

Over the Rainbow

Noel Hodson



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By Noel Hodson

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Over the Rainbow – by Noel Hodson

A novel in which Global Warming & Avian Flu change the world order. It's an inspiring adventure. **“Every responsible person, politician & civil servant should read this book.”**

“If both the icecaps melt the oceans will rise by 100 metres (300 feet) and 80% of the population will move to higher ground. Will your home be submerged? Will your family survive? Are we ready to face it?”

When the tidal Thames quietly overflows its banks in London, young Alice Whitaker and her family follow government advice and stay put, in Marylee Way, Lambeth, just 23 feet above sea-level. Alex Whitaker and his school pals have great fun sailing round Hyde Park Corner, avoiding the polluted ‘reflux’. But the rising waters force them, and the 80% of the world population who live on the coastal margins, to move to higher ground; precipitating the collapse of food, energy and medical supplies. In the chaos, the bird-flu pandemic attacks the migrating people, decimating the population. In America, gun-anarchy rules the roost. Alice and Alex survive – by building a den in Harrods - and start to rebuild society, on new principles, in conflict with the returning aristocratic landlords.

A fact-based, exciting, transformational, page turning novel.
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Forward

The oceans have a surface area of 335 million square kilometres. Antarctica has an area of 13.8 million square kilometres which is 98% covered in ice, with a depth of up to 5 kilometres. Greenland, in the Arctic, has an area of 2.2 million square kilometres, with an ice cap of up to 2.6 kilometres. Should both the Antarctic and Arctic land based ice caps melt, the sea-level would rise 113 metres, or 370 feet. Eighty percent of all the people in the world live below 300 feet, on the coastal margins. Greater London is all below 300 feet. Florida's east coast urban areas are below 30 feet. Manhattan Island rises just 36 feet above the ocean. The infamous settlement of Monmouth Junction in New Jersey is built at 135 feet above sea-level. The centre of Oxford, England is 200 feet above sea-level. *SW2000 Telework Studies 1994.*

France had once upon a time been saved from brutal invaders by the visionary maiden Jeanne d'Arc; who was then betrayed, arrested, tortured, tried and cruelly burned. Centuries later, with coastal lands invaded by the sea and populations destroyed by deadly plagues, a charismatic and prescient English girl brings her message of renewal to the survivors in London, to Britain and to the whole world. Like Joan of Arc, her fate is to die at the hands of her own people. But her power to change mankind's direction transcends her mortality.

Before the inundation, Alice Whitaker of Lambeth was a carefree, pretty, sixteen year old Londoner, earning an honest living at Liberty on Regent's Street, as a highly decorated, cosmetics sales assistant. She had rarely thought about the big questions of Birth, Life and Death and had never voted in an election and, despite the brave, sisterly sacrifices of the suffragettes, most likely never would have voted. But, even assuming any political urges might arise to move her, with Westminster lately submerged and deserted, was there anyone left to vote for – or against?

Alice hadn't dreamt she might one day be revered as a prophet of the people and, as her mother, if she had survived, would have said, it was '*a merciful blessing*' that though gifted with prescience, Alice could not foresee her own premature death at the hands of an assassin.

Chapter One

London 2008

“Fifty years ago, most of the glaciers we looked at were slowly growing in length but since then this pattern has changed. In the last five years the majority were actually shrinking rapidly.” Scientists estimate the glaciers are losing 250 cubic kilometres of ice to the seas each year – about 60% more than they gained through snowfall.

British Antarctic Survey report – 22 April 2005.

On the late afternoon low tide Alice slid her kayak into Hans Place, just behind Harrods, lifted the paddle from the dark, swirling waters, drifted to a half submerged first-floor window, floating twenty feet above street-level, checked as she always did that the darkened room behind the glass was abandoned and empty of decaying corpses and their unquiet ghosts, clung onto the window struts under the wide dark-red brick lintel, where she all but disappeared from view, stopped breathing – and listened.

Alice Whitaker was now turned nineteen. And although she had the best of everything that she had ever wanted or, in her wildest shop-a-holic fantasies, had ever dreamed of having, after three years of creeping inundation and recurrent plagues, Alice’s face, and her character, had changed from being outgoing, confident, innocent and in full bloom to being pale, set, paranoid and wary. She wore her fair hair tied up tightly into a top-knot and pony tail, not for the pleasing appearance it gave but to lift the hair clear of her ears – *‘all the better to hear you with, my Dear’* – and out of her eyes – *‘all the better to see you with, my Dear’*. Survival depended on being always alert.

The tide was on the turn and grey-brown, threatening water was already pouring inwards, rushing through broken windows, along alleyways and narrow streets, and surging dangerously around corners of buildings, lampposts and pillars. Alice bobbed in her camouflaged double-handed *Aluet Sea 11* kayak and clung on. After a

long, long silence, while her ears heard nothing but the water slapping against stonework and cries of gulls scudding high in the grey skies above the sheltering canyon, she whispered into a walkie-talkie handset, billed on its convincingly hi-tech, shiny designer box as “*Spy-Con - Inexhaustible Battery and Wind-Up-Power. Range Two Kilometres – Defies interception as it auto-cycles through Four-Thousand wave bands per minute. Privacy Guaranteed*” and, as she whispered into the very expensive mouthpiece, her privacy and her transmission were, despite the promise on the box, breached and intercepted.

“I’m coming in...” she whispered, “...OK?”

“OK” confirmed a husky reply – also whispering.

High above the water with views over much of London, in the Executive Suite and Restaurant of the two-hundred-and-forty-foot, seventy-four-metres high Post Office Tower, latterly BT Tower, on Cleveland Street, south of the Marylebone Road; an ordered chaos of electronic telecoms boxes nested in a bewildering maze of wires and fed signals from near and far into recording equipment and, of particular threat to Alice’s preference for secrecy, into the headphones of one of several middle aged men who bent tensely over a control panel – and listened with fierce concentration to Alice’s “*Privacy Guaranteed*” conversation.

Chapter Two

Waving or Drowning

Mount Kilimanjaro, (*Kilima Njaro, Shining Peak*) at 5,895 metres (19,340 feet) Africa's tallest mountain, has lost its famous snow cap. Fifteen years earlier than the most pessimistic global-warming forecasts, the volcanic tip of the mountain is visible for the first time in 11,000 years, testifying to the devastating speed of climate change. *G8 Energy and Environment Summit, London, March 2005.*

"AVIAN FLU FOUND IN MIGRATING GEESE. Tens of thousands of birds that could be carrying the H5N1 avian influenza virus are due to leave the reserve..."
The Guardian Thursday July 7 2005.

Three years earlier, on government advice which in turn the government obtained from the very best scientific authorities, the population of central London, north and south of the river, had stayed put when the waters rose and spilled over the Embankment in the Spring Tides.

About two million souls, including Alice, hopeful, dark-eyed, slim, pretty, seventeen and dating, and her family among them; all imbued with the same stubborn and stoical spirit as the people of the London Blitz, humming Land of Hope and Glory and appropriate sea-shanties, simply decamped from their ground floors, abandoned their cellars, delicately ignored the politely named 'reflux' that washed back up the lower lying lavatory pans, basins and bathtubs, donned waders to go shopping, rescued what precious belongings they could, watched the filthy waters rise and invade their buildings and then, with their families and household pets, moved upstairs.

"Protect your property from looters." Was the sensible and sound advice issued by London's Emergency Services Council, in turn taking their advice from HM Government, which in turn relied heavily, as they often repeated, on the best available scientific advice, "You may be uncomfortable for a few days; but don't lose a lifetime's assets for want of a few days of vigilance." Nobody could be sure that their Household Contents Insurance would

remain valid if they ignored the government's advice – and so they stayed - for the duration.

The duration was far longer than Londoners expected. At high tide The Thames rose several feet above the pavements in Parliament Square, flooded Guy Fawke's cellars under The Palace of Westminster and, nudging forwards a margin of mostly unmentionable flotsam and jetsam, it crept up Whitehall, made a left into Downing Street where Number 10 was protected by the very latest home-flood barrier, and, after spilling ten feet deep at the end of the street down into Horse Guards Parade, it edged up Whitehall towards Nelson, the greatest of all English Admirals, who had been raised high enough to ignore the mess which had been advancing for some weeks in his direction and who could therefore turn a blind eye to it with haughty disdain.

The salty tidal waters rose and fell twice a day, the tides flushed out the sewer rats and all the other sewer contents and, over several weeks, the sea sank deep into the ground, down through fissures and abandoned pipes to pollute the famous artesian wells that had reliably supplied the city with fresh water for more than two thousand years.

But as the tap water became bitter and diseased, Lady Porter and Lord Sainsbury showed their true metal, buried their political differences, rose nobly to the occasion and directed vast supplies of bottled water from Tesco's and Sainsbury's supermarkets respectively, discreetly charged at only ten times the usual price, to the stricken areas below and East of Teddington Lock. From the west the Thames above the lock still flowed with fresh-water which was piped, in rapidly laid yellow plastic mains, to cleaning and pumping stations above the shore line in Chelsea, which in turn supplied the affected buildings.

During the Easter Spring Solstice, when the Sun and the Moon line up their gravitational fields to tug in tandem at the Earth and lift the mighty oceans into a higher than usual bulge – the North Sea had flooded up the river

estuary, unobtrusively flowed across the Swanscombe and the West Thurrock Marshes and had spilled down into the Dartford Tunnel – fortunately at night when there were no gridlocks of queuing vehicles – then swamped the Dartford Marshes and flooded up the River Darent to Dartford town. Some seventy thousand homes between Dartford and Eltham awoke to find their feet in freezing cold salty water, with human waste floating on the surface. And most of the brave inhabitants, as advised, stayed put.

That same night The Woolwich Ferry had found its slipway and jetty was suddenly twenty feet below water and was unable to dock on either side of the river. City Airport and the Royal Docks became part of the Thames as did New Charlton – and the North Sea flowed effortlessly around the Thames Barrier. The Blackwall Tunnel was flooded through its airshafts – again, Thanks Be to God, without anyone being trapped inside under the water – and Bow Creek expanded from being an interesting narrow channel into a broad, unpredictable, swirling, dangerous tidal surge. Canary Wharf and other fabulous high rise office buildings on the Isle of Dogs, at sunrise found that they had no island to stand on, and were ankle deep in the sea.

With the dawn of the next day, joy riders packed the Overhead Light Railway to Docklands from Minories at the edge of The City just for the novelty of seeing the sea below them, sweeping past the rails' pillars and supports as the tide inexorably advanced on London Town. The Cutty Sark at Greenwich was disgraced when, as the North Sea liberated the famous ship from its dry dock on a mighty swell, it failed to float for more than a few minutes and sank back, elderly and incontinent, to its tourist geared mooring with water flooding over its decks and up its wooden masts. The first single-handed, world circumnavigating yacht, Gypsy Moth, in contrast, bobbed happily about on the choppy surface like a puppy let out to play.

The sea had flowed to the north up the Lea Valley and tens of thousands more homes were marooned. River Police and local boating clubs rushed to aid the families

and carry them to higher ground. Wapping and Shad Thames, long the favoured film location for Jack the Ripper movies, went underwater. But it was south London that suffered more than the higher north side. The Elephant and Castle traffic gyratory system became a large boating pool to the joy of Alice's younger brother Alex and hundreds of other teenaged school children who, oblivious to the dangers, brought rubber boats, home-made rafts and every sort of vessel to play with, making a welcome improvement to the built landscape; and the whole area back to the river was inundated.

New Concordia Wharf on Jacobs Creek and Joseph Conran's huge Butlers Wharf development, taking in the old brewery by Tower Bridge, had been surprised by tidal flows twenty feet higher than the previous records, which reached high over the puddle-clay skirts, which had kept the submerged basements of those early Victorian masterpieces in baked bricks completely dry for nearly two centuries. The ground floor apartments were soaked, the basements filled and many of the occupants were forced to go out for lunch to expensive restaurants – also as it happened - owned by Joseph Conran. While on the north bank at the other end of Tower Bridge, The City stood proud of the first floods and, apart from the Traitor's Gate in the Bloody Tower being overwhelmed, had looked down with effortless superiority upon the plight of its poor south bank cousins.

But, higher up the River Thames at the royal end of London, in the Boroughs where the Royal Court had first settled in an uneasy truce with the wealthy and fiercely independent City, at Westminster and along the Victoria Embankment, it was the north bank that the North Sea had first breached, before it leaked along the southern walk and into the National Theatre and the Royal Festival Hall, swamping the electric drives of the Millennium Wheel and stranding people who had been curious and brave enough to want to go up aloft in the Wheel's observation cars to view the scene of creeping and insidious devastation for themselves. They were eventually rescued by Royal Engineers with back-up from Royal Air Force

helicopters. It was estimated that more than seventy-thousand more homes, mostly in Pimlico, Lambeth and Battersea had been flooded to a depth of up to four feet on their ground floors – obliging residents to move up to the next floor.

Chapter Three

Elixir

From studies of 35,000 post-menopausal women in Iowa, 58,000 men and 62,000 women in the Netherlands and many other studies, drinking tea, green tea and black tea, apart from being refreshing, is thought to protect against cancer, arthritis, heart disease, high cholesterol, Crohn's disease, multiple sclerosis, malaria and sepsis. The English have been drinking tea for 350 years. The Chinese and Japanese have imbibed tea for two-thousand years. A British economist in 1790 lamented that tea was replacing beer as the national drink for the peasantry. "Take two lean hogs" he wrote, "and feed one on home brewed barley beer and the other on tea. The beer fed hog will thrive and get fat; the tea fed hog will wither and die." He predicted that the fashion for tea would bring the end of the British Empire. *Internet fragments 2001.*

As evening faded into night, Alice slipped her kayak away from the tall terraces in Hans Place, crossed the baffling waves and counter-currents in the narrow street and slid into the deeper shadows of an unpromising looking yard at the rear of Harrods. The walls, climbing a hundred feet above her, punctuated by dull red, solid iron doors, were tiled with white glazed, tired and cracked tiles, carrying runs of metal fire-escapes, polished air conditioning and boiler chimneys, and water and electricity conduits.

She waited confidently for her moment on the bucking surface, dipped her paddle expertly and ducked into a square black window that looked too low and narrow to enter, and disappeared into Harrods store. Alice was in one of the goods-elevator shafts. The last of the evening light entering the square windows stacked above, was barely sufficient to illuminate the interior. As a good sailor, allowing for tidal changes as her father would have done, she secured her craft with a long line to a buoy attached to a wire ladder, which she and her brother Alex had unrolled down the narrow shaft and, in the encroaching darkness, heaving on the swell and noisy slapping of the sea, she checked the cord attached to her wrist, surefootedly hauled herself onto the ladder from the frail kayak, clambered through the lift opening into a hallway – and drew a heavy bag up behind her.

Now sure of concealment Alice switched on a tiny, credit-card sized, bright torch beam, *Perpetualight – Charged by Sunlight – Guaranteed for Life*, and hurried through the back corridors leading to the sumptuous interior of that most famous international shopping experience.

She went up two flights of stairs to the fourth floor, switched off the torch, went through double doors onto the trading floor and, relying only on the store windows letting in the marginally less dark, ragged night sky, wove her way round counters and piles of display goods to a back corner where she and Alex had built their tent of drapes and carpets. Alice noted, as she had done many times, a light glowing on the low clouds, somewhere far to the north of the store – maybe near Euston Station, but she couldn't tell. It reminded her how dangerous it was to show a light in the otherwise total darkness of London.

Lifting a heavy rug, Alice stepped into a fabric antechamber, dropped the outer door, checked it for cracks of light and lifted the second carpet door onto a scene of light, warmth and sumptuous wealth, an Arabian Nights interior of several rooms, designed by Alice and her brother, such as a family like the Whitakers had previously seen only in exotic Hollywood films.

"Alex! Alex! I got it. It seems okay. ...And I saw a gang on the river."

The den was totally silent.

"Alex!" she called louder "...don't play games. Where the hell are you - Alex?"

The silence unnerved her.

"Are you alright? Where are you? Answer me."

She could hear her heart thumping; but nothing else.

Alice panicked and switched on her walkie-talkie.

"Alex – it's me – I'm in. Where the hell are you?"

A few seconds later that took a lifetime or two to pass, her machine answered with an annoyed grumbling.

"I'm on the loo. Just on the loo. I'll be down in a minute. Leave me alone."

Alice relaxed a little. Two years ago she would have laughed. Now she grimly counted her heartbeats as they slowed back to normal. She took off her jacket, went into her room, washed her hands and face in a fabulously expensive china-bowl full of clean, antiseptic, scented water set on a priceless, Italian, designer stand and then sat before an ornate mirror surrounded by a wealth of rare cosmetics, creams, lotions, potions, perfumes and colours. She let her pony-tail down and shook her hair out, and in a ritualistic manner, repaired her appearance to Liberty cosmetics-counter standard.

She had no way of knowing that the vital intelligence that Alex was on the lavatory was already being studied by a very determined and excited male in the tall concrete Tower, only three miles to the north, as the crow or seagull flies.

Fortunately, Alex's and her instinctive brevity had made it impossible for any listeners to work out the range of the short communication. But it had confirmed the bearing. They would know which compass line to follow – if any were motivated to search.

Alex, now sixteen, had perforce learned practical skills. The bright lighting in the den came from disembodied sets of car headlights which relied on electricity generated by a boat's small outboard diesel motor wired to a car's generator and several car batteries. Alex and Alice had hauled the engine up the outside of the store, inch by painful inch, without the help of pulleys, and siphoned the fuel for it from the tanks of buses abandoned, in those early days in just a few feet of water, on the other side of Hyde Park. With little thought of the fire risk, they stored hundreds of gallons of diesel in one of the goods corridors near the furiously revving motor and the spinning generator, which Alex had roughly bolted to the wall.

Alex's face, like Alice's, reflected the horrors he had lived through. His features wore the optimism of youth overlaid by the sternness of manhood, prematurely aging his

regular but homely features. Like his father, he had far seeing blue eyes, sailor's eyes, dark hair and pale skin which looked as if it would take a deep tan. He suddenly appeared in the living room, said 'hello' loudly to the door-carpet of Alice's room and folded his long legs to slump elegantly on a pile of cushions by a superior music player and DVD set.

"Did you say you'd found some?" he called.

Alice came in quickly, "Yes – look. And it's still frozen – just starting to melt." She held up a large plastic bottle, white inside with a small green label.

"That's neat Alice..." said her brother appreciatively. "...We can have a real cuppa again. Bloody Good..." he smiled broadly and leapt to his feet. "...I'll put the kettle on. God! Real milk. Where was it? "

He reached out a long arm and grabbed the container from her. Despite their earlier mutual fear of losing each other, they didn't embrace. By tacit consent they now avoided bodily contact – Alice particularly sent out strong body language signals that she no longer welcomed intimate hugging. Alex never thought about it – and if he had, he would have shrugged it off as just another eccentricity of his barmy sister. But as the only male and female that they met – or even saw, Alice had troubling shadows, shades of potential incest, which darkened her mind from time to time. Her body knew it needed a man – a good man – a partner – a mate, but her intellect, knowing Alex was the only male in her life, was obliged to deny the instinct.

Moved by she knew not what forces, she had created an elaborate religious ceremony, preceded by days of self-denial and inspired by reading a book about medieval Anchorites, a ceremony which, she understood, sublimated the power of her basic instincts, of which she was barely conscious, and guided the energy into higher thoughts; thoughts she interpreted as insights – foresights even – or perhaps prophecies.

Alex grabbed a large shiny kettle, still holding onto the milk, and vanished outside. Alice could hear him pound across the shop floor, the only human sound for miles around, to where he had made a mountain of bottled water. She heard him attack plastic wrapping and wrench a few bottles free. Long strides and a playful leap over a counter carried him back through the dark – and he burst in with bottles, kettle and the frozen milk. As he plugged in the kettle the lights all dimmed and stayed dim until the water boiled.

Alex was almost as obsessive about tea making as Alice was with her religious observances. He opened a vermin proof silver chest - they had seen the odd rat sauntering through their den - and extracted three carefully stored Best Quality English Breakfast Tea bags, placed them reverentially at the bottom of a silver teapot and at the precise second the water boiled, he poured it, still bubbling noisily, onto the tea bags and watched earnestly as the brown infusion swirled from the bags and the tea, the elixir of life, started to brew in the pot. He carefully closed the teapot lid, placed the pot on a silver tray – and sat back to wait. As he waited in companionable silence with his sister, imagining her journey through dangerous and unpredictable waters and narrow streets and alleyways, his mind went back to the first days of the flooding of London.

The sea had crept in, unstoppable and imperturbable, establishing a secret beachhead overnight and then consolidating its invasion forces over the next few days as it filled every tunnel, dislodged every docked craft, swept loose stones and bricks from buildings and pavements and stealthily cut off low lying streets, roads and rails.

Victoria Station had become a covered aquarium of immense size – well worth a visit for Alex with his school pals just to marvel at that huge area of water under glass. The electric power supply for the trains sparked, crackled

and sputtered and gave them a great show – before whimpering to a halt. And then the waters had stayed – no matter how much the media trumpeted authoritatively about the temporary and ephemeral nature of tides in the Thames Estuary – the sea either didn't hear the lectures and theories – or simply wasn't convinced. So it had come and it had stayed.

At home, at 17 Marylee Way, Lambeth, twenty-three feet above sea-level, the Whitakers were untouched for the first few weeks of the Spring Tides and life continued almost in its normal, dependable ways. They all bought wellies for shopping and Dad acquired a black-market home-flood-defence-pack, through a mate at the local pub, for a real knock down price – with no questions asked. The nod-nod-wink-wink flood-defence turned out to be a folding plastic wall, three feet high, fifteen feet long, the length of their house frontage, weighted down by a sealed, sand filled hem. It provided reassuring solidity and waterproof mouldable seals where it contacted the walls and lay across their front door, by the counter-intuitive process of filling the bulk of it with water. Once filled, it was both very heavy and very flexible, blocking every crevice where flood-water might creep in.

One Friday evening, just as the light was fading, the gutters in the street had quietly filled with water and a few manhole covers in the street lifted ever so slightly. Kids trickled out of the terraced houses and formed in groups, sitting and crouching on the pavements, to sail toys and paper boats on the flow – until Arnold Whitaker came by on his way back from his work on the Thames tourist boats and river buses.

“Ere! Get yer ‘ands out of there! You kids. Get yer ‘ands out. S’filthy. Look! It’s got sewage in it.”

A five year old boy in a worn, black, padded puffer-jacket looked at him speculatively and noted Arnold’s silver jack knife on his tool belt. “That your knife Mister?”

Arnold ignored the question and addressed the wider audience. "Git up out of it, you kids. It's absolutely bloody filthy. It'll make you ill. Make you all sick – get away from that water..."

But the pale faced child was really focused. He tugged at Arnold's jacket. "I said..." he enunciated slowly and very clearly, so as to leave Arnold, who might be a foreigner, in no doubt, "I said... That your knife, Mister?"

Arnold was momentarily distracted and brushed the child's hand away. "Yeah, course it is. Yeah, it's me ferry knife. Now you kids..."

"Then give it to us Mister! Give us your knife. I like it." And the boy got one hand onto the Jack knife, hampering Arnold's forward motion.

"Git orf. Git orf me. Let go me knife! ...And all you kids," he raised his voice, "Come away from that water. Come away – it's got shit an' all sorts in it! It'll make you really ill!"

"Will ...you ...give ...us ...your ...knife." The child stated again, patiently, with deadly purpose.

Arnold was again forced to engage with the child. "I will 'ell as like – No! get orf!"

The five year old considered his options. He was one metre high, weighed a little over thirty pounds and was a minor, without legal property rights, and his home location was well known to Arnold – so even if he could steal the knife, he had no hiding place. Arnold Whitaker, on the other hand, stood six feet high, two metres or so, weighed around a hundred and sixty pounds and was in the prime of life and had all the privileges his age conferred. The older mature male was however constrained by customs, protocols and various Child Protection Acts. But, a major consideration, he was also becoming agitated about something and in confusion might lash out irritably. The

child had nowhere to go – no further tactical arguments to deploy.

He took a cautionary step back, his face deadpan, his eyes watching Arnold's every twitch and body signal.

"Then Fuck-off mister!" he said gruffly and quietly, and he turned and walked away with all the dignity he could muster.

Arnold adjusted his home's flood defence and as darkness fell and the street lights cast their prison compound orange glow, he stepped over the barrier into his open door and closed the door against the night and the sea. All the family were in – he was relieved to find – and with the door shutting out the world they settled down for their tea; Mum, Dad, the two older girls, Alice and then Alex, the youngest, ranged round the table with the television ten feet away, belting out the news of London's stubborn floods.

"That barrier's working, I think, Mother."

Mother looked out suspiciously through the curtains, onto the pavement. "I hope so. The waters got onto the pavement now. It's only an inch or two below the door sill."

"Well they've just said on the telly ...Even if it don't go down, it'll not rise more than an inch or two this month – unless there's a bore or some'at; like a surge up river. So we should be fine!"

As he spoke, a disturbingly loud glugging and gurgling came from the downstairs loo at the back of the kitchen. It drew all their eyes to the kitchen floor. The sink pipe glugged too.

"Oh! Bloody 'ell."

"What is it Dad?"

He pointed at the kitchen skirting boards they could see through the open door. Just below the skirting, on the floor, tiny bubbles were popping into existence then bursting, leaving a tiny drop of water. Alice crossed the living-dining room and put her hand on the fitted carpet where it met the wall. "It's really damp, Dad!"

A minute rivulet of water forced its way through the cross-joint of four lino tiles laid in the kitchen and strayed about, looking for somewhere to rest.

"It's comin' up through the floor."

"And through the walls Dad!"

The six of them sat in silent indecision for a minute or two.

"It could get the electric sockets tonight." Arnold warned. "And trip the fuses. Then we'll 'ave no lights."

"Let's get everything we can – upstairs. Quick now!"

And so the family had abandoned its three rooms and lavatory downstairs and took everything portable to the four smaller rooms upstairs. Arnold sealed off the kitchen lavatory door with tape and filler. Whatever the pipes might regurgitate was better not being allowed into the kitchen. Fortunately, the loo in the bathroom worked, even if it made alarming sounds.

"It's the rats trying to get up the pipe to bite your bums." Alex confided to his two elder sisters. For which evil, horrid and overly intimate thought he failed to dodge a swingeing slap to his ear.

Within the month, at high tide the street was six inches deep at the house walls and every family had decanted their possessions from the ground floor. Several of the residents had converted their roof spaces into a bedroom or playroom, affording them far more storage for precious

things than their poor unfortunate neighbours – who they looked down on pityingly.

But, despite the privations, Arnold and family followed government advice and stayed where they were, as did all the families in Marylee Way, and they carried on as normally as possible.

The Cabinet, on an upper Whitehall floor, in constant session day and night and fully aware that eighty-percent of Britons lived on the coastal margins – which were all being flooded - were told that they should feel greatly relieved that the “Stay-Put” strategy had worked, ring-fencing millions who might otherwise have wandered back into the mostly Victorian suburbs – built on solid banks of Thames shale on higher ground, and started a migration that would have destabilised the whole of Greater London’s fourteen million souls and then the whole South-East, one of the most densely peopled areas on the planet – and stalled the intricate supply-chains and infrastructure that sustained them. Whether it was this ‘stay-put’ policy that created the optimum conditions for the first sweep of the killer flu’ pandemic, to race through the populace as it did, killing four of the Whitaker family, may never be known.

Encouraging scientific data was broadcast on radio and television.

“...As spring returns in the Northern Hemisphere, in the Southern Hemisphere the iron grip of winter returns to the Antarctic – freezing the Southern oceans, locking up the icebergs and stopping the sliding glaciers dead in their tracks...”

Thus the networks showed that Mother Nature was restoring conditions that made living in Central London – and in many other foreign coastal cities, which got barely a mention on the UK news – not only bearable but still enviable throughout the modern World.

“Heavier than usual snowfalls are shifting billions of tons of water from the surface of the Southern oceans...”

None, except Alex and his cynical, mocking young gang with their maturing senses and intelligences acutely tuned to every nuance of adult hypocrisy, whether of voice, facial expressions or posture, bluster, half-truths and misdirection, could mistake the implication that therefore the sea level would fall.

“...And are dumping the snow as high as three-thousand metres, that’s more than nine-thousand feet, up in the Antarctic mountain ranges.”

Images of limitless tracts of white snow, smothering plains, valleys and mountains, contrasted against high, blue skies, grey skies and black skies, reinforced the concept that World Leaders, were, like King Canute, sternly ordering the unruly elements to mop up the surplus fluids they had irresponsibly spilt into the World’s oceans and to lock them once more into glaciers, pack-ice and snowdrifts in the most remote and coldest places on Earth.

There then followed a deeply serious set of factoids, delivered in a madly sexy male bass of immense credibility, proving that snow added to the top of Antarctic glaciers took several million years to travel back to the sea – and melt in the briny waters. It was clear to anyone of any intellect, except hyper-observant cynical teenagers, that ocean levels – sea levels – could therefore only go lower.

Alex’s and Alice’s family, their Mum, Dad and two sisters, were as deeply cynical if not as sharply attuned as the teenagers but withheld judgement and waited for events to unfold before voicing their unflattering opinions of the present government. After all – they were, as British Subjects, renowned world-wide for their ability to queue patiently and quietly in extreme conditions.

But, for the good of the country and stable government, the scientists – or at least their actor dubbed, deep bass voices – were lying.

The sea level kept rising while the Greenland and Antarctic ice-sheets rapidly slid down to the sea and wasted away.

To President George Bush's surprise, even the American sea-levels rose. They rose in New York, in Washington, in Boston, in Los Angeles, in San Francisco, and in every US coastal city. Despite Governor Jeb Bush releasing \$2.5 billion dollars in Emergency Disaster Avoidance fees to consultants from Halliburton Corporation, in which he proved he had only a very slight and not-material financial interest, the whole State of Florida and the Gulf States seaboard, starting with the marvellous city of Miami, was, over time, gently submerged in warm Caribbean waters, lapping in at blood temperature, which then quietly and slowly crept to the West, opening salt channels to inquisitive sharks and other sea creatures, covering low lying areas in Georgia, Alabama, up the Mississippi, into Louisiana and the Texas coastal plain, and to the East and North, submerging plains and valleys in South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Philadelphia, New York, New Jersey, Boston and parts of Maine.

The West Coast fared rather better, with much of Los Angeles congratulating itself for being built on hills – at least those that didn't melt into mud piles and slide flat into the water – and with displaced Californians finding huge empty tracts of solid high ground to migrate to. How the San Andreas Fault would cope with the extra weight of water was not publicly explored.

"I read..." offered Alice to add to the dignity and import of the tea ceremony, hauling Alex out of his reverie, "...that in the War they hid tea in six-hundred different stores, protected from bombs and everything..."

"Six-hundred" echoed Alex amiably.

“...Because Churchill knew we could beat the Jerries, survive the Blitz and all – but that if we didn’t have our cuppa – morale would be so low that we’d lose the war...”

“A real cuppa...” murmured Alex, shaking the frozen milk to hurry the melting process. “...You didn’t say where you got this from?”

“You know that big brick shed, on the Fulham Road... The Co-op ...Well more at the back of the Fulham Road really...?”

Alex nodded uncertainly.

“...It was a dairy. A depot for the milkmen...”

“...The ground floor is thirty feet down, but it’s only a garage for the milk-floats...”

“That don’t bloody well float...” chortled Alex, without taking his eyes off the teapot.

“...Well, the first floor above the garage is flooded – I think mostly offices, but the second floor is still dry – and it’s got these huge walk-in fridges...”

Alex nodded.

“So I walked in – and one of them’s full of frozen milk. The doors are so thick the frozen stuff is still frozen...”

“...There’s enough for years if it stay’s cold.”

“Hey!” said Alex in a sudden panic – “...you shouldn’t bloody well go into those cold rooms...”

Alice looked at him startled.

“...Suppose the door shut on you. You’d never get out. And you couldn’t phone – and I’d have no idea where you are...”

They'd seen just that accident on the films. The thought was so awful that they both sank into a frightened silence. Being left utterly alone in this strange world was beyond imagination.

"...The tea's brewed..."

Alex squeezed fresh milk from the container into china cups and poured the tea. Alice opened another silver box and passed them both a biscuit.

The excellent tea, warming and reassuring, soothed them and fear was put on the back burner; for a time.

"You said you'd seen a gang – on the river..."

"Yeah... Yes I did. From the floor above the fridges, I could see the river, that bit that curved round Chelsea Harbour – overflowed now – it's really wide across that bit – the bridges look really daft, starting and stopping in the middle..."

"...Anyway, I was up there and a river bus came upstream..."

"Not them again?" queried Alex sharply.

"No. Definitely not them..." Alice shuddered at a bad memory "...this was the Belle of Bow. You know that double-decker green one in the London Pride fleet?"

"Ah ...oh yeah. I think so." Alex was uncertain.

"...And it must have had thirty or forty people on it. The top was full of supplies and things under tarpaulins. I think they'd divided up the inside to make rooms – bedrooms and the like..."

"Lads..?"

"No. Not just lads. All ages I think. I couldn't get a good look – and I didn't want them to see me..."

“No – you don’t. ...Any ...girls?” he asked shyly, nonchalantly.

“Could have been... They looked normal families. Anyway – they seemed okay...”

“Okay..?”

“Normal. Not ill. And as if they had all the things they need.”

“They’ll have electricity...” Alex ruminated “...and if they can get diesel – or petrol, they can keep going for a long time. But most of the storage depots, the oil depots, are under water now. They built all the refineries at sea level. At least I don’t know any not at sea-level. Not a one... But there are garages with pumps above the waterline.”

“You know...” speculated Alice, changing tack, “...It’d be a lot easier to get into stores and fridges and things – on dry land...”

Alex thought about it. “And a lot easier for a whole pile of other people too. Our way; we’ve got special skills – and no competition. I think this is easier for us - probably. We don’t have to fight anybody for anything. We can stay on our own.”

“No...” agreed Alice – perplexed by a sudden urge that swept over her; an urge to dance beautifully and seductively under a bright spotlight, in a flimsy dress, before an audience of thousands, including the Crowned Heads of Europe.

“No... You’re right. But we can’t stay alone forever – can we.”

“S’pose not”

Then Alice suddenly switched and did something she rarely did anymore. She deployed her female charms.

“Alex...” she smiled sweetly “Could you go and beach the kayak, Luv. It’s a bit too heavy for me to haul up the shaft... Please...?”

Alex didn’t for one moment believe that she couldn’t beach the slender craft – but he was grateful for the milk and his Real Tea – hadn’t fully got over the idea he might have lost her to a locked cold-store, and was flattered by the idea that he was the strong man and she the weak and feeble woman.

“When I’ve finished me tea” he said graciously.

Chapter Four

Tubes

The Thames Barrier.

“There was last night the greatest tide that was ever remembered in England to have been in this River; all Whitehall having been drowned” *Samuel Pepys 7th Dec 1663*. The last time that central London was flooded was in 1928 when 14 people drowned. In 1953, 300 people died, 58 of them on Canvey Island, when a storm-surge hit the Thames estuary. The Thames Barrier when raised is 6.9 metres above high tide. Opened in May 1984, it is sunk 17 metres into the chalk under the river at Woolwich Reach. The Thames tide rises and falls by up to 5 metres, 14 to 20 feet. Taking the most likely projection, a 0.31 metre rise in global sea level, the Barrier design will be exceeded by 2030. With the less optimistic forecast the allowance could be surpassed as early as 2010.

Extracts from the Environmental Agency website and from floodlondon.com 2002.

In the first months before Glacier Flu’ struck, when the sea was rising, in central places close by the Thames River, particularly in fashionable Knightsbridge, which realised to its horror that it was lower lying by as much as forty to fifty feet than Piccadilly and Berkley Square, the streets were deep enough to sail punts and other flat boats. A few experimental personal hover-craft demonstrated their flexibility and speed on land and water, up The Mall, round Buckingham Palace and down Victoria Street, until a wading commuter was flattened and nearly drowned in the horrible, diluted effluent by an enthusiastic hover salesman.

Cheery, helmeted outward-bound types appeared in gaggles of little brightly coloured plastic kayaks and other innovative variations on canoes. Chased by a brisk March wind a highly skilled, handsome and lithe wind-surfer was filmed as he skimmed between the trees, the length and breadth of the south end of Hyde Park, on what could not have been much more than three feet of water; earning his heroic fifteen minutes of fame and the brief adulation and adoration of Alice and her girlfriends.

The tide lapped up Park Lane almost as far as the Hilton, where business suddenly increased as its penthouse restaurant and bar had spectacular views over the flooded area. It immediately became very bad form in polite society

to point out or identify specific forms of flotsam and jetsam that the incoming waves offered just metres from the grand entrance of that or any other West End hotel. It was also very bad manners, in fact the worst breach of all etiquette, to muse on the confusion which must have descended upon the London sewer system – doubly bad manners when it was learned that the indomitable early Victorians when gifting their marvellous disposal system to the greatest city in The Empire had, for logistical reasons known only to themselves, located the largest confluence of sewer tunnels, a multiplex of cross roads of underground rivers carrying effluence from every district, from all persons regardless of class or bowel-condition, directly below the very epicentre of Buckingham Palace. From this royal maelstrom of colliding colostomastic flows, the waste was channelled into a brick built tube as high as a horse-drawn coach and ushered, originally untreated before the Victorians pumped it with great steam engines out to Greenwich, into the Thames above Westminster.

It simply wasn't done to make ribald and tasteless jokes on the matter. When the North Sea retro-flowed up the brick tunnel and met the out-flowing stream of waste from millions of loyal subjects, the meeting caused an upwelling and public outpouring, called, as written earlier, "reflux", into Buckingham Gate, Birdcage Walk and The Mall – where it had floated around for weeks before the fierce tidal flows eventually dispersed it.

Ministry of Health advice was reiterated on widely distributed posters that anyone who was splashed by or spent any appreciable time on the water, should ensure that they disinfect themselves before eating, mixing with others or even placing their hands near their 'faces' – a word which a gifted graffiti artist spent many happy hours, on dozens of notice boards, expertly changing to 'faeces'. It had proved impossible to divert two hundred years of sewage pipes, engineering systems and sludge-pumps serving about five-million more highly placed Londoners – which incontinently dumped untreated raw sewage, paper, condoms, needles and ST's into the tidal

Thames – out in East London. And so the honoured, venerable early Victorian tradition of using the Thames as an open sewer, of which the aged Leader of the House in robust good health proclaimed in his last television interview, “It has never done me any harm,” continued unabated as before.

The encroaching North Sea, ebbing and flowing up an ever widening Thames Estuary, filled basements where most of the heating plants were located and put them out of action and shorted-out thousands of electric junctions. But emergency electricity supplies were rigged up with feed cables at fourth and fifth floor heights, “*Just in case. In the unlikely event that the water keeps on rising*” said the engineers. Millions of electric heaters made in China, Korea and Taiwan were shipped into London, unloaded at awkward, partially flooded piers and jetties and sold to the public at cost-price, with just a small handling fee added, for risibly low prices.

“How on Earth do they do it for the price?” marvelled one City banker to another – safe above the waters, on the twentieth floor of a City institution in Fenchurch Street with views across to The Bloody Tower, Tower Bridge and the broad easterly Thames estuary. “Beans – my good man – beans. They work for a handful of beans. Or, rice actually...” smiled his colleague.

The government promised to pick up the tab for the extra electricity bills which homes and offices would suffer. And the public gave a low, disbelieving, patient cheer and soldiered on. Optimistic documentaries on the rise and rise of the Venetians – the most famous and enduring aqueous civilisation on Earth - were repeatedly screened on all channels. What the Venetians could do, Londoners could do better.

The Royal Family, already obliged to relocate up thirty-feet to the floors above the high Staterooms and despite the reflux, stayed on at Buckingham Palace and appeared regularly on the flooded streets for photo ‘ops – either wading, ankle deep, dressed in waist high, pale green

salmon fishing waders, or more regally, sitting in wide flat bottomed punts, propelled by environmentally friendly, hydrogen fuelled water jet motors and crewed by Able British Seamen, whose eyes gazed steadily to the far horizons, and beyond to Oxford Street, garbed in no-nonsense working uniforms with handsome cream coloured roll neck sweaters.

The tunnels for London Underground, which many regular commuters said could only benefit from a good flushing out after accumulating one-hundred years of rubbish, were flooded in parts at the first high tide and the whole network was closed, including lines and stations well above the waterline – never to reopen.

Alice had been underground, commuting to work in Regents Street, on the first day that the Thames had flooded down into the tunnels.

Transport for London had seen it coming, had hoped it wouldn't come, and had held off as long as possible – to support the Government line that world sea levels were now falling, or at least not getting any higher – and they had taken it beyond the safety margin. The few inches of water in Whitehall and Parliament Square looked harmless enough. It even, ignoring the reflux, looked like fun. But after creeping higher for weeks, when it suddenly found and tipped down the Underground steps, it was startlingly clear that the sea would flood the tunnels right up to and beyond their roofs.

Alice's crowded tube train was rattling along with its usual cargo of silent, expressionless, let-me-out-of-here-or-I'll-scream passengers, herded together in the fast-virus-breeder climate created by the damp exhalations and oozing body sweat of packed, anxious humans – when the train stopped, the lights went out and in the deathly, terrified hush as four-hundred-and-seventy-three adults held their collective breath, water could be heard pouring in great volume onto the roofs of the carriages and around the tracks and wheels.

Then they panicked.

In the tumult a few pocket torches flashed on. The windows were smashed with anything that came to hand. The doors were wrenched open. The boldest leapt down despite the potentially lethal mixture of water and millions of volts of electric power – and found themselves up to their knees in black water, their feet and ankles cracking and spraining on the hidden rails and sleepers – with the waters rising fast to drown them. Alice, though slender and slight, was very fit and she fought her way out of a door and thanks to instincts of survival she never knew she had, her intelligent physique scrambled her and her temporarily blanked out intellect, up the side of a carriage, stomping on shoulders and heads as she went, guided by the meagre flashes of light from passengers' torches, and she slipped and fell onto the roof. There was just enough room between the brick arch of the tunnel and the top of the coach for her to crawl forwards on her hands and knees.

But for the foresight of the London transport planners, Alice and all the other commuters would have quickly died – drowned like rats deep under the earth. But while they had miscalculated the timing, the planners had not been completely inert. At one hundred yard intervals along the tunnels were air chimneys, with dependent iron ladders fixed into the old bricks. Waterproof lights had been lowered down the chimneys and they remained lit. Though Alice had no idea what the lights signified she crawled towards the nearest of them, to the very edge of the front carriage – still twenty metres short of the tantalising light in the roof of the tunnel. The single bulb ahead of and above her illuminated the black, black waters which were pouring down the walls and were already as high as the driver's cab. With her intellect still switched off, Alice's body said jump – and she leapt into the bitterly cold water. Hampered by her coat and dress, spitting out the evil fluid, she still managed to thrash through the water and get under the ladder – which she climbed like a squirrel.

Cold, wet and in deep shock, as soon as she cleared the surface Alice shouted and shouted back to the train, “There’s a ladder. Here’s a way OUT!” she screamed; over and over until she was sure the message had got through and that everyone who could was struggling in the right direction. And so Alice saved herself or was saved by her physical instincts, only half the others were drowned – and the train stayed underwater for the foreseeable future.

And Alice learned that in emergencies, she could trust the instant intelligence of her instincts and reflexes far more than the processes of intellect.

Chapter Five

Pandemic

...The samples of virus H2N2, which caused 4 million deaths in the 1957 flu pandemic, were sent by mistake to more than 3,700 laboratories by a leading American medical institution (the College of American Pathologists, Chicago) some months ago. The virus went to Bermuda, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Mexico, the Korean Republic, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Taiwan and many labs in the USA. The wrongly labelled dangerous virus was discovered by chance in a lab in British Columbia. Dr Stohr, who heads the WHO's influenza programme, said the virus could cause a global outbreak.

Taken from The Guardian newspaper April 14th 2005 and from New Scientist.

NewScientist.com – **NEWSFLASH 14 Oct 05** - Deadly Asian bird flu is in Europe
- The bird flu outbreak in turkeys in northwest Turkey was caused by the same strain of H5N1 bird flu that was isolated in August 2005 from poultry in Siberia - meaning that the deadly strain has reached Europe as feared. It is the same virus as found in wild birds in Mongolia and Qinghai Lake in China in spring 2004. Those in turn derived from the H5N1 that has spread across East Asia, so far killing at least 60 people. It is thought to pose the greatest current risk of a human flu pandemic.

Alice had experienced terrifying, inexplicable nightmares for months before the first cases and fatalities occurred. She had 'felt' it coming. Felt it and was forewarned in ways she could never explain to rational beings. But to Alice the plague announced its coming by casting a black depressive pall over the whole city, which defeated the brightest sunlight and deepened the already dark shades of night. For three months she never smiled and walked in perpetual dread of she knew not what.

Like the Black Death and Bubonic Plague in the Middle Ages, and like the biggest killer of all time, the 1918 worldwide epidemic of influenza, 'Spanish Flu', the source of the 2006 to 2010 global flu' pandemic was a matter of speculation.

When it struck, it struck very hard and very fast. From the first sniffles and aches, through sweats and high fever, to the final croaking searing coughs - could be as little as seven days. In some cases from first symptoms to death from pneumonia - the lungs and throat filling with a red

froth which drowned its victims – was a shockingly brief eight hours.

Scientists at the World Health Organisation thought it might have been a virus they labelled as H5N1, which quickly evolved into H9N2 and just as rapidly evolved into H7N7, that started as avian influenza, or Bird Flu, which somehow crossed the barrier between animals and humans, as it had in 1918 when up to fifty million people died in one winter. The delicate global balance of standard medical precautions, containment and remedial, curative actions broke down when society and commerce were severely disrupted by the rising tides.

Seafarers, already disbelieving forecasts about the sea-level rise and spurning any more flawed scientific ideas, were utterly convinced that Glacier Flu', as the popular media dubbed it, came off the land – the gently flooding land – possibly carried by the recently buried corpses that sometimes floated up from drowned graveyards, or from the rats, toads, frogs and all the creeping and burrowing things which escaped from the sodden and then inundated underworld, making a rich and infinite feast for crows, ravens and gulls. Landlubbers were even more certain that the disease came from the sea. Newspapers printed statistical maps proving that the majority of cases occurred in the flooded sea-side cities and towns, days before the illness progressed inland. Professors Fred Hoyle's and Chandra Wickramasinghe's book *'Viruses from Space'* was dusted off and wheeled out for discussion on BBC Radio 4 – but their innovative theory that both life and disease came to Earth from other star systems, was neither proved nor disproved in the thirty minutes allocated by the media to solving the World's greatest ever, killer pandemic.

The BBC documentary, in as soothing a manner as possible under the extreme circumstances, reviewed previous visitations of epidemic influenza. "The largest ever pandemic in recorded history, when it is thought that up to fifty million people may have died, was caused by Spanish Flu' in 1918 just as World War One was ending;

so called because at first only Spain – which was a neutral country – reported the virus. In May 1918, in Spain, in that one month, eight million people caught the virus.”

The commentator, carefully citing the facts as very much in the past, gave the majority medical opinion of the causes. “Medical researchers now believe that this most notorious of all viruses originated in birds – in fact in the pigeons kept in the trenches for both food and for message carrying, then moved to chickens, ducks, geese and pigs, kept close to the war front in cramped pens to feed the troops, and then into the stabled horses, at the time still used in warfare, and onto cattle and into the human population. The cold and wet winter of 1918 and 1919 was a major contributory factor, as was the worldwide movement of troops – Americans, Australians, Canadians, Ghurkhas, other Indian regiments, Africans; and people from many other Commonwealth countries.”

“...The virus returned, though not nearly so lethally...” the programme reassured its audience, “...in the winter of 1957, when seventy-thousand died in the United States...” Which was okay; a purely American problem, perhaps, “...and in 1968 when thirty-four-thousand Americans lost their lives.” Yes – it definitely only kills Americans.

Only a very few extrapolated the 1957 and 1968 statistics to mean that globally about seven-million died of the virus in 1957 and another three and a half million died in 1968.

The World Health Organisation and The Centre for Disease Control were quoted as saying, in effect, that there was no known cure for influenza other than bed rest and plenty of fluids, and that it spread from human to human by tiny droplets of moisture, from coughing and sneezing for example, which stayed longer and travelled further in a damp atmosphere. There was surely a much damper atmosphere in London, these days.

Alice’s Dad, was a leathery skinned river-man born and bred who had worked all his life on the tourist river-buses which plied the estuary from Greenwich to Westminster

and back, but lived on dry land in their small terraced house, tended to support the seamen's majority opinion that the deadly virus came from rats and sewage, from many millions of heaving London bowels, and that the sea-water would, one day, ultimately, sterilise the germs. But sadly for Arnold, and his family, the sterile salty waters, even if they ever could, did not work fast enough to save him from contracting the disease, starting with the feared bout of compulsive sneezing, and despatching him in five short days, his lungs bubbling with a bloody froth, to 'Meet his Maker' in the next world.

Alice, and her brother and sisters, had naturally been deeply distressed by the death of their father but - in the full bloom of womanhood with generative and creative life forces animating her mind and body - Alice was not completely devastated. For her, life must go on. Like most victims Arnold died at home. And like most corpses at the time, he was carted away to a crematorium by a squad of hastily recruited, briefly trained ambulance and undertaker crews drawn from the ranks of redundant parking attendants, bus drivers, London Underground staff and other suddenly unemployable workers.

There was little time to mourn; with so many deaths, the living and healthy existed in mortal fear of contagion. People spaced out as far as possible. A single sneeze was enough to empty a room, or a cinema, in seconds.

The pandemic was tracked by the media and the health services. It struck all the coastal settlements. Liverpool was devastated by the virus which seemed then to follow the Manchester Ship Canal into Salford and Manchester, killing indiscriminately and cruelly as it passed. Bristol was hit at the same time as Liverpool, along with the South Coast ports - so long the defenders of Britain from foreign invasion - the people now retreating slowly uphill from the inundation as it washed the filth from sewers to the surface. Plymouth, Portsmouth, Southampton and all the Channel towns succumbed. The low lying East Coast, The Fens and the fertile eastern counties, had little defence against the rising tides and the chilling and

clammy touch of death which accompanied the creeping waters.

For a few weeks urban legend turned Norway into the villain of the piece when it was recalled that a Norwegian medical scientific team had, with full knowledge and forethought, with no concern for the human race, with reckless abandonment of their responsibilities, travelled to Greenland in 2001 to dig up deep-frozen corpses, buried in 1918, probably killed by Spanish Flu', in the hope of finding the virus still alive and reproducible in laboratories. The SUN newspaper ran a headline "DID NORWAY GIVE EUROPE THE BIRD - FLU" which excited several million people for some hours before the next National Lottery draw drove the story from their minds.

Other television documentaries filmed icebergs the size of Mount Everest, sliding off distant lands and calving into the polar oceans, with immense spouts of clean, cold, freezing water leaping high into the air. Some were so large they caused tsunamis, giant waves, which raced across oceans and battered distant coasts. The film makers guessed at the quantities of fresh-water liberated into the sea and made computer-graphic calculations of how the immediate sea-level around the ice would rise as the bergs and sheets melted and the waters flowed away from the impact sites, around the globe. Slabs of ice described as the size of Sicily or Wales – or half of France, or as big as London, would increase local levels by only a few inches or centimetres and, by the time these higher surface waters had evened out across the huge surface of all the global oceans, the increase would be undetectable. But the ice kept on melting, slowly denuding the mountains of Greenland and Antarctica – and the sea, slowly, imperceptibly, inexorably – as slow as an unfolding spring flower – kept rising.

Climatologist Professor Michael Mann, the American whistle blower who had worked assiduously, unbiasedly and scientifically for years, studying the last thousand years statistics of weather and temperature, had, to meet the media's needs for a simple "sound-bite", summed up

his life's work in a single temperature graph, the so-called Hockey Stick Curve, and demonstrated beyond any doubt that (a) the world was heating up and (b) that the recent upsurge was probably due to human activity. He had thereafter been jeered at, conspired against, insulted, lied about and threatened by industry, government, fellow scientists and by his neighbour's slab faced, SUV transported, grossly overweight, twelve year old, diabetic son. But the scientist was, as the sea rose, briefly rehabilitated, honoured and featured on the cover of Time magazine, before (a) the World said "what the hell does it matter who or what caused it – it's happening," and (b) before he caught a bad dose of Glacier 'Flu from an interviewer's microphone and died within ten days.

With up to fifty percent of the population dead or dying of Glacier Flu' as it was universally called - and with no effective treatment in sight – the "Stay-Put" policy could no longer hold Londoners in the unhealthy, damp estuary districts, those London Boroughs south of the river in Wandsworth, Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham and Greenwich; and north of the Thames in Hammersmith, Fulham, Westminster, The City, Tower Hamlets and, almost entirely submerged, in Newham.

Visitors to London's very popular shops in Oxford Street were bemused at the fuss being made about The Floods, as in the first year the water didn't even get half way up Park Lane – and Oxford Street was operating normally selling clothes – and doing a brisk trade in wellies, waders, waterproofs, inflatable home-flood barriers, alternative remedies and every sort of Survival Kit. Fit young men thought it a great adventure and revelled in equipping themselves to tackle and overcome the unleashed forces of Nature.

