he passed a familiar face, noticed it was the little girl he had met earlier on in the day; the same one who had been walking through the park with him looking for a missing boy. He smiled at her as they passed, she didn't notice was looking directly in front of her, staring at the curly haired woman sitting on one of the plastic chairs. He touched her on the arm as she walked past, momentarily breaking her concentration, and extended his hand for her to shake,

"Hey kid that's no way to treat an old friend is it?" he asked, making her jump with surprise and recognition.

Then John looked up at the woman holding Sarah's hand, she looked kinda funny, didn't look like a mother, was too pretty, he held out his hand to shake hers, "Jack Tramery, pleased to meet you m'am".

The little girl started laughing,

“First you said Patrick, then John, now Jack? And you” she looked up at Jade, “You said your name was Jade then Jennifer,” she looked at the surprised eyes in front of her, “You think you might be related? At least I know my own name, you people got problems,” Sarah concluded.

“Well of course we do, why else would we be in a hospital” Jack concluded, still looking at the blond woman in front of him.

He had seen her face before somewhere. Jade or Jennifer, whoever she was, he had seen that face before. She held out her hand to shake his,

“Nice to meet you young man, you are a friend of Sarah’s? You both go to school together?” she asked, while walking back to the plastic chairs with both of the children.

Jack grumbled something to himself about old age, and then took a seat beside Sarah on the chairs,

“We met earlier on today, while on a walk in the park.”

Then he looked at Sarah, noticed she was still wearing the school uniform she had been wearing earlier on that day,

“You know that they found the kid you were looking for earlier on?” he said.

She nodded her head.

“Yeah I heard that some-one found him” she replied, before absentmindedly picking up the cards that were strewn around the floor.

Then she looked around the lobby and noticed the old lady they had met earlier on,

“You see the dragon lady is over there?” she said nodding over at the woman seated at the other end of the room who was muttering something to herself. Jade was listening to their conversation couldn’t help but look over to see the old woman for herself, and was shot down mid stare by Maria Thornton’s profile a few chairs away from her. Knew that woman, had been interviewed by her a few years ago when she was just starting out in the business. It had been on a daytime TV chat show, her agent said it would be a good start, because the average IQ of the audience was similar to the TAM ratings, so she had nothing to lose. Thornton was filling in from the woman who usually presented the show, because she was on a holiday skiing, or at least that was the official line. The presenter was certainly knee deep in snow that was for sure just not the kind on the ski slopes. Jennifer’s slot in the show was to come between the makeover for construction workers and the spiritual slot on ‘how my dog brought Jesus into my life’, or pets with stigmata. The piece Jade was being interviewed on

was on the increasing numbers of woman who were having fashion shows and starting up their own companies in the business. Jennifer had started out as a designer, and the theme of the slot was to be that if women had more input in the design process for fashion then unrealistically thin models wouldn't be used so often and thus decrease the numbers of adolescent kids becoming anorexic or bulimic. This was not something that Jennifer particularly agreed with. Perhaps fewer makeover programmes and self-help books implying that a change in appearance is necessary for a shot in the arm for the image would make a difference. But she knew better than to say as much, and kept her mouth shut as her clothes rolled out on the curvy models with wobbly thighs and bad hair. She answered a few questions about colours patterns and contours and then Thornton asked her about the fact that clothes were mostly designed by men, and why Jade thought this was wrong. So Jennifer started into her tirade against the men who seemed to design clothes for prepubescent boys, all bones no bum or boobs. Then Thornton stung her with a question about Jennifer's maternity range of clothes, asked her how a single woman with no children could possibly design comfortable and fashionable clothes for pregnant women. Jennifer flickered a glance at her agent who was standing behind the cameras as if to ask how to deal with the question, he started frantically waving his hands and looking as though he was cradling something. So he wanted her to say she could empathise with pregnant woman because she was planning a family to distract from the question. She looked across the orange-faced big haired moustachioed ladies in the audience and Thornton's smug face. Jade then replied that though she had no desire to have children herself, but never got a chance to finish the question.

"Why no plans to have children?" Thornton fired back at her, sensing a scandal.

"No reason I just want to enjoy having a career for now, is there anything wrong with that? Some women want to focus on families, some on fostering a career, I'm one of those women."

'Its unnatural' one of the old ladies in the front row could be heard whispering while nursing a dog with what looked like a crucifix shaved into its chest on her lap. Thornton picked up on this immediately,

"You mean you hate the fact that men design clothes for women because its unnatural, but refute the nurturing aspect of the woman's role in life, you seem to be contradicting yourself Ms. Nix?" she asked.

Jennifer looked over at her agent who was making frantic slashing movements at his throat, wanted her to be quiet.

“I just mean that there is nothing wrong with a single woman wanting to have a career. Nobody ever blames a man for wanting a career, we praise it in men”

“Except when they want to be fashion designers” Thornton interrupted.

“No that’s not what I meant, I mean just that if a woman is single and doesn’t want children and wants a career people find it strange for some reason. Like there must be something wrong with her. Like it offends the average woman who wants to get married and settle down.”

“So you have no plans to marry?” Thornton asked her, Jennifer said nothing wondering where the questions were going.

“Do you have a boyfriend at the moment?” she asked Jennifer who suddenly knew what the woman was implying.

“You think that you can rationalise my ambition with my sexuality?” she asked Thornton, who looked over at her producers; they had great smiles on their faces.

“So you are gay then?” Thornton asked.

At this point Jennifer became very exasperated,

“I’m gay?” she repeated at Thornton shaking her head, why couldn’t she just be ambitious, why was this woman trying to needle her. Then before she got a chance to explain that she was not gay, a voice from the audience shouted something about it being unnatural which annoyed Jennifer, given the fact that in the art world she was known as something of a fairy princess.

“Can you stand up?” she asked the large lady who was shouting at her.

“Its unnatural what you folks get up, its against the word of god,” she concluded to a ripple of applause from the people with pets in the front row.

“You are right it is against the bible for people to gay, we shouldn’t tamper with the laws of nature should we m’am?” Jennifer asked in her sweetest voice, much to the amusement of the studio heads.

The large lady nodded her head, almost losing her face in the many chins that rippled up and down her neck,

“Yes m’am its not natural” she agreed about to sit down.

“So we shouldn’t tamper with the laws of nature?” Jennifer asked.

“Yes m’am we should leave things as they is, shoun’t be messing with our bodies tampering with them like that. Folks should just be as god intended.”

“Leave the body alone, no unnatural tampering with it?” Jennifer asked again.

“Tha’s right” the lady answered.

“You short sighted?”

“Yeah just wear these for reading and such likes,” the woman answered as she fixed the glasses on her head.

“Could you take them off?” Jennifer requested.

The woman obliged.

“Now you can’t see can you?”

The woman nodded in her direction explained she could make out shapes but the faces weren’t clear as her friends nudged her and smiled for the cameras.

“Now you are just like god intended, so you won’t be needing the glasses anymore, dare say, you won’t be able to read drive write watch TV recognise your family at a distance or ever become a pilot of an aeroplane but hell that’s alright because if we were meant to fly god would have given us wings, that’s right isn’t it? Though it will be a hell of a cross for all of us to bear, living without those thing, except of course for you folks with the puppies, you already have your own crosses to bare for us don’t you!” she said nodding at the woman with the dog on her lap seated in the front row.

The large lady stopped smiling and sat down in the audience again. The people had started clapping and laughing at Jennifer. In the production room Jennifer’s agent made a deal with the producers and the cut and pasted version of the programme brought her and Thornton oceans of free publicity and was the makings of both of their careers. Thornton’s as the inquisitive face of daytime journalism and Jennifer’s as the feisty outspoken artist. She looked over at Thornton again; the woman was probably there looking for a story, looking to interview Sarah about finding Peter Jones. Jennifer didn’t want that to happen, didn’t want Sarah to be remembered as someone who brought out the dead, so she left Jack and Sarah talking to each other and moved over a few seats to land right beside Maria Thornton, who nearly dropped the Dictaphone from her hands when Jennifer sat down.

“Nice to see you again Maria, been a long time hasn’t it?” Jade asked moving slightly nearer in the seat alongside her as Thornton stuffed the Dictaphone into her suit pocket.

Jade reached out her hand and slowly reached it into the inside pocket of Maria's suit taking out the Dictaphone in one swift motion.

"I'm sure that you'd prefer if this conversation was taped wouldn't you? Say it would be worth a little bit more to your two-bit station and their lawyers, like having it all on tape don't they? So what are you doing here tonight? Bloodsuckers run out supplies at the office have they?"

Maria looked into Jade's oh so green eyes.

"If you must know Jade I'm here looking after my camera man Mike, he had his nose broken earlier on, I 'm only doing what any descent person would do."

Maria replied straightening the creases on her skirt just above the knee.

"I could ask you what you are doing here, looking for a little artistic inspiration are we? Knew your bandwagon of outrage couldn't last."

"You should know the sell by date seeing as you helped create me."

"If that's true, where's my ten per cent?"

"You get your cent's worth every night on that programme you peddle as news" Jade grinned at Maria, who cocked her head to one side.

"So what are you doing here then Ms. Nix?" Maria asked finally holding the Dictaphone up to Jade's lips.

"Bandaging a wounded career like you said already. Perhaps you'd like to interview me about my stolen masterpieces. I know that you have been covering the story already today. Perhaps I don't look as grief stricken or as pained as your story demands. I gather you have been interviewing Peter Jones' parents already?"

"You should know the importance of getting a picture *straight* from all angles" she said turning around to face Jade eye to eye.

"So how does it feel to be at the centre of this scandal? To have your paintings being kept for private viewing in the assistant D.A's office, to have the blood of a young boy on your fingertips. You have realised *Ms Nix* that if the cops hadn't been looking for your thieves they might have found that kid alive yesterday, if they weren't so concerned with you."

"Why interview me then if I'm not important. You forget you are the one who made it that way Maria."

Jade noticed her looking over her shoulder at Sarah and Jack; she grew worried about what Thornton would do with the pair of kids.

“Listen to me, you are going to leave those kids out of it right? And I’ll give you all the sobs stories you desire, show you what’s left of the collection tell you how it all felt, shocked dismayed overjoyed anxious whatever, and you will leave the kids out of it alright?”

Maria was a little surprised at Jade’s concern.

“You know these kids?”

Jade took the Dictaphone from Maria’s hand and looked her square in the eye,

“Is it a deal?”

“I don’t know”

“Its not hard.”

“But I don’t know how to.”

“Alright I’ll be the dealer”

Jack sorted the cards out into two almost equal piles, allowing Sarah a few extra cards, to help her out, even the odds. He noticed that Jade had stood up to talk with some curly haired woman a few chairs away.

“Is that your mother?” he asked Sarah.

She looked up to the front desk expecting to see Nora there, and then she followed his gaze over to where Jade was seated.

“Naw don’t be silly, she’s just some lady I met earlier on at the police station.”

Jack turned around his full of surprise all of a sudden, had he heard her correctly, she was at the police station. He looked at Sarah watching her play with the cards in her fingers.

“You had to visit your father at the police station?” he asked in an understanding voice.

Sarah picked the cards up in her hand and slowly straightened them into a perfect rectangle, so that there was a clean edge on the bundle of cards.

“My father isn’t at the police station. I came *here* to visit my father” she replied after a time, before taking another quick glance up to the front desk expecting her mother to be standing there.

“Sorry I didn’t know your dad was ill” Jack replied feeling guilty about leaving his own father in the police station.

“He’s not sick,” she answered before laying down one of the cards on the chair in between them waiting for him to lay another on top of it

“He is injured, is going to be alright that’s what the nurses said.”

It was a queen of hearts; Jack laid a two of spades on top of it and pretended to look disappointed no match was made.

“Well that’s good news then isn’t it. You will probably be able to bring your dad home with you won’t you?” he said as she fumbled taking another card out to lie on top of his.

Then both dived for the little pile of cards on the plastic chair before bringing their hands back just as suddenly.

“Three of spades, no use to us. So why are you here then Jack?”

He placed a king of diamonds on the little pile.

“I’m waiting for my aunt to finish her shift, she works as a nurse here. She is going to bring me home with her when she finishes her work.”

He replied watching as she placed another card on top of the pile. Then Jack looked over at Jade who was still animated chatting to the curly haired woman. She definitely reminded him of somebody, perhaps a photograph in the paper, or a friend of his father’s.

“My aunt was supposed to be done by now. Say if that woman isn’t your mom, do you think I could borrow her for tonight, do a swap for my aunt?” he asked distracted by Jade again she definitely reminded him of somebody.

Sarah looked up at him, frowning in child-like confusion as she placed the card on the pile,

“I thought you said you had a mother and that she was alive still?” Sarah asked.

“And I thought you said your father taught you the rules of the game” he answered grabbing the pile of cards on the chair.

Snap, two kings. One on his deathbed in the hospital, another turning off the lights in her bedroom in the evening. The same faces on different cards.

CHAPTER 14

Introducing DeVille

A prince among thieves a king for the paupers, a fisher king, a Faustian pact and he sold his soul to the devil for a chance to become king. Angelo straightened his tie and tightened the cufflinks at the wrists of his suit. He smoothed the almost invisible creases on his trouser leg and sat and waited in one of the temporary cells in St. Michael's precinct. Awaiting his interview, awaiting his inspection. So they thought they had him Angelo Deville did they? Thought they could get him that easily. He remembered talking to Jimmy earlier on that day, how relaxed Jimmy was when Angelo had told him the paintings were gone. Didn't seem even a little surprised. Angelo took the handkerchief from his breast suit pocket and shined the tops of his leather shoes, till he could see his own reflection in them. Of course Jimmy wasn't surprised, it was all clear now; Jimmy had moved the paintings from the river, wanted to see how Angelo would react, knew that if Angelo overreacted it would be because he had planned to keep the paintings for himself. The details, Tramery had told him it was the details that made the man, maybe the old guy wasn't so foolish after all. Angelo smoothed his hair as he heard them unlocking the door of the cell preparing to bring him down to the interview room. So they wanted to know what happened last night, well he would tell them all about it, every single technicoloured detail.

Sanchez took a seat beside Winter in the interview room and switched the tape recorder on for what he hoped would be the last time that night. At this stage in their investigations it was almost a formality interviewing Mr Deville, neither was looking forward to it, were sick of the games that everybody was playing. He Sanchez begrudged the tape spinning in its box recording each moment as it passed. Taking every word they said and etching it onto the plastic ribbon, tying them up with accusations incriminations and arrests. In the reflection on the front of the recorder, Sanchez could see a pasty-faced lawyer and dark haired man with unusually sharp shaven sideburns staring back at him. Winter nodded at Sanchez to press the start button. She noticed that his eyes no longer had the sleepy look they usually had; instead, Sanchez just looked very tired. It was now past ten o'clock and both of them

had been working since early morning. Since they were both briefed about a missing boy named Peter Jones. Sanchez was reading the man in front of her his rights in a weary voice and as he did, she recalled the interview with Tramery. She tried to piece his story together and then just as slowly let the words slip out of mind again, knowing that only the edited version of their transcript approved by Darcy would matter. Angelo was the one wearing the cuffs, but they were the people with their hands tied.

“Mr Angelo Deville you have been instructed on your rights which I hope you understand, tape please note that the suspect is nodding his head. Right, I put it to you that you were involved in a robbery last night, which resulted in the shooting of an innocent bystander Peter Jones. How do you plead to this Mr Deville?” Winter asked, knowing what his reply would be.

Angelo consulted with his brief for a moment; his brief whispering and raising his eyebrows every so often before finally giving a shrug of his shoulders.

“I plead not guilty detective inspector Winter, that is what you told me your name was isn’t it?” he said in a most charming voice while Sanchez exhaled deeply in the background.

“Let it go on record that Mr. Deville is pleading not guilty to the charges of robbery and of being an accomplice to manslaughter”

“That’s not what I said detective”

Winter looked up at Angelo who was almost grinning at her, eyes bright and shining. He was definitely a charming man, but she wasn’t sure what he meant.

“You said that you plead not guilty to the charges Mr. Deville,” she enquired as Sanchez straightened himself in the chair and rubbed his nose.

“I plead not guilty to being involved in the robbery, which you say resulted in manslaughter. Surely you have got more than one question to put to me detective. An intelligent woman like you I imagine has got plenty of questions on her mind.”

Angelo then took out the handkerchief out of his breast pocket to give to Sanchez.

“All you have to do is ask the right questions detective and you will get the right answers. I presume that is what we are here for detective, you are looking for the right answers aren’t you?”

Winter was unsettled momentarily.

“Okay then Mr. Deville why don’t you just tell us all you know and cut the bull” Sanchez interrupted waving his hand at the handkerchief Angelo was offering him.

Angelo smiled back at Sanchez and slowly and carefully folded the handkerchief before replacing it back into his breast pocket. He straightened himself in the chair, was clearly enjoying every minute of the interview.

“Alright seeing as you ask me so politely I guess I will be obliged to tell all that I know.”

The story that Angelo began to tell enthralled, bored, and by chances excited the three listeners in the room, as he described in minute detail how the robbery was planned and executed. He told how they got the uniforms from the Davidson’s paint shop. How Tramery had connections with the place because his cousin worked there. That Angelo had been smart enough to know that the assistant D.A. was too ambitious for his own good and wouldn’t be able to resist an opportunity to show his business friends that he had some good standing and could get them what they wanted to see, namely Jade Nix’s paintings from her latest collection ‘Tempting Faith’ as it was called. Angelo inhaled deep breaths of air taking dramatic license with the story enjoying the attention and respect he was getting from the listeners. No mention of Jimmy, what part did Jimmy have to play in the whole thing anyhow; Jimmy hadn’t the brains for a scheme like that. James Murdock was over, he was finished, and he was a low-grade hustler who got a lucky break, had no class. Angelo explained that the moustaches on the other painters were his idea, added a bit of flair to the job he had always thought. At this point Winter enquired about the names of the other guys involved in the job, to which Angelo replied that they were only regular guys off the street and had done nothing wrong in effect seeing as they really did work for Davidson’s and had only walked into and out of the building. Can’t arrest some one for taking a walk can you? Angelo and the unnamed other guys went into the Muscat building to distract from the fact that Tramery was breaking into the building at the back through a window on the first floor. It was a lucky break; a serendipitous event that had left the window open for Tramery.

“Do you believe in luck Detective?” Angelo asked Sanchez, who didn’t reply and folded his arms across his chest.

“I suppose not. Your game isn’t about luck is it?”

Angelo directed the question at Winter, who hadn’t taken her eyes off him. Then he continued his story, much to the annoyance of his Brief, who was beginning to

wonder why he was there at all seeing as his client seemed to be intent on incriminating himself at every opportunity. Angelo explained that they had not been planning for the open window. They had expected Tramery to be tripping alarms left right and centre hence all the planning that went into distracting the security guards at the front desk. Angelo then paused while the others hanging on every word sat and watched his every movement. After the robbery, they had met up with Tramery at the back of the building the escaped into the park to hide the paintings in the river. Angelo told them about his knowledge of the currents in the local waterways, never mentioning that it was only because his father was a fisherman that he knew the local waterways, didn't want them knowing that he was the son of a fisherman. He was a big fish now. Angelo then requested that Sanchez go and get him a coffee said his throat was a little dry from all the talking and waited and watched as the big dark haired man lumbered out of the room grumbling to himself.

“We were walking through the forest at around one o'clock, passed some old lady who was sleeping in a sewer, she tried to grab at me, started shouting about being left behind or not getting flowers at Christmas, I tell you sometimes you ladies can be quiet peculiar” he said smiling at Winter who for some reason found herself blushing. Sanchez entered the room holding a coffee for Angelo and a soda for Winter.

“While we were on our way through the park we passed a group of kids drinking cans near the old playground. Tramery recognised one of them and started shouting at him to go home and not to be spending his time in the park with the rest of the gang. He lost it I tell you, never seen the guy get so pissed off. I told him we didn't have time for him to start getting a conscience about those homeless kids. He said he knew the boy, that it was some guy from his neighbourhood. But we didn't have time for any delays, so we left the kids and started making it towards the river again. I was bending over the bags tying the stones onto them. Tramery waded into the water to check that the test-bags that I weighted last week were still there. You have to be careful in this business you know detective, its not all hit and run we do our jobs very scientifically these days. So anyway” he took a sip of the coffee, then shook his head and looked at Sanchez before continuing his story,

“ Tramery heard a noise in the bushes nearby. He saw that it was the kid that he was talking to a few minutes before hand, the one who was drinking cider near the playground. The kid started shouting something at Tramery about knowing how the trick was done, about how he was going to show every one the next day how it was

done and tell them all about it. Then Paul suddenly loses his temper and starts shouting at Tramery saying how he shouldn't have mouthed off to the kid about the job. He said that if the kid knew we did the robbery then it was only a matter of time before everyone found out. Then the kids started shouting across the park that he recognised Paul. That he knew who Paul was, that one of his friends remembered him from the other night. The boy was only kidding around, trying to make out like Paul was some kind of a pervert or something. But Paul went crazy when the kid said that. I tell you tge just lost it. Tramery was telling him the kid knew nothing that he was talking about something else. Then Paul reached into his pocket and took out a gun all of a sudden and pointed it over where the kid was, shouting at the kid to be quiet. I tell you Paul hates kids. The boy just started mouthing back at him told him to fuck off that the park was his that he was not going to listen to some old fat guy telling him to stop making noise on his turf. I could see Paul was losing it, could see it in his eyes, something wild and angry. He had his finger on the trigger. So while Tramery was stood in the mud, I jumped over on top of Paul and tried to wrestle the gun off him. The gun went off. Bang, just went off in his hand. The bullet did this," Angelo rolled up his sleeve and pointed to what looked like a very deep scab along his arm, possibly formed from a passing bullet.

"It must have passed by me into the Jones' kid. But we thought that he had been scared by the shot, didn't know it hit him, thought that the bullet had only hit me" Angelo concluded. His voice sounded doleful, almost like it was tinged with regret.

"So you took a bullet to *protect* the boy?" Winter enquired while taking a sly glance over at Sanchez as Angelo rolled down his jacket sleeve.

Sanchez shook his head. Angelo did not seem like the kind of man who would take a bullet for some random kid in the park.

"If I was a hero the boy would still be alive wouldn't he?" Angelo replied in a voice empty of emotion.

Sanchez looked at the impeccably dressed man in front of him.

"You are saying that it was Paul Rivera who shot the Jones's kid, and that you tried to stop him and that in trying to stop him you yourself got shot?"

Angelo smoothed the creases at the elbows of the jacket of his suit. Then his face suddenly became hard again and lost any hint of emotion that had been there when he described how he had gotten shot.

“Quiet correct Detective Sanchez isn’t it? Think I recognise your face from the newspapers. Yes I did get scratched by a passing bullet, I suppose you’ll find my fingerprints on the gun from the struggle that myself and he were involved in, will probably still be able to find traces of the powder on me and on him of course. I take it you have Paul Rivera in for questioning don’t you?”

Sanchez breathed out deeply. Angelo wasn’t going to let anything slip past him. He knew that Angelo knew they didn’t have Rivera in for questioning. They could not possibly interview Paul to verify the story because Angelo had already seen to him in the park.

“Mr Rivera is in hospital recovering from some serious knife wounds Mr. Deville.”

Angelo appeared to be shocked by this and shook his head slowly from side to side. Winter watched this show trying not to smile; Angelo was good, he was very good. Then she noticed that the collar of Angelo’s shirt was immaculately clean and that he was impeccably dressed for a common hood.

“You say that you were nicked by the bullet that came from Paul Rivera’s gun during a struggle last night.”

Winter stated as Angelo looked back at her.

He was watching her very carefully as she took a little plastic bag from her pocket.

“I’m now taking people’s exhibit number five from my pocket and am showing it to Mr. Deville and his brief. A witness presented this navy button to me earlier on today. She said she grabbed off a man wearing a navy suit who ran through the forest past where she was sleeping near the sewers last night. This button is one of a kind and matches your suit am I correct Mr. Deville?”

Angelo gingerly took the little bag into his hand and passed it over to his brief barely having taken a proper look at it.

“I told you already detective that I was involved in something of a fracas with an old lady last night that is not in dispute” he replied dismissively.

“So you were wearing that very same navy suit last night after the robbery Mr. Deville?”

“Yes Detective that is true.”

“And you had it on while dumping the paintings.”

“Not dumping drowning, and yes that is true again detective. Do you only ask questions you already know the answer to?”

“If you were wearing the suit when you had the struggle with Paul Rivera can you tell me why there is no hole in the sleeve if you got shot last night?” Winter asked, waiting for a reaction from Angelo.

She knew he was lying, knew he had to be. Tramery said that it was an accident. Paul had shot the boy by accident and they didn’t know he was shot; otherwise they wouldn’t have left him to bleed to death. An accident not an execution. This guy Deville must be making the whole thing up trying to make himself look good and make the others look like cold-blooded murderers. She had seen Tramery’s son, had seen him with the boy, didn’t want to believe he could have left little boy to bleed to death in the bushes. Angelo stood up slowly, took off his jacket, and folded it on the back of the chair behind him before sitting down. He looked over at Sanchez who was wiping the beads of sweat from his forehead.

“You don’t always wear a suit to work do you detective? No I didn’t think so. In our business, we always dress to impress. Have an image to maintain you know. We have to let people think that we are professionals. That is only in public, in private we change our clothes, some guys go home and put on tracksuits and trainers. Me I don’t consider it a uniform I like the suits. Always liked the suits.”

Winter Sanchez and Angelo’s brief were listening carefully.

“I suppose perhaps you can tell that about me. I like style, like the look, but that does not mean that I always look perfect. I was not born wearing threads with labels you know. So, I appreciate them. These suits I wear, they are expensive detective, like you said one of a kind, hand made. Do you really think that I would keep this jacket on while I was supposed to be splashing about in the mud weighting the paintings detective? Surely you don’t think I’m that foolish” he smiled rhetorically at both Sanchez and Winter then started to roll down the sleeve of his shirt.