But millions of families had had enough and they fled from the stinking insistent tides to higher ground on the London shale beds; laid down over millions of years of river-flow in stately stony plateaux one above the next all the way up to Hampstead in the North and Crystal Palace in the South. The migrants forced open offices, empty

houses and warehouses, for living space, and invaded shops for supplies. Local residents – seeing their shops stripped of goods, panicked and joined the fray – breaking down doors and risking arrest rather than merely sitting and waiting for Glacier Flu’ to infect and kill them.

As the population squabbled, sickened and died, familiar routes would suddenly - it seemed sudden to those who were not watching daily - be swamped by the sea; sometimes miles inland where least expected, as salt tides found their way along the routes of long tamed minor rivers such as Bow Creek and up the Lea Valley, Barking Creek, the Ingebourne River from the north, and the Beverly, the Wandle, Deptford Creek, the Cray and the Darent flowing from the south, all of which fed into the Thames. With many roads and rails impassable and too few boats and jetties, supplies were severely disrupted. The people realistically feared starvation. Without fuel and with roads flooded, traffic was stopped across swathes of lower land. After a few days without traffic, *Transport 2000* remarked triumphantly on how peaceful it all was and how clean the air had become – with no cars on the roads.

London’s spring in 2007 had been particularly miserable and cold.

Chapter Six

Dislocation

“The collapse of the global marketplace would be a traumatic event with unimaginable consequences. Yet I find it easier to imagine than the continuation of the present regime.”

– George Soros –

False Dawn by John Gray

In the air, passenger, freight and military aircraft flew overhead, in and out of the main London Airports, on important missions to God only knew where but obviously, judged by their determinedly straight flight-paths drawn across the canvass of the skies, on vital business. Vacations in mountainous regions became very popular and those who had the resources bought homes in high places and moved out and up. Flights became fewer as Glacier Flu’ decimated the numbers of trained pilots, engineers and flight controllers and, even more of a determinant, when airports around the globe, many located on coastal plains, became waterlogged and unsafe with runways collapsing into the sodden earth. Planes then only took off after checking the flood status of their destinations.

But the Royal Navy flourished and its ships and Fleet Air-Arm were often filmed triumphantly for the morale of the Citizens – or Subjects, as the British remained. Massive cruise-liners, unassailable bastions of untrammelled civilisation and luxury, sailing like great wedding cakes on the impertinent oceans, were also filmed as living proof that mankind, particularly the Rulers of the Waves, still dominated Nature. However, the large vessels could not use the old docks and ports as they became submerged and more and more often the liners were reduced to heaving-to out at sea and being serviced and refuelled by relays of smaller craft – with ever decreasing numbers of crewmen. Building new, large-vessel ports and harbours further inland, set at a stable level above the changing sea, required more skills and labour than most communities could muster. Instead they focused on small

floating-docks for smaller boats which could be relocated as the sea level demanded. Rubber inflatable craft of every shape size and colour became the new status symbol and were in great demand.

Alice had remained healthy. Some people seemed to be naturally immune to the fatal Glacier Flu'. But her boyfriend Roy, a red-headed printer from Deptford, who she was deeply in love with, died of it within a few hours of infection, choking on the horrifying red-froth that emanated from the lungs – and then in rapid succession, her mother and two sisters were taken ill and all three died within a fortnight.

Overmastering Alice's mounting grief was a growing terror, a shuddering phobia of being near the sick, of the insistent beckoning of Death, which unconsciously transmuted into an instinctual superstitious paranoia, which, though Alice couldn't remember the last time she had entered a church, temple or any place of worship, manifested in compulsive rituals she developed, involving Crucifixes, Bibles, Books of Common Prayer, Stars of David, Holy Water, Shawls, Statues of Buddha, The Virgin Mary, Islamic Prayer Mats, All seeing Eyes on Pyramids, Crescent Moons, Horoscopes and Pantheistic Spirits and Nature Gods. But her rituals and prayers seemed to work as she did not fall sick – and, who knows, possibly due to Alice's new religious fervour and invention – neither did her younger brother Alex.

"If it works..." Alice told herself after performing a particularly complex ritual with scented candles, an international mixed bag of prayers, Lucky Cornish Pixies and an unusual diet, "...Don't fix it." An embryonic Prophet, Witch or Saint for the coming generations, if there were to be later generations, Alice started to write down her thoughts, prayers, services and incantations, and their purposes – as they became far too complex to remember. Her Book of Ritual was a fabulously expensive, leather bound, heavy portfolio filched from a shop off Piccadilly where it had been in stock on the second floor. Alice wrapped it in an equally fabulously expensive yellow

silk shawl – courtesy of Harrods – and guarded it with fervour.

“You’re barmy Alice,” said her ungrateful brother risking the wrath of a whole phalanx of Alice’s Gods, Daemons, Spirits, Prophets, Saints, Angels and Guides as he absently tackled his third Harrods Hamper of the week, to get at the Beluga Caviar which he had grown to like. But the Gods either were not listening or were in a forgiving mood – as Alex also stayed healthy through all three visitations and mutations of the dreadful pandemic.

However fast the mass-communication celebrities and media writers fell victim to the deadly sweeps of Glacier Flu’ the first second or third time it decimated the population, they were instantly replaced by less and less well trained apprentices, and The News and Opinion and Government Policy continued to be broadcast, in an increasingly homely manner, on Radio and Television and Newspapers and to be narrowcast over the Internet, essentially by amateurs. The most prevalent and persuasive power over public opinion was however local gossip. Urban Legends abounded. They had much to feed on. Death, disease, dislocation, dishonour and disappearances fed the gossip machines. Crime became a second plague as people fought, stole and murdered to get food, medicines and clean water – and then began to take whatever they desired or needed as Law and Order evaporated.

As ports and airports, roads and rails were submerged, the distribution system collapsed. Around the World, with eighty percent of the population living on the flooded coastal margins, billions of people drove and marched to higher ground, fearing that the rising waters spawned the killer viruses. The visionaries who had seen it all coming, who had established homes in the hills and mountains and had laid down supplies and stores, were overwhelmed by the endless columns of refugees from the seaboard, low lying land, towns and cities. Mostly they opened their doors to the sick and starving families – and were rapidly overwhelmed. Some incumbents created fortresses against

the invading human tide, armed themselves and beat off their countrymen, only to be battered and wrecked by the endless waves of desperate people, who were driven inexorably by the rising tides of the vast oceans.

The refugees from central London, concentric tsunamis of millions of dispossessed families spreading out like ripples on a disturbed pond and, wherever possible, moving upwards, in turn disrupted the areas they invaded, eating everything they could find, breaking in to get shelter and burning whatever they laid their hands on for warmth and light, creating ever more refugees. Within a few months every house, structure and crumb of food in the South Downs, The Chiltern Hills, the Cotswolds Hills, and on into the high land of South Wales was consumed by the desperate human tide. Cattle and sheep were slaughtered, butchered and cooked on open fires on the hillsides. Better off were those who stayed put, clung to life in London, moved up from the ground floor, and learned where to find unpolluted stocks of food, water and fuel. Tall buildings offered some of the best accommodation.

Telecommunications thrived for a while, until cables and junctions, transmitters and re-routers, exchanges and maintenance centres were flooded and put out of action. The Internet, designed by the American military originally to enable communications even in the event of a nuclear war, faded fast as the main-frame computers and satellite transmission boosters on which it relied, lost their power sources. It could have been fixed - some years earlier, it would have been fixed - but now there simply were not enough engineers who understood the system. So when it stopped functioning, it stayed stopped.

Wireless communications became the currency of the day but, after just a few months, when most of the scientists who knew what was on a micro-chip, how to send a signal through one and how to make new microchips, were either dead, deranged or dislocated, the communications faded off the airwaves. Old transmitters, originally used in 1920 by radio enthusiasts, were resurrected and a few elderly Electrical Engineers cranked up their electric generators,

dusted off their last stocks of valves, ran aerials up trees and chimneys and made contact with each other – sometimes around the Globe. But the engineers also became ill and with their deaths the skills were lost – and the radio communications, requiring a sender, a receiver and a sentient observer, were also as good as dead.

Chapter Seven

Sepulchres

“None of us is ever alone. The Earth, every city, every village, every home, every abandoned farmstead, is crowded with ghosts, with billions of troubled spirits, our ancestors and antecedents, reminding us of catastrophes and imploring us to mind the future. Only through us, through our generation, through our children, may these ephemeral energies take new corporeal forms, express their life force – and then perhaps, this time, reach their true potential, and live and die well.”

From the early writings of Alice Whitaker – Volume 1.

At the same moment that Alice slipped her kayak into the Harrods’ goods elevator-shaft and sought Alex, in the BT Tower a group of men hunkered over a radio panel. “I’m pretty sure that was a young woman’s voice” said Martin Blackmoor to two other men. “And I am sure it came from due south of here; but I couldn’t guess at the range.”

“Maybe they’ll show a light...” murmured Jonathan Goodge, “...I’ll concentrate the cameras on the south as soon as it’s fully dark.”

As dusk settled over the city, the sun, which had been cloaked by thick wet clouds all day, made an unexpected, brief appearance, setting somewhere over Oxford, shooting red fiery arrows from the narrow gap between the lowering clouds and the rim of the Earth. The watery rays painted the grainy concrete and green glass panels of the tower bright pink and so dazzled the three observers that they wandered round to the far side of the circular viewing platform. On the east side the sunlight glanced from building top to building top in infinite regress and the tower cast a long black shadow that stretched beyond their sight. South of them, the heaving water’s edge, at low tide, weaved a golden line among tall buildings, just north of Oxford Street and in places touching the Marylebone Road. In the far southern skies illuminated seagulls highlighted against gun-metal grey clouds, wheeled and watched, patiently searching the heaving surface for edible scraps.

Down at the foot of the tower was dry land. The narrow streets in the half-light of evening looking unchanged and unchangeable; but to the north-east and due-east the failing light flashed in ponds and channels, on flooded roadways and on water that swirled between elegant white terraces where it was no longer land – it very clearly belonged to the sea.

Overlaying the peace that follows sunset was an eerie and deep silence.

“Where on earth are all the people...” wondered the third man, Thomas Bainbridge.

No one responded so he answered himself.

“...I mean! Glacier-Flu could have done for – say seventy percent of us. Or even eighty percent. Let’s allow eighty-percent shall we. ...And the inundation would drive most of the rest back above the water-line and maybe away from London altogether. But if that only left one-percent; one measly damn percentage point ...there were nearly fifteen million in Greater London. One percent would be a hundred-and-fifty-thousand souls...”

His calculations, often repeated, fell once again into a black hole of uncomprehending silence. After an eternity of contemplating the sunset’s pink, golden reflections, he carried on his soliloquy.

“...And a hundred-and-fifty-thousand people is a hell of a lot of people. They can’t have just vanished. Can they? ...You’d think that people would see our lights and would be flocking in to join us. Wouldn’t you?”

“I imagine...” said Martin Blackmoor, “...that everyone is hiding from everyone else. One thing we’ve all come to understand is that this damned flu’ is transmitted from person to person by sneezing and so on. And it’s so terrifyingly fast and so horribly lethal – I think all survivors are determined to remain isolated. They don’t

want to mix with any others... ...Also! They'll be protecting their supplies, won't they?"

The other two men felt no need to speculate further or comment on this most visited of questions. They stood quietly, wordlessly sympathetic, and watched the pink change to grey that slowly faded until the scene below was entirely black. Above, the clouds pressed down, low to the rooftops.

"It'll be a good night for light-watch..." said Jonathan, breaking the silence, "...they'll bounce off the clouds."

"I wonder if that girl will give herself away. Show a light?"

The three men arranged their faces to ensure that they would give nothing away, and looked at each neutrally. It had been a long time, even for the most civilised and educated of men, it had been a long time. To a greater or lesser extent, they felt hollowed out, harsh and dry on the inside, and they yearned for that which they could not, did not dare, bring into conscious focus.

"Three into One – won't go." ruminated Professor Blackmoor; not pausing to consider what the unbidden thought meant, which part of his psyche it had come from, or what consequences it might have. But, while his mind was in denial, his body knew that bachelorhood and the life of a celibate – was not for him a long term option.

The men in the Tower, fourteen of them in all, searched for lost souls by radio, light-watch, loud-hailer and, when their nervous systems were feeling strong enough, by making forays out into the streets. Sometimes they ventured down flooded streets in flat bottomed boats recovered from the nearby Regents Canal, boats which allowed them to float by the elegant Georgian windows of white terraces – still looking graceful and serene. But looks were deceptive.

The third – and they fervently hoped the last – outbreak of Glacier Flu' had killed far more people than the few

survivors could possibly bury or cremate. Most victims instinctively headed for home as the symptoms overcame them, where with little or no care they died in their beds or on couches and settees. Tempting though it was to raid wealthy homes and empty the deep-freezes of food and take useful tools and bedding, the looters needed nerves of steel to face the corpses, a seemingly infinite number of corpses, which lay in darkened corners, under coverlets, behind chairs and slumped in hallways. By now, the corpses were well rotted and they disintegrated in widely different ways.

Some were almost reduced to skeletons, hurried through the corrupting process by rats, bluebottles and their maggots, and by damp foetid air, with hanks of hair dangling over fleshless faces and bony hands clamped onto banisters and bedposts as they fought their final battle against arbitrary and conscienceless Death. Others, when looters broke in, seemed unchanged, complete and at peace – somehow preserved by the room being sealed – but making sudden belches or twitches as the intruders disturbed the air pressure and allowed dank breezes to blow in off the encroaching waters.

To searchers it seemed every house was occupied by death and disease, which had spared neither the young, nor the holy, nor the strong. The bodies were of all shapes, sizes and ages – and of all creeds, colours and credit ratings. Neither the rich nor the religious had won any special dispensation to life.

Foragers were soon worn down by constant encounters with corpses but they found that few if any had died at work. At least the human-race had displayed that modicum of sanity. Everybody had subscribed to the Jewish homily that *“Nobody, on their death bed, ever regretted not having spent more time at the office.”* And when they felt ill – they went home, or a few went to hospital but as health facilities workers also succumbed to the viruses, there was no help to be had there. So offices, shops and workshops were pretty much corpse free zones – and so were much less fearful places to raid for supplies.

As well as the dead and decaying discouraging foraging, the water was still filthy. As the tides crept forwards, deepening by inches every week, they unseated more sewer-manholes that gushed forth the trapped filth, left by millions of Londoners, which now had nowhere to go. The floating human debris slowly disintegrated as it was sloshed on the ebb and flow against walls, railings and steps but it broke down into a festering and suspect grey grainy soup that swayed with the movement of the sea, inches below the surface and accumulated along the creeping shoreline. It needed strong guts to overcome squeamishness and launch a boat over the filthy margin – was it the source of the terrifying flu’ they wondered - and it needed the ability to ‘not-see’ in order to paddle or punt across the sick greyness.

So most foraging, previously raiding and before that looting – was on dry land, and in commercial premises. Harrods, now in deep water, was no beacon for survivors to make for. Most survivors, deeply traumatised by two years of ubiquitous illness, selfishness and death, including the group at BT Tower, preferred to stay on dry land whenever possible. Alice and Alex’s secret home was relatively safe from discovery, for the time being.

Chapter Eight

Leaders

Put down your nets and follow me – *Jesus recruiting his Disciples.*

The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and yet notwithstanding, go out and meet it – *Thucydides*

Another four men had joined the academics in the BT Tower.

“There’s going to be a shortage of fuel – petrol and oil” said Dennis Clough, a balding younger engineer. “...Ninety percent of refineries were built round the coast, at sea level – for obvious logistical reasons of course. But most of them will be thirty feet under by now.”

“Can one salvage the fuel – as long as the storage containers are sound, the water won’t have got in - will it? And even if it has, it can’t be rocket science to separate oil and water – can it?” replied Roger Winkle, a once lecturer and Professor in Media-Studies, now desperately trying to migrate into a currently useful, practical new field.

The balding engineer looked at the Media Studies man pityingly and snorted a little.

“Any lights tonight – or that elusive radio female?” asked Jonathan Goodge jocularly.

Martin Blackmoor stiffened and slid a note he’d made of Alice’s latest communication under a blank sheet of paper. “Uh! Oh no. Not a peep. Of course they could have been on a passing ship – sailed up the Thames and then turned back. Not a sound out of them” he lied easily – and changed the subject.

“You know...” he addressed his colleagues authoritatively, “...we really have a duty to archive every damn thing we can – wouldn’t you agree?”

The other men looked blank and suddenly very tired. They had all been traumatised by the last two years, losing family, friends, homes and their careers, and none were ready to accept the new conditions as permanent and perhaps getting even worse – or to take on responsibilities beyond their own survival. A silent, collective sigh filled the room.

But Professor Blackmoor had found a well of energy within and was driving his idea forward vigorously.

“If it’s like this all over the country...” he waved his hand at the black night, “...it is not inconceivable that all knowledge – all the sophisticated knowledge of how to do practical things for example – could be lost. Lost for millennia...”

His tired companions looked at him wearily and stayed silent. A sociologist, Paul Broadling, broke the silence.

“It won’t be the same as here in America... Or in China... Or even in Russia. Nor for that matter in South America... They’ve got far more upland, more mountains, than we have. I mean...” Paul started to warm to his theme, “...think of Jerusalem – that’s about a thousand metres, isn’t it...?
...And so is Madrid...”

“Madrid is even higher” volunteered another. “And think of the Himalayas and the Andes and the Rockies – enough room for the whole world.”

“...And how high is Moscow...?”

“Oh! Not very high. Not high at all. You know; the Russian Steppes and all that. Quite flat this side of the Urals. About five-hundred feet or so? It can’t possibly be flooded.”

Martin Blackmoor felt his command was slipping, “Ah... But it’s not only the sea level we have to contend with.

Those cities may have suffered just as many deaths – or even more, from Glacier ‘Flu... Might they not...?”

Nobody jumped in to contradict him.

“...And just as we see devastation all around us; with nothing working... ...None among us who know how – in practical terms – to make a microchip, or a mobile phone or almost anything of the modern world – that would actually work. ...Do we gentlemen? ...Then other countries will be similarly depleted of skills. The theoretical knowledge will be saved, somewhere, in some university library or other – but the “how-to” knowledge could so easily be lost.” Like a seasoned politician he delivered his punch line: “...If we do nothing, the whole world could slump back into the Dark Ages... Some person or some group will, quite soon I believe, have to start organising those of us who are left. As soon as people recover from the immediate shock of the past three years, we are going to have to install some sort of governance. Don’t you agree gentlemen?”

And he paused to let the dramatic statement have its affect. Then he offered them a solution – under of course, it was the unspoken assumption, his leadership.

“...But before we even start to think that other regions are just as badly hit as London; before we contemplate that it may be necessary to archive key manufacturing knowledge – after all, we are all – or most of us are, university tutors, - we must undertake research to assess the state of each region. ...We don’t want to reinvent the wheel; do we gentlemen? ...Or indeed the microchip? ...Only to find after heroic efforts, that the damn Koreans have continued happily churning them out by the millions...”

“You know; I think Martin’s right...” said the engineer cautiously. He was never a man to jockey for position and power.

“Well he may be...” cautioned Paul the Sociologist; himself used to and very skilled at grabbing and keeping the leadership in large groups, “...You’ve made a very good point Martin; a jolly good point. Well said man...” he continued thoughtfully, on the verge of damming his professorial colleague with faint praise and crushing him with hierarchical condescension.

But Professor Martin Blackmoor had not risen to TV don status without years of practice of devising battle strategies. And he wasn’t about to be outflanked by a mere sociologist. He was, he didn’t need to remind himself, a renowned physicist, mathematician and Dean of Faculty. He wasn’t sure, but he would bet that this Paul Broadling, sparring with him, wasn’t even a Head of Department.

“...Thank you Paul...” he interrupted, speaking extremely quickly but with such command of his diction that his haste was not apparent – it simply left no gaps for Paul to exploit.

“...Thank you very much for your support...” he smiled charmingly and with great self-assurance. He also remained very still – he had years ago learned not to fidget and developed the knack of LPM – low peripheral movement, particularly to lend him more gravitas on film and TV and when speaking to high powered audiences. In the leadership stakes he could show this bumptious social studies tutor a very clean pair of heels.

“...Perhaps... Your field is sociology isn’t Paul? ...And therefore social trends and statistics? I recall hearing that you are quite brilliant at comparative population studies...” still he left no gaps and no hooks for Paul to re-enter the conversation, “...You, or someone here you might choose, could map out the research we need on the developed – I think the priority will be the G-eight and the OECD regions – don’t you agree – developed nations – perhaps starting with estimates of survivors and then a listing of the Universities and Institutes – and of course Libraries and Patent Offices, still above sea-level... with their special skills identified ...and for economy of course

we want as little overlap as possible – and when you, or of course your assistant...” he bowed very slightly at Paul, “...has the definitive list – If you will bring it to me, I will organise the best form of communication – starting with my modest little efforts here...”

And with a statesmanlike sweep of his arm he modestly indicated the array of wire and computers that he had, inarguably he had, put together and made function in the revolving top of the BT Tower. It was a demonstration of his abilities, right down to soldering circuits, and of his clear decision making.

“Well – that makes perfect sense to me” chipped in the bald engineer, still completely unaware of the battle – or so far the mere skirmish – for leadership of their small band of men. Thus, all unknowing, he confirmed Martin at the top and subjugated Paul to second rank – for the moment.

Paul was wrong footed – and still struggling to frame his response. Martin saw it coming - and sabotaged him.

“...Thomas...” he proclaimed, while Paul was still drawing breath, placing an avuncular hand on the smaller man’s dandruff speckled shoulder and manoeuvring them both out of the room. “Thomas! That optic fibre junction we hooked up yesterday is overheating – and I really would welcome your assistance to correct it. You have so much more experience with optics, than I...”

And still talking loudly and graciously – Martin left the group, and left Paul with his mouth slightly agape and considering the option, the self-defeating and weak man’s option, of talking Martin down – behind his back. Paul grimaced and vowed to do better next time.

Round One went to the Dean of Faculty.

As Paul composed his features into a winning smile and turned to face the other men, Betty huffed and puffed her

way through the door having climbed the stairs with a message from below.

The high speed lift up the centre of the Tower was working, thanks to a dozen building-site electric generators and more than a hundred car batteries installed in the utility room on the ground floor, but Betty Cumberbatch, previously a cook at the now defunct Kwik-Snak-Café across the street from the Tower, who had lived alone in the shabby but warm flat over the café kitchen, despite her age and her bulk could not be convinced that the damned elevator was reliable. So she climbed the internal staircase – the equivalent of about thirty floors – when she needed to get from the kitchens and canteen on floor two to the exalted circular viewing room.

She staggered in, breathing hard, with her message. “I’ve made a meal for us all – in the Canteen,” she gasped, “...And Mister Montrose wants you all to come to a meeting down there. ...A ...Facilities Meeting, ...or some’at like that, ...I think he calls it...”

Mr. Montrose’s invitation to his meeting was not greeted rapturously by his esteemed colleagues.

“Betty...” said Dennis Clough kindly “...I fixed the lift. You can use the elevator quite safely now.”

Betty, leaning against the wall and struggling for breath, shook her head. “Thank you – But ‘No Thank You’ Dennis,” she puffed. “I’d rather not get stuck in that thing, half way up this concrete monster – thank you very much. ...Anyhow,” she panted on with more regular breathing “...The exercise is good for me. ...Some of you lot would do yourselves a favour if you walked up ‘ere,” she concluded, with a defiant sweeping glance round the men – accurately aimed at waist height.

“Don’t worry Betty,” put in Jonathan Goodge reassuringly, “...By this time tomorrow, I’ll have the internal phones working. So you’ll be able to call us – and we’ll call you.”

“I didn’t know you were skilled in telephony – and of course feeding in the power...” queried Dennis, with an edge in his voice, feeling his unique abilities under threat.

“Ah! Ha! – Man of Mystery – that’s me,” smiled Jonathan. “Before I was an industrial psychologist, I was an IT Engineer.”

“Oh – where?” Dennis asked too quickly.

“I studied at Cranfield – and then worked at AEI for a few years, and then taught at Sheffield,” answered Jonathan obligingly. “But I got bored with it and studied psychology at Oxford – That’s where I got my doctorate.”

“Oh.”

“...And for about six years I was in a partnership with five others. Our firm did the report on the;you may remember, surely MUST remember the incident – on the Paddington Rail disaster. The psychological relationships between the controllers, including the train drivers, their driving conditions and equipment and the impact of the warning signals – and how they might be redesigned. ...The Health and Safety Executive adopted most of our recommendations.” He added casually – but not so casually as to entirely dismiss the fame and glory of such an important study.

Dennis looked at him with new eyes, ignoring the ‘soft’ science of psychology. “So you’re an IT communications expert – then?”

“Ha! – Well not really. But I haven’t forgotten everything I learned – quite just yet.” Then he added quietly, musing to himself, “...I can still figure out a communication log and follow a bearing.”

Betty had recovered enough to lift herself away from the wall. “Your supper will be going cold – or dry – or both” she announced.

“Well let’s go down then!” said Paul Broadling, ushering the others before him; like a host, like a true leader. “We can get six in the lift...”

“I’ll walk,” said Betty firmly, and made for the stairs.

Chapter Nine

Black Knight

There is no hunting like the hunting of man, and those who have hunted armed men long enough and liked it, never care for anything else thereafter – *Ernest Hemmingway*.

Martin Blackmoor, unusually self-absorbed, had eaten Betty's fare quickly; excused himself from Bill Montrose's meeting as being in need of an early night but instead had slipped out of an obscure side-exit from the Tower, making sure he was not seen. Warmly clad and well equipped, risking the dark, the water and the isolation, he had avoided the main plate-glass doors, securely locked with a chain and padlocks, and silently padded through a maze of back streets down towards the water's edge.

The Moon just less than half a disk, occasionally glimmered from behind the heavy curtains of clouds which tumbled and swept across the wide sky and wept continuously onto the dark streets and into the black sea. When the Moon appeared it showed its pale light in the sky south-west of the Tower and painted a bright silver margin along the turbulent rims of the rain clouds. Its silvery light illuminated the deserted buildings and reflected off the wet roads set at the bottom of the tall, overpowering, unlit street canyons.

If anyone from the Tower had been following Martin Blackmoor's journey, starting with a turn into Hanson Street, even guessing at his initial direction towards the tethered punts and boats, the watcher or watchers would have almost immediately lost sight of him as, dressed in black, he melted into the pitch darkness on rubber soled shoes that made no sound despite the urgency of his passage. A pursuer thus unsighted, at every junction of the narrow side streets they trod would either have to press on and risk that Blackmoor had not stopped in one of the innumerable doorways, even blacker than the impenetrable dark of the street, and was waiting and

listening in ambush, or the pursuer would have to wait at the top of the street in the hopes of glimpsing Blackmoor, in a lottery of shining moonlight, as he reached the lower corner where he might be outlined before he slid round it.

Any hunter of this professorial quarry would almost certainly fall further and further behind, even over the short distance to the punts moored in Cavendish Square. And Martin Blackmoor, calling on long dormant physical cunning and instincts, knew this – and was prepared to be very careful. He did not want to be followed. He did not want any of his colleagues to witness what he was urgently on his way to do – or, failing total success tonight, perhaps simply to plan the route for a future occasion. He would not submit to being judged by his peers. If asked what he was intending this dark and dank night, what it was that had driven him from the safe and congenial company in the Tower alone into this maze of narrow streets south of the Marylebone Road, in the dark, by the shores of an uncertain new sea, where the slightest accident, beyond help, might be fatal – he would experience great difficulty in voicing what drove him, and even greater difficulty in being aware of the imperatives within. His mind was in denial. Consciousness was in the ‘OFF’ position and his dark, burning eyes, the eyes of an alerted warrior, would tell any observer, if any were there to see, that the man’s physicality, his adrenalin, was in charge. Mind and reason, ethics, manners, social behaviour and laws were all subjugated to a nervous system informing a body which had been electrified by the merest phrase overheard from a private – *Privacy Guaranteed* – conversation. He had become a hunter and, if his intellect could let go, he could rely on several million years of inherited instinct to guide his actions.

It was the hunter’s instinct that told him how to pad along like a panther and that bade him sink into a deep shadow of an archway fifty feet from the water’s edge – and wait. He knew that if he stood by the water, even in total darkness, he would stand out like a man walking the skyline. Light, however weak, was reflected from the water’s surface, against which Martin’s dark silhouette

would show as if he was illuminated. So he drew into a doorway above where the street sloped down to the foreshore, where mooring ropes snaked back up to a black railing – and he waited. Like Alice had outside Harrods, he listened as he waited. And then he waited again.

He waited another ten minutes, watching the rain fall and the occasional moonbeam glance across the empty square – now a tidal harbour for the craft they had collected and secured there. As he waited, timing his stay on a luminous watch, knowledge of the danger he was risking crept unbidden into his thoughts. He could not believe how completely and utterly stupid he was being. He realised that since the start of the emergency he had not travelled alone, or lived alone, or undertaken any potentially dangerous task – such as fixing an aerial out of a Tower window – without being sure that other humans knew where he was and could come to his rescue.

And he realised that everyone was the same. The fewer survivors there were the more they all sought human company and the more concerned and caring they were about each other's safety. If Martin had, as he leaned back into his black concealment above the punts, allowed his intellect to reassert itself, he would have returned immediately to the Tower community hoping, on the ten minute journey back, not to twist an ankle or break a leg in the dark or to be faced by a large hungry dog – or a wandering madman. But his intellect was not allowed to take its customary leadership position – and instead of doing the sensible thing, he was being impelled to do the exact opposite, to cover his tracks, ensure none knew where he was going, take a boat out in the dark and sail on a compass bearing which may take him, with no boating skills and no seamanship, into the perilous, fast flowing Westminster estuary, now several miles wide. "Did I just say..." he mused, "...that I should like to avoid being attacked by a madman?" And he smiled a self-deprecating smile.

At that moment he had probably never been less sane in his whole life. His plea, in a Court of Law, if courts of law

were ever to be re-established, would simply be, "Temporary Insanity". And he would almost certainly be acquitted, with a light sentence.

His body, which normally he was rarely aware of, was poised like the body of a trained athlete before an event. He could see more in the darkness than he had ever believed possible. It would be folly now to shine a torch – but he found he did not need one. He could make out the shoreline and see gentle waves breaking through the railings of what had been a central garden. Tall trees, killed by the salt but still standing proud, overhung Wigmore Street. The night mercifully hid the accumulated debris at the tidal margin. When the moon shone, he could almost believe that it was Cavendish Square, before the floods, in civilised times, on a wet, London evening – caught at a rare moment with no pedestrians and no traffic. On the north side of Wigmore Street stood a row of parking meters, all miraculously empty, presenting a cornucopia of luxurious space for shining powerful cars to cruise to a legal, elegant halt, and set down their passengers.

But behind the parking meters – was the ocean.

Martin Blackmoor shook himself, tuned his ears like radar scanners and turned his head slowly; then at last, satisfied he was alone, he emerged from cover, made his way to the west side of the square where ropes snaked from the water to lamp posts, and hauled in an inflatable dinghy. The tide was out, as far out as he had ever seen it. He slid and slipped down steps and had to walk a long way down the muddy sloping surface, on the unpleasant scum left by the receding waters, to reach the boat. If he had been trained as a waterman he would have known the tide was on the turn – and paused yet again before testing his seafaring skills in the treacherous and bewildering fast flowing spumes, torrents, bores, whirlpools and undertows caused by the water rushing round buildings and down steps and underpasses. An experienced sailor would never have gone out in the dark, alone, as the tide was on the turn. But he wasn't a trained waterman, so he pressed on.

He hauled the boat up until its prow grated on the pavement, hesitated briefly as his emotional intelligence reinforced his cognitive processes and advised him that what he was doing was damn foolhardy and very dangerous; ignored the warnings, and pushed off across the small harmless waves into deeper water.

In the square, the light was fractionally less dark than it was in the narrow streets he'd paced through – but it was still dark. The clouds had closed in again, precipitating a fine, floating drenching rain that soaked everything, even down into Martin's polo neck sweater under his black *“Storm-Proof – dryness and warmth Guaranteed – Breathing, Intelli-Fabric”* anorak. The light from the Tower's observation floor, a beacon inviting all survivors to come and join the growing band, the only light showing in that vast mourning city, lit the underbelly of the weeping clouds and glanced from a thousand wet surfaces, glinting in the waves and whorls of the presently quiescent sea. The myriad windows in the empty buildings, standing over him in soaring haughtiness, caught the vestigial light on their black mirror surfaces and stared at the traveller with blank, cold disapproval.

The grey inflatable had a small outboard motor – which only yesterday the professor had checked and found it had fuel and necessary supplies. He checked the fuel tank again now and it was full. But the raucous racket of the engine would alert the Tower to his going – and the World to his coming. Tonight he needed to move silently so he sat up at the back of the craft and paddled. The boat was surprisingly responsive and glided rapidly out of the square, along a broad avenue and onto Oxford Street where the shop signs stood above the surface, unsullied and waiting to re-open for business. Martin knew London well, very well. He had noted likely refuge buildings on the south-by-south-west transmission bearing, buildings identified by the meagre clues he'd gleaned from the two intercepts.

The girl with the sweet, local south London voice and the gruff younger sounding boy had, in their few words of

communication, let him visualise that it was a building surrounded by water – even at low tide. He could therefore surmise it had five or more floors. He supposed it was secure – all the ways in and out closed apart from their secret entrance – and he supposed it had stores of supplies. The communicants had sounded at home in the building; so he could assume they had been there for some time – so it had been flooded at least a year or so ago. And he knew the compass bearing precisely though not the distance. Along the compass line he had decided on this first reconnoitre to visit the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square, several tall hotels on Park Lane, The Grosvenor Hotel on Hyde Park Corner and some of the taller buildings just south of it, on Knightsbridge. What he hadn't known how to calculate was the time it would take to paddle his route.

He was in Davies Street just south of Oxford Street when the incoming tide started to run. The inflatable sat atop the water, seemingly hardly affected by the currents below it. At first it skimmed over the surface as easily as ever, though the surface was rising. But the further he went south down the street, paddling forwards, in fact moving towards the main estuary channel two or three miles distant, became harder work. London's famous twelve to eighteen foot tide that had helped it become the main English port to Europe, was filling the spaces between the buildings, once roads, streets, passages and gracious squares. The configuration and confluence of some of these highways and byways funnelled water from wide expanses to narrow confines and, where that happened, the sea rushed and bucked and sucked and spun at the corners of buildings. It was difficult enough to manage in daylight. In the near pitch darkness, for a novice sailor, it was the stuff of nightmares.

But Martin felt strong and the maritime difficulties set even more adrenalin pumping through his veins, making him all the more determined to follow his course. It had been a long time since he had tested his stamina, but in the prime of life, and having kept fit, he revelled in the fight, in winning the fight, against the elements. The

moonlight broke through often enough to allow navigation and his trained intelligence informed the decisions he had to make moment by moment. He slipped the boat to the right, cutting across a swirling hollow vortex at the corner of Grosvenor Street and thrust forward onto smoother, broader waters and up to the American Embassy. He knew that with care, nothing would stop him now.

Chapter Ten

Nautilus

The Arctic is warming faster than any other region on Earth. Normally its ice sheets reflect much of the sunlight that falls on them back into space, but they are receding and exposing the land and sea underneath, causing the ice to melt even faster.

Celest Beiver, New Scientist, June 2005.

Approximately one thousand miles nor-nor-west of where Professor Blackmoor was paddling his inflatable dinghy, another, far more cautious, infinitely more experienced and fantastically more powerful sailor weighed the latest information, updated that morning by his First Officer.

Captain James Cruickshank, captain of the nuclear submarine HMS Rutherford, who also held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines, an independent unit responsible for the nation's nuclear weapons, was a fast-thinking, slow-reacting kind of a man. These attributes were valuable, if not imperative, in an officer in charge of one of the most sophisticated vessels on Earth, carrying a crew of seventy, half of its crew capacity, and with the capability of waging nuclear war on any country and, for example, inflicting overkill by a factor of five on the Russian Federation. Not that such a thought would ever enter Jim Cruickshank's mind, for he was essentially a man of peace.

He was also what American Indians, the Indian Nation and the Inuit, would regard as an Elder. To be an elder, a wise person, a man or woman had to demonstrate that they could and would consider the consequences and impact of any important decisions they might make – down through the next seven generations. Had he been born a few hundred years earlier and joined the American settlers, James Cruickshank would not have hunted the buffalos and bison to near extinction; he would have thought it through. He had never embraced the fast and fickle, instant gratification socio-economic theories of Reagan and Thatcher's Monetarism – though he fully

comprehended the infantile-greed and immaturity that drove the theories. He wore a beard, a grey beard, and occasionally smoked a pipe, usually when resting in a Highland glen after a long walk.

HMS Rutherford could circumnavigate the globe under the seas. It could conceal itself from most radar, sonar, satellite cameras and other detectors. It was one of five *Orcinus-Class* 'sleeper-submarines' hidden in the deeps quietly and slowly patrolling the oceans, unseen and unheard. It was sometimes mistaken for a deep diving whale – but it was much, much larger. It had been on a long-term mission when Glacier 'Flu first struck the continents. Captain Cruickshank had kept his ship submerged, monitored all the news channels, and stayed quiet. As the news grew worse and worse, as the pandemic swept back and forth through all the communities on Earth, Captain Cruickshank's colleagues, in charge of the other four sleeper ships, returned to bases in Scotland and the South-East and, on compassionate grounds, gave their crews shore-leave to attend to sick and deceased relatives. Most of the crewmen caught the virus and died. Unmanned, HMS Rutherford's sister ships stayed in port.

Jim Cruickshank, despite fearing for his own family, had stayed at sea, under the sea, and listened to the news. The more he heard, the less inclined he was to return his crew home to port. One day, after nearly two years at sea, signals from The Admiralty in London ceased. At first, Jim assumed the transmitters had failed. Later he assumed the buildings had been flooded and that the Admiralty was relocating. Later he managed to have communications with an American aircraft carrier sitting off Boston, short of skilled crew members but stocked and provisioned for up to five years – if it didn't sail very far – and he learned from the Americans the true extent of the devastation of the UK's population – and of the rest of the world. So he stayed at sea, mostly below the surface.

Only by sharing the incoming news with his entire crew, which was part Royal Navy personnel and part highly specialised Royal Marine Commandos, moment by

moment, did the Captain avoid mutiny. Grateful to have been kept alive in a world of arbitrary and meaningless death, the ship's company, sixty-six men and four women, had so far not questioned the hierarchy and ranking on board. They followed orders and Jim was careful to make sure the orders made sense. He took the submarine to remote islands and brought fresh water and food aboard by tender – using inflatables very like the one Martin Blackmoor was paddling into Grosvenor Square. When they felt the need to allow fresh air to flow through the ship, Jim surfaced as far from land as he could – and stayed as short a time as the crew could countenance. With these precautions, they had avoided Glacier Flu for nearly three years.

“What now?” Jim asked himself as he studied the latest, sparse intelligence gathered by the ship's top secret and decidedly high-tech, surveillance and communications systems. There was little broadcast or even narrowcast radio that HMS Rutherford didn't hear. Whenever a ship sailed, an aircraft flew or a mobile phone attempted revival and was tested by the satellites, Rutherford recorded it. The few Radio and TV stations that stuttered into life in various parts of the world, however briefly they transmitted, bounced off the satellites and were heard by HMS Rutherford – and by Captain Cruickshank and his crew. Automatic military spy systems, some on solar powered pilot-less spy-planes circling the globe eight miles high, took photographs, recorded messages and beamed it all down to receiving stations around the world – and HMS Rutherford heard and saw it all. The crew had become masters of decrypting encoded signals – there was little else, apart from the tedious business of survival, to occupy them.

“So what do we do next...” pondered Jim. He knew they had to do something different. His crew, and himself, had all suffered terrible bereavement. They had survived too much death. Now their sanity was under threat as the guilt of surviving while their loved ones had perished, crushed down on their collective psyche. The ship's crew was clinically depressed. As an entity, the submarine and

her crew in symbiotic relationship, was deeply depressed and in grave danger of reacting.

"How might very depressed people react?" Jim had asked the medical officer. And he knew he wouldn't like the answer. When one of the most powerful and lethally equipped units in the world decides to commit suicide – who might it take with it?

"We must make port – and very soon..." thought Jim.

He turned to his Second-in-command, "Lawrence – we'll do one more ice survey... Just here, around southern Greenland..."

"Yes Sir?"

"...and then we'll head for home."

"Home...? Home where, Sir?"

"...I think we should check out London first..."

"...Check out the estuary maps. Adjust for the rise in sea-level. And work out how far we can get in, submerged."

"Submerged, Sir? In the Thames Estuary, Sir?"

"We don't know what we will find when we get there Lawrence. I'd rather we saw them before they see us... And mind those bloody bridges. If we surface – twenty to thirty feet higher, Rutherford won't get under those damn bridges. Will she? ...We should visit all the major ports. Someone must have started to establish some sort of government; don't you think?"

"I couldn't say Sir. We've had very little reliable information for the past eight months or so."

"...Hmmm! Yes! Yes; well tell the crew will you. Two more days on this report, we'll do the usual visuals of the land, and soundings under the sea-ice to measure the rate of melting then we'll head for London."

Chapter Eleven

Mummy's Grocers

“The general population would certainly be concerned and may well panic if they realised that the UK holds only enough food to feed us for two weeks. The just-in-time-stock policy leaves little room to cope with emergencies.”
Spokesman, Yorkshire Union of Farmers, Summer 1985.

The sea had invaded central London and swamped the embankments beside the Thames and eventually flooded thousands of homes of people who had then become refugees; who began to move to higher ground. At first Alice and Alex had followed the crowds – away from the river, the damp, the smell and the now useless bridges, isolated in the middle of the widening Thames Estuary, and they made for higher ground.

Being South Londoners, they had headed south – and upwards; along with several million others, until they crowded into the urban rim of Outer London, gateway to the South and backed by small hills. When the Flu' struck, the food ran out and fresh water all but vanished – Alice, with the instinctive wisdom of a rugged, independent, seafaring family running in her veins, and with most of her family dead, took young Alex and went against the bewildered crowds – back where they had come from, close by the Thames.

They liberated a posh, seaworthy looking boat from Chelsea Harbour, which they lived on for several months, pillaging any likely looking buildings they could reach for supplies. Conscious of her sexual attraction and lack of defences in an increasingly anarchic society and despite her own, barely recognised and certainly not understood, insistent imperatives to find a good man – Alice kept well away from the gangs that started to roam across the estuary in boats, as she and Alex roamed, and avoided those who wandered on foot along the scummy rim of the new shoreline.

But despite Alice's awareness and caution one of the roving gangs, about eight rough teenagers, had given her a bad-time.

As she and Alex, still a gangly teenager, turned their boat into Jacob's Creek, on the right, just downstream from Tower Bridge, they collided with a river bus, hijacked by the gang, churning the mud and emerging slowly from the creek onto the river. Shaken but unharmed they were grateful for the raucous and confident company of the lads on the large craft who straightened a few bent railings and offered them some bread. The invitation to eat and to have a drink with them transpired to be, however, the prelude to an unplanned attempt at a gang-bang. Thanks to Alex accurately swinging a fifteen foot barge pole, knocking two of them into the lethal deep oozing slime of the creek – from where their pals had to rescue them or see them die, and to some vestiges of lingering ethics still alive in the boys' souls which persuaded them not to pursue her – Alice escaped with Alex, clutching her torn clothes – nearly naked and hysterical with shock.

When the second pandemic exhaled its pestilential, evil breath over London and the rest of the World, again halving the population, the marauding gangs suddenly disappeared and the city estuary became silent. The Thames in London became very dangerous to boats as the water surface rose closer and closer to the underside of the bridges. The tidal flow could sweep a boat, large or small, under a bridge and trap it there being battered and broken. The bridges started and finished in deep water but it was impossible to know what obstacles lurked under the water at either side. Going around them was perilous; going under them on the tide was even more perilous, so Alice and Alex decided to give up the power-boat.

Following the attack on her, one dark night Alice had moved them to Harrods, drowned and isolated by the very first Spring Tides, its ground floor entirely underwater, but otherwise locked and intact and still well stocked. Under the swelling, tidal dark waters – lay the Food Hall and much of the food was packed in tins and sealed bottles.

With clever use of fishing rods, nets and torches that claimed to be "*Waterproof - Tested down to thirty metres*", they learned to recover as much food, water and drink as they could ever consume. The washrooms' taps still delivered clean water, stored in large tanks on the roof, which with masses of added bleach they used to wash the tins and jars before opening them. The lavatories on the top floor still flushed; where to, neither Alice nor Alex considered – but the siblings could stay clean in deluxe surroundings. The rest of that most superior of Department Stores, courtesy of a long absent Mohamed Al Fayed, its last known owner, provided the best of clothing, jewellery and furniture – and just about everything a human being might require, in vast quantities; far more than they could ever use; as long as they could rely on having the place to themselves.

With fox like cunning, Alice had constructed their current home, a tent, a most sumptuous and ornate tent with several rooms, from carpets, bedding and curtains, in a hidden corner of the fourth floor and ensured it was a blacked out living area. Inside the tent at night they had light, and heat – driven by recovered car batteries and portable generators – with food and comfortable beds. The electrical goods department provided battery driven and portable TV's, computers, DVD's, radios, a large supply of fresh batteries and every film and recording any civilised citizen might wish for. But broadcasts were few – and they never tried to respond, preferring to be secret and safe.

One of their smaller indulgences was to borrow – they still thought of it as borrowing on the unconscious assumption that one day life would return to normal - self-winding, waterproof, in fact they recovered them from underwater, perpetual Rolex Oyster wrist watches – one each; which they admired for many months before they took the shining, bejewelled mechanical marvels for granted.

They were comfortable in Harrods – with nothing but the best. But Alice had seen some terrible events in the past two years which had convinced her the World had become a very dangerous place – and in response to the danger

they had developed the safety routine of checking, checking again and re-checking, floating in the shadows and deep window bays of Hans Place, before making for the hidden entrance they used to get into the store. And so Alice, when she had returned from the milk store, had waited and she had listened and she had waited some more before slipping into their secret home.

Just three miles to the north, in BT Tower, its feet not yet lapped by the polluted tides, electronic tracking machines, some taken from laboratories at London University, cast back and forth, programmed to detect again the faint murmur of Alice's brief conversation with Alex and to report the co-ordinates to the group who had adopted the Tower as their headquarters and home.

Chapter Twelve

New York, New York

Sociologists have reasoned that the birth and development of great artists, philosophers and inventors, such as the famous figures of the Renaissance in Europe, requires a critical-mass of population to educate, inspire and support them and to create a receptive environment in which their talents will flourish. In short – emergent genius needs to stand on the shoulders of giants of civilisation; giants who have created stability and prosperity, and who provide liberal, intelligent patronage of arts and science. Can we, without the critical-mass, from our tiny, shattered population, struggling for survival, organise society and find the wherewithal to nurture mankind's next Renaissance?

Professor Martin Blackmoor, Dean of the University of London 2008.

80% of the World's population lives on the coastal margin. If they suddenly retreated inland, utter chaos would ensue. *Global Analyses of Populations and Physiography -1997*

In America in New York State and New York City, the rising waters had disturbed the lives of twenty-million people. As in Europe, a large percentage of the population had died of Glacier 'Flu, the indiscriminate killer pandemic. Long Island was mostly below water, the Statue of Liberty stood ankle deep in the ocean, battered by waves that on stormy days leapt up and disrespectfully doused her face. Fierce 'Can-Do' survivors had miraculously constructed floating wooden skirts around famously tall buildings; skirts that rose and fell on the tides providing safe landing and berthing for a myriad of small boats clustered at the feet, or rather knees, of Manhattan skyscrapers. The Hudson River made a conduit for the sea to invade inland, west of the Taconic Mountains. In the north, Lake Ontario rose as ocean waters reversed the flow of the Saint Lawrence Seaway, and flooded down the Mohawk River, cutting the State in half. The Atlantic water, fed by the Labrador Current, complete with immense icebergs as large as major mountains, direct from Greenland and the Arctic Circle, was bitterly cold, giving rise to innumerable grim ironic jokes on the theme of "global warming."

Like Londoners, millions of citizens had made for higher ground – of which, unlike London, there was plenty. And like London, the New York supply infrastructure, food,

medical, fuel, sewage and water failed under the strain of the mass relocation and shorted-out electrical power. Like London, all these things could be fixed. But again like London, the experts and labour to make things work were in very short supply.

At first it seemed the smart money was on those who made it into the Appalachian Mountains and the Allegheny Plateau, rising in places as high as six-thousand-feet – for how could the ocean reach up there – and there was plenty of space, all the space they needed, for mankind and all the displaced farm animals. In theory the mountain dwelling refugees would be alright. A little of the old pioneering spirit – some rapid courses on farming and food production and those who survived the ‘flu would make it. They would pull through.

But, there were two additional buggeration factors that Londoners did not have to cope with. Firstly, it was now winter and it was unbelievably cold. It was hellishly cold. And it snowed heavily. It was so cold and wintry that it was far safer to stay indoors than to venture out to take care of cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry; particularly for amateur farmers, still dreaming of centrally heated penthouse apartments. So getting food was a very tough proposition. The distances to storage centres, abandoned supermarkets and the like could be very long – and fuel was now harder to come by. So foraging for food was often unsuccessful. Some isolated and unfit people simply died of hunger, marooned in snowdrifts or iced in to their cabins and mansions.

And secondly, most people were armed.

It was exactly for this type of emergency that American families had for many years fought to retain the God given right to own weapons. There was a gun for every man, woman and child in the States. There were limitless amounts of ammunition – enough to kill the whole population of the United States of America about three hundred times over. It was enthusiastically referred to as “Overkill”. The overkill capacity was a subject of excited

urban-legends, particularly among the teenagers and young strong males – who were of course, like all those under forty-five, still immortal.

Militia and gun-school trained middle aged men and women also gloried in their skills with weapons. This is what they had trained for; what they had fantasised about; this was raw survival; so most people, on most foraging missions, were armed. The armaments in some cases were spectacular. They were not limited to handguns or hunting rifles. Military weapons of awesome power had rapidly found their way from abandoned military camps and weapons stores into the surviving civilian population. Previously peaceful, mild mannered, suburban fathers and mothers, teenagers and grandparents raided village stores – in Humvees or Jeeps or giant 4x4 trucks – when they could still find fuel, and, while loading the entire contents of the shop into their vehicle - for who knew just what they might need in the future - another foraging party would appear, challenge the first group – and then wage war with automatic rifles firing dozens of armour penetrating rounds per second. Truck mounted machine guns were not uncommon, with grenade guns, bazookas, anti-tank missiles and every manner of lethal weapon.

Survivors of the floods, pestilence, grief and privation entered glorious battle in quiet mountain towns with fellow Americans, over frozen turkeys, pastry, hamburgers, potato fries, cola, warm jackets, blankets, flashlights, fuel and portable telecoms – and slaughtered each other incontinently. Even a slight wound, in the absence of good medicine, would often eventually be fatal. A siege mentality had developed, exacerbated by feuds between relocated city dwellers, toughing it out as survivalists in farming and mountain country. As in London, these people had also figured out how the deadly flu' was transmitted – and feared any contact with their neighbours. Frightened of disease, guarding and concealing their stores of food and fuel and protecting their families' lives, the nomadic settlers hid in the most

remote houses, farmsteads and commercial buildings they could find – and listened.

And so the population was even more decreased and skills necessary for the maintenance of society became more and more scarce. All major facilities which stopped working – stayed out of commission. When, for example, well away from any sea-level effects, the giant hydro-electric turbines that made electricity for Hartford, Connecticut cut out, as they did on their normal maintenance sequence, only one surviving engineer knew which buttons had to be pressed to switch them on again. But, he found a fault. It was a small fault but it shut down the mill-stream, the sluices through the dam and needed a team of three or four skilled engineers, for eight or ten hours, to correct it. He couldn't muster a team; he tried to the point of exhaustion to do it himself – and failed. He bussed in his own family and instructed them what to do – but they lacked the physical strength and the engineering know-how. If he could find and direct six or seven strong men – he could fix the problem. But he couldn't recruit a team and food and self-preservation became more pressing problems he had to attend to – so the generators stayed silent. And so, as in London, the last survivors clung on to the margins of civilisation by foraging and by inventive DiY. A group did, however, take up residence in the Empire State Building and started to tackle the telecommunications, determined to hook into the global satellite network.

Chapter Thirteen

The Empress

All of us; every human on the planet, unconsciously broadcast our distress, our joy, our insights and innovations. When several people around the globe have the same inspiration at the same time – we call it synchronicity or coincidence, denying our underlying connectedness. I can “hear” those unconscious communications. My rituals help me to clear my own thoughts and focus on the incoming messages.

Alice Whitaker, Early writings, Volume 3.

Despite the cold tap water and the chill air, Alice peeled off the army-style fatigues she’d worn and she showered with antiseptic soap in the executive washrooms on the sixth floor, as she always did after being out on the water. She unwrapped another brand-new, comforting and luxurious bath-sheet, which would later join the rest of their neatly stacked laundry on the fifth floor – which was unlikely to ever be washed – and, snuggled into a bathrobe, of a style and quality as previously worn only by the super-rich, (so did this make her super-rich now, she wondered); she settled down at her dressing table in the warmth and security of her Turkish-and-Chinese-silk-carpet boudoir. Later she would eat – perhaps smoked salmon with tinned baby new potatoes and peas and she might yet again indulge her sweet tooth with another tin of Christmas Pudding and a tin of cream.

But for now, to take the edge off her appetite, with a single crystal flute of champagne before her, she nibbled at Harrods Selected Honey Roasted Cashews, and attended to her toilet.

Along with all the religious symbols, services and processes she created, Alice was becoming dominated by compulsive repetition of actions which, deep in her psyche, she believed kept her safe from the kind of attack she’d suffered at Jacob’s Creek and surrounded her with a magical aura impenetrable to the flu’ virus. Her elaborate routines for waking, rising, exercising, travelling, eating, washing, relaxing and sleeping grew more and more

detailed. Most of the detail she remembered and some she wrote longhand in her leather-bound portfolio.

At evening time she set aside two hours for dressing and grooming herself. With the whole of Knightsbridge – at least the upper floors still above the water – and all the shops in Piccadilly, Regent Street and Oxford Street to salvage from, her clothes, jewels, perfumes and lotions were, quite literally, fit for a Queen. Her attire and appearance had evolved to ever more exotic heights. Her self-pampering filled some of the deep void of the affection lost when her parents, sisters, boyfriend and friends disappeared. She was, after her evening session, truly The Queen of the Night – or perhaps, she thought, The Empress of London. It might even have been, the idea occurred to her, that all the events of the past few years, the whole incomparably dreadful emergency, and all the suffering and death, were in preparation for, paved the way for – but no it was too silly to even think it – had ordered the Universe in advance of – her royal ascendancy.

Her underlying slenderness and pretty face, accentuated by the professionally applied make-up and her good if highly colourful taste in fantabulous apparel, did give rise to a star of stunning beauty. And she moved very well; with the grace, strength and balance which was vital to survival when kayaking across the treacherous tidal waters.

“Wow – Alice...” said Alex with an involuntary gasp as she paraded into the sitting room, a vision of womanhood in an eastern Sari of ruby-red silks and deep emerald greens. Alice didn’t always welcome her brother’s appreciation of her pristine beauty – but he was the only audience she had.

His hand-held camcorder whirled and she obligingly turned, twirled and postured for the paparazzi with regal disdain. She both enjoyed and disapproved of his enthusiastic attentions, particularly being filmed by him – and she was a little disturbed that Alex had recently

added a side-room to his already large Kung Fu dominated bedroom, which he had decorated with three female window-display models, dressing them in sexy underwear and swimsuits – and manipulating them into suggestive positions. She knew he also had a store of pornographic films and magazines that would have made a policeman from the Vice-Squad blush. But they had wordlessly agreed not to explore Alex's teenage, burgeoning sexuality.

Alice looked at her watch. According to her timetable it was time for supper. At home in Lambeth they used to call it 'Tea' but she'd learned early on, working at Liberty, that posh people called it supper – so that was what she would now eat.

"Have you had supper?" she asked Alex.

"Yeah! I had a tin of Scottish Highland Prime Cuts stew and some spaghetti..."

"I hope you've cleaned up," said Alice, with a hard tone that actually made her brother flinch. She was acquiring and deploying a force of personality not previously evident.

"Er.. Yeah! Yeah... I will. Course I will."

"We don't want rats – do we? And all the diseases they carry?"

"...Er! No. No. we don't."

"Well...?"

Even twice her size and twice her weight, Alex couldn't countermand his sister, The Empress. Grumbling, he lurched to his feet and went off across the dark shop-floor to a back room, windowless, that they had made into a kitchen. And he cleaned up his meal. The leftovers went down a lavatory, to go wherever all the other waste went to. Where that particular complex of sewage pipes emerged, under the streets further south and deep under water, a massive eel colony was thriving on the manna

that arrived two or three times daily. Hundreds or thousands, they were uncountable, squirmed, wriggled and writhed in a tangled skein where the sewer discharged. It had been originally designed to flow from a narrow pipe to a wide catcher tank and then into a main-line sewer. But the catcher had been broken and the eels benefited. Eels used to be good to eat, jellied-eels was a favourite working class Victorian dish – and may have to become a favourite again – whatever the eels fed on.

As Alice cooked her supper, Martin Blackmoor pushed off from one of the bullet proof windows by the first floor of the American Embassy, having learned that there were indeed some people living there; and he hoped and believed they hadn't seen him outside in the blackness, but was sure at an intuitive level that this group did not include the girl he'd heard; a girl alone, he was almost sure, except for a younger boy. At the south-west corner of Grosvenor Square, in the incessant drift of rain, he held onto a thick downspout, the sea running and bucketing beneath the inflatable, and studied his luminous compass. Direction confirmed, he let go and paddled rapidly to force the boat, over the current of the incoming tide, around the edge of the building, in the direction of Park Lane and the main river channel.

Chapter Fourteen

Tumescence

When you are drowning you don't say "I would be incredibly pleased if someone would have the foresight to notice me drowning and come and help me", you just scream.

John Lennon

Alex, deep in sleep at around midnight, had a dream.

He climbed, with energy and confidence brandishing a shining sword in his left hand, up the outside of a tall, tall building on the south-bank; so tall, that it was higher than the Millennium Wheel. His father stood in the street below, urging him on with advice and good wishes. The sky above was blue with white racing clouds; but there was no sunshine. At the top, higher than all other structures in London, the hard ground hundreds of metres below, the building narrowed and narrowed until he found he was clambering onto a steep, slated roof, with mean little eaves, no bigger than the roof at home. A slate slipped – and he skidded down towards the fatal edge. His foot caught in the flimsy gutter and he dropped his gleaming sword into the void to grab onto the uncertain rotting eaves. He was paralysed with vertigo – terrified of the fall, down and down and down to the streets so far beneath. He knew he must and he was told, by whom he could not guess, to climb higher. To climb up those thin welsh slates to the blue-black fleur-de-lis patterned ridge. But he couldn't move. At last he inched himself upwards, lying flat on the steep elevation, one hand grasping the sharp edges of the slates, which threatened to lift in his grasp, the other hand tentatively spread on the roof and exploring upwards. If he slipped now and slid backwards again – the gutter would not save him this time; he would plummet over the edge and fall, and fall and fall, bellowing with fear, into oblivion. He reached the ridge. It seemed firmer than the slates. He straddled it and sat between two ridge tiles – higher than he had ever been, his lower intestines drawing themselves and his testicles up into a sweet, convoluted knot, in a desperate attempt to float.

“You can fly” said his mother’s voice right in his ear. “Stand up Alex – you can fly”. He stood on the chimney stack, feet jammed between the chimney pots – at the pinnacle of the world, with all London a mile below at his feet. He rose upwards into the air arms outstretched and he soared eastwards. He fled across the sky faster and faster, zooming down now towards Tower Bridge and along the river to the sea. Ever faster he flew; exhilaration elated his soul. He was the master of the skies and all would look up to him in wonder. But – now he flew too fast, he plummeted like a stooping eagle towards the steel and stone of Tower Bridge. The sky went dark. The bridge was outlined in white. He had no wings to spread. He could not slow the dive. He couldn’t stop – he would crash and be mangled and die. “HELP” he shrieked, “HELP – Oh God Help Me” he cried. And the sound echoed back at him from a massive pipe, as high as a house, spewing a torrent of filth into the muddy river.

Alex woke in a lather of sweat. And lay quiet. Despite the carpets, despite the blanket over his head, despite the double glazed Harrods windows; he heard a faint cry in the night which echoed in the black air.

“Oh! God! Help me. Help me!”

“Alice” roared Alex, leaping up and through the hangings. “Alice... Are you okay? Are you okay?”

Alice stirred in the dark then sat up sleepily as Alex turned on a light.

“What is it? What’s up? What’cha doing?”

“Shushhh!... Listen. Be very quiet and listen...”

Alex switched the light off and threw back Alice’s door, then he cast back the inner lobby door and the outer hanging.

Alice listened.

“Help! Help! – God Help me!” came a faint cry on the wind.

“Open a window. East side! – quick!” ordered Alice.

Alex bounded out, collecting a jemmy on his way, and leapt across the shop floor. Alice heard him attacking one of the tightly sealed windows.

“Don’t break it!” she yelled “Don’t show we’re here!”

“Okay! Okay! – nearly got it...”

Alice heard the window swing open – probably for the first time in a hundred years except for maintenance – and felt the sound as the air pressure changed. She was rapidly dressing, donning her combat fatigues as the cry, or scream, came again – now much clearer.

“HELP! HELP! HELP! – I’ll be drowned. HELP!” The sound had an echo and was startlingly loud.

Alice joined Alex at the window. “I know where that’s coming from...”

“...It’s quite a long way, from Hyde Park Corner. Somebody’s stuck in that bloody great marble thing, Constitution Arch. Ya’ know; over that walk they made – Apsley Way, or something!”

“That’s a nasty bit of water. You can get whirlpools when the tide’s coming in.”

“S’only one voice...” said Alice. “...launch the big kayak and let’s try and help him.”

Alex hesitated – “Could be dangerous Alice! It’ll give us away. ...And anyway, we probably can’t save him...”

“Close that window! Get the kayak – and we’ll see.” And Alex knew there could be no argument.

As they dragged on anoraks and launched the craft, Alice was pondering her reaction. For more than a year she had automatically avoided all other people. She had shied away from boys and men and still felt a surge of sick horror when she remembered the attempted gang-bang. And yet? This man's voice, even in extremis, had triggered something very powerful that she'd suppressed. It told her the man's age; it said he was strong; and that he was educated; it had authority, even in direst peril. He was abroad on the water at night, possibly alone out there – he was bold. He might even be handsome. An Empress needed a very special man as her escort – perhaps this man was special enough. But -she must be wary.

He was also, she thought wryly, expressing some basic Whitaker river-craft experience, a bit of a twerp to be out on his own and get stuck in a bloody huge white monument. '*What a total prat*' her father jeered inside her at the anonymous amateur.

Alex surprised her with a show of easy strength, as he lowered the larger kayak one-handed down the shaft to the water. The craft had a pack with lights, a wire ladder, a rope and other tools – suitable for foraging. Both their anoraks had sailing gear in sealed pockets. They had helmets with headlights and life jackets – though they rarely wore the latter as they were so bulky – tonight however they fixed them to the back of the kayak. They carried an inflatable raft, now folded small, which was often used to tow supplies home. Alex took the stronger paddling position at the rear and Alice was upfront. They sat on the bucking water in the lift-shaft waiting for the precise moment to exit through one of the small square windows.

"Where do we live?" shouted Alice above the slap of the water.

"We won't tell you..." rehearsed Alex, belligerently.

“No! – No. he’ll just keep trying. ...I know – we live in one of those huge icing sugar mansions in Belgrave Square – but we never say which one...”

“...If you want to meet us...” continued Alice, “...we’ll arrange to meet you somewhere neutral – like... let’s see ...Buckingham Palace. Yeah! Buckingham Palace. That’d be good.”

“NOW!” yelled Alex and they both ducked as he shot the kayak through the impossibly small window – and out of the tiled yard onto the street.

“Suppose they’re in there...” Alex said with breathless awe.

“Naw! They’re not. I’ve been round it a dozen times; and the water’s up to the roof almost. They’re all either dead or vamoosed to Windsor or that place in Scotland they’ve got...”

“Balmoral.”

“Yep! Balmoral. There’s been nobody here for at least a year.”

Then Alice had a marvellous idea, which pleased her very much. “I wonder if they left the Crown Jewels in that place at the Tower? I’d really like to go and see – one day...”

The poor lost soul hollered again with a booming echo, and they fell silent for a moment. “HELP! OH HELP! Can anyone hear me – HELP!”

They were both paddling strongly and the slim boat whipped across the water with precision. They were such familiar partners that they acted in unison, pre-thought and pre-verbally – a team at maximum effectiveness. They were already in Knightsbridge, passing the Casino, and ahead, even through the rain and dark, they could see the tall white monument, where they reckoned the man was trapped, as a blurred rectangle sitting up from the water, straight ahead of them.

They approached at such speed that Alex had to back paddle hard to avoid slamming into the structure. "Hello..." he called into the blackness inside the arch, "...Hello. Where are you?" And he switched on his helmet light and peered into the tall cavern, while effortlessly paddling to hold the kayak still on the racing waters.

"WHAT! – HELP! Yes I'm here. OH! THANK GOD! On your right! ...There's a stone buttress coming from the roof that's blocking my way out and there's a big metal – sort of a copper lantern sticking down, right inside my boat – it's got it – really got it – like grappling hooks..."

"Shut up and let us look," commanded Alice.

"...BUT!..." Professor, Doctor, Dean, Martin Blackmoor, cited for a KBE in the Honours List – only postponed due to the emergency – but for which he would be a Knight of the Realm, was most unused to being told what to do.

"Shut up!" said Alice quietly. And he shut up.

The incoming tide was exceptionally powerful tonight. The wide lagoon around the arch was always turbulent and difficult to read – due, she suspected, to the confluence of six major arteries, a submerged, swooping, wide road underpass about two-hundred metres long and a long footpath underpass, both tunnelling under this massive square-shaped and high-arched stone monument; crowned, as far as Alice could recall, with horses, chariots and warriors with spears. She switched on her helmet light and from the stowage under her feet took another lantern, *'500,000 Candle-Power Rechargeable Searchlight – Waterproof, Unbreakable – Nite-to-Day-Lite'* which, when she switched it on, was surprisingly powerful.

The endangered boat and passenger were seven or more metres back under the arch. The inflatable was trapped hard against the inside of the soaring white edifice. The prow was jammed against the wall with a large confection of wrought copper, some kind of a lantern or eternal flame

shape, caught in the bow. A taut rope snaked over the front and disappeared into the mirrored liquid gold and ebony water – tethered to something strong below the surface. The back of the boat was heaved up out of the water, its small outboard dangling redundantly in the air, and the stern tossed about as waves ran through the long arch and hit the inflatable. Crouching in the prow was a man dressed entirely in black. He was ineffectually trying to press the prow under the water, deep enough to unhook it from the copper lantern. He clearly had run out of strength – and his courage was failing.

“How deep is that metal thingybob into your inflatable?” she asked curtly – noting he was slightly older but rather better looking than she had imagined.

“Well the inflatable has risen on the tide... I was trying to get the outboard started...” The Professor attempted to excuse his stupid predicament, “And the tide kept rising. ...So it’s now actually pressing down into the water. The floor, I mean decking has cracked, and the metal is making a hollow in the floor at the front of the boat...”

Alice couldn’t excuse his stupidity and her voice said it all as she interrupted him, “...So it’s about eighteen inches for the inflatable walls and about another six inches lower?” she conjectured.

“...Er. Yes. About two feet in all...” he tried to sound confidently intelligent, but had to add lamely “...I couldn’t paddle back that way, where I came in because of the concrete buttress – and my outboard...”

Alice could see that behind him was a two foot wide stone beam – against which the nearly knighted Professor was in danger of being pitched by the racing tide. Currents swept in, swirling round the scene in a baffling choreography of movement and black light. As she shone the bright searchlight around inside the white stone arch, it reflected from every surface – and lit her intent face.

'My God, but she IS beautiful. Ravishing...' thought Martin Blackmoor; once again demonstrating that men, even putative Knights, think about sex every six seconds – or whenever they get the chance, whichever is the most frequent, even on the point of death. 'And she's bejewelled. She's wearing the most fabulous jewels. She is a jewel!'

Alice was weighing up the options. "What do you reckon?" she said to Alex.

"I think he's stuck. I don't think we can pull that dinghy out with the kayak. Do you?"

Alice didn't need to answer Alex.

"You'll have to swim out – we think."

Panic raised the Professor's voice an octave. A panic only held in check by the presence of this most desirable princess – who he HAD to impress, "...Er. Well ...Er. I can't swim."

"You WHAT?" exploded Alex and Alice simultaneously, "You can't bloody well what?" and it was only the Professor's so obviously upper-class and educated accent, and perhaps his age, that saved him from the full blast of their derision.

Alex barely managed to stay polite. He had after all been catapulted from sleep, a warm and dry bed, out into this pissing down, black, cold night, at the risk of his own and his sister's life, to rescue this sailing simpleton. "...What the hell're you doin' then..." Alex began.

"Alex!" warned Alice – setting the manners, behaviour and etiquette for the Whitaker family to adhere to - When Rescuing Halfwits from Drowning.

"I mean... What are ya doin' on the water, at night, on your own, on a running tide, just here – its very dodgy just here you know – And you can't even swim?"

“If I could swim...” apologised the shipwrecked mariner abjectly, “then I would probably have swum out – to that wide shelf out there – and then dragged the boat after; and saved you having to turn out to rescue me – on this filthy night. For which I most humbly apologise...”

“You ain’t rescued yet!” replied Alice pragmatically.

There was a silence.

“Do this!” she ordered.

“There’s a quick release valve under a red flap right at the front of that inflatable. It’s marked with a white skull and crossbones – so’s nobody will accidentally deflate the craft. Got it?”

“Er... – Yes.”

“We are going to float you a line and a lifejacket. You are going to tie on the life jacket and attach the line to the jacket – NOT to the boat. Got it?”

“Yes again.” He admitted very nervously.

“Them’s just precautions – you ain’t goin’ in the water – Got it?”

“Yes. I’ve got it.”

“Then ditch the outboard and anything else that heavy. We don’t want you dragged down by the stern do we?”

“Ah! Er! No.”

“Then, you sit in the front and let that valve go. Not all of it though – it’s still got to float. We’ll haul you and the dinghy out. The inflatable will start to collapse and go lower in the water. You’ll have to feed the soft prow around that metal thing as we pull. Got it?”

“Yes. I think I’ve got it.”

“...And what’cha goin’ to do about that sheet?”

“Sheet? What sheet. I don’t see a sheet...”

“The rope. The mooring line you’ve tied to something under water?”

Alice hardly managed to maintain civility.

“...Ah; I see. Yes – a sheet. In naval, sailing terms – a sheet...”

“Can you cut it?”

“I don’t have a knife.”

Alex and Alice could not bring themselves to comment.

“We’ll put a knife in the vest... Got it?”

“Yes – I have got it – thanks.”

Martin thought that drowning might be preferable to bearing the scorn of this Venus, arisen from the waves and come to rescue him.

“Right – well I reckon we’ve got about five-minutes on this tide before it’s all over for you – so Jump About!”

Professor Martin Blackmoor jumped about as he was told. Alice wisely held and did not tie the rope at her end, just taking a loop of rope around a thick plastic hoop on the kayak. If he panicked and she had to let go – she would - handsome suitor or no handsome suitor. The kayak would not support the two of them and a heavy, drowning man in a state of panic.

“...And don’t go and let out all the bloody air. Keep your hand on the bleeding valve!” Alex advised.

It worked. The undignified, deflated dinghy, with Martin almost below the water line, was pummelled and pressed and pushed under water in places – but at last came free from the elaborate metal lamp holder, and, looking limp, embarrassed and bedraggled, the Professor was free – and safe for the moment. The deck of the softened inflatable suddenly but with grace folded and the craft took on a rounded shape, like a giant lifebuoy, – leaving the Professor sitting low down, now below the water-line, in the centre.

Alex switched off the big flashlight and warily backed off a few metres from the now hapless sailor. If they left him here, with his boat partly deflated; sunk like a soggy dumpling in the middle of the excess rubber, he would have no way of paddling his boat and no way of steering it. The next outgoing tide would carry him into the main channel and take him where it would. Despite the lifejacket he would be in as much danger of drowning, like a child washed to sea on a Li-Lo, as he just had been.

But Alice and Alex did not need to speak to know that they both wanted to go home – quickly and in secrecy; to leave the man to his fate and not engage any longer with this potentially dangerous stranger.

While they pondered, there came the sound of an outboard and a light shone in their direction. “Ahoy there!” called a friendly, happy voice. “I see your lights – Ahoy!”

Alex and Alice exchanged a hard quizzical look at this jovial ‘Ahoy’ – but Whitaker Water Etiquette prevailed.

“If it’s okay with you – I’ll come alongside...”

Alice hesitated. This night was getting out of hand. She wished they had stayed in bed. There were now too many imponderables – each one a possible threat to their way of life – or possibly their lives.

“Yes...” she called back into the darkness. “Pull up to the Monument and we’ll do the same.”

Alex flicked his paddle and they touched the white stone. Alice extended a hand and held onto a cornice. A wooden boat, dancing and sliding on the waves, came alongside – and Jonathan Goodge, garbed from head to toe in bright yellow waterproofs, gave them a welcoming, calm smile from his perch on the – punt!

“That’s a PUNT!” said Alex “You’re alone and it’s just a punt...” his jaw dropped in disbelief.

“...Where the hell are you going on that thing? It’s off the canal isn’t it? From the boating pond! You can’t sail that on the estuary. You’ll kill yourself. That’s not seaworthy – Even here it’s not seaworthy. Do you think the Palace will protect you from the ocean – or summat? Are you all stark raving loonies...”

Alice touched Alex on the arm to quieten him. But Jonathan Goodge wasn’t listening. He seemed to be perfectly confident about his craft, leaving the engine on tick-over and unconsciously correcting any drift with a small paddle. He was weighing up his friend, with a surprisingly sharp and analytical eye. He’d already noted the almost military utility and equipment of the kayak – and had been impressed. But he wanted to know more of his colleague.

“Well I never did. Well I never, ever did. Is that you down there Professor? Is that you in the middle of that floating blanket, sitting underwater? It is isn’t it? Well I never. How did you get here?” and before Martin Blackmoor, admittedly at a grave disadvantage being several feet lower than his colleague and some feet lower than the kayak – and being utterly dependent on their goodwill for his safe return – and now suddenly feeling very physically tired – could gather the strength for a riposte or a way of steering this most important of conversations – even driven by the imperative of the stunning presence of Alice, Jonathan pressed on “...And what good fortune. What amazing ... well I’m lost for words. ...Who do we pray to, to find lost treasures? – You must have done some seriously effective

praying old man... I mean she, I don't mean to insult you by referring to you in the third person my very, very dear girl – but I mean to infer 'She' as in Rider Haggard's tale of an Empress – 'She' is simply adorable – stunning – beautiful..."

And before Martin could stop him, "How did you track her down so quickly old friend. From just one two-second broadcast? I am amazed. I take my hat off to you. You traced her, and found her and presumably you've now got her? When you struggle up out of that grey diaper – that is."

"Nobody has 'Got' me," said Alice between gritted teeth, "And if you 'gentlemen' are okay – we are going now!" and she dipped a paddle in the water and disappeared into the blackness.

"You'd better 'ave the other vest," came Alex's voice dismissively, and a bright orange lifejacket dropped out of the black sky accurately onto the punt.

"Don't go," shouted Martin – "Thank you for saving my life. I must see you again – Hey come back."

"We are in the BT Tower near the Marylebone Road..." called Jonathan after the kayak – already out of view. "Come and see us. Do. – Come and have lunch next Sunday – that's four days from now. Both of you – Do come. We can help you. And give you a good lunch. Roast Beef!" he yelled into the night with a final desperate inspiration. "...And Yorkshire Pudding."

But the darkness gave them no answer. "Bugger – Bugger – Bugger" breathed Jonathan quietly. "...C'mon you old roué – let's get you up into the punt and tow that thing back before we run out of fuel or suffer some other setback. Are you mad – to venture out alone like that. You may draw the simile between your very deflated inflatable and your previously supercharged tumescent state – or maybe you don't wish to; just now?"

With difficulty and fighting off immense tiredness, Martin now followed Jonathan's instructions and clambered from the floating grey blancmange onto one of the broad ledges which supported a golden chariot and prancing horses, and from the ledge, down onto the punt. Jonathan attached a sheet to the inflatable – put his outboard in gear and headed for Park Lane. The punt, without a keel and far too heavy for the small outboard, struggled to hold its direction across the water, which slapped loudly under it. The tired men became ever more aware of the impenetrable darkness and welcomed the moon, when it emerged from the clouds, with sighs of relief. The punt proved extremely useful at slewing over the top branches of the drowned trees which marched up the centre of Park Lane – and was solid enough to sit without damage on top of any high lamp posts and hidden wires that occasionally blocked the route – until they could wriggle the punt free and continue.

“Now just what were you doing out there – old man?”

“I would really rather not talk about it now if you don't mind,” said Martin wearily but with as much authority as he could muster.

“...Suffice it to say that I see our immediate mission is to help isolated and stranded people – and bring them together. After all...” he sighed “...if the human race cannot now work and live together in intelligent cooperation – after all we've suffered; there can be no hope for the future...”

“...And what chance do you think a couple like that have of surviving alone? The merest small accident could be the end of them – I am sure you'll agree...”

Martin tailed off into an only slightly exaggerated overwhelming weariness which forbade any further questions.

“Yes” thought Jonathan, “Very laudable. But it doesn't really explain why he chose to go off – alone – without a

word - in the dark - at night - dressed in black. Does it?
...And I wonder if he'll find the bug I planted?"

But he said no more and concentrated on getting the punt, and themselves, safely back to Cavendish Square.

Martin Blackmoor for his part, watched the highly competent Jonathan Goodge, through half-closed eyes and wondered why - and he'd also like to know 'How' the man had - What? - followed him? Or was he abroad this fateful night on some secret errand of his own? And just where had he acquired such confidence - and - Martin had to admit, ability, in handling boats?

Chapter Fifteen

Rutherford

Mankind first slaughtered each other for land, for possessions – then killed for religion and politics, to control thought. The new society will dispense with personal possessions, other than what a person can carry when walking; and thinking and speaking shall never again be a crime. - *Captain James Cruickshank (RN)*

A few weeks later, looking at herself in the mirror over her morning tea, Alice was still buoyed up by the memory of the nakedly admiring glances – in fact the jaw-dropping adoring stares – lavished on her by the two, not so old and not entirely uninteresting, nautical academics. And it wasn't just their undeniable awe at her looks; she remembered what the taller, pale man had said about her – “like the Empress in a book – She.”

The shorter, perhaps slightly younger, dark one had openly desired her. His burning eyes gave him away as lustful and driven. He had the eyes of a Stalker – Alice thought – but then in the good old days only Hollywood stars suffered from stalkers; and, now confident in her own survival skills and able to rely on Alex's protection, growing stronger by the day, she rather liked the analogue. She had never before considered herself truly beautiful, but the reaction of those men was undeniable, unambiguous and unmistakable. She was powerfully beautiful. The dark one had obviously heard her talking to Alex – they had since ditched the intercepted faulty Walkie-Talkies and acquired another set – and the same day, without even being able to swim and obviously knowing nothing of the water, he had launched himself into real danger and darkness – and had nearly died – to try to find her.

It did good things for a girl's ego.

But the sister and brother hadn't gone to Sunday lunch. They hadn't even surreptitiously explored around the Tower, and they had increased their own precautions

against being found. In their den at Harrods, permanently surrounded by deep and unpredictable water, they felt safe and well hidden.

The sudden huge drumming over their heads that morning, followed by violent crashing and battering as someone started to break into one of the roof exits, therefore came as a terrible shock.

Alex bounded long legged up the stairs four at a time with Alice racing behind. He reached one of the rooftop emergency exits, disabled the closing mechanism and edged it open a crack. It was obvious what had made the noise – a helicopter, a small yellow and black, bubble nosed three-seater - had landed on a corner of the roof, on the flat roof of the North-East tower, where somebody had managed to fell the flagpole. It sat high enough for the blades to miss aerials, chimneys, air-conditioners and water tanks, and was perched with its engine running and a pilot at the controls. A rotund dark skinned man in his sixties was angrily directing a swarthy, sharply dressed younger man who was sweating and irritated as he wielded a red two-handed fire axe at one of the other emergency doors.

Alice caught up with her brother and peered under his arm at the intruders across the roofscape.

After five minutes, the axe-man slumped to the ground in exhaustion, the emergency exit no more than scratched, and the tubby manager stood over him shouting and gesticulating, his voice drowned by the helicopter. It was an unhappy scene.

Alice pushed past Alex and walked out onto the roof. The sky was clear and blue; a few puffs of white cloud raced across it. Gulls soared and wheeled in large numbers above Big Ben, The Millennium Wheel and Nelson. The estuary was full, seemingly reaching up to the Marylebone Road in the North and at least to Clapham Junction in the South. It was perhaps seven miles wide and its margins were indistinct as they melded with trees and buildings in

the distance. Alice could not see any craft on the water. She was certain however that many hidden eyes and ears would be sharply focused on the aircraft buzzing noisily like a giant wasp on Harrods' roof. Alice weaved her way through the maze of roof machinery and fixtures towards it.

The older man turned and saw Alice and shouted something at her. She waved her hands showing she couldn't hear him and pointing at the helicopter. The man motioned his companion to get to his feet and sent him scurrying off to the helicopter with a shove to his back. After a few more minutes the helicopter shut off its engine – and the area went quiet.

“What the bloody fuck are you doing bloody hell on my roof? Who the bloody hell are you – anyway?” shouted the silk suited rotund man, gesturing with his fist, the fingers downwards and his index finger, oddly curved against the knuckle, pointing to the ground, as if commanding Alice to kneel for a beheading.

“Another total nutter...” Alex breathed in her ear “...Maybe these floods have made everyone totally crazy?”

The little man waddled towards them fearlessly. His younger colleague, also wearing a silvery-grey silk suit, recovered from swinging the axe, leaned against a water tank, languidly lit a cigarette and watched from a distance.

“That jacket. Your bloody jacket – you young bastard fuck you...” said the man, accosting Alex. “...That's my jacket. It was on the list. That's a very expensive jacket. I bought that jacket.” And suddenly overcome with indignation, though half Alex's height, he grabbed an arm and with podgy be-ringed fingers he started pulling the jacket off Alex's back.

“Hey. Hey! Gerr'off...” complained Alex, easily shrugging the small man aside and stepping back a few strides.

The cigarette smoker sighed, half closed his eyes and exhaled blue smoke into the air. The pilot, a middle aged woman, was fiddling with the dormant radio, her ears encased in headphones. She watched blankly from her seat, and said and did nothing.

“...Your roof?” said Alice pointedly.

The man wheeled round and stepped towards Alice belligerently. He was the same height as her but several times her girth. As he moved, Alex was instantly about six inches behind him. “Touch Alice – Fat Man – and I’ll tear your ugly sweaty head off...” he whispered levelly.

The man seemed not to hear, but nevertheless stopped in his tracks a few feet from Alice. “...Yes. The fuck it is my bloody roof. ...Who are you? No! Don’t answer that. I don’t bloody well need to know who the fuck you are... You need to know who I bloody am. Do you know who I am? Well do you?”

“HEY!” yelled Alex, responding to the senseless violence and aggression of the man’s delivery and shouting loudly to the skies, “...Here’s a guy who doesn’t know who he is. Another completely crazy loony. Shall we lock ‘im up then?”

The little man spun on the raised heels of his hand-made Gucci shoes. He waved his short arms in Alex’s face, showing off immaculately pressed shirt cuffs and diamond links. “What the bloody hell are you anyway...” he challenged. “You are a nothing. You can have barely left the school; can you? You never earned enough in one year – not in a whole year – to buy my jacket. You’ve stolen my jacket – that’s what you’ve done. What were you – hey? What bloody were you anyway – an errand boy – a fish seller – a milkman? Hey!”

Alex was a bit stunned by the man’s vehemence and couldn’t find a quick reply.

“I can guess who you are,” said Alice coolly.

He thought for a moment, an idea, a scheme, visibly forming in his eyes, he cocked his head, took in Alice and Alex as if seeing them for the first time and the man's demeanour changed instantaneously. He transformed into a charming host.

"Of course, my dear. My very dear child. Of course you know who I am. And I most humbly apologise if any of my behaviour has alarmed you – or indeed has insulted you in any way or your ..." and he weighed Alex up against Alice very thoughtfully "...I can guess," he laughed merrily, inviting them to be happy with him; "Oh Yes!" he chuckled "...I can guess. I am good at guessing. You will see. You will see... He's family! Aren't I bloody right? He's your brother isn't he? A fine young man. What a hero he will grow to be. What a tower of strength. And so good looking he will be – when he grows up a little more. And he's quick too. Thinks and moves fast..."

The man was now circling Alex, admiring him as if he might buy – or indeed, sell – the boy.

"You are a fine pair..." he waved generously. "A bloody marvellous pair. You are brother and sister aren't you? And haven't I seen you on the films my darling – or on television sometime? You are memorably lovely. I never forget a classical face like yours my dear. The English make some of the prettiest girls in the world. Yes; you were right..." he suddenly pronounced, "Indeed! - I am He!"

And he stopped, smiling beneficently at his two new friends. "And you boy! You can keep the jacket. It suits you well. It is my gift to you. My Thank You for you looking after my store..."

"You are then..." said Alice, determined to get there at last, "Mister Mohammed Al Fayed, aren't you."

He chuckled with delight. "I am not. Of course I bloody am not. Though I knew him well. We grew up together; well

almost – in the same place at least. He was my great friend. Just before he died...” he wiped the corner of a suddenly grieving eye with his hand, “...Al Fayed sold me his businesses. I bought his empire – fair and square - as a favour to him, to take care of his family – in Cairo – last year. And now I am visiting all my shops and hotels. So I own all this...” He swept his arm across the Harrods rooftop and included the Whole of Creation.

Then slowly and loudly, like an Englishman addressing a Wog, he announced himself:-

“I am Muhammad – not Mohammed – we spell this differently, like this ...Muhammad ...Al Jazari. And there is no ‘Mister’ just the Muhammad, you see? But you should address me as Al Jazari – Do you follow?”

“Er – Yeah. Yeah, I get you.”

“...And what should I call you,” he said dismissively, turning away from them – as their names didn’t matter at all. After all, they were, clearly, nobodies, just refugees, of no talent and no consequence – but they might be useful.

“I’m Alex and she’s Alice – Whitaker” said Alex truculently.

“Very interesting names. Both of you. Alice and Alex; double ‘A’ rating. And I am sure your Whitaker family is one very bloody good family. A good London family – I am sure. And I am good at guessing – as you know.” He had now elevated them to the status of his confidantes and allowed them into his charmed circle.

“Hey! Ali, come here and speak English...” he called to the smoker, who uncoiled his legs reluctantly and moved towards them, “...and meet my friends – Alex, he’s the boy and Alice, she’s the girl... Ali Pasha is my nephew,” he explained aside. “Like you, I too believe in family. He’s bloody good family. He’s from Paris. I have my interests in Paris. You know I now own much of that city too?”

“...And Ali will stay here with you and look after my shop – and look after you as well. Triple ‘A’ – Hey! That’s more bloody good isn’t it – Ali, Alex and Alice – Triple A. Very good, very good...” and he suddenly laughed uproariously and was unable to stop.

“We don’t want Ali to live with us,” said Alice, an uncompromising edge glinting in her voice, “You should take him home to Paris. It’s not safe here these days.”

Al Jazari paused and weighed up Alice again. Not quite the pushover he’d expected. “Of course my love; I will pay you. I will pay you well. The water is halfway up my building but what is on the upper floors is still okay, maybe, and is still bloody good fucking stuff. Worth a lot of money – I have studied the stock list. My stuff is worth a great deal of money. Millions I think... But we can go and see. C’mon, we’ll go and see... Now show me where you came up!”

He started to usher them, including the reluctant Ali, in the direction he guessed they’d come from. Alice stopped. Alex stepped aside – a long stride. “Don’t even think of touching me...” warned Alice. Alex shifted position, putting a hand inside the disputed jacket.

Al Jazari smiled; a wonderful sunny, broad, seductive, chuckling smile. In forty-five years of haggling in business it had never failed him with underlings. He made his most inclusive and generous gestures. He put his head on one side – cutely.

“Oh Alice! Alice! I am disappointed in you Alice Whitaker. You don’t believe me do you? You don’t believe I will pay you well. But I will. I will pay you very generously. We’ll be partners...” he was suddenly inspired to say; looking round at the surging sludge coloured tides, the devastation and the miles to the distant shores. This needed, he realised, specialist skills. And maybe these common hirelings had somehow learned those skills. After all, they had survived.

“...But I will. And pay in English pounds. Thousands of British currency pounds...” he pronounced the word ‘pinds’ like the Royal Family and Old-Etonians. “In solid Sterling... You’ll both be rich!”

As he spoke, like a magician he drew a wad of pristine fifty pound notes, imprinted with the Queen’s head, from an inside pocket. It was a thick wad, which he expertly flicked through his fingers.

Alex goggled; and leaned forwards.

“Nobody uses money any more,” said Alice flatly. “It’s no use.”

“Ah! But they will again. Very bloody soon. Commerce cannot be stopped. Society...” even as he said it he looked around uncertainly at the lack of people who might comprise society, “...cannot function on barter for long at all. Money will return to use very soon. And when it does – you’ll be bloody richer than you ever dreamed...”

“I don’t think you own this building anymore than we do Mister Jazari...”

“Then who does, my dear? Who the fuck does own the bloody place – if not me?”

“We do. You might never have paid the last owner or suppliers of the stuff in the store. We’ve lived here for more than a year. And we want you – and Ali and your helicopter to leave.”

Muhammad Al Jazari nodded at Ali – and drew a pistol. Ali drew a pistol too.

“You try to be nice. Try to do the right thing. Try to be decent. Try to do a fair-trade deal – and the bloody fucks always fuck you up...” he ranted, waving his gun in the air.

“Show us the way in... Or...” I’ll shoot your fine brother in the leg...” and he aimed the pistol at Alex’s knees.

“You have just made a very, very serious mistake. A deadly serious mistake Mister Jazari” said Alice, with such understated menace that Muhammad felt a chill run through his gut and into his bladder. Was this damned girl bewitched?

“Harm either of us – and you will regret it for the rest of your life. There are powerful and mysterious forces working here that you have no comprehension of – sir!”

Muhammad Al Jazari was shaken but not so much as to give up the stock of half of Harrods; to an ordinary common girl and a callow boy.

He shook his head to shake off Alice’s curse and narrowed his eyes to reply with menace and a show of his strength. Gun power would triumph here. He aimed his pistol again and warned Alice with a hard look and a nod of his head at Alex’s knees.

“You are putting yourself in grave, mortal danger Mister Al Jazari – you have just a few seconds to do as I said...” threatened Alice quietly.

“Monsieur – Monsieur. Le radio Monsieur. Un message pour vous...”

“Speak English damn you bloody woman” snarled Al Jazari at the pilot who had run over to them.

“Er! Oui, Monsieur. Er! ...There’s a broadcast Sir. For you Sir. I told them your name. But they already knew your name and want to speak to you Sir, Monsieur!”

“But there are no bloody people out there...” he wondered. “Who the bloody hell is being out there to call me?”

He walked over to the helicopter and the others followed, intrigued and excited, their own feud suspended.

“Put it on the speaker thing. The bloody loud thing...”

“They’re using the BBC Radio Four – long-wave, Sir. It’s very good. Very clear, Sir.”

Muhammad Al Jazari grimaced in consternation and waved imperiously at the woman at the radio. She pressed buttons and made to offer the earphones to the four of them. But they didn’t need them. The radio was clear – and the city around them was as quiet as the grave. Sound carried in that primordial silence.

“Hello” snapped Al Jazari suspiciously.

“Ah! I am honoured sir. We have tracked your flight from Paris and made a few enquiries. A Paris broadcast said you have taken over from Mohammed Al Fayed? Stepped into his shoes, as it were. We all knew of your predecessor of course sir. A most famous and successful gentleman. And we have found your own details in our data banks here – also an energetic, self-made entrepreneur – from Cairo I believe. I see The Arabian and European Banking Corporation of Cairo is listed as one of your interests, sir. Captain Cruickshank here, captain of the nuclear submarine HMS Rutherford...”

“...We can see your helicopter sir. It’s just visible from our mooring in the estuary, sir. And by the way, sir, our two way conversation is being broadcast on the old radio frequencies, sir. We want people to know we are here.”

Muhammad Al Jazari adopted his TV and media face. If there was a public out there, he wanted to woo it. He smiled; a mature, statesmanlike smile.

“Well. This is a great surprise Captain. I have heard no radio voices for two or more years. What can we do for each other – I wonder?”

“Not to beat about the bush, sir; as there is a lot to be done. We would like to borrow your helicopter, sir.”

Al Jazari blanched. Ali lit another cigarette. Alice smiled quietly.

Al Jazari maintained his composure. "That is what I can do for you, Captain. Not that I'm automatically agreeing to your request. Now what can you do for me in return?"

"It's rather pressing, sir. But we can get aviation fuel and we'll fly you back to Paris, before carrying out our mission – and show you where you can fill up another plane, sir."

"...And – Muhammad Al Jazari, sir - after all the deaths the world has suffered, we are discouraging violence and the deployment of weapons – so if those are pistols in your hands – and if they happen to be loaded – and if you just might be threatening or coercing my fellow countrymen with those pistols, sir; British Citizens, sir – I would strongly advise you to put the guns down."

Al Jazari snarled, halfway between fear and rage, and twirled about, scanning the horizon. "Where the bloody fuck are you? You bloody spy. Where are you?"

Alex was looking at Alice open mouthed, still in shock from being only moments from having a kneecap shot off. "How did you do that Alice? How did you know?" he whispered.

"No need to be alarmed sir. It's all perfectly normal. Everything is fine. And I can answer your questions."

"Well Captain. Well?"

"HMS Rutherford is standing off in deep water, just east of the Queen Elizabeth the Second Bridge – a few miles down the estuary from Westminster. And we have surfaced – so I am in the conning tower getting a fine view of London, sir. And your helicopter stands out on that roof top."

Al Jazari's eyes, eyebrows and furrowed forehead indicated he was juggling these facts. He didn't for a second have to

consider he might be being misled. He knew people like Captain Cruickshank were too dull to play about with the truth. The boat was seven or eight miles away – and, he'd flown over the drowned Thames bridges earlier, the channel into the centre was impassable to any large boat. But he was unnerved by the man's intelligence.

"Hey, Captain! You are too bloody far away to see what I might or might not have in my hand – so how do you know bloody well what we are doing on my roof here?"

"Ah! We have our means sir. We have our methods. ...Can I add sir that that is a very fine suit you are wearing – with, let me see, a fashionable four small buttons on the cuffs – Is that a Paris fashion, sir. And I particularly like the touch of red silk handkerchief in your top pocket, sir. Very gay, if I may say so, sir."

"I am no bloody fuck queer... Not gay – Captain. Not gay!" shouted Al Jazari, spinning round again and beating at his cuffs as if they had suddenly burst into flames.

"My apologies, sir. I use the word with its traditional meaning of happy. ...Now perhaps we can conclude our business sir. I have a busy day ahead..."

Conclude? – thought Al Jazari; I haven't even got started yet.

"...And if I won't loan you my helicopter Captain? What bloody powers have you – what authority – by what laws can you make me?"

There was a silence. And an electronic sigh from the radio.

"I am a man of peace sir..."

"Yes! Yes! ...BUT WHAT? Captain. I thought you were bloody in a bloody hurry!"

"Well sir. My gunnery officer here, Lieutenant Peter Brock, sir, like me he's from Scotland – though a Lowlander – and

like me he's a man of peace – as I hope all my crew are, sir...”

Al Jazari stamped his foot and hissed at the radio. Alex stepped back. Alice stayed where she was, smiling silently.

“...And he seems to hold the opinion, sir, that it would be a very great insult to me, the captain, to the ship's complement, to the Royal Navy, to Her Majesty the Queen, and indeed to the whole nation, if you found it impossible to cooperate, sir. And attempted to take off without permission, Sir. We suspect you haven't obtained air-clearance permission to fly over central London? Sir.”

“From whom Captain? From Whom? And so? And so? So bloody what, Captain?”

“Mister Brock, sir, tells me he could fire a small missile; not a large one; just a wee one that would reach and destroy your aircraft sir, in a little less than eight seconds, sir...”

“...As we are both busy men. If you and your companions would move away from the helicopter – get inside the building sir – we could demonstrate Mr Brock's aim – and get on, sir.”

Al Jazari looked around at his four companions – and shrugged with a large smile. He put away his pistol and Ali did the same. Al Jazari smiled again – a beaming friendly smile; and he winked conspiratorially at Alex.

“Captain! ...I am the bloody soul of diplomacy and compromise. I have always tried to help the British as much as I can. I have always loved Britain which is why I have bought Harrods and invested so much wealth in your capital city. And now ...in this terrible aftermath, I am ever more bloody ready to do what I can for your Queen and Country.”

“Well, I am glad of that sir...”

“...But – we help each other don’t we Captain. I respect you – and you respect me. And what is bloody mine...”

“Of course, sir. Within the spirit of the law sir.”

‘Whose bloody law?’ thought the Egyptian banker. But he pressed on with a winning smile.

“...Everyone knows Captain; I am sure you bloody will not disagree, that I now own this store. I helped my friend to die happy by taking over Harrods, the most famous store in the world...”

“Indeed sir.”

“And I want to move all the goods that are still bloody good – millions of pounds worth – to Paris; which is higher and drier than London.”

“That’s reasonable sir.”

“But! Harrods has squatters. Looters! Captain. Thieves! sir. Bloody thieves...”

Alex’s face went brick red and he clenched his fists – but Alice reacted not at all.

Al Jazari suddenly grabbed Alice’s wrist and waved it in the air. “My Rolex!” he yelled at the radio, “...My bloody Rolex. Bloody four-thousand pounds – four thousand-pounds, she has stolen. I saw these on the inventory. I know every bloody thing in my store. In my country – she would be whipped! Whipped! Bloody Yes! And have her hand cut-off. Yes cut-off...”

Had he not been so overwhelmed with righteous anger at Alice’s guilt, he would most likely have seen, and perhaps avoided, the flash of blue steel from a very, very sharp, small kayaker’s blade that leapt into Alice’s free hand. One moment, there were two declamatory hands, his and hers, owner and thief, raised and conjoined in accusation before God; the next moment, a third hand leapt to join the two,

marking a brief triangle against the sky, until, in less than the blink of an eye, she plunged the blade without a word or even a change of expression, straight through Al Jazari's wrist. He let go of her arm.

"I said – don't touch me."

The man's punctured wrist spurted blood and the rest of him pranced around in terror and pain, whipping out his silk handkerchief to staunch the wound.

"...You bitch! Bloody fuck bitch!" he shrieked. "...Shoot her Ali. Shoot her dead. She has attacked me – shoot her..."

But Ali wasn't about to move, even to help his favourite Uncle. His sleek hair was in the inescapable grip of Alex's left hand. Across his throat was a Samurai type, razor sharp, two foot knife, which Alex held in his right hand. Ali was a foot, or more, shorter than Alex. He froze and his cigarette dropped from his lips.

"Now, Now, everyone... Let's not get over excited. I suggest, sir, that your hand needs medical treatment. We have a very competent medic here on HMS Rutherford – so why not hop into that helicopter – with your friend, and pop over here. We have a helipad you can land on..."

Al Jazari was slightly mollified and truculently reassured, but blood continued to spout from his wrist – and he'd have to move quickly. But he hadn't yet got his own way.

" But Captain – what I came for? To secure my property; my new possessions. Can I have your solemn promise - your British and Christian oath on your Holy Bible - to help me get my property...?"

And he managed to finish with a brave little sob that would move the most obdurate and unsympathetic hearts and minds.

"Well Sir. We don't know a lot of law, sir, on a submarine. But it so happens sir that in my crew is a lady,

Midshipman Fiona Goss, who is studying marine law – by correspondence, sir. And Miss Goss has just informed me, sir that permanently sea flooded structures, under the international law of the sea – the law she is studying sir - might perhaps be considered to be salvage. And the rules of salvage may therefore apply. Or they could be classified as tidal margin or beach and so belong to the Crown, or the nation. Now we don't have all the time in the world – and you are fast losing blood, sir, – but for now, I cannot give you that commitment. But we will examine it sir and give your claim full consideration...”

“I suggest you get in the helicopter sir. And wrap a bandage tightly around that wound!”

The pilot was already taking the lid off a first aid box and the cellophane from a roll of bandage.

Martyred, wounded and huffing and puffing at a lifetime of injustices, Muhammad Al Jazari allowed his nephew to assist him into his seat and the pilot started to go through her safety checks.

Alice and Alex moved closer to watch.

“Before you shut that door! ...Young lady! Tell me, do you use a mobile phone or similar. Do you have a communications device?”

“Er! Yeah. We use these walkie-talkies... They're new ones.”

“I'd like to talk to you later, if you don't mind. Could you switch on and just keep repeating 'Calling Rutherford' until our wireless room tunes in to you – please.”

Within a few seconds, Alice's handset responded “Rutherford here – we've got the wavelength – Thanks. Over and Out!”

“Er – Yeah! Over and Out.”

The pilot slammed the door shut – waved them away, gesticulating at the blades, and she started the engine.

They watched from a safe distance as the helicopter warmed up and started to vibrate up and down on its wheels, as their visitor slumped in pain and blood loss in the back of the tiny cabin. Ali tried to light another cigarette but it was snatched from his mouth by the pilot. He shrugged moodily. After ten minutes of warming and tests – the whirly-bird lifted off and headed due east.

“I’d love to see that Exocet or whatever, take them out...” said Alex. “BOOM!”

“We’re gonna have to move from here,” said Alice “Half the country’s got our bloody address now. Most of London that has boats will be trying to break in by tea-time.”

She took out her walkie-talkie. HMS Rutherford answered immediately. Alice was put through to Captain Cruickshank.

“We were alright till today. Now you’ve blown our cover. Half of London’ll be here by nightfall... Thanks to you going on the BBC.” she accused him.

The Captain saw some justice in her argument. And he had liked what he had seen of this fierce little maiden and her fast moving brother – he was inclined to help. In the background they could hear the helicopter hovering above the submarine, manoeuvring to land.

“It was the helicopter, not me, that first gave you away. But how can I help you, Lass!”

“We need to move out – fast; today. But it’s taken us a year to get all the stuff we need into here. Can you send a big dinghy and ten men to help relocate us?”

The Captain paused – and thought long and hard.

“It’ll be a good opportunity for them to see the damage for themselves – and report back...” he mused, “...Okay young lady – we’ll do it. I’ll pass you over to Lieutenant Elizabeth Gordon, she’ll lead the team. She looks as if she could do with a day out in the fresh air. And who knows what she might pick up at Harrods, hey! By the way, what’s your name? What do we call you?”

“Alice”

“Er! Where to? Where will you go to Alice? Is there a community you can join? It’d be far safer for you.”

“I’ll tell ‘em that when they arrive. Oh! and a couple of divers ‘d be useful.”

The Captain paused again – and thought some more. He wondered should he pass on what they had found in Greenland. Would it cause mass panic? But as it seemed there was no mass to panic, he felt he owed these two a duty of care.

“Yes okay. But go high in your new place...” he advised “...We calculate only about one-fifth of the land ice has slid into the ocean – there’s a lot more to come. And it’s sliding far, far faster than anyone thought. We’ll analyse all the data when we find some scientists – but for now, you and your, Er?”

“Me brother.”

“...brother, should think of a hundred metres – measured from, say, The Embankment. That’s three-hundred feet in old money!”

“...Yeah. Thanks. How quick will it get up there?”

“Nobody knows; probably decades. But if you want to live on the water, pick a building that won’t crumble – and a tall one. - Do you have a craft?”

“Yeah - several”

“Can you navigate the estuary?”

“Oh – Yes. Yeah”

“Well when you’ve settled in to your new place – come and have tea. Give us a call – but not in a powered boat and no guns or explosives. We are not allowing any potential threat within a mile of us.”

“We have kayaks; them too big for you?”

Cruickshank smiled into his beard. “Come and see for yourselves.”

“How did you do the trick with his cuff-buttons? How can you see us?”

“I’ll show you when you visit.”

Chapter Sixteen

Cadogan Place

Low power mobile phones could call from Iceland to New Zealand; how far can we six-volt primates communicate? Like all life-forms, humans comprise a single-super-organism. Just as each of our trillions of cells has our whole blueprint, every individual may carry the template for the whole race. Faced with annihilation, we harmonise and concentrate our extra-sensory broadcasting and receiving - religions call this prayer - to create super-humans by activating dormant nucleotide sequences among our billions of mysterious "junk" DNA pairs, by reordering the subtle electromagnetic and sub-atomic forces underlying the double-helix. Thus the collective-unconscious of our race summons and conjures archetypal demigods, prophets, saints, seers, wizards, champions, heroes and geniuses, who emerge, lead us to safety and then vanish into myth and legend. Alice Whitaker was, in my view, one such archetypal, evolutionary figure.

Anthony Gleick (RN retired) "Reflections of a Radio Officer".

As they waited for the work party to arrive from HMS Rutherford, Alex stacked away his window-display models, with some regret, and locked his embarrassing film collection in a stout bag; a bag which Alice later surreptitiously dropped into deep water when he wasn't looking - a loss which baffled him for ever after, but which may, according to authoritative Victorian medical opinion, have saved his soul, his hearing and his eyesight. Alice took two brushed aluminium brief cases, lined them with scarlet silk and safely stowed her books of ritual, notes and magic, and her jewels, perfumes and cosmetics. Then the Whitakers made themselves a cup of tea and decided their next move.

They had learned from surviving by foraging that most food and goods stores were closer to residential areas of homes - or past homes - than to offices. The City, undoubtedly offering some of the safest buildings with its many skyscrapers and views over the river bridges, lacked reliable supplies of food, bedding and all the vital household items. It was also too close for comfort to Hackney and Tower Hamlets; districts that were low lying, mostly small houses, all flooded, and likely to hold too many corpses, or what might be left of them, from the

third visitation of the pandemic when sick people struggled home to die in their own beds.