“I wasn’t wearing the jacket when I jumped Paul last night, but I was wearing the shirt.”

He put his finger through a hole in the material and showed it to all three of them. It was a perfect match for the bullet mark on his arm. Winter shook her head her heart sank. She had a murder on her hands. Reluctantly she believed Angelo when he said that he had tried to stop Paul from shooting Peter. She knew that he had sliced Paul to ribbons earlier on in the park; she knew he was an animal because she had seen the pictures in the paper of what he had done to the Irish guy behind Mc Daid’s pub. He was the perfect villain, the bad guy that they loved to catch and send down the river.

But something did not add up, he had tried to protect Peter Jones. He was probably the only person, between the hoods and the cops who had actually done anything to protect him. He had even taken a revenge of sorts by sorting out Paul. She shook her head as Sanchez turned off the tape recorder, and then stood up as if to leave the room.

“Before this session is over, I’d just like to ask one question detective Winter, the paintings, may I ask If you discovered the paintings at my house?” Angelo asked slightly nervously.

Sanchez nodded his head reluctantly in contrast to the easy smile that sprung up on Deville’s face. Angelo had to be sure that the job would go down as his job. Angelo Deville a name to be reckoned with. If he was going to go down he wanted to go down as a king, a king who had gotten shot in the line of duty, a prince among thieves.

CHAPTER 15

Two new friends are made

Two woman stared daggers at the dull-faced uniformed bodies in front of them. Both were angry that they could not gain access to Paul Rivera, could not interview him. At the front desk, Winter was demanding that the doctors pay attention to her request while upstairs Maria Thornton was losing her self-control. Thornton had made her way up to Paul's room, by a variety of methods, including stepping over life-support machines, and carrying the camera wrapped in her Pashima, to make it look like a baby through the maternity ward. Now she was confronted with a pair of belligerent would be GI Joes outside of Paul's room. Angry tufts of black curls shook themselves in waves and tossed themselves astride her fiery eyed head, as she struggled to make her way past the security guards on the corridor, with Mike in tow behind her. Maria was angrily protesting her right to speak with Paul Rivera to get his side of the story. She was telling the guards that they were preventing freedom of speech, that Paul had a right to get his side of the story across, that it would do more damage to him in the long term if she didn't get a chance to talk with him. Mike was holding the camera with one arm balancing it precariously on his shoulder while trying to ascertain if the plaster of Paris on his nose had begun to set yet. Through a nasal voice he was trying to ask Maria if they could come back later on, like maybe the next day. She turned on him frowning at him for opening his mouth,

“If we wanted your opinion maybe you'd like to be the one with the microphone. Christ I don't know why they hired you, now hold the damn camera straight and stop playing with your nose. Jesus its only a bruise, I don't know what you'd do if we had to go reporting in LA. Christ hold the damn thing straight”

Maria started fiddling with the lens of the camera, momentarily pausing to check her lipstick in the reflection in the lens, before starting on the security again.

“Look I know you have a job to do, we all have jobs to do, why make this harder than it needs to be.”

The burly woman and man in front of Paul's door remained stood in front of it with their arms folded on their chest. Maria decided on a different approach,

“Say I'll bet you get a lot of cases like this in the hospital I'll bet you have some stories to tell? Like you honey, I'll bet you could write a book on your experiences,

Say Mike doesn't this guy have good structure," she reached over and touched the man on his stubbled jaw while he kept his arms firmly folded on his chest.

"Maybe you might be able to have a spot on my new documentary series, its on real life stories from real life heroes, what do you think of that?" she asked watching as the guard relaxed his stance slightly.

Maria nodded at Mike direct the camera at the guards and film them in profile then face on while she continued with her flattery.

"I tell you you were made for TV, both of you" she continued making fleeting eye contact with the man and woman who were growing increasingly distracted by the camera hovering around their heads.

Maria noticed that the woman guard had a chain around her neck, a silver spiral that had been made famous by one of the celebrities on a hit sit-com. She looked up at the fan whirring above the head while they looked into the whirring lens of the camera. She was trying to remember the name of the actress off the show; suddenly it came to mind Trent that was it. Thornton walked over to the woman security guard,

"Has anybody ever told you you look just like Macy Trent? You know her she's on that sit-com what's the name of it?" she paused waiting for the guard to fill in the blanks and watching as the woman's cheeks were suddenly flushed with what Maria perceived to be excitement.

Mike looked at the good looking lady with the microphone in front of him, she never let them down, always got her story no matter what it took.

"I don't care what it takes or who you have to get permission, I am here to speak with Paul Rivera, tell me what room he is in."

Winter was getting increasingly annoyed with the lack of response from the doctors she was talking to at the front desk in the emergency lobby of the hospital. First the woman at the desk refused to tell her whether or not they had Rivera in their care, then she wouldn't tell her what room he was in, and now the doctors were telling her that he was too ill to be interviewed by the police.

"Look" she flashed her badge at the grey haired doctor " I am an officer of the law and it is imperative that I speak with your patient immediately, don't you see that its all the more important that I speak with him now, especially if he is in a critical

condition, I might not get the chance again” she said exasperated at the dull faced white coated woman.

The doctor took out a chart from under her arm and flicked through it, pausing at certain words then looking up at Winter from behind it. Looking at Winter as though she was some kinda moron incapable of understanding what was being said to her.

“My patient has suffered serious trauma today, has lost several pints of blood, has received well over one hundred stitches all over his body, was unconscious for the past few hours and is only now beginning to regain his consciousness. The loss of blood has resulted in localised Ischemia on the left side of his cerebellum that is to say,” she paused looking again at Winter.

“That is to say that the loss of oxygen could have resulted in brain damage, cut the gimmicks doctor, you know as well as I do that anything that *your* patient tells me in his current condition may not be taken as evidence in court. I’m sure that his defence team could muster plenty of reliable witnesses like yourself who could dispute every word that I can take down. I am not here to trap your patient; I am here trying to solve the mystery of why Peter Jones died earlier this morning. I want to know what part your patient had in it. I know that you have many friends in the business Dr. Wormwood but I wasn’t aware that harbouring child killers was one of your many talents.”

Wormwood bristled at the suggestion, reminding Winter that she was the physician, that she only had the best interests of her patients at heart, and that if Winter persisted in trying to talk with Rivera she would have her removed from the hospital. Wormwood said she would be lodging a harassment complaint against Winter herself if Winter didn’t leave the building. Winter took a deep breath and looked around the inside of the hospital lobby for some inspiration. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed what looked like Maria Thornton being ejected out of an elevator by two heavy-handed security guards onto the corridor. Winter smiled when she saw them pushing her out onto the corridor, and she could hear Thornton shouting something about public justice about the rights of the people to know the truth. Then she watched with an amused expression as Thornton picked herself up the floor and dusted herself off, before lifting up the camera off some confused looking blond haired man who seemed to have a plaster wrapped around his nose.

“How was I to know that she was Macy Trent’s sister? How was I supposed to know that Macy had stolen the part away from her sister at the audition? Come on get up Mike, there must be another way into that Rivera guy’s room”

Mike sighed softly regretting having taken the opportunity to work with a *professional* like Thornton. He was happy filming weddings and the occasional pop video, never had been that ambitious. It was his girlfriend who worked at channel three who had been pushing his name forward. Begrudgingly he followed Maria Thornton towards the front desk in the emergency department where a shorthaired woman in a navy suit was talking to the lady behind the desk.

“Listen I’ve come here to visit with Paul Rivera I just want to have a few words with him, to let him have his side of the story aired. Its for his own benefit, people need to know the truth that is all I am after sweetheart; I’m just looking to show the people the truth. So can you tell me what number room he is in? Can you just do that for me?” Thornton asked as gracefully as she could manage.

Winter gave a little start when she heard Thornton ask about Paul Rivera. Where did *she* get her information? Thornton noticed the shorthaired woman looking at her and recognised her from the press statement earlier on that day. So she must be on the right track otherwise why else was the detective in the hospital lobby.

“Aren’t you the detective Winter woman who is investigating the death of Peter Jones?” she asked nodding at Mike to turn his camera on Winter; trying to distract his attention from the good looking blond seated on one of the waiting chairs at the other end of the lobby.

Winter nodded her head reluctantly.

“Are you here to interview Paul Rivera? We just want to ask him a few questions, find out a few details” she said echoing Winter’s conversation with doctor Wormwood only moments beforehand.

What difference did it make any longer Winter wondered. What was the truth? Were either of them in it for the truth anymore. Winter knew she had to piece together a story but only one that her boss the assistant D.A. would find acceptable, one that the public could digest. She wanted to interview a man that was possibly on his deathbed, wanted him to tell her the truth she told the doctor. Was that true did she want the truth, or did she just want him to tell her that Deville was behind it all, that he shot the

boy, that Tramery and the others knew nothing, that they still had souls, that she still had a soul. Thornton took out her press badge and started flashing it at the woman behind the desk, trying to gain a little credibility. Winter looked at her own hands in which lay the police shield that she had been flashing at the doctors trying to gain access to their patient. Trying to get an interview, trying to use whatever means necessary. She looked over at Thornton who was getting impatient and noticed the security guards coming to escort them both off the building, saw Dr. Wormwood stood in the background filling in the guards on who could stay and who could leave, as though it was her own private press conference she was conducting. Winter despised the media. She hated them for the way they controlled which stories the public got to read about and instructed which side of the story to sympathise with. She hated the way they landed like vultures at every crime scene looking for nuggets of news to report, like publicity parasites; a symbiotic relationship between the criminals the crime and the columnists. Maria Thornton stood in front of her arguing with the receptionist about justice about her rights to record the truth, and her Det. Winter trying to plead the same case, trying to pretend that she was looking for truth and justice, when all she was looking for was a story, only she didn't have as many props at hand as Thornton did. Winter noticed the guards getting closer and observed the cameraman omnipresent at Thornton's side recording them being ejected from the hospital knowing that those pictures would be appearing as news tomorrow. Winter tried one more time to gain access to Rivera, asked Dr. Wormwood one more time if she could see him before finally giving up. Back at the receptionist's desk Winter left her number and her card, asked the woman to call her if Rivera's condition improved. Then noticing a little cardboard box on the desk Winter asked the woman if she could borrow a cigarette. No light needed she already had one in her pocket.

Wispy walls of smoke moved in sudden white waves through the streetlights up into the stars. Taking with them wish-whispers wonders and warnings. Twisting twining and lining the sky with smooth bursts of smoke. Winter exhaled again enjoying the warm nicotine buzz in her lungs, then coughed a deep throaty cough of surprise upon seeing that Maria Thornton was filming her every move a few feet away. Moments beforehand a car had pulled out of one of the spots in the car park, leaving Thornton stood holding the baby outside of the hospital. Thornton started to laugh then placed

the camera on the ground beside her feet and took out a cigarette beckoning to Winter that she needed a light. Winter walked slowly over to her, suspicious of her motives.

“Thanks” Maria said inhaling deeply, “nice evening isn’t it? Perfect for a walk in the park you think?”

Winter balanced her cigarette between fingers, letting it slide from grip to grip before putting it in her left hand. She ran her fingers through her hair, appeared to have come to a decision.

“So what story are you going to be running with tomorrow?” Winter asked finally.

“Same as you I suppose. We’re going to report that there was a robbery at the Muscat building, that there were four maybe five men involved in it and that while the intruders were making their escape through the park a little boy got shot” Maria said waiting for Winter’s reaction.

Winter remained stationary, not wanting to give anything away.

“What about the paintings Darcy, and Rivera, what about the kid who found the body, what take are you going to make about that?” Winter enquired taking another breath off the glowing embers in her fingertips.

“Same as you I suppose; that the little girl found the boy’s dead body, before you were able to, that the Rivera man was the one who shot him and that he is in hospital because somebody cut him up today. Maybe it was a good thing that Rivera got attacked, maybe not. Its justice some would say though. Revenge is always a real selling point with the public don’t you find detective?”

“I wouldn’t know we don’t usually have to sell the law. It’s usually given out for free, or didn’t you know that?”

“I know that justice is cheap detective” Thornton replied, casually tapping off the excess ash from her cigarette, before taking a few steps away from the building and looking up at the windows lit up like fairy lights in front of her.

“He is up in one of those rooms isn’t he, the guy who shot that kid?” she asked not waiting for a reply.

“They wouldn’t let me interview him you know, said *he* was too ill. Said that it would make him worse. It’ll make him all the worse when he sees his name all over the papers tomorrow. He’ll be hung out to dry if I have anything to do with it.”

Maria stubbed the half-finished cigarette on the ground under one of her heels. Then picked up the camera at her feet, “You mind if I ask you a few questions detective, once you have finished your cigarette?”

Winter laughed out loud.

“You think I don’t know that the camera has been on the whole time, you think I don’t know you better than that? Ask me what you like; just don’t expect too many answers. What’s wrong your partner deserted you?”

Thornton shook her head then placed the camera at her feet again as though it was a toy and took out another cigarette.

“One more for the road I guess before we both go back to work hey detective?”

Winter wrapped her arms around herself feeling a little cold breeze blowing around the outside of the hospital.

The two plastic doors of the emergency department swished open; bringing a draft of warm air with it.

“I thought that they had taken you in for good William”

Winter could hear an old voice coming from one of the doors and watched as two old people, a man and a woman held each other as they stumbled out the front doors.

“They can’t take me in Catherine my dear, I’m the great William Blanco, they can’t mess with me. Thought they could tie me down, inject me with needles, thought they could keep me in for the night, but I told them, I said I’m a busy man I have places to go” he replied nuzzling his old whiskered face against hers.

“And people to see” she retorted as they walked into the desolate car park of the hospital, oblivious to Winter and Thornton smoking in the background.

“You still want a drink?” he asked.

She started to spin around slowly, and dropped a canvas bag that she had taken from the lobby onto the tarmac,

“We have to dance now, we have to dance at the end of the evening, because that’s how it ends, if we do it properly isn’t it?”

“Like in the old days, but I never brought you flowers or chocolates”

A smile sprung up through the wrinkles on her face as he straightened the hat on her head,

“You weren’t supposed to. And I waited for you in the room, and you came, you returned to me. They said you would, said all I had to do was wait and you would come back to me and you did here you are.”

“As good as my word. You can trust me,” he said brushing his bandaged finger under her eyes rubbing away the mascara that had clogged its way under her eyes.

“I know where we can go to dance, I know a place that plays music all night, and its bright warm free, and its not far from here” Blanco continued before he stopped moving as he noticed Winter standing against the wall.

He nodded over at her showing Catherine who was there watching them. Damn cops. She watched as Winter stubbed out a cigarette against the brick wall of the hospital. Thornton had picked up a television camera to film both of them twisting in the misty night-time air. Catherine stuck her fingers up at both of them,

“No god damned respect, no place we can go to get some respect. That’s what they are always doing, wanting to know where we go what we do what we know. What will we do then William?”

“We will leave and we will dance” he replied taking her by the hand whistling a tune into the dark air leading her to dance the night away in sober silent steps.

Winter watched Thornton filming the couple and shook her head, before asking if she could borrow another cigarette off the woman.

“Don’t you have any conscience? Can’t you leave those people a little privacy?”

Maria put the camera down and took out two more cigarettes from her box.

“I don’t think it was me that they were giving the two fingered salute to honey”

Thornton replied lighting two cigarettes in her mouth.

She offered Winter one. Maria took a few deep breaths watching the homeless man and the bag lady stumble off into the distance, a pathetic sight she thought to herself.

“You really think that I’m that bad do you?”

Winter leaned against the brick wall considered the question for a few seconds and then shook her head.

“Worse, I think you’re worse.”

“Why?”

“It’s my job to talk to people like Rivera and Murdock to get questions answered so that they can be taken off the streets. It’s your job to make them into a commodity that can be recognised and sold back on the streets as news.”

“All we do is tell the stories, there is no accounting for what the public want to make of them.”

Winter shook her head again shivering slightly in the breeze.

“What about the Jones kid? What about his parents? I had to tell them that he was dead. And you know the first thing that they were worried about was how he died, because some journalist had been filling their head with stories of David Waters. You call that journalism? Why didn’t you just use a saline spray on their eyes before you interviewed them, would have been a little less painful wouldn’t it?”

Maria looked at Winter’s fiery eyes. She remembered the haunted look they possessed earlier on that day, the look that the station was going to edit to fade into another pair of eyes, those belonging to Peter’s mother. Eyes hungry for answers, eyes hungry for release from the uncertainty of not knowing.

“You feeling a little guilty about not finding him sooner, about letting a six-year-old do your job?” Thornton enquired.

“I suppose it makes a good story to show us up like that doesn’t it? I’m surprised you haven’t been interviewing the little girl, getting her to front your programme, perhaps you could get her to do a reconstruction of when she found the boy’s body, I’ll bet that the public would love that.”

Maria twisted the cigarette in her fingertips watching the spirals of smoke it created.

“You really do think that I’m that bad don’t you.”

“I don’t think, I only react, you forget I’m just a cop” Winter replied.

“You ever have to do a case like this before?” Thornton enquired, showing that she was finally switching off the camera as she spoke.

“First case I had we had to look for a missing kid. Same result in the end but it took two weeks to find him. Two weeks of pleas on TV two weeks of interviews of searching of saying somebody knew, but we all knew, knew the kid wouldn’t be found alive, not after the first day had passed.”

Maria looked into the distance ever so softly sighing to herself. Then she turned to face Winter.

“It’s a strange old thing death isn’t it? They say there are only two things in life that are certain, that we were born and that we will die. I don’t remember having been born and I don’t think I’ll remember having died. It is as though we live a series of dreams that have no beginning or ending, but that we know we have dreamed because we remember parts of them. When we are awake we try to create stories out of the memories; beginnings and endings but they don’t make sense after we stop believing in happy ever afters. Its what we are both looking for isn’t it, beginnings and endings,

because we think then we can be certain of what happens in between, certain that we have lived. And in that time between knowing and unknowing, we have memories of places we have been people we have met, things we have seen, people we have loved. My father was a journalist, did you know that detective?”

Maria looked above Winter’s head into the sky past the neon sign advertising beer and soft drinks,

“He worked on the newspapers, was a proper journalist. He was respected he covered international affairs. Used to come home at the weekends and tell me all about the wars that were going on in the world, and the people he met from all different far away countries, and I used to imagine what they looked like, before I went to sleep at night I would think of the countries, keep saying the names over and over again, trying to control my dreams so that I could go to the countries in my dreams if not in person. Dreamt I was in Paris one night. Only that one time in Paris I can remember that I controlled my dreams. You think that we try to control the news? Try to control it and package it and sell it to the public. You think that we make the victims and the villains, maybe we do maybe we don’t. But it is up to people like you to decide what difference it makes.”

“So what does your dad think of what you do now?” Winter enquired, thinking of her own father at home with her mother in a city many hundreds of miles away, probably just getting up for work.

“He would be proud, told me he would be proud of me no matter what I did. No matter what I do. I told him I wanted to be on the television, I remember his face, he was a little confused and I think at first a little ashamed, but I convinced him it was the way to go that newspapers were a thing of the past. And for all my dreams of adventures in foreign countries, I ended out doing reports about local fairs. What date is it today?”

Winter looked at her watch,

“August the 14th why do you ask?”

“Its almost ten years to the day since he died, was a stroke. Lucky I guess. We didn’t have to watch him grow old and die,” she faded off thinking of her mother at home with her brother to watch over her and a television to baby sit her, “your parents are still alive?”

Winter took another puff of smoke, and nodded her head,

“I think I have good genes, my grandparents are still alive on my father’s side, grandfather is ninety-eight. So I suppose I’d better not get hooked on these again if I want to continue the tradition,” she laughed lifting the last burning ember of the cigarette to her lips.

“Hey they take years off your life, and remember they’re the kinda bed wetting Alzheimer’s years that you can do without, don’t knock the nicotine too soon detective,” Thornton replied stubbing out her own cigarette before bending over to pick up her camera.

“You going to go back in and wait for Rivera to recover?” Winter enquired.

“Naw I gave the lady at the desk my card, asked her to give me a call if anything happened.”

Winter gave a smile of recognition to herself.

“So I guess you’ll be wanting a lift seeing as your partner deserted you?” she offered.

Maria gave her one of her TV smiles and graciously accepted it. As they walked towards Winter’s car, Winter stepped over the canvas bag that the old woman had dropped when she was dancing with Blanco. She caught her shoe on one of the straps and noticed to her surprise that the label on the bag read Jack Tramery. Winter said nothing as she opened the front seat of the car, her instincts told her not to let Thornton see the bag. In the car, Winter turned down her police radio suggesting that Thornton try to find a station with some music as they drove through the city.

“Come rain or come shine”

“Uh Huh?”

Winter looked over at Thornton who was humming to herself, it didn’t look like rain outside, perhaps a little misty still.

“Sarah Vaughan on vocals.”

“Think it could be Billie Holliday or then again, I’m not quite sure maybe its Sarah, can’t remember her name ah well it doesn’t matter. ‘We’re in or we’re out of the money’ how appropriate isn’t it Therese?”

Therese said nothing and gritted her teeth. She had been hoping to get out of the hospital with John before Tramery arrived. She had been hoping that the police would have kept him in custody for much longer. Did anybody do a proper job these days? Tramery pulled the car up at her apartment then watched Jack’s reaction waiting to

see if the boy would jump out of the car to leave him. He turned the rear view mirror around so he could see Jack's blue eyes in the yellow glare of the streetlights. Therese turned her head around in the front of the car,

"You coming with me?" she asked the little boy.

Jack hesitated not wanting to make a choice; he looked at both of them. Then he looked at his father,

"Don't you want me?" he asked Tramery.

"Of course I do, I want what's best for you, both of us do," Tramery replied.

Jack looked at both of the weary faces in front of him, which one was he going to trust. Both of them had been feeding him lies for over five years now, his face twisted when he thought of the deceit.

"I'd like to go home with Therese" he replied, watching Tramery's face drop,

"and I'd like you to come too" then he noticed Therese's face drop also,

"I'd like to talk with both of you about where I should stay, will you do that? Dad will you do that for me?"

Tramery's eyes lit up and he nodded his head. They parked the car outside of her apartment and he tried to avoid the bags of garbage left out in the street. Just as he was locking the doors of his car, he remembered the package in the garbage bins outside of his apartment. A chill ran down his back. He had to make sure it was still there, had to collect it before Jimmy and Darcy realised that he had taken it. The package was going to be more than his life was worth if he didn't get it back to Darcy. Tramery raced around the car to talk with Jack,

"Listen son I can't do this right now there is something I have to collect from my house, I won't take long, I'll be back in a little while I just really need to collect something you understand don't you?"

"You think that it's more important than me," John asked softly.

Tramery shook his head at the sad faced boy in front of him while Therese stood at her front door calling his name.

"I just really have to collect this package"

"Right now at this time of night."

"Sorry kid you understand don't you? I'll be back in a little while" Tramery replied edging his way around into the car.

"You won't find it in the trashcan *dad*" John shouted over the car roof at him, much to Tramery's surprise.

“Well not the one you think you’ll find it in.”

“What do you mean John?”

“I mean I took that bag that you dumped out of the garbage can earlier on today, thought you might need it later. But you couldn’t even trust me with that couldn’t even tell me that was what you were looking for. You think that it’s so much more important than me don’t you. Yeah well you can find it in the trashcan of the hospital where I’ve spent the past few hours waiting waiting to be brought home, yeah home with Therese. And if you can’t spare me the time to talk, that’s where I’m going to stay.”

“The hospital you left the canvas bag in the hospital?” Tramery repeated in a shocked voice.

He could not believe what he was hearing. He watched his son run into Therese’s house and made as if to go after him, then stopped suddenly. Jack would still be there in the morning maybe the package would not. Tramery had to go to the hospital, had to be sure that it was there. Tramery turned the key in the engine and automatically looked at the window second on the left from the front door expectantly. He was looking for a little face to watch him as he drove off. The little face he used to see on his way to work at night, the little face that used to make shapes with his fingers on the windows and wave goodnight to him all those years ago.

Thornton gave a small wave of her hand as she stepped through the automatic doors into the lounge of Channel Three studios and Winter nodded in reply watching her leave. She reached her hand around to the back seat of the car and picked up the canvas bag that had lain on the seat. Inside lay a plastic bag, which Winter examined carefully before lifting it slowly and carefully out of the canvas bag, had to be sure that here was no needles or bombs going to jump into her hands. The plastic bag had the logo of a triangle. She recognised it as the logo of the local supermarket chain. Inside the bag were some old papers, which slid easily into her hands. She looked around outside of the car checking to see that she wasn’t being watched, and then started reading the papers. Some were on headed notepaper, some were yellowed memos and others what looked like legal notepaper. Winter read the name on top of the first sheet in her hands, then suddenly sat up straight in her car. She recognised the address, knew it off by heart by now. She took another hidden glance from left to

right, expecting faces to be staring back at her through the streetlights. Her finger started tracing the words along the page, trying to make what she was reading real. She stopped all of a sudden and kept her index finger trained on one word. Code name *Drosophilae*. All at once she was back in a grey room with blue carpet and smooth topped desks. There were officers in uniform seated on the desks behind the desks beside the desks, with their arms folded expectantly, waiting as whispers flooded the packed room. Then a man entered the room and a hush enveloped his entrance, all eyes were on Darcy. The lights went off and at the front of the room a large white screen slowly rolled down. The projector flickered on and pictures flashed in front of all the officer's eyes; pictures of white tape around the ground, pictures of people in white shining gowns prodding and poking at the ground. The camera zoomed in closer and closer to what they were examining, till a tiny shiny pink limb became visible through the muck. She couldn't make out what it was, an arm a leg. Suddenly flashes of ashen faces, legs, and limbs, like pieces of lean meat the dead boys paraded in front of the officers who slowly and carefully studied the screen, unable to take their eyes from the gruesome sight in front of them. Darcy started intoning descriptions of what happened to each victim one by one, as though in an auction looking for the best police for each lot. Lights suddenly flashed on illuminating the now pale-faced young men and women who still had their eyes focussed on the bare wall where the screen had been.