The Whitakers needed instant accommodation; beds, furniture and kitchens and bathrooms. They wanted to be high above the water; and to have hidden entrances, which implied a complex building. The new building needed to be completely empty. They were not yet ready to share with anyone. They were still afraid of any resurgence of Glacier Flu' and of being attacked, robbed, or of simply having to carry passengers – people who couldn't forage for themselves. Being young, the perils of being isolated, in danger if they had an accident, simply didn't occur to them; they were young enough to know without doubt that they were immortal.

The most likely, suitable, unoccupied buildings were, like Harrods, those which had become surrounded by water in the first floods. Like Harrods, trade and traffic would have ceased at the initial inundation, of even a few feet of water and, as more and more died of flu', the best option for the surviving owners was to lock the buildings, make them as secure as possible, and move to dry land.

Like London cabbies, both Alice and Alex by now had detailed knowledge of London, particularly Estuary London. They had both foraged far and wide and gone into narrow flooded places in their slender kayaks where powered boats, even the popular small inflatables, couldn't navigate. They suspected where other waterborne foragers, few in number, had set up their concealed camps. And they had no wish to be close to any of them. It was Alex who made the suggestion they agreed on – partly because it amused him to have such a posh address. An address where he would never have dreamt, back in his childhood days in Lambeth, he might ever make his home.

The penthouse suites at Hyatt Carlton Tower, Cadogan Square, Chelsea, a suite each, seemed like a natural progression from their occupation of Harrods. And it was close enough for them to be able to continue to exploit

their hard won knowledge of how to recover everything they wanted from the store – ‘Mummy’s Grocers’ – as Alice had heard upper-class customers at Liberty describe it.

Alice waited on Harrods’ roof for the Royal Navy while Alex sped off in a single cockpit kayak, taking a circuitous route to confuse any watchers, to vet their new home. By the time he got back the sailors had arrived – and so had the two Tower academics they had met at the near drowning at Constitution Arch.

Just in case Alice’s self-appreciation and confidence of herself as a female goddess might be on the wane, the shy glances and bold stares of the six young male sailors, denied shore leave for almost three years, who came in a fast large inflatable under the command of Lieutenant Elizabeth Gordon, fully restored her. When Professor Blackmoor and Jonathan Goodge turned up in a more seaworthy powered yacht, with two of their male colleagues from the Tower, all trying to not be seen to be at all interested in Alice, other than in a professional or neighbourly capacity, her sense of power and celebrity filled the whole building.

The presence of Elizabeth Gordon, an attractive no nonsense, square rigged, fair haired, safe and intelligent thirty-five year old, who understood both nuclear engines and deep ocean navigation, only served to contrast and enhance Alice’s youthful feminine glory. When Alex returned from his reconnoitre, he immediately fell in love with Elizabeth, the first, perhaps available, female he had seen at close quarters in two years, and he followed her around like a large dog, wagging its tale at everything and anything the woman did or said.

The Rutherford tender moored by a large second floor window on Knightsbridge, a window which the men unceremoniously removed. Alice and Alex worked with the six sailors to cart their most precious possessions, including generators and lights, to the craft. Two of the sailors donned skin-diving gear and swam down into the lower floors with powerful lamps to recover items that

Alice wanted. The academics helped where they could and they forbore to quiz Alice about the new location. They did however endlessly rehearse the pros and cons of joining their group in the Tower – always, not unexpectedly, reaching the conclusion that Alex and Alice would be far better served by moving in with them.

The survivors from the submarine, the survivors from the Tower and the surviving Whitakers made a group of thirteen; eleven males and two females. With a common task in hand, to move Alice and Alex's belongings, and on the first occasion in some years that they had spent appreciable time with strangers, and with the opulent party flavour imparted by Harrods legendary and exotic goods, an atmosphere of celebration developed; as if this were the start of a new, interesting phase, from which only good would come. Everybody could only see positive characteristics in the others. They all liked each other. Conversation flowed freely and, as the work came near its end, and, with the sailors being given permission by Lieutenant Gordon, several bottles of salvaged champagne were tested – for quality and research purposes only.

But underlying the jollity and good feelings, a current ran which was common to all and which governed all. The more they enjoyed the afternoon, the more excited they became, then the stronger the undertow pulled back at their psyches. The submariners, on only their second day back in London, the first day they had left the ship, were learning, with bewilderment, disbelief and consternation that denied the reality of their grief, that almost everyone they had known, when HMS Rutherford set out on its mission nearly three years earlier, was most likely to be dead. The men from the Tower, as they responded to the sailors' questions, reflected again on their own losses of family, friends, colleagues and even enemies; for even one's enemies help to make the world go round in its familiar groove. Alice and Alex had been too busy simply surviving to properly grieve their dead. The shock to their systems had never been acknowledged, never mind explored or assuaged. The bond of those few workers that afternoon, was the bond of feeling they were numbered

among the few, the very few, of the human race, who had survived. And somehow, miraculously at the collapse of civilisation, they had remained civil.

The sailors who undertook the several trips to transfer the goods to The Hyatt were sworn to secrecy. Promises which Alice trusted; for her father had been a sailor, like these sober young men. And like her, they mostly came from working-class families, a culture which she understood. The sailors, with skilled electrical engineers among them, took less than an hour to rig up reliable generators and to plug in the entire top floor of the building in Cadogan Square – the lights, electric heaters, power circuits and even power showers. As at Harrods, the water tanks were still full with clean if old water – with enough bleach added, it would do for washing – but they would still have to find bottled water to drink.

It was growing dark as the team assembled on the fourth floor of Harrods round a group of lamps for a final cup of real tea, courtesy of Alex's store of frozen milk, which was to be shared with all.

"You've shown us all how to survive in the Estuary," said Elizabeth Gordon smiling with her eyes at Alex and Alice, "...it's quite an art."

"We've had a lot of time to learn" replied Alice.

"You must come and see Rutherford..." continued Elizabeth, "...she's quite a girl."

Ten pairs of male eyes caught the glow of the lamps as they flashed longingly at Alice from the dusk.

"Yes. We'll come - soon... ...Say! How did Captain Cruickshank 'see' the buttons on Al Jazari's cuff? How could he do that?"

"Oh that was with the help of Anthony Gleick, here... Tell them Anthony how we did the magic."

He was probably no more than twenty-seven, tall as Alex, with a self-contained stillness, "... Yes Ma'am. I'm on communications..." he flushed a little as he became the focus of the group, "...and Rutherford has some of the most powerful telecoms in the world. About the best there is. And it is a warship – and an intelligence gathering vessel. So we can still patch into the satellites. There's a low orbit air-traffic monitor and telecoms unit in geostationary orbit above London – and, well, that's it..."

"Gerr'orf" growled Alex. "...You can see buttons – from space. You're havin' me on..."

"...He's having us all on!" Alex laughed. "S'impossible – can't be done."

Two or three of the youngest sailors bunched their hands and looked to Anthony (The Geek) Gleick for a lead in case they needed to physically impress the truth on this civilian yob and defend the honour of the crew.

Anthony smiled slowly, allowing his professional face to dissolve into admitting them into an open secret. "It was a particularly clear day..." he acknowledged Alex's cynicism, "...but, with a blue sky, good light and a non-moving target – we did it! I could have counted the hairs on his nose today... Worried the hell out of Mister Jazari didn't it" He flapped hysterically at his own cuff and he laughed aloud, loud and long, until everyone couldn't help but join in.

Jonathan Goodge was leaning forwards, two hands around his steaming mug of tea, enthralled by the conversation.

"Was that the EuroTelSat XN6?" he asked, "...and it's got an Asaaki 7000 telephoto unit, hasn't it... How do you get control of it?"

"Hey whoa there!" intervened Lieutenant Gordon, still laughing, "...that sounds like classified or at least privileged information. Don't answer that Mr. Gleick..."

Anthony dutifully closed his mouth – and smiled back at Jonathan.

“How do **you** – know that?” Martin Blackmoor jumped in, giving Alice a short respite from his constant and close observation and making the logical deduction that Jonathan had correctly identified the technology.

Jonathan waved airily and became vague. “Oh, I read all about it once. We were doing a report on the psychology of long distance telecoms – and I just picked it up. It’s all public domain stuff, you know.”

“Humph!” said Professor Blackmoor, justifiably unconvinced. Then a million questions occurred to him, “...if you can see from space – then you can trace the new shoreline – and the in-land flooding – and where the people are...” he said excitedly.

“Can you see settlements up in the hills? – Smoke from stoves and fires and so on? – You see, we are in the process...” he added pompously, a pomposity which he recognised, but he needed to stake his claim as early as possible, “...of organising dialogue with all the survivors – and perhaps,” he coughed modestly “...to bring the community together.”

Nobody responded. Jonathan Goodge, guessing the next lines, was stunned by the man’s unashamed, driving ambition.

“...I’m sure you’ll all agree ...Oh it may be a little too soon for you to have thought it through as we have...” He waved to include his three colleagues with a gesture that indicated he already had their backing and agreement, “...But we’ve been discussing this for some time. Britain needs good governance – or the population may slide back into a new Dark Ages, if that isn’t a contradiction in terms. There are those among us, even among the very few who have survived, who could lead the community, could bring back hope, could help to make a great future...”

Martin Blackmoor was suddenly aware that he was on the verge of making himself incredible and of ranting, so he calmed down "...Starting of course with helping everyone to survive as we are doing now – dividing out the useful spoils, or in fact that which is not spoiled, left by our countrymen who have died." He was wise enough at this point in his unrehearsed oratory to avoid themes like Sacrifice and Dying for the Nation – as none had actually chosen to die and few had died nobly.

He had though to pose issues that only a man of his intellect, insight and energy could resolve. They had to want him to lead.

"For example, we must all forage to survive; does private ownership still exist. Who owns the land – when all the farmers have died? Who owns the buildings? How can society start to function again? What should the community make its first priorities? What is needed immediately? What skills will our children need – if there are to be any children; how many children are there today? And if we are to educate the next generation to deal with the new world – what do we teach them?"

He was right – none had thought about these matters and his intellect was racing ahead of them all. He now wanted to make one major point before he clambered off his soapbox – or was knocked off it. It was the point he'd had in mind from the outset – it was the real reason he had come to meet these simple sailors, at the earliest possible opportunity.

"...And how, if the need ever arises, will we defend our people? If, in other parts of the world, unscrupulous gangs of marauders appear out of the ashes of the old order and – for example, raid London. Raid this very estuary with its rich pickings of salvage and its stores of consumables which we are all relying on for our very lives...?"

“We could, I think, blast them out of the water... Even nuke ‘em,” chimed in Elizabeth Gordon, confident of the power of HMS Rutherford.

Her remark was exactly what Professor Blackmoor had manoeuvred to elicit. She was right on cue.

“You are of course right Lieutenant. Most perceptive of you. Rutherford indeed has that power. But ...We don’t want to exist in a state of armed alert. In a state of war. Fearing every stranger who comes over our horizon. ...Surely, if we are to learn anything from this immense human tragedy, it is that mankind must cooperate – and do so intelligently. We need Intelligent Cooperation – subtle and thoughtful government. Violence curbed by central power on behalf of the people – and our weapons used only for and by the people. We are all equally entitled and equally valid. And equally valuable. We cannot let this most free nation, this country of fiercely independent, fair and just people...”

Jonathan was only slightly surprised to see, in the half-light, chests swelling proudly and attention riveted on Martin’s words. But he was, nevertheless, a little surprised.

“...become a nation led by warriors. Our armaments must be deployed only by the Will of the people...”

And there, he had said enough for one day. The seed was firmly planted, at least in the minds of eleven percent of the crew of the mighty submarine, a crew of trained warriors, that if a command chain was to be rebuilt, which it obviously should, then “The People” represented by far-seeing and vastly intelligent superior beings, should be at the top of the command structure.

Martin Blackmoor knew when to stop. And he stopped now, hiding his glee at his small triumph.

There was another long silence.

“We will not,” said Alice quietly, with that command in her voice that Alex had wondered at before, “...We will not be as we were before. The old ways brought us this ruin...” her hands indicated the world outside, “Now there will be a new way for mankind.”

Alice stood – and stepped a few feet back from the circle, illuminated by faint reflections. Not a breath could be heard. Not a hand moved.

“Tomorrow, I will visit Captain Cruickshank and discuss these matters.”

‘She is either as mad as a hatter or another Joan of Arc,’ thought Jonathan Goodge, putting on his psychologist’s hat. ‘Maybe she is the way forward – maybe I should allow this. Where, after all, in the present reality, does my allegiance lie?’

It was Martin Blackmoor’s turn to look stunned – and silently furious. He couldn’t counter this ... this ‘Witchcraft’. But perhaps, just perhaps, he could ally her to him. What power and influence his intelligence and her, ...what...? her presence, her charisma might wield; and what a prize in this ugly, grieving world; What a beautiful prize to capture and to own.

Alice spoke again. “I am tired, and I must perform my rituals for the evening. Alex and I will leave now. Thank you Elizabeth and our grateful thanks to you boys for all you have done today,” she bestowed a radiant smile on them all which they would carry into their dreams. “...And please give my thanks to Captain Cruickshank.”

Nobody spoke as she turned and left, followed by Alex. And nobody spoke about her after she had gone. The others made their farewells, took to their boats and went their separate ways – deep in thought or thoughtless enchantment.

Chapter Seventeen

English Breakfast

In the final analysis, all wealth, power and influence has relied at root on violence. Society tolerated state sponsored violence – its military and police forces, arrests, trails and prisons – in exchange for stability. Can that foundation shift without destroying the community? – *Captain James Cruickshank (RN)*.

“Ah! Captain Cruickshank, What a very great pleasure – and what a very great relief it is – for us all here, to welcome you to London.”

“Well Thank You Professor Blackmoor. I look forward to meeting with you. ...Now, when you say ‘us’ I’m interested to learn just who and how many you are Professor.”

It had taken the academics less than an hour to navigate round Hyde Park Corner, up Park Lane and across to Cavendish Square, securing their craft just before the light failed; and to walk up to the Tower. Martin Blackmoor had collared Paul Broadling as his back-up and assistant, gone straight to the telecoms equipment, rapidly tuned in to the submarine – and raised Jim Cruickshank.

“...We are in essence a group of free-radicals,” smiled Martin Blackmoor. “We’ve gathered here at BT Tower and as far as we know, we are the democratic voice of London, as it were. We broadcast every day and search for other survivors and have formed a working community organisation; set up discussion groups; are considering the key issues and, I suppose, - we are the government, such as it is, of London.”

“Then, again, I’m most pleased to make your acquaintance, Professor.”

Martin Blackmoor needed more than an acquaintance. And he’d be damned if he was just going to sit around and wait for that – that – oddly compelling girl to engage on equal terms with what was indubitably the most powerful

force in London – if not in the whole of Britain – the captain of HMS Rutherford.

“...I understand...”

“Er! We don’t know...”

“Sorry Professor – do go on.”

“Not at all Captain – do go on. You were saying...?”

“No sir. I interrupted you. ...Do please continue.”

Martin Blackmoor’s impatience cracked first. “I was about to say Captain; that we have no news of the Queen, or any of the Royal Family – nor of the Government – do you have any intelligence?”

“The last I heard Professor, more than a year ago, was from the Admiralty – You’ll appreciate that the Admiralty never transmitted... never admitted in their transmissions; just how parlous things were at the Admiralty, or elsewhere. National Security you see...”

“I can perfectly well understand their reticence Captain...”

“Yes sir. But they were able to let us know that The Court, in its formal sense – had moved to Balmoral. Who survives, we don’t know. But the official residence is currently in Scotland.”

“...That’s something Captain. It gives us a start. ...and the Government?”

“Hmm! Well Professor. We have no data on where the Government went. ...My chain of command is of course via the Admiralty – and their allegiance would, I suppose, - in the absence of a Minister of Defence or indeed a Defence Ministry - and therefore my allegiance also, would be to Her Majesty or the Heir to the Throne...?”

“Advised of course by Her Prime Minister... ...In fact, after several hundred years of parliamentary democracy we can cut to the chase Captain, and be sure that The Queen would still be directed by Her Government. ...Unless you envisage a return to inherited Monarchy, Captain?”

“Perhaps that’s so, Professor.”

“Complex and weighty matters, Captain.”

“Yes Professor. We’ll have to give them a great deal of thought.”

“...We have held a number of committee meetings. Governing Council of London meetings, Captain, over the past year or so...”

“Have you now, sir...”

“And we’re keen to share our thoughts – the ideas from the Governing Council of London and our initial conclusions – with you Captain.”

“That’s kind of you Professor...”

“...You must owe yourself a spot of shore-leave Captain? And your chief officers? Would you like to come over for breakfast and an exchange of information, in the morning? ...We have a wonderful cook who looks after us very well, Captain. ...Not to create any border conflicts in our first conversation – but our Betty, with our own very expert assistance can whistle up a most mouth watering Full English Breakfast... It tastes just as good if you call it a British Breakfast; Captain...”

“You are most hospitable sir; you and your colleagues. And my officers and I haven’t received such a generous invitation in... ...Well in such a long time as I can’t remember when.”

Martin Blackmoor kept a welcome smile on his face and controlled his breathing. Paul Broadling held his breath. He had to admire the man's political skills. He was a real operator.

"We would love to come along and see you all – in the Tower. Mooring in Cavendish Square you say..."

"That's marvellous Captain – and the college will so enjoy it. There is so much news to exchange."

"...But – let's make it the day after the day after tomorrow, Professor. If you are not tied up that day and if your offer extends that far..."

Martin gritted his teeth. Then he relaxed and smiled welcomingly again.

"...Of course, of course, Captain. It'll give us time to get fresh eggs..."

He let the thought of fresh eggs dangle for an enticing moment. "... and Betty's home baked bread is already legendary..."

"It sounds like a trip to heaven Professor. And I'm sorry we have to delay it – but we have other items to take care of first. That helicopter we, Er, co-opted this morning for one... I need two working days. ...I'll tell you more – at breakfast – on Thursday then... Ten o'clock?"

"We are all looking forward to it Captain – very much. How many from HMS Rutherford?"

"It's a matter of who I dare to leave behind. Let's say six of us on the first foray – if you can cope with that number?"

"Absolutely. It'll be our pleasure."

"Damn – damn and double damn." Shouted Martin as the connection was closed.

“You did very well, Martin. I take my hat off to you.” said Paul. “Brilliantly well done I would say.”

“...But it gives that weird little witch two days to get to him before we do.”

“He’s a busy man Martin. And I’m sure a Dean of London University – and...” he added with a conspiratorial slyness, “...shall we say Leader of the Governing Council of London? Will carry far more weight with a sober, Scottish sixty-something submariner than an uneducated shop assistant – once he’s got over her... her... charisma – which we can help him to do...”

“Well we’ll see!” said Martin, slightly mollified.

“We’d better get everyone together and write some past Governing Council Minutes for our visiting Sea Captain. Longhand or Word-processed – do you think?”

Chapter Eighteen

This Vexed Priest

“Violence is the last resort of the incompetent” – *Isaac Asimov*.

Starting that same day; over the next year Captain Cruickshank put skeleton crews on board the other four nuclear submarines, which had been abandoned in Scotland, and brought them to London to join HMS Rutherford at its mooring between the most easterly bridge across the Thames and the North Sea.

As more survivors crept from their lairs and dens and, agog with curiosity, came to see the ships, every fit young person he could entice he recruited as crew, stopping just short of shanghaiing them. After only two meetings with Lieutenant Gordon, Alex was also persuaded to join the Royal Navy – not to see the world – but to live aboard one of the most sophisticated submarines on Earth, in the Thames Estuary, with a team of bright energetic younger people – including females; and be trained in essential trades, global communications, professional war and diplomacy. With the long view of an Elder, considering the effects down the next seven generations, Jim Cruickshank did everything he could to balance the genders and mix the racial types.

HMS Rutherford, HMS Russell, HMS Maxwell, HMS Faraday and HMS Newton moored downstream from the marooned Queen Elizabeth the Second Bridge, its immense anchoring piles and towers sitting miles from either shore. The submarines lay at anchor about a mile from each other.

A few dozen metres west of the London side of the bridge, now fifty feet below the surface on what had been the south bank, were three immense storage tanks of petrol, and diesel – still half full. Divers brought pipes and pumps up to the surface and made the fuel available to estuary Londoners.

“But why submarines, Captain?” queried Jonathan Goodge, “Why not other large naval ships – an aircraft carrier for example?”

“We have limited training resources Doctor Goodge. And if I am to rebuild the excellence of the British navy, I want my crews to train on the most up to date ships we have; particularly to be familiar with our telecoms – our intelligence gathering and communications. That’s one reason. Another is that I and the others on HMS Rutherford understand these vessels – and I am a great believer in always working from the known to the unknown, not the other way round...”

“...And your third reason?” encouraged Jonathan, sensing more to come from the usually verbally economic Captain.

“They have infinite power.” He said simply.

“...Not quite true I know. The nuclear piles have a half life – but it’s a long one. And I would not normally exaggerate – but we will have increasing difficulty finding processed fuel oil...”

“Yes – we figure that too...”

“And these are nuclear. These power plants can each produce 150,000 horsepower... That will drive turbines to make enough electricity for about 35,000 family homes. ...And I’ve got five of them.”

“Good God! You can electrify what’s left of London then!” Jonathan’s brain was racing, “And what armaments have you got?”

“Ah! Well ...Sir. I think that has to remain classified.”

“From whom Captain? There’s nobody out there to be our enemy. For Heaven’s sake man!”

“I’m a cautious man Doctor Goodge.”

Jonathan muttered something not entirely complimentary under his breath.

“...Let’s just say that I’m fairly confident of our capability to first of all detect any incoming vessels, aircraft – aircraft at any height or speed, submarines or land vehicles; to know what armaments, if any, they have, and to dissuade them from coming any nearer than several hundred miles – if we need to stop them.”

“Good Lord!”

“My weakest component – my Achilles Heel, is the size of my crew. And that is what we are working on daily.”

The Royal Navy commandeered Canary Wharf and its high rise buildings for accommodation as a Naval College. Jim Cruickshank, listening to Alice Whitaker and to his own instincts, was adamant that each sailor would learn all the theoretical and practical skills required to operate the submarines. Every crew member would be a holographic representation of the entire company – each individual reflecting the skills of the group.

“At full strength...” said the Captain, “we will number only about five-hundred. We cannot afford to lose an engineer and be brought to a halt, lose a radio officer and be silenced, lose a cook and eat raw food, lose a navigator and be lost, lose a doctor and die. We must all know everything.” He reinforced and demonstrated his determination by going back to school himself. Tailoring was included in the curriculum – the uniforms, navy blue, were pretty classy.

In Canary Wharf, behind its stainless steel cladding, they also made defensible storage rooms for the goods gathered by the foraging parties – which with teams and large inflatable boats under Alex’s guidance, became ever more profitable. Sometimes Alex, taking a leaf from Muhammad Al Jazari’s book of philosophy, priced up their

cache of stores – and gasped with wonder at his potential wealth. In a little less than a year on the water, they had all become multi-millionaires – even billionaires - if the money economy ever took over again from the real economy. The goods, first priority being tinned food and frozen food, had to be defended from scavengers of all kinds – human, animal and rodent.

The rats were enormous and aggressive. All accommodation had to be protected with one-way-valves in pipes and wire netting protecting vulnerable surfaces. Wild dogs and cats could be lethal and were best avoided. In the murky water, still rising and increasingly cold, shoals of long black eels filled shallow basins, particularly basins close by drowned homes. Sharks, small whales and dolphins became common visitors and large unidentified fish flashed through the water, obscured by depth and muddied turbulence. Nobody was tempted to swim in the estuary. Bird life blossomed with every sort nesting on empty buildings, old boats, bridges and towers. They were not hunted. Foraging brought more than enough. It was supplemented by fresh produce from smallholdings that sprang up in the least likely places, growing basic crops like corn and feeding goats, pigs, geese, ducks and hens – all fear of a recurrence of avian flu suppressed in the urge for fresh eggs, milk and meat.

The Tower community, not quite as seductive to teenagers and twenty-something's as the power and practicality, not to mention the uniforms and romantic possibilities, of the Navy, nevertheless grew as more survivors emerged and drew together on dry land, led by the academics and their excellent global communications. With fuel available from the storage tanks near the submarines and by rigging up wind and wave generators, they gained reliable electricity and were able to supply other buildings nearby. Families, most fractured and decimated by the pandemic, were attracted by the promise of fuel, energy and intelligently directed, safer foraging. The tutors did what they knew

best and believed in the most – they started classes and they educated people.

The Tower now had its ankles in a few feet of water at high tide, but, still beaming out light and messages day and night, it had become the beacon of hope and of sustenance for dry-land Londoners and retained its status as the centre of London's surviving families and communities. Martin Blackmoor led a team of Representatives of the Governing Council of London, who searched the dry districts to the north and regularly crossed the dangerous estuary to find survivors in the south. With the sea still rising and, advised as Alice had been by Captain Cruickshank to live high, the Tower town rapidly colonised the top floors of the Nash Terraces around Regents Park, and then occupied Primrose Hill and on up into Hampstead, following the ridges of previously invisible and un-remarked hills. The night was once more illuminated with the lights of not millions but of many hundreds of homes.

The number of known survivors grew. The Tower computerised the list of people and created a Directory. Each person who plucked up the courage to contact the group knew of other survivors who were living in isolation. These names also went into the Directory. The number of survivors in Greater London, statistically calculated by Paul Broadling, tended towards the twenty-percent that had seemed logical two years ago. What that meant, they realised, was that eighty-percent had died. There had been some fifteen million people in Greater London, out to the stockbroker belts beyond the M25 motorway; so twelve million must have died. No human mind could comprehend, could empathise with, that number of deaths.

The estimated two million survivors had scattered outwards and upwards – away from the sea and up to elevated towns where foraging kept them alive. Slowly, communications with these two million were established. Radio transmissions, now via a salvaged Broadcasting House, bringing the BBC back on air, continued day and

night for anyone with a battery radio. Inner London, Estuary London, Broadling calculated, had a hidden population of about a quarter of a million. The Tower had made direct contact with some twenty-thousand of them.

Professor Martin Blackmoor, once nearly a Knight and now undisputed Leader of the Governing Council of London and by merit and protocol also the Dean of The University of London, groomed and allowed his self-importance to grow. With his influence and position he could bestow favours large and small on anyone. He had the power of patronage. In turn he was admired by men and courted by women – he was a great celebrity who could take whatever pleasures he desired.

He took pains to act benignly at all times. He cultivated his popularity and worked hard at organising life for the people to be better and better. But rarely a day passed when, from the top of his two hundred and forty foot Tower, he did not cast a sideways, acquisitive glance at the flotilla of five warships in the Estuary of London, an estuary which the Governing Council of London, it could not be denied, governed - democratically. He spoke with Jim Cruickshank as often as possible, never neglecting to raise the subject of regeneration and governance of “our great nation” and how the hierarchy of responsibility and power might be structured.

Alex never officially left Alice and their luxurious and still secret Cadogan Square penthouse home. There wasn't a particular day when he sat Alice down and said “I'm leaving.” But he stayed away for longer and longer periods, returning whenever training and his social life allowed. The submarines were twenty miles downstream, too far for a casual day-return journey by kayak, so Alex and Alice obtained a fast, small powerboat from a marina near Gravesend which they hid, appropriately, inside the flooded upper floors of the green roofed Ministry of Defence in Whitehall. Alice would paddle silently and unseen from Knightsbridge and, entering through a

camouflaged flap, swap boats at the Ministry, paddle the black powerboat, under the stern gaze of Admiral Lord Nelson, through alleyways into the complex of buildings around Trafalgar Square, then race away suddenly and noisily downstream.

With the Royal Navy in residence, the estuary had become a safer place, but Alice, and Alex, still chose stealth and secrecy as the best defence for Alice. At HMS Rutherford, Alex would take the boat for refuelling and Alice had her meetings with Jim Cruickshank.

“It was as if...” Jim Cruickshank recalled years later, “Alice was referring all the time she spoke, to an inner vision. As if she could see further and deeper than anyone I had ever met. She was inspired – in the true meaning of the word – she had taken into herself a spirit, breathing into her soul, which gave her an astounding... and you know I am not given to hyperbole... an astounding charisma ...and tremendous strength. I loved her very dearly.”

Alice did not always meet Jim Cruickshank alone. Often the entire ship’s company would crowd into the assembly room to hear their conversation.

“The passage of life, since we emerged from our caves and came down from the trees, has been a tortuous winding path through a lunatic asylum. The majority of the sane have hoped to get from one end of the path to the other without encountering too many lunatics; mothers and fathers who attacked their own children; sadistic teachers and bosses; neighbours from hell; deranged drunk and drugged teenagers; sociopaths in high places; conscienceless criminals; psychopathic Dictators; torturers: mad Generals and Bishops sending millions to their deaths to defend crazed ideas and their lands...”

This time...” her message was unequivocal and her magic very strong, “It will be done differently. The human race will learn from our turbulent past and evolve from warring and violent conflict to a new state of being and

understanding. The only authorities in our new society will be those of self-governance. Each will be the author of their own destiny. We can only truly have power over ourselves – we are our own authority. None shall have power over another. We will all be equally powerful and will wield our power with responsibility. We must individuate.”

“Everyone seeks power. In the past we have yearned for and pursued the primitive power; Power for Dominion; the power of dictators and bullies. From now, we will only cultivate Power for Service; the power of sages; the Power of Love. Power for Dominion requires – it can only function – if the dominated invest power in the leader. They ask to be dominated and hand their Will over to the leader. This is the primate, herd animal, irresponsible response. We must now evolve beyond it. ‘I was only obeying orders’ can never again be accepted as an excuse. All must say ‘I think for myself, I am responsible for my own actions and I invest nobody with power over me’. It truly is better to live on our feet than to die on our bellies.”

In the world of Martin Blackmoor, the traditional world of politics, influence, spin, hierarchy, forces and power structures – Alice’s message was seditious. “Where is she getting this stuff?” he snarled. Girl’s, even girl’s as pretty and as young as Alice, had been beheaded or tortured and burned at the stake for far, far less.

Though the term was much too old fashioned for a post modernist such as Professor Blackmoor to use – she was preaching “Treason and Treachery”.

‘Will no one rid me of this vexed priest,’ he mumbled in his dreams.

And yet he too loved her. He desired her. She haunted his sleep. His intuition and his analysis of the culture of the Naval College informed him that she was whispering in the ear of the most powerful man in London – the commander of an internationally powerful, cohesive, disciplined fighting force. She was, he knew, whispering a message

which countered his own carefully planned and constructed hints and webs concerning the law of the land. Violence is the sole prerogative of governments – and Martin had become, de facto, the governor. The Government has to have control of the nation's weapons for defensive and offensive purposes. Captain Cruickshank must take his orders from the People – as defined by Martin Blackmoor. He would... if she, just a scrap of an uneducated girl, acted like a woman should; acted with femininity and knew her place and acknowledged him as her master; if she bowed before his true strength ...he would raise her up, to be his queenly consort. And so he dreamed.

As he brooded on the burgeoning presence and power of Cruickshank's Royal Navy – Martin had a Eureka moment. He, the governing council, would form a land force. He would build a combined Army and Police force. Society, even such small communities as London could muster, always contained rogue elements. Crimes would be committed; and the government, under his leadership, would have to deal with the criminals. He would have a Force of Good Men and create new Courts and Justice – for the Good of the People. And... to organise his army, they would re-open The Ministry of Defence. The question of resuscitating the Admiralty and how Captain Cruickshank would view it could be introduced later.

The same day as he had his idea, he put forward a proposal to recruit and train men and youths as the core of the Special Armed Team, which he shortened to SPAT, for the Defence of London and Britain, which was adopted by the Governing Council of London by a majority of thirty to one. The lone dissenter was Jonathan Goodge.

Chapter Nineteen

Landlords

“All change is threatening. Profound change is profoundly threatening. Like starving African children who cannot or will not eat western food; most of us would rather die than change our paradigm – that is, we will not alter the basic beliefs and habits upon which we have constructed our view of the world.”

Second Lieutenant Benjamin Levy, of HMS Rutherford – Assembly at Clapham Common.

London weather, never regarded as one of the best climates on Earth, was not improved by global warming. The sea was colder; icebergs drifted down the east and west coasts and were often to be seen in the English Channel. There was far more cloud than before; grey layers of damp, turbid shadows, inexorably drifting, dense packed, filling the skies from horizon to horizon. And it rained. And it rained. And it rained. When the wind blew it blew strongly. It picked up the top of the waves in the estuary, plucked harsh pellets of freezing salt water from the crests and flung them in their millions at the buildings, boats and any people foolish enough to be out and about. On many nights, the north-east wind scudded fast and low across the estuary, full of ice, spleen and disappointment, to fall upon the lonely island outcrops of once warm, welcoming and admired buildings; a shrieking, moaning, stinging, whining banshee blowing from the Russian Steppes, hopelessly seeking solace among the desolation.

As the water level rose, fewer buildings stood proud from the surface and local navigation related less and less to the old maps of London streets, relying more on the tallest landmarks. Lamp posts, pylons and telegraph poles carrying dangerously complex wires were drowned deep under water, safely neutralised from snagging passing boats. The rails and roadways of the twenty Thames crossings in central London lurked at different depths beneath the surface; life threatening hazards in the surging tides. Alex had watched helplessly from his kayak one grey evening, as the outgoing eight-knot tide, surging

and swirling over the roadway and through the wrought-iron fretwork of the starkly marooned Chelsea Bridge, absent-mindedly snaked out a two hundred foot long, twenty foot wide coiling tentacle and sucked a forty-foot barge and its seven or eight passengers, cautiously negotiating their way around the bridge and downstream, into the centre of the river, pressing it against the raised metal beams; upending the craft in a moment and rapidly breaking it apart. The failing light, the distance and his own battle with the currents prevented Alex from seeing what happened to the shipwrecked people.

The dangerous tidal race also demolished structures and buildings – washing away clay and earth from the foundations or exploiting crumbling brickwork and inferior concrete. One day a street of fine Edwardian terraces stalwartly stood in Albert Bridge Road, in the downpour of rain, seven stories high, four floors still above water, monumentally eternal, quiet and strong, confidently funnelling the endlessly probing, restless estuary waters. The next day, part of the frontage had collapsed; thousands of tons of brick, timber and roofs vanished under water, exposing the soft vulnerable interiors of dozens of what had once been expensive private homes. Some of the rooms had still harboured and dignified the remains of the dead, which, ever pragmatic, the cold, unfeeling, uncaring ocean would scoop out and feed to the squirming eels and screeching gulls.

But it was exceptionally mild and calm on the morning after Muhammad Al Jazari's helicopter had invaded their secret hideaway, and two days before Martin Blackmoor could really get to work on Captain Cruickshank at their first breakfast meeting, when Alice and Alex paddled the twin-cockpit *Aluet Sea 11* kayak, checked and re-provisioned to military expedition standards, down to the main channel and eastwards out of London. Even on a day as bright as this the camouflaged craft and its two paddlers were difficult to spot against the grey and brown colours of the water and the urban landscape. Nevertheless, they instinctively used every scrap of cover and shadow they could to avoid being silhouetted against

the bright surface of the sea or the pale background buildings.

After an hour and a half of skimming expertly and effortlessly downstream they passed Wapping Pier, leaving the tall drowned buildings of central London behind, and in many ways the wider estuary and its margins seemed more normal and natural. Though riverside buildings still poked their roofs above the playful sparkle of the waves and besieged, converted wharves sported brave banners advertising the sale of submerged luxury apartments, the area they paddled through appeared somehow natural and appropriate, as if the buildings had grown up from the sea-bed. In the gentle light, on the smooth surface, with a safe, containing and exciting destination ahead of them, three years of vigilance and instinctual paranoia, three years of an unspoken dark burden of disease and danger and distress, three years of concealment and suspicion, melted away.

“Hey! Alice...” called Alex from the rear cockpit, “Are we goin’ on our hollies – Shall we go down Southend and get ourselves a Fish ‘n Chips dinner – then I could join the lads down the Kings Head for a piss-up?”

Alice smiled in warm agreement, remembering her days out in Southend-on-Sea. Then sadness filled her mind as the friends and family she had lost crowded into the spotlight of consciousness.

After two hours, beyond a modern bridge, still standing high above the estuary, ahead of them they could see the menacingly powerful shape of HMS Rutherford lying on the quiescent water; and it silenced them.

Their super-expedition double-cockpit kayak; seaworthy and dependable, was twenty-two feet long, about seven metres, with a beam of just over two feet. Beaching it and hauling it up the elevator shaft in Harrods had been difficult, and though Alex now threw it around with ease, the kayak, after a hard day’s work foraging, could loom very large in their eyes. But it was like a tadpole attacking

a blue-whale as they paddled towards the still classified, top secret, *Orcinus-Class* submarine.

HMS Rutherford was two hundred metres in length; a length visually exaggerated by the backbone of the enormous bow and stern disappearing below the surface fore and aft, leaving the great curving bulk of the middle section, carrying a moulded low-level superstructure, looming fifteen metres above the water – forty-nine-feet above the kayak and leaving the eye to guess where the ship began and ended. It was thirty metres wide, some ninety-eight feet, which allowed for a helipad, a flattened area of deck fifty-feet wide on the front section, without breaking the smooth, aqua-dynamic lines of the ship. From the deck down to the keel below the conning tower, it also measured thirty metres, much of its height now above the waterline, its construction and architectural strength based on a series of braced, perfect circles; enabling it to dive to one-thousand metres, three-thousand-two-hundred feet, two-thirds of a mile down beneath the surface. Submerged, it displaced seventy-five-thousand tons of water and, still a very deep secret, it had an underwater speed of forty knots.

In its double self-healing carbon fibre skin, filled with an “intelligent” viscous material which solidified on contact with water, it carried hundreds of short range electronic, video and sound probes whose data was converted to visual pictures on screens on the bridge – giving the pilot surround-viewing, a 360 degree transparent image of the outside. Its weaponry, still classified, included no less than twenty-five Intercontinental-Ballistic-Missiles, each with fifteen nuclear warheads with ranges up to eight-thousand miles. An unladen ICBM, without warheads, could be fired into orbit with a reconnaissance capability which would put the fear of God into the guilty, and persuade them to repent of their sins – if they ever learned they were being watched so closely from the heavens. Even more secret, a fact which surprisingly the captain later shared with Jonathan Goodge, than its other features, the sub’s nuclear engines produced one-

hundred-and-fifty-thousand horse power; without having to store hay for the horses.

The outer skin was not flat as it seemed from a distance. It comprised thousands of radar and sonar deflecting shallow valleys, dimples and ripples, which close up looked very fish like, though perhaps having more of the skin of a squid than a shark. Large structures extended sideways under the water; which Alex took to be carrying stabilizers or propulsion units.

“Bloody Norah!” breathed Alex as they sidled up to a metal stair depending from the conning tower deck area, in the shadow of the vessel.

“Fantastic!” said Alice.

Two of the young sailors who’d helped with the removal to Cadogan Square, clambered down the steps. “Tie up to the steps here...” one of them called. “...Do you want us to bring your ...um, vessel aboard?”

“No thanks. If it’s not in the way; we’ll leave it on the water.”

“...Just don’t go diving down with our kayak trailing after...” said Alex as he cricked his neck to see up the blue-black bulbous wall above, and climbed the steps.

Alice followed him, her eyes shining with anticipation. She could “see” or feel, she never could define which senses were involved, some hints of the future – of the journeys and events which would unfold from this moment. This was a significant moment; it was a beginning; it was a fork in the path, a direction she must choose correctly; it was... How could she grasp its meaning? ...A watershed in her life - and a fulcrum of divergence for humanity.

On deck, grey bearded Captain Cruickshank was there to greet them. He was in full uniform and was accompanied by his three senior officers, also in their best. HMS Rutherford was intent upon making a solid impression on

London, and these two were the first Londoners they would welcome aboard.

“Ah! Miss Alice?” smiled Jim Cruickshank invitingly. His eyes took in more than their immediate appearance; his glance noted and reflected their physical tautness, their calloused hands, their haunted wariness, and understood some of the continuous trauma these two youngsters had endured – and overcome. It had been a bad time, a very bad time. They had witnessed too much death, too much disruption and too many threats. He and his crew had also lost everyone they had known and loved – but, unlike these adult-children, with the pinched cast of street-orphans, he hadn’t seen his family and friends die. “In battle terms...” he thought to himself, “they are suffering from post traumatic stress.”

But he let none of this knowledge filter into his expression.

“Alice Whitaker” said Alice extending her hand. “...And this is my brother Alex.”

The deck, a high platform above the river, offered a marvellous view, in the warm bright air, of the estuary and the clearway out to sea. It swayed a little on the light swell. But it was reassuringly indestructible and imperturbable. Everything that could be cleaned was clean. Everything that could be polished was polished. And everything that should be folded, secured and locked down was properly stowed. A flag flew on a short mast from the conning tower. The Royal Navy knew how to present a vessel.

Alex wasn’t sure whether to say “Hi” and wave, or to salute, though he didn’t know how to, or to shake hands. After a baffling instant rehearsal of all three, he opted to follow Alice and shook hands with the four men.

“...And the quick witted Alex” added Jim Cruickshank, “You immobilised Mister Ali Pasha very efficiently

yesterday. Have you been taking martial arts lessons, young man?"

"No. Not really. Just from videos and the like..." said Alex happily, enjoying the compliment.

"Impressive! Don't you think Mister Nicholson?"

"Saved the day; Sir. Excellent move I thought."

Lawrence Nicholson stepped forward "...Just before we all go in for coffee – or tea if you'd prefer; with fresh milk thanks to you; could you leave any weapons here with the officer on the bridge, please."

From his tone, there was no question of any discussion or argument.

"Weapons?" queried Alice perplexed.

Commander Nicholson had no doubts at all. "For example, Miss Whitaker that small knife which inflicted such a nasty wound on our honoured visitor from Paris..."

"Oh! Me kayak knife"

"...And that murderous looking Samurai dagger you produced from nowhere in the flash of an eye... Er! Alex." It was clear the officer was adamant. They would never enter the submarine with so much as a sharpened nail file.

They handed over their knives.

"Did you see us coming this morning; a threat to the whole bloomin' fleet?" asked Alice with a wicked grin, the child in her daring to peek out, in the new safety of these sane, self-disciplined and civilised older men.

"Ah! Now did we detect their vessel of war, Mister Nicholson? Did we see them coming?" queried the Captain.

“I think that’s got to remain classified information, Sir; too many civilians around here.”

“Let’s go in for coffee then.”

Captain Cruickshank led the way through a complex double skinned door into the side of the superstructure and they found themselves in a bright square hall with ladders ascending and stairs descending.

“I thought we’d go down a hatch – with a wheel on top and a steel ladder...” said Alex.

“Oh nothing quite so ...gymnastic” smiled Commander Nicholson. “We have to cater for the Er! Hum! Let’s say ...middle-aged members of the crew. It’s all quite comfortable these days. We’ve moved on since Jack Hawkins defeated the U-Boats in black and white.”

During the tour of the vessel which Alex found more and more awesome, Jim Cruickshank led the conversation and steadily unpicked the facts of their lives – and the life of London, since the floods had started. Lawrence Nicholson supplied the running commentary on HMS Rutherford, Jim Cruickshank politely asked his questions and the other two officers listened and observed quietly.

“There’s a lot more room than I’d ever imagined...” said Alex.

“We are carrying about half our full complement, so there is plenty of room – in submariners’ terms – for us all. We can accommodate up to one-hundred-and-thirty crew; on just about indefinite voyages. And we can stay submerged for ...well ...months if needed.”

Alex whistled appreciatively.

In the officers’ mess, with fresh tea and biscuits served, Alice passed on all she knew about the hidden survivors in

the estuary district and Jim Cruickshank made notes. "So who is in charge?" he asked.

The question made Alice blink. "Well nobody. We're all independent. Everyone is separate."

"...But the Governing Council of London? What about them – Professor Blackmoor and his colleagues at the Tower."

"Oh that lot!" chimed in Alex. "The barmy-boatmen with the posh accents..." and he guffawed at the memory of rescuing them.

"Aren't they in charge? They say they are."

"First I've 'eard of it. They're not in charge of nobody we know of. They listen in though..." added Alex as a complaint.

"Yes. I imagine they do" said the Captain slowly.

A sailor came into the mess and straight to Jim Cruickshank, ignoring the others, "A signal Sir. Just coming in, Sir. They say they are the Queen's emissaries, Sir. Speaking for the Crown. Heard you on the BBC longwave frequency yesterday, Sir. They say they have orders for you, Sir."

"More people in charge," mused the Captain, getting up. "Well bring in a speaker phone, Petty Officer, and let's have a word with them..."

Alice and Alex also stood and hovered uncertainly. "No. No. Stay here; Do!" invited the Captain. "This is your future as much as ours – and we do live in a democracy. Don't we?"

The officer returned, plugged in an instrument and placed it on the table.

“This is Captain James Cruickshank of HMS Rutherford, a submarine. Who are you...”

The speaker was loud and clear, with no interference.

A man’s voice replied.

“We are... We represent the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Duchy of Westminster. Also here with us are gentlemen representing the Duchy of Cornwall...”

“Pleased to make your acquaintance, gentlemen. And who am I speaking to, sir?”

“I am Sir Randall Delawarr, Captain. The Duke’s private secretary and manager of his Lordship’s estates...”

“And the gentlemen... Any ladies by the way? ...there with you, sir?” Jim Cruickshank gestured at an officer to take notes. Paper and pens were rapidly produced.

“From the Duke of Westminster’s office, I am assisted by Mister Samuel Laing-Wootton, a property manager concerned with the Duke’s land in London...”

“Much of what I understood the Duke owned in London is forty or fifty feet under the sea now, sir...”

“Yes, Yes, That’s as maybe. Though the Duchy has extensive land and buildings well above the current tidal margin... And we have here the Right Honourable Frederick John Obolensky, also involved in the London estates. ...And from the Royal Duchy of Cornwall, Mister Robert La Salle, who manages affairs in Cornwall and elsewhere – for His Royal Highness...”

“For Prince Charles?”

“Yes – for The Prince of Wales.”

“Well – again, Gentlemen. Welcome to you. ...What is it you’d like to discuss with me?”

There was a babble of four or more voices then the first man spoke again. "We understand Captain, that HMS Rutherford, is an Orcinus Class submarine...?"

"That is classified, sir."

"Even now Captain? Surely we have to redefine what is classified and what is not. Things have changed Captain. ...Congratulations to you and your crew on your remarkable survival, by the way, Captain. But while you've been away – the nation has changed Captain."

"I am aware of that, sir"

"Yes, yes. Of course you are. ...The point being Captain that we are coming to London; we will mark the position of the Duke's property, above or under the water; and we'll do what we can to administer it in accordance with the law. ...You do adhere to The Law, Captain?"

"Ah! Yes sir. The law of God and the law of the land. 'Render unto Caesar those things that are Caesar's and unto God those things that are God's.' Yes sir, we cleave to the law. Without it there is a real danger of barbarity and chaos."

"Then we are close perhaps to agreement, Captain. ...We are calling you, to obtain your military protection, to harness the power of the Royal Navy, the Senior Service, for our lawful endeavours..."

There was a long pause. The men and Alice in the mess looked expectantly at their Captain. The decisions were definitely his... it seemed.

"That is the second time in two days, Sir Randall, that I have been asked to provide protection for a property owner..."

"I imagine, now the worst shocks are over, Captain, that order is being re-established. Are you minded to provide such protection?"

Jim Cruickshank prevaricated while he chewed the matter over, slowly, "We are a very small complement, sir; of highly specialised men and women. Not warriors, sir. Not warriors at all. ...Not even pirates."

"Yes. Well?"

"We have limited resources for giving protection to anyone, sir. Or any 'endeavours'. It's all we can do to keep ourselves going at present, sir. ...And the law, you suggest I follow, sir, is very complicated. With this inundation, it seems the law of marine salvage could apply – particularly in central London."

Muffled consternation and mutterings came from the microphone. Pages of large books could be heard turning.

"...We hardly think... ...salvage has any role here, Captain..."

"Then you might criminalise everyone in London who has survived the last few years by foraging, sir" and he looked levelly at Alice and Alex. Alex shrugged – a 'What Else' – shrug.

There were more whispers.

"No. Not at all Captain. It's been like the Blitz. It's been an ongoing emergency. Raw survival. But for the future, Captain? For the future?"

"It needs a lot of thought, sir."

There was another long silence. Then a different voice came over the speaker, "Robert La Salle here Captain. I speak for The Prince of Wales, for the Duchy of Cornwall – and for our estates in London..."

“Yes, sir.”

“You know that His Royal Highness is a Rear Admiral?”

“Now you mention it, sir, I do recall seeing Prince Charles in uniform at Ark Royal...”

“And are you prepared to follow orders, Captain?”

Jim Cruickshank paused; and paused again. “Is his Royal Highness with you sir?”

“Er! No. Not here. No.”

“Is he still alive, sir?”

It was their turn to pause. “In the absence of any news of his death, Captain, the only course is to assume His Royal Highness has survived. That is the correct legal view to take and the correct Constitutional royal protocol to follow... Don’t you agree?”

“...And what about the Queen, sir?”

“We don’t know. We have not got that information. But it makes no difference to the case for the current chain of command, Prince Charles is, you accept, a Rear Admiral, and we are his representatives...”

“And you wish to commandeer a nuclear submarine, capable of wiping out the western world ...sir.”

“We insist that you follow orders, Captain.”

“And what about the orders that the Governing Council of London may see fit to issue ...sir?”

“The WHO?” exploded four or five voices at once.

“Can I suggest gentlemen that one or two of you come to London – where are you calling from by the way? – and we

have a discussion; with the reality of flooded London all around us.”

“We will not rebuild the old ways” pronounced Alice, her voice cutting through all other sounds.

There was a profound, shocked silence. The officers looked at her in astonishment. Alex gawped at her. The men at the other end of the telephone stopped breathing then gasped for air.

“It is not a matter for debate and discussion. The human race has all but annihilated itself on the politics and power structures of the past. It will now change...”

Jim Cruickshank looked at Alice – perplexed and impressed. “Stay and have lunch!” he ordered. “I want to talk with you.”

“Who’s that? Who was that speaking?” spluttered the microphone.

“Let me call you back...” said Jim Cruickshank. “My officer will sign off this conversation and take your coordinates. “We’ll continue this tomorrow gentlemen. Thank you for calling.”

The call was disconnected. The three senior officers stared at Alice, stared at their Captain, stared at Alice again – and waited.

“...I do not wholly disagree with that sentiment, young lady...” began Jim Cruickshank slowly, “I have been ruminating for some time on the same theme myself; though I haven’t articulated it as you do. ...We have, for whatever reasons and whatever causes, as the cleverest animal on the planet, come to a pretty pass.I have been wondering whether, had we acted differently, been more thoughtful, taken more heed of our environment, made longer term plans – if we would have experienced global-warming, or, if that was inevitable, would we have been prepared for it; and if we were more – what? – more

together, to use an old nineteen-sixties term, would we have been so terribly, tragically vulnerable to a simple virus?"

"It is a turning point in our evolution," said Alice with the utter certainty which still surprised her brother – he did not know this Alice; Alice the Empress. "And the change will come, Will He, Nil He. It is happening now. It is time to evolve from our first stage, as blind warriors and slaves, to the second stage, personal responsibility. We are entering the era of self-realisation and intelligent co-operation."

"Gentlemen..." said Jim Cruickshank, not taking his eyes off Alice, "Do feel free to express yourselves – do join in." Then addressing Alice again, speaking even more carefully than before "...You do not invite a discussion, Alice..." there was no hint of condescension or criticism in his tone; on the contrary, it was clear he regarded her with some respect. "...You make statements of ...prophetical certitude. You demand that we take it – or leave it... Where do your ideas, your very certain ideas, come from?"

Alice suddenly looked confused. She looked like Alice the East-Enders again. The question threw her off-centre. "I ...I don't know. I read a lot of books," she said like an unexceptional shop assistant who left school at sixteen might look, waking from a trance to find she was explaining Special Relativity to a college of physicists at the Royal Society. But then her face changed again, and the imperial Alice reappeared. "I 'see' some of the new way, the emerging truth, in my dreams – and sometimes when I'm awake, particularly during my rituals – it comes to me. I think many people are 'talking' to me – but not talking. They don't know I can hear them. But like you Captain, many survivors are re-thinking society – and somehow, I don't know how, I am 'hearing' it all."

"I don't even 'understand' it is right. I 'know' its right. I know it like I know I have two arms and a head; and like I know the sky is 'up' and the earth is 'down'. It is simply beyond question."

“Sir ...” blurted out Benjamin Levy, one of the so far silent lieutenants, “...I’ve been thinking on these lines too. For some months since we heard the bad news...”

“And Lieutenant...?” urged the Captain.

“It seems to me Sir. With no disrespect, and you are of course the shining exception that proves the rule; that the leaders and thinkers of the human race have let us all down very badly. The hierarchical structures we have relied on for thousands of years don’t meet the complexities of the massive population we have, or had, Sir...”

“Do go on Mister Levy.”

“To my mind; we’ve lost the plot – and killed nearly five billion people in the process. Short term gains and head in the sand leaders should never be in charge again. Been There! Done That! – didn’t work, Sir!”

Captain Cruickshank looked surprised – but agreeably so. “Let’s get lunch shall we – its gone one o’clock!”

Alex demurred; “...Er! I’m not sure. The tide and everything...”

“There speaks an alert sailor. You really should think of joining us Lad. But never mind the time – we’ll ferry you and your kayak back in the tender and see you safely home... We have a great deal to talk about.”