“We cannot release all the details of this case to the press. We cannot let this material out for public consumption. There would be too great of a reaction too great of a backlash, we cannot have panic on our streets. You are instructed under your word of honour to this badge, to this city to yourselves to keep the details of this case to this department to this precinct: to the good people of this room. We are going nail the guy who did this, and we are going to do it quickly before he gets a chance to repeat himself do I make myself clear?”

Clear as crystal everything every word every photograph came back into Winter's mind as clear as crystal. She could remember Darcy standing at the top of the room could remember how he commanded the respect and attention of everybody that day with the speech he gave. Could remember the suit that he wore, the dark rimmed glasses, and the wooden podium he stood behind. Could remember she was sitting at the back of the room could remember wishing she was taller so she could see more of him. Could remember the flickering bulb above his head. Could remember the notice

board that was behind him, covered in a map indicating where the victims had been found, their ages, their names, their mutilated young faces glowing like Hollywood starlets beneath a billboard, their names under spotlights. And the billboard above the dead smiles read *Drosophilae*, the code name their department was to use for the David Water's case. Winter stuffed the papers back into the plastic bag and started the engine of her car before taking another look around the desolate car park, wondered if anyone had seen her, if they knew that she knew. She knew she wasn't safe, she knew she needed to get back to the station immediately. Had to contact Sanchez had to tell him what she had found out before it was too late.

Jack Tramery ran crashing through the crash units of the lobby of the emergency department of St. Benedict's hospital. He took frantic glances over all the shining disinfected surfaces searching for the bag. In the corner of the room was a round metallic trashcan, could Jack have dumped the bag there? He had to find it, had to get the papers out of the bin before anybody else. He jumped over the luminous orange plastic chairs in front of him and dived towards the bag, and threw his hands into the junk in the bin, rummaging, routing and writhing with anger when there was nothing to be found. Think Tramery think, where would the bag be. He hunkered down on the ground and looked along the floor through the maze of legs of chairs tables and patients, but there was nothing but air between him and them. His watch was ticking the time away, each second passing like quicksilver taking the bag further and further from his reach. Tramery jumped up and looked around him then raced down the corridor to the men's toilets, maybe Jack dumped it in the toilets; maybe he dumped it in the bin there. Seconds later Tramery was kneeling face first into a stinking can of foul smelling soggy and sodden scratchy public toilet paper wondering what possessed him to take the papers from Darcy's office. It would have been so much easier if they had to have done what Jimmy asked. No joy no plastic bag to be found in the rubbish, Tramery wiped a sticky hand across his sweaty brow and stood up to face himself in the mirror along the wall. In front of him he saw an old man with tired twitching eyes and hunched shoulders over a hooked and hooded body. He tried to straighten himself but hadn't the energy. Then all of a sudden he was startled by some kid entering the toilet, and pretended to be washing his hands, all the time looking at the face in the mirror in front of him and the eyes that belonged to a stranger. Last

night things had seemed so different, last night things were going to be so good. He remembered the feeling like electricity at his fingertips when he crept in through the window of the Muscat building. Someone had forgotten to close it; he knew that was a good omen that it was going to be a good job. He remembered walking up the fire escape stairs onto the second floor and picking the lock, before creeping into the hallway where the lights were turned off. Remembered looking up at the cameras on either corner, which swept the corridor every two minutes. He looked at his watch it was nearly eleven o'clock, nearly 24 hours since he had stood in that corridor with its brown carpet and faux teak coloured doors. The assistant D.A's office had his name in gold lettering on the door, which glistened golden signalling to Tramery the treasures that were stored inside. The lock was easy to pick, he was in the office in seconds, in fractions of a second had his fingers in the safe beside the D.A's desk knew that the key was in the second drawer of his filing cabinet. Inside Tramery remembered feeling around trying to sort out which was a painting and which was just another document about policing or personal life in the dark. He was unable to see because he couldn't turn the lights on in the office otherwise the security cameras would pick him out for sure. The paintings were textured with slashes of paint. He remembered taking them out and stuffing them into the black bag that Jimmy gave him earlier that night. Then Tramery had stretched his fingers inside the safe and felt another bundle of papers and what felt like a painting underneath. Tramery turned his wrist around to search further inside the safe. He looked at his watch. In flashing fluorescent figures, it told him he had thirty seconds to leave the building. Only thirty seconds before they left without him. It was only in the Van when he was sorting the paintings out into their waterproof bags for Angelo to weigh that he noticed that he had taken more than just a few paintings. His eyes opened wide when he read the names atop of the documents. His fingers started to tremble with fear. All of a sudden, the vehicle came to a halt. The others started banging on the sides shouting at him to get out. Quickly he stuffed the papers into his own bag. He did not want the other's to find out. He panicked, didn't think about what he was doing. He knew Angelo hated when a plan didn't run like clockwork. He just panicked. Angelo was completely and utterly anal about certain details and Tramery was already on edge because he was going to be getting away with Jack. He didn't realise what he had taken until it was too late. The details Tramery remembered as he washed the sweat-splattered excrement off his brow, the details he remembered telling his protégés; the details were what would

make the man. This time the details were going to break him. Tramery shook his head free of the chlorinated water and dried it with some paper towels. He made his way into the bright lights of the corridor. Think Tramery think where was the plastic bag?

CHAPTER 16

They drank deeply and were silent

Purely mechanical. Fizz flowing fast and furious. Through the nozzle gushing and jumping out in spurts of motion the liquid filled his glass from the pump. Jumping and bounding the bubbles frothed up clambering on top of each other wanting to be the first to leave, to burst free floating into the disco detonated air. Inside was yellow clear and smoothly settling into a creamy white head, inviting his mouth to taste it. Dollars flooded the counter dancing paper dances around the amber idol as wearily he grasped old fingers on its cool sides, fingers slipping on the condensation. Too hot, she jerked her hand back from the machine. Rubbed the burned fingers on the outside of the water cooler beside her as steam angrily hissed out at her before coughing up some globules of coffee; making a strange bedfellow with some white powder at the bottom of the polystyrene goblet. Inside the brew was mixing and mingling with all the incantations of middle-aged wizardry warning her off tasting it, warning her to stay back. She reached her hand into the metallic slot again. It was cold and sticky. Steam rose up and condensed itself on the windowsill as he watched the cars hovering silently past, waiting. With his fingertips he drew spiral shapes and faces through the cold mist on the windowpane above his mug where it lay to cool. He took it in his hands and blew softly over the top of the dark drink, cooling it a little before daring to take a sip. It will help you sleep Therese had told him. Help to relax, help to forget. He knocked the glass back deep into the back of his throat, thrashing it against his insides, feeling the alcohol burn inside. Then Sanchez wiped his hand against his mouth rimmed with beer and old age before reaching into his pocket and rummaging around for another bill to slide across the counter. Inside was hot and sticky and Jade's fingers could smell the stench of stale coffee. The polystyrene cup squeaked its way into her hands as she raised the boiling goup to her lips, taking silent glances around the lobby as she did so. Hoping for something she didn't understand, watching and waiting for Sarah to return. It tasted sweet and warm and reminded him of Christmas time and warm blankets and stories that his father used to read to him. He placed the cup back onto the table beside his bed and closed his eyes listening to the sounds of the city. Hot chocolate the band of his youth Sanchez recollected bitterly tapping the empty glass to the music. He nodded his head at the barman and ordered a

shot. An espresso shot the button on the machine said, but it tasted like some one had been collecting rainwater through industrial chimneys and added some swollen milk to it. She tried to swallow watching the machine watching her with menacing flashing lights. Then she sat down surrounded by the beeps blips and clicks of monitors monikers and medical equipment and for that moment, life seemed purely mechanical.

The door to the bar had two burly bouncers dressed in dark suits who grinned leery smiles at her as she entered. Inside she could hear music playing could see drunken ladies dancing at tables in the darkened corners, could see hear clinking glasses of cheap wine lining their tables. At eye level a cloud of smoke was hiding their faces as they made music with their chatter and laughter. Propping up the bar, Winter could see Sanchez counting out the shot glasses in front him. He was slouched on a stool watching the ladies who danced. She made her way through the drinkers stepping over the handbags, shoes, stilettos and glittered faces. Then she tapped him on the shoulder.

“How did you know I’d be here?” Sanchez asked surprised to see here there.

“I called into the station, Marge was just finishing her shift for the night, said that you always went to drink here after working late. You don’t mind me coming do you?”

Sanchez called the bartender over again; the young man shook his head.

“I would get you a drink, but they seem to think that I’ve had enough already.”

He flashed his badge at the young man who was cleaning glasses with a white cloth,

“I would like to requisition your best bottle of whiskey for the night.”

He laughed as the young man shook his head and indicated to Winter that she should take him home. Winter called him over, ordered an orange juice and a cup of coffee for Sanchez.

“Its too late for coffee, I don’t want to sober up, didn’t spend all this money so I could *walk* outta this place.”

He said gruffly, as he tried to straighten himself into the stool, propping his feet up on the metal bar that ran along the ground.

“I need to talk to you” Winter said loudly over the din of the tinny disco music.

“Talking all we do is talking. We ask questions we get answers we ask more questions we change the answers. Why talk to *me*? Can you just leave me here, just for tonight

no talking? Have a drink and sit down, you're making me uncomfortable, hey bartender, get this woman a whiskey, no not for me for her, she needs one, you need a real drink, can't be ordering orange juice in a place like this lady."

He tried to stand up but lost his footing, then decided better of it and slumped back into the stool. Then he grinned back at Winter as she looked at the drunken wretch beside her.

"So what are you here for then Detective?"

"I've just been to see Paul Rivera at the hospital."

"Give him our best wishes did you?"

She pulled up a stool alongside him and looked around to see who was near, to see who would hear what she had to say.

"There is something I have to tell you Sanchez, I need your help"

"I'm sure there is lots you have to tell me, but like I said, I'm not here to listen. I am not here to talk. I'm here to drink. We're not on duty now, or haven't you noticed what time it is?"

The barman came over and placed a mug of black coffee in front of Sanchez and an orange juice in front of Winter. He shook his head as she handed him a ten dollar note said he'd put it on the tab. In the background Winter could hear Blondie singing about being left hanging on the telephone. Sanchez was eyeing up the lovely ladies in the corner of the bar, and then he looked back at Winter.

"You should do something with your hair you know. You'd look a whole lot better" he commented.

"Listen I need to talk with you do you think you can manage to walk out of this place its really important."

"Its always really important isn't it? For a while so very important. What do you think you can do Winter, think you can save the world tonight do you? Think that any of these people give a damn what we do? You think any of them give a damn about each other. Look at them, dancing drinking. They are just like us, so why can't we be like them, just for tonight. Can I do that, just for one night, can I be like them?"

He pushed the mug of coffee over to her, "You drink it, you stay up all night, you kid yourself that it will make a difference, I'm staying here, at least everyone here knows what they want, knows where they're going. At least they don't pretend they're something they're not Winter."

She grabbed his arm and placed the mug of coffee into it,

“Look drink that. Drink it now. You are leaving with me okay, you don’t have a choice. You are leaving here with me if I have to drag you out. I need your help tonight, do you understand?”

“Ahh getting forceful now are we Winter.”

He brushed her hand off his shoulder, “You like it on top don’t you? Yeah I’ll bet you’re the type that likes it on top. What’s wrong Winter got nobody to go home to? You are just like me; don’t kid yourself that you are any different. Stay and have a drink. Relax for once.”

She lifted up the canvas bag onto the top of the bar and took out one of the pages.

“Leave the god damned work at home for once can’t you just leave it?”

Then she grabbed his head and forced it against the page, forcing him to read the name that headlined it. At first, the words were foggy, he was unable to focus on the letters never mind attempting to read it. Then the letters strung themselves into a word. One word that made him bolt upright on his barstool. Murdock.

“You think I care, you think I want him still, just leave it Winter its too late” he said taking a gulp of the coffee.

She watched as he gazed at the bag, not taking his eyes off it, not even to look at the blonde who was now dancing on one of the tables in the corner of the bar.

“You know you want him, you know you want him still. I know you listen to those tapes. I have heard you playing them in the interview room when you think that there is nobody around. In the evenings, I know that is where you go to, when we leave. I saw the look in your eyes when you went to pick him up earlier on today. You’re still hungry, mightn’t be so thirsty anymore, but I know you still want to nail him don’t you?”

“You seem to know a lot tonight Winter” Sanchez replied finishing the coffee.

“And you want to know what I know don’t you?” she enquired, as he took the bag off the counter.

“Well you better drive then,” he said sliding off the stool trying to stand up beside her. Could see the surprised look on her face, “This is what you wanted isn’t it Cagney?” She grabbed his arm as he made as if to fall, then dragged him through the hoards of drunks drinks and dancers outside into the cold air of the streets. He faltered again “Christ it’s the fresh air isn’t it, gets me every time.”

She unlocked his side of the car and helped him get into the seat then darted around the other side. Again, she looked over her shoulder before getting into the car beside him.

“We need to find somewhere to park the car where we can be alone for a little while”

“Hey look baby, I’m know I’m drunk but that doesn’t mean you can take advantage of me, not on our first date, I’m not that kind of guy you know.”

“Yeah well maybe you can wake your mind up if nothing else. Start reading these tell me what you make of them while I park the car” she replied, driving down the dead streets checking her rear view mirror to be sure she wasn’t being watched.

Winter parked the car in a nearby alleyway and got out to get some fresh air as Sanchez continued to peruse the documents at his fingertips. Wished that she had another cigarette and contented herself with taking slow breaths of the heavy sweet air rising from the gutters at her feet. Inside the car, Sanchez switched on the light above his head and squinted at the writing. His fingers writhing reading and reeling from the shock of what was in front of him. There was a small yellow page, the first of many in his hands, it was a memo dated from two years ago from Michael Darcy to a Mr. John Doe. It detailed a body that one of the officer’s under Darcy’s control had found. Details of the age of the boy where he had been found and the injuries he had sustained. The memo was a request for more time from Darcy, more time to as he put it ‘work on the doll, see if he could stop it from talking’. Sanchez picked up another memo, dated a few months later, it was from Darcy to Doe again, detailing payments that were made, and people’s names were listed with stars beside them. He picked out another piece of paper, it had phone numbers on it, and more stars and names written down. It was from Darcy to Murdock, had been dated from early last year. January 14th the day after the first one of the David Water’s boys had turned up. It was a request that Murdock tighten up his end of the deal, that he do a better job because the fishing season had begun, and Darcy was not in the mood to trawl through the river for Murdock. Then there was a typed document, just signed P.T., which had a photograph of a man with dark hair, in his mid thirties and attached to it someone had scrawled wanted in felt tip pen. On the back was a list of names and numbers again, this time one was scratched out. He tried to make out the name. Christopher Bradley. Christopher Bradley he was one of the judges in the David Water’s case. He had

sentenced the killer to death, had been lauded for giving out such a harsh sentence. Darcy feted his tough justice. Bradley then retired some months later to great acclaim. Bradley, what was his name doing on the document. Names faces dates places, meetings that never took place, people that didn't exist, every line he read, every number that was noted was dragging him and her deeper. In his hands was evidence that the wrong man had been fitted up for the David Water's case, that Michael Darcy had been behind it, and even worse that he was covering up not just for one man, not just for one crime, not just for one backhander, one donation that would go untaxed, but for a whole series of people. From those who were supposed to be the doyennes of justice to those who did the time. He rapped his knuckles until they were white against the window calling Winter in to the car. She jumped in beside him both breathing heavily.

"Do you know what you have found? Do you know what you have found? This ain't no Hardy boys mystery. This runs much deeper than you and I are equipped to deal with. Shit tonight, why tonight."

He picked out one of the papers, the one with Christopher Bradley's name on it.

"You know who this guy is?"

Winter nodded her head silently.

"You know what this means?"

She nodded her head again.

"Where did you get these papers?"

"I found them, found them outside the hospital earlier on today an old bag lady, the one from the park dropped the bag on the ground outside in the car park this evening."

"You're telling me you *found* this stuff?"

"I'm telling you the truth I found the papers in a canvas bag outside the hospital. You know what the name on the bag was? Jack Tramery."

"What the fuck does that mean?"

"You know he was behind the robbery last night, the one from Darcy's office?"

"You mean..."

Both detectives looked stony faced at the sheaths of papers in front of them. Neither liking the position they were in.

"You realise what this means? It means that Peter Thatcher wasn't behind all those killings. Look do you see this do you see what this means. Pulled me out of a fucking

pub to show me this. Christ Elaine what makes you think you can trust me of all people with this?"

"Because you don't trust me" she shot right back at him.

Then she moved over in the car a little closer to him, speaking in half-whispers.

"Because I don't know how deep this runs in the precinct. Darcy orchestrated some kind of a cover up last year; he picked that Thatcher guy out as the perfect criminal; a history of mental illness and a previous conviction for trafficking in kiddie porn. He pleaded innocence throughout the trial just like he was supposed to. They must have known that would make him look so much worse in the paper and on TV. Sentenced to death by Bradley. Found guilty by the public. Jailed by us. Supplied by Murdock. Corruption, its everywhere its all over the city; in our own department Sanchez. Somebody must have helped Darcy, it could have been anyone, everyone. So out of all the mess, you are the only person I know who hates him enough not to have helped. That is why I trust you Sanchez."

"So what do we do now?"

"I don't know?"

"Why did you bring this to me tonight? A case like this is going to take a long long time to get together, why tonight."

Winter ran her fingers through her short hair and put on her seatbelt.

"I'm not sure, but something doesn't make sense. That kid getting shot in the park, Jimmy and Tramery behind the robbery. All of them being so helpful. Why do you think they took these documents, why do you think I found them on the ground? Could be that kid Peter Jones knew more than they let on, could be they executed him. I don't know I just have a feeling."

"You have a feeling. Do you realise that the amount of people we are going to cross will stay with us for life. That there will be no way back after tonight and you want us to do this because you have a feeling? I have a feeling; I have a feeling that as long as we have these documents we're not safe. I have a feeling that I'm going to throw up, you don't have a feeling you have a conscience, and that's all the more dangerous. Suppose I refuse to help you, what do you do then Winter?"

She said nothing and started up the engine of the car.

"I wait until you have sobered up and then I ask you again."

The two lone figures drove through the nightlights, past listless sleepwalkers jaded joggers and men in bright jackets sweeping the city streets clean. The car stopped as the traffic lights turned red. Sanchez suddenly broke the silence,

“Why do you think that the paintings were in Darcy’s office last night, why do you think they were stolen with such ease. Don’t you think that that it is strange? Him having covered up the Water’s case so well, don’t you think that it’s strange that a man like him would let his office be burgled so easily, especially with documents as sensitive as these inside? Don’t you think that he would have made a bigger song and dance about it?”

Winter relaxed her grip on the leather wheel a little.

“You mean he didn’t seem worried enough for a man who could have been on the brink of self destruction. A little too professional and businesslike?”

Darcy’s face came back again, the face at the top of the hall briefing them about the Water’s case, telling them they would catch the guy behind the murders. Remembered his speeches and how they sent shivers down the backs off all the officers. Remembered the respect he commanded.

“Like he wasn’t worried at all,” Sanchez mused, “Like he knew he would get them back. Like he knew who did the job already. I’ll bet he doesn’t even know that these are missing I’ll bet he thinks that whoever stole the paintings has the documents too. That they’ll be making their way back to his office ASAP courtesy of Murdock enterprises.”

The lights turned green as Sanchez directed Winter to turn left two blocks up the street. She followed his instructions until they drove up outside of an apartment block, which had two black doors outside. He told her to turn the engine off in the car.

“You think that we should expose this cover up?”

“We have to, it’s not a choice.”

“You think that it’s important to expose this to the public, you think that they have anymore reason to believe us and not him? You believe in yourself that much Winter? You think that you have that much integrity?”

Winter said nothing. She looked around the desolate streets, for some sign of what Sanchez was looking for.

“This is the first time that you have had to deal with a case of this size isn’t it Winter?”

“I guess so.”

He undid the seatbelt and opened his door slightly.

“You think so?”

Winter nodded,

“Yes.”

He shook his head back at her.

“No its not. You people had your chance during the Murdock case. You had your chance to get my back to tell them that I was set up. All of you knew what happened and nobody opened their mouths. What makes you think its all going to be so different this time? What makes you think you are so damn special Winter?”

She looked at the number on the door on the apartment, and then read the name printed on a sign on the street corner and watched as he got out of the car. Her heart sank.

“Thanks for the ride home, Winter, I wish you good luck, hope you enjoy justice as much as I did.” Sanchez said shutting the car door, leaving her in an exposed car in an empty street, in a city full of solitude.

The two black doors shut behind him, shutting out the night time air. Sanchez left behind him the cockroaches and the rats that scampered past in packs along the walls of every building in the city as they dined on the dirt. Swished slowly before clicking shut, locking solid. He hated the little slits of light that made their way into his bedroom through the chinks in the curtains. But the light that shone in through the bedroom door, Jack could shut that out. He could close the door, could sleep when it was entirely dark. It made him uncomfortable to sleep if the door was left open even an inch. A centimetre, a fingertip reach a few seconds ago and she was in the running, but now as the doors shut behind him suddenly Winter was oceans away. She turned the key in the ignition and chinked the seatbelt into place, stretching it over her chest. Before adjusting it slightly and hoping nobody noticed Jade pulled at her bra strap again. She was watching the tall man talking to the rosy-cheeked woman at the front desk agitatedly asking questions that had no answers. A cool breeze washed over her face as the two plastic doors of the emergency lobby swished open and then suddenly shut again. Why hadn't Sarah returned yet, what was taking so long? Why was she waiting why did she think she needed help Winter wondered as she drove past the Channel Three news building again. Her thoughts of despair and hope circling round

and round with the revolving doors on the front of the building, opening and shutting, moving without actually getting anywhere. She had made a decision, but was it going to be the right decision.

CHAPTER 17

The body of a man is discovered

Nora held one hand on the sheets beside where his body lay. Where she could feel the warmth of his body, the only place she could touch him that was not covered in bandage, or blood or bleeding. His breathing moved in slow heaving sighs across his chest and onto the flickering screen beside her. She watched each ripple of green moving across in straight lines and traced the wires from the machine to his body and from his torso to his face, his eyes that were barely able to open.

“Why did they do this to you Paul why?” Nora said through silent sobs, as the nurses cleaned his bandages.

“I told you I told you something like this would happen, I told you it was dangerous,” she looked up at the nurse nearest her, “I told him something like this would happen and now look.”

Her voice started to tremble as she watched his limp limbs being lifted and straightened under the sheets as they prepared him for sleep. They asked her to leave as they gave him a plastic cup full of syrupy sleep medicine to sip, held it to his lips and told her she should leave, could visit in the morning. She shook her head, wasn't going to leave, and wasn't going to leave him to wake up without her beside him.

“But what about your daughter Mrs. Rivera?”

Nora stared at them blank-faced for a moment. Then she noticed the little girl that sat silent at the other side of the room nearest the window.

“Would you like us to ring some-one to look after your daughter for the night? Its very late you know, I think that she would do better if she had some rest all things considered don't you Mrs Rivera?” the nurse enquired walking over to Sarah.

The nurse made as if to pat her on the head, but Sarah jumped out of the chair out of her hand and walked over to Nora. Walked past him, didn't look at his face but could feel him still looking at her.

“I'll go with the painter lady? She is still downstairs waiting for me mom, she can take me home can't she?” Sarah asked as her mother dismissed her from the room with a tiny inflection of her head.

With a movement almost as invisible Sarah took a shy glance at her father before leaving the room with the nurse. Outside were two men in uniforms sitting on chairs

reading magazines and further down the corridor she could see a policeman standing by the elevator. They had the same expression that she was wearing on her face only moments beforehand sitting under the window hoping to catch a draft of cool air in the stuffy sick room. She followed the white uniform past the blue shirts and into the elevator.

“Is there any news on Paul Rivera” Jade enquired for the fifth time that hour, brushing past the tall man to get to the reception desk.

The woman behind the counter shook her head again. She was not allowed to give out information about their patients to people who were not blood relatives. Tramery was startled to hear Paul’s name being asked for. He looked at the blond haired woman beside him she looked familiar. He couldn’t help but stare, then tapped her on the shoulder,

“Don’t I know you from some-where?” he asked.

Jade barely acknowledged the question, she was used to it by now. In taxis supermarkets, in pubs, at the dentist, people were always asking if they knew her from somewhere or telling her that she looked like their cousin, or their neighbour. She shook her head,

“I don’t think so” was the barely audible reply as she walked to return to her seat back on the plastic chairs.

Tramery watched her walk away in long elegant strides, it reminded him of someone. He walked over to where she sat and took a seat beside her.

“Are you sure that we haven’ t met somewhere, I’m sure that I know you from somewhere... I can’t place your face but I know I’ve seen it before”

“Jade?”

“No I’m a just a little tired for this time of night, but I’m not trying to pick you up”

Tramery continued with his questions,

“You asked how Paul Rivera was doing, you a friend of Paul?”

Jade kept her eye on the corridor looking out for any sign of Sarah or her mother.

“I’m more of an acquaintance of the family. I was looking after their daughter Sarah today while Nora went here to check how Paul was doing, you are a friend of Paul’s?”

“More a business associate really. Are you sure that we haven’t met before? You have a really familiar look, I’m not sure why.”

Above his head on the flickering screen was another report on the Muscat Robbery this time with an art critic making an estimation of how much the paintings were worth and the effect that the robbery would have on future exhibitions in the city. She pointed up at the screen and waited for a reaction of recognition. Tramery shot a cautious look to her. He was unsure as to what she meant or how well she knew Paul or their line of work. Who was this woman, and what did she know about the robbery? Was she in the business too?

“I heard there was a robbery yesterday, they stole some chick’s paintings. Terrible wasn’t it?” he said amiably eyes fixed on her waiting for a response.

“I heard that the paintings weren’t any good, they probably did *her* a favour anyway don’t you think?” Jade smiled back at him.

He tilted his head slightly to the left, so his eyes were no longer in the glare of the white neon lights that lit up the lobby. She could see that they were brown and friendly. The pupils were rounded without irony and she knew that he had not guessed yet who she was.

“I’m not so sure, I can’t say that I know too much about art” he replied wondering where they had met before.

She started to jangle with the bracelets on her narrow wrists.

“They’re very pretty bracelets”

“I thought you said you weren’t going to hit on me.”

Tramery grinned and held out his hand.

“I have an interest in jewellery, that’s all no need to be so defensive. You mind if I take a closer look?”

She said nothing and held her arm up for closer inspection. Gracefully took hold of her arm as though he was picking up a delicate flower and he held his face a little closer to the bracelets. Could smell her perfume, all traces of bags parcels and robberies lost for a moment.

“They are very pretty, but I have to say in my humble opinion, maybe not so.”

“Not so valuable. Worthless is the word you’re looking for”

“No not not worthless, priceless” he said as she slid her wrist out of his hands, allowing the bracelets to remain in his fingers for a moment as she did. Underneath where they had lain he got a fleeting glimpse of the pale naked skin beneath and saw the tiny raised white lines on her wrist. All of a sudden she jerked her head to the left

and jumped out of the seat towards a little girl. Tramery peered down the corridor; it was the little girl from the electrical store.

Sarah could see Jennifer walking towards herself and the nurse, as they walked past the lobby for the second time that night. She was feeling tired, feeling like she wanted to sleep, but didn't want to go home. She didn't want to be alone in her bedroom tonight. Jennifer and the nurse were talking in whispers above her head. Then Jennifer nodded her head and thanked the nurse, gave the woman her phone number said to call her if there was any change in Paul's condition. She reached down to take Sarah's hand before deciding better of it.

"I'm going to drive you home again is that okay?"

Reluctantly Sarah nodded her head.

"You want to go home? Sarah you do not have to leave if you don't want to," then she added softly, "We can go somewhere else."

Sarah's eyes met Jennifer's enquiring what she meant but saying nothing more and nothing less.

"We could drive to an ice-cream shop, get you some more food if you like? I hear that that ice-cream is the best thing for you young kids to be eating in the middle of the night. And I know that I'd like to get some, would that be alright?" Jennifer asked again.

Sarah wasn't paying her any attention and was looking at the man in the brown jacket seated on the orange plastic chairs. He raised his hand to his head and gave her a mock salute before striding over to talk with her. It was the definitely the little girl from the electrical store.

"Pleased to meet you again young lady" Tramery smiled at her offering his hand to hers. She shook his hand timidly,

"You got out of the police station already?"

"But of course, they only keep the criminals in or didn't you know that?"

Then he turned to face Jennifer again.

"This is Paul's kid? I never knew he had such a pretty daughter," he said and secretly wondered what it would be like to have a father like Paul and shivered as he remembered Peter Jones face, the rumours and the crimes that they never put a name to. He bent down to Sarah suddenly aware that she was staring at him.

“I know your father, sorry to hear that he is sick.”

Sarah said nothing didn't move an inch.

“You going to go bring her home now?” he enquired of Jennifer.

“I think that we are going to go get some ice-cream, no point bringing her home, if I have to wake her up in an hours time” Jennifer's voice faded.

She was loath to say too much in front of Sarah who was watching the two grown ups talking. The little girl reached up and grabbed Tramery's hand,

“You want to come with us?” Sarah asked.

Tramery looked from her to the blond lady in front of him, waiting for her to indicate whether he should come.

“I don't really know if I should.”

“You have to go home to your son?”

“My son?”

“Yeah, remember the one you said you had to buy a television for in the electrical store.”

“Ahh my son, em” Tramery pictured Jack at home asleep.

He could see Therese sitting in their kitchen smoking watching late night TV waiting for him to return so she could pick a row with him. Then he looked at the little girl, Paul's kid, who was stood in front of him.

“He's probably asleep by now. I'd be delighted to come with you, if that's alright with you?”

Jade watched as Sarah kept holding his hand, she was half surprised that Sarah allowed the stranger to touch her and felt for some reason like she could trust the tall man.

“That's Jennifer” Sarah interrupted, “And I'm Sarah.”

“And I am John, pleased to meet you both”

“Again” Jennifer replied smiling at him.

“What do you mean you don't know, all kids have a favourite ice-cream? You don't, well now never thought I'd meet a lady of your years who didn't know what her favourite ice-cream was. You go over to the counter and tell that man that you have never tasted ice-cream before. Yes yes I know you had it once or twice before, but he

does not. Now you go over there and tell him that, and give him your biggest smile, and you see if he doesn't let you taste every one in the shop" Tramery directed Sarah. He continued stirring his coffee, while pouring in some sugar very slowly. Jennifer noticed his hands, noticed that his nails were immaculately clean.

"Its good of you to come with us both here" she said watching Sarah taste scoop after scoop of ice-cream and frozen yoghurt from the spotty faced kid behind the counter.

"Not a problem, I owe it to Paul."

"So did you find what you were looking for?" Jade enquired.

Tramery looked a little surprised.

"Sorry, I wasn't stalking you. I have been sat in that lobby for the past two hours. You get used to watching everyone who comes and goes to pass the time. I noticed that you ran in through the doors, and were the only person not to go to the reception desk and demand to see some one or be seen. You were rummaging through the bins, but I have to say you don't really look like you need the Five pennies for recycling cans, so I'm guessing you were looking for something."

Tramery took a sip of his coffee, for some reason he felt incredibly relaxed with Jade.

"My son was in the hospital earlier on, he left a bag belonging to me in the lobby I came back to check if it was still there."

"Sorry to hear your son is sick." Jennifer replied sympathetically, still watching the smiles and frowns of Sarah in the distance, as she tasted every flavour. Her mouth was wrinkled into a grimace as she sucked on spoonful of rum and raisin. The young man behind the counter had got her a paper cup to spit out the evil raisins into.

"My son sick? My son wasn't sick he was just there waiting for Therese to give him a ride home."

"Your wife is a nurse?"

"My wife, no she's dead, she died a long time ago."

"Sorry, I shouldn't have asked, should have stuck to the weather and your health maybe?" Jennifer said before turning her gaze back to Tramery.

He was looking at her eyes, very green eyes.

"No they're not contact lenses before you ask" she said smiling noticing him looking at her intently.

"I didn't think they were, I was just thinking you remind me of someone. Are you sure that we haven't met before? No probably just the time of night, god knows I can't see straight."

“Busy day today?”

“You could say that.”

“If you don’t mind me asking what do you do for a living, I notice that your hands are very well looked after.”

“What do I do for a living, I do card tricks I’m an entertainer.”

Card tricks. Jennifer started to rummage through her bag trying to find something she had taken from Nora’s apartment.

“You any good then? Because I can’t say I’ve ever seen a trick that I couldn’t figure out, most guys just lack originality in their tricks, you know what I mean, they just make you pick a card out of a bundle and then find it again.”

John stood up and took a mock bow,

“John Tramery, master illusionist at your service my dear.”

He said in a grandiose manner, noticing Sarah laughing at him at the front of the parlour, he winked over at her.

“So you think that you’re good then?”

“Not good, the best.”

“Well then Jack see what you can do with this” Jennifer replied throwing out the Jack of Spades onto the table in front of him. He reached out, took it in his fingers turned the card around slowly, and saw the design on the back. It was his card. It was the card that he had thrown out the window at Peter Jones, the night that Peter got shot, the night of the robbery, last night. He stuffed it back into his pocket trying to figure out how Jade had ended up with it.

“I’ve made it disappear, just like magic isn’t it.”

Sarah was tottering back to the table holding what looked like a mountain of ice-cream loaded with nuts chocolate pieces and hundreds and thousands, but no raisins. Tramery fingered the card in his pocket and looked at the lady seated in front of him, she was playing with the bangles on her wrist.

“Do you believe in Fate Jennifer?”

She looked a little surprised.

“Sorry, but I noticed that the bracelets you were wearing had the signs of the Zodiac cut into them. I was just wondering if you believe in fate?” Tramery asked fingering the jack of spades in his pocket again, flicking it through his fingertips.

Jade stirred her ice-cold coffee before adding a little more warm milk to it.

“You mean because you think that we met before? I don’t like to believe in fate, because that would mean that things happen for a reason, and that’s just not possible, we can’t rationalise life away, can’t rationalise decisions we make with our *destiny* otherwise we just give up our responsibility to live, to make choices.”

“That’s a little harsh isn’t it?”

“Only if its true. You believe in fate?”

“Life has a habit of repeating itself, but of dealing us the same hand each time, and it seems like no matter what you change it all happens over and over again.”

“You mean like meeting *me* again.”

Jennifer rubbed at the skin under her bangles, something about him seemed familiar, something about him made her feel comfortable and vulnerable at the same time.

“You did it to yourself didn’t you? Sorry, I noticed when I was looking at your bangles earlier on. It reminded me of my wife. Of what happened to her.”

Jennifer pulled the bracelets down and looked at the tiny straight lines.

“Is that how she died?” she asked running her index finger along the lines.

“The cuts didn’t kill her, she died in a fire five years ago, it was an accident. They said that she would have felt no pain. I know they were lying, trying to make us feel better about it.”

“Because you blame yourself?”

“No I blame everyone else, I blame fate. You think that’s irresponsible Jennifer?”

“Sorry, I’m being very arrogant, I really don’t know, maybe its because its so late at night.”

“The words always come out wrong”

“Which is why they say never write letters to people after midnight, because people get more emotional at night-time”

“Less distractions.”

“Less distractions” he echoed at the same time as her.

They sat in perfect silence for a moment until a buzzing noise interrupted it. The sound appeared to be coming from somewhere on the table. As Sarah took a seat beside him, Jennifer excused herself and went over to the payphone outside the ice-cream parlour on the street by the window. Tramery gave a frown of surprise.

“It’s her watch” Sarah said in her best grown up voice, “Don’t you know? She has a beeper installed in her watch, that was probably her agent calling.”

“Her agent?” Tramery enquired in a surprised voice.

“Yeah, all famous people have agents”

“Famous people?”

“Yeah famous people, she’s a painter didn’t you know” Sarah said through mouthfuls as Tramery stared out the window at the beautiful woman in the phone box.

“Her name is Jennifer, she said her name is Jennifer.”

“She is a pseudo-mom”

“What a surrogate mother?”

“You know when people use names instead of their own when they are famous”

“A pseudonym!”

Sarah looked at the man in front of her gazing at Jennifer stood outside still hanging on the telephone. Tramery noticed her watching him watch Jennifer then turned around to face Sarah. He was unexpectedly embarrassed and made as if to dip his fingers into the ice-cream to distract Sarah’s attention.

“So what do you make of the ice-cream kid?”

“Very sweet, and crunchy. Maybe a little too sweet, you want some, I don’t think that I’ll be able to finish this.”

“Thought you’d never ask.”

“So what do you do for a living?” Tramery asked as Jennifer sat down on the other side of the table.

“Oh little tricks with paper just like you I guess” she replied flippantly, before her face became grave.

She nodded at him to come a little closer to her so she could whisper to him.

“We have to go back again to the hospital that was St. Benedict’s on the phone. The receptionist said that Sarah should come see her father, her mother was asking for her.”

Tramery nodded with a concerned look on his face.

“I’ll come too”

“That’s very noble of you”

“Maybe but I left my car outside the hospital”

She half smiled at him then looked at Sarah.

Jade’s face suddenly riddled with worry, then just as suddenly smooth again.

“You don’t want to bring her there do you Jennifer?”

“Have you ever had to make a decision before, that you know could change somebody’s life, but that you knew wasn’t really your place to make?”

“Every day brings decisions.”

“I know something, and I know that if I tell, that it could screw up a family, and if I don’t mention anything, then I’ll be just as guilty as the rest of the people involved.”

“You have to follow your instincts, always follow your instincts, because its all you have. If you hadn’t met me tonight, you’d be having this conversation with some-one else, the kid behind the counter, some punter in a taxi cab, some guy behind a bar and at the end of it you would still know what you were going to do. People only ever ask questions aloud that they already know the answers to.”

“You believe in honesty then?”

“I believe in identity and that’s entirely different. Follow your instincts, keep your identity, its all you really have.”

Jennifer sat back on her faux leather seat and looked at the man in front of her, his handsome and weathered face.

“So you know who I am now? Sarah told you?”

“Yeah, I didn’t recognise you which is strange considering all that has happened tonight, but you looked familiar anyhow. I’m still not sure why.”

“Since you know my identity maybe I should know yours. What were you doing in the police station earlier on today? I saw you being interviewed when we walked down the corridor.”

Tramery shifted himself uncomfortably in his seat then noticed that Sarah was listening to what they were saying.

“Maybe I tell you another time, but we should be making a move now shouldn’t we?” he said getting up to leave.

Tramery took his wallet out to leave a few bills on the table as a tip for the kid behind the counter who had been feeding Sarah all the samples. Jennifer reached out her hand to stop him and placed a twenty under one of the saucers.

“Let me buy, thanks to the robbery I’ll be a rich woman from now on.”

Tramery cocked his head up at her inquisitively as they walked out the doors of the parlour.

“Insurance money Jack, insurance money” she explained, holding the door open for Sarah and he to leave through.

“You don’t expect to get the paintings back?”

“I don’t think so.”

“You don’t have much faith in people.”

“I think it would be ‘tempting faith’ to hope to get them back don’t you?”

Tramery thought for a second then walked around the side of the car and opened the door for Sarah to let her in. He then jumped into the front seat beside Jade as she waited for a reply.

“I bet you that you will get the paintings back before tomorrow.”

“You’re a bit of a gambling man hey?”

“Work with me its my job.”

“Alright what’s it worth then?”

“You get the paintings back, you come to dinner with me, you don’t get them back and I’ll..”

“You’ll what?”

“I will clean your car out it is a mess in here” he said picking up the empty packets of chewing gum and chocolate off the dashboard. He held them up for Sarah to see, pretending to be disgusted.

“Fine it’s a deal.” Jennifer smiled back at him.

She tilted the rear view mirror to get a better look at Sarah who was looking out the window, watching the pathways and passing buildings as they drove through the city, back to the hospital, back to *him*. Jade recognised the look on Sarah’s eyes, knew her face as well as her own. Tramery turned the radio onto some music station with easy listening and started humming along to himself, filling the car with music for a few brief moments as Sarah wound her window up again, closing out the night shutting out the silence.

A few moments later, the traffic lights turned red, bringing the car to a halt. Sarah looked out the window, recognising where she was.

“That’s the electrical store we were in earlier on,” she said excitedly pointing out the window showing both of them what she was looking at.

Tramery turned his head to his left and looked over at the window. It was still full of TV’s glowing with news, comedy and cartoons, not that there was much difference between them. The lights turned green again and as they drove past his eyes were

drawn down the alleyway beside the shop. He peered into the darkness and could make out fleetingly what looked like two people waltzing in heavy steps. He watched as they stopped and the man bowed down in front of the old woman. Then he stood up again, his face momentarily illuminated by the passing traffic. Tramery looked at the face, watched him bend down and kiss the withered hand he was holding as the old lady smiled a gap toothed smile at him. Blanco, it was Blanco that he had left bleeding in the same alleyway only hours ago Tramery shook his head in marvel. The old woman took the hat off her head and held out her arm from the side of her body. She was attempting to give a curtsy before falling over and landing in a heap against the wall of the electrical store. Blanco took a seat beside her, placed his arms around her and closed his eyes ready for sleep, nuzzling his whiskered face against hers, still able to hear the hum of the piped music of the electrical store through the brickwork behind them. Jade reached her arm around to switch the station, told Tramery the music was too slow, that they needed to be listening to something a little more lively. As she switched stations, they drove past the Channel Three building. Outside of it Sarah noticed a face she recognised getting out of a car clutching a canvas bag, making her way up the steps of the building.

“Look over there,” she said trying to attract the attention of Tramery and Jennifer. Neither turned around, both lost in their own thoughts as Winter walked into the news station’s lobby clutching Tramery’s bag.

CHAPTER 18

They find some evidence

Maria unlocked the door of the editing room. She switched on one of the lamps as she entered, placed the camera on one of the tables in front of her and tried to get the tape out. She pressed buttons and flicked switches on the sides of the camera until it popped out. The room smelled of polish. The cleaners had just left for the night. And as Maria padded across the freshly hoovered carpet, she left deep shadowed indentations with each silent step. Warily Maria deposited the camera into the metal press, and then took a seat at the mixing desk. Her fingers felt around under the counter for the plugs and pressed them hard into the sockets. Flashes of light and flickers of pictures swamped the room as one by one the screens twitched with electricity. For a second she was surrounded by sounds of different TV stations. The panel of buttons and knobs lit up like a Chinese new year. In the background, she could hear videotapes automatically reeling into rewind. Maria flicked the switches on the panel off one by one till only the monitor in front of her was alive, then grumbled to herself about the fact that nobody ever rewound the tapes when they were finished with them. Two black lines jumped up and down on the screen as the world spun into rewind behind them. The tears in Peter Jones's mother's eyes were sucked back up under her eyelids, and her husband took his arms from around her. They backed out of the room, and shut the door behind them. Maria hedged her way outside of the Muscat building taking staccato steps at the front door as men in dark boiler suits danced their way out the doors. The picture wobbled for a few seconds as a fist jumped from behind the camera back on a uniformed officer's arm. The flickering screen took her back to the early morning hours, when they had first found out about a robbery. Snapping her out of the trance was the phone ringing on the wall beside where she sat. One of the receptionists from the lobby downstairs was telling her that she was required at the front desk, that there was some woman looking for her.

Winter walked around the inside of the building watching the traffic pass by waiting for Maria Thornton. The receptionist pretended not to be watching her, to be typing something on her computer. The elevators doors rung open and Maria stepped out,

Winter couldn't help but noticing that she had no shoes on. She walked over to Winter and told her to come upstairs with her, that they could talk privately in her office. Both women stepped into the elevator hesitating between the sliding doors. Winter was a little unsure as to what made her drive up to the station, as to what made her think that she could talk with Thornton, as to what made her think she could trust her. A light came on on the panel beside Winter in the elevator. The fourth floor a voice announced. The doors slid open again and Winter stepped out and followed Thornton down through the dark passages of the building. Maria opened the door of the editor's room and pulled out a chair at the counter for Winter to take a seat beside her.

"I'm going to guess that you aren't here for a tour of the building detective" she said as she took the tape that was inside the video player out and switched it for the one that had been in Mike's camera.

"This is your office?" Winter asked feeling a little uncomfortable as she placed the canvas bag on top of the counter.

"For tonight only, I have to try to piece a digestible story out of these tapes for tomorrow's programme, seeing as Mike has deserted me. And you detective, what are you here for? Come to see yourself on the big screen?"

Winter looked around the room, at all the monitors wires and cables, and then back at Thornton. She wondered if she had made the right decision because it didn't feel right being in the room alone with Thornton.

"I came here, I came here to ask you a favour" Winter replied.

Thornton rewound the tape in the machine and pressed the play button.

"You came to ask help from me?"

On the screen behind Thornton's head the tape was still playing. The pictures on screen showed her own face in a flurry of flashlights in the green room of St. Michael's precinct, then Darcy conducting his own press conference on the steps of the building, as cool calm and collected as ever. Thornton paused the tape and cocked her head up at Winter.

"So what can I do for you detective, I'm a little busy tonight as you can see."

Winter opened the canvas bag reluctantly.

"I have a story that you might be interested in. Off the record, completely off the record alright?"

Thornton laughed scornfully at her and shook her head.

“You don’t think that I have enough material already? What happened, let me guess, your friend Sanchez wants to stick his oar in, get his two cents worth on TV. After all this time has finally decided that he will talk to the press about what happened with Murdock? Saw your face on TV and decided he wanted a piece of the action did he?” Winter shook her head, regretting having decided to talk with Thornton. She picked the bag back up off the counter and made as if to leave the room, before Maria called her back.

“Hey look, you came all this way, you might as well tell me what you’re here for”

Winter stood poised at the door, holding it open slightly and looked into each of the corners of the room searching for an answer in the shadows. Thornton was the only option left. She looked at the screen paused on Darcy’s cool confident gaze and then walked over to where Thornton sat.

“You think that will make a story do you?” she asked pointing at the screen.

Thornton turned her chair around to face Winter who was hovering beside her. She was stood so close that Thornton could smell the soap that she had used to wash her hands with earlier that morning. It was like lavender; Thornton had her pegged as a juniper girl. Winter’s eyes had a look of such intensity that Thornton could not resist but find out what was on her mind.

“So tell me what you know then detective, strictly off the record of course.”

Winter threw the canvas bag in her lap.

“Read these papers, and tell me what you make of them.”

Thornton pulled the papers out of the bag with weary fingers and sorted them on the counter by colour and size. Winter grew agitated, picked up one of the printed pages and pressed it into her hands impatiently.

“Read it and tell me what you think of your precious Darcy now.”

Thornton skimmed through the document; it detailed the David Waters case, the number and some of the names of the victims, where they had been found, the injuries that had been sustained and a list of possible suspects.

“That’s old news, what do you expect me to do with this? Want me to write a book about it because I think its already been done detective.”

“Now read this” Winter said handing her each of the yellow memo’s one by one in chronological order. At first Thornton skimmed each page, reading the names and dates of meetings arranged. It seemed like a business diary nothing more and nothing less than business. Something made her sit upright all of a sudden. Reading the code,

clarity cutting through her thoughts. Christopher Bradley and Michael Darcy were arranging places to meet and discuss the Waters case. Except that the dates of their meetings before the dates that the boys started to appear in the river. She grabbed the rest of the memos out of Winter's hands. The headings of the papers had three circles interwoven. They were filled with names of local businessmen. People that she had met at media dinners. People whose hands she had shaken in the hope of being remembered, in the hope of making a name for herself in the media. Thornton pulled pages up close to her face. Winter rifled through the other documents on the counter. Presented her with a list of names and phone-numbers to which stars and astrixes like smiles had been added. Then she showed her another list with the names of boys, little boys, lost boys, missing boys, dead eyed doped up boys that that Thatcher man had been arrested for murdering. Beside their names were dates and meeting places with stars, beside their names, tying them to Thornton's list of businessmen. A chill ran down the back of Thornton's neck. Some of the boy's names appeared regularly and had been highlighted. Their performance rated with stars like Hollywood harlots. The dates were only a few months old beside one of the names. Thornton looked up at Winter then back at the pages shaking her head.

"Is this true?"

Winter nodded.

"You mean that?"

"Christopher Bradley and Michael Darcy have been rigging up kids for these men to have their fun with. Darcy has been supplying them with boys of the streets. Boys that he knew would be seen and not heard, boys without face or traces, boys that would not want to be found. He had us leave all those homeless kids to themselves during the David Water's case. There are no places for them to sleep at night, because the department won't fund any new centres," Winter pursed her lips together in sudden anger,

"He has been keeping the market open for years. We have been keeping the prices up do you see, publicity and policing, that is what has been keeping this underground do you see. Tell me you see that Maria."

The cars outside passed a little slower and the rainwater running in the gutters seemed to be flowing in the wrong direction. Everything was spinning backwards in Maria's mind. She tried to digest the information, tried to make sense of it. She remembered the Water's case, remembered how busy they all were reporting on every aspect of it,

from Thatcher to the jury in the court. They even had a fashion expert comment on what the judge was wearing. She remembered the unquenchable appetite the public had for every gory detail.

“Bradley retired after sentencing Thatcher guy to death. I remember it, we asked him for an interview after the case, but he refused,” Thornton said quietly, the papers shaking in her hands as she suddenly realised what it all meant.

Was Bradley behind the killings? Had he gone too far with the boys that Darcy provided him with. She read the memo again; it was dated two months before the investigations into the Water’s case had begun. Her fingers trembling as they underpinned each word on the page. The note was from Darcy to Bradley. In it Darcy outlined that water burial would decay the bodies in such a way that a time of death would be impossible to ascertain especially if the kid was infected with the larvae. The faces of the first kid that the cops found, the one whose eyes were eaten out, skin pocked and marked with infestation, and every inch of his body covered in bruise, in violent patches of violet and dirt, the face of David Water’s dead in the river water drowned in her thoughts. Winter remembered the young face smoking a cigarette in an interview room only hours before telling her she didn’t have a clue telling her that the boys were the kings of the park. She shook her head bitterly. Thornton was scrunched into her seat, reading every little detail that Darcy had covered during the case.

“Murdock is mentioned here, look, here he requests details of the profile that Darcy wants to fit up as the prime suspect; somebody with no family an outcast, some one with a past and a few prior convictions, somebody just as disposable as the boys were. Winter did you read this? They used Thatcher they set him up.”

Thornton put her hand on her head as it all made sense, thoughts crashing thumping their way through her head, “They used all of us. Jesus, when I think of all the stories we produced of Darcy and his team of good guys searching the streets for that Thatcher guy, when all along.”

Thornton’s voice trailed off as she jumped out of the chair. Winter placed her hands on Thornton’s shoulders tried to calm her down.

“They used all of us. I was on that team. I was one of the people that went out and dredged the river for bodies. Weeks and months it dragged on. Weeks and months of those kid’s faces haunting me and everyone else in the city. Hours every day, slow sticky hours searching the streets for kids with no names. Us all the time telling their

parents that we would find them. Darcy holding press conferences with them telling everyone not to give up hope, to be brave.”

Thornton started pacing around the room shaking her head scratching her fingers through her hair, reading each piece of paper again and again not wanting to believe what she was reading, feeling nauseous. Then suddenly she became very cool, very calm.

“Why did you bring these here for me to read?” she asked in a slow serious voice.

Her eyes dared Winter to reply, eyes filled with suspicion and distrust.

“I know you don’t like me, you said as much earlier on so why bring them to me? Here tonight, why?”

Winter walked across the room stood face to face with Maria.

“I didn’t have a choice, I had nowhere else to go, and you can see that can’t you? I can’t bring these into the precinct. You think this story will get past the first stages of an investigation, that these papers won’t be lost just as quickly as I found them? You think I won’t be checking parking tickets for the next twenty years if anyone there knew I had these. If they are capable of killing all those kids in public and still looking like the good guys, do you know what they would do to me?” she asked while placing one of her hands on Thornton’s shoulder, pleading with her, hoping she would understand.