It was from this first meeting that Jim Cruickshank arranged a weekly breakfast in the officers’ mess with Alice, to talk political philosophy, and he persuaded Alice to lead monthly meetings for all comers. She held these public debates on dry land, as many feared the water, alternately at the famous black and white pub at Swiss Cottage, north of the estuary and, for south Londoners, in

one of the huge houses on Long Road, up at Clapham Common. With HMS Rutherford advertising the events on the old BBC radio frequencies and with the greater sense of security afforded by the presence of the Royal Navy, the initially small gatherings, of a dozen or so, grew to hundreds of people.

Among the hundreds were reactionaries who wanted to rebuild the old institutions – with themselves, of course, more elevated than they had been – who, like Martin Blackmoor, Muhammad Al Jazira and the representatives of noble landed families, found Alice's ideas to be treasonable, sinful, criminal, repugnant, crazy and untenable – but with eighty percent of London empty and being systematically pillaged for food and goods, it was difficult for the conservatives, the followers of the old ways, to propose any practical method of restoring ownership and the laws of property, as they always had been and as God, so they claimed, obviously had intended them to be. Nevertheless, despite the weakness of their case, Alice was often shouted down and booed by hostile groups.

“Love her or Hate her...” remarked Jonathan Goodge to his colleagues from the Tower during one of Alice's imperial afternoon performances at Swiss Cottage, “...You surely cannot ignore her.”

Alice sat before an audience of some four-hundred, women, men and children; most agog at her fabulous presence – she was swathed from throat to toe in a scarlet silk kimono and decked in blue sapphires – and some stunned by the import of her imperatives.

How? But how? How, could we all, everyone, be equally powerful. How would anything work without bosses and servers? Who would organise anything? How would anything ever get done? Without leaders, managers and bosses “They” would simply sit around indolently expecting “Us” to keep them? Wouldn't they? And even if “They” were motivated to get off their fat backsides and work like I

do – they would simply do everything wrong; wouldn't they? Unless "We" told them what to do?

"If you Will to take charge of your own power, your own energy and employ it in the world – the price is that you will be responsible for the consequences of your actions. But the rewards are that you unleash your true creative power. Letting your creativity flow, acting creatively, touching the hem of God's cloak of creation, is the only state of true happiness for humans. As you use your generative power, so the Universe replenishes it and being the conduit for that flow of energy is mankind's highest state of being." She paused and looked over her audience. When her gaze focused on a person, he or she felt, and it was so, that Alice was connecting with them at a level and with an intensity rarely achieved in human relationships.

"Or ...You can invest your power in another or others and remain thoughtlessly irresponsible – anxious and unhappy; a powerless lackey, following instructions. 'I was only obeying orders'" she mimicked with a flat military voice. "You can trade your God given energy and creativity; and the risk of being truly alive – for security, for safety, for an automated life and, you hope, a pain-free death; resting sound asleep in the knowledge that anything that goes 'wrong' is someone else's fault – not your fault. You can remain unconscious and blameless – worried and miserable."

"Oh for heaven's sake Goodge..." said Martin Blackmoor, employing his most subtle understated sneer – aimed at Alice and at anyone who entertained the merest idea that Alice had anything useful, interesting or even coherent to say, "The girl's a dreamer – an uneducated, illogical populist. Her admirers are of the same ilk – low IQ fantasists who believe in Angels, Fairies, Father Christmas and Pixies. She is preaching Nirvana – freedom and power for the hoi-polloi. History, I am afraid to say, as the infant in me too would love to cleave to her dilly day dream, roundly contradicts her."

“Her messages are not new – and it is undeniably a time of immense change. Perhaps this time they will take hold...” observed Jonathan mildly, carefully keeping his tone neutral and casually light-hearted. “This audience is certainly lapping it up.”

“For a time. For a mere hiccup in the collective political psyche – she will sway some minds. I concede she is already influencing parts of London. But as soon as they face a real decision – whether to turn left or right when they leave this building, for example; or if they should drink water from a London tap; or should they move away from the urban centres; for example – they will turn and look for, more than look for, they will demand leaders – just as mankind has done since the beginning. For Heaven’s Sake! If we adopted her rituals and superstitions it would be setting back mankind’s painfully slow crawl up out of the mud of primitive ignorance and insanity towards intelligence, cooperation and reason by two-hundred-thousand years. She lives a life of utter nonsense.”

“She is compellingly attractive though...” said Roger Winkle, clearly mesmerised. “And it isn’t that she is particularly ‘beautiful’ or even stunningly ‘pretty’ – but beyond all the glamour there is a ...a ...quality which draws one...” he trailed off, leaning forwards to get a better view.

“Yes. Yes Winkle” reprimanded Blackmoor testily. “We’ve all noticed – haven’t you been listening in our meetings? It’s called ‘Charisma’. The girl has charisma – but so did Rasputin and many other mad dreamers – prophets and seers. And think of Elvis Presley ...and Arnold Schwarzenegger. For God’s sake; just because she is popular doesn’t make her right; or any less of a bonehead!”

Alex, in uniform, heavier and more assured than when he’d first joined the Navy three years ago, scanned the audience for any trouble makers. He made it his business, with the full support of Captain Cruickshank, to be at all

Alice's meetings as her escort and bodyguard. This evening he particularly kept an eye on a group from Martin Blackmoor's new community police force, dressed in something resembling army uniforms, and lurking conspiratorially at the back of the room. After the talk Alex stood guard at Alice's door as she changed out of her kimono into kayak gear. He shepherded her out of Swiss Cottage and turned south towards Lord's Cricket Club, just as the light was starting to fade.

A few of Alice's fans kept pace with them in the street, eager to carry on the conversation and some asking her to autograph books and pictures. They gave the fans a few moments before Alex expertly steered Alice away and hurried her down the wide street towards the city centre, checking regularly to ensure they were not being followed.

The estuary shoreline now stopped just short of the famous cricket ground, the tide lapping lazily, a hundred yards away, around the foundations of the golden topped white mosque at the edge of Regents Park, and seeping through and killing the tall neglected grasses of the park's open spaces. They had beached and concealed the kayak in an alleyway where, on the incoming tide, it now floated on two or three feet of pleasantly and surprisingly clean, sea water. Alice balanced on a wall while Alex hauled the craft shore-wards into shallow water. With barely a pause or a wobble they waded to it and lowered themselves into the cockpits – and pushed off. Within a few yards the water below them was four or five feet deep, making small waves which splashed up the alleyway walls.

They still preferred the kayak to any other craft. Not only were they completely expert at handling it; the vessel could also travel fast across very shallow water, where other boats couldn't follow, and through the narrowest of gaps, where others could not fit. As a getaway vehicle, the kayak was ideal. When the dangerous tidal race was on, with water spouting through openings and spilling down steps and terraces, Alice and Alec effortlessly propelled it through white water, turbulent water and fast running

currents, more swiftly, more safely and more accurately than almost anything else which would float.

The black, torpedo shaped craft that tracked them in the gathering darkness was far shorter than the kayak, it was less than a third of the kayak's width; it moved silently on electric motors as rapidly, when required, as a speedboat. It was unmanned but had camera eyes and infra-red viewers looking in four directions, which enabled the operator who sat up on the roof of a high building, a one-time Hilton Hotel at the junction of Edgware Road and the Marylebone Fly-Over, with a radio control console, to steer it with ease and, thanks to the *Nite-Sight* light multipliers it was fitted with, to stay well back from the kayak, where there was little chance of the paddlers, even if they turned around, seeing the torpedo's slender black aerial.

As Alice and Alex navigated back across the Marylebone Road, in the direction of Lancaster Gate and, from there, to make towards Cadogan Square, the torpedo followed. When they took a daring route through the roof of Paddington Station leaping a water chute via a broad skylight – the torpedo followed. When they sped across what had become an infamous maelstrom above The Serpentine, battling, just for the youthful joy of it, with waves and clashing currents which could upend boats large and small, the torpedo followed. As they weaved, in the near total darkness, through narrow streets and wave wracked attic rooftops at the back of Harrods, the all-seeing torpedo followed. "I have you now Alice Whitaker," the remote controller murmured. "Now let's see, you cunning little girl, just where you hide yourself away – shall we?" And the torpedo followed the bobbing kayak. When Alex and Alice accelerated suddenly, both forcing their paddles with all their strength through the water to make the kayak leap a cascade pouring off a high building in Pont Street, into churning waves on the north side before jiggling a right angled turn through an impossibly narrow gap between two roof spaces – the torpedo twisted and turned, put on speed, and dived after them.

And it foundered.

It had dived too deep from too high a place and plummeted under the water, cutting off the remote-control's transmissions. The subsurface pressure forced unsympathetic sluices of cold ocean water inside the electronic marvel. The operator's screen went blank. "Fuck!" the controller said,

"...But I'll get you next time – my pretty lady."

Chapter Twenty

Thanatos

Historian J.M. Burrows has made the intriguing suggestion that in failing to achieve its ends by direct action, the spirit of that age (1848-1914) sought to do so by a cleverly different means, equally utopian: the attempt to find unification and liberation – this time of intellectual kinds – through the progress and promise of natural science.

The Heart of Things. A C Grayling 2005. -

A few weeks later Alice held a similar meeting - it was her hundredth such gathering in the three years since HMS Rutherford's arrival - south of the estuary, up at Clapham Common which, at twenty-five metres or eighty-two-feet above the old sea level markers, was still safely above high tide. The nearby railway complex at Clapham Junction was by now permanently submerged. Alex and Alice kayaked across the always potentially dangerous and treacherous central tidal flow, between the stranded and barely visible Chelsea Bridge and Albert Bridge, cruised over the sunken remains of Battersea Park and the railway, and moored just below Lavender Hill. The meeting took place in one of the huge houses, converted into a theatre and dance school, on Long Road, on the north side of the common.

Alex reckoned that more than seven-hundred attended – which was a large turnout for families and groups who were still having to spend a lot of time struggling hard for survival. Alex had to be firmer and faster than ever before to extricate his sister from the press of well-wishers who wanted to talk or touch or simply to gaze.

There were several “Restore-the-Law” groups, a few cliques looking hostile and truculent. Men claiming to have property rights, including some tough looking characters allegedly acting for the English Estates, interrupted with shouts of “Anarchist” and “Whitaker the Thief” and gross insults about her morals and gender. A one-time barrister, who had specialised at Quadrant Chambers on Fleet

Street in Marine and Salvage law, spoke up often and effectively for the restoration of rights of ownership and for a return to a society ordered as before the floods. He affirmed the landlords' legal rights, in Marine Law, to continue ownership of drowned property, which legal precedent made clear was neither salvage nor irrecoverable wreck.

Dozens of grim owners or, as Alice controversially would have it - ex-owners, nodded at and shouted their approval of the barrister's arguments. The majority of the audience of course, who had shared only marginally in the wealth of the nation, seventy-five percent of it having been the property of just four percent of the population, were unconvinced by the barrister - but were intrigued and enticed by the hints of largess which the landlords alluded to, of fat crumbs which might fall from the rich-men's tables and perhaps, risk and responsibility free, into the lucky hands of those who supported them.

Alice was not afraid of controversy. "In this phase of recovering from shock and rebuilding communities," she told them, "everything that can be salvaged from the old civilisation and used has to be communally owned."

This drew a few angry shouts.

"...And we must include 'useful land and buildings' as a lot of the estuary buildings we are using today - and a lot of the land we're using for smallholdings, even if it stays above water - will be washed away. So its going to be many decades before we can safely know which land to occupy. We can't have anybody claiming exclusive ownership."

"What can we bloody well work for then - you daft bint!" shouted one of the bailiffs.

"We must all work for the common good; for the commonwealth. 'Profit' is a dead word. 'Mine' is a dead word. We cannot allow anyone to find - say, a store of tinned food - and claim they own it. It must be shared."

This made sense to the majority of the people. But one or two booed the idea. "Like you and yer brother shared out all that stuff hidden in Harrods – or didn't you? Eh!"

"That was years ago and that was survival at a mad time. Society will go through many phases as it recovers. I am talking about now – and for the future."

"So what the hell do you think we can keep – from our own hard work? Bossy boots!"

"People will, as they get over their fear of Glacier Flu and see the lights coming on in centres, all move back to live close together. There will always be some sad loners. There's a lot of hermits and tramps out there, mad as hatters; and there'll be more of them – but most people will live together. Its safer, its more efficient. And we need each other..."

"Oh! So where's you hiding out just now – Secret Estuary Alice?" and one or two laughed in sympathy with the question and the nickname.

"I work with a lot of people. I am not a hermit and not alone."

"So what can we keep for ourselves – then? You never said what."

"Nobody..." pronounced Alice with prophetic emphasis, articulating a rule which most communities across the Earth would later follow, "...should own any more than they can carry – walking."

"...All other useful goods we recover should be pooled. If we find good land and grow food – that food must be pooled. If we find stores of food, fuel, clothes, medicine or anything useful – they should all be pooled."

What she said made a lot of sense to all the foragers and salvagers in the room – which was all of them. For none

would have survived the first years without recovering goods from the old civilisation. But the land capitalists; those imagining they would be better organised, more able, more assertive, with fewer dependents than average folk – detested the idea of community cooperation. And they shouted out their angry protests.

In the quiet moments, when immediate issues were not under discussion or being argued, inside the crowded meeting hall it was easy to assume that beyond the sober, late Victorian walls the world had returned to normal – and if they were to step outside for a quick fag they would surely see, hear and smell the traffic building up to the four o'clock gridlock around Clapham Common, as across London millions of mums and a few under-employed dads manoeuvred gleaming, hefty, steel cars and monster SUV's en route to collect their overweight, glassy-eyed school kids, being groomed for childhood diabetes, from state and private schools; saving the children from the strenuous exercise, the terrible privations and the awful risks of walking home - as much as half a mile or more – and in the process of queuing outside schools and blocking the business traffic, spewing billions of litres of noxious exhaust fumes into the streets from where, after inducing asthma and other toxic reactions, it would silently and invisibly ascend to add to the stratospheric problems of global-warming and ozone depletion.

But even though the reality of commuter chaos had gone, it was somehow comforting to lapse for an hour or two back to the "Good old Days" when God was in His Heaven and All was Right with the World – and four percent ordered ninety-six percent to keep their laws – which the four percent themselves avoided having to comply with through, completely legal, off-shore trusts. But, while the Good Old Days had not returned, the landlords or the landlords' alleged agents had.

In fact, outside, on both sides of the miles-wide estuary, the streets and parks were deserted. And in the hall, some

of the few remaining remnants of the old civilisation, huddled together against the shock and trauma of the past few years, were being goaded by Alice to think afresh, to think new thoughts, to think new possibilities. Even though they had invested time and effort in getting to the meeting, they had not come to work but to meet a celebrity, to be entertained, and most of them really resented having to think. "Wasn't life hard enough these days – without having to think about it as well?"

Four or five of Martin Blackmoor's armed community police were there – but they stayed in the background and didn't seem to be taking sides. Alex did not see any of the senior figures from the BT Tower, except the enigmatic loner, Jonathan Goodge, sitting in the midst of the audience who gave him a friendly wave in his usual confident fashion. Before the meeting ended, thanks to Alex's planning and an early call on his walkie-talkie, a squad of ten sailors from HMS Rutherford slipped into the theatre and stood calmly, reassuringly in control, at the back of the room.

But despite the vociferous opposition, Alice's essential messages were unequivocal and determined. She took another tack, "None can exercise authority over another," she said quietly, "...until and unless they have taken authority over themselves. And even then, particularly then, their power must be used for service – not for dominion. Those they lead must be willing and informed and conscious colleagues. Today's society will become a truly "collegiate" society – of individuals - who are different, perhaps even eccentric, but all freely cooperating and all equal in power.

...The rules have changed, have been changed by Nature," said Alice. "The new society; the society we here today are starting out to fashion and order, will not be structured like the old one – which failed its members so badly. In the new society each will be responsible for themselves and for their own actions. Each will be the authority for – the author of – their own destiny. In the new society there will be no masters and no servants. There will be no bullies

and no victims. There will be no exploiters and no exploited.”

“You’re a bloody loony Alice Whitaker! You’re a crazy communist bitch! Try building a nuclear sub by bloody committee! You moron!” yelled a heckler. Another shouted, “What makes you think you can just take whatever you like? Some of us worked damn hard to make all the stuff you steal when you’re out foraging! We should make sure the real owners – one day – are compensated.”

The heckler had gone too far. The audience grew angry. Despite being baffled by what she seemed to be offering them, in their eyes Alice was a lovely girl and they related to her as a Londoner like themselves, who had survived the most terrible times by her wits, courage and, of course, by foraging in central London as they had.

“Who the fuck are you? Bigmouth! Shut yer face or we’ll shut it for you! She’s a good girl our Alice – and maybe... ..she just might be right.”

Alice rode out the shouting with measured calm.

“We must all, we few survivors, rely on the stores of the old order while we plan and build the new society. What sixty-million people left behind, the parts of that wealth which can be used, is our shared birthright. We must use it wisely while we recover from shock, make plans and find new ways to live sustainable, intelligent lives. We are in a time that requires our shared, cooperative survival. What we used to regard as ownership must go. All rights of past ownership, hierarchy and command must be rethought. We must work very hard to retrain ourselves and our children – particularly the children - to be cleverer, more skilled, more prescient, more self-responsible. This is a new start for the human race and we few survivors, groups of us around the globe, are the stewards of the entire future of mankind. The old system must pass away.”

The bulk of the audience, though still baffled, was won over, particularly by her youth and charisma – her undeniable charisma. The dissenters, in roughly a minority of ninety-six to four, knew when to stay quiet.

“This damn minx has just got to be done away with” whispered one tall, elegant, real and surviving aristocratic landlord from the old order, to his recently recruited, none too bright, thickset Bailiff; wooed into the owner’s service with murmurs of gold, influence and power over junior staff.

This landlord’s lands, rural and urban, awarded to his ancestors by William the Conqueror, were all submerged but he was working up an extremely good legal argument to be, legally, granted similar, or far greater, wealth, legally, on dry land – by whatever Court might soon be established; under English Law of course. And when he obtained property, land and all that might be upon it, over it or under it – he would need peasants to work it and build for him. His long and august sociopathic and psychopathic ancestry demanded that he take charge, by as much force as necessary, that he take land, that he issue orders, that he and his ilk rule society – and that, for stability, they punish detractors and evildoers. This little witch Alice might stand in the way of his ambitions. The first witch trial in two hundred years would take care of her – and amuse the plebeians; if she lived that long. He may reluctantly need to apply the first rule of government – directed state violence - build an army and be prepared to kill, maim and imprison. Once the victor - then perhaps be magnanimous, charming, caring even to the vanquished – but on one’s own terms.

Alex hurried Alice away from the meeting with his usual efficiency and, despite the tender and crew from HMS Rutherford standing by, they took the kayak. Darkness was descending as they paddled silently, enjoying the evening air. The air, keen sea air, was definitely fresher than it had been for a long time. They automatically checked around them as they travelled across the mainstream and slipped into the streets off Chelsea

Embankment – they were alone. They circled a few mews and rooftops, weaving a baffling course and then darted suddenly into a yard and, without pause, into one of those dark elevator shaft openings, far too small it seemed for any craft, where they disappeared from sight.

The black, electronic torpedo which had followed them every inch of the way from Lavender Hill, stood off from the opening – to see if it was a ploy from which they would emerge before going to their real destination. But it was no ploy. And the persistent, patient remote-controller knew that Alice's secret home was no longer secret.

"Gotcha" the watcher murmured.

"I don't like you being here on your own. Why not come back with me to the Naval College. There's over four hundred of us and it's really great. We have a good time?" argued Alex for the umpteenth time.

"I need a lot of time to myself at the moment. I'm writing a diary – a journal of my talks – and I need to do my rituals to ...to get the messages coming through more clearly" countered Alice absently, combing out her hair before a large mirror at her dressing table.

"You'd meet some nice fella's" her brother tempted her.

Alice paused and considered this. It was tempting. "Yeah. That'd be nice," she said dreamily. "Have some music and a dance maybe. Chat up some lads. I quite liked the look of that Greg you knock about with..."

"Gregory – he doesn't like Greg. And he's bloody clever too. He's top of our class in just about everything'. 'Cept unarmed combat. I'm top in that. ...But he's top in all the brainy stuff. He's older than me."

"He's got nice eyes..."

Alex could offer no opinions on Gregory's eyes.

As they had in the early years at Harrods, the siblings had made sure the blackout precautions ensured that no light showed outside the hotel. The merest glimmer of light would be seen from miles away and reflect on the black night waters. Alex had reinforced the doors of Alice's and his own penthouses and set up alarms and booby traps – some electronic, others were simple mechanical traps with near invisible wires which rang bells or slipped bolts when disturbed. The apartment was as secure as they could make it but, marooned in deep water, the building was a remote and lonely place and Alex daily became more and more concerned for his sister's safety.

"...Hush!" he suddenly whispered, putting up a hand towards Alice to silence and freeze her into immobility.

Alice listened; her expression immediately relapsing into the deadpan, wary cunning of the street urchin – instinctive, animal cunning that had kept them alive through the very worst of times. But she heard nothing.

Alex stopped breathing and listened. He was sure he had detected something; something out of place; something unusual; something perhaps dangerous. But now he could hear nothing other than the usual sounds of water and wind outside and the quiet humming inside of a heater and the fridge in the next room.

"...It's nothing" he said. "Must 'ave been the fridge clicking on. It's nothing is it?"

"...No" agreed Alice slowly. "...It's nothing. Everything is okay." But, even as she reassured them, something snagged at her instincts. She felt a chill and a shadow, a foreboding of evil, emanating from the collective unconscious.

What Alex had subliminally heard was the nearly silent, tiny motors of the electric torpedo, which had found its way round the perimeter of the hotel and was

manoeuvring silently in the swell twenty feet below them. There was no sign of light or life in the hotel – but the controller was sure they were within.

“I’ll stay over, I think.”

“Yes – you do that luv’. Stay here the night and we’ll both go to the submarines in the morning. I’d like to see Captain Cruickshank about a few things – so we can go together in the speed-boat.”

“Yep – I’ll stay. I’d best let them know. I’ll call June and I’ll call the ship and let them know we’ll both be turning up tomorrow.”

June was Alex’s current girlfriend, a girl of his own age and nearly as tall as himself, who was working her way through the Naval College. Alex was manoeuvring things to try to get June transferred to the HMS Rutherford crew – and he thought he might just be able to pull it off.

But fatefully in the morning – in the reassuringly bright light shining in on a white clothed breakfast table – Alice decided she would stay at home and write – and perform her rituals. Alex took a single cockpit kayak and embarked on the long paddle down-stream to HMS Rutherford.

On that sparkling day, with strength in his arms, his eyes on the horizon and his mind on the friends and the girl he was returning to, he had no inkling that he had seen his sister for the last time.

Alice, in a high window, watched him scud off across the water. And she suddenly shuddered. “Oh! Someone’s just walked over me grave.”

The phrase, words her mother would have used, mitigated and normalised the sepulchral, cold shiver which had seized and chilled her. But she knew it wasn’t normal. She knew, in ways she could not describe, that today was the most significant day in her short life. As she watched Alex

and his canoe recede into the distance, her face softened and a tear ran down her cheek.

“Bye-bye little Alex” she murmured.

Chapter Twenty-One

Nemesis

The British had the most expensive money of all the developed economies. The Bank of England rate was persistently twice or more those of America, Europe and the Far East.

In 2005 every quarter percent increase in the UK rate siphoned two and a half billion pounds from the poorest to the richest. The meek acceptance of this punitive impost, enriching the very rich with unearned income, came from hundreds of years of social deference. We had all been brainwashed to tug our forelocks and bow our heads, "God Bless you kind Sirs" to our betters, the capitalists; who grew six inches taller and lived fifteen years longer than working-class folk, like my family. But, never again!

From the Journals of Alice Whitaker, Volume 7.

The day was beautiful and her work was inspired. She dressed in a simple but fabulously expensive blue-grey full length shift, highlighted with a few discreet but even more expensive pieces of jewellery, and slid her small feet into soft silver slippers. She piled her hair on top of her head and secured it with a shell and diamond comb. She ate little and wrote fast in longhand, the ideas streaming in from dimensions she could almost but not quite define, thousands of minds energised by the imperative for change, fuelled by grief and freed from the constraints and inertia of millions and billions of concretised human assumptions, melded into one vast collective, insistent, unconscious power which, like fields of electromagnetic energies, had no boundaries, flowing round the globe and out across the universe to infinity. And Alice could receive, channel and translate the collective messages. Then suspending her critical faculties and all disbelief, without intellectual censorship or impedance, the translation into words flooded out from her mind into her arms and hands and fingers and neatly and rapidly onto the paper of her current, highly expensive, salvaged notebook.

She sat by a long window, at a smart modern desk in her luxurious, cream penthouse in the heart of once fashionable London, and worked until the light in the east started to fade from the sky and pink slivers of the setting sun skittered across the waters from the west, casting long shadows. She worked late into the pale grey evening,

her eyes adjusting to the near darkness – keeping the lights off and the blackout curtains open for as long as possible. She did not want to miss one second of the light. Today; particularly today, she did not want to miss a precious ray of illumination or a single photon of light.

At last it was dark. And she could no longer see her writing. What she had composed today was, she knew, good work. She stood, looking young and untrammelled, and stretched her arms and back. She moved elegantly around the rooms, closing the shutters and curtains. Satisfied with the blackout, she snapped on the lights and walked into the kitchen to make a pot of tea.

The assassin, in camouflaged military clothes, standing across the kitchen and backed tensely against the far external door, was if anything more shocked to be confronted with Alice than was Alice to encounter the intruder. The assassin jumped as if electrocuted and Alice froze by the living room door. Something deep inside her groaned with weariness at the stupidity and banality of evil; Alice's primary reaction to what she had foreseen was depression.

The universe and all of life pressed into the confines of the kitchen; excluding every other time and place. The world grew silent; so silent that the murmuring waves and the sighing winds ceased to sound. The silence filled with intent and became heavy and oppressive.

Alice drew her energies together. She integrated her powers, thought of the Holy Trinity and willed to make a channel for power with her body, with her feelings and with her mind. "Think, Feel and Will," she advised herself with one of her many mantras. She was, in this most terrifying moment, the future shadows and consequences of which Alice could darkly envision, unafraid.

The intruder stared and glared at her; crackling with destructive tension; torn between love, hate, desire, triumph and guilt.

“I didn’t imagine it would be you.”

The man didn’t respond, now faced with his victim, faced with the terrible thing he’d come to do, he was paralysed by indecision.

“You don’t have to do this. You can turn and leave if you will.”

Alice made minimal movements to slip her hand into a pocket fold in her shift, where it found the small, razor sharp canoing knife which had been so effective on Al Jazari. She calmly noted where the light switches were and planned the fastest route needed to plunge this room and the rest of the apartment into pitch darkness.

The intruder, with senses heightened and pumped full of adrenalin, understood her body language.

“So the little bitch is going to make a fight of it, is she?”

“...But not if she is shot through the head – first.”

Even as the thought of putting a bullet through Alice’s head, of therefore necessarily shooting her through her pretty face, filled his fevered brain; her poise, beauty and charisma, Alice’s essential life force, overwhelmed the assailant’s resolve.

“She is – lovely. She is lovable. I want her – I want what she has.”

Then, enraged by his vacillation, *“I’ll have her; before I kill her.”*

And as Alice looked into the assassin’s eyes, she could read these insane thoughts as clearly as if reading a book. She instinctively knew he carried a pistol and other weapons – and definitely had the skills to use them. This man was trained in killing.

The intruder drew a broad, serrated hunting knife, levelled it at Alice and at last found the volition to move towards her. Alice leapt back, snapped off the light and fled into the living room. The assassin came after her – fast and furious.

Alice had her closed knife in her hand. She opted to get the lights, flying round the room to the switches – there were five of them. Four she killed but as she turned for the fifth her assailant stood between Alice and the switch, waving the long knife. Alice used the split-second pause to flip open her own small knife. Though breathing hard – still she was not afraid.

“I’ve got you now Alice Whitaker” he said between clenched teeth, manifesting a strange, sad, twisted smile.

But, despite the threat and Alice’s diminutive size compared to the man’s height and obvious strength, they both knew Alice was not afraid – and this unnerved and unsettled her attacker; who lunged and tried to grab her knife-wrist to take control of the moment.

Alice dodged and scored a hit on the groping hand; slashing a four inch wound up the arm and into the palm. Blood spurted and the attacker howled – more in rage and self-criticism than pain; but with an instant reflex action he closed the bleeding hand over Alice’s hand – canoeing knife and all, which, as it slipped sideways inside Alice’s fist, cut cruelly across her fingers – clamped shut by the attacker’s far larger fist.

Alice grimaced. She kicked with lethal speed and accuracy but the assassin was ready for that and used the kick to unbalance Alice and pitch her to the floor – where he dived on her – serrated knife at her throat. Alice twisted her body away with a ferocious energy neither of them expected. She couldn’t escape the killer’s grip entirely but she could grab the curtains. She hauled on them, dropping her knife to employ both hands. The heavy curtains collapsed onto them, burying them – and panicking them both. But Alice had achieved what she

wanted – the light poured out into the utter blackness of the night. Every alert watcher in London would see that alarm beacon in the darkness.

Struggling out from the curtains, the attacker had Alice's ankle and dragged her into the middle of the floor before – too late – seeing the dark glass of the unveiled window.

“Damn You!” he screamed and then suddenly, so suddenly it seemed he had to do this to surprise himself and evade his civilised feelings, he stabbed the huge knife hard into Alice's abdomen. Horrified by his murderous action; the attacker reared upright and stood, glassy eyed over Alice who curled up in silent agony. Then, amazingly, uncannily, Alice, deeply wounded, rose easily to her feet and stood facing out her attacker – with a calm pale face – one hand over her slashed abdomen, which was pumping out her life's blood.

“Killing takes a lot more than that – didn't you know it would? Its far more personal than you must have imagined.”

The intruder sagged, knees trembling, and then recovered. Face twisting again with rage – rage at his own evil, rage at the unjust universe and all its deities and powers – he pounced on Alice and grabbed her throat; squeezing harder and harder as Alice gazed back, still unafraid, into the attacker's demonic and blood-shot eyes. Time once more stood still and the universe quivered in stasis. The hands tightened in desperation, like a vice.

The hands, one bleeding profusely, clenched round her neck, were oddly reassuring to Alice. The palms were hot and warmed her. Her head, containing all her thoughts, seemed separate from her body, which automatically twitched in protest at the lack of air. There was an inevitability and finality about the action which removed all doubt. Alice was certainly in the hands of a mindless, if temporarily insane, killer and she was justified in fighting for her life. She could herself shed all inhibition and in self-defence, with full legality before the community and

before God – Alice could kill. If only she could get free of this locked, manic grip – and draw one more breath to give her the strength to fight back, she was wholly entitled to kill.

The phrase “*Licensed to Kill*” flashed through her mind as her arms and hands lifted, with no volition on Alice’s part, to grip the strangler’s wrists. But she had left her response too late. Already her muscles were deprived of oxygen – of the fuel urgently needed by the long muscles in her shoulders and arms to contract and twist and strike out. The savage wound in her belly was bleeding fast - spilling her life-blood and her last remaining energy.

She gazed into her killer’s eyes. At the surface were only the raw emotions of an out of control member of one of the species of great apes, a murderously enraged adult homo-sapiens. His face was suffused with and dominated by the most basic emotions of two of the seven-deadly-sins; Lust and Envy.

The once civilised man, temporarily a madman, who gripped her throat, who denied her the right to breath the free air, was himself gripped by inescapable paranoia; pale and taut without colour in his skin – literally green with envy.

The envy was unrelenting, beyond hope of redemption or mitigation – it was the essence of all envy which twisted the killer’s body, mind and ego into tortured forms. It was the envy of Alice’s connection with creativity – and therefore of her connectedness with God and the limitless created universe. Alice had found her creative power into which she could pour her entire being, integrate her body, mind and feelings and dedicate and direct her whole energy. There was no more enviable state of being – and the killer, at a level of consciousness above the physical primate, knew that Alice had what he dared not, had never dared to try, to discover. He was too terrified, too timid, too limited to let-go, open out his life to explore and activate – and reveal the spark of divinity which animates all life. And because she had such courage and he did not,

he loathed her and would deny her the universal power she had earned.

But Alice had opened and tuned herself to be a conduit for creative power, power for service, and the world adored her for it. It was the source of her natural, mysterious charisma – her anointing with spiritual balms. What she had found could never be bought nor sold, never diminished, never stolen and never surpassed. While many women and men gave expression, with immense satisfaction, to their essential creativity, by creating a child; Alice had not been a cradle for a new life, but she was the channel for powerful impulses which would give birth to a whole new world. The connection to the universe, her creativity, gave her that which allowed Alice, even in extremis, to be not afraid. She had transcended religious guilt, the Christian's original sin, or the Humanist's social caution, the fear which limited every man and woman's actions – she no longer felt guilty or afraid. And her lack of fear was also enviable.

The murderer's lust by comparison to the gnawing envy, was minor and transitory. The envy was infinite and eternal; it existed at the deepest human, spiritual and universal levels – the lust was, in this moment of suspended time, merely physical; firstly a blood-lust. The ape wanted to kill, and to hurt and to kill again. He wanted to remove that which threatened him. To destroy the thing which caused him to question his own certainties, which required him to think again; which caused a huge rage to well up and demand a physical response to the challenge. And it was also a sexual lust; an urge to dominate, a burning lust to own, to control, to stroke and paw, to command and order, to penetrate and to absorb the beauty and style and assurance of such a blessed, silken young body and talented, admired girl. He wanted, needed and yearned for and simultaneously feared Alice's love.

The appetite of lust might be temporarily – and unsatisfactorily – fed, at least for a short time; but the envy could only grow, to finally and fatally consume the

envious. The only escape was for the assassin to discover his own creativity – and to employ the liberated power for service, not for dominion.

Alice, as her mind darkened and as she choked in pain, understood her primate attacker. She could also see beneath the animal passions a guilt-ridden, confused and self-loathing, once balanced person. Behind or through the layers of animal, overlaid by twisted humanity, another presence was apparent to Alice; a presence which cared not at all for the pain, fear, sin, guilt, elation, goodness, morality, ethics and courage coursing through the human drama as the protagonists wrestled in mortal combat. And within Alice, at the same deep level, a logical being dispassionately observed the fight and the desperation and the agony – and it also was undisturbed and unperturbed by the desperate struggle. *“I recognise the divine in you”* Alice thought, seeing her assassin on three distinct levels with new insight. Her spirit stepped backwards into the observer where all was calm and all struggling ceased. *“I have found the Third Observer within me”*.

And as she accepted this new connection, Alice floated from her body, not very far, just a few feet above the battle, out of her failing, damaged, captured, twitching corporeal form. She saw, without rancour or regret, that she was dying and that the grip of her killer was unbreakable. She knew that she was free and she knew that this was a defining moment in human evolution – in the evolution of communities on the Earth. And she knew that it had to be so. This human tragedy in which Alice played the main role was her fate and the fate of humankind; this death was an inevitable step into the next phase of existence. A new era had begun.

Without warning – Alice had gone.

Her murderer was baffled. The victim had escaped. The attacker was horrified and dropped the body. Alice slumped to the floor. He fell on her and held her face and

shook her hard. But she had gone. She had cheated him. She had escaped.

He held Alice's head right up to his own face and stared and stared and stared and stared. Alice was no longer there. The assassin ripped at her clothes and tore off her upper garments, searching for that which created life. The body slumped – it lacked animation. Alice had flown. The assassin slapped wildly at Alice – but Alice felt nothing.

Alice Whitaker, daughter, sister, shop-girl, seer and saint, had left the building.

Slowly, hugging Alice tightly and moaning, some vestige of sanity, triggered by the urge for self-preservation, returned and flared in the man. The light was still on and the window unshielded to the black night. The bright light streamed out across the water. Anyone might be coming. Alex would come. Others would come.

The intruder, taking a few seconds to collect the more obviously incriminating evidence, fled the building, accompanied for life, perhaps for eternity, by deadly, cancerous envy, unfulfilled lust and unacknowledged and inexpressible grief and guilt.

Alice Whitaker was no longer on Earth. She had lived out her twenty-three years courageously and died well. She had transcended and become infinite. She had fulfilled her karma. And the Earth, without the infinite Alice, was an infinitely sadder place.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Mourning

The Midas Syndrome: The old business system was governed by the sacred term 'Profit and Loss', without acknowledging that for one person to profit, another person or system had to lose. Exploitation was implicit and unquestioned. But 'Profit & Loss' were legal conventions defining the costs to be counted – usually excluding people's lifestyles and the Earth's finite resources. Business was blindly dominated by greedy monkeys so intent on grasping the cookies through the neck of the jar that they could not withdraw their clenched fists to eat the cookies – nearly destroying mankind. When all rights and responsibilities are accounted for, profit is always zero. In the new age, none will profit more from cooperative shared human endeavour and enterprise than any other.

From the later writings of Alice Whitaker.

It was said by those closest to him that Alice's murder marked the turning point in James Cruickshank's life. It precipitated him across the threshold from middle age into the last phase of his existence. Always a notably thoughtful and quiet man, he now became an introvert; no less intelligent and forceful but this one extra death, of his dear Alice, added to the billions of deaths, which God had seen fit to visit upon the people of planet Earth, triggered a deep sadness, bordering on despair. James seemed more concerned with contemplation of his own coming demise than with the future of his command. But such was the mettle of the man that only his closest friends could detect the change. To those outside the Naval College and submarine fleet, he presented as a powerful man in his prime of life whose soul had turned to iron and stone.

"Alex..." he said as experts from the naval college carried Alice's body to HMS Rutherford's ceremonial barge and searched the apartment for information, "...find and collect every piece of Alice's work. Gather all her writings – every scrap – and have it typed and secured on our computers. This is very important Alex. I want every word archived and broadcast. Collect and protect every photograph there is of her. And be careful Alex. Tell no-one you don't need to. Be very careful."

Alex, supported by friends in his inconsolable grief; blaming himself for leaving Alice alone that final day, nodded uncomprehendingly – then, slowly, understanding seeped through his anguish and connected with a new adult determination. He too would be forever changed.

“We can’t let them win, Alex. Her words must live on...”

James Cruickshank caught and held Alex’s eyes, at once with deep sympathy for the brother who had lost his lifelong sister, the last member of his family, and with a shared sadness, a community sadness, which Captain Cruickshank and Alex Whitaker had equal rights to exhibit. The whole of London would mourn this tragic death.

Alex nodded again, unable to speak but now in conscious agreement and with his volition slowly returning. He found a large empty travel case and started searching the apartment for Alice’s papers.

Alice’s body was taken from flooded Cadogan Square to the medical floor of the naval college at Canary Wharf high above the water. Even with the limited medical science facilities available the doctors quickly identified that there were two types of blood and concluded that the killer must have bled copiously. Alice had not gone quietly into that dark night. The murderer had been wounded – probably slashed by Alice’s kayaking knife which had been found open, under the fallen curtain.

Alex could not contemplate Alice being buried on land or at sea – all he wanted was to hug her close to him as she had sometimes hugged him as a little boy – the thought of her being cold and alone was too much to bear. The institution, in the form of Captain Cruickshank stepped in and lifted the personal burden from him.

“HMS Rutherford adopted Alice and has protected her for three years. We will bury her at sea with full military

honours. We will inform the London Governing Council, and hold the funeral in three day's time."

Three days later, a Saturday according to the calendar, HMS Rutherford slipped her moorings and sailed on the surface followed by a small flotilla of estuary and naval boats, ten miles out into the North Sea. On her broad landing deck, Alice's coffin was laid on trestles and draped with a Union Jack. Four Royal Marines stood at attention – one at each corner of the flag, facing outwards, heads bowed in respect. The ship's company occupied the rest of the deck; all in dress uniforms; all in mourning and several unable to keep back a tear. Alex stood alone at the head of the coffin – pale, weeping and inconsolable. The ship's officers stood above, in the superstructure, filled with a great sadness.

At midday, Alice's leaded coffin was despatched with traditional prayers, into the deeps.

As the mournful fleet returned to London the grey skies opened and wept quietly for many days and nights.

Lieutenant Anthony Gleick, who could command the spy satellites to spy on cuff buttons and sweep the airwaves for communications, however faint or encrypted, gathered a team around him and listed and collated all the intelligence about the crime he could garner.

"Alex! We'll get the bastard. We have enough already to start a process of elimination – and I have authority to circulate the entire estuary population with questionnaires. A wounded man – or woman, as we don't know for sure it was a man – who was missing that night; is not going to be so difficult to find. We'll get at the truth."

Alex, paler, older and quieter – nodded his appreciation; strangely dispassionate about the hunt.

Two weeks after the funeral, Sir Randall Delawarr, private secretary to the Duke of Westminster – a duke who, having been missing for some years, might be presumed dead – radioed HMS Rutherford saying he was speaking for his master's estates and, in this matter, for the representatives of the Prince of Wales; and he was eventually put through to Captain Cruickshank.

"Our deepest sympathies Captain on the terrible loss you and your company – in fact we all – have suffered. An awful business! Simply awful!"

"Yes; Sir Randall. As you say, a terrible and sad business. Thank you for your condolences. How can I help you?"

Sir Randall sighed silently; this was not going to be easy. *"What an awkward, remote, uncooperative and cold fish the man is"* he thought. But aloud he pressed on.

"We have been discussing the... um... affair, with the Governing Council of London..."

"Indeed?"

"Ah yes. And we are all determined to catch the wicked villain who committed this murder..."

"A worthy aim. Sir Randall."

"...And once we have arrested him..."

"Or indeed 'Her' Sir Randall"

"Of course – it could have been a woman – but we consider it unlikely. But once arrested? – Well popular feeling is running very high. The people are exceedingly distressed and angry... ...And we, that is the three main authorities..."

"You aggrandize yourself more each day – little man" thought James, but he said nothing.

“...feel that an example needs to be made. We have to publicly try the murderer – do you agree?”

James Cruickshank considered this question for so long in silence that Sir Randall had to ask “Are you still there Captain?”

“I’m thinking Sir, that as far as I know, we have no judges, no functioning prisons, no Courts, no police?”

“I entirely agree. Perfectly correct – except of course we now have the Special Armed Team; Professor Blackmoor’s SPAT unit who are now taking on a policing and security function...”

“...And there are a number of empty buildings which might be converted as small prisons. In fact there are numbers of larger Police Headquarters which have cells we could use...”

“You have clearly been thinking this problem through, Sir Randall.”

“We can’t afford to let murderers go free – can we man? Society must be protected. We must show the people that they are protected by the law – and will be called to account by the Law?”

“I have to agree with you. The rule of law is fundamental in an ordered society.”

“Good man!” said Sir Randall encouragingly. “I think all intelligent officers – those of us who serve the community – are agreed on that. We need to be seen to be re-establishing the rule of law...”

“...And fundamental to British law Captain; is property. Do you agree with me there Captain?”

There was another of James Cruickshank’s long silences, which he could maintain without the slightest apology for

leaving his communicant hanging on. Sir Randall felt exasperated – but he stayed calm – this could be a long haul – but the stakes were very high; far higher than bringing the clumsy murderer of that anarchic girl to justice. He wondered if James Cruickshank could see it coming. Was he bright enough to read between the lines – or was his ponderous thoughtfulness just a cover for a slow mind?

“In the present state of crisis Sir Randall; are we still to assume the laws of property, on sea and on land, apply as before the inundation and plagues?”

“Why do you so often answer a question with another question?” thought Sir Randall. *“You may not be as dumb as your speed of speech implies.”*

“Well we can set that intriguing debate aside for another time Captain. I think you know my views on the question but for now – can we concentrate, please, on Alice’s murderer and the reinstatement of Criminal Law?”

“I’m all ears, Sir. All ears. There is also of course Military Law. We have our own courts and justice system.”

Sir Randall was rocked by this idea. “You surely wouldn’t presume to try a civilian matter – and a crime – so...so...close to home... so personal?”

“I am no Judge, Sir Randall. I merely note that the Navy has its own form of law and punishments – and has had for hundreds of years.”

It was Sir Randall’s turn to remain silent and think, before he continued.

“Captain – we, my colleagues and I, think that you, representing your naval college and fleet, should meet – and ...ahem... create a law and justice system which we all agree will meet the case of Alice Whitaker’s murder. I’m telephoning to invite you to confer with us, Captain.”

“And have you now established the credentials of your friends and colleagues, Sir? If “we” are to revive or reinvent British Law, it would be necessary to first track the hierarchical authority we are claiming – which, correct me if I’m wrong, Sir; was once the province of Parliament and the Judiciary? My recollection from our first conversation is that your royal and aristocratic masters were missing presumed – alive! But is that still the case?”

“We have also been discussing that very point Captain. And we are now all willing to submit our claims to power and property and influence – to the democratic body here in London – which I trust you agree, is the only body – the nearest we are likely to have in many decades – to a representative government for the people – by the people – as it were.”

James Cruickshank didn’t answer, which Sir Randall took as a score to himself – at last. And he pressed home the advantage.

“It will only work – and you and I have already agreed we urgently need the rule of law – if all the diverse authorities agree to submit to the Governing Council...”

“To the power of Professor Blackmoor – and his colleagues; is that what you are saying, Sir?”

“Only if after full discussions and reflection – we remain in agreement. ...After all man – we are simply inviting you to join us in talks about talks. You can’t object to debate and discourse. We can’t do nothing, can we; we can’t just sit here and let matters drift – can we Captain?”

After another pause, James Cruickshank replied – and he sounded less than his sober quiet self, “I, Sir Randall! I can do exactly what I consider is in the best interests of my fleet and highly trained squadron of nearly five hundred personnel.”

“...That’s preposterous man! You have to comply with the duly constituted legal authorities. Damn it Captain you

swore an oath of allegiance – didn't you? Those are not "your" men and ships – they belong to the nation."

But James Cruickshank was through with answering questions and countering challenges.

"I have five nuclear submarines and five hundred military officers and crew men and women at my command, Sir Randall. Together we are capable of finishing off the whole damned human race. And that means I can, and I think must, do what I think fit – and when I think it fit..."

"...I have heard your request to join your talks – and I'll reply within three days – by sunset on Thursday. And now if you'll excuse me Sir Randall – I have other matters to attend to; including briefing the team who will track down Alice Whitaker's killer. Good day to you Sir."

"...But, but – we are investigating the crime. Professor Blackmoor already has a SPAT unit on the case led by a very good ex-Scotland Yard man. It doesn't need two teams. Won't they get in each other's way? ...Captain. ...Captain!" But Sir Randall found he was talking to himself.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Detection

This animal is dangerous. When I attack it, it defends itself – *French aphorism*

Lieutenant Gleick commandeered an operations room high in Canary Wharf with long views north and south across the still widening estuary and west towards central London. He had chosen a core team of ten very bright specialists to investigate the crime – and he thought that he knew beyond question that he could rely on all five-hundred Naval College personnel whenever any of them might be needed. One of the continuing lines of enquiry that had been pursued for the past week was interviewing every medical doctor and paramedic in London. He stood at a whiteboard and waved his companions to silence.

“The killer is, almost without a doubt, injured. Cut by Alice’s kayaking blade which was razor sharp. And we know from her defence against Muhammad Al Jazari three years ago that she pulled no punches when threatened. If Alice struck back and landed a blow; it is unlikely to be a surface cut. It is more likely to be a deep gash – which we think bled a lot... Adrian, you have something to add on the wound...”

“Yep! There was a lot of blood in the room which was not Alice’s – Type O and Alice was type A – There was probably an artery cut... Now our doctors say that the estuary water in the centre is still pretty foul with a high level of nasty bacteria and viruses – and the killer fled in a hurry. We can tell that from the trail of blood; back out of the rear door of the penthouse into the service corridor – avoiding all the alarms – there were five along that route; so we think the killer has some technical skills...”

“The wound Adrian! The wound...”

“Yep! Well the killer had to have arrived by water. There’s no other way. And leave by water. In the dark. And we’re assuming he or she did not come by power boat as it would be too noisy. If they were paddling or under sail – they’d get splashed. The wound is likely to be infected – Unless – Unless the killer could get a powerful antibiotic injection soon after the murder. They’ll most likely have a badly infected wound by now.”

“...If I were the killer, and wounded...” said Elizabeth Gordon, “I would want to hide up somewhere until the hunt died down – and my wounds healed. In a fight with Alice, the killer is probably bruised as well as cut... And if I needed medical supplies – I might make for one of the abandoned hospitals. In the centre there are at least three sitting in deep water.”

“The hospitals have been pretty much emptied of all drugs and equipment...” put in another team member.

“Yes; but not always below the water line. The very central buildings, which flooded first, still have floors, underwater, which are untouched” Elizabeth responded. “Anything that’s vacuum packed could be recovered as good as new.”

Lieutenant Gleick picked up the ball. “I agree the killer is unlikely to have sought a doctor and more likely to try self-treatment. But we’ll cover both angles...

...Elizabeth – you set up a team to search the old hospitals. Adrian – take two men and finish the job of seeing every doctor and nurse in London... And I’m going to see Professor Blackmoor and start a search for any absentees. One possible way to hide is to have to suddenly go elsewhere on urgent business – travelling on foot.”

One of the older officers, Commander Lawrence Nicholson, threw in a note of caution. “Of course it might have been someone from outside London – a contract killer – a hired assassin...”

“Not impossible – but very difficult” said Gleick slowly.

“Difficult? – How?” asked Nicholson.

“I’m not sure I can say Sir.”

“...Perhaps you’d prefer to be court-martialled?” smiled Nicholson to indicate but not guarantee that he was joking. “We can’t win this one if information is withheld.”

Gleick hesitated, but only for a few seconds.

“Well Sir! We... That is my communications unit, Sir; monitor just about everything that moves; by land, water or air. Coming or going. For...Er...for training purposes, Sir. Very, very difficult for any vehicle to get past us without being noticed. And with our surveillance, I would just about rule out a revenge attack by Al Jazari – though he’s still on the list... Sir”

“God!” thought Nicholson, *“The old man has got them on a war footing – very nearly. He’s not comfortable with the situation here. I wonder what is in his mind.”* But he said nothing, showed no great interest and smiled blandly.

He kept his counsel while Anthony Gleick pressed on.

“Okay everyone – Let’s get on with it. You have all the resources you need. So let’s get the bastard. But be warned – this person is very dangerous; armed, wounded and, we think, a clever technician – so if you corner him, or her, get back-up. And only give out information on a need to know basis. Keep your mouths shut, please!”

“Even with Alex?” asked Elizabeth.

“Particularly with Alex” said Anthony Gleick grimly; an odd remark which Elizabeth did not then understand.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Duck & Hide

It was a crime against nature and humanity that in 2004 four percent of the population owned seventy-five percent of our land and wealth. The land and the ocean belong to the planet, which is our common inheritance, and the wealth has been created through all of mankind's work over many generations. Was a highly paid corporate director, or his family, however hard working, any more deserving than a common soldier, or his family, who died young and underpaid defending our commonwealth? The French and Russian revolutions, and the republicanisation of most modern nations, were intended to rid the world of selfish, greedy aristocrats and to distribute their wealth. Was it really the poor and dispossessed, the struggling, huddled masses, who fled from Europe to America – or was it the dislodged, sociopathic aristocrats who migrated to the USA and with black slave labour rebuilt their ideal, exploitative, capitalistic world – leaving behind only the giveaway grand titles. - *Alice Whitaker, Later journals – Volume 4.*

At low tide the BT Tower base was still just above the water mark. At high tide, as now, the sea rose above the aluminium and glass entrance and extended across Regents Park to the lower slopes of Primrose Hill.

Captain Cruickshank, disembarking from the tender of HMS Rutherford, was assisted to clamber up a well rigged, over-engineered gangplank to a new, higher entrance hacked into the tower's massive concrete flank. Two other walkways, leading to nearby buildings, had been attached to the entrance, giving safe, dry passage above the sea. Alex, now Midshipman, Whitaker, was with him as were six senior officers, all in immaculate dress uniforms. Four sailors crewed the tender and stayed with the boat. Professor Martin Blackmoor, Leader of the Council of London and undisputed Dean of the rapidly growing University of London, flanked by his senior colleagues, greeted the party, fussing and apologising about the inconvenience to his guests as they negotiated the gangway up into a wide, bureaucratically grey corridor.

It was two weeks after the murder and Martin Blackmoor noted how much more taut and inward looking was the Captain. Previously a quiet, polite and thoughtful man of few words, James Cruickshank was today noticeably less polite, more taciturn and self-absorbed. The professor

noted that Alex had also changed; he was quieter too, and moved only when he had to with a deliberateness that reflected determination and strength; an adult mature strength which he had not manifested a month ago.

The art of diplomacy and small talk seemed to have died in the captain and his introspection was heavy and impenetrable, worn like a thick outer skin. But his concentration was as fierce as ever and his directness brooked no evasion.

"You've hurt your arm Professor Blackmoor. What caused the problem?"

"Aha! – straight in!" thought Martin Blackmoor, but he kept a civil tongue and a welcoming expression and waved his bandaged right arm in its black sling at the group. "Its only repetitive strain injury, I'm afraid Captain. Nothing more sinister. Not a knife wound. We've got our computers fully functional again and I've spent many hours catching up with keyboard work – and its jiggered my arm. I've suffered from it in the past."