Maria looked at the earnest eyes in front of her. She didn’t know what to believe, she wanted to believe Winter, something about the look in her eyes made her want to trust her. Thornton backed away from her.

“So why here, why bring them to me, what do you want from me?”

Winter took a deep breath.

“You said you wanted a story, well here is a story for you” she simply stated watching the expression change on Thornton’s face.

“You made Darcy, you and all your people made him. You all brought Thatcher down. You crucified him every day of that trial, all the old girlfriends the family that refused even to mention his name in public after he was arrested, the school reports the psychiatric reports the newspaper reports. You owe it to him to get the truth out, to tell people what the truth is.”

“And you, you do what? What can I do that you can’t do?”

Thornton picked up all the papers strewn around the counter and waved them at Winter,

“This is evidence, why don’t you use it? Why do you think it’s enough for me if it’s not enough for you?”

Winter took the papers back off her, and forced her to sit down in the chair calm down a little. She then touched and turned Maria’s face gently to the TV screen, the screen with Darcy’s smiling face grinning down at them.

“You made him, and you alone can break him. Nobody cares about courtrooms or about the law anymore. They only care about what they can see, what they can read about. You put that story on the news, you bring it into every household in the city, you bring the names of every sicko on this list into subways the waiting rooms, into the conversation of everyone who lives in this city and you will see justice being done. Five minutes on your station will bring them down quicker than any of the proceedings that I initiate will. You know that Maria you have to know it. You don’t have a choice you have to do this.”

Thornton said nothing and started to shake her head, suddenly very afraid.

“It’s a chance, it’s a chance for you to do something real. Try to tell me you want to spend your life spinning local gossip on this two-bit station. Believe that is why you got into this business if you want. But for once do something that he would have been proud of,” she pleaded.

“I can’t, I can’t why tonight, why right now, why not wait, and can’t you do something else with this?”

Winter’s eyes flashed narrow and dark till the pupils loomed like black angry holes in front of Maria.

“It has to be done tonight, if Darcy realises that the papers are missing that they aren’t coming back, its only a matter of time before some-one finds out who has them. Do you understand what that could mean? Murdock works for him. You saw the state of that Rivera guy. You saw him sliced in ribbons with a razor. Take the story. Do what I can’t. Give those kids a beginning and an end; tell the public what really happened in between dying and being undead. Pin a happy ever after on it if you want,” Winter implored.

For a second, and only a second, which lasted almost for a lifetime, Thornton considered her options, seated in the editor’s room in the fourth floor of the channel three building. Hadn’t even an office to herself. They told her she would have to prove herself before they would give her the respect that she craved. Told her she had to work for it, while all the other boys played their way to the top. Thought they could

keep her like some kind of trained monkey, chained to their studio. A choice, a chance an opportunity, Thornton didn't need to think about it. A second passed. She gave Winter one nod of her head. One nod that sealed both of their careers.

"You'll have to stay here, you'll have to stay here and help me piece it together. I can't have any loose ends okay? This has to be picture perfect. If I'm going down I'm going down in style. Christ knows why I ended up in here tonight, but if this is how it is then this is how it is" she said turning off the monitor in front of her.

Then Thornton used the controls at the counter to turn the lights back on. As the shadows disappeared in the room Maria was, suddenly aware of how frightened Winter looked. Her eyes had the same haunted look that she had earlier during the press conference.

"Thank you" Winter said slowly and carefully to Thornton before helping her to put all the documents in order to make beginning and an ending to a story that both thought was buried with Thatcher the year before.

Winter spread out all the papers like a giant collage on the carpet as Thornton moved the chairs and tables out of the way, giving them both room to put everything in order. Thornton started replacing the memos back into chronological order. Then she stood up allowing Winter to piece the story together seeing as *she* was the detective. Out of her pocket, Thornton took out her mobile and started dialling up some contacts of hers. She turned on a nearby laptop and hooked herself up to the internet, started typing in the names of the local political parties, logging onto their sites, trying to get some photographs that could be used in her five minutes of infamy. She clicked on a few photographs and sent them to herself so that they could be saved under the editing package. The nerds in the office had spent one summer showing her how to use it; she was starting to make her way up in the station as they spent their time trying to make their way up her skirt. Winter could hear Thornton's fingers dexterously clicking on the keyboard as she sifted through all the information in front of her, looking for a name or a face that they could use, somebody who would corroborate the story. She knew that they would need more than a few headed sheets of paper and some signatures. They needed eyewitnesses if the story was going to stick; Darcy was too slippery to be tripped up on some paperwork.

"What about Thatcher's family? Would they talk?"

“Don’t think so, not if they remember me. Last time I was in their house I took photos of the family photographs on their mantelpiece and we cut and pasted them into a newspaper article. It was kinda messy, I don’t think that’d be a good idea.”

“What about his alibi? I remember he had a woman some older lady, she was an alibi for him. She stood up and acted as a character witness for him during the trial do you remember her name, Alice, Alice Bayer or something..”

“We fished her off the streets, paid her a few hundred dollars to testify, Sorry but the ratings were getting a little slow that week. Come on detective you must have guessed the name was a fake, Ali Bayer?”

Winter looked up wide-eyed at Thornton.

“Now don’t go judging me again detective. Thatcher was pleading insanity wasn’t he? Right so when his defence team called Alice and he kept shouting from the box that he had never seen her well it just made him look even more crazy didn’t it? We did him a favour”

Winter shook her head, and contented herself with the paper work.

One name jumped out from all the others on the list.

“How about Eric Fitzgerald his name is on the list, maybe he knows something.”

“Come come Winter,” Thornton frowned through furious mousework and clicking, “If his name is on the list, I hardly think that he is going to want to have anything to do with us do you?”

“No you don’t get it do you. The stars and the spirals beside the names, I’ll bet that’s the code for the people that he supplied with the boys, but the rest of these names, I have an idea, log onto the Liberal’s web site, see what comes up. Right, and now see if there are any pictures of their latest fundraiser, yeah you got that, now tell me who you see in front of you”

“I see a whole lot of balding WASPs with bulging red-eyes. Why?”

“Right tell me if there are any names below the photograph.”

“Yeah a list of credits,” Thornton turned her head down to Winter’s “You mean that you think?”

“Here check it out yourself”

One by one Thornton matched face to name from the screen to the yellow notepaper in front of her, almost all was a perfect match. One name missing was the very same Eric Fitzgerald that Winter had been asking for.

“How did you know that?” Thornton enquired, handing back the memo, and downloading the picture to edit.

“Because he deflected from the Liberals a few months ago, said he was standing down from public life, don’t you remember the fuss that was made about it? And then he started speaking out against the Liberals and giving public support to National Democrats? Or perhaps you were already busy with other more pressing issues. That was about the time of the breeding season for the rednecks wasn’t it? You got another two headed baby story perhaps?”

“Funny very funny. So you think that this Fitzgerald guy retired because he found out what the others were up to.”

“I’m not sure, but if we tell him what we know, then maybe he’ll come forward. At least as another anonymous source, or a voice you can cover up. The more background noise we can make the better.”

“Right I guess I’ll get phoning”

“*You* will?”

“Well I do have some talent for this kind of thing” Thornton replied before sweet-talking some secretaries with a voice simply dripping with honey.

“Four sugars? Are you sure that you don’t want a fork with that? Fine fine I’ll be back in a moment, third door along the corridor isn’t it?”

Thornton nodded her head, before stepping over the papers and sitting herself at the mixing desk, inserting the cd, and trying to increase the resolution of the pictures taken from the internet. She had some footage of the last conference that the Liberal party had, was intending mixing that into her news programme. Eric Fitzgerald’s secretary told her that he was busy. Thornton explained she wanted to do a piece on him for her documentary on politicians with principles, and that Fitzgerald was a key player in it. Immediately the secretary found a gap in his diary, said that Fitzgerald would meet up with her for an interview after Darcy’s press conference on the steps of the Muscat building, which was scheduled for Saturday evening at seven thirty. The clock on the corner of the screen read 02.30 am. The press conference was less than 24 hours away. Where was Winter and what was taking her so long. Thornton needed a strong cup of coffee. In the corner of the room the light was flashing on the

intercom phone. She jumped over the pages on the floor and lifted up the receiver just as Winter entered holding two steaming paper cups.

“Yeah put me through,” Thornton nodded at Winter to leave her cup on the counter, “Yeah hi this is Maria, yeah working late, no no trouble at all, I enjoy it, yes, yes, Mike is going to be alright, no didn’t get any footage of Rivera, apparently the guy is too ill they don’t think he’ll make it through the night, yes that is too bad, no Mike has gone home, no I have the tape, no we can still run the story, its alright I know that the boys have enough work to do without having to edit my stuff, its okay, um *Mike* did it before he went home, so the story is still on for tomorrow, no I know that you have a lot of sports coverage to fit in, but I that is to say, we got an exclusive interview with Jade Nix about her paintings being stolen, and I got some news about the little girl who found the body, apparently it is her father Rivera who was admitted into hospital with the knife wounds.”

Thornton paused noticing the angry looks from Winter, she waved her back.

“So what do you think? Yeah I’ll get on top of it, what am I still doing here? Just looking through some old tapes, you know how us girls are, like to see ourselves on the screen, trying to get myself picture perfect, alright Mr Draper, alright, yes you have a good night too.”

She slammed the phone down swearing to herself as she did, then shrugged at Winter and walked over to the monitor again. She took a quick gulp of coffee before settling down to work again.

“You didn’t mention it?” Winter asked, while using a luminous pen to mark sections of the pages that were most incriminating.

“Better not to, better to just slide this tape in in the middle of the programme, otherwise it won’t be shown.”

“What why not? Surely your station will be lauding you with roses and anchors when this programme airs” Winter asked standing up beside Thornton to take a sip of tea.

“You saw the list, Draper doesn’t ring any bells detective?”

Winter shook her head in dismay,

“You still want to do this?”

“You think I want to spend my life having to paint a face do my hair and wear those heels every day? You think that I like doing this? It’s a job nothing else. Hell what can I do, its not everyday you get a chance to do something good. Not to mention the

chance to screw him over, after all the shit they made me sift through when I first started in this company. Right back to work, tea break over”

CHAPTER 19

Preparing to Even the score

Tramery turned on his heels and walked reluctantly out the double doors of the emergency department. He left Jade and Sarah at the reception desk, asking to be brought up to Paul asking to visit him. Old age was catching up with him. He started to cough in the cold air outside the building as he shuffled towards the green beat up car. It had all been so different, last night when he had walked to his car, with Peter following him asking him to prove that the card trick worked. He took the card out of his pocket, looked at the pattern of the warrior poised for the kill, ready to pounce on the dragon. With a dextrous flick of the wrist he sent the card into the breeze. He watched it flutter and turn, spinning Jacks and dragons before landing in the gutter face down. Reluctantly he turned the key in the rusty lock of the car door. Jimmy had phoned him, only minutes before when he was getting out of Jade's car. Jimmy said that he wanted to speak to Tramery told him to meet him in his office said it was important. He said that he just wanted a quick word with Tramery and told him not to worry. Jimmy never said not to worry unless there was something to worry about. Tramery reversed the car out of the car park, and waited to turn his car onto the road, which was filled with taxis, taking teen spirits through the streets. Jimmy must have found out. Darcy must have told him the papers were missing. Tramery would have to face the music. Except he had no score, had no goods to return, didn't know where they were. Why had he been so greedy, why had he kept the papers for himself. Was going to be the start of his new life, him and Jack, they were going to getaway last night. Tramery was going to use the papers as a little bargaining tool with Darcy to get a little money together. He never planned on losing them, never planned on being in the city for another night. Tramery looked at his watch; it was just after three am. Three a.m. on Saturday morning. Saturday was supposed to be San Francisco, Saturday was supposed to be a walk in the park, a drive with he and Jack, getting away from it all. His phone rang again, it was Jimmy asking where he was, asking what was taking him so long. He sounded impatient. Behind Tramery another car was honking its horn. Tramery held his hand on the indicator, left or right, which way to turn. After Jimmy there would be no turning back. The orange lights flickered on the sides of his car and he shifted gears. Had to see Jack, had to see him tonight, had to

talk with him before it was too late. Tramery did not have a choice anymore; it was only a matter of time before Jimmy caught up with him. It was too late for talking. Tramery drove down the highway towards Therese's place, passing the signs for the airport for the freeway, for his escape through the silent nighttime traffic as the neon streetlights buzzed orange above his head.

Jade sat back down on her little orange seat in the hospital lobby. Paul was back on the critical list again the lady at the reception had said in a sympathetic voice before Sarah was whisked upstairs again by one of the nurses. The receptionist bent over the front desk to whisper to Jade. She said that they doubted that Paul would make it through the night and then sighed while watching the little stone faced girl walking back up the shining corridor. Poor little thing she said, Sarah's going to need a helluva lot of counselling after tonight. Going to need some one to talk to they said. Told Jade that she would be better if she would just talk to the professionals about it. She was in her room sketching the birds outside her window when both of her parents knocked on the bedroom door. They entered, her mother taking a seat on her bed, and her father kneeling on the floor beside her. He looked at the picture she was drawing and then started talking to her as she continued sketching. He told her gently that they knew that something was wrong with her, said that they would both be there for her. Then her mother told him to stop skirting around it, got up off the bed and walked over to Jade. Told her that they knew about the cuttings, knew that she was injuring herself, had found blood stained pyjamas under her pillow when she was cleaning the room. Told her that they had arranged a session with a counsellor that they were going to talk through whatever problems she was having. Jade remained silent. Her father took the picture out of her hands, imploring her to look at them when he was speaking. Then he shook his head and looked at her mother and both of them left the room just as soon as they had entered. She picked up the notepad and began drawing again. At tea later that night she told them that she was fine, didn't need to go to a counsellor that it was a phase she was going through, that all teenagers went through phases didn't they, and she sat and talked at them, and watched TV and listened to them discuss the neighbours, remembering to be more careful in future. You should talk to someone her boyfriend at college told her one night when they got drunk. At heart she agreed, had come to that conclusion a long time ago. Except it was too late

now, because she needed the pain, needed to survive, needed to feel, and needed it to create. Charged with emotion she felt creation at her fingers, to lose the pain would be to lose the gift, they were linked she knew they were linked, because she could only produce something truly beautiful after one of *her* nights. The nights when she cut up a canvas with her brushes instead of her skin. Counselling what would that have done? Made her into another robot just like them, coffee table counselling and doped up dinners. She wanted more from life. To talk about it, to make it a reason, a memory to lose what she felt just so they could feel like she was normal. What was normal? What was forgiveness, what was it to forget. Then Jade looked around the waiting room again, what was it to be six-years-old again. Maybe she was just as bad as them, maybe she was making Sarah into something she wasn't. Maybe Jade didn't have any answers. What if Paul died tonight, would that make everything okay, would that be better. She toyed with one of the bracelets on her arm, would that be good Karma. Like she even believed in that, another media ploy supposed to make her more interesting in interviews. Who wants to read about another Christian with repressed guilt? She shook her highlighted head and resolved to stick the night out, to wait for Sarah no matter what happened. One of the nurses came over to her and offered her a cushion, told her that they all knew how hard the seats could feel after a few hours, then left Jade to sleep.

"I was trying to sleep, Christ John have you no idea what time it is?" Therese asked angrily as Tramery pushed past her to get into the flat.

"Shh, I came to talk to Jack, I want to explain a few things to him" he whispered trying to convey the urgency of it to her as he stood outside Jack's bedroom door.

"He's asleep can't it wait till morning, haven't you done enough already today?"

"Look I need to talk with him tonight, alright, I have to do it tonight, so you can just go back to bed and dream your self-righteous self to sleep, I am here to speak with my son" he said raising his voice.

The bedroom door opened slightly and a tired faced fuzzy haired little boy peered out at his aunt and his father arguing in the landing.

"Its alright Jack you go back to sleep, you've had a long day, your father is just leaving weren't you John?" Therese said ordering him out of the house.

Tramery stood his ground. It would be so easy to leave, to get out of the house and never come back. He looked at the greedy eyes that beaded and swallowed in gulping blinking movements on Therese's face. She had never liked him and she had never liked Jennifer, they all knew why she liked to play at being the good parent to Jack. Defiantly Tramery walked over to Jack's bedroom door, bent down on his hunkers and placed his hand on the handle of the door.

"I'm not leaving not tonight, Jack, I never meant to leave you before, I have to talk with you, I know you're tired, but I need to talk with you, can you do that, can you stay up and talk with your old dad tonight?" he pleaded as the kid wiped the sleep from his eyes and opened his bedroom door to allow Tramery in.

Therese stormed down the corridor shaking her head, before she slammed her bedroom door shut. He was always causing trouble, was no good for the boy she told herself as she got back into bed. Jack was still somewhere between sleep and dreams as his father entered the room. They sat in the half-light which entering the room through slits at the open door. Tramery moved himself along the bed to be closer to Jack who was squinting at him. His blue eyes were barely visible in the darkness but Tramery could still see them, could still see her looking back at him from the tired blue eyes lying on a pillow beside him.

"Have you come to tell me you don't want me?" Jack asked in a croaky voice. Tramery shook his head wishing that he had the courage to talk to the boy before now. He wished that he could go back to the days when Jack was born, the days that were full of hope, the days that were full of being held and holding and hugging onto Jack, squeezing all the love into the boy that he could not show to Jennifer because she thought he was a stranger.

"Why are you here then?"

Tramery brushed with the palm of his hand. The hair on Jack's head it was smooth and silky just like his mother's was.

"What do you remember about your mother?" Tramery asked in a barely audible voice.

Jack sat up straight in the bed and looked at Tramery for a moment. Was his dad going to tell him the truth? He had dreamed of that moment, of waking up with his dad beside him, telling him that everything was going to be alright, was Jack still dreaming, nothing seemed real any more.

“I know what you said that she has gone away somewhere that she left when I was born. But that’s not true is it? I saw the newspaper I read the report. It was in Therese’s” Jack stopped speaking, his voice started to shake.

Suddenly he wasn’t sure why but he was afraid. Jack took a deep breath. The truth, for once in his life, all he wanted was the truth. They told him she was still alive, they told him his mother had ran away, they told him she would be back some day to see him.

“It was in her wardrobe, I found it by accident I wasn’t being nosey I just”

Tramery felt a burning sensation in his stomach. His face winced as he wrapped his arms around his son.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry. Your mother;” he took a photograph out of his wallet and showed it to Jack.

It was of a beautiful young woman standing beside a tall man with big dark sideburns.

“Your mother, this is your mother. Was your mother, Jack. She is dead. I should not have let you read it in a newspaper. She died in an accident a few years ago. Died in a fire, they said that she didn’t feel any pain, would have suffocated in the smoke, wouldn’t have felt any burns.”

Jack took the photograph from his father’s hand and peered at it through the darkness, looking at the photograph from the man with the fuzzy sideburns to his father.

“She’s in heaven now, we will meet her again some day Jack, we will, I know we will, we have to, otherwise it doesn’t make sense does it? We can’t lose her twice in one lifetime.”

“Why did she leave? Was it because of me, did she not want children?” Jack enquired softly in an old sounding voice.

Jack was trying his best to cover any emotion in his voice, trying to be a man. Tramery shook his head slowly from side to side. His eyes had a distant dreamlike look as he gazed at the photograph of his wife, Jennifer.

“No Jack no not because of you. She loved you; you should have seen how happy she was the day you were born, when she cradled you in her arms. She had blue eyes just like yours, deep blue eyes,” Tramery’s voice faded into the shadows as he held Jack tightly in his arms again.

“Before you were born, she had to leave to go to the Nalin centre, where the fire was. She was sick, they told me she had something like amnesia, made her forget everything and everyone.”

Jack was unsure as to whether or not to believe his father.

“Why did I never get to see her, why did you never bring me to see her, why did you tell me that she was off in different countries that she was abroad, that she was travelling why?”

Tramery rubbed his hand under his eyes, try as he might he couldn't rub her face from his mind, her beautiful face with its bright blue eyes.

“It was so long ago, I don't think I even remember anymore. I thought it would be best, because you were too young to understand, and those places are not for children. I didn't want you growing up thinking that your mother was crazy or seeing her in the state she was in. I wanted you to always picture her as the beautiful woman that I married. I watched her go lost her by inches. Every week she grew away from me, her eyes her eyes got so old so empty, I didn't want you to see that. I wanted you to know who she was before she got sick. Before she changed.”

“Why did you leave me? You weren't sick?”

Jack moved himself out of Tramery's reach. Not sure whether or not to believe what he was saying.

“I didn't leave you, I never wanted to leave you. The day I left, that was the day of the accident, of the fire. I went to, to see her one last time. While I was there, I don't know I guess I was stupid, I thought that you would be better off without me. I didn't want you ending up like her, I didn't want to watch the life drain from your eyes too. I blame myself, I blamed myself for what happened to her. I'm not a good guy Jack, I'm not. You've got to believe me I hated myself for leaving you, and then it was too late, I couldn't go back, I didn't know how to be a father again. I was afraid.”

Jack moved a little closer to Tramery.

“So why have you come back now?”

“I'm too old to runaway anymore. I'm too old to leave you. Its too late to change what happened with your mother, but I was hoping that it wasn't too late for me to be your father again, Jack, Jack my son Jack you've grown up so fast” he said shaking his head allowing the hot tears to flow onto the pillow beside him.

“You never stopped being my dad, but you never came back, she said that you would come back.”

“I have come back, and I'm not leaving again, I promise I won't leave you again Jack, can you forgive me? Can you” Tramery's voice faded again as he tried to swallow over the lump in his throat.

Jack slowly sat up on the bed beside him then reached his arms around Tramery's neck pressed his young face against his and squeezed him tight.

"Tell me a story help me go to sleep, will you? Like you used to?" Jack whispered to him not letting go.

Tramery held Jack in silence, embracing him embracing her, not wanting to let either of them go. He pressed the photograph into Jack's hands telling him to keep it, to put it by his bed. Then lay down beside Jack as he told him stories of pirates and soldiers and young maidens that needed rescuing from tall towers and knights with funny names who went to do battle and kill dragons to protect their honour. An hour passed and both were fast asleep on the bed, the door of the room still open slightly.

A man in uniform entered the room and checked to see that it was only Nora and her daughter inside. He told them it was a routine check then asked how Paul was doing. Nora asked him to remove the cufflinks from her husband but he refused. He said that they couldn't risk Paul escaping. Sarah watched silently listening to the conversations between the doctors and her mother, between the police and her mother, between the doctors and the police, and said nothing. Sarah felt uncomfortable seated beside her mother at her father's bed. Then all of a sudden both the doctor and the policeman left the room to have some heated words through gritted teeth outside in the corridor. Nora placed her hands on Paul's sleeping face again cupping his face in her fingertips before letting go.

"Sarah, sit a little closer to me, move your chair a little closer to me."

Nora put her hand on Sarah's knee still looking at Paul's eyes, hidden by their lids, lost to dreams. Then she squeezed Sarah's knee.

"Your daddy is sick, he was in an accident earlier today. The doctors, that woman I was just talking to, said that he is going to be fine, that they hope and expect him to recover. But," Nora turned her eyes up to the cross above Paul's head.

"You remember from mass, you remember what the priest said at Sunday school. About heaven and the after life, about what happens to people after they leave here."

Sarah could see the raindrops splashing in Peter Jones' eyes again, could smell the wet earth at her feet. Sarah sat statuesque, looking at her mother, feeling her cold hand on her leg. She could see the tiny hairs on her arm sticking up as she shivered, even though the room was sodden with heavy warm air.

“You remember last year when the little boy in your school was hit by a car. And when I took you to the church, and there was beautiful music and singing and everyone he knew was there.”

The little girl said nothing. Nora lifted Sarah onto her lap; it was still damp with rain from earlier that night.

“You remember singing in the choir, how beautiful it was”

Sarah could smell the incense burning now, remembered the chain swinging above their heads, remembered watching every one stand kneel and sit down in perfect order. Remembered wondering how they all knew what to do like some exotic dance that she had never been taught. Remembered the candlelight flickering on the bronzed sides of the box spilling smoke out under the high arches of the roof above her head. Swaying left to right left to right casting spirals of smoke in the air, before they were splashed with water and everyone bowed their heads and she was told to make the sign of the cross. In the corner of her eye she could see it glinting under the neon lights above his head.

“That was a farewell, we were saying goodbye to him, saying our goodbyes before we meet again, in heaven. It was so moving wasn’t it? Remember how you said you liked the music, do you remember?”

Sarah nodded her head with a tiny inflection of her neck. Didn’t remember it was beautiful. She remembered the withered hands pressed into her hands and the old women who rattled rosary beads and mumbled words without moving their lips in front of her. Remembered her father commenting on the professionals, his hands folded on his chest. She remembered receiving the communion and that the minister’s finger was wet when he pressed it into her mouth, covered in old people’s goup. Remembered scrunching her face trying to swallow it as she walked down the aisle and remembered the voices commenting on the poor little children and how they were lucky not to understand.

“Do you understand? The thing is that we only get a short time, a very short time on earth, shorter than the beat of a butterfly’s wing on a summer’s day. And some of us get called to be in heaven sooner than others. And its not a bad thing, its not, but your father might not last through the night. They think there is a chance that he might not wake up Sarah, you understand you have to be brave now.”

Sarah said nothing and looked at the sleeping man beside her mother as she felt her mother’s arms around her body hugging her. She shivered uncontrollably at her touch.

“You know that your father loves you Sarah, you know that he always will, will be looking down at you from heaven even if he dies you know that don’t you? We both love you”

Sarah felt suddenly suffocated as her mother said the word always. Sarah remembered what Jade had said to her earlier on that day. That loving people after they were dead would mean that heaven existed and they wouldn’t die. She sat back from her mother for a second,

“You mean that he’ll get to heaven if we love him enough?” she asked.

Nora nodded her head, not noticing the fear in Sarah’s eyes. Then Nora jumped out of her chair as she noticed Paul’s eyes making flickering movements. She ran out the door to call for a doctor, leaving Sarah alone with her father.

Slowly his eyes opened, Sarah sat and watched feeling like Ali-baba watching the rocks part as the caves shuddered open sesame. He didn’t open his eyes fully, just enough to let in some light. He looked around the room for a few moments trying to focus on distant cups on trays, blinds that were shut and his daughter’s face. Sarah was frozen to the chair. He tried to reach his hand over to her, but was restrained by the bracelets on his wrist. She could see the lump in his throat move up and down as he tried to swallow, before creaking and croaking words at her. Love, love them after they are gone and they will get to heaven, she remembered them telling her. Her stomach turned as she moved her seat a little closer to him. He was trying to tell her something, wanted her to come even closer. She gritted her teeth in her mouth, honour thy father and mother, what choice did she have, he was sick he was her father. Her eyes were half hidden in the shadows cast by the light above her head. Again he tried to croak something at her, wanted her to do something, to say something. He wanted to touch her. She could feel her face twitching, tried to stop it as she watched his hands rise slightly from the bed again. Watched his fingers spread out grasping trying to reach for her. She started breathing with difficulty, love love that was what they said. She shuddered as he frowned in deep concentration rolling his head about the pillow, trying to tell her something.

“Sarah, Sarah come here, come over here” he was saying softly.

She listened to the fevered voices deep in discussion outside the door, and shivered as a sudden coldness shot through her spine. Her hand hovered at her side as she tried to

force it into his, tried to make contact. In her mouth she could feel saliva building up, as though she was about to be sick. Didn't want to love him, didn't care about him. Hot tears were swelling up in salty wells under her eyes, making it difficult to see him, making it difficult to hear him call her name. She hated the way he called her name. She pushed her hand into his could feel the sticky skin of his palms; her whole body gave an involuntary shudder. Then all at once somebody took her away from him. They unplugged the wires in his chest, wheeled his bed out of the room. All at once the room was full of faces bodies, moving white sheets, pale faces and noise all around her noise, drilling through her head with high pitched squeals and machines jumping and flipping and her mother cursing some man in a blue shirt stood outside the door. All at once her hand was empty, nothing but a cold clammy feeling where his hand had lain. She heard them talking about a crash unit, about the paddles, didn't understand it, made the doctors sound like they were at the beach and not a hospital as a wave of cold fresh air whirled into the room taking her away setting her free. Her body slid to the ground lifeless. A second a moment a sound and she was lying on the ground unconscious amidst the movement, amidst the morning amidst the music of machinery and medicine.

CHAPTER 20

The bears attack!

They growled in the corner of the room. Their eyes were sharpened slits of teeth talons, claws and everything sharp that scared her. They grunted and moved through the shadows but only Sarah could see them. Outside the window, red skinned things flapped their wings fired flames and crashed against the windowpanes. Outside, their tails were pointed and fiery. Their eyes burned rays of the days that passed like sleeping embers of a flame that had no beginning or end scorching through her soul. Days full of light and hope. In the corner of the room, whispers were wallowing winding and swallowing her breaths. She could see the hairs on their skin, brown, sticky, and standing on end. She heard their lumbering claws clambering paws and crunching jaws coming to get her as she cowered under his bed. She felt their breath breathing heavily. They sniffed at her ankles so close that she could feel the dampness of their breath on her skin. They had brown eyes; bear's disguise and grunted out lies they said would keep her safe would protect her. A woman wearing a dark coat stood up from a chair beside his bed. She walked in clipped short steps. The heels of her shoes like razor blades cutting through the air, snapping on each stride. She could not see Sarah. The woman's hands were hard callused and as callous as her face. Outside they roared and rained flames on the window. Sarah silent-shivered under the bed as the bears touched, rubbed her shoulders and asked her to keep quiet because they would keep her safe. She watched as the woman stood in front of the window. She stared at the dragons daring her to open the window; Sarah still-watched and silent-waited. They stirred the air with fingers whipping up a storm, lathering the flames that seared through the little girl's skin. She called their name, through the night time air; she called their names like they were her friends, called them to care. But the bears took her voice and stifled it with their great arms. Told her to be still, told her to be silent told her not to make any noise. As quiet as a mouse and as easy as death. Her mother beat her hands upon the window in a furious rhythm that sounded like the crash of broken dreams till the dragons succumbed to her screams. Succumbed silent; they hovered like angels from the dark side, from the outside, from the places that Sarah used to hide. All the time they whispered and covered her, the bears that said they cared, said that they would die for her. Would they cry for her? The windows

flew open as the dragons leathery skinned scaly and screaming flew in at his touch. Finally broken free and furious, they swooped, crashed, and burned everything they touched. Her skin was blistered broken touched and smoking. She felt no pain. Her mother now stood at the window and watered the cactus plants that withered and died every summer. Sarah tried to call out, tried to say the name that was no longer her own, daughter. All around her everything was burning, everything was noise. Under the bed, everything that said it would protect touched her skin. The faces melted from their garish bearish heads, folded, and creased into his sickening smile. Everything was hot everything was hell and everything burned into the smell of his aftershave. The smoke was choking her as she tried to call, tried to move, tried to stand, to fall anything everything nothing and nowhere in between. Outside the dragons couldn't hear her scream. They didn't know which was dreamer and which was dream. She punched her face into the darkness, tried to call them, tried to direct dragons, daggers, and danger at *him*. Wild beats, cheats, toys and treats in her bedroom. The beasts that moved burned and bubbled with fire and shame. Movement, a moment then motionless she slipped back into consciousness. Sarah opened her eyes slowly and peered into the bright lights of the hospital ward. Under her nose, they were shaking salts smelling of sweetness and summer time. They were telling her she would be okay. Their eyes were brown like the bear's, but they wore white uniforms. The room was bright shining and clean. There was no trace to be seen of the battle just fought and unfinished. No bears hiding in the shadows, no dragons screaming at the window. Only her mother staring out at the streetlights remained the same. Only Sarah's silence spoke out tying her to the time between sleep and dream dragging her into daylight. Only the feel of the cool metal bars on the bedside told her she was awake.

Nora touched the cool glass of the window as she stood gazing out into the dawn. Morning had come without warning, had come without an invitation. Outside cars were driving past, postmen were posting letters and people were taking their dogs for a walk. Down the corridor, Paul was still under the knife. Nora had nearly lost him last night. The doctors said that he was going to make a full recovery. They told her that he only had to make it through the night on his own. Just one night. She watched bitterly as outside everything was the same, everything was carrying on as normal. Everything was going to be fine she heard the nurses telling Sarah at the other end of

the room. Everything already was fine, already was making its way into another day. She turned her head as Dr. Wormwood stood beside Sarah, holding a clipboard, of notes and needs, of illnesses and everything that cuts and bleeds. A woman suddenly came running into the room and started calling out Nora's name frantically saying that she was needed outside in the corridor urgently. Sarah's heart skipped a beat as she allowed herself to feel what they said was forbidden. Was he dead?

The mysterious woman raced down the shining corridor clutching onto Nora's arm. She was asking her if Sarah was her daughter, and shouting into a mobile phone as they skirted around the corner into a nearby bedless room. She was dressed in a grey skirt, black jacket and white top. Her hair buffoned into a great crown of sprayed Barbie doll curls. She didn't look like a doctor to Nora. She didn't mention Paul's name, in fact she kept talking about Sarah. Sarah was fine, she had only fainted, why all the fuss about Sarah, what about Paul.

"Thank you yes sir, I have her here beside me," the woman said into her phone, before giving it to Nora, who did not understand what was going on.

Nora took the phone and placed it up to her ear.

"Hello" she said cautiously.

"Good morning M'am, this is Michael Darcy speaking, how do you do?"

Nora gave a cough of surprise and recognition, as the Barbie doll lady beamed back at her in pride.

"I'm fine Mr Darcy" Nora replied after a moment's hesitation.

"That's good to hear, that's very good to hear. I have had a hard time tracking you down today " he replied, as his assistant kept smiling and nodding at her.

Michael Darcy, the Michael Darcy that she knew from TV screens, was talking to her. Nora could not believe what was happening. And now he was saying how he had a hard time tracking her down, *he* had a hard time finding her. Whatever could an important man like Michael Darcy want with her? She listened unquestioningly to everything he said.

"We heard that your daughter was in the hospital, a local news reporter said that she saw her waiting in the hospital lobby early last night. I hope that she was not ill"

Nora's head was spinning, and she forgot all about Paul, about the stabbing about everything other than the fact that Michael Darcy was on the phone talking to her.

“Sarah fainted that was all sir” she replied, skin tingling all over.

“That’s good to hear M’am. I hope that she will be better soon.”

Nora smiled over at the woman with the curly hair, and coughed again.

“The reason that I called you, Nora, may I call you Nora. Thank you, I hope that you don’t think that I’m being too friendly.”

Nora tingled with pride again.

“I would like to honour your daughter for her brave achievement. I would like to present her with a medal of honour tonight at an award’s ceremony outside of the Muscat building. If that would be okay with you, if you feel that she would be up to it Nora.”

Nora frowned slightly, what was so brave about what Sarah had done. She said nothing for a moment, and then suddenly pictured her self stood outside the grandiose steps of the Muscat building surrounded by photographers cameras and Michael Darcy.

“Yes sir, thank you sir that will be wonderful. Sarah would really love that; I’ll make sure that she is fine Mr. Darcy.”

“Call me Michael, and I have to say Nora, that you are a credit to mothers all over the city, having turned out such a fine young daughter as Sarah.”

“Sarah?”

“Yeah, where have you been?”

“Planet parole where do you think I’ve been?”

“Well you must have been away not to know that. It was a little girl called Sarah, she found Peter Jones’ body.”

Angelo ran a finger along his forehead and smoothed his eyebrows.

“What age was she?” he asked.

“It was a little six-year-old girl. Cute real cute. Keeping it in the family that’s what the word is” the man replied.

He was a beast of a man with tattooed fingers spelling out hate. His skin was cracked with summer days spent working on the roads, his hair shaven short and his temples bulging with throbbing purple veins. He smelt of sewers, his breath like an open drain. He had been Angelo’s cellmate for the night. Herbert or Humbert. Angelo’s ears pricked up when he said that they were keeping it in the family.

“You mean that the girl was related to the little boy.”

“Naw the chick and the stiff weren’t related, the chick and the shooter are father and daughter, or that’s what the word around here is.”

Angelo shook his head. Then the beast stood up and sniffed around Angelo’s heels, was checking out his suit. Then he churned his face into a grin, much to Angelo’s disappointment. Angelo knew he was in shit creek, but that did not mean he was going to swim the chocolate river with that ape, he had better taste.

“Like the threads”

Angelo stood up and straightened his collar, and squared up his shoulders, then looked steely eyed at the beast.

“And?”

Then the guy nodded his head at him and winked. Angelo said nothing for a second, waiting ready for action.

“You’re one of Jimmy’s boys aren’t you? I’d recognise one of Jimmy’s boys in a second. You all look the same. What did he do? Put an add in Vogue or something. Fuck it you guys are all Bond wannabes. Now don’t get me wrong, nuttin against Jimmy, but Jesus, these places are always crammed with you guys. You make it too easy, you stand out a mile.”

Angelo sat on the mattress, feeling slightly relieved, but also slightly annoyed. One of Jimmy’s boys, he was not one of Jimmy’s boys he was Angelo Deville.

“So how do you know Jimmy then?” Angelo asked the beast.

“Did a job for Jimmy a few years ago. He needed a bit of muscle and I knew a friend of his, and he hooked us up. Jimmy is a good man; the guy really looks after his own. I guess that you already know this, guess it won’t be long before Jimmy gets you out of here hey?”

Angelo nodded his head reluctantly; decided it was better not to tell the guy too much. He straightened his cufflinks; Jimmy Jimmy Jimmy all he talked about was Jimmy. Angelo wondered who would talk about him when he was sent down, or even if the job would go down under his name.

“So what are you in for?” he asked trying to change the conversation.

“You guess”

Angelo looked at the big man, covered in hair with muscles growing out of every place that the testosterone was able to hit.

“You did some guy over? Got caught out debt collecting without a licence?”

The big man started laughing much to Angelo's surprise.

"No, fuck, you'd expect that wouldn't you. Shit, naw, they got me on littering in public. Yeah no shit. I was outside, waiting for my crew outside this apartment block. They were inside, doing a removal job on a guy's apartment while he was at work, when this little shit of a cop walks over to me. And here's me thinking that he recognises me, or is going to start asking questions, you know, thought maybe one of the guys neighbours had rung them up, thought he was going to do me for the job. Then he starts reading me my rights and pointing at some public notice sign. Asked me for my name, so I tell him my name, and then they drag me down here and throw me into a cell. You know why?"

"Tell me"

"Smoking. Fucking smoking. I shit you not. Some new rules about public places or some shit, and they saw I had been done for littering before, one time when we dumped this guys furniture out onto the street, doing a cleaning job, trying to give him the spooks, you know how it is. So that time I got a fine for littering, cause the guy was too afraid to tell it how it was. They had me on record, and this littering shit, the new laws those fucking Liberals brought in last election, they say two strikes and you're done. Two years for littering!"

Angelo smiled to himself, trying to hold in the laughter. Yesterday always sounds worse, when someone else sings it.

"So what are you going to do then?" Angelo asked.

"You think I'd be well pissed off wouldn't you, after all the years I've been in the business. But I have got an old acquaintance with friends in high places. Guy called Christopher Bradley, met him a few years ago. He owes me a few favours."

"Bradley?"

"Yeah the guy from the Thatcher trial," he looked down at the cuff links on Angelo's wrists and gave a start of recognition, "Shit, man you gotta know all about it, you being a friend of the family, hell I'm talking to one of the professionals now."

The expression on the man's face changed immediately, becoming friendly and warm. Angelo was unsure what he was talking about, what did he mean by friend of the family, what did the family have to do with Bradley. Angelo knew that Jimmy had friends all over the city, but the look in the mans' face told him there was something else, something that Angelo did not know about. Was it the same something that

Jimmy kept hidden in the desk is in his office, the papers that he always hid whenever Angelo entered the room? He decided to play the guy for everything he knew.

“You know about the Bradley thing too?” he enquired leadingly.

“Hell yeah, shit you should have said beforehand, people like us we have to stick together. You know how the others react.”

“They don’t understand do they?” Angelo agreed, wondering what this guy was talking about.

“Exactly, they ostracise us, don’t understand us, and don’t even try to understand us. If they just left us to our own thing, then we wouldn’t have to go clean up the kinda shit that happens when it gets out of hand, like with the Water’s thing.”

Angelo tried to hide the involuntary shudders that ran through his torso. He didn’t like what was being unsaid.

“They treat us like we are criminals don’t they?”

The big guy looked up at Angelo from where he was sat, then past Angelo’s head, through the gap in the metal door, into the corridor, where a cop was walking past, in rubber soles.

“You know how it is, man you know how it is. They think that we are the ones with the problem. But its the murderers, the rapists, the white collar guys who steals millions and millions of tax payers money, the ones who stop the hospitals and schools being built they are the bad guys. What do we do that is so wrong? Who do we hurt?”

“Who do we hurt” Angelo echoed.

“Exactly. We never force the kids to do anything they do not want to. We treat them well; we look after them don’t we. Not our fault if something goes wrong. Nothing usually does go wrong, except with the older ones, they react to us, to who we are. The ones that have been suckered into believing all the self help shit that those people peddle on daytime TV. I blame the TV shows, like Oprah Winfrey and all those one-hour perve shows, fuckin emotional vampires the lot of those bitches. They invented this guilt culture, this idea that we’re all fuckin victims, or that we all have something to feel guilty about.”

The guy stood up and started pacing around his cell, speaking in a voice that was just barely audible to Angelo, in a voice, rasping and stinging with hate.

“They are the ones who make the kids feel like what we do is wrong, make the kids feel guilty, when all we do is love them, isn’t it? I mean its just about loving them

isn't it. The kids, they like it, they like the attention we give them, they like the way we look at them, I've seen the way some of those little girls, the ones in the playgrounds, the ones on the swings, with the bangs, and the little dresses, I've seen the way they look back at me, smile at me. Whats wrong with that? They call us the criminals, give us a name, fucking register and tag us like we are the crime and not just a criminal. Call us paedophiles, call us what they want, what they don't want to call us is friend, father brother or sister, they want to think that we don't exist, want to cut us off from everyone else, tag, labelled, shut off. What they don't want to know is that they, all of them are just like us, just like you and me man, you know how it is"

He reached his arm around Angelo's neck squeezed him tight. Angelo was making the links through the gaps in the sentences.

"Which is why we sorted out the David Water's case" Angelo croaked, trying to take the guy's arm from round his neck.

"Fuck yeah, none of us liked what happened, but shit, you gotta protect your own don't you? I mean we told Bradley to cool it, the guy just went too far a few times, he made some mistakes, but he quit it. We don't need the bad publicity in our circle do we?"

Angelo said nothing, and jerked the man's arm off him. As he did one of his cuff links fell to the ground. The beast bent down to pick it up for Angelo, oblivious to the expression of disgust on Angelo's face.

"Yeah I knew you were one of Jimmy's boys, knew you were in the business when I saw your suit. But it was only when I saw the cuff-links that I knew you were in the family" he said as he handed the cuff link back to Angelo.

Angelo gave the man a look of surprise.

"You know, the cuff-links", the man rolled up his sleeve and showed him a tattoo of three circles interwoven, one larger and two smaller, "the signal that we have."

Angelo threw back the cuff link back into the man's hand and rolled up his own sleeve to expose the scabbed over bullet wound from the night before.

"Look at it more care-fully why doesn't you"

The man examined the cuff link carefully and then dropped it onto the ground, when he realised his mistake. It spun along the cold tiles of the cell before coming to rest against one of Angelo's polished shoes. Angelo showed the man his scar, and then he slowly and carefully rolled the sleeve down again. He took off his suit jacket and folded it neatly before placing it onto the bed beside him.

“That, was the wound I got in a shooting last night. Messy wound isn’t it? Not the kinda one I like, will leave a scar, lot of blood, but no pain. No pain at all. You know where the greatest numbers of nerves are on the body? No didn’t think that you did.”

The man said nothing and edged his way to the other side of the cell.

“Look don’t start any shit with me. Leave it, forget about it okay?”

Angelo shook his head.

“You see that wasn’t first mistake you made.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“You see, that’s what’s wrong with you people, you perverts, yeah Pervert. You don’t ask people, you just make assumptions don’t you.”

Angelo asked as his eyes narrowed into slits of concentration. He slowly unbuttoned his top shirt button, as the guy stood defiantly at the other end of the room staring back at him, waiting.

“Just don’t say any thing else, and maybe your mother mightn’t be needing dentist’s records to I.D. you” the guy replied.

Angelo’s whole face melted into a grin, every part of it stretched lean, and beaming, every part but his ice-blue eyes.

“You see that’s where you’ve gone wrong again, making assumptions, assuming that something is going to go down here. Your first mistake as I was saying, was assuming I was some one I am not. You never asked me my name did you.”

“Fuck that shit, tell me your name then, better spell it out, so they’ll know what to write in the papers.”

“Nice to know you can read. I’ll guess you already know how to spell my name, Angelo Deville, you may have heard of me already,” he said giving a mock bow.

The blood ran cold in the big man’s body. Everyone in the trade, hell everyone in every trade knew Angelo, knew what he did to people, how he did it to people, and that he liked it. He stood up tall, till he was almost a foot higher and broader than Angelo trying not to show the fear that was beating in his eardrums.

“You might make it out there, but not in here, in here you’re on your own,” he replied defiantly.

Angelo shook his head and slowly and carefully reached down and picked up one of his shoes. He flicked out the blade hidden in the sole and held it sideways in his fingertips till it glinted in front of both of their eyes.

“We’re gonna have another conversation,” he said in a slow sharp voice, eyes threatening the big man with unspoken violence.

“And if you don’t want it to be your last, you’re going to tell me everything, and I mean everything you know.”

The big man slumped onto the floor, shaking in fear as Angelo strode towards him. It was one thing to do down as some ex-hood of Jimmy’s but he was not going down as some pervert. He wanted to know everything, was not going to be made look like another one of Jimmy’s boys. He stared, face full of disgust at the man at his feet and shook his head. He wasn’t a criminal; he was a nothing, a disposable piece of moral excrement, a nothing that nobody would miss. Angelo knew the difference between right and wrong, good and bad, he might have broken the law, but he never broke the unspoken unwritten laws of nature, he lived by the law, just not the kind that they had written in the books. Angelo did not have any time for anybody who broke the code, who thought that they could change the unspoken order of instinct and identity. The fat guy squirmed like a school girl as Angelo bled him dry of every piece of information he had, before finally knocking on the cell door to inform the guard there had been an ‘*accident*’ in their cell. There was right, wrong, and nothing else as far as Angelo was concerned and some things were worth going down for. He knew whatever else happened he wasn’t a bad guy, just the wrong guy in the right places.

The good guys, the bad guys, the fall guys, the guns, the grins, and Peter Jones’ dead eyed stare followed Sarah as she stumbled off one of the beds in the ward. One of the nurses took her by the hand and rubbed her head as she led her down the corridor. The nurse told her that she had a surprise for her. Above Sarah’s head, they whispered about what was going to be best for her, but never asked questions, never talked to her. The door opened slowly like sandpaper scratching the memories of her dream from her eyes. The room was slightly darkened inside, because of the half open blinds on the window. Sarah allowed her eyes to adjust slowly to the light and squinted at the crumpled bed linen until a figure became visible under the sheets. The nurse lifted Sarah into the air and sat her down at her father’s feet. They smiled at the door, said how sweet it was, how lucky she was. Sarah could see her father’s feet sticking out from the end of the bed, inches from where she sat, could see the thick black hairs that grew on his toes. She watched his feet move ever so slightly along the sheets

crumpling the linen, saw the movement climb up his legs, till his body stretched into a great yawn and his eyes opened into a full eyed stare. Then he sat up on the bed. The wires no longer attached to his chest. All traces of death vanished from her mind. He reached his hand towards her. Slowly she could feel the fingers before they landed on her cheek and grazed her face. Sticky fingers that she couldn't remove as the nurses stood at the bedroom door, telling her how lucky she was. His eyes seared her soul as he moved along the bed to be closer to her, all the time whispering her name, in tiny movements of his mouth, tiny movements that no-one else seemed to notice. Sarah shivered as the door closed behind the nurses.

CHAPTER 21

They made a family

Jack stretched his arms and legs yawned comfortably and took a deep breath of the sun filled air. He snuggled in his bed a few moments later warm and snug before lifting himself out of his bed. He walked over to his window and pulled the curtains, looked out at the sun kissed roads outside and the blue skies way above the city, at the early morning sun slinging sunbeams down at him. Saturday morning, he loved Saturday mornings they meant cartoons and bowls of sugary cereal and sometimes-plastic figurines of x-men that tumbled into his bowl. He stretched again before running out into the landing into the kitchen. Had it all been a dream last night? Tramery was seated at the kitchen table, drinking a cup of coffee. His bowl, the one that had a picture of Spiderman was already set out, with spoon and glass of orange juice waiting for him. He smiled good morning to Tramery and turned the TV on before sitting down at the wooden table opposite him. He felt warm and alive he felt happy and felt the sugar buzz beating around his little body.

“So I’m all yours today Jack, whatdya want to do. Anything you want anything at all” Tramery asked him as he loaded up another bowl of cereal popping and crackling with ice-cold milk. His dad Jack Tramery the illusionist having breakfast with him. It was going to be a good day; Jack could feel it was going to be a good day.

“All day, anything I want to do all day?”

Tramery nodded at him between sips of coffee.

“Anything you want kiddo.”

“Right well then if you’re paying, I want to go to the park, I want to skim stones, then I want to have a picnic with no sandwiches okay, I want Coca-Cola not the store bought stuff? Cause I can taste the difference, and sweets and stinger bars and ice-cream and I want to go to the cinema, and I want to go out for dinner and I want to go roller blading how about it old man want to go roller-blading with me? You said anything”

Tramery grinned at him.

“Okay okay, we’ll see about the roller blading but everything else that’s cool.”

“What about Therese does she have to come too” then Jack added conspiratorially, “Because she’ll want us to bring sandwiches and store bought cola, and I’m telling you its not the same I know the difference”

“I should hope so, I’d like to think that I brought up a young man of discerning tastes. No Therese won’t be coming just you and me kid, a whole day of fun and it starts right now, so you’d better get yourself dressed, or I’ll be buying you fruit and sugar free sodas all day and I’ll bring you to one of those museums that your aunt is so fond of, you know the ones I mean, the kinda ones that will be educational”

Jack shivered and nodded before drinking the sweet chocolate goup at the bottom of his bowl.

“Give me ten minutes and I’ll be ready, and tell me what happens at the end of the cartoon, and you’d better not make up the ending because I’ve been following this series for the past two months okay dad?”

Tramery nodded his head and marvelled at the serious face of Jack frowning at him, “Don’t worry I’ll even watch the credits okay, now go go go on get yourself dressed, and wash your face alright, and your teeth okay. Don’t just rinse them with water and chew on some toothpaste, yeah I remember that one, I’ll be checking your toothbrush”

Jade felt some-one tapping on her shoulder. She tried to sit up moving her neck slowly and stiffly. Every part of her was tired and sore. They were not joking about needing a cushion. Jade squinted up at the woman who woke her up and recognised the woman who had been on the reception desk the night before.

“Christ, you look like shit you been here all night?” she asked.

Jade stretched her legs slowly and shook her head vigorously trying to wake up.

“Thanks”

“No problem that’s what they pay me for, its all about customer service here. Sorry to wake you up, but I’ve been getting phone calls for you all morning and this woman just phoned up said to say that your paintings had been recovered that you could sign for them at the station, does that make sense to you?”

Jade nodded her head and thanked the woman for her consideration.