He smiled sadly, a smile which acknowledged their shared grief at Alice's death; and his colleagues took up the empathetic feeling and expression and they all moved back a little to let the naval contingent further in.

"You won't mind then Professor – I have no wish to be rude but I have an urgent duty to pursue our investigation – if my medical officer, here, Doctor Llewellyn, takes a look at your arm to confirm that."

Martin Blackmoor felt his temper rising and it showed on his face. But he bit his tongue and spat out a civil enough reply; "It's damn rude of you Captain. But in the circumstances I ...would I, I wonder? ...might do the same... ...And who knows," he managed to add brightly, "Llewellyn might have some good advice for me."

"I'll do my best to help, Sir."

“You do know, I imagine, Captain, that we, the Council that is, have authorised a Council of London SPAT team, led by an experienced Scotland Yard detective, Detective Inspector Charles Barrow, to solve the murder...”

His last word “murder” fell like a dull lead weight, a dead sound in that anonymous corridor.

The universe and time stood still. Alex paled to such a degree that he feared he might disgrace himself and the Senior Service by fainting. He bent forward. His head did not so much spin as empty. His thoughts evaporated, leaving a hollow place where his critical faculties should have been. Infinitesimally slender filaments of energy, with no start and no end, filled the space. Each of the myriad filaments connected him with some other soul – a living person somewhere on the planet. The filaments carried their essential inner wisdom, their instinctual insights on the human race at this crucial and evolutionary turning point. Alex could “hear” the messages; he was plugged into the collective unconscious. He could feel the imperatives.

With a shock that jolted him upright, Alice, as real and present as he had ever seen her and at her most imperious, wearing her scarlet kimono and her favourite jewellery, stepped between him and the people in the corridor. “That is how it is Alex. This is how I heard my messages. This is real but unconscious communication from other real people around the world. These are what are most important. We have no time to pursue revenge. Develop and publish the message. That is what you must do!” and he could not question or countermand her utter certainty of purpose.

With a silent snap of invisible light – she had gone. Alex made to speak to her; to lift a restraining hand to her wrist. But his speech was like the scream in a nightmare – it emerged in the real world as a low incoherent moan; and the arm he tried to raise did not lift from his side – his fingers merely twitched involuntarily. No time had passed. Only Lieutenant Elizabeth Gordon noticed him stumble for less than a second – and then recover.

The word "...murder..." was still reverberating in the damp air and Alex saw the movements of the people around him shift from slow motion back to normal speed. He drew a sharp breath.

As Professor Blackmoor finished, the captain, alerted by his odd moan, spared a glance at Alex, reassured himself the young man was alright then replied "...I have been so informed Professor. The Naval College team is led by Lieutenant Anthony Gleick, our chief communications officer. He's been on the case for twelve days now..." and he nodded at Anthony Gleick who was standing with Alex.

"Any progress?" It was Blackmoor's turn to be blunt. And as he spoke he was deliberately and slowly unwinding his bandage, visibly wincing as he did so, in the small hope of embarrassing his single minded and obdurate guest. "We should co-operate Captain – a full and free exchange of information between Gleick and Barrow may get the job done far faster..."

Cruickshank answered before his Lieutenant could get a word in. "We are not minded, at the moment, to share our findings, Professor. Maybe later that will change – but not for the present."

"You trust no-one and we are all potential suspects – You old curmudgeon!" thought Martin – but he still responded politely, enjoying the contrast which showed him in a very good light compared to the grim, monosyllabic submariner.

It was at that moment that Professor Blackmoor and two of his colleagues simultaneously noticed that the naval team, apart from the captain, were all armed. They each wore holsters which clearly held pistols. Blackmoor recoiled.

"Is that really necessary, man!" he spluttered, pointing at the officer's weapons.

“...I mean! Good God man! You’re here to meet our Council and the Prince’s and the Duke’s representatives... Why the devil have you come armed like that.”

Lieutenant Peter Brock intervened with a reply and a tight smile, “No need to worry Professor. We’re not here to shoot anyone. But these days when we travel in the estuary – we come nearly twenty miles by water to get here for example – it makes sense to be able to defend ourselves. There are still some very odd characters and groups out on the river... ...And the pistols are part of our formal uniforms – Sir.”

The professor and his academic colleagues did not reply. They were definitely unhappy about the weapons – and they made their point with a silence which was unmistakably not to be taken as assent.

Into the brooding quiet, Captain Cruickshank showed no reluctance to blunder, once again.

“Any of your party missing Professor? You know we are looking for any injured man – or woman – who may have been cut by Alice’s knife?”

Alex stiffened at the words and his mouth tightened into a pale line.

Blackmoor was still preoccupied with the underlying message of the pistols – and the continuing abruptness, almost direct hostility, of Captain Cruickshank. He was suddenly aware, again, that this bearded, unhelpful, unfriendly man was a military man; and a man who controlled more fire power, who could unleash more violence, than perhaps anyone else in the world – certainly more than any anyone Blackmoor could think of. This man, alone, had the capacity at his command to overkill what was left of the human race, twenty or thirty times over.

Blackmoor wondered what the knowledge of that power – and that level of responsibility might do to a man’s

psyche. How does one carry that much potential death on one's shoulders – he mused. As he weighed these thoughts he kept his eyes down, apparently focused on the last few turns of bandage. His arm ached like hell and he wished he had gone into a side room and sat down with the doctor for this demonstration of, if not his innocence, then at least his wholeness and lack of wounds.

“There” he said, flexing his fingers at the group and pulling back his sleeve – still grimacing with pain and making no attempt to be macho about it, “no cuts or bruises – are there Captain?”

“I’m sorry to have inconvenienced you – and all of us,” said Cruickshank not sounding at all sorry. “And I do want to thank you for doing that so immediately...” and his thanks seemed genuine enough. “I couldn’t have concentrated on our meeting sitting near a man who may have been the wounded murderer! You’ll appreciate that Professor?”

His Highland accent came through strongly on the r’s in ‘murderer’ causing Blackmoor to reflect further that he was not only dealing with perhaps the most powerful military man left in the world – but with a man rooted in the warring, independent traditions of the ancient Highland Clans and the historical, respected and feared, battle hardened Scottish Regiments. And he realised that Cruickshank was deeply distressed and extraordinarily angry over Alice’s death. This was also the man who, without consultation, and now with no external checks and balances to the ICBM firing systems, had planned and carried through the reassembling of the *Orcinus Class* fleet, quintupling his firepower and, in just three years, had built a naval college, of, Blackmoor and his friends had assessed, the highest quality; in turn creating a formidable armada of nuclear submarines, crewed by five-hundred dedicated, intelligent men and women trained both as Naval officers and as Royal Marine Commandos. Cruickshank had revealed himself to be an ambitious man of wide vision and practical ability. This was a man with a mission. *“It would be a dangerous time for London, indeed*

for the entire planet, if this man became, even temporarily, mentally unbalanced,” cautioned Professor Blackmoor.

“We must all tread with the very greatest of care” thought the professor and he made a note to discuss it with his university colleagues.

Aloud he said, holding out his arm for Doctor Llewellyn to re-bandage after a gentle and detailed examination:

“I quite agree with you Captain. And on reflection your insistence was entirely the right thing to do. Quite the right thing. I would possibly have done that very self-same thing myself. ...And now we are on the same side again...” he left a slight question mark and a pause for Cruickshank to take up if he disagreed – but the captain let it pass, “...let me thank you for coming to our Talks About Talks, and offer you some tea and coffee – and, I think, if Betty has wrought one of her culinary miracles...” Blackmoor injected a hint of joviality into his tone, “...we may be able to provide fresh scones and biscuits to accompany the beverages.”

The bandaging complete, Martin Blackmoor, once more the solicitous host, ushered the company in the direction of the elevators.

Though said softly, the challenge from James Cruickshank sounded churlish and ungrateful, like the cawing of an angry crow during a lullaby; “You didn’t answer my question Professor,” he said, coming to a halt and obliging the whole party to halt with him.

“I was about to Captain. I was about to. But first can we all please take the lifts up to the restaurant floor – there are other guests waiting for us Captain; important guests; and our coffee!”

“Certainly Professor. Let us ascend your tower. ...I assume, by the way, we will be meeting Doctor Goodge this morning? I particularly want to discuss a technical point on satellite cameras – and I hear from my crew that

he has a close interest and professional knowledge of them.”

It was Blackmoor’s turn to stop in his tracks. The party wheeled about him, automatically separating into two; the naval personnel and the academics, who all eased back from the centre allowing the captain and the dean to stand facing each other.

“Doctor Goodge won’t be joining our meeting today Captain” said Blackmoor guardedly.

The air was electric.

“I must insist Professor.”

All pretence and any suppression of the fact that Captain Cruickshank was the most powerful man in Britain, possibly in the World, was demolished in that moment.

Martin Blackmoor, driven by his ego, at first bristled, then as his intellect looked at the reality of the situation and engaged his brain, he inwardly shrugged, “*When facing the inevitable, embrace it*” he reminded himself.

“Jonathan Goodge isn’t on any of our committees and wouldn’t normally be invited. He’s a bit of a lone operator, you know. But if you want him to come today – I’ll send somebody to find him. I’m sure he’ll be interested.”

“I am afraid that I do insist that he comes this morning Professor.”

“We’ll do what we can do Captain. ...Winkle, old man, would you be so kind as to organise a search for Jonathan. I’d be ever so grateful. ...I’d start with using the internal phone, by the lift shafts; if I were you.”

Roger Winkle nodded vigorously, glad to be of practical use, and hurried over to the telephone.

“...Now if that’s alright with you Captain? ...We can take the elevator.”

The top floor, eighty metres or two hundred and forty feet up, built as a revolving restaurant with views over the whole of London, was flooded with morning sunlight streaming in from the south-east. Even from this highest of high eyries the banks of the Thames Estuary to the distant south were impossible to trace with confidence. The shoreline to the north, only a half mile back from the Tower, was more surely delineated but it was still difficult to see with certainty just where the sea stopped and dry land started, or to know for sure if a particular building was an island or a promontory.

Behind a Formica counter, Betty Cumberbatch was in charge of a neatly installed *Calor-Gas* stove, which sported boiling water and baking trays, where she was plying six or seven men with coffee and tea, scones and biscuits. The six sailors suddenly realised that their breakfast had been three and a half hours earlier and that a twenty mile sea crossing put a keen edge on an appetite. With barely a break in stride they stepped out of the lift, into the restaurant – now a laboratory – and made straight for Betty. Alex with his long legs and the youngest of the team got to Betty first – then remembered himself and made a space for Elizabeth Gordon, who smiled her thanks at him. James Cruickshank almost smiled himself, his eyes briefly twinkling at the sudden return of enthusiasm in the grieving brother. *“As long as there is the tiniest spark, the life-force will not be denied”* he thought.

Blackmoor introduced the land agents to Captain Cruickshank. “This is Sir Randall Delawarr, the Duke of Westminster’s private secretary; and his assistant Maria Worminghall, who I believe is officially the “Bailiff” to the estate. Here is Mister Samuel Laing-Wootton, property manager of the Duke’s land in London with the Right Honourable Frederick John Obolensky, manager at the Duchy of Westminster. This big fellow here...” and he

shook a large stolid outdoor type by his clearly immense bicep; who didn't react at all to being so manhandled, "Is Michael Staunton, another bailiff, and last but not least I present Mister Robert La Salle representing the Royal Duchy of Cornwall."

The professor turned to encompass the naval officers, but seeing them elbow to elbow at Betty's small counter with their backs to the room, he introduced Captain James Cruickshank alone; "...commanding officer of the Canary Wharf Naval College and of course of the *Orcinus Class* submarine fleet, anchored in the Thames Estuary. ...To which, by the way, we owe our uninterrupted power supplies, as does the whole of occupied London. ...And you met my academic and Council colleagues earlier..."

"Ah! Sir Randall. We've spoken by radio several times," said Captain Cruickshank, taking the man's arm and pumping it fast in a manly handshake until the Duke's man shook with the force of it. And before the others could escape he repeated the handshake on each of them in turn. But while his handshake was unequivocally powerful and welcoming, his eyes were hard and inquiring.

"The cunning old Sod..." said Martin Blackmoor to himself. *"...He's testing them for wounds. He suspects one or all of them of complicity! No! Of direct involvement. Or is he going to shake all two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand hands in London, watching for a sign of pain?"*

Cruickshank turned back to Sir Randall Delawarr, keeping the others in peripheral vision. Alex came over smartly and offered his captain a cup of coffee which Cruickshank took with a nod of thanks. "Stay here lad – just for the moment." He ordered.

"Sir Randall! We're waiting for Jonathan Goodge to join us here. Not a knight, Sir, but a doctor of science. Doctor Jonathan Goodge – I believe you know him, Sir; a psychologist and an electrical and computer expert, so I'm informed."

There was a frisson of tension, swiftly submerged, which quivered through this side group.

Sir Randall, the tallest man in the room, looked down at James Cruickshank, seeing a dogged Highlander, strong and intelligent, with the unmistakable air of unchallengeable authority – perhaps even equivalent to his own authority – but originating from lowly stock. He smiled sociably.

“Do I know the man, Captain? I am not at all sure I have met a Doctor Goodge...”

“...Or spoken with him by radio, Sir?”

“...Or communicated with a man of that name in any way. But I may have done. I speak with a lot of people, Captain. As I’m sure you do.”

Alex, very still and deliberately making himself as anonymous and unobtrusive as possible, detected something. A look or a tension; a recognition; at the name ‘Goodge’ or some other message had passed between the four gentlemen – the land agents. It was subtle; it was fleeting – but it had happened.

Captain Cruickshank extended a friendly arm and put his hand on Sir Randall’s back and shoulder-blade, pulling the taller man a tad closer. “I thought you may have come across Jonathan Goodge in your days with military intelligence, Sir. I’m told that Goodge had a similar training – and I would judge you to be about the same age?”

Alex started with surprise – but stayed invisible. He’d never thought of Jonathan Goodge as a secret agent – though it was obvious from their first encounter under the Arch that he had rare abilities and skills. He was more than a dusty, middle ranking academic – that was for sure.

“I was never a spy Captain. Military Intelligence – pshaw! I’m no James Bond, Captain. Ha! Not nearly bright enough and certainly not fit enough. I’m afraid you’ve been misinformed.”

“Ah! Have I Sir Randall. So I won’t be introducing you to an old friend when Goodge comes through that door over there?”

And now they caught it. Both James Cruickshank and Alex Whitaker felt the unconscious shift of nervous energy as Sir Randall absorbed the idea of Jonathan Goodge, stepping into the room. Neither observer could have defined what it was they noticed – what they suddenly knew to be true – but know they did that Doctor Goodge and Sir Randall Delawarr had been in touch with each other at some time. Like all the most successful British civil servants, Sir Randall was being economical with the truth.

As this subliminal information struck the two submariners it triggered a current between the older and younger men and, in a microsecond their eyes checked each other and saw the confirmation they were seeking. So deadpan did Alex remain, apparently keeping a sentry’s duty watch on the whole room, and so experienced was Captain Cruickshank at misdirecting the enemy – that the exceptionally astute Sir Randall missed it. He didn’t know that they knew that he knew, perhaps innocently - but then why would he lie about it? – And not only knew, but had had some contact with, Doctor Goodge; a trained British military intelligence officer.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Vigilance

The seeing plays the most important role in Buddhist epistemology, for seeing is at the basis of knowing. Knowing is impossible without seeing; all knowledge has its origin in seeing. Knowing and seeing are thus found generally united in Buddha's teaching. Buddhist philosophy therefore points to seeing reality as it is. Seeing is experiencing enlightenment. – *D.T.Suzuki writing of the Eightfold Path.*

My predilection is to see ...because only by seeing can a man of knowledge know.
Don Juan, Yaqui mystic.

An hour later; an hour spent by Professor Blackmoor and Sir Randall Delawarr and their colleagues skirmishing with and attempting to manoeuvre the captain into admissions that democratic rule and good governance should be restored as soon as possible – the unspoken logic being therefore that his fleet must brought under government control and dedicated to the service of the community; Martin Blackmoor announced “Ah! Here’s Goodge now, Captain. The very man you wanted to meet!”

Winkle, partly apologetic and partly self-congratulatory that he’d tracked down his quarry, was ushering his charge, his esteemed and as-urbane-as-ever colleague, across the room towards them. Doctor Goodge, tall and unhurried, wore dark blue overalls and industrial boots, sleeves rolled high and his arms and hands mucky with old grease and engine oil, which he was making a valiant attempt to wipe clean with a large rag. He was smiling pleasantly with an air of questioning surprise, head cocked enquiringly.

“Excuse me gentlemen” said Cruickshank breaking away from the group and moving to meet Goodge, “Doctor Goodge – sorry to drag you away from your work – wrestling with some machinery...?”

“Good morning Captain. Yes, someone found a DUCK – from World War Two, which we’ve got in the railway workshops over at Chalk Farm. It still floats well enough

and we thought a large amphibian would be very useful – if I can fix the engine and a few other broken bits and pieces. We are having to make one or two parts ourselves – quite tricky...”

“...Er! Forgive me if we don’t shake hands...” he shrugged, indicating the black grease and wiping at his hands and wrists.

The question as to why he had been dragged to the Tower hung in the air.

“Well it’s good of you to spare us your time Goodge. Sorry to interrupt your morning – but we have a problem with understanding one of the spy-cameras in the sky...”

The Captain lowered his voice and got closer to Doctor Goodge who obligingly bent his head conspiratorially to listen, “...and as we don’t get over here very often I took the opportunity to bring our senior Radio Officer, Lieutenant Gleick, Anthony Gleick, with me to have a conversation with you and see if he can’t pick your brains...?”

“Well I’m flattered – but I’m no expert on satellite cameras Captain – no expert at all. Of course I’ll do what I can...”

“Aha! You’re a modest man Goodge; A modest man. And as a puritanical old Scot I like that – but your records at the Admiralty... tell us a different story...”

Goodge pulled away in surprise; still smiling calmly and dismissively but his eyes, suddenly wary and alert, gave him away. Captain Cruickshank held him by an elbow and drew him close again.

Alex, standing back from the scene, as still as a sentry; noted a quiver of anxiety emanate from the landed-gentry as Cruickshank went into a quiet huddle with Goodge; and he noted Goodge’s body language as the Captain cornered him. Unseen by all except the watchful Alex, he glanced rapidly at the group with Sir Randall, careful not

to catch anyone's eye but needing clues about what had led up to this – what might they have said to Cruickshank; was there anything Goodge should know to help him deal with this stubborn sailor.

“...You have an excellent record Jonathan; an exemplary intelligence officer with a most useful range of practical skills. And... you do indeed know a great deal about spy-satellites... Don't you man?”

“If you have my service records Captain... First let me congratulate you on finding the un-findable – those records are cunningly concealed... and secondly; I can hardly any longer deny that I have some training... a certain facility with optics, telescopes and lenses... Though hardly up to Lieutenant Gleick's standard. I doubt there is anything...”

“Ah! That modesty again Goodge!” said Cruickshank, giving him a friendly and comradely slap on the back, just behind his right shoulder.

Goodge made a half-step to steady himself from the blow, but he nodded amiably and looked James Cruickshank in the eye, with a quiet smile.

Captain Cruickshank lowered his voice even more, and Goodge bent closer to hear, “We hope to recover a recording of the night Alice died. The satellite has night eyes and we know it was working... But Gleick can't get it to transmit the data. It's in a good cause Doctor.”

“None better Captain. None better. Of course I'll give any help I can – but the signals you want will be very faint – in the infra-red... Does Gleick have enough technology to read them?”

“Oh I think so Doctor. I think so... Look here's Anthony Gleick over here...” and he steered Goodge towards the welcoming smells from Betty's counter and three uniformed officers propping it up. “...Have a chat – see if we can recover the camera record... Then we'll see.”

Just as he let Goodge go and turned away from him, James Cruickshank turned back and, speaking so the room could hear, he said “It must be quite a coincidence for you to meet Sir Randall again – you’ll be able to talk over your old spy-school days; won’t you Doctor...”

Under the scrutiny of many pairs of eyes; eyes of intelligent and trained observers, and not knowing what may have been said before his arrival, Goodge did not panic. He looked levelly at Captain Cruickshank and then at the representatives of once aristocratic estates, and he said – nothing. He smiled enigmatically, a relaxed and easy smile which could have meant “Yes – we are old friends” or it could just as easily have meant “No – never met the man”.

When he did respond it was obtusely, leaving them all guessing. “I’m always happy to talk with people Captain – old friends or new acquaintances – and if you particularly want me to have a chat with Sir Randall...”

James Cruickshank smiled; wryly acknowledging he’d been outmanoeuvred. His eyes were hard as flints.

But, un-remarked by all, as silent as the grave and unmoving, Alex had watched the cameo and he saw, or did he see – was it more of an intuition? – He felt, he was aware of the merest hint of triumph in Sir Randall Delawarr, reflected even more subtly by Jonathan Goodge, and mirrored in the eyes of Sir Randall’s friends. And Alex knew; knew beyond doubt that they were conspirators – they were a team and they were hiding something. His inner eye had been opened – was it opened by his vision of Alice in the grey corridor – and he could see clearly what previously would have been obscure to him.

But whether they were concealing their driving ambition to gain control of the *Orcinus Class* fleet; sinister enough in itself – or some even more sinister knowledge of Alice’s murder – Alex could not fathom.

In the early afternoon hazy sunshine, after a good lunch, on the journey back to HMS Rutherford; the gunmetal motorboat slicing through small but bewilderingly patterned waves, which formed as the ebb and flow slapped at the many buildings and echoed back into the wide estuary; Captain Cruickshank sat near the prow of the boat, letting the unpredictable wind and spray dash into his face and through his hair. He indicated for his second-in-command, Lawrence Nicholson, to join him and then asked Alex to come forward. With the subtlest of signs the captain made it clear they should not be overheard, that this was a private conversation.

As the two men sat with him, they maintained a companionable silence and took in the scenery. The boat, crewed by four Able-Seamen, had slipped down from the BT Tower, through the West End, through a maze of small streets, now permanent waterways, and into Piccadilly, then onto Trafalgar Square where Nelson's Column still towered high above the water, but the lions which guarded him were deeply submerged. From there the boat made for the central channel and headed east out towards the North Sea. Great care had to be taken to manoeuvre round the capitolis and piles of the now underwater bridges – and to avoid the sunken roofs of buildings abutting the bridges. They scudded across the grey, turbulent waters on an incoming tide; battling cross-currents and dangerous whirlpools – not quite in the category of maelstroms but nevertheless making for difficult sailing. The air was not cold, and it was not raining – but both conditions were threatened despite a bright, overcast sky. After half an hour of slow progress, the tender cleared Tower Bridge, the channel opened out and the boat put on speed – the engine roaring as it churned through the water; the shoreline they were following – on their left – receded; at this place the estuary was more than twelve miles wide. As the noise increased and the buildings hemming them in stepped back by about half-a-mile, Cruickshank addressed them.

“You know Lawrence... ...If I was an English aristocrat, or considered myself to be of an aristocratic caste, and I had powerful and clever colleagues who could see the opportunity to lead the community, to forge a government to take on the whole country; and I was faced by a stubborn, old, lowborn bastard from Scotland who, through unforeseeable events and natural causes had, almost by accident it might seem, had acquired the power to blow up the whole world, and had built a military force of more than five-hundred stout hearted men – and women of course – a man who had, through no particular talent or ability of his own, they might think, had effectively stepped into the shoes of the First Lord of the Admiralty, and a host of other high offices which in the past had been reserved for or were in the gift of royalty or the Prime Minister...”

Commander Nicholson nodded his understanding, but said nothing. The captain looked at Alex to ensure he was following. This was too important to be misunderstood by Alex.

“...Well then... ...If I believed the military might and machinery of this once Great Britain should, when being re-formed, be as near as possible, constrained and directed by the protocols and procedures and chains of command which had been wrought – with very, very good reason and considerable sacrifice – over the past one-thousand years of history...”

Here he paused ruminatively while his audience of two caught up and nodded at him.

“...In all those circumstances – I might be; in fact I almost certainly would be, anxious to bring such a man under my control... Don’t you agree?”

“Yes Sir. That would be the logical train of thought, Sir.”

Alex, his eyes looking to a more distant horizon and his mind racing, nodded his assent almost absently.

“...And if it began to seem to such a lawful and law abiding putative leader that the old Scottish bastard was not about to comply – now or in the future – with your plans for rebuilding the United Kingdom’s democratic institutions; if in fact the man appeared to be unassailably in command of his military force, which appeared to be equally loyal to him in turn... ...And this most powerful warlord, swayed by the inspiration of a mere girl, a dreamer, a latter day Jeanne d’ Arc, also was rejecting the fundamental tenets of the basis for resurrecting the old civilisation – then what then would one do?”

Lawrence Nicholson, astonished at his captain’s unusual verbosity, bit back the reply that was on his lips as James Cruickshank turned to look him straight in the eye. Alex however, was far too young and impatient to think twice before uttering.

“I’d ‘ave to kill ‘im. Do ‘im in. You couldn’t leave him around. You’d ‘ave to get rid of him and put someone else in charge of the fleet.”

Captain Cruickshank looked at Alex and back to Lawrence Nicholson. His gaze was level and came from a different dimension. He was already a man who knew he was of great historical importance; his look was the unwavering look of a portrait – a portrait of a hero. He sat as if carved in stone – he manifested utter certainty.

“You said from the beginning Lawrence that he was a quick lad. He’s leapt to the right conclusion – wouldn’t you say?”

“We are going to have to be very careful, Sir. ...They could take you out, now, with a sniper’s rifle from any point along this shore. And I’d lay odds on that Doctor Goodge being a crack-shot – along with his other talents.”

“I want...” continued Cruickshank, his voice even lower, “...the whole unit to be placed on a security footing, with lookouts and scouts posted. I will use my cabin on Rutherford and half the command must be on duty in the

submarines at any one time. What rota do you suggest Commander?"

"I'd say week and week about, Sir. We'll announce it as an intensive training programme..."

"Good man Commander. Just make sure I've got at least fifty percent of my crews aboard at any one time."

"Aye, Aye, Sir."

"Now, Alex lad, why are you here, privy to this very secret discussion? ...Well – why man?"

"They may've killed Alice – and they'll try to kill me – Sir. Is that what you think, Sir?"

Cruickshank nodded grimly. "As you disseminate Alice's writings..." he saw a perplexed look cross Alex's face, "...Disseminate – print, email, radio, broadcast – distribute across the media..."

"Ah! Yes Sir."

"I want the work to go out across London, across Britain and around the world. I want it so widely disseminated that it can never be suppressed – never be lost... I think your sister was right Alex."

"It will be Sir"

"And so be very careful. This is far more important than catching the killer – don't get sidetracked..."

"That's what Alice said Sir..."

Cruickshank's head came up in shock and he searched Alex's face intently.

"Beg pardon, Midshipman. What did you just say?"

“Er ...That’s what Alice would have said, Sir ...if she were here, Sir!”

But James Cruickshank, himself reared in a fey far northern family, hailing from the Western Isles, where shades, shadows, portends and signs from nature, in his grandmother’s day had been taken for granted and interpreted by the prescient members of the inhabitants – particularly prophecies and omens of death, knew he had heard aright the first time. But he hid his knowledge and let Alex be.

As the Royal Navy tender ploughed through the grey estuary waters on an easterly heading; to the north, two men in the vicinity of Regents Park, winced as they nursed injured arms.

Martin Blackmoor’s repetitive strain injury had not been helped by the acute tension of the morning’s meetings. His shoulders and neck had locked up as muscles involuntarily contracted in response to the impossible demands of the Duke’s men, as he thought of them, and the impenetrability of the implacable brick wall presented by James Cruickshank. The tension in his back and shoulders crept down his injured arm, turning a dull ache into a deadly, throbbing pain.

The professor couldn’t decide whether to take another handful of pain killers – but he may have had too many of them already – or could he bear – or bare perhaps – the ministrations of a self-taught “physiotherapist”, an attractive large, young woman originally trained as a nurse who – if asked and rewarded in the right way - gave an excellent and relieving all over body massage, which did, he knew from several previous sessions, at least take his mind off the suffering arm for as long as an hour. “I wonder...” he thought “...if I just turn up at her apartment; will she be there – and will she be available...” But as the question excited him and tensed his neck it sent shocks of pain down his arm – and he groaned. “On

the other hand! ...Maybe I'd be better just going to bed for the afternoon."

In the voluminous roof space of the Nash Terraces, the fine, high, white terraced buildings on the eastern boundary of Regents Park, in a second home wrought secretly from what had been the closed-off and unoccupied lofts to several grand houses, Jonathan Goodge also groaned with pain as he ministered to his left arm. He had taken off his overalls, donned a dressing gown and cleaned away the black oil with hot soapy water. He sat now at a table, under a roof window, with both arms bared, laid palms upwards in front of him. He experimentally flexed his fingers – turned pale – and groaned again; dropping his head down onto the table.

At first glance his arms and hands were unmarked and unremarkable. Closer inspection; very close inspection, revealed a skin coloured plastic sleeve on his left arm, covering from above his bicep down to the centre of the palm. His thumb stood out from the sleeve. He lifted his head, set his face and mouth, picked up a clean piece of lint and carefully, tenderly wiped away the final traces of make-up which had disguised the covering. Despite the pain he felt a glow of satisfaction that the make-up and the black grease had fooled Captain Cruickshank – and everyone else in the room.

Apart from the pain, which he had managed with heroic strength during his time with Cruickshank and later while discussing satellite cameras with Anthony Gleick, his discourse with Gleick mithered him. The young man struck him as someone who only asked questions he already knew the answers to. Goodge had been wary of entrapment from the start of their conversation. He had no wish to help the sailor to download data from the night-sight memory of the spy-satellite. Goodge did not have to pretend that he did not know everything about the satellite's technology – but he knew enough to suggest solutions Gleick may not have tried. He realised that the satellite may well have had an owl's eye view of his journey across the water to Alice's penthouse – and his hasty,

panicky retreat after the killing - and that if he helped Gleick capture the data, it might – just might, with great difficulty, be analysed and resolved to show who had been paddling the small grey inflatable boat.

Jonathan had used all his skills and instincts to steer a credible course between Gleick's penetrating questions; withholding key knowledge about accessing the satellite's CCTV records but letting out just enough new, and genuinely useful instructions, to convince the lieutenant of his cooperation and goodwill. But the longer they spoke, the more he feared he was being set-up. In a sudden wave of fear, which for a second or two wrested the acute pain from his iron control which washed over him like a sick blow to his testicles, he suddenly thought that Gleick had already gained and analysed the satellite pictures. But he could not be sure either way.

And now the thought niggled in his mind, decreasing the mental energy he required to tackle the acute stabs which ran from his forearm to his armpit, down it seemed through his heart and lungs and gripped the pit of his stomach. *"Does Gleick already know?"*

But the pain overwhelmed him, driving everything else from his head. Unaware that he was uttering a low moaning sound, Goodge took hold of the top of the tight sleeve and without pausing throughout the agonising process he folded the sleeve down, inch by painful inch, revealing a jagged and livid suppurating scar. When he finally dragged off the plastic covering, the wound could be seen to run from the palm of his hand, just above his thumb, up almost to the crook of his arm. The slash had been roughly stitched with black cotton. The edges of the wound were angry, painful, swollen red and along its length and through the needle holes, seeped creamy yellow pus. In his armpit where the antibody lymphatic system factories are located, the whole area was bright pink and extremely tender with swollen, overworked glands battling the invasion of pernicious and dangerous viruses and other foreign bodies, picked up from the filthy estuary waters.

Jonathan Goodge moaned some more, then forced himself to his feet, supporting his damaged limb, and walked with deliberately tenuous and careful steps to a washbasin, which he filled with hot water and poured in antiseptic. Lowering his entire lower arm into the water he placed his forehead against the mirror above the basin and leaned on it with closed eyes.

“The cunning little bitch was damned quick...” he told himself, “...too damned quick. I hope I’m not going to lose this arm...”

He winced again in desperately controlled silence and then, breathing deeply and rhythmically, he forced his mind to lift itself above the pain, away from the hidden attic, and out into the wider, active world where throbbing pain did not rule every thought and constrain every tiny movement.

When the pain was momentarily diverted to some other universe, with his free hand he reached into a drawer beside the basin and brought out a cellophane package. He used his teeth to tear the wrapping and manoeuvred a pre-charged syringe from the pack into his active right hand. Forcing himself to look hard at a target spot on his left arm, he suddenly drove the needle into the wound, winced and pressed the plunger; dispensing a large dose of penicillin into his bloodstream.

With his last reserves of nervous energy and strength he soaked a towel in the antiseptic water of the basin, wrapped it tightly round his forearm, collapsed onto a bed – and slept heavily, plagued by feverish nightmares of hellish goblins and unforgiving, unremitting, heartless torturers. However much he may have yearned for her, Alice Whitaker, pretty, admirable Alice, Alice the sometimes Empress, would never again grace his dreams and drive out the eternally tormenting devils.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Sniper

From the same period, the late 1470's, Leonardo made a set of illustrations of war machines [including crossbows]. This was the beginning of a lifelong fascination with mechanical devices for use in battle or to provide defences, designs that could have appealed greatly to the heads of state Leonardo had been weighing up as potential patrons. *Leonardo the First Scientist*, by Michael White.

A month later autumn arrived in the estuary, with no Indian-Summer to soften the approach of winter, bringing solid, high, flat, grey cloud cover and biting cold, dry, north-east winds. The north London and south London visible communities, now each numbering about fifty-thousand people, hunkered down in their upper-floor seashore apartments or, more usually, in houses on dry land – the higher the better – and relied on the atomic submarines to generate electricity and to continue to pump fuel from the submerged storage tanks. Many more families, individuals and groups still hid themselves away, living isolated scavenging lives; too afraid to risk contact with others – who may harbour the deadly flu virus – and too paranoid to share their knowledge of survival stores, despite the obvious benefits of the well lit homes and cooperative collection and distribution systems on offer from the London Governing Council.

All manner of hermits and strange lone characters scuttled through the streets of North London; of what remained above water in East London and in the South of the city and, just as Alice and Alex had done, took maze like circuitous routes home to secret dens where they stored vital supplies of food, clothes, fuel and batteries.

The BT Tower community, the University of London, pounded out information on the BBC radio channels; which they estimated were available to ninety-five percent of all survivors; offering education, organisation, safety and above all, good medical services. Medicines and

doctors were the greatest attractions in persuading stubborn loners to become cooperative citizens. Slowly the organised communities grew – and just as slowly and irrevocably, the sea level kept rising.

Martin Blackmoor was worried by the appearance of Jonathan Goodge. “Good heavens Jonathan you must have lost at least eight kilo’s and you have great dark circles under your eyes. Do you feel ill?”

Jonathan Goodge shook his head and looked back at the professor, still able to muster his accustomed poise and easy manner.

“Well at least go and have a medical at the UCH – there are seven excellent doctors there now – let them have a look at you...”

Privately to his colleagues, Blackmoor said “He looks to me as if he’s got cancer. He is clearly very unwell. The man is wasting away...”

But in fact Goodge was over the worst and getting better. His arm had healed and the wound was no longer festering; his glands had returned to normal and the pain had all but gone. But the nightmares he couldn’t dispel or avoid; demons visited him and invaded his dreams every time he fell asleep. The arrival of cold, winter weather eased his life – he could wear long sleeves and even gloves; hiding the guilty scar without having to haul on and disguise the plastic arm cover. Also, with a month gone by and no accusations made by Gleick – or the other duffer leading the SPAT team; the ex-Scotland yard Johnny – Goodge was confident that the satellite had not given up its secrets or that any pictures obtained were simply too dark to reveal his identity; and so he was, very probably, in the clear.

“Clear” was exactly what James Cruickshank thought as, in a secure room on the top floor of Canada House, the

Canary Wharf skyscraper, he considered for the twentieth time a set of blurred, infra-red satellite pictures, refocused and realigned by a highly sophisticated surveillance computer programme, showing a small boat, an inflatable dinghy, on black reflecting water, illuminated – for just three seconds, sufficient to produce six stills – by a stream of light from a curtain-less upper window in the Hyatt Hotel, Cadogan Square, Chelsea. The six spy-satellite pictures, laid together, made it clear that a skirl of water had swept the craft sideways as its occupant paddled hard to escape the not overly bright shaft of light; but the sea, the infinitely powerful sea, had had other ideas, pushing the boat into the avenue of illumination; the paddler fighting urgently to force it back into the shadows. And in the battle between the sea and the mariner for direction, the boat had twisted one way and then the other and as it did so the paddler glanced up angrily and fearfully at the lighted window – showing his whole face to the spy high in the sky. The face was indistinct; little more to the naked eye than a white blob with grey patches for eyes – but there was something familiar in the shape and posture, the physicality of the paddler, which was recognisable and, with more computer enhancement, the pale patch of face pixels was resolved into features they thought they knew.

Captain Cruickshank had ordered Lieutenant Gleick to maintain total secrecy – determined to root out the nest of rats and vipers which had assisted or directed the assassin on his murderous mission.

“You are a clever girl Alice...” he murmured. “Tearing down the curtains, and with the cooperation of the satellite, the sea and the light caught him in the act – as I’m sure you somehow hoped it would. ...But what do we do now. Are we completely sure about who this is and do we let him get back to full strength – when he could be a threat to Alex and to me – or do we take him now?”

“...Is it important to gather evidence against the whole bunch of them – The Duke’s Men – and if we arrest Goodge – what do we do with him then?”

For the umpteenth time, Cruickshank shuffled the pictures into a neat pack, placed them in a steel drawer and locked them away.

Troubled and undecided, he walked round the room. It was on the north-east corner of the building, seven-hundred-and-seventy feet high, standing in some fifty feet of water – being three times higher than the Tower occupied by the Governing Council of London – a fact which occasioned in him a wry smile, and out to sea the five Orcinus Class submarines, moored a mile apart from each other, were all visible. Beyond the submarines the estuary became the North Sea, the estuary shores too wide to be any longer considered as river banks. His glance went towards the eastern horizon. Even under the permanently grey skies something sparkled and glittered with light in the distance. As soon as the captain realised what these reflected lights meant, he leapt, defying his gravitas and advanced years, across the room and snatched up a handset.

“Get me Commander Nicholson...”

“I don’t care if he’s having a pink bubble bath with twenty naked Thai masseuses in attendance – get him – Now!”

“...Commander – two damn great icebergs drifting our way, into the mooring area – range about twenty miles. Cast off the submarines; get the captains on board – wait till I’m on Rutherford and make ready to manoeuvre.”

“...And Lawrence – one thing we might do is to blow them out of the water. Or will breaking them up create more hazards than we could cope with? Think on it man.”

The Governing Council had only fifteen minutes warning that the submarines were about to unplug the power supply and leave their moorings. Thousands of large and small diesel generators were kicked into life filling housing areas north and south of the estuary with fumes and noise not experienced since the demise of the, pre-

inundation, twice daily commute – disrupted and stopped forever by the rising flood waters. The hills were alive with the sound of twin-strokes, many of them like Italian mopeds being thrashed along by speed crazed, underpowered youngsters, without silencers, making a terrible din. Power was maintained for the telephone system and most water pumps were kept running – but cookers, kettles and heaters were sabotaged by shortages, outages and weak currents – making what had come to be accepted as “normal” life impossible.

Within twenty minutes the centre of the estuary by the Isle of Dogs was buzzing with small boats ferrying the other two-hundred-and-fifty sailors from the Canary Wharf buildings to the five submarines, leaving a small group on guard at the Naval College and in the shore based communications centre. Within thirty minutes all five submarines, fully crewed, were casting off, their huge engines and propulsion systems churning the brown waters into foam as they manoeuvred to approach – and not get trapped by – the drifting icebergs, which, by necessity sitting in the deepest part of the shipping channel, were competing with the Orcinus Class submarines for navigable depth.

“Can we go round them gentlemen?” asked Captain Cruickshank of the other four captains, in a radio ring and all on the bridges of their vessels.

“Tricky Sir. Round the sides we could run aground; particularly on the south side where the mud flats are – and there are hundreds of hidden, submerged obstacles – some of which could be explosive. That lead brute is at least fifteen metres high, so it could be seventy-five metres below water and as wide as its deep. That’s all the depth we’ve got - down to the sea bed – so we can’t go under them!”

“Presumably they’ll snag on the seabed – and stop? – and melt? – and disintegrate?”

“Remember Titanic! - is what I always say Sir when it comes to icebergs. I wouldn't like to take any risks that depend on the damn things being predictable. There are fierce tidal currents as we know Sir – and they will be even more powerful if they are partially blocked by the ice...”

“Could we run between the bergs, gentlemen? Would any of you volunteer to try?”

“No Sir” came back rapidly – four times.

“No...” said Cruickshank, “...to run between them poses the same difficulty as manoeuvring round them – only doing it twice in succession. We can't be sure there's enough water. The estuary is very wide – but it's mostly too shallow – and icebergs can and do turn turtle without warning.”

As Captain James Cruickshank considered the options, an exceptionally quiet, sleek motor launch carrying two men, slipped away from the vicinity of the BT Tower, weaved its way over the drowned roofs of central London, slid around Nelson's Column and, using all the cover it could find, sped eastwards along the northern margin towards the Canary Wharf complex. Looking gaunt and pale, Jonathan Goodge nevertheless stood easily with one hand on the tiller, clad in black, a case containing a sniper's rifle at his feet – and held a conversation over a radio-phone held to his ear. Crouched in the bow was Michael Staunton, a large, uncommunicative character, Sir Randall's heavy-set bailiff, wrapped in thick outdoor clothes. “My very own, personal Caliban.” Goodge thought. “Is he here to help – or to clean up afterwards – I wonder?”

With the buildings nearly empty he was sure of getting into the Naval College unseen and once inside he was equally sure he'd find a high eyrie, a bird's eye view, over the submarine moorings – and over the waters where the good Captain and the bold Alex often ferried back and forth.

Jonathan sensed, rightly so, that James Cruickshank knew or guessed or might come to guess too much – and apart from removing the main threat of being detected as the killer – he was under orders to rid the world of those who would promulgate Alice Whitaker's ideas and to destroy any originals and copies of her work. He was not an evil man; he was a thoughtful, intelligent and balanced man. He was also a trained agent of the British military and the intelligence services; a man who had taken an oath of loyalty to his Queen, to his country and, by extrapolation, to the chain of command and hierarchy that had once existed, and that may again come to be established in London – and then across the rest of the country.

Jonathan liked and admired Cruickshank; he loved and admired Alice – what man wouldn't? And he welcomed Alex's advancement as an initially self-taught martial-arts trainee and latterly as a broadly trained skilled submariner. It was not, definitely not, personal. But, after several conversations with Sir Randall and the other land agents, with their indisputable pedigrees, drawing their authority and power from duly elected, albeit probably deceased government ministers – and, more persuasively to Goodge, from royal lineages and aristocratic houses – also probably deceased, he had seen where his pledges, oaths and allegiances lay – and had reluctantly opted to do his duty as an officer of the Crown. Sadly, he would now have to kill these two admirable men – just as he had had to dispose of the lovely Alice.

At dusk, the sleek craft weaved a careful course; first passing Canary Wharf a kilometre to the north east then, using buildings and abandoned industrial towers and other debris from the flooding for cover, Goodge nursed it southwards back towards the tall Naval College, which was now mostly in darkness and nearly deserted. With half a kilometre to go, he killed the engine and silently eased the boat through the black oily waters with a small paddle. Michael Staunton crouched in the bow, probing ahead with a long boathook held in one hand, as if it

weighed little more than a toothpick. Suddenly, putting Goodge immediately on his guard, Staunton, still crouching, and without the slightest noise, left the bow and loomed into Goodge's face. Staunton at ten paces was neither pleasing to the eye nor to the nose; not even the man's best friend, loving wife or devoted mother – not even Mary Archer's poetic judge - would describe this homely creature as 'fragrant'. At five inches, on a gloomy autumn evening, it needed a man highly trained in martial arts, diplomacy and self-control, as was Goodge, not to reel back in horror or to let his eyes water from the unmitigated, undiluted, overpowering body odour which, despite the cold air and sea breezes, assailed and enveloped him.

"Effing Hell!" he thought, "The brute hasn't washed or changed in months. It's like being in a bloody cattle shippin; only worse! The stench is built into the man's clothes." But he managed to show no reaction, even when Staunton drew closer, close enough to breath on Goodge's face, to whisper. Clumsy as he looked, Staunton had moved from the prow to the stern without the least sound.

"...There's a scavenger," he mouthed, making a tiny movement with his right hand to point discreetly at a set of shadows beneath a building and on a jetty seven feet away. "He's seen us. ...I think we should ...talk to him."

Goodge looked, marked the oddly shaped, deeper shadow, saw an outline of a head and shoulder, and nodded agreement. One cautious dip of the paddle took them to within two feet of a concrete shelf and, as Goodge drew breath to whisper instructions, Staunton leapt like a hunting bear, still utterly silent, his thick coat trailing out and behind him, the boat rocking wildly and shipping water, and crashed down on the target who squealed in terror. His cry was stifled by Staunton's huge gloved hand clamped over his mouth and nose.

"Good God!" thought Goodge, "He's lethal. I wouldn't want this man stalking me one dark night – or day."

But partly from empathy for the innocent citizen now trapped under the stinking bailiff, and partly from the urgent need to question the man, Goodge also leapt onto the jetty, bringing a painter with him.

“Staunton! Staunton! We need to question this chap. Don’t hurt him. ...Let him up ...But no noise. Keep him quiet.”

“One squeak ...And I’ll rip your fucking head off. Understand? ...Understand?” insisted Staunton, his hands now round the man’s throat and shaking the captive rapidly.

With a compliant gasp and by rolling his eyes pleadingly in terror, the smaller man let them know he agreed. He would not give them any trouble. But, his depth of terror, even given that he had been within minutes of strangulation, far outweighed reasonable fear of the bailiff’s threats. Goodge categorised him as a one-time middle grade civil servant, with small deskwork hands; now bearded, his beard roughly cut, wrapped in a fat padded anorak and, like the bailiff, and common to mentally disturbed patients, undoubtedly lacking in personal hygiene.

“Just get’orff me. Get’orff me. I won’t shout. I won’t run. – Just don’t touch me. Stay back. ...Disease!” he hissed, “You’re diseased. You’re all diseased.” And he started to struggle – like a lunatic – to get away from Staunton. But he might as well have tried to break granite with his bare hands as to break Staunton’s grasp.

“He’s mad as a hatter, Staunton. Mad as a ...hatter. Like most of these vagrants and hermits – he’s seen too many and remembers too many Glacier Flu deaths. He won’t go near the College – or anywhere where people are. He’s terrified of being infected by the virus.”

Goodge wondered; if they held a competition – which of the two, the countryman or the lonely madman - would smell the worse. “They might mutually gas each other in that ugly embrace,” he grimaced.

Staunton held the deranged man less tightly. "You sure?" he growled.

Goodge nodded. "Look at his eyes, man. Look at his eyes."

"So we've no questions for him, then?"

Goodge looked pityingly at the mad isolate, eking out a harsh living from salvage. "No – No questions. He's no use to us. Or them. Let him go."

"Better safe than sorry," said Staunton, and casually broke the man's neck.

"He'd seen us. Might identify us." And, as he spoke, he hauled the body, the head hanging at a ninety degree angle, to the water's edge and slipped it under the black surface with all the care he'd take to introduce valuable salmon trout to a new pond.

Even Goodge, trained military assassin as he was, winced and shuddered at the callous brutality.

"Jesus Christ, Man!" There was no need for that. He was no threat. Why kill him? Why?"

"Just following orders Doctor Goodge. Following orders – to keep things tidy."

In dark and disagreeable silence they marked a hidden mooring by an architecturally enhanced nineteenth century crane then paddled to a corner of Canada House where Goodge clambered, also completely stealthily, onto the building.

"Go back to the old crane – and wait for me. However long it takes. Could be a day or two. If I get caught, I'll try to fire a green flare." Goodge hissed, locking his eyes onto Staunton's.

"I'll wait. I'll be here."

And Goodge knew that he would be. Whether out of team loyalty or '*to keep things tidy*' wasn't clear; Goodge put the question to the back of his mind and focused on what he had come to do.

"Now Lawrence... ..Have you done the analysis I asked you to tackle...?" asked James Cruickshank.

"Yes Sir! Though we could do with a few weeks of material-scientists and mathematicians figuring all this out for us; Sir. But by my reckoning a metre cube of ice weighs about nine-hundred kilograms, that's just about a ton; so a ten metres cube, which could have about three-feet showing above water, weighs a thousand tons..."

"I'm following you so far Commander..."

"Now... While a thousand ton block of ice falling, say ten feet, onto the deck would make a considerable dent, and sink us, that's an unlikely contact. More likely is that we'd collide with it floating in the water – where its inertia is only about twelve percent of the mass – one-hundred-and-twenty tons – say..."

"Which at very low speed would do us no harm at all... In fact we could nudge our way through many such without damage..." speculated the Captain.

"Indeed Sir. Despite our icebreaking capability – it is vulnerable to impact from the side... and to the propulsion and steering units of course... So if we became trapped between two such blocks..."

"...But by my calculations HMS Rutherford and the other submarines could safely nudge aside such blocks, floating blocks, - free floating blocks – without suffering damage."

"And with respect to that monster advancing on us now Commander - ...that is Commander?"

“The first one I reckon is – if we overestimate it as a perfect cube – is about six-hundred-and-fifty-thousand cubic metres. A weight of about half-a-million tons”

“And we can cope with one-thousand-tons at a time...”

“Roughly; if we are very careful! – So we need to break it up into five-hundred ‘safe’ pieces – and avoid the bigger ones until they melt down...”

“Hmm! Five-hundred boulders of ice, loose in the Thames tidal race... The tide runs at up to four knots and, if it is channelled by the ice, that could increase to – what? ...seven or eight knots?”

“...I don’t fancy the idea of being bashed by a thousand tons of ice coming at us at eight knots Mr. Nicholson... What do you other captains think?”

“We confirm Commander Nicholson’s estimates” said Captain Mallalieu, master of HMS Newton, “...but our calculations warn us to stay well clear of any ice blocks weighing more than a hundred tons or so. ...That’s ten times less – meaning we’d need to reduce the icebergs to five-thousand not five hundred pieces...”

Other captains added their assent to this. None were willing to risk their vessels among hundreds or thousands of ice blocks swirling on the unpredictable tidal race and swells.

Captain Cruickshank pondered long and in silence then said. “Can we retreat gentlemen? Can we back away from these two bergs and sit it out in shallow waters?”

“No Sir. Not without considerable risks to our ships and to the moorings.” came back the unanimous conclusion.

“Then I need your recommendations – and we have only a short time left to start our action...”

“Sir...” said Captain Mallalieu, “...my Radio Officer, Lieutenant Chamberlain, has an idea. I’ll let her explain... With your permission?”

“Tell her to be brief, Captain...”

A woman’s voice came across the radio network; slightly hesitant but directly addressing the problem. “I think we can melt them down, Sir...”

Somebody in the radio loop sniggered. But if he had seen the look on James Cruickshank’s face – he would never giggle again.

“...Each submarine has a powerful microwave uplink. We use them for direct satellite communications...”

“Yes Lieutenant...” and aside he said “Get Gleick here...”

“We can run them at many times the power used for telecommunications – and we have five of them, Sir...”

“...Well?”

“Think of a microwave oven Sir...”

“Where’s Gleick? ...Ah there you are – Did you get that Lieutenant?”

Gleick was as wary and tense as a hunting cat. But he didn’t buckle under the pressure being exerted by the five sea-captains, responsible for five hundred crew members and for what were probably the last functioning nuclear submarines on the planet.

“...We’d need an immense amount of energy to melt them down...” and before he could be asked, Gleick pressed on “...one calorie will raise one gram of water by one degree – the heart of those mountains can be minus twenty; but the surfaces, the seawater, air and ice interfaces are gradually melting from minus one – so if we focus on the surface...”

“We’ve just agreed the mass at half-a-million-tons...” said Commander Nicholson “that’s how many damn grams?”

“...Six hundred and fifty thousand cubic metres of ice; you said earlier...” a voice interrupted “and there are nine-hundred-and-seventeen-point-four kilograms in one cubic metre...”

Calculator keys were clacking all round the fleet.

“...that’s five-hundred-and-ninety-six-billion grams – or calories...”

“Or” rejoined another voice “Allowing an hour to deliver those calories its equivalent to nine-hundred-and-twenty-nine-thousand horsepower...”

“...Which is...” carried on Anthony Gleick, bent over his pocket calculator “...six-hundred-and-ninety-three-million watts of electricity in the hour – or across three hours - say sixty-four-thousand watts a second... ...And we can spread that load over many hours.”

Commander Nicholson broke into the network “The uplink dish magnetrons are about sixty-five-percent efficient; but as each of our nuclear engines can deliver a-hundred-and-fifty-thousand horsepower – seven-hundred-and-fifty-thousand horsepower between us, we could just about generate enough microwave energy - if that is – the dynamos, cables and fuses can stand the power surges?”

Anthony Gleick answered the question “We can focus all five dishes on one iceberg – each delivering a fifth of the energy. I believe we could boil the damn things away in twenty or thirty hours – without burning out any circuits... ...What do you think Lieutenant Chamberlain?”

Gloria Chamberlain addressed Captain Cruickshank. “Divide the job between the five submarines, Sir – the fuses are the weakest link; but we can fit stronger ones. I

think the dynamos can push out the power. But divided by five we get ...thirty-eight-thousand watts a second. I agree with Lieutenant Gleick – over some hours, the job could be done...”

“And” warned Cruickshank, “make sure you keep your distance; as they melt and change balance, the damn things will roll over. But we have more time than I first thought – when the tide turns it will carry them out again – though the inevitable drift is inwards; up the estuary – and onto our moorings.”

Securely hidden away by the window of a small stationery store, high up in Canada House, with views over the estuary to the south and east, Jonathan Goodge busied himself with cutting glass away from the sealed window and watched with intense interest as the five Orcinus Class submarines manoeuvred, some miles away, into a semi-circle standing-off two hundred metres from the first iceberg as it drifted upstream on the tide – and backed away upriver as it approached. He had correctly analysed the problem of the icebergs commanding the deep channel and threatening the submarines, but could not figure out what action they should take; and thought they were cutting it a bit thin. From his high vantage point Jonathan could see the sea colours denoting the shallows on both sides and the central, limited, deep, navigable channel, blocked by the ice-mountains. He could make out the wide, submerged pyramid-like bases of lethally hard, almost diamond hard, ice reaching deep into the grey waters. The submarines looked as if they were surrounding the bergs, intending to torpedo them below the water line and break them into pieces, which was not a solution he would have chosen.

But no explosions came. No guns fired. No missiles were launched. For a long time nothing seemed to be happening. Goodge ran his fingers through his hair and pondered. At length he noticed a mist, a cloud, forming over the nearest iceberg. He blinked – and the cloud was

still there. He snatched up his sniper's rifle and peered down the telescopic sight at each vessel. Then he spotted it. On each submarine deck a substantial radar dish, about fifteen feet high, had been raised from beneath a sliding panel. Goodge recognised them as microwave satellite uplinks, saw they were aimed at the ice – and figured out the strategy.

The first iceberg was starting to shrink before his eyes. The microwaves were obviously being fired at the ice on the water line and, through the sniper-scope, he could see the surface water bubbling furiously around the berg. As ice melted away from the top, the iceberg rose, offering yet more ice; so very little change was apparent, except that Goodge could see, though he had to check several times over an hour to be sure he was actually seeing what he thought he saw, the underwater base was getting smaller.

"The clever devils" he smiled to himself. "The clever, clever so-and-so's."

As he cut holes in the glass, enjoying the draught of cool air it let into that small room – little more than a large cupboard – he kept a watch on the fleet. When he had tested the sighting holes with the rifle to his satisfaction, he set about rearranging boxes full of paper around the window, making a cardboard window-seat cum couch that he could sit or lie on as he wished; and he settled in for as long a wait as necessary; reflecting on who they should appoint to replace old James Cruickshank, after his forthcoming mysterious assassination and sudden, sad end, as fleet commander. He thought Commander Nicholson might make a fine and able replacement – with, as the Land Agents had ascertained in clandestine meetings, all the right attitudes.

The fleet stayed away from the moorings all that day. Night fell and the first really sharp frost of the late autumn and coming winter took the estuary in its icy grip. The next morning, as the dawn broke it could be seen that the submarines had continued their careful slow dance

ahead of, and always retreating from, the icebergs. But now the rules had changed. The leading iceberg no longer looked dangerous – some four-fifths of it had evaporated into the still, cold air under the microwave bombardment. It looked possible for a large ship to pass by it without the risk of being forced over into the shallows and into the tangle of drowned buildings. But whether or not the submarines could circumnavigate the obstacles – they had to keep them from crushing the moorings, which had been equipped to relay electricity to London homes and to pump fuel to shore based depots. The five submarines had, during the wee small hours, started to tackle the second iceberg, dividing their efforts three to two – three were facing off the larger mountain of ice and two were finishing off the front runner – now estimated at a mere one-hundred-thousand tons of nearly diamond hard ice.

It had been decided to reduce the glassy, blue-white mass to around seventy thousand tons and then, using some of the tug boats originally employed to haul and guide ocean tankers and passenger liners, to beach or ground the remaining ice. It was, after all, pure Arctic water, a hundred-thousand tons of ice contained twenty-two million gallons of water, and if it could be safely held, the submariners and the University of London would consider if and how they might make use of it.

The night had not been kind to Doctor Goodge. Concealed in his tiny eyrie, sleeping on boxes, with half the window removed, as the black frost slipped across the estuary, thickening and stilling the surface of the water, crackled up the walls of Canada House and crept icily into his room; Jonathan slept fitfully and endured his worst nightmares since slaughtering Alice. He was still young enough to not question his mortality and he had always had good reasons to be easily confident of his intellect, strength, speed, skills and endurance. Staking out a patch for a few days as a trained sniper, was, or once would have been, of little or no effort to him. But the wound Alice had inflicted, the consequent infection and his self-

treatment, and now these damn nightmares, from which he would wake sweating and as fearful as a five year-old several times a night, had burned away more of his life-energy than he could know.

In betraying Alice – Alice, for whom he had previously enjoyed finding books on and occasionally tutoring her in PPE, Politics, Philosophy and Economics, not only because she was a delightful student who soaked up the knowledge and reorganised it in seminal and interesting ways, but also because; in fact it may have been mainly because, he loved to secretly tease and taunt Martin Blackmoor and the others – who railed against Alice’s “new” ideas and wondered time after time, just from where could she be getting such coherent information – and when he betrayed her trust, despite having acted with proper gentlemanly manners, keeping his emotional distance and having given her no cause to regard him as a special “friend”, he had nevertheless sacrificed a significant part of his integrity.

With the loss of integration his psyche started to lose its focus and, denying any guilt, as he convinced himself that he had in the last analysis acted for Queen and Country, keeping his original pledges and oaths to Great Britain – as he saw it – he began to come apart and to disintegrate. As he built an impenetrable wall in his mind, to keep out the demons and insistent self-doubt, he was in fact walling himself in with the very devils he needed to expel, to exorcise from his soul. And as he wrestled internally with these malevolent, encapsulated devils, in the depths of his unconscious, his life-force leaked away through the innumerable barbs and wounds the demonic, psychopathic entities inflicted.

He woke in the early light. He was stiff, tired and very, very cold. It took all his training to enable him to go through a programme of callisthenics and get his muscles and bones moving easily again. He had to fight down a rising depression to chew his way through some of the supplies he’d brought with him – to strengthen him for the day and for the assassinations ahead. He donned two

more layers and a woollen hat – the last of the clothing he carried – and tested, sighted and retested the rifle; targeting the stretch of water and the newly rigged landing dock and walkway which Alex and James Cruickshank invariably used to approach the Naval College. Eventually, by eleven o'clock, he had calmed his mind enough to relax his shivering muscles and, from an outsider's viewpoint, he had appeared to regain his languid confidence and his patience – prepared to sit it out for as long as it might take.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Bergs & Iveagh

“God is getting a bum rap” commented an American climatologist when politicians and journalists cited Hurricane Kristina, which flattened and flooded New Orleans and the Gulf States in September 2005, scattering one million people, as an Act of God. The scientist explained “Mankind has contributed greatly to these extremes of weather – and we’ll see many more strange effects yet.” – *Global Media* 6th September 2005.

One of the factors which had helped Captain Cruickshank to maintain morale during HMS Rutherford’s self-imposed long isolation in the Arctic as it sat out the visitations of killer ‘flu pandemics, was the all round vision of the Orcinus Class submarines. The vessels could ‘see’ their surroundings through cameras, echo-soundings, radar and other sensors, and the views were transmitted to screens throughout the ships, so the whole crew could see what was happening around them. When ordered to tackle difficult jobs, or simply to do nothing while submerged for hours on end, the crews did not have to follow orders blindly and wait for scraps of information from the bridge. Well informed and supplied with reasons for actions, the crews were many times more effective and more cooperative than they could have been in previous decades, incarcerated and ignorant in old fashioned naval vessels.

Alex, stationed by the forward starboard torpedo tubes, monitoring the status of the armed torpedoes around him and the tube mechanisms – and, by dint of some cheeky Cockney manipulation of the crew schedules, assisted in his duties by a trainee naval rating, who happened to be his girlfriend, June Goldblythe - watched the icebergs drama on screen as the submarines moved around them and pounded the ice with microwaves. Alex approved of the solution.

“Clever that, ain’t it June? Who’d ever ‘ave thought of boiling the great damn things with microwaves?”

“A woman...” smiled June “But she’s probably an awful cook.”

“Yeah! I bet she boils everything. Boiled beef; boiled spuds, boiled cabbage... Yuk! Boiled cabbage! If there was anything I really hated in school dinners, it was boiled cabbage. ‘Martian skins’ we used to call it...”

“Oh – don’t be so disgusting.”

“...You know. Little green men; LGMs – from Mars. Skinned...” stressed Alex, explaining the schoolboy logic.

“Yes – I get it. I get it. It’s still disgusting.”

“It was disgusting food... Now when we was in Harrods...”

“Did you cook – or did Alice make the meals?” June’s voice shifted as she mentioned Alice. Alice had already acquired legendary fame and by many was spoken of with awe.

“No – No” said Alex, immediately saddened by the memory, “...we both cooked a bit. But mostly...” his words trailed off.

“...We got our own.” And he lapsed into silence.

June got up and put a hand on the back of his neck – and stood there in silence; watching the on-screen sea water bubble at the base of the first iceberg. From time to time a par-boiled fish floated upside down in the hot salt water. After a while she asked;

“How’s the publication work going?”

“Pretty good. We’ve got most of her stuff onto computer – about eighty percent of the text I reckon. ...And we’ve started to copy it around the world. Last week I sent volumes seven and eight, Alice’s latest writings, to a bunch in New York – and they promised to send it on to other survivor groups in California. ...You see, the satellites are still working pretty well, so if they can get

hold of dishes and know a bit about telecoms – we can uplink it and they can download it...”

“As long as we are not using our uplinks to boil icebergs...”

“Or to steam cabbage...” added Alex with a grin. Then his voice dropped again;

“I’ve got some videos of Alice... From when we were in Harrods. Her dressing up and stuff...”

“Could I see them?” asked June shyly.

Alex considered this for a several seconds – exhibiting habits of caution gleaned from being around Captain Cruickshank and from having been trained in his Naval College.

“I don’t see why not...” he said slowly, “But I’d better clear it with the captain – just in case. And we’d better keep mum about it.”

June nodded her agreement.

As the second iceberg slowly evaporated away under the onslaught from the microwaves and up in his hideaway Jonathan Goodge did more stretching exercises and donned gloves to keep his hands warm and supple, Martin Blackmoor was making his way in the university car from Regent’s Park up to Hampstead, where Sir Randall Delawarr, after politely but firmly, with the help of the Governing Council’s SPAT unit, cleared out some riff-raff who had taken up temporary residence, had established his home and offices in Kenwood House, home to The Iveagh Museum. At three-hundred-and-twenty feet above the original 2003 sea level, the house, a fine building, was still well above the encroaching waters and likely to remain high and dry even if all the world’s ice melted into the oceans.

Sir Randall had produced some ancient records of Kenwood showing that, despite what the last alleged freeholder, English Heritage, may have claimed, the underlying land had belonged to the Duke of Westminster's London estates since 1535. He had demonstrated before the Governing Council's recently created and convened Property Adjudication Hearings that it had been leased via ground-rents to the Victorian brewery magnate, the Earl of Iveagh – and that the museum managers were now clearly in breach of the licence (being most probably dead and unable to meet the terms) and that he, as the Duke's agent, now had the legal right to dispose of the property – so he was duly awarded custody of the building and, after ejecting the squalid proletariat squatters and their unpromising, unlovely and squalling children, he moved in with his household and staff.

Before Professor Blackmoor arrived, Sir Randall was in a closed meeting with three of the powerful land agents.

“Should anything untoward happen to old Captain Cruickshank...” he was saying, “then we have to think of who would command the submarines – and, in effect, all the British Navy, whatever craft are put back in service. Cruickshank, with his Naval College, is de facto the most competent, the highest authority...”

“Do we have any reason to think Cruickshank might step down? And where's our man Goodge today – shouldn't he be here to discuss this?”

“Goodge is otherwise engaged today. He cannot be here. ...As for Cruickshank – well he's getting on. And several people think the murder of Alice Whitaker has shocked him to the core. He could become ill or simply decide to throw in the towel – or, if he's getting a bit forgetful, men of his age can suffer accidents; especially if they are around heavy machinery such as defence equipment...”

“You told us, Sir Randall, that you would speak with his number one – Commander Nicholson...”

“Yes – I have done so. We’ve had several private communications...”

“...And?”

“He’s a good man. I think. ...He’s nearly twenty years younger than the Captain and, more importantly, ...I believe he is loyal to Queen and Country. More specifically, I gathered from him that he is broadly sympathetic to restoring law and order to the London communities. He sees the sense in it – and would, I think, support a return to the constitution and laws. ...If we help him to take command, he promises to, and my assessment is that he will, row in with the hierarchy we propose.”

“...And if he doesn’t?”

“He would have to be removed from office.”

There was a barely audible gasp from the group.

Sir Randall pressed on, anxious to dispel any hint that he might have been referring to violent methods.

“That would be far easier than dislodging Cruickshank – Nicholson will have nowhere near the loyalty that Cruickshank enjoys. ...We will be able to put our own men in charge of one or two of the submarines – then divide and rule. ...And we will always have a willing successor for the top job. ...And Nicholson will know that.”

A knock on the door announced the arrival of Martin Blackmoor.

“Ah! Professor – Welcome. Do come in. Thank you so much for coming. ...And it is good to see your arm out of its sling. Is it fully better?”

“Completely restored – thanks” beamed Martin Blackmoor. “And it’s good to be here. What a marvellous house. I’m so pleased the Governing Council was able to help. Thank you for inviting me.”

“...And you know these gentlemen of course – or ...”

“No. No. Of course we have met before. ...La Salle; Obolensky; Laing-Wooton – good to see you again.”

Using their surnames without first names or titles, and mentioning the role played by the Governing Council in handing the house to Sir Randall, was designed to remind them of who he was and what he was.

Blackmoor wore his rank with dignity and wielded its power with ease. Backed by his quasi-military SPAT police squads and with various courts, arbitrations and adjudication procedures in place, and legitimised by the transparent democratic system which apparently elected him, though he had never fought an election or received so much as one vote – Martin Blackmoor had grown in the world of affairs and government. He had, if he ever had to regretfully drop his natural charm and polished manners and become stern, the power to order an arrest, to lay charges, to institute a trial and to enforce custody. And he was clever enough to never yet have applied these powers.

“I noticed four or five men armed with shotguns, well I took them for shotguns, Sir Randall; as we drove in through the estate...”

“Rustlers and poachers, Professor. It never occurred to me five years ago that we’d have to defend our farms day and night against rustlers. But as soon as we started to assemble flocks and herds – the animals were like magnets to every Hill-Billy, tramp, survivalist, hermit and lunatic within fifty miles.”

“...So you’re farming?”

“Of course Professor! What else can we do? There has to be fresh food and we are not people to see good land neglected. This is what we do. We develop and use land and buildings to create wealth – Commonwealth! Without people like us the world would regress to primitive smallholdings – look at Mugabe in Zimbabwe when he drove the European farmers out of Rhodesia – chaos and starvation. Even during disasters the grass continues to grow. We have beef, milk, mutton, pigs, hens, geese and some horses – even some fish in the pond – and the world and his wife are determined to steal it from us. We have to be organised. ...We will need more land of course – quite soon!”

“But how do you?...How do you pay your ...Er ...retainers? Sir Randall.”

“Well with food of course. And accommodation. And mutual protection, of course. It pays to belong – to attach oneself to a powerful group; to a well organised group. Just as people join your London Council for foraging and sharing activities – to share in all the facilities; health, education, above all ...electricity; and the strength of a community; so we attract people who want to join us. Far more modest numbers than yours, Professor; just a handful of families – but all with farming experience. So we get by. Would you like to take back with you a pig for roasting? Always popular for public events?”

Professor Blackmoor’s mouth watered at the distant memory of chewing real pork and crackling, hot off the spit. And though he hadn’t the slightest idea of how to butcher and prepare a whole beast, he hoped someone back at BT Tower would know. He looked at the almost effete figure and demeanour of Sir Randall anew. It was not easy to reconcile this careful, soft skinned diplomat with farming – or building; but he obviously could command peasants and artisans with a natural authority. Did his authority come from an ability to organise? The man had hidden depths and dimensions.

“Well that’s very kind of you, Sir Randall. I’m sure my colleagues will enjoy that very much. ...So what do you do with the thieves you apprehend?”

Sir Randall was guarded. “...Oh not very much. I leave them to the bailiffs; who give them a bit of a scare and throw them out. ...We just discourage them – and give them a warning...”

His host made it very plain that it was not a subject he wanted to discuss further. Martin Blackmoor diplomatically changed tack.

“It’s Palladian isn’t it?” inquired Blackmoor admiring the gracious interior of the house. A substantial crackling log fire drew his gaze, “and surely, isn’t that an Adams’ fireplace?”

“Rather more than just his fireplace, Professor. Adams rebuilt the place around 1775. It was a good London brick house before he remodelled it – Elizabethan I imagine, though I’ve not read all its history and I am no expert...” he said this modestly, to indicate he in fact had great expertise.

“...Its not Palladian as such, Andrea Palladio was two centuries earlier – but, like Wren, Inigo Jones and other great architects, Adams was inspired by his work – except that it lacks the Roman influence, it could be thought to be very much of that style. A great white wedding cake of a house set in sculpted English parkland...” Sir Randall ushered his guest to look out of the parade of elegant, twenty feet high windows, onto views of green lawns and amber fields, furnished with grazing white sheep, fawn cattle and ancient trees, stretching away to the south. In the distance, below them, as a constant backdrop, the estuary waters, almost indistinguishable from the flat grey skies, gleamed like polished slate.

The estate was calm and beautiful. Above the vivid green grass and the vast trees, formally dressed in their autumn yellows, gold and reds, the sky was a solid plate of dark

blue-grey, wreathed and interwoven, to the eyes of perceptive observers, with barely discernible oil painter's skirls in hues of diverse greys, lending a subtle interest to the scene. Solid as the cold skies were, they were at that moment pierced from the south-eastern horizon by a single, weak errant sunbeam, which briefly and brilliantly illuminated the bark of trees, the wool of sheep and the creamy white arches and spars of the windows, before being apprehended and suddenly extinguished by the imprisoning, implacable clouds.

"Why..." silently wondered Professor Blackmoor, Leader of the Governing Council of London, Dean of the University of London, noted academic, aesthete, and man of culture, power and influence, "...do I spend the majority of my time in a grimy, tatty concrete tower in ugly, anonymous rooms designed for anonymous, insensitive civil servants?"

Tea and coffee were handed around. "Now to business gentlemen" announced Sir Randall.

"We were discussing as you arrived Professor, the rumour that Captain Cruickshank is showing signs of age and we were anticipating..." he paused here to underline the many shades of meaning in the word and also to let this upstart councillor know that power could often switch from elected leaders to men of action – whenever the men of action decided.

"...anticipating that he may retire and pass the baton to a younger man..."

The idea that such a man might be a woman never crossed any of their minds.

"...to a fitter and more able man. More suited to the changed circumstances and political realities..."

Martin Blackmoor's eyes gleamed with interest both at the implicit challenge to himself who one day may also have to be replaced by a younger, fitter, better suited man – a fight he felt quite capable of winning – but more so at the

thought of Cruickshank quitting the stage and leaving, as they all believed, the world's most powerful and cohesive nuclear force requiring a new leader. A power vacuum was always a fascinating but dangerous phenomenon. He did not need to explore if Cruickshank might fall or be pushed from his pedestal – they had already given him the answer to that question.

“I speak with Captain Cruickshank as often as I can – which is as often as he cares to converse with me. And I haven't detected any hint that he wants to hand over power to ...others? ...Who might be a candidate to replace him – do you have any views on it.”

“Have you ever had a conversation with Lawrence Nicholson – Commander Nicholson?”

“Er ...Mm ...Not especially; other than social chit-chat. I know that Cruickshank relies on him. And trusts him utterly. Trusts him with his life...”

And here the professor paused as for the first time he factored violence and murder into the power equations. And why not; torture and assassination had been a tool of governments, good and bad, for hundreds and thousands of years.

These four men were too sure of themselves. This was no idle speculation they were discussing. After all, somebody had murdered Alice – and excised that thorn from the establishment's side – or had had her murdered. Blackmoor reconsidered his own position if he was indeed facing men who would kill to create a political advantage. How much more justified than killing Alice would it be to reorganise the control of Britain's nuclear deterrent and destructive capability – the “proper” control that is, of a deadly force which could kill, or quell, millions of people – by simply chopping off its head and replacing it with a new head, handsomely fashioned and sculpted from the traditional clays of English estates. And, the still smiling professor reasoned, if they would do that to control the fleet – they would have no hesitation in dealing equally

psychopathically with the self appointed leader of the Governing Council of London – if he got in their way.

His soul shivered. But outwardly bland, naive and smiling he continued.

“...Have you sounded out Nicholson?”

Blackmoor’s altered body language didn’t get past Sir Randall’s scrutiny. He had scared the academic, as he had intended, and now had the upper hand. “I have had a few chats with the man. Very sound I thought...”

The other three nodded their serious assent.

“...And I am pretty sure he’d like the job. ...If that were to happen, well, we, at least we three, are agreed that The Admiralty should be immediately reopened – here in London of course, somewhere you, your Council, might recommend ...as the departments will have to work hand in glove with each other...”

He had placed a hand on Blackmoor’s left arm and he felt the perceptible relaxation in the man as the message was delivered, received and understood that Blackmoor would be safe – and his power base would remain.

“...So back to my question, Professor. What do you think of Nicholson? The right chap – do you think?”

But Martin Blackmoor hadn’t lost all his courage. He parried.

“Why today, Sir Randall? I gained the impression from your secretary that this meeting was urgent – why do we need to have this discussion today?”

Sir Randall’s eyes warned Blackmoor with a glance so bleak, deadly and stark that the professor swallowed anxiously.

“...Oh no particular reason. Sorry if we gave the wrong impression old man. It’s just that my colleagues were coming here today on land matters – and I thought it a good opportunity for us all to meet – and for you to see what we are doing to Kenwood, of course.”

“Ah! Yes. I see.”

“...So what about young Nicholson? How do you rate him?”

“My primary concern...” said Blackmoor, aligning himself with the powers of violence to avoid being bullied, “...is how he will adapt to us rebuilding layers of authority over the top of that, it has to be admitted, very well organised fleet and Naval College. It is an extraordinarily powerful position. ...If he can fit in – with the ...er ...Admiralty, with a political Secretary for Defence or the equivalent...”

Blackmoor paused again – just sufficiently to let it be known that he would be an excellent choice for that political job – if it was ever resurrected.

“...If he’ll adapt, I think he will be excellent. I judge him to be bright, conservative, quick and knowledgeable – he knows those vessels...”

“...And his loyalty professor – is he a man who would betray a friend and colleague? A comrade in arms?”

“I was hoping you might tell me that Sir Randall” said Blackmoor, refusing to pretend to stupidity when he now knew that he had guessed the plot.

Sir Randall obliged, “All the indications are Professor, that if Cruickshank were to step-down; today for example, we can rely on Commander Nicholson to step-up – and help us to reinstate the proper law and constitution.”

“And today is a rather special day – is it Sir Randall?”

“Commander Nicholson may be persuading Captain Cruickshank of the need for fundamental change – as we speak Professor. At this very moment,” he added consulting his watch.

“...Oh – and Professor...”

“Er. Yes?”

“You have all that telephony and bugging equipment at the Tower...”

“Oh – not bugging Sir Randall. We monitor the airways. ...That’s all. Monitoring...”

“...Yes! Yes! Have you intercepted any of that subversive Alice Whitaker stuff being transmitted...”

“Why do you ask?”

“I have a friend in Washington DC – or up in the hills west of DC – and she tells me Alice’s speeches are being sent on the wires from New York to Los Angeles...”

“That surprises me, Sir Randall.”

“...The amount of text sent implies a professional campaign Professor. It can only be Captain Cruickshank – and that girl’s brother...”

“Alex Whitaker.”

“Yes. Young Alex. ...It has to be stopped Professor. We don’t want to have a revolution on our hands BEFORE we’ve even reconstituted the government. It cannot be tolerated Professor.”

“There’s such a thing as free-speech, Sir Randall...”

Sir Randall said nothing but he looked Martin Blackmoor up and down with such cold, sociopathic eyes that, once again, Blackmoor shivered involuntarily. This man was a

dangerously violent animal – a born killer. And the professor did not fancy being the target of his hunting instincts. The man's dead-eyed review flustered him.

“...Well. Well! ...but what can we do about it. Not that we have intercepted anything like that. ...If it's coming from the submarine's communications ...we can hardly storm a fleet of five hundred men on five, nuclear, fully armed ...fully crewed, world beating...”

He knew he was gabbling, but he also know he was frightened and he needed to talk fast to soothe his nerves.

“...state of the art...”

Sir Randall cut him dead.

“We need to get rid of Cruickshank.

...And we will.”

James Cruickshank watched what was left of the second iceberg join the first in the shallows on the gravel on the north-side of the estuary, both pushed to shore by large tug-boats – crewed by his submariners. He breathed a deep sigh of satisfaction; it had been a long two days.

“Well Lawrence. We did that rather well. Thanks to your initial calculations and excellent input from all the crews ...pretty impressive coordination. They've been well trained.”

“Thank you, Sir,” said Commander Nicholson, setting aside his binoculars, also satisfied that the icebergs were safely parked out of the way and unlikely to meander back into the shipping lane. “Just in case, Sir; we'll keep two of the tugs on duty to give them an extra shove should the tide lift them...” And he allowed himself a tight smile.

“We ought to get back to the moorings; switch the power on again for London; and let the crews get back to shore and the college. Half of them that is; ...I still want fifty-percent aboard.”

Lawrence Nicholson wondered again at his boss’s mindset. Was his paranoia warranted or was it far over the top? But while he observed Cruickshank carefully, with some reserve, he responded positively enough. “Putting the power back on will take us a few hours, till sundown, Sir, and just about finish off today. I’ll suggest to the Captain’s that we give two day’s shore-leave to each team starting tonight – then revert to weeks about, again.”

“I’ll leave that to you Lawrence – to discuss with the others.”

“I’ll see to it, Sir. ...Will you be coming ashore tonight, Sir? There are a number of important issues we might tackle. ...And perhaps we need Midshipman Whitaker to join us briefly?”

“Let’s get the fleet moored; then I’ll see. As for Alex; Yes, I would like an update from him – if we can prise him away from that pretty blonde rating he’s managed to smuggle aboard my ship. I should have him clapped in irons and keel-hauled; like in the good old days. ...But I regret there’s no real naval discipline anymore; he’d probably sue me at an Employment Tribunal – and win.”

Commander Nicholson was surprised at this flash of relaxed joviality; but again he kept his own counsel and said nothing. He knew almost certainly, and he suspected that the captain instinctively also felt it, that today – or it could be tomorrow - posed a real danger to Cruickshank and to Alex. Events were approaching a crisis point. The players were all becoming agitated and wanted to resolve the big issues. They wanted action. Now there was something fey, something carelessly dangerous, in the captain’s mood which unsettled him.

“We need to take especial care, Sir, transferring from the submarine to shore. You are like a sitting duck out in the open boat.”

Cruickshank paused, looking levelly at his Number One for several seconds. Slowly he said, “Yes – it is becoming increasingly dangerous. But I have you Lawrence; to shield me from any shots. If I sit and you and two or three others stand around me – and we’d better include young Whitaker next to me – then they’d have to shoot you to get me. ...Wouldn’t they?”

Nicholson flushed “Yes – I suppose they would, Sir.”

“...And it’s a pretty good bet, they don’t want to blow your head off – at least not just yet. ...Isn’t it Lawrence?”

Commander Nicholson, the putative new Fleet Commander in waiting, locked eyes with his captain, facing him out, and said nothing. His expression showed no emotions, except a refusal to show any emotions.

“...Well! Let’s go home. Give the orders Commander.”

“Aye, Aye, Sir.”

From his vantage point, Jonathan Goodge saw the five submarines turn for home and, one behind the other, start to cruise back down the central channel towards the Queen Elizabeth the Second bridge and their moorings, churning the grey waters to an oddly persistent soapy foam – a sign of the pollution still escaping from abandoned underwater stores. He shifted his rifle from one hand to the other, lined up the sight several times on the bridge of HMS Rutherford, now manned by four young officers, and then placed the weapon by the window and went into his callisthenics routine again. It would be this evening or tomorrow morning – he was sure. Then he could leave this icy box-room and get a comfortable night’s sleep.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Hunter Hunted

I think that the power that we see expressed here for the first time is the power of anticipation: the forward looking imagination. In these paintings the hunter was made familiar with dangers which he knew he had to face but to which he had not yet come. When the hunter was brought here into the secret dark and the light was suddenly flashed on the pictures, he saw the bison as he would have to face him, he saw the running deer, he saw the turning boar. And he felt alone with them as he would in the hunt.

J. Bronowski on cave paintings - The Ascent of Man.

As light faded from the sky, a bitter east wind drifted across the North Sea and took a cruel grip on London. The sighing wind brought clear skies and the piercing cold precipitated any remaining moisture from the air, as an invisible, powdery snow. The submarines moored and re-coupled the cables which carried current to Canary Wharf and thence to the rest of London. As switches and fuses were thrown, Canada House lit up windows on every floor, as if no disasters had ever occurred, and in the distance, north and south, patches of sparkling lights announced the return of reliable power to the London communities. The five submarines, widely spread across the estuary, hummed quietly as they once more donated power to the citizens and to the Naval College.

Jonathan Goodge sat in his dark cupboard at the half-gaping, high window and, despite the energy sapping cold, he unwaveringly kept vigil through his rifle's night-sight on the bridge of HMS Rutherford. The green telescopic image showed him clearly that two younger, armed officers, in Arctic coats and hoods – which as the night drew in Goodge greatly coveted – were on watch; on sentry duty. “He’s a suspicious old bugger” he said beneath his breath.

The irony didn’t immediately strike him, as he muttered against Cruickshank’s paranoia, while waiting in the darkness to shoot him dead the moment the man stepped

onto his own command bridge. Then he got the message – and he laughed silently at himself.

But neither Cruickshank nor Alex appeared. Deep in the warm belly of the submarine both these targets were standing behind Anthony Gleick at a large screen showing four seemingly identical pictures of the north estuary buildings – two in daylight and two night images.

“These, Gentlemen, are digital images of the view from our bridge – to the north. You can clearly see the Naval College and the other Canary Wharf buildings. And ...just there is what remains of the Docklands Light Railway station...”

“...What the computer is doing is comparing these images to spot changes since the control pictures were taken – a week ago – and the ones taken in the late afternoon – and the night scene which is in real time – now!”

“That’s very clever Mr Gleick. And what are your computers telling you...” asked James Cruickshank pressing a hand to his forehead and eyes.

“Where it spots a divergence – it highlights it on the latest picture with a red box. ...See; there are six on the daylight image.”

They all three stared hard at the lighter screen and Alex leaned forward to point at the boxes on the screen.

“...That’s the flag – going the other way. The wind’s changed. That’s a different bunch of people on the jetty ...and that’s boxed the tender coming away from the quay. ...Its great ain’t it?”

“Its pretty good,” smiled Anthony.

“But we must never be lulled into relying on this technology and forgetting to use our eyes.”

“No, Sir!” said Alex and Anthony as one. The captain had lost none of his natural authority.

“...but it’s the less obvious changes we need to decipher the most, Alex. Take a look at the night scene – what’s happening now. Right now!”

Alex peered closely at the darker picture occupying the top, left quarter of the screen. “There’s a box on that small window – up on the college; about five floors from the top...”

“Yes – I noticed that one. Shall we take a closer look?”

Lieutenant Gleick slipped into his own world, oblivious to his surroundings as, with immense care, as if repairing a minuscule, valuable watch, he manipulated keys and listened and watched. Cruickshank and Alex heard the slight but, to experienced submariners, unmistakable sounds of HMS Rutherford’s extraordinary periscope changing its height and focus. The tiny red box on screen grew larger – and larger, until it filled that part of the screen. It was a corner window – with a line across it. “A window blind?” queried Alex.

“...And we can brighten the image...” murmured Gleick.

Like a theatrical spotlight slowly growing in intensity for dramatic effect, the small window gradually revealed its secrets.

“...Some of the glass is missing. That’s what it is. The glass has gone from the lower part...” said Alex excitedly.

James Cruickshank leaned forward to see better, and his jaw tightened.

“...And ...And, I can see something at the window. ...Just there.” Alex poked hard at the screen.

Anthony Gleick took his sleeve, “Delicate equipment Midshipman – delicate electronics...”

“It’s a gun. A rifle. A bloody rifle...” Alex couldn’t hold back, “...and a face; there’s a sniper up there. Who is it? Who is it?”

“That’s my would-be executioner, I fancy. And yours too, if I’m not mistaken, Alex.”

“Do we know who that is up there Mr. Gleick?” As Captain Cruickshank faced his enemy on screen, his eyes and his set face would have frightened Professor Blackmoor just as much as the psychopathic gaze of Sir Randall. Cruickshank was, after all, a trained, toughened and experienced Royal Marine Commando. Killing was part of his trade and if threatened he had no compunction about shooting first and asking questions later. His expression was implacable.

“...I can’t get any more light from that shadow, Sir. But we have a clue to who that is up there. ...I just have to switch to satellite pictures. These are in real-time. The cloud has only just opened up enough to give us a view of the ground...”

Gleick dove into his own world again – stroking controls, pressing buttons, typing in passwords and racing across the keyboard.

The views on his screen changed to one large dark image. As his fingers danced over the keys the screen altered slowly and subtly.

If they hadn’t been utterly silent, the captain and Alex would not have heard Gleick’s whispered remarks; “There, just behind the old crane – two hundred metres or so back – north – from the college. On the water, by the old barge...” and he put his own finger on the delicate screen.

“More light, Anthony? More light?”

“We can, Sir. There’s far more light than you’d think. Coming from the Naval College. The satellite takes some seconds to respond. Night-sight scans coming up...”

The old Thames-Barge, preserved as a monument to London's trading and sailing past, came closer and grew greener as light enhancement technologies kicked in; Under the shadow of the barge, on the water, sat a sleek, black, powerful looking craft.

"I know that boat," said the captain.

In contrast to the slender, fast lines of the designer powerboat, a large man sat at the wheel. He was uncouth looking – perhaps asleep – wrapped in several layers of coats. One large mitt grasped the wheel.

"I cannot see his face – but... Alex haven't we seen that man before. At the Tower? Isn't he one of Sir Randall's bailiffs?"

Alex peered - then nodded slowly with growing certainty.

"There's our link Mr Gleick. There indeed is our link. We've cornered the whole rats' nest of them. ...If we can just catch Goodge up at the window – rifle and all!" Cruickshank looked twenty years younger. He looked like a warrior; an unavoidable, inescapable, battle ready warrior.

"Goodge?" asked Alex sharply. "He was Alice's friend. Her secret tutor she called him. ...Was he the one that did her in?" and he was rising to his feet with clenched fists and tears of rage welling in his eyes.

"Guard" shouted Cruickshank, shocking Gleick and Alex with the loudness of it.

Two armed crewmen crashed into the cabin almost immediately.

"Lock this young Midshipman up – in the forward brig."

Alex struggled, spat and swore as, without even a few seconds to react, he was grabbed and carted away.

Cruickshank noted the shocked question on Gleick's face.

"This is war Lieutenant. Out and out war. There's no room for a distressed, vengeful boy getting under our feet. Goodge would have him for breakfast. He's a dangerous, highly trained, calculating killer."

Gleick had no reply – still shocked at Alex being carted off so suddenly.

"...And I am not even sure I want him dead. ...I don't think Lieutenant, ...that Alice would want him dead..."

"We'll see. We'll see. ...But we must catch him in the act. Arrest both those men. Who is in the college at the moment? Ask Commander Nicholson to meet me in my cabin. ...Now man. Don't gawp. Get Nicholson!"

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Rabid

Any attempt to impose one's own will or values upon others or to unify the world under a certain model of 'civilisation' will definitely fail ...No one economic system is good for all countries. Each must follow its own path, as China has.

Qiao Shi, Chinese Politburo; quoted from False Dawn by John Gray

Martin Blackmoor was not the only person in England able to use a car again.

Slowly, routes along ridges linking higher ground were explored; obstacles were cleared by local survivors and tracks, back roads and even sections of motorways, the latter now ludicrously wide and overblown for the very few vehicles they carried, were joined haphazardly. Within three years of roads, rails and airports being cut by the encroaching waters and becoming impassable, innovative individuals and groups pressed every sort of vehicle into service, some converted for unlikely fuels, and traffic started to edge its way from higher spots such as Hampstead in the south, up through the Midlands, made its way along the upper land and ridges of the Pennines, the backbone of England, and eventually found its way across the border into Scotland.

Farm tractors were a favoured go-anywhere machine; simple to maintain, slow, able to ford four or five feet of water and powerful enough to climb most slopes and pull a load. The journey from London to Edinburgh, for those with the need, determination and resourcefulness to make it, could take ten days or more. Most old roads in the higher hills crossed on an east-west axis; few followed the ridges on a north-south line, requiring travellers to edge their way along paths and walking tracks such as the Pennine Way. Whoever made these journeys was well advised to carry all the fuel they would need, as supplies were hard to find and jealously guarded. High axle Army lorries, with a cab big enough for four, waterproofed engines and ample carrying capacity could make it from

one end of the country to the other without needing to find supplies en route. Some intrepid wanderers used tracked vehicles, even large tanks, but they needed so much fuel and, when they broke down, were so heavy, difficult and dangerous to repair, that the attempts were soon abandoned in favour of lighter, more flexible carriers.

Even the high roads, where a driver could pound along at speed for miles, took unexpected dives down hills into flooded valleys to drowned villages which then had to be painfully slowly negotiated and circumnavigated, across fields, round farm buildings and through empty housing estates, until the road could be picked up again on rising ground. The tortuous routes, forged from and to London heading north, south-west, south, east and to other compass points, became widely regarded as “pigs’ ears” of roads and, as they mostly followed ridges, were nicknamed Hogs’ Backs.

It was along the ill-defined London to Brough Hogs-Back, making for Lancaster, that, as Goodge kept his murderous vigil, Sir Randall and his companions Robert la Salle, Samuel Laing-Wootton and the Right Honourable Frederick John Obolensky travelled. They would be far away from London when James Cruickshank and Alex tragically died at the hands of an unknown assailant; though only Sir Randall Delawarr knew that Goodge was instructed, ordered by Delawarr, to carry out the assassination. It was information held on a strictly need-to-know basis – and the other three did not need to know. They would, Sir Randall was entirely confident, wholly approve, after the sad event.

Their vehicle of choice was a Range Rover. It was carrying a hundred gallons of diesel in jerry cans and twenty in its fuel tanks. The diesel had been bartered from a group who had settled at a large petrol station on the road to Watford, converted the pumps from electric to hand power, took control of all the vehicles in the vicinity and assumed long term ownership. In exchange the travellers had swapped two fine sheep, a ewe and ram, alive, which they had carted from Kenwood House, crammed

complainingly into the back of the vehicle. The sheep were as glad to leave the men as the men were glad to get rid of the sheep. The mutual relief was palpable.

The garage group, fifteen or twenty people, would not forget the transaction and, if needed, could be called on to confirm the land owners' alibis. As darkness fell, the Range Rover had made fifty miles to the north of Watford, passing into the south Midlands, and it was pulled over into a dense copse of beech and yew trees. Two of the men walked back with spades and disguised the wheel tracks from where they had left the road; they shared some cold picnic foods and a good bottle of wine; then, with pistols on their laps, they started planning the next day before settling down to sleep in their seats until first light.

Obolensky studied the maps, "We can get across west from here to pick up the M1. I came down that stretch and it was okay, not flooded, from near Coventry to Milton Keynes. But getting onto the M6 is a bit of a bugger. There was a pile of wagons – you know, those huge continental size monsters – strewn right across the road just about here; both carriageways, with cars and coaches crushed in the mess, which forced us off the motorway. Then getting back on again is a real bitch – takes hours to work your way around."

"And I understand," said La Salle that further north, as it runs by Manchester, there is a long flooded area which is impassable – and we'll have to take to the east – up in the Pennines?"

"Yes," rejoined Sir Randall, "I don't think the whole Cheshire plain is below sea-level. ...What is it now? About sixty feet? ...And some of the land is much higher than that. But there's a peculiar tidal bore, it was explained to me; which at high tide races up the course of the Manchester Ship Canal from Liverpool Docks, piles up at Salford Docks and spills over. So the flooded motorway is actually being inundated from water running back to the sea. Whatever the cause – it's impassable."

“So there,” surmised Obolensky, his finger tracing across the maps, “we have to get to the east – towards south and central Manchester and follow these roads up to Ashton – here! Across Saddleworth Moor...”

“Or we can take these suburban roads lower down,” said La Salle pointing, shoulder to shoulder with Obolensky. “We don’t want to get into Yorkshire if it can be helped – we want the Lancashire side.”

“No – For God’s sake don’t get lured down into Yorkshire,” chipped in Laing-Wootton. My pals and I were following the east Pennines and found ourselves drawn towards Hull. My God! It’s nothing but a mud bath. Not a building above water. The Humber estuary is miles and miles and miles wide of oozing, it is the Ouse inland there isn’t it, ugly, trackless mud. It spreads right back to the hills and is un-navigable, even in an amphibian. Keep away is what I say.”

No hero rose up to champion Hull.

“You know?” continued Obolensky, “...We could keep off the motorways and take the old ‘A’ roads up the centre of the country, here, head for Derby, through Staffordshire, to Leek, onto Macclesfield and then north Manchester. Its higher ground all the way – as far as I can recall.”

The others agreed with the plan and they all four studied the ordnance survey maps, tracing the contour lines which crossed their intended route.

Outside, under the dense trees, although it was cloudless, it was completely dark, without a moon. The interior lights were on and Obolensky wielded a slim torch as a map pointer. La Salle sat in the front passenger seat; the window was wound down, admitting a couple of silver birch twigs carrying a froth of small damp leaves. The other windows were closed, reflecting the illuminated scene like black mirrors.

A screech owl sounded off close by and some small animal skittered up the birch tree in panic, rattling the leaves.

The damp of the night, replete with heavy woodland smells, pressed in through the window. Another, distant, owl answered the first with a screech and a prolonged hooting. Robert La Salle lifted his head from the scrum over the map, stretched, took a deep breath and set his elbow on the edge of the window. As his elbow moved beyond the door panel, an animal leapt and gripped his arm with a bite like a steel trap. Only then did it snarl ferociously as it fell back, pulling the arm and the ambushed La Salle with it.

“Jesus bloody Christ!” screamed La Salle, too shocked in that instant to feel pain. His expletives were drowned by a chaos of baying, barking and snarling.

Obolensky swung his torch to find the dog, a large foxhound, dangling from his friend’s arm. In the same moment a second dog launched out of the black night and grabbed La Salle’s flailing hand; its teeth meeting through the centre of his palm. He screamed with terror and was yanked half out of the window. Sir Randall, from the driving seat, hit the Range Rover’s headlights and lunged across La Salle, firing his pistol. The reports were deafening and shocking, exploding in that small space. But the dogs were dead. Randall Delawarr rarely missed a target. He hauled back to his seat, dragging La Salle with him, the pistol trained on the open window. He tossed the pistol expertly to his left hand, found the keys in the ignition, turned on the power and hit the passenger window button. As the window quickly closed, a third snarling beast hurled itself up, aiming at La Salle’s face, to collide with the glass which it bit at and banged with its deadly fangs before falling back. The glass held.

Cordite and gun smoke dominated the cabin. Sir Randall started the engine and they all looked for the way back to the road. Surrounding the car were fifteen or twenty attacking dogs, their panting breath hanging in the frosty air, snarling and manoeuvring to get at their supper – the four succulent men. La Salle gripped his savaged left arm with his right hand and curled up in pain. Half the dogs looked like foxhounds, the other half were a mixture of

breeds, all large dogs, some looking deceptively homely and approachable; but every one was as feral and dangerous as the baying fox-hounds. Two dogs leapt onto the bonnet and scrabbled onto the roof – seeking a weak spot.

Obolensky, once a Sandhurst officer, took command. “Pistols pointed at the windows, men! And confirm safety catches off! ...La Salle! ...Robert! – if you want to live man! Leave that injured arm and pick up your pistol – aim it at the damned dogs.”

“Now – safety catches OFF?”

The other three nodded obediently. Sir Randall twisted in his seat, killed the interior lights and engaged reverse. Bright back lights came on, showing yet more dogs ranged behind them, crouched, snarling, ready to kill, ready to exploit any weakness. Sir Randall, with nerves of steel, backed the vehicle slowly out of the copse, around trees, avoiding a deep ditch, ignoring the thuds as maddened, hungry pack animals hurled themselves at the machine, at the windows – and at the soft morsels inside their steel and glass shell. At last, out on the road, the sky still as black as ever, with no stars or moon, they lined up the Range Rover towards the north, took one last, long look at the frustrated dogs, and drove away, chased for a few moments by the frenzied animals.

“My Holy God!” breathed Sir Randall.

There was a relieved silence. Then La Salle groaned.

“I must bandage this fucking arm. ...If it’s rabid! If I get rabies! Will you finish me with a mercy shot? I’ve seen a woman in India die of rabies. I don’t want to go through that. ...Will you?”

Although he addressed them all, it was clear he meant Sir Randall.

"I'll do it La Salle. I'll do it. ...But I don't think it'll come to that. Those dogs didn't look rabid and we did manage to keep the disease out of Britain. It's difficult to think where it might have entered the country – since the floods..."

"The Channel Tunnel, perhaps..." suggested Laing-Wootton.

There was a polite silence.

"Flooded old man – Flooded at the very first – Obviously it would be flooded."

Samuel Laing-Wootton withdrew in confusion; even though he wasn't entirely wrong. The tunnel entrances were well above the flood waters but even so the Chunnel had slowly flooded over six months as the water and air pumps lost power and the sea seeped in.

"...There's a major town ahead, Milton Keynes, which is above sea level and almost certainly will have large groups of survivors. We'll have to be careful. But, maybe there's a hospital or a doctor. Let's hope the natives are friendly. In any case, we'll find a defensible position and stop there for the night. And at least apply the first-aid kit. ...My God! Those damned dogs were terrifying. We'll have some hunting to do to protect our livestock; that's for sure."

As he spoke, Sir Randall slipped his pistol into a jacket pocket. From now on, he would be armed and ready.

"What poses the greatest threat to us?" he pondered, "Packs of wild beasts or packs of lawless humans?"

An urgent knocking on his cabin door wrenched James Cruickshank from his intense radio-telephone conversation with Commander Nicholson.

"Hang on Lawrence. ...Come in! ...What is it Sergeant?" snapped the captain.

“Sir! Two of my men, Sir! Tapped into the communications wire and got a message out, Sir.”

“Don’t babble man. Get to the point!”

“Midshipman Whitaker, Sir. He ...er ...overcame my men, Sir – and locked them in the forward torpedo room – the brig, Sir.”

“Are they injured?”

“No Sir.”

“And Whitaker? What’s happened to Whitaker?”

“He launched a life-raft from the mid loading bay and was observed making for shore, Sir!” The burly sergeant was perspiring freely and standing rigidly at attention as if the captain’s boot was already wedged painfully up his rectum.

“Was he armed – Sergeant?” hissed Cruickshank.

“I’ll check, Sir! He may have his pistol and the lifeboat has several knives.”

“...And knowing Alex; he will be carrying one of his own knives. Get me the facts sergeant! ...Did you get all that Lawrence?”

Captain Cruickshank waved away the Marine sergeant who gratefully disappeared.

“Yes Sir. And if our watch saw the dinghy – it’s a safe bet that Goodge saw it too. But he was wrapped in a hooded Arctic jacket; unrecognisable even through a telescopic sight.”

“We mustn’t let Whitaker near Goodge; or vice versa. Have you got him trapped?”

"I've got six armed men in the corridor, which is a dead-end – and there's no other way in or out; unless he jumps twenty floors, Sir."

"Have they ever killed; Lawrence?"

"They are crack shots, but never fired a shot in anger, Sir."

"Warn them again. Goodge is a trained killer and will not hesitate. But, I need him alive, Commander"

"We'll do our best to disable him, Sir."

James Cruickshank left his cabin and joined Gleick at his screens and keyboards in the radio room. One screen was focused on the high, south facing, broken, corner window, where an occasional tiny flash of reflected light showed when Goodge shifted his rifle.

Cruickshank, in hunting mode, became an implacable, unavoidable enemy; he counted the floors down to the sea. There were eighteen floors; about two-hundred feet, he judged, above thirty to forty feet depth of water; a fall or dive which would kill anyone. He systematically counted the floors up to the copper pyramidal roof; seven – and the outside surfaces looked smooth, with not a handhold. Goodge could neither go down – unless he had climbing ropes; a lot of rope – or up.

In the green, faint night-sight light, Cruickshank could just detect cables depending from a structure on the roof line, on the east side. He couldn't make out where they went but assumed they supported a maintenance or window cleaners' cradle. If it was a cradle, Cruickshank estimated it was twenty feet or so back from the corner; too far to be any help to the concealed sniper.

Cruickshank turned his attention to the floor of Goodge's den – and what might prove to be his terminal trap. The college floors were solid concrete; completely soundproof to the rooms below, even proof against the loudest noises. Apart from the stair-wells and lift-shafts, there were no chutes or trapdoors through the floors that Cruickshank

knew of. He was confident that Goodge, however desperate, could never find a way out through the floor.

Methodically and with cold calculation, he turned his thoughts to the ceiling. He recalled the college rooms were about eight and a half feet to the ceilings – false ceilings! Above was a two foot gap carrying cables and air conditioning ducts.

That was Goodge's only way to evade the arrest squad. He couldn't hack through the wall into the next room; but he could climb into the ceiling space and wriggle through to other rooms – or even the stairs and elevators.

Cruickshank grabbed some paper and rapidly sketched a diagram. The door went into the corridor – six men and Commander Nicholson blocked that route. The window offered no safe exit and almost certain death if the assassin jumped. The walls and floor were impenetrable. Opposite the cupboard door across the corridor, was an office door. It was conceivable that Goodge could burst out of his room and break into that office. Did that east side room have a window with access to the cradle? It possibly did. And Goodge could shoot to break it. But even if Goodge made it onto the cradle – what then? He would be inches from the window, two hundred feet above the water and a very hard, slow climb away from gaining the roof. He could be picked off at leisure.

Cruickshank picked up the phone.

"Lawrence – his options are either to come out firing and hope to break through your cordon – or to get into the roof-space and creep away. He'll only do that if he knows you are out there, waiting for him. What are the chances he's heard you?"

"We've been very quiet, Sir. But this is an empty floor. It's peculiarly silent. And he's had time to acclimatize to its sound patterns. He may have sussed us."

Cruickshank checked the screens. "Lieutenant Gleick – do your young eyes tell you if the sniper has detected us? Has he changed position?"

"His weapon is still at the window; ...see that glint, just there, Sir."

"Ah! Yes! I see. But is the man still behind the weapon?"

"I can't tell that, Sir. It's too dark to say."

"Um! ...and any movement from the man in the boat?"

Anthony Gleick manipulated buttons under another nearly black screen and peered hard at the resulting increase in green light. "He's still there; by the crane and the barge. And he shifts from time to time. But he must be a patient man – and a hardy man, Sir."

"Why so, Lieutenant?"

"It's perishing cold out there, but he just sits it out. I've not seen him get up and exercise. He's either frozen solid or damn tough. He's like a troll!"

A red box suddenly appeared on the first screen, near the base of Canada Tower, just above the water-line. Gleick swung to it and rapidly zoomed in. "Another man, Sir. Just there! He's one of us, Sir; in an Arctic parka."

Captain Cruickshank leaned across and glared at the screen. "I can't see that clearly Lieutenant. Turn the juice up or something." He snapped.

"It's at maximum, Sir."

"Describe him then!"

"Just left a small dinghy – one of the small life-rafts. Can't see the HMS label, Sir; it could be ours. Could be Rutherford. He's tall – about six three. He's slim and from the way he moves, he's young. No face visible, Sir – but from his gait and stance – I'd guess it's Alex Whitaker..."

"And you'd probably be right, Gleick. Probably correct. ...Where's he going?"

“He’s on the floating dock, Sir. Moving very quickly – to the south-east corner.”

“Right under Goodge’s window.”

“Yes Sir. Though the dock doesn’t reach the corner.”

“If Alex has anticipated Goodge – and manages to intercept him. ...Goodge will murder him. Literally. ...Goodge is a trained killer.”

“Midshipman Whitaker has been training with us for more than three years; Sir!”

“Your point being, Lieutenant?”

“He outclasses everyone in martial arts and unarmed combat, Sir. If the Olympics were still held – the Royal Navy would be sponsoring Alex for a Gold ...Sir. And he’s fit as a flea!”

“Hmm! I think my age is fooling me into grossly underestimating two very able people, Gleick. ...Alex obviously figures that Doctor Goodge will somehow descend that wall – and thinks he’s a match for the man.”

“But I’d rather he didn’t take Goodge on. Alex has never killed a man. That slows you down. ...I’d hate to be responsible for losing two Whitaker’s on my watch.” His voice sank and he went silent for a moment. Then he snapped to again.

“Gleick – patch me in to the captains – loop all five submarines. Fast as you can man!”