“The little girl, the girl I came in with, she still here? Sarah Sarah Rivera” Jade enquired suddenly remembering why she had been sleeping in the hospital all night. The rosey-cheeked lady smiled at the fuzzy haired blond sprawled on the plastic chair, “You don’t worry about her she is fine, is with her mother now. I think that you would be better to be going now don’t you? Get some fresh air, get a shower.”

“You are too kind thanks.”

Jade replied before standing up, and then sitting down just as promptly as the oxygen rushed to her head.

“Give me a minute and I’ll be on my way, the toilets are?”

“Down the corridor second on the left, you might want to fix your hair while you’re there, just a word of warning, there has been press people wandering through here all morning looking for that Rivera guy. We told them that they were a hazard inside made them wait outside, but you might want to fix yourself up before you go out?” the woman smiled at her in a motherly way.

Jade looked confused.

“I saw you at the awards ceremony saw that dress you were wearing and listen honey I don’t care if they’re real or not, if I looked like you I’d be out there in a second. So if you want to keep up appearances you should fix yourself up a little before you leave.”

Jade smiled at her.

“That’s very sweet of you.”

“Hey its not every day we get some-one famous here, and you seem kinda sweet, been looking after that Rivera guy’s daughter since yesterday haven’t you? Yeah its important that people remember other people when they are famous, remain humble. Just call it a return of a favour”

“Thanks, if you ever want anyone to paint a portrait for you...”

“Hey I’ve seen your work, if I want someone to do my picture it will be someone who can paint, not any of that impressionist modern art you do, honest my kid can draw better than that.”

“Tell me her name I’ll pass it on to my agent” Jade smirked back at her as she hobbled her tired legs towards the toilet leaving the woman chuckling to herself back at her desk.

Her left hand had a cramp as she felt pins and needles trickle across her desk. It had rested under her face as she slept on a chair in the editor's office. Maria could feel that one side of her face was warmer than the other as she sat up. Eyelids were heavy with sleep and mascara that she hadn't removed last night. Outside she could hear men's voices at the door, talking about the league matches about sports or some such thing. The papers, Winter, the tapes, Christ what if they saw them. Her eyes scanned the floor, the counter the top of the desk and came to rest on a piece of paper near her other hand. Beside it was a polystyrene cup. Maria read the note with great effort. It was from Winter saying that she thanked her for helping her with the story, that she would meet her later on as they arranged, and then in brackets it said where and when in case Maria had forgotten, and said that the cup of coffee on the desk was for her, black with four sugars. Thornton opened the lid and took a gulp, the coffee had gone cold by now, but she needed something to wake her up. As the door opened and the editors and rest of the boys entered. Maria felt about with her feet under the desk for her shoes.

"Christ Maria you look like shit, have you been here all night?"

Thornton stood up fixed her skirt as she walked over to the mixer desk and took out the tape they had been working on. She hastily scribbled Interview with Jade Nix highlighted on it.

"What do you think I am crazy, think I'd stay in here on a Friday night, please boys don't you know me better by now. No, I just left."

Maria looked around and picked up a notebook from the top of the mixer desk.

"I left my address book here yesterday thought I'd collect it on my way to do some shopping you know how it is, forget my head if it wasn't screwed on."

She lavished one of her trademark smiles on them before brushing past them onto the corridor then turned back to one of them.

"Look at me I nearly took Mike's tape with me, so absented minded."

She smiled at them before pushing it into one of their hands.

"He edited so its all ready to go for tonight's show, well I'll be on my way then, see you later boys."

They watched in appreciation as she sashayed into the waiting elevator, then nodded at each other faces dripping with delight,

"Sweet isn't it."

Jack ran around the shelves picking up all the brightly packaged parcels of biscuits sweets and chocolate that he could find. Tramery watched him silently agreeing he really was just like a kid in a candy store.

“Hey that’s enough, we’re not going to Alaska you know, and we have to carry this stuff.”

“You mean that we are walking?”

“Yes walking that okay with you?” then Tramery looked at the kid behind the counter, “And I’m supposed to be the old one?”

The guy rang up the prices on the till as Tramery fished about in his pockets for his wallet. He came upon his mobile and took it out. It was flashing that he had missed four calls all from the same number.

“Sir that’s going to be fifteen dollars, sir?” the kid was saying to him.

He switched his phone off before taking out his wallet and handing the kid a twenty told him to keep the change before handing Jack the plastic bag full of goodies.

“Your goods I believe Ms Nix.”

“Thank you”

“You’ll be relieved to get them back I expect. I’ll be glad to give them back, don’t feel comfortable carrying something that valuable around with me.”

Winter said as she handed Jade her paintings back at the side of the hospital where the canteen was. Jade smiled back at Winter in appreciation.

“Thanks a million, I’m really sorry to make you come out here with them; my car wouldn’t start, and I didn’t fancy all the cameras at the station. You’re very good to drive all the way out here.”

“It’s the least we could do all things considered Ms Nix. Although I have to say, considering how much they are worth, you don’t seem too surprised to get your works back so soon after the robbery.”

“Why would I be with the good people of the city out searching for them?”

Winter half smiled back at Jade, and raised her eyebrow inquiring if that was the only reason.

“Well how about we just say, that somebody told me last night that I’d be seeing them again soon, and I believed him.”

Jade looked at each of the acid coloured canvases in the bright sunlight, then she peered up at Winter.

“I don’t suppose that”

“Where do you want to go?”

“Well if you could drop me near Brentwood place? My agent’s office is there, if you don’t mind, he ‘s probably going frantic looking for me. Has probably got a host of interviews and things lined up you know how it is.”

Winter shook her head, and opened the door for Jade to get into her car. She didn’t really know how it was, closest she got to being famous was her picture in the local newspaper when she was ten for winning a hundred metre sprint at the county games. Jade sat down into the padded seats of Winter’s car and then put her seatbelt on very conscious of the fact that she was in a car with a cop. She rested the paintings on her lap.

“I don’t want to bother you again, but I was wondering if maybe you would have a plastic bag or something I could put these into, I’d hate for anything to happen to them after all the trouble you folks have gone to to get them back for me” she asked.

Winter fished around under her seat and pulled out a bag for her to put them in.

“No trouble, that’s what we’re here for, to serve and protect” she said pulling the car out of the hospital car park, “So I’ll drop you off on the way to the precinct its on the way how’s that for service?”

“You guys live up to your certainly live up to your job description” Jade replied gratefully as they drove down the sunlit streets past the morning drunks doubled over sober.

“I told you you’d get a cramp if you ate all that junk while we were walking.”

Tramery said as Jack bent himself over stubbornly denying that it had anything to do with the four chocolate frosted fizzy chew bars that he had wolfed down, insisted that he was just tired or had heartburn or something else. Tramery looked at the car that was stopped at the red lights nearby, noticed someone in the passenger seat looking at him. She was talking to the driver, in whispers and hidden glances. He waved at her as she jumped out of the car telling the driver that here was fine. Then she walked over to Tramery and the boy.

“You were right about the paintings.” Jade said.

Then she looked at the little boy bent double beside him, “This must be your son”
Jack looked up and saw the woman he had met in the hospital earlier that night. He smiled at her as Tramery introduced them,

“We’ve already met”

“Figures” Tramery commented, “We’re on our way to the park if you want to come along? We’re having a picnic”

“Sure, but hang on a second,” she said walking over to a hotdog stand that was just outside the park gates.

The man was just setting up for the day and stared at her as she ordered three hot dogs with the works, then she skipped back to Tramery,

“I owe you a dinner don’t I?”

Tramery took one off her,

“This is dinner? Thought you said that you were loaded, hell I feel cheated now.”

“Which will teach you to gamble with a lady won’t it” she said handing Jack one, but he refused, said that it would spoil his dinner, so she ate that one too, explaining that she had no breakfast. Then she walked with both of them into the park as Jack looked at her a little suspiciously it was supposed to be a day for just he and his dad only. He noticed Jade playing with the watch on her wrist and look at it repeatedly. She was frowning; they never stopped ringing her never left her on her own. She saw Jack looking at her then took it off her wrist,

“You want it? It is of no use to me really. I don’t like being so easily reached, how am I supposed to be a woman of mystery if they know where I am all the time?” she said slipping it off her wrists, much to Tramery’s amusement.

He shook his head, “It’s a girl’s watch” he replied indignantly.

“Who are you calling a girl” she asked stomping along the path beside them strutting copying the man dressed in shorts that were too small for him in front of her.

“I’ll have you know you’ll be the envy of every kid in the neighbourhood with one of these? They’ll all be after you, including the girls,” she said stuffing it into one of his pockets.

He couldn’t refuse her this time and shrugged his shoulders at his father who was gazing at both of them with a funny look in his eyes.

“Just up here will be good I think, just at the top of the hill, under the shade of that chestnut tree, what do you reckon Jack, think that your old man can still beat you to the top?”

Jack nodded his head shouted one then three loudly as the two of them raced like schoolboys to the top of the hill.

Sanchez looked up sheepishly from the top of the pile of papers on his desk as Winter entered their office. Beside him a glass was fizzing with powder, there were empty packets of headache pills, and vitamins scattered like confetti at his feet. Winter barely acknowledged him as she took a seat on the opposite side of the desk. They shared a desk in the nether world of the basement of the Precinct, and sat on chairs that looked like they were made out of cardboard.

“Look, about last night” Sanchez began apologetically as Winter checked the messages on her phone.

“Hmm” she enquired pretending not to have heard him.

“I’m sorry about last night, I was drunk, I shouldn’t have left like that. I just had some stuff in my head.”

Winter looked at him, eyes ringed with dark circles as he took a sip of alchezelsefaced scrunched up with every sip.

“You can remember last night? The state you were in I’m surprised you showed up today.”

“Yeah well how about we forget about it? Make a new start, if you want any help, just ask, but not too loudly hey?”

Winter tapped her pen on her side of the desk, which was immaculately clean and orderly.

“You still want to help then, you remember what I showed you last night?”

He frowned in concentration, could remember the women with the short skirts dancing on the table, could remember her making him drink coffee of all things, could remember dancing earlier on in the night, before they picked him up and propped him against the bar and could remember the tequila, oh god the tequila. He rubbed his hand against his head.

“Not really, but I remember you tried to help me out of the pub for something or other.”

Winter continued tapping her pen on the desk and then looked around through the windows of their office outside in the rest of the building she could see people answering phones and rushing about their business.

“If you really want to help me, then you can meet me outside the Muscat building at half past six okay? And bring you badge.” She instructed before picking up her handbag to leave and get a few hours sleep back in her apartment. He nodded his head, said it was a done date then poured another sachet into his glass and watched the fizz froth up all over his desk as she slammed the door loudly behind her.

Tramery jumped back as the bottle of coke fizzed up all over him spraying all over his clothes. In the background he could hear Jack giggling as he busied himself with swinging out of the branches of the chestnut tree nearby trying to see how high he could jump. Jade was laughing as he took a seat beside her.

“Funny very funny.”

She looked over at Jack who was tangled among the branches of the tree.

“That’s a good kid that you have there.”

Tramery nodded his head, and then tried to wipe the soda stains off his trousers as Jade lounged about on the grass beside him soaking up the rays of the sun.

“So you are going to show me these paintings or what? Just going to sit and laugh at me all day are we? Think I should get my revenge now Ms. Nix see what all the fuss is about?”

Jade sat up her face suddenly serious.

“You mean you haven’t seen them before?”

He cocked his head at her quizzically.

“Because the lady I just got a lift from Detective Winter, she said you were quite a fan of mine.”

“Did she now?”

“Yes, she told me before I got out of the car that you and her had quite a long discussion about me last night.”

“I see.”

“So anything you want to tell me?”

“Nothing you don’t already know” he replied looking at the view of the rooftops of the city.

“I know that they released you” she said picking up the bag with the paintings in it to take one out.

“So what do we do now?” Tramery asked her without turning around to face her.

“Well I guess that since you like my work so much you tell me which one your favourite is? And don’t forget that you have to clean my car out later, since the bet is off all things considered Mr. Tramery.”

Tramery turned his head to look at her; she was smiling back at him. He didn’t know what to say, wondered why she was reacting so calmly.

“Don’t you want to ask me why? Don’t you want to get mad?”

She looked up into the sunlight, face looking like an angel’s,

“I got them back didn’t I that’s good enough for me. Karma good karma, no harm done. You have succeeded in making me one of the most written about artists in today’s papers you know. Can’t buy that kind of publicity. Plus you were good enough to help with Sarah last night, so why bear a grudge they’re only pieces of paper you know.”

“I see. If they’re only pieces of paper, then why do you paint if that’s how you feel?”

Tramery asked noticing Jack jump out of the tree again landing a little bit further away. He clapped his hands at the boy and waited for a reply from Jade.

“I put it down to dyslexia,” she replied adopting the poise of a professional actress.

“What?”

“You know dyslexia not being able to understand words, how to spell.”

“Christ you’re not going to get all existentialist are you?”

“No it’s much simpler than that. I got a school report when I was about twelve and on it the teachers said that I was good at maths and if I worked hard could do well for myself. One of the teachers said they thought I was autistic and that was why I didn’t participate in class so much.”

“So you were a little quiet?”

“No our family thought that it said artistic and my mother got me art lessons in the evenings soon after. And it just started from that.”

Tramery looked suspiciously at her for a second.

“I don’t believe that.”

“Its true honest? So how did you end up being a card hustler then?”

Tramery lay on the grass and put his hands behind his head.

“Illusionist not hustler,” he corrected her, “its an art not a profession” he said pointedly as she lay down beside him, “I guess I just like thinking up tricks, liked having people notice me, thinking that I was smarter than them, and I was good at it. Can’t say how it started, it was just something I did.”

He rested his head on the ground and looked up at the branches swishing and swaying in the early evening sky.

“Ever wonder what it would be like to be free, to be able to leave it all behind. Free to grow, free like the branches of those trees”

“Neem Trees” Jade replied in a low voice.

Tramery turned his head around to face hers, he was not sure he had heard her correctly.

“Neem Trees” she repeated, “*Azadirachta indica*, to give them their true name.”

“That makes it clearer?” he laughed.

She turned her face up to the sky again, smiling.

“Sorry, it means free tree in English. It’s the name of a tree found in the Indian subcontinent. The local people there use it in agriculture medicine and cosmetics. You think that nature is free, and that we are free to use it. But the drugs companies have patented almost every product from the Neem Tree, so that the locals can no longer use it. Just as the branches are rooted in the soil, we are rooted in greed. They patented nature and placed a price tag on our souls in doing so. I don’t think that we can be free Jack, and I don’t think that you’d like it if we were.”

Tramery let a shout out as Jack jumped on top of his stomach and asked him to come see how far he had jumped to see if he could better him. Tramery stood up and wiped the grass from his trousers then raced after Jack before tackling him to the ground and tickling him till he was crying with laughter. Then the boy wriggled away and stood up and looked at the view from the top of the hill.

“Isn’t that uncle Bobby?” Jack asked.

Tramery jumped up and looked where Jack was looking. He peered down the hill and could see uncle Bobby wearing shades walking along with two other men. Both men were friends of Jimmy’s. Uncle Bobby was one of Therese’s erstwhile gentleman friends. Tramery watched as they looked around the park and made their way towards the playground. He ran over to where Jade was lying down. They didn’t have much time left now. He figured that Jimmy rang Therese and she told him where they had gone. Christ he shouldn’t have left a note for her, she had their whole itinerary for the day. Now what to do.

“Alright time is up for the park, so what was next on the list?” Tramery asked trying to sound calm as he picked up all their plastic bags hurriedly.

He held out his hand to help Jade up and lifted up her bag to hand to her. In his hands, the canvas material felt familiar. Then he read the name on the outside of the bag and looked at her shocked. She read the label, Jack Tramery it read in bold black letters. She shrugged her shoulders.

“Looks like they were yours all along. Maybe you were arrested falsely” Jade joked as he looked into her so familiar face.

“Figures” he simply stated before rushing Jack to hurry up, to gather his stuff.

“What’s the hurry we have all day don’t we” Jack asked not liking having to move so fast.

“Exactly so lets not waste one moment of it” Tramery replied, lost in thought for a second.

He stood still for a moment, trying to think of somewhere safe they could go. Then he smiled softly to himself suddenly having had an idea, and pointed for them to go to the lake, Jimmy would never figure him to be near the lake.

Winter fished through her wardrobe trying to find something appropriate for her to wear. Something that made her look a little more human, a little less threatening. Something that would make her looked younger. She tried on different work suits, they all made her look too stern. She knew the look she was going for, knew the dress she wanted and the way that her hair was supposed to be fixed, had seen it on TV so many times before. The contents of her handbag spilled out onto her bed. She took out the press badge that Thornton had given her and then pinned it onto the breast pocket of her blouse. On her bedside table were all the little tubes, pots, and potions and preening tools that she never used. Winter arched her eyebrows in the mirror and slowly and carefully started to darken her lashes, to rouge her cheeks to cast shadows of shimmering colours above her eyelids. On her radio, she could hear snippets of news, reports of sports of robberies of royalties. Then she heard Darcy’s name, heard him speak in a compassionated voice about the little girl who had discovered Peter Jones’ body. He said he was going to make it his mission to protect her from the media frenzy that was surrounding the case, he was going to honour her with a medal on behalf of the city. The ceremony was to take place at the steps of the Muscat building later that evening. Winter’s lips curled into a smile for the first time that day she felt confident as she carefully applied colour to her mouth.

Tramery bit his lip as he abstractedly watched Jack skimming stones. He looked over his shoulders every few seconds expecting the worst, expecting them to be there waiting for him. The trees seemed to be crowding him in suffocating him, he couldn't breathe in the hot sticky air. A hand clamped his shoulder. Tramery jerked his head around to see who it was body trembling in fear.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing, nothings wrong, how could anything be wrong on such a beautiful day with such a beautiful woman at my side."

"The truth, tell me what's wrong. You've been looking over your shoulder for the past half hour, you're making Jack nervous, don't tell me its because you enjoy the view tell me what's wrong. Is it the robbery?"

Tramery took a deep breath of air and said nothing. He kept his eyes focussed on the little boy with fine fair hair playing in the distance, trying to avoid Jade's eyes. Jade kept her hand on his arm, holding onto him, unable to let go for some reason.

"I made it out of the station last night, but that doesn't make me a free man. I upset a few people last night. They will be wanting a word with me today," he replied in a soft voice, so that Jack could not hear him.

"A word, how serious is this word."

Tramery looked over at Jack who was pretending not to notice as he hopped stones along the surface of the water.

"I don't know you, you don't know me, we're just here to take a walk in the park, you don't need to know about it."

Tramery still could not look her in they eye, knew that if he did the truth would tumble out, and he could not let her know the truth. Could not let her know what he was. Jade let go of his arm and looked into his brown eyes.

"I won't ask any more questions, I don't understand, but I won't ask you any more questions," she stated simply.

Jack continued firing stones across the water, looking at the reflection of his father and Jade talking in the ripples.

"Are you sure we haven't met before?" he asked quietly as he brushed his hand against her cheek for a moment as both looked into each other's eyes, in sudden recognition.

And just as swiftly both backed off from each other, still maintaining eye contact, still watching still waiting for the moment to pass, without being able to end it. Then

Tramery heard Jack calling his name. He glanced over to where Jack was kneeling at the riverbank then picked up a stone and fired it across the ripples of the water and challenged Jack to do better.

Better, everything was better bigger and brighter than she could have imagined. Nora's chest welled up with pride as she held Sarah's hand in hers. They stood in the glare of the sunlight and the camera's flashing in their faces. Paul was going to be okay, he had made it through the night. The damn cops wouldn't take the cuffs off his wrists, wouldn't tell her why they had him chained to his bed, but that didn't matter to Nora. He had made it through the night and the doctors said he was going to be fine. She smiled down at Sarah whose face was covered in worry lines. Then Michael Darcy started making a speech about her bravery about the importance of the community, the family. He walked over to Sarah and shook her hand and placed a ribbon on her jumper, and stood up to shake hands with her mother as the camera's flashed in her face, capturing the moment, capturing the fear in Sarah's eyes. Her father was going to be all right they told her. Was going to make a full recovery. She could hear them shouting at her to smile and remembered Peter Jones dead eyed stare at her feet. Couldn't understand how they all had found something to celebrate out of his death, couldn't understand why her mother was holding her hand telling her how proud she was of her. In the skyline across the road, she could see the spire of a church and could hear the bells ringing, thrashing through her thoughts, telling her to be quiet to be brave, telling her to honour both of them.

Tramery looked at his watch then shook his head at Jack.

"But its favourite restaurant, you said I could go there, we always go there, and he said that we could go where I wanted to today" he implored Jade.

Tramery shook his head again, and asked if he didn't want to go somewhere different for a change. Jack shook his head again,

"You gave me your word, you said you would do it"

Jade agreed with the boy, asked if Tramery wouldn't go along with him Reluctantly Tramery agreed and walked with both of them out of the park. They asked for a table for three at the restaurant and the hostess smiled at him recognising Tramery and Jack

from different occasions, hadn't seen them there together before but guessed from the way they looked that they were father and son. She showed them to a table at the front of the room near the window, but Tramery asked them to be moved nearer to the back, said that it would probably be better if Jack was seated near the toilet given the amount of junk he had eaten that day, much to the boy's indignation. Jack skimmed through the menu and ordered a fanta and the house special with the works and a side order of chilli fries and a chocolate sundae. Tramery smiled at him he was taking him at his word for sure. Then Tramery told him to go wash his hands in the bathroom because they were covered with green rubbed on from the bark of the trees. He gave the waitress their order and settled into his chair again looking around the place checking out who was there, checking to see if there was anybody he knew there.

"I don't think it's a good idea for us to be here. They will know that we'll be here"

Jade lifted the napkin from the place setting in front of her as she watched a waitress laden with trays of steaming food walking towards them.

"Better to do what Jack wants isn't it? You didn't want to let him down did you?" she said sympathetically noticing the old couple in the corner having an animated discussion and then pausing every so often to look over at her.

Winter pulled at her skirt trying to cover her knees as she noticed people staring at her as she walked past. She could see Sanchez standing at the corner of the street oblivious to her still nursing his hangover. When she shouted at him he stared in surprise,

"I know that I told you to fix your hair last night but"

"Don't flatter yourself Sanchez"

"No that's not what I meant," he said eying her up, "You look fantastic, so what am I here for, to make some guy or girl jealous. That the game?"

Winter shook her head.

"You have your badge with you?"

"That's a little kinky isn't it?"

She shook her head at him again.

"I need you to do a favour for me, just don't tell anybody else at the precinct. It could get you in trouble, you still willing to help?"

“Hey I told you I owed you a favour after last night. Just nothing too active, I don’t know how much I can do for you in my state” he said rubbing at his cheeks trying to wake himself up.

Winter wondered to herself what exactly she had let herself in for. Last night, everything seemed clear as they frantically pieced the story together, as they plotted and planned Darcy’s demise, but now, dressed to kill and execute the plan she wasn’t so sure. She stood a little closer to Sanchez, stone-faced and serious.

“There is going to be a channel three news van parked on Suffolk Street in about fifteen minutes. I need you to knock on the door and tell them that you have to see the broadcasting license of the guys inside and that you have had reports of drug use among the media people and that you have to search the van okay?”

Sanchez listened very carefully then shook his head.

“What?”

“Last night, the documents I found, I’m going to do something about it. If you don’t want to help I’ll understand. I just need you to clear that van for a few minutes at seven o’clock okay, I want it empty at seven, can you do that for me?”

He shrugged his shoulders,

“Seven?”

“Seven exactly no sooner no later.”

“They’ll be parked at Suffolk Street?”

“Yes can you do it?”

“Are you going to mess with the camera’s or something?”

“Something likes that.”

“Well if it screws with their shows, after what they said about me last year, it would be a pleasure to screw those guys over. Say no more” Sanchez said.

Then he watched with amazement as she proceeded to take a press badge out of her pocket and pin it onto her lapel. Winter had decided it looked more credible on the lapel. She was intent on getting the look right. Sanchez breathed in deeply.

“So this is what you spend your time doing? Christ you have to leave your flat more often Winter. You should just get a dog or some cats or something. Fine fine I’ll say no more, seven o’clock I remember. Don’t worry I’ll be there.”

He said as she tottered down the street towards the Muscat building where a crowd was beginning to gather.

Maria pushed past the crowded steps where Darcy was giving a press conference on the Jones' case and found a place that wasn't already dripping with wires. She took out the compact from her bag and fixed her make up, fluffed her hair a little and rubbed the lipstick from her teeth.

"How does this look Mike?"

He started filming some test shots then radioed back to the van asking how it looked if the light was good there. He shook his head said that the sun was blocking her face that she should move over towards the left a little. She obliged and waited as he radioed back to the Van again asking if that was better then gave her the thumbs up, told her that would be her mark. From where she was stood she could just make out the face of Eric Fitzgerald stood in the distance talking to one of his political advisors, and winking over at her. She read through the papers in her hands again. Mike had asked her what she was holding since they never normally used scripts on location, it was only going to be an introduction to their piece on the Muscat robbery, he couldn't understand why she was pacing about so agitatedly. She said they were just crib notes, that she had a late night the night before, after having to get a taxi home with the camera on her own. He said nothing else didn't want to start an argument. She took out a cigarette and took a few fleeting puffs as he shouted at her they had only five minutes before airing.

Tramery watched Jack shovelling the chilli fries into his mouth in-between gulps of soda and strips of steak. He played with the food on his plate unable to eat any of it. The bell on the restaurant jangled. He watched as two men in dark shade and sunglasses entered. His face turned white with fear. Jade looked over and recognised them from the park.

"Jack your face is a mess, what kind of a father are you to let your son get in such a mess, such table manners, shame on you both, take him into the toilet and get him cleaned up" Jade ordered much to Jack's surprise. He looked up at his father wondering if he was going to let the blond chick talk to them like that. She flashed urgent glances at Tramery flicking her head towards the toilets,

"Don't worry about it, just get up and leave now before they see, take him, I'll be fine" she whispered and Tramery followed her instructions. He knew they'd search the toilets what use was it to hide there. But something in her face something he

couldn't touch made him trust her. He stood up and took Jack's hand walked him through the swing doors with the little man painted on the outside. Jade called the waitress over started clicking her fingers loudly then jumped up from her chair. She took Jack's plate in her hands and walked right up to the young woman who was serving the old couple in the corner.

"This isn't cooked fully look its red in the centre, are you trying to poison me, I can't believe it what kind of place is this look at this meat its raw." She shrieked at the waitress.

"But your table ordered it rare" the waitress stuttered back at her. Jade snorted at her and looked at the old couple for support showing them the plate,

"Rare not extinct can you believe this can you" she said taking up the pieces of meat to show them then turning to show the other diner's in the restaurant as all eyes turned to her. "Trying to kill us I tell you I'll sue" she shouted again, "Trying to kill me Jade Nix feeding me this poisoned meat" she shouted watching as their faces twitched in recognition. The old man jumped up to shake her hand, and some tourists who had been watching the traffic pass outside took out their camera's to take her photo, the hostess ran over from her desk to calm Jade down and knocked down another waitress carrying a tray loaded with food, spilling it on the floor as more and more people left their seats to get a picture and an autograph from Jade. For that moment the restaurant was chaos. Diners prodding their food, shaking their heads at Jade's arrogance, some hopping with excitement, having travelled all the way to the city just to see her paintings, panting with fever now being garnished the chance to meet her as the food was trampled under their feet. The two men in shades watched the confusion with smiles on their faces as the beautiful blond picked up more pieces of steak and offered them to the fan club who was gathering around her as mementos. She kept her eye on them saw them whisper to each other and make as if to walk through the place.

"You gentlemen you taste this look at this so called meat, I tell you I wouldn't eat here" she shouted at them smiling, flirting doing anything she could think of to draw attention to them and to her.

"Okay lady okay, think we'll take your advice" the larger one said then shut the door behind them shaking his head in amusement.

Sanchez rapped his knuckles on the door again, this time a little louder. A young man in a check shirt with a ratty looking beard opened the door. Sanchez flashed his badge, said that he had come to search the van. The man went to shut the door on him. Drugs as if they would believe that. Winter wasn't the brightest.

"I'm here to search your van" he said in his most authoritarian voice. The bearded man shook his head,

"Listen man it'll have to wait were just about to start our broadcast alright?" he said slamming the door shut on Sanchez. He rapped his knuckles on the door, and the same guy opened it, sneering at Sanchez,

"When we're ready man okay?" he said attempting to close the door, but Sanchez stuck his foot in the way.

"We have had some reports today of a possible bomb threat to the Muscat building to a threat to kill Darcy from the Tridents, you have to have this vehicle cleared we have to search it for a bomb, that urgent enough for you? I mean I can wait until you're finished you know it doesn't matter to me, I can wait across the street out of the way if you really want"

Before he could finish what he was saying three guys jumped out of the Van white faced.

"That's better, now my colleagues will be along in a little while but how about in the mean time you wait over here with me and we have a little chat, see if you have seen any suspicious persons around today"

"I don't know it's a little suspicious isn't it," the man in the navy cap that said security said to his colleague.

Winter waited to be let into the area they had closed off from the public. Her pulse was racing; she waited and showed them her press pass again, trying not to let them see how afraid they were.

"Sure is real suspicious, a pretty lady like you wandering around on your own" the other guy said to her as he opened the gate to let her in. She smiled at them both like she had seen the others doing, and strode towards the channel Three van hoping that Sanchez had been true to his word. She stepped up to it and knocked and the door. Nobody opened it, then she tried her hand at the lock and opened the door slowly, inside it was completely empty. She took a seat at the desk, and looked up at the four

monitors in front of her. She checked the tape deck, checked to make sure that the tape they made the night before was poised for play and then checked the monitors on the one on the left she could see Maria's face. Watched as a little red light came on on the monitor as numbers from five to one flashed on the screen. Suddenly it was live and the camera zoomed in to Maria's face. She looked calm looked relaxed. Winter watched as the images flashed in the corner of the screen, of Peter Jones of the lost boys of Darcy with new footage coming in of him presenting Sarah a medal for finding him, then as Maria told of the robbery the enactment the police brutality she heard a voice coming from one of the radio's hanging on the wall, telling her she had moments left.

“the robbery of Jade Nix's paintings. I spoke to her earlier today, to see how she felt having been involved in such a heinous crime”

Play play play the voices from the studio was saying, play she could see Maria's eyes pleading into the camera lens. Winter watched her career flash past her eyes as she pressed the button, and the tape began whirring inside, going out live across the city live into every home and every waiting room and every shop window. TV screens flickered and hummed with the names of the hypocrites

CHAPTER 22

Breaking news

The lens broke, for the first time in her career; the pictures shattered just like her ego and every piece of her career. It flickered and churned their faces mingled with the names of the dead boy's before spinning into a freeze frame, before thinning into a beast with no shame and bills to pay. The network switched onto a preview for the upcoming match and shot her tape down less than a minute after it had been aired. Winter jumped out of the channel three-news van and raced over to where Maria was stood with the microphone in hand, still being filmed by Mike. She was shivering in the cool night time air as she waited for Mike to give her the signal back that they were on air but nothing happened. In the distance, she waved over at Eric Fitzgerald who made his way through the crowds to talk with her. Then she walked over to Mike, said there had been a change of plan and she was going to do Fitzgerald while they were running the Jade Nix tape. A young thin man omnipresent was giving Fitzgerald instructions wherever Fitzgerald was, who was talking into a mobile phone. Mike was shaking his head, they were telling him to cut the tape on his radio, that the show was being taken off the air. It was a job and nothing less than a job, and it was keeping his girlfriend in Gucci and he was not prepared to give it up. Just as Fitzgerald arrived to speak with Thornton, he left the camera at her feet like a gift to the Grecian gods then walked away. She reached out her hand to stop him, and then turned to shake Fitzgerald's hand not wanting to waste the opportunity.

"I'm so glad you came Eric" she said, smiling sweetly at him, "I wanted to talk with you about the David Water's case and about Bradley and Darcy, I think that a story on it would be mutually beneficial don't you?"

Fitzgerald was a tall slightly plumpish man in his forties. He had a strong jaw and a manner that suggested that he was more comfortable speaking to horses than humans. He smiled at Maria and shook her hand warmly.

"You would have done a great job with the story, I know that Ms Thornton" he replied, while his assistant jabbered at his side.

"Would have?" she enquired.

“Yes you would have if you had to have gotten to me sooner but as it stands, I am afraid that I cannot possibly comment. In fact if you try to link me to your story, I shall be obliged to press legal charges”

In the distance, Darcy had just finished his speech to the throbbing crowd of journalists; he was saying how important it was that family values remain at the core of any administration in the city, be it in politics or policing.

“I don’t understand” Maria asked, uncertain as to what Fitzgerald was saying.

“No you don’t understand how we work at all do you Ms Thornton. Let me put it another way, what you did there now, what you tried to do to Darcy, you have just won him his election. Your tape ran for about thirty seconds before they pulled the plug on it, published a retraction and put it down to dirty tricks from some other political party.”

Maria said nothing and listened in perfect silence as a wave of applause passed over the crowd nearby.

“If I am seen speaking to you, or if I even attempt to corroborate your story, I’m dead in the water, just like those boys you think that you were trying to protect.”

“Its true?” she said slowly releasing the words that were lodged in her throat.

“Of course its true. But do not even think of telling me that is why you are in it, I know you people; I know that you were only doing this to help your career. I just hope you are happy with what you have achieved tonight. Now if you don’t mind, I have to go congratulate Darcy on an excellent job with the Muscat robbery.”

With that, Fitzgerald strode off as two burly security guards started making their way towards Maria. They had been given instructions to escort her off the premises. Darcy was blowing kisses at his supporters as he raised his arms encouraging their cheers.

“Cheers”

“Cheers” Tramery replied as he opened his can of soda.

He took a sip out of it and then watched as Jack jumped into the puddles along the pavement.

“This isn’t how I would have wanted the night to end” he started to say to Jade.

“But we knew it had to end” she replied also watching the little boy. She was reminded of Sarah, was reminded of herself in a different time in a different place when she was more carefree.

“Does this mean that this is the end” he asked as she flagged down a taxi on the road nearby.

“Do you remember when we met?” Jade said as she turned to look up and down the empty streets. He said nothing.

“Which means that you won’t remember when we said goodbye” she said as he reached out his hand to hers as she stepped into the taxi.

“And if we never say goodbye, then tonight is not the end” she said as the car door closed.

“You think we’ll meet again.”

“I still owe you dinner” she replied as the car drove off into the nightlights.

Jack was stood waiting for him at the front door of his apartment. He looked up at his dad, at the wistful expression on his face and said nothing for a moment, then took the spare can of soda from his dad’s hand, and drank a few sips of it.

Thornton scrunched up her face involuntarily and then took another sip of the liquid.

Winter shook her head,

“I forgot, four sugars wasn’t it?”

Thornton nodded her head and then smiled back at Winter.

“That was really funny, I won’t forget the faces on those two security guys when they tried to remove us from the Muscat building and you took out your badge and told them we were undercover cops.”

Winter smiled back at her and sipped some of her tea.

“You know that its going to be hell back at the precinct after tonight, they’re going to guess it was me, I know that Darcy will find out about me he’s not stupid.”

“I thought we had him too, I thought we had it all sewn up when I saw Fitzgerald there, Christ Elaine, what made us think we could do it”

Winter took out a cigarette from her freshly purchased packet and lit it, then offered it to Thornton to take a drag.

“I never told you that you looked really beautiful tonight, you’ll be doing me out of a job tonight” Maria said as she took the cigarette gently from Winter’s hand.

“And you will do me out of a job if you keep playing detective”

Maria turned her eyes up to the heavens.

“I think that you and me are a lot more alike than you would care to admit” she said handing the cigarette back to Winter, who was blushing.

“You want to hitch a ride back to the station with me? I noticed that Mike had left already?” she asked as she watched Maria play with her cigarette.

Thornton took the cigarette between her forefinger and thumb and twirled spirals of smoke out of it, before letting Winter take hold of it.

“Sure, I guess I should pick up my stuff”

“Have you got all your stuff?” Tramery asked Jack again.

Then he picked up his own bags, still prepacked from the night before and took one last look around his apartment before looking at Jack again.

“You will be better off back at your Aunt Therese’s house Jack”

“Yes I will”

“It will be less disruptive”

“You’re right”

“So I’m going to take you with me then?”

“Damn right”

Tramery pretended to frown at the sandy haired boy with the bundle of Spiderman comics standing beside him. Then he patted him on his head before opening the door to let them both out into the cool night time air. Saturday meant San Francisco, escape and summertime.

“Shall I have a false name again, because I kinda like the name Charles now, I’m not sure that I pass for a Patrick any more”

“Sure, just as long as you tell me first, alright kid?”

“Fine, it’s a deal as long as you let me choose what songs get played on the radio, I’m sick of all those old jazz songs you listen to” Jack replied as he twirled the knobs on the old radio in Tramery’s beat up Datsun.

Winter was about to turn the police radio off in her car, when she heard her name being called out. Marge was running dispatch for the night. Marge said she liked dispatch because it made her feel like she was making a difference to run the controls every weekend, but everyone else knew it was because she couldn't get a date, and that was the only way she'd ever get to talk with some men.

"Det. Insp. Winter are you there?"

Winter picked up the radio in her left hand and pressed the button with her thumb.

"This is Winter speaking go ahead Marge."

"Winter, one of your prisoners from last night has gotten himself into more trouble and has been asking for you to talk with, said his name is Angelo Deville and he refuses to talk with anybody other than yourself"

Winter looked over at Thornton who nodded her head in response, said that she would wait in the car for her, would busy herself playing with Mike's camera.

"All right Marge I'll be there as soon as I can" Winter replied before placing the handset down. Then she turned the car around to drive back towards St. Michael's precinct, with her foot to the pedal.

The car seemed to be moving achingly slowly as the taxi-driver took advantage of the fact that he had the Jade Nix in his car.

"You sure you want to be left off in this neighbour hood lady? Pretty lady like you shouldn't be walking the streets on your own" he said as she handed him a twenty-dollar bill.

Jade looked up at the tall apartment block in front of her and regretted the fact that she always wore her heels everywhere. She guessed that the elevator was still broken from earlier that day, and set about climbing up the flights of stairs to the Rivera apartment. She knocked on the door twice before Nora opened it slightly and peered out through the gap.

"I don't want to do any interviews" Nora said before Jade had a chance to get a word out. Nora was not going to let Sarah do any interviews till she was certain she had gotten the best deal the most amount of money possible.

"Its me Ms. Rivera Jade Nix, we met earlier today," Jade said, stepping back from the door under the light in the corridor so that Nora could see her face.

She opened the door and appeared flustered and excited that Jade was in her house.

“How is Sarah doing?” Jade asked as the woman picked up newspapers off the floor and invited Jade into the kitchen to have a cup of coffee.

“Sarah? Sarah is fine, she is asleep in her room, has had a long day, I’ll wake her if you like?” Nora said as she filled the kettle up with water.

“And your husband Paul?” Jade enquired.

“Paul is good, Paul is going to be fine, thank god” Nora replied as she blessed herself. Then she turned around to Jade, slightly puzzled looking,

“Why did you come here if you don’t mind me asking?”

Jade looked around the kitchen, everything lay exactly as they had left it, even the pieces of paper that they drew on remained crumpled on the kitchen table.

“I felt that I should see how Sarah was, she was very upset after everything that happened.”

Nora walked over with two cups of coffee then went back to the cupboards to search for a bowl of sugar before returning unsuccessfully. Then she picked up the crumpled pieces of paper and made as if to throw them into the bin.

“Sorry about the mess, Ms Nix, if I had known you were coming”

“I wouldn’t throw them out”

“What?”

“The pieces of paper, I drew one and Sarah drew the other”

Nora uncrumpled the pieces of paper and looked at both of them sceptically.

“You mean that it will be worth a lot of money, you being famous and all”

Jade felt slightly angered, she meant that it would be worth something because it was a picture that the woman’s daughter had drawn and that in itself should mean something, should have a value. It had occurred to Jade while she was travelling back to her agents in the taxi that her art was the one thing that she had in her life that kept her going. A gift got her through life. If she could not bring her self to name the crime, that nobody mentioned she could at least bring that gift to Sarah’s life.

“I mean that I think that your daughter has talent. I came her to offer her a chance to learn how to draw, think of it as a scholarship, I’ll take her under my wing, and teach her all I know”

Nora stirred her coffee, and looked a little pensive.

“You won’t have to pay me”

She said nothing and then picked up the crumpled piece of paper that Sarah had drawn. On it read the name of her husband, Sarah's father, Paul Rivera.

"Paul Rivera, Jimmy Murdock, Christopher Bradley" Angelo listed off again.

Just like he had minutes beforehand when he was talking to Winter in the interview room. He was explaining that it was an accident that Humbert, Herbert or whatever his name was had slipped and cut himself on one of the edges of the metal bed. Probably had a right to sue the police for negligence. And then, for no reason he had asked Winter how Rivera was doing, if he was all right, and asked if his kid was doing okay. Winter saw something that she had not expected in Angelo's eyes and all of a sudden, everything made sense. She asked him what he knew about the David Water's case, and that was when he asked her to turn the tape off. She knew that he knew more than he was saying, but also that he wasn't going to just tell her all about it, not when there was so much at stake. That was when she got the idea to tell Thornton about it.

"Angelo Deville, such a handsome name for such a handsome man" Maria said as she shook his blood stained hand.

"You really do have a face made for TV, such bone structure" she said, meaning it for the first time in her career.

"I don't know if Detective Winter told you, but I am doing a documentary on Criminals who have been misunderstood, who are good guys at heart, who help others, people like you perhaps Mr. Deville. I think that you should be the star of the show, what do you think?"

Angelo straightened his tie and sat straight up in his chair as Maria set up Mike's camera in one end of the room. Outside Winter was telling Marge that Maria was just getting some test shots around the station before she started to make the documentary on Marge herself. Then Winter returned to the room,

"So Mr Deville have you decided on whether or not you want us to make you into a star"

Angelo stood up and pushed his hair back along the sides of his head till he looked picture perfect and then nodded at Thornton to point the camera away from him.

"I know that I'm going down detective Winter, and I know that I'm going down for a few years. I am not interested in taking everyone else with me. But there are some

crimes that we as criminals do not commit. We are professionals are we not, we each have our own tools and skills, and we all treat this like a job. But at some point, somebody always crosses the line, and they have to pay for it, because they give the rest of us a bad name. Now I'm going to do this detective, not because you" he nodded over at Thornton, "are telling me you'll make me a star, but because you," he stared back at Winter, "have integrity, I know you do. That is why I asked for you after we had that little accident with that guy in my cell. I can trust you. I will do this interview, as an interview, you can roll that tape for the TV stations and you can roll that tape recorder for the police stations and you can use whatever you want. But lets not kid ourselves, there are some things that are worth going down for and this is one of them. We each were all children, we are not now, and we all hold that sacred. I will do my bit you do yours, and we shall take each of them down, Bradley, Darcy and especially James Murdock" Angelo concluded before taking a seat on the other side of the desk.

Maria squeezed Winter's shoulder before stepping back into the corner of the room to film Angelo. Darcy was going down, and he was being taken down from the inside, she still had the tape they made earlier that day, all the papers with his name on them and a testimony from Angelo was all they needed to nail him, to nail all of them. Peter Jones RIP.

"Which is why family values are important." Darcy concluded to a ripple of applause from his supporters in the front row of the reporters. He could taste the seat, could taste victory in the upcoming election.

"Is it true that the man who killed Peter Jones has been arrested Mr Darcy?"

"Why yes of course he has and we will be swift in dealing out justice for Peter. That man will be sent to jail for life you see if he isn't."

"Even though you awarded his daughter a medal for public service a few hours ago?" somebody at the back shouted at Darcy.

The cameras turned to a man with sleepy looking eyes ringed in dark circles standing at the back of the crowd.

"You did know that Paul Rivera is Sarah Rivera's father didn't you Darcy." Sanchez shouted as a ripple of excitement passed over the crowd.

“Or perhaps you were too busy with your colleagues trying to get good press instead of good policing Darcy?” Sanchez shouted again.

“What about Paul Rivera? Are you going to have him sentenced to death are you? Just like Bradley did for you last year when you set up Thatcher for the David Water’s murders. That how it works, who are you protecting now Darcy.”

The assistant D.A’s face fell ashen and he faltered on the steps outside the building looking for his aids, looking for help, they said nothing as the cameras whirred and clicked and captured every moment of it. He stepped backwards and tripped on the cable from his microphone face first onto the cold concrete as the camera’s snapped at his face.

Nora reached across and turned the television off, and sat down at her kitchen table.

“I thought that they would show footage of Sarah getting her award earlier on, I thought the news would be on” Nora said in a monotone voice as she buried her thoughts into the kitchen table.

Jade reached her hand across the table and clutched Nora’s hand in hers.

“You knew that he had been arrested already didn’t you, you knew that was why they had a police guard at his bedside?” she said soothingly.

Nora shook her head and ran her fingers through her hair. Then she looked up wide-eyed at Jade.

“Its okay for you, you have it all, money cars fame, you have it all. You don’t know what its like to be someone like me, to have to cope with all of this, and you think that you can come in here” she stood up and picked up Sarah’s crumpled drawing, “ and offer my kid drawing lessons like you know my daughter, like you think I’d leave her with you a perfect stranger, well let me tell you you know nothing. People like you you know nothing. Paul is a good man, he looks after me, he looks after both of us, it was a mistake, he shot the boy by mistake, it was an accident, even the police say that it looks like an accident, manslaughter not murder. He is my husband, he is my man, and he is not a murderer. They told me he’d get five years,” she said sobbing.

“He gave your daughter six ” Jade retorted without thinking.

Nora took her hands from her face and stared back at Jade.

“What?”

“Nothing, don’t think anything of it. I should never have come, I’ll leave” Jade said, regretting having come back to the house.

Nora stepped around the kitchen table and grabbed her by the arm stopping her from leaving the house.

“What do you mean that he gave Sarah six years, do you mean Peter Jones gave her six years what do you mean” she shouted at Jade, who could not look the woman in the eye.

“Where is Sarah?” Jade asked.

“She’s upstairs, she’s in her room in bed upstairs, why do you ask?”

“She spends all her time in her room doesn’t she?”

“She likes to read.”

“And she never talks does she?”

“She’s just a quiet kid, why do you?”

“And she never hugs you does she, she hates to be touched doesn’t she?” Jade interrupted her eyes fiery green staring into Nora’s.

“And you never asked yourself why did you?” Jade continued in a slow deliberate voice.

“I don’t know what you mean, what do you mean?” Nora asked as she started to shake, suddenly afraid of Jade.

Jade took the crumpled drawing from her hand and pressed it to Nora’s face.

“Did you read the name on top of it? Did you see the face she drew and called father, did you look at her eyes when she was visiting him today, when he was unconscious?”

Nora let the paper fall to the ground and slumped into chair beside her.

“He wasn’t unconscious he woke up, he is going to get better”

“Did you see her face when she saw *him*?”

“They were alone when he woke up” Nora replied. Thoughts of Sarah’s face started to roll into that place in her mind that she shut off when he told her what he did for a living. She stumbled to the sink, coughing as she did, choking on her tears. Every part of her body was sick every part shaking.

“He loves Sarah, he’s a good man, and he looks after both of us”

“So why did you threaten to leave, I know you did, because Sarah is terrified that you will leave her”

“I thought he was having an affair, he doesn’t touch me anymore, at night time, we haven’t been intimate for over six months now” Nora’s voice trailed off as she clutched at her stomach.

“And you never wondered why? Why she sits there alone each night, why she won’t speak?”

Nora shook her head, refused to listen, refused to believe what Jade was saying.

“You’re her mother, don’t tell me that you didn’t already know what he was doing to her. Tell me you don’t believe it, but for Christ’s sake don’t tell yourself that anymore. Don’t punish Sarah any longer” Jade shouted at Nora, her eyes burning through the woman.

Nora was shaking her head trying to get rid of the thoughts that were flooding her mind. Every time he sat Sarah on his knee, every time he said he would pick her up from school, take her swimming; it couldn’t be true it couldn’t be true.

“He’s her father, he’s a good man”

“He’s a killer”

“It was an accident, he said it was an accident”

“He shot a boy in the park last night like it was nothing, and he didn’t tell you about it did he? Probably came home and had his tea with you like nothing happened”

Nora remembered the conversation over breakfast about the missing boy, she could hear Paul’s words ringing in her ears, each one of them stifling her. These days you never know what is going to meet you outside. You have to be careful, kids are so vulnerable Nora could not believe what was happening she crumpled into a heap on the floor.

“How do you know?” she asked through stifled sobs.

Jade bent down to the ground and tilted Nora’s chin upwards till both women were face to face,

“Because I know,” Jade replied simply as she helped Nora to her feet.

Her feet were tingling with the cold wind that breezed through her window. Sarah sat at her windowsill shivering dressed in her nightshirt. She was clutching Del and listening to them argue downstairs, then she heard a woman’s voice saying that she was going to leave if *she* did not and the door slammed behind her. Unseen to Sarah Jade left the apartment. *Either she goes or I do.* Sarah started rocking slowly as she whispered her prayers into the night air. She could hear the creak of some-one’s footsteps on the stairs creaking towards her bedroom door. The handle turned ever so

slowly the metal glinting with shine from the streetlights. Sarah shivered again waiting to see his face, waiting to see his smile. The door opened. Nora stood pale-faced and looked down at the little shivering girl that she had cradled in her arms what seemed only weeks ago. The eyes staring back at her were older and so much colder. She softly padded over to where Sarah was sitting on the ground and sat beside her. Then slowly and carefully she took the doll out of Sarah's hands, placed it on the ground, and put a shoe under its head as a pillow. Then she made as if to take Sarah in her arms to pick her up and lurched as Sarah edged back from her. Above her head, she could hear the wind chime clinking through the silence.

"Sarah," Nora said softly as Sarah turned her head around to face her mother wondering what it was she had done.

"Sarah, I don't know what to say to you. I really do not know what I should say to you. I, your fa..." Nora tried to look Sarah in the eye but could not see her as everything blurred with the hot angry tears in her eyes.

"He is never never coming back to this house. Sarah, just you, me, Delilah, just the three of us. I don't know what to say I don't know how to talk to you, I don't have a right anymore I just..."

"You're not leaving me?" Sarah interrupted in a timid voice. Sarah said nothing. A million years between her and her mother, a thousand hours of darkness in her bedroom, a hundred times she had listened to them outside of her room, twenty times she had hidden at under her bed wish whispering her prayers with Del, six-years she had lived with them, four pairs of eyes that hollowed and bore their way into her dreams and one time she had tried to talk with her mother.

Nora took Sarah's hand in hers.

"I'm not leaving you" she replied softly squeezing the girl's hand softly as the wind sent shivers down both of their skins.

The breeze circled around the room sucking out the dead dreaded memories of night time before leaving the two clutching onto each other's hand's as though it was the only thing they had that kept them alive. The wind howled round, down the front of the flat-faced building, over the treetops in a distant park while children smoke, drank cider, and warmed themselves with tales of adventures and yesterday. The smoke from their cigarettes catching in the breeze and mixing with the steam that hissed and

sputtered from a drain in an alleyway where an old woman and an old man rocked themselves to sleep with the lullaby from a nearby electrical store. As cars rolled past they kicked up dust against the glass of a nearby coffee shop where two women were talking about tomorrow holding hands and making plans for new careers. They raised their glasses toasting each other as the aroma of the coffee carried itself through the air conditioner and into the night-time air, under the noses of the nightwalkers of the city, and up into the nearby apartment blocks. The smell, unnoticed crept back into Sarah's room where mother and daughter lay sleeping in each other's arms, unnoticed made its way out again, silent and unseen save the pair of glass eyes that would never close on a doll that Sarah no longer clutched against her chest. Or at least that is what I saw.