Within three minutes Gleick had the other four captains in a conference ring.

The links were made. Cruickshank was abrupt. “There’s a sniper in the south-east corner window, eighteen floors above the present sea level. Get your surveillance trained

on it. There's a black speed-boat a few hundred metres north of the college, moored in a shadow by a Thames Barge under an ornamental dockland crane – with a large farmer type at the wheel. That's the getaway boat. A team of men are approaching the sniper now – and one of my men is on the floating jetty below the window. ...The sniper we think is Doctor Goodge from the University of London, who most of you have met. He's a trained military intelligence officer and highly dangerous – so beware! ...He'll try to get away and we want him alive! Understood! Alive!"

"Aye, Aye, Sir!" came a chorus.

"Now, each submarine will despatch six inflatables, thirty in all, four men in each – armed – and I want you to form a circle, or semi-circle, leaving no escape for the speedboat or for any other craft leaving the college. Position our boats, total silence, show no lights, appoint a coordinator and then close in. From the college, I want a circle of men on land – blocking any routes that Goodge might reach if he escapes that way."

"Yes, Sir."

"Thank you gentlemen – and tell your crews to be alert – this is life and death; it is not an exercise."

"Understood, Captain."

The four land agents, with the badly mauled Robert La Salle clutching his hastily bandaged arm, had made contact that evening with survivors in Milton Keynes, who had established groups, and some electric power, in the central shops and tall offices off Silbury Boulevard. After initial mutual suspicion, the townsfolk welcomed the travellers as people bringing news and finding routes north and south; which meant trade and safe travel might one day follow.

They had hospital supplies, hardly diminished, and several experienced nurses who were glad to treat La Salle with painkillers, antiseptic, penicillin and rabies-serum. While he was being repaired, the travellers were given food and wine; and stories of the past few years were exchanged.

The town had been spared from flooding and the first wave of coastal refugees had not reached the district. But the rising waters had cut off supplies to Milton Keynes as to everywhere else, driving the whole population to plunder stores and local farms for food and drinking water; quickly consuming all the obvious stocks. Glacier Flu had not spared them, though it came weeks later than in the major cities, and then the second wave of refugees did arrive – multitudes of disoriented, starving, frightened and sick people – who by sheer force of numbers overwhelmed the town, broke into every house and shop in their desperate search for food, warmth and survival and reduced the area to famine and chaos.

The current survivors were a mixture of locals and refugees; drawn from the twenty percent who had survived the several visitations of Glacier Flu and the fights for goods. With food stocks near zero, many had moved on, leaving about only ten percent of the original population. These few had found mutual cooperation the only way forward, had wired up some generators and, far sooner than Londoners, had started small-holdings and allotments with hens, geese, pigeons, goats, milk-cows and pigs.

They listened to Obolensky recounting the travellers being attacked by wild dogs just a few hours earlier, with wide eyed fear.

“We haven’t seen a pack like that, though we’ve heard howls at night – like wolves,” said Marilyn Powell, a middle aged woman who had become a community leader, “but we do have families of cats which have gone wild and are very fierce; and the size of the rats you wouldn’t believe. They are really fearful! ...This big,” she demonstrated with

her hands, and they're as bold as brass. ...So we keep guard dogs – and they see off the cats and hunt the rats. Mostly farm dogs they were; a cross between Collies and Labradors.”

“With a bit of Alsatian thrown in for luck,” said a young man. He whistled repeatedly and called “Brutus! Brutus!” until a heavily built, black, tall dog ambled in and stood wagging its tail. “See, he looks more Labrador than anything – but he’s a real heavyweight fighter and clever too.”

“He looks like a trainable guard dog,” smiled Sir Randall, “Any chance of a few pups if we come back this way? ...I anticipate we’re going to have to ward off feral animals at Kenwood House, very soon.”

“We’ve got radio connections; I’ll give you our coordinates and you can call us – or we’ll call you when the next litter is ready...”

“Thank you – that will be really most helpful. Now; with Robert here all patched up and inoculated. ...We’ve had a pretty hard day and ought to turn in early.”

There was no shortage of beds in that sprawling, empty model town.

As Sir Randall Delawarr, after a good meal, conversation and pleasant wine, fell into a deep sleep in a safe, warm, dry bed; Doctor Jonathan Goodge rubbed his tired eyes, flexed his frozen muscles, peered hard down the telescopic sight at HMS Rutherford, moored in the dark night – and listened intently to hear again the slightest of shuffling sounds he thought he’d detected in the corridor beyond his door.

His senses switched on to full alert and, as adrenalin pumped round his system, his tiredness evaporated, his wounded arm forgot to ache and his ears focused on another unusual sound.

It was, he decided, the muted mutterings of several outboard motors, blending in harmony, as if speaking in tongues.

He scanned the black sea surface where the burbling seemed to come from. His sniper-scope found the surface, between the college and the submarine moorings, alive with scuttling inflatables – twenty or more he estimated, each with four men, carrying rifles. The boats fanned out, some slowing, some speeding up, until they formed a semicircular cordon slowly closing on the college – drawing in to the south-east corner of the tower.

“I’ve been spotted! ...And they’re in the corridor as well!”

It took him eleven seconds to soundlessly dismantle and pack the sniper’s rifle. Two seconds later he had checked his semi-automatic pistol was fully loaded and the safety was off. He undid the safety clasp on the sheathed stabbing knife strapped to his ankle and adjusted the rake of a hunting knife, the knife which had torn Alice’s belly open, holstered behind his neck. It took ten seconds more to pack his gear in his backpack and to fix it on his shoulders, adjusting the webbing. He ensured his small flare gun was in an outer pocket.

Without pausing, he took out a glass-cutter and with an easy long movement scored the remaining window, bringing the cutter around in a large arc, removing the inner glass and placing it silently on the boxes. He did it again, scoring the outer glass, and removed that pane just as efficiently. The window frame was nearly empty.

He reached into an inside pocket, pulled out a pen like tool, lifted his thick jacket over his head, brought the pen inside the tent and – switched it on – shining a bright light into his left and then his right eye. It blinded him for a second or two. He blinked; and was ready to tackle the lighted corridor.

The flicker of light escaping from under the jacket – no more than a few stray photons – was not missed by Anthony Gleick’s surveillance equipment; which lit up a

red square on screen and beeped. "There, Sir! See – the rest of the glass has gone. He's on the move, Sir!"

"Lawrence! He's moving. He's probably rumbled you. Get your men out of the line of fire. There's no need for heroes. Just wait for him and pin him down. And..."

"Yes, Sir!"

"Alive if possible."

"Yes, Sir."

Lawrence Nicholson hand-signed his six men into three open doorways flanking each side of the corridor. The nearest gunman knelt, the second stood, slightly bent, and the third mounted a chair; six rifles in six doorways, plus Lawrence's pistol – all with clear shots, trained on the stationery store door – the last door in the corridor. Commander Nicholson crouched behind the door jamb with the first man. All seven of the arresting officers had good cover.

Thanks to the generosity of spirit, opulence and soaring aspirations of the Reichman brothers, owners of Olympia and York, which had planned and developed the five million square feet of Canary Wharf, the corridors were wide and gracious. A thick pile carpet ran down the centre. Between each office the sedate walls were relieved by stainless steel, pyramid topped lights, fixed above short alcoves. Topping each thigh high alcove were narrow glass shelves. Each of the alcoves held fire equipment, an extinguisher and axe in one, a fire hose in the next, alternating along the corridor. The controls for the light switches were thirty metres away at the stairwell doors. Glassed in alarm buttons, with small red hammers, were set at shoulder height by each doorway and, in the corridor ceiling, every forty feet, were three feet long glass and steel, designer light boxes – on a separate circuit to the wall lights.

There was an interminable silence while the universe drew a deep breath. The dust motes caught in the corridor lights hovered in stasis. Then it was all over in seconds.

Goodge slipped open his door, stuck out a firm hand and automatic pistol, and sprayed a burst of deadly lead around the corridor, with shocking explosions of gunpowder and screaming ricochets. He followed the bullets without pause; moving almost as fast as the projectiles, dived skew-wise across the corridor, still firing; snatched a fire-hose, flung himself back to his doorway, still firing, clutching the flat hose which unravelled without snags, and, before any of the squad left their doorways, and without a single shot fired in return, Goodge pocketed his gun and flung himself backwards through the window, into the darkness, gripping the hose with both hands locked above the brass nozzle.

It was a fifty-metre hose. Thanks again to Olympia and York's insistence on quality, it flowed perfectly smoothly. Five metres stretched from wall clamp to window; Goodge plunged forty-five metres down the face of the skyscraper; held on to his lifeline with his fingers, hands, wrists, arms, shoulders and whole torso stretched to breaking point; managed to check his rate of fall, to dangle and swing for an agonised split second; let go; dropped again; drew both hands in to his chest; clasped his nose with finger and thumb; put his feet together and straightened his legs; and plunged down another fifty-feet, fifteen metres, into the paralysingly cold, dark belly of the sea. At eight metres depth, the pressure forced blocks of water, like bitter concrete, into his ears, nose, mouth and eyes. Slowly he rose, making no effort to swim, just surfacing slowly as his natural buoyancy carried him up. At last Goodge broke the surface, and gasped for air.

Above, the window he'd fallen from was jammed with heads; eyes urgently hunting for him. But he had surfaced in a shadow and was invisible to them. The cold; the bone aching, skull numbing cold of the water, spiced with melted icebergs, struck to his marrow and weighed down

his dangerously heavy clothes – but it hid his heat signature from Anthony Gleick’s electronic trackers.

On the dark screen, the lights of Canada House blazed like angels before the throne of God. The stationery room window glowed with heads and bodies, captured in the infra-red rays of Gleick’s heat seeking sensors. If he had been quick enough, Gleick would have seen a six-feet-three-inches tall, man shaped heat profile on the end of the floating dock, twenty-feet from the spot where Goodge had cleaved the surface. Had he switched to night-sight, he would have clearly made out the figure, as Alex, gripping a short knife in one hand, dived into the cruel sea.

But Gleick’s attention was on the Marines looking down from above – and he failed to notice Alex. As Alex entered the water – and was shocked to his core by the crippling cold – his heat signature also disappeared from the sensors.

Jonathan Goodge and Alex Whitaker were alone and unseen, hunter and hunted, man and boy, sniper and target, in the dark, limitless ocean.

Chapter Thirty

Double Agent

“The societal expedient of reinventing ourselves to escape responsibility for our own actions was the ultimate madness. It was the antithesis of the spiritual quest to connect with our true immutable selves – our souls. Reinvention rather than reflection, contemplation and meditation, denies our essence. It is the deliberate creation of false selves – driven by the appetitive intellect, hungry for power and sensation at any price. In Christian terminology, it denies Christ’s imperative “Know Thyself”. It is the anti-Christ, the shape shifting guises of the great liar, Satan. It is the conscious fabrication of multiple-personalities and therefore of disintegration, precluding integrity. Without integration of Will, Mind and Body, connecting our godliness, our eternal spirit, to our creativity, to our imagination and down to our intellect, emotions, physical body and our constituent particles, the human race has no focus, no guiding light, no direction and no coherent will, and thus inevitably it destroys itself or is destroyed, even by simple unicellular, basic, but integrated, viral life forms.”

From the Contemplations of Alice Whitaker – Volume 7.

Both men knew that they could stay conscious for only eight or nine minutes in the freezing water. Goodge, though sparsely built, had the marginal advantage of mature weight, a little more fat than Alex, which would keep out the cold. Alex was tall and lean, but had more youthful zest and energy to move vigorously and generate heat in his muscles. Though Alex had shed his arctic parka, both men were weighed down and dangerously hampered by heavy clothes – and Goodge had a backpack full of clothes and gear, taking in more water and growing heavier by the second.

Alex dived shallowly into the black surface, edgy and choppy from small waves which coruscated with reflected light from the building. He knifed down, gasping in shock at the cold, through the gilded water towards the spot where he’d seen Goodge plunge in; turning his dive upwards from six feet deep. He was astonished at how bitterly icy it was and amazed at how deep the college lights penetrated. Alex shook his head wildly, to try to keep his freezing brain functioning, and looked up at the surface, searching for Goodge.

Goodge had surfaced in a deeply shadowed area, hiding him from the searchers above – but from below the light scattered like sparks through the water and illuminated Goodge. He, the trained assassin, the murderous sniper, was in trouble, in danger for his life. The tide was running out to sea, making three or four knots round the corner of the floating dock. In shock from the cold, battered and badly winded by his high fall and wrapped in wet clothes which resisted every arm movement, Goodge was fighting to keep his mouth above water, while irresistible currents, arbitrary and careless of this foolhardy and rapidly chilling warm blooded mammal, swirled him away from the wharf towards open water.

He snatched a breath, turned on his back, floated a few inches below the surface and with immense effort wriggled out of his backpack, which fell away into the depths. Exhausted, he spread his arms and legs and stayed calm enough to allow the remaining buoyancy in his clothes and the air in his chest to bob him to the surface again, where, between chilling waves slapping over his face, he could breathe. He drew air in to fill his lungs as far as he could and felt relief as he rose an inch higher in the heavy salt water. By controlling the amount of air in his body – he could float high enough to breathe. He lay inert and sucked in air regularly until he could stop the desperate gasping and gaping of his mouth and windpipe. For the moment he could get air; but he couldn't escape the cold. His head felt it was in a vice of ice, his ear canals ached abominably – and he might drift too far from any landing place. He had been in the water for two minutes and was just twenty metres from the building.

From underwater, Alex located Goodge's shape on the surface and he kicked out towards him. The moment his head broke the surface, he lost sight of Goodge – so he dived again as deep as possible and pinpointed the man's shadow above him, and swam to it.

As Alex swooped up like an attacking shark and locked an arm round Goodge's neck, to drag the man under, Goodge

instinctively threw out his left arm which miraculously found a fat floating pipeline – a new, yellow plastic pipe laid by the Naval College engineers to pump sewage from Canary Wharf ten miles out to sea. The quickest option had been to float the pipe and weave it through the north-east shallows of the estuary, clear of the shipping lanes. Goodge grabbed it in the crook of his arm and, in panic, hauled himself up, pulling his surprise attacker with him.

Alex had done survival training in this space of water. He understood what Goodge had found – a lifeline which could support both of them and be followed to or from the college. What Alex didn't know, and what Goodge instantly realised from his reconnaissance two days ago, was that a short two hundred metres north, the yellow pipe passed within a few metres of Michael Staunton waiting in the black speedboat. Leaning on the pipeline, Goodge applied his fighting skills and despite Alex's expert grip and arm lock he twisted round, to come face to face with Alex.

The evil, killing streak in Goodge crowed in malevolent triumph as he recognised his adversary. He had spent forty hours trying and failing to get Alex and James Cruickshank in his sights and here, delivered to him by a twist of fate that would enliven a Greek tragedy, was one of the targets; the younger target; the innocent target; like a lamb to the sacrificial altar.

Goodge forgot his exhaustion; forgot his peril; forgot the perishing cold – and exulted.

He was in the prime of life, the peak of condition. He was trained, equipped and experienced. He had killed – and would kill again. This callow youth; this pretender, who had learned a few combat tricks and thought himself a warrior, was no match for Goodge. Goodge would eliminate the boy. Goodge, who had just escaped a firing squad of seven Marines, leapt two hundred feet into the sea and, surely because the gods were favouring him, had found a pipeline back to his rescue boat, would despatch the lad – with gentlemanly regret and effortless superiority – and be, yet again, triumphant!

Alex saw the madness, the egotistically driven certainty in Jonathan Goodge's face, and he knew that Alice had seen the same mania in those usually mild eyes – and died. But Alice was a small, slight, untrained girl. Alex was a cadet in the Royal Marine Commandos in the service of the Royal Navy, and he was the most skilled martial arts student out of five hundred other cadets and officers. He faced the man who had bullied and slaughtered his sister – and Alex never could abide a bully. He also no longer felt the cold, no longer feared drowning; was no longer impelled by passion and revenge. He was calm, collected and considered. He knew Goodge was skilled – and knew that he was better. He wielded the power of life or death. It was an initiation. At that moment he matured and became a manly warrior.

He tightened his stranglehold on Goodge's neck and watched dispassionately from two inches away as the veins stood out on his neck, temples and forehead, and his eyes bulged with blood pressure, shock and alarmed disbelief – as, like Alice had, he choked.

But Doctor Goodge was not finished yet – not nearly finished – he suddenly let go of the pipeline, simultaneously pushing underneath it to force them both down below the water. His left hand went to his left ankle which he raised to meet it, and he whipped out the stiletto and drove it up into Alex's armpit. To his amazement, in the minimal space between them, Alex's right hand anticipated the blow and was in place to deflect the stabbing wrist; his hand turned in an instant, caught Goodge's jacket cuff and forearm and flicked the accelerating dagger into Goodge's cheek, gums and teeth, before twisting and wrenching Goodge's wrist and forcing the knife from his fingers. As their bodies sank deeper into the infinite ocean; neither could breathe and both had been at terminal temperatures for five of their eight allotted minutes. Alex – the untried, the untested, the supposed amateur – tightened his grip.

Goodge was bemused. The fight did not compute. This East-End, ill educated London oik could not better him. Something was horribly wrong. And in a sense, Goodge's drowning reverie was accurate.

On a strict points system, analysing all the pro's and con's, taking an unbiased and expert, betting man's view of the protagonists, Goodge should be winning this terminal battle. But what he wasn't bringing into the equation were his past weeks of pain and illness; his nightmare disturbed sleeping; the long wound, his Alice band, up his arm – which not only had diminished the strength of that arm but had unsettled his psyche. Alice had been too quick for him. A mere eight-stone girl had struck and cut him. That should not have happened – and it sapped his self-belief. He had also just endured two harrowing nights of cold and stress and – though he couldn't countenance it – he was no longer a youngster and took longer to recover from such privations. And he was on the wrong side of righteousness. He was a murderer; he hid in dark corners and struck from a cowardly distance; he was culpable; he was the sneak aggressor.

In contrast, Alex was a crusader full of righteous anger. He had God on his side. Alex attracted the grace and the extra energy earned through nobly defending his friends and himself and of revenging the foul assassination of his sister. He trained daily, ate well, slept well and had many friends. He was, as Goodge was beginning to realise, a twelve stone, fighting fit Marine – trained to kill.

As Goodge drowned and wondered how it was that this youth could overmaster him, Alex tightened his grip again. He was half a twist from breaking Goodge's wretched neck – so discharging his obligation of family honour and revenge.

But two voices intervened. The first and most insistent was Alice's voice, "Alex! Protect your integrity; stay integrated; do not lose your energy in killing. Serve the higher purpose, Alex! Serve the higher purpose." This

imperative, invading his mind as if from his sister at her most regal and commanding, made him quizzically examine the face of the man he was clutching to his bosom in a deathly embrace; the man she would have him spare. It was far too dark now to see Goodge with ordinary sight, but somehow Alex could see or sense the man's expression – and he loosened his grip by the merest fraction. The second voice in his head was Captain Cruickshank's. As Alex had escaped arrest, set himself up for a court-martial, imprisoned his navy gaolers and made for the mid-section life rafts, he had heard the captain order – "I want him alive" and the word echoed in his freezing brain; ...alive, alive, alive. Alex let his grip loosen again – wary of Goodge's fighting reaction.

But Goodge was unconscious. He had succumbed. His awareness continued to descend into the depths of these dark, fathomless and freezing waters, which bit agonisingly into his very bones. Just as the icy pain became utterly unbearable, and surely could not get any worse, the freeze turned to all consuming fire, blistering his flesh; demonic faces pressed impossibly close, mocking and jeering. They pierced his temples and eyes with white hot icicles and twisted his limbs into death spasms – which he knew would never bring the release of death. And thus he fell, locked in the nightmare to end all nightmares, in eternal torment.

Alex kicked to the surface and grabbed the pipeline, hoisting Goodge behind him. He used Goodge's jacket belt to truss him like a turkey, tying his wrists to his ankles. Goodge was dormant and white – Alex was shivering violently; in two minutes he would also be unconscious – in theory. But Alex was young and utterly determined. He had a mission in life and a lovely girl to return to – and he was only forty or fifty metres from the jetty. He attacked the yellow plastic pipe which could lead to survival. He lay on his back, gripped the inert Goodge with his legs and hauled himself, like an athlete in peak condition testing his strength, against the running tide, along the pipeline, feeling his muscles expand and contract, making a little heat – enough to keep his blood coursing and his heart

beating and brain ticking – and he surged on and through the water to the college building.

He was so elated that at the floating dock, he still had the strength and stamina to haul himself and then Goodge from the water. Goodge was deathly still. Alex, shivering violently, glanced up at the stationery room window – but his colleagues, the rifle squad, had gone. He tore off the belt, laid Goodge flat and started mouth to mouth resuscitation. At the moment he felt Goodge stir and breathe, a shadow fell across them both; a man alone, carrying a pistol, had come to investigate the odd sounds.

“Commander Nicholson, Sir! He’s alive, Sir; I got ‘im back alive.”

“Well done Midshipman. Well done. Is he conscious?”

Goodge lifted his head painfully, trying to cast off the horrible visions which dominated and blocked his mind. His left cheek streamed blood from a gaping wound. He slowly focused against the background light and as he recovered his faculties, he realised who Alex was talking to. He checked around quickly. Lying in a slowly widening pool of bloodied water he at last spoke with effort from his prone position.

“Lawrence – thank heavens it’s you.” He gasped with relief. “We can ...still do this. This lad’s played right into our hands. You ...finish him and I can get Cruickshank. ...There’s still all to play for. ...Take him man. Take him – Now! ...And the crown will be yours.”

Alex rose and crouched, snarling, facing Nicholson, keeping Goodge in his peripheral vision. Here was deep betrayal, here was Judas, the captain’s most trusted officer and friend. But Alex was no Jesus. However powerful his memories of Alice’s words Alex was not about to turn the other cheek. He tensed and checked his frozen limbs for rapid action and reaction. He weighed up Nicholson, finding the man’s most vulnerable points; vulnerable to the samurai knife which his left hand, like a

conjurer's unseen hand was secretly reaching into his jacket to grip, while his right hand made a florid distracting movement. He knew he could slash or stab and kill this traitorous bastard in an instant – before Nicholson could fire a shot. Alex, star of the martial arts, knew beyond doubt that he could do this.

But the commander instinctively sensed danger, and took two steps back – out of reach.

Nicholson pointed his gun at Alex. "So all I have to do is shoot young Whitaker here before he can kill me with one blow – to be clear, I shoot him dead first; then I lure James Cruickshank within your range – you kill him; I inherit the fleet, and I become the most powerful military man in Britain – possibly in Europe – maybe in the world. ...It all sounds very attractive, Doctor Goodge."

Goodge wasn't following the nuances. He had suffered a near death experience, his frozen ears were just thawing out, he had been strangled to unconsciousness and he wasn't quite sure what his limbs were doing. He responded impatiently, "Yes man! You made a deal. You made a bargain. Sir Randall will keep his side of it – just fire; one bullet is all it takes. ...What..."

"I have served with James Nicholson for twenty years, Doctor. He has saved my life several times – and the lives of his crew. I like to think I have saved his life on occasions. We've fought battles side by side. He has never told me a lie or given me a stupid order. He is the nearest I have left in this world to a father – or brother. You and your diplomat friends have read the runes wrong. We made fools of you. I would rather shoot myself than put James Cruickshank at risk."

"That is ridiculously over-sentimental Commander," said a quiet voice as its owner turned the corner of the dock. "I have to wonder if you're fit to hold command. But I'll take it all as a compliment within the bounds of our military code. Providing, that is, you pledge now, on your most serious oath, not to try to kiss me when I lie dying."

“Take that as read Sir. I’ve never been able to develop a fancy for older men with grey beards. ...Alex got the sneaking bastard, Sir. And brought him in alive.”

“You make it very difficult for me to decide whether to court-martial you or decorate you for courage, Midshipman Whitaker. But not to draw that out – I will be discussing your promotion with your immediate superiors – as you seem to be battle ready.”

“Er, yeah! Thank you Sir.”

Alex was blue with cold. His hands were clawed, his movements becoming stiff and slow, his clothes dripped sea water and he shivered uncontrollably with chattering teeth - but he wasn’t going to miss the last act of this drama.

“And ‘im? What about Goodge?” said Alex stirring the sniper with his foot.

“We’ll question him Alex. Learn the truth – then decide his fate.”

Goodge rolled over on his side and groaned with pain. His hand went to his jacket pocket – and drew a gun. Even as Alex stamped on the man’s wrist, turning the gun out to sea, Goodge managed to press the trigger. A charge rushed out, climbed and burst into a green firework.

Cruickshank spoke into his radio. “That will be warning the getaway boat. Lights on all inflatables – and close in fast – and arrest that man. And get him alive too.”

Goodge listened resignedly, lacking the energy to protest or to try to stand. But, like Don Giovanni he clung to his over-weaning vanity and, refusing to relent or repent, he mocked his demons, the universe and himself with laconic humour. “If they get Staunton - advise them to don their gas-masks... ...Captain.”

Chapter Thirty-One

Wimbledon Court

To no man will we sell, or deny, or delay, right or justice.
Clause 40, Magna Carta AD 1215

“I accuse Doctor Goodge of the murder of Alice Whitaker and I accuse Sir Randall Delawarr of conspiracy to murder Alice Whitaker, Alex Whitaker and myself.” James Cruickshank laid out the charges as he formally handed his two prisoners into the custody of The Criminal Court of The Council of London.

The accused, Goodge, thinner, gaunt eyed, his cheek padded with wound dressing, but once more seeming his cool, laid-back self, and Sir Randall, affecting a dignified and innocent calm, were led into a dock constructed by and now surrounded by Professor Blackmoor’s Special Armed Team, elevated at the end of a conference hall in a former Wimbledon Common hotel, south of the estuary. A judges’ bench had been fitted and as many seats as the room would hold were installed for the officials, witnesses and the public.

Thousands of people had tried to pack into the court which accommodated only two hundred. Salvaged TV cameras feeding large public screens, brought up from the Tennis Club, had been hastily revived and plugged in with the help of naval technicians. Crowds stood outside in the cold and damp, watching their new court, new judges and new police force bring them a new justice. North Londoners were there in large numbers, having either crossed the treacherous estuary by boat, or taken the long land route along northern ridges, nudged onto complicated dry routes by creeping fingers of the invading seas, slowly, imperceptibly but inevitably seeping inland as, thousands of miles away, mountains of ice melted and slipped into the oceans. The travellers went west, all the way to Maidenhead, where the bridges over the old, familiar, fresh water Thames were above sea level, crossed

the water, then worked back along the southern margins of the estuary up to Wimbledon.

From the Common, surrounded by gracious trees, gracious houses and still a mile or two back from and above the encroaching shore-line the estuary could not be seen. It was archetypal England. It was typical middle-class London suburbs. It was difficult for the assembled Londoners to hold onto the reality of the past years of floods and plagues.

Here, these crowds of people sensibly wrapped up against the weather and coming winter, quietly swapping stories and information, might be gathering for a social rally – or a ramble through historic Wimbledon, flourishing guide books of the fine old houses, manors and halls fringing the wide, green Common. From here one could, it seemed, walk south or west along similarly elevated greens and streets, out into the gentle and civilised English countryside of the Home Counties; along rural lanes, safe from hazards and assured of finding an overheated, bluff English pub every few miles serving overpriced yesterday's display sandwiches and meat pies to accompany a pint of bitter-shandy.

Children raced about excitedly, teenagers played football using coats for goalposts. Some of the people had dogs on leads – Wimbledon Common had always afforded space for London's dogs to cavort with their owners – all that was missing was the distant roar of traffic. The air was different. It was definitely sea air; clean with a salty tang under ragged grey clouds and high, gliding seagulls. There was no pollution – no smell of traffic or heating system chimneys or fast-food. But, for a few minutes, it was possible to forget the present and sink gratefully and nostalgically back into the past.

Professor Blackmoor's Governing Council of London had decided this, the first criminal trial of the new era, should be a jury trial but with a tribunal of judges, appointed the previous week from a list of surviving solicitors and barristers, who had never acted as judges before. After

some debate for considering proposals for novel procedures, the old adversarial system was adopted, with prosecuting and defence lawyers.

Though the questioning and his spirited attempt at a defence took three days, Goodge's guilt was readily established. There was Alice's wound on his arm, which he had concealed; his matching blood group; the satellite photographs of Goodge quitting the Cadogan Square Hotel; then his murderous intent to kill Alex and Captain Cruickshank – his breakout from the stationery room and leap to freedom; the secret boat trip with Staunton (whose murder of the hapless lunatic never emerged in court); the contents of his backpack including the sniper's rifle, recovered by Navy divers; and all the surveillance tapes recorded by Gleick.

Alex had a harrowing time reliving Alice's last day and his discovery of her body. The defence lawyers went on the attack, accusing Alex of being his sister's murderer; but, facing Alex's blazing eyes and balled fists across that small court, with its untested, uncertain security, and the boos and threats from the increasingly hostile audience, muted the barristers' worst insults, leaving their circumstantial logic in chaotic tatters. But nevertheless, it was hard for Alex and the pain of it showed. After the first such examination and cross-examination, Alex left the courtroom and walked off with June Goldblythe to find solitude and solace under the wide sky.

The witnesses came and went; their evidence riveting to the large audience but in reality it was just a rehearsal before the inevitable result; as Goodge's guilt was never in doubt.

Proving Sir Randall's involvement was far trickier.

For reasons none could fathom, Goodge showed an odd loyalty to Sir Randall, which was not reciprocated, and he would not betray his – what – his leader, boss, controller, compatriot, colleague? He twisted and turned under cross-examination, cleverly anticipating and countering leading

questions and flimsy evidence that might break Sir Randall's alibis and protestations of innocence.

Cross examining the bailiff, Michael Staunton, the prosecution eventually came to understand, was like trying to break into a sealed crypt with a hazel twig; the man was silent, taciturn, obdurate and immobile. He had at least been cleaned up – sparing the court his distinctive body odours.

Next to Staunton, the black speedboat, regarded generally as belonging to Sir Randall, was a strong link – but Goodge just claimed to have taken it without permission from its mooring – and persuaded Staunton to come along, ignorant of his purpose, to help out; without reference to Sir Randall, who proved that he was in Milton Keynes with three other upright citizens, a day's travel away, when Goodge was found at the Naval College. Goodge's and Sir Randall's military records were unearthed and produced by Anthony Gleick – demonstrating they knew each other and were both trained in military intelligence – but that by itself proved nothing. There was no evidence of any clandestine meetings or assassination plans.

Commander Nicholson gave damning evidence of being invited to meetings with Delawarr and the other land agents, who had set him up to do a deal and step into the captain's shoes "after his demise." It seemed cut and dried, but Sir Randall's defence lawyers made mincemeat of the reports. "Demes" could mean many things – retirement, illness, or an accident. Nobody had mentioned murder or a sniper or disposing of Alex. Yes! Goodge had been in Kenwood House at the same time as Nicholson, but he had not taken part in meetings – and had never mentioned his military intelligence skills to Commander Nicholson; ...And dozens of people visited Kenwood – most of the key figures in London had been at some time. It was not, after cross-examination, evidence of a conspiracy.

The most solid evidence came from the three submariners, Captain Cruickshank, Commander Nicholson and

Midshipman, now Marine Sub-Lieutenant Whitaker, who unshakeably reported Goodge's unguarded remarks, when he had urged Martin Nicholson to shoot Alex, betray James Cruickshank and fulfil his bargain with Sir Randall. What all three had heard was irrefutable – and clear. Sir Randall was on the hook!

But, his very able lawyer picked away at the three witnesses; at their grief over Alice's death; at Cruickshank's determination to root out the land agents, "the nest of rats". He introduced the HMS Rutherford transmissions of Alice's life work; making much of the huge investment being made to record her words and spread her thoughts around the world – ideas which blankly contradicted all the capital and commercial values Sir Randall was known to cleave to. These "friends of Alice" must without doubt be in conflict with Sir Randall and his likeminded friends and colleagues. And, so arguing, the lawyer planted seeds of reasonable doubt in the minds of the jurors who, to a woman and a man, instinctively believed the three sailors were being truthful in recounting their memories of Goodge's words. ...But, the jurors had to consider that the three men were very close. Nicholson and Whitaker obeyed their captain. The three of them could – just could – however unlikely it was – they might have been influenced in their own memories by what Captain Cruickshank already assumed to be true. And, in the drama and trauma of that tumultuous, freezing night – when Alex could have died of exposure and Commander Nicholson had been responsible for six men, shot at by Goodge, they could have misheard or misinterpreted; confused by the excitement and influenced by comradely loyalty.

And so, Sir Randall, probably wasn't, but may have been, innocent of the very, very serious charges – conspiracy to murder – being brought by one of the key witnesses. There was – put into the mind of the most convinced juror – an element of reasonable doubt.

Captain Cruickshank was oddly withdrawn, as he had been when Alice died. He kept his statements brief; did

not rise to the insults, slings and arrow-shots of the defence counsel who sought to unseat him, and he seemed oddly remote from the proceedings.

The prosecution countered the *“may have been confused”* defence of Sir Randall. Was it remotely likely that two very senior and seasoned officers, especially selected to have command of this country’s main nuclear weapons and put in charge of the most advanced and most – certainly most expensive – vessel employed by the Royal Navy, would, under whatever stress, imagine and misunderstand Goodge’s invitation to shoot Alex. No! It was inconceivable that they would delude themselves at such a moment. If one entertained the idea – think of the terrible consequences if these two key men entertained fantasies about “the enemy” – misread signals; feared harmless enemy ships and planes – all the time with their paranoid fingers on the nuclear trigger.

It convinced the jury, who had all seen the captain, the commander and Alex as the most reliable and honest witnesses. But ...the defence lawyer had planted a tiny seed of doubt. And ...in any case, who really wanted the charming, urbane and very English – the quintessentially English gentleman, Sir Randall to be found guilty. Wasn’t it enough to get Goodge – the actual killer?

After seven days of courtroom drama; the jury retired to deliberate. The indications were that they would take some more days to reach their verdicts. The crowds dispersed, back to their own survival tasks; relying on the radio links, still being broadcast on the old BBC long-wave band, to keep up with the trial.

The trial judges went away to a private location where they discussed the forms of punishments and sentences which they might levy in this brave new world; and how in practical terms sentences would be carried out – and who would bear the labour, food and care costs – in a community without money. They invited and listened to arguments from all sectors of society, particularly from the

members of the Council for London, ably represented by Martin Blackmoor.

The Professor was in a dilemma. He had been fooled by Goodge, who he had always assumed was a bland, uninvolved and facile, if clever, joker, but who was now proved to be a trained and merciless assassin – rightly imprisoned for the safety of the people. He had been frightened at Kenwood by the sociopathic and probably psychopathic Sir Randall; but the case against him was far from proven – however much Blackmoor would like the man to be locked up. And so he felt compromised and, when asked by the judges for his suggestions for sentencing – and who would act as gaoler – or even executioner, the professor had difficulty being entirely objective and in separating his personal safety from the long term judicial rules for the London and perhaps national, communities.

If Sir Randall was found not guilty, Martin Blackmoor realised, he would return in full power to Kenwood House and he – Martin – would have to deal with the man; a man who frightened the life out of him. If Delawarr were imprisoned (and where could they hold him?) he'd get out eventually, and be intent on revenging himself. If his friends were as peculiarly loyal as Goodge was, Sir Randall may even wield significant power from his prison cell. Blackmoor shivered involuntarily. To be on the safe side, Professor Blackmoor had been extremely careful throughout the arrests and trial to show impeccable impartiality and unimpeachable good manners towards Sir Randall, and to Goodge – who may somehow, someday be liberated by Sir Randall – for why else would Goodge protect the man? And he practised his impartial attitude, he hoped, without alienating Captain Cruickshank.

Would they, should they, the learned judges debated, adopt the death penalty. Imprisoning Goodge – and maybe Sir Randall – for years, would cost the community dear. Would it be in every way more effective to execute such people? And if the answer to that was – “Yes!” Then how should it be done? And what would it mean for the future

of their tenuous, shocked, traumatised, embryonic civilisation?

The prisoners were locked in a nearby hotel with a squad of guards.

The sailors walked a mile or more to the hill running down Putney High Street, where their tender was waiting to ferry them back to the Naval College and their submarines. Captain Cruickshank was invited to contribute to the judges discussions, but he declined, saying that such complex ethical matters were beyond his remit. He returned to HMS Rutherford in the same quiet, pacific and reflective mood as he'd maintained in court; a mood which even Lawrence Nicholson could not penetrate.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Determined Dinosaurs

In industrialised nations, due to generations of hard work, valour and sacrifice and, recently, the Electronic Revolution – incorporating the Knowledge Economy - there is overproduction of most consumer goods and services. Real wealth and the products of the Real Economy are flooding developed countries. The world has never before produced so much real wealth. But the traditional, tribal, Money Economy mechanisms, used to count, account and to share wealth fairly, are inadequate. The Real Economy, over millennia, has been and is maintained by the efforts of the majority of the population while the Money Economy, the legal paper which represents real wealth, is 75% owned by just 4% - some of whom have contributed little to the commonwealth. Despite sweeping, historic, social revolutions to diminish the plagues and powers of aristocrats, aristocracy has resurfaced with a vengeance, this time rooted in America, under the guise of capitalism and free-market forces for the good of all the people. As global society deposes the last of these dynastic dinosaurs, they will lash their powerful tails in potent rage.

New Epoch News – Oct 05

The oceans had risen seventy-two feet, or twenty-six metres, indicating that approximately twelve percent of the Antarctic and Arctic land ice had turned to melt-water or, still frozen, had calved as icebergs falling from cliffs into the seas.

The Naval College climate change unit, taking readings from satellites, calculated that the pace of thawing was accelerating, noting billions of tons of immense glaciers on the move from the high reaches of the Transantarctic Mountains, bearing down from five-thousand metres or fourteen thousand feet, onto the ancient ice on plateaux below, and robbing the icy ramparts clinging to the peaks above of support. The same ice-slide phenomena could be clearly recorded, in less than a month of observations of changes, to be affecting all the key ranges. Antarctic ice sheets three miles deep on the King Charles Mountains, above the Amery Ice Shelf, were collapsing in giant, monolithic blocks, and falling from precipitous ridges, vertical and high above the frozen sea. These colossal mountains of blue and white ice crashed into the southern Indian Ocean sending the largest tsunamis ever recorded racing across the southern ocean to Australia, New

Zealand, South and East Africa, Indonesia, India and its east and west neighbouring regions.

If the towns and cities on the coastal margins were not already abandoned to the sea, it looked as if none could possibly survive the onslaughts from the tsunamis; one wave striking The Wilderness, the most southerly South African holiday resort established on sandbanks, was estimated by the distant observers to be moving at fifty kilometres an hour and towering a hundred feet above the shore line as it made land.

The satellite pictures, particularly those taken at night, showed where the surviving populations were now living. Most major inland cities showed some electric lights at night; enough for the cameras to produce intriguing and quite beautiful shots. With heat sensors and filters to remove the bright lights, camp fires could be deduced to be burning across previously wealthy regions, indicating large and small groups falling back on nature and embracing medieval village living.

The extra twenty-six metres added to the old sea levels translated in low lying areas into many miles of incursion by the sea. The dykes of Holland were a lost cause, an underwater maze many miles out to sea. Similarly the fenlands, arable fields and canals of eastern England were deep below water. Major river deltas, boasting the most fertile lands on Earth, disappeared, possibly for millions of years – or maybe for just ten thousand years or so until the next ice-age. The once populous deltas and surrounding lands of the Ganges, the Nile, the Amazon, the River Plate, the Mississippi basin and most of the Gulf of Mexico states, the Saint Lawrence Seaway, the Euphrates and Tigris; and the major deltas in China and the far east letting onto the Pacific rim, were all submerged; drowning the best of what had been the majority of the planet's farms and therefore its food production.

Naval College geophysicists and oceanographers weighed the new oceans with complex arithmetic; tracing the mass

of the Antarctic and Arctic land ice which had thawed and flowed into the seas, then calculating the additional weight added to and sitting above fault lines such as the San Andreas earthquake zone. Contrariwise, unimaginable billions of tonnes of ice had been lifted from the mountains of Greenland and the southern continent, lands which started to take a deep breath and stretch their stony limbs upwards as the burden melted away. These shifts of mass would put stresses on already groaning fault-lines and trigger powerful earthquakes and volcanoes; but not quite yet, not for several hundred or thousand years. For this generation it was an SEP – Somebody Else’s Problem – that survivors had no need to add to their worries, just yet.

As the polar ice thawed, so did the permafrost in northern Russia, Siberia, Alaska and Canada. One day, if the higher temperatures persisted, these vast land masses would become agricultural regions. But for the foreseeable future the melting permafrost made a sticky, wet, cold and ecologically chaotic mess.

“We might plan to send an expedition to the poles again, Commander,” said Captain Cruickshank as they reviewed the data and the observers’ concerns and conclusions. “And we could also take a look at some of those communities around the major cities. ...See there, in Italy! That must be Rome...” He placed a large finger squarely on one of Anthony Gleick’s screens, oblivious to the Lieutenant’s glare of disapproval as the night view image was overlaid by the captain’s fingerprint.

“...And that is definitely Paris! I wonder how Al Jazari is faring with his salvaged stocks of consumer goodies? ...And that centre is almost certainly Berlin, isn’t it? See how the lights seem to follow natural lines? ...I’ll bet they are hills and ridges. And that glowing hub – just there...” Gleick winced with pain and wiped urgently but gently with cotton wool along the track made as the great man’s finger slid across and pressed onto the screen; “...must be

Madrid. Its high isn't it, Madrid? Three-thousand feet or so?"

"Until we can be certain, Sir, of the status of Glacier Flu and the level of civility and calm – we may be better advised to make radio contact first, Sir; before we put our crews in danger..."

"Hmm – You're right Lawrence. Quite right. ...How are your language skills Gleick? Can you chat to these Europeans in their own tongues?"

"I learned some German, Captain; But we've got good linguists at the college. Between us we can converse in most languages. And we can always draft in some of the University bods. Paul Broadling is, I'm told by the female students..." and here he couldn't resist slipping in one of his favourite puns which he had a right to assume would go over the captain's head, "...something of a cunning linguist."

It did bypass the Kirk educated, puritanical, Cruickshank filters, making no impact on the captain, but Commander Nicholson smiled widely – out of the captain's line of sight.

"I'd rather we relied on our own people..." said Cruickshank abstractedly, in a tone which intrigued the commander, "...We shouldn't come to rely on the locals for the skills we need." Then seeing Lawrence's puzzled look, he briskly changed tack, "Yes! So you're right Lawrence. Let's systematically try to contact groups across Europe. Start with the nearest clusters. Get some data on them and let's build a population and demographic map. Then we might go and visit some of them. ...Bring in all the crews. I'd like to get it done as soon as we can. ...And keep the initiative confidential as far as possible gentlemen. We don't want every Tom and Dick and Harry knowing our business – do we?"

As Cruickshank left the communications deck, still with his air of abstraction preventing any real understanding of his inner thoughts, Gleick and Nicholson exchanged

glances which said more than “We’re puzzled.” They also said “He’s up to something and we are damn well going to find out what it is.” They smiled politely at each other and neither needed to articulate the thought. But no one on HMS Rutherford, particularly their captain, could get away with acting mysteriously with any of the long serving crew members. After years of close quarters and team work, they could read each other’s minds without words or explanations.

A few days later the jury announced it was ready to deliver its verdicts and the judges went into a final huddle with the Governing Council of London to consider suitable punishments.

The court reconvened and despite the onset of real winter weather the Londoners gathered at Wimbledon Common in even larger crowds than before, including a few dozen tough and determined land-claimants and food growers.

Marine Sub-Lieutenant Whitaker and five colleagues distributed hundreds of copies of one of Alice’s speeches, arguing for shared wealth, the commonwealth, self-responsibility and self-authority; a paper which incorporated three photographs of her reproduced from Alex’s video tapes. Seeing Alice aged twenty, innocent and beautiful, dressed in exotic raiment at Harrods and smiling regally into the camera, and later aged twenty-three, charismatic and boldly delivering a controversial message of individual power, development, freedom and of hope for all people, brought tears to many eyes. As Doctor Goodge and Sir Randall were brought to the courthouse in an armoured van, the crowd’s grief turned to anger and some stormed the vehicle, yelling, booing and throwing stones.

For the first time the SPAT units were put to the test, nervously and reluctantly directed by Professor Blackmoor who at that moment realised he was well equipped to be an academic, but he was not a natural militarist or Chief

Constable. Paper cuts, sharp staples and repetitive strain injuries posed as much danger and discomfort as he wished to have to meet in his work.

As Goodge, hollow eyed and uncharacteristically uncertain with a livid scar healing on his cheek, stepped down from the van, not handcuffed but restrained by two guards, he came face to face with Alex. Goodge gave an odd half smile acknowledging their past. The air crackled with tension.

Alex hated Goodge; Goodge the assassin, Goodge the insane, Goodge the murderer of his sister. But he also unconsciously admired some of the man's qualities; Goodge the soldier and Goodge the technician and Goodge the stoic. For Goodge had borne his continuous nightmares, physical wounds, defeat, arrest and trail with extraordinary composure and ironic, self-mocking humour.

Alex glared at his enemy and tried to see and detest only the evil in the man. But he couldn't do it. As young and impetuous and as mature a warrior as he was, months of immersion in Alice's writings and of being exclusively brought up by her after their parents died, had impressed and inspired him. In the literal sense Alice's presence had inspired her brother; she had breathed into him her own spirit and vision; a spirit which, in this frozen instant, in this crucible of confrontation with Goodge, wrestled with Alex's natural feelings of violent revenge.

To Alex's great surprise, his burning hatred evaporated. Alex did not return Goodge's strange little smile but, suddenly swept by a deep non-judgemental current, which soothed his features into a calmly grave expression he glanced back at the man and, at a deep level, understood Goodge's inner torment. He intuitively recognised the demons which drove this man, and he also saw or sensed, as Alice in extremis, in her death throes, had seen, the third observer - the dispassionate, neutral, universal life energy which animated Goodge and himself and guided their karmic fates. Alex well knew the phrase which unbidden now entered his consciousness. He'd read it a

hundred times in Alice's papers – "I recognise the divine in you."

And, to the amazement of the onlookers he lowered his challenging gaze and stepped quietly aside.

The electrifying tension between the two protagonists had created a potential flashpoint in the mood of the crowd which might have exploded.

But, thanks to Professor Blackmoor's foresight in the design of SPAT civil training; thanks to the unit's restraint and to the intelligent orders Blackmoor gave, the prisoners were safely transferred without injury to anyone and with some grudging respect shown to his men. Sir Randall stepped down giving a confident, celebrity wave for the sake of any of his supporters who might see – and it drew a muted cheer from a handful of citizens. The mood remained volatile however and, in the absence of what had been unquestioned, normal Law & Order before the floods, it was anybody's guess as to how the crowd – no longer polite and compliant, socialised Londoners who would meekly queue for a bus in the rain, but ungoverned, rugged, self-responsible people who had survived for years through individual struggle, physical toughness and initiative - would choose to behave.

A large contingent of uniformed naval officers, including three of the captains and about forty of the crew, equal numbers of males and females, all carrying side-arms, crowded into the court or stood silently outside the door, looking up at one of the TV screens. James Cruickshank was not with them – he had decided to stay on board HMS Rutherford.

Professor Roger Winkle was deployed to ask Commander Nicholson for help with crowd control.

"But who will control the controllers?" replied Nicholson.

Winkle was shocked. "You cannot mean that, Commander. Surely the Royal Navy is on the side of the law. You can't

mean to stand by and perhaps let this crowd flaunt the authorities and become abusive and violent. Can you?"

Nicholson looked Winkle in the eye. Winkle was an intelligent man, a civilised, thoughtful, slightly anxious, pacific man who was impossible to dislike. But could he earn Nicholson's support and respect? This trial, this gathering of Londoners, the verdicts, the sentences and the deployment of the SPAT units, represented the first test for the ethics and attitudes of the Governing Council and of the traditional land owners.

Here on Wimbledon Common, and perhaps being played out similarly around the world wherever civil society survived, the new order, the way of the future, was being forged and crystallised. The decisions taken and the direction set would create compass bearings which mankind would follow for decades or centuries. Here, among these once ordinary people, now extraordinary survivors of plagues, pestilence and social chaos, Alice's vision for the world's future, her insistence on individuation, equality, love and power for service, may be snuffed out like a single gleaming spark from a flint falling on a damp faggot, or be cherished, nourished and fuelled to become a great beacon, a shining, guiding light.

Would London revert to the primitive traditions and values developed over the past ten thousand years, or would it collapse in chaos back into the dark ages of ignorance feared by Professor Blackmoor, or would the people learn from past mistakes and grasp the opportunity to take the next step for mankind into the new epoch? As Alice had often said, the community was on the verge of a new era, the era of intelligent co-operation. She had offered people everywhere this new vision – and she had been foully murdered for it. How would the progenitors of the new world order decide to respond to events?

Nicholson hesitated over Winkle's question – then decided to seize the moment. "You are presuming two things I don't really endorse. Firstly that traditional "normal" order will have to be imposed by a police force on our fellow

citizens here..." and he indicated the whole assembly with his hands, "...and secondly Winkle, old fellow ...that whatever the outcome, you assume myself and all my colleagues will support your court and your judges..."

"But ...but; you are their commander. They are not colleagues Nicholson. Not colleagues at all. They are your inferiors in a strict military hierarchy. They MUST follow orders ...mustn't they?"

Winkle's sense of panic, of the world order disintegrating once again into chaos was palpable and infectious. Nicholson felt and empathised with it, but he too, like Alex, had been inspired by Alice Whitaker.

"Never again, Winkle. She said 'never again' would any person be able to say 'I was just obeying orders.' ...Do you realise the implications of that laudable philosophy old man? Have you thought through what it means in practical terms for any group of people – for any hierarchy, military, academic, government, family or otherwise?"

Winkle hadn't. But he was now plunged into the deep end of the question where his feet didn't touch the bottom. And it frightened him even more. "...Do you mean collegiate consensus, Commander? Constant democracy – everything by committee? It can't work, Nicholson. It just can't work!"

"It's a two way imperative, Winkle. It is two way! If I have to freely agree to follow Captain Cruickshank's orders, which by implication I must query in my own mind; it also means he cannot, must not expect me or anyone to follow his orders blindly. Do you see that?"

Winkle did see but was reduced to muteness by what he saw.

"We, my Royal Navy 'colleagues' and I will react depending on the acceptability of the jurors', judges' and, I suppose, the Governing Council's decisions."

Winkle nodded, not agreeing, but to acknowledge he had understood.

“We suspect, but hope not; that is, Captain Cruickshank and I suspect ...that the jury is packed with Sir Randall sympathisers. We reckon Goodge will be declared guilty – and Sir Randall innocent...”

“Yes, Yes, I daresay! ...But that’s politics. Alice Whitaker’s dreams cannot banish human politics. As society reforms, power groups will emerge – rise and fall. History will repeat itself Commander. It will repeat itself. I am sure of that.”

“You may, sadly, be right Professor. ...We further imagine that Sir Randall will build an even stronger power base and that, in a short time, he will effect Goodge’s release. ...Do you agree?”

“It could go like that. Yes it might. But I know that Blackmoor is absolutely against it. He’s terrified of Sir Randall – thinks the man is a sociopath or worse, a psychopath. He wants to see Randall Delawarr behind bars for life.” Then Winkle had another thought.

“If we agree that Goodge may be ‘sprung’ at an early date and defeat justice; ...then presumably you’d go along with a call for the death penalty – in this unique case?”

“We would see any severe penalties as a step back into barbarity, Winkle. We must go forwards not back...”

Winkle was getting frustrated and cross;

“But that resolves nothing Commander. The authorities are today faced with major decisions. Decisions which will set precedents for years. Here, with you, I represent the Governing Council and you represent the fleet. We ARE those authorities – and we have the duty to decide matters. Surely you can see that?”

“We each must make our own decisions – and cooperate if we must with like minded friends.”

“Oh that’s pap! Muddled, useless, Utopian, pre-digested, democratic, sugary pap!”

Lawrence Nicholson was surprised by Winkle’s vehemence. But the usually mild man, released from doubt, energetically expanded his thoughts.

“You’d make government a hostage to the common will – to the lowest common denominator. We’d be ruled by brainless thickies. It’s the politics of Bedlam. Nothing would get done. There’d be no organisation. At present, with supplies becoming exhausted - we’d all starve. ...At least Sir Randall has organised a farm – producing good food. ...The roasting pig he gave us was delicious...”

Winkle paused, catching himself beginning to rant. Nicholson tentatively ventured in again. “What you leave out of the equation, old man, is the phrase I used a moment ago – I said I freely agree to follow the captain’s orders – remember? It is the lack of compulsion that’s missing from your analysis.”

Winkle was now silent.

“If I have to think about the orders I receive and agree whether to follow them. ...Quite important when we have nuclear capability – wouldn’t you say? I mean, suppose Captain Cruickshank went quietly batty – should we still blindly follow orders? Or should we challenge him and take another route?”

“Into anarchy!” huffed Winkle.

“...No, not at all. But if I have to think about orders and then agree – I have taken personal responsibility for what I do. That is the key difference. I am not “just obeying orders” – am I? ...It doesn’t mean I won’t choose to follow some intelligent organiser who obviously has a vision and knows what they are doing.”

Winkle had had enough of Utopia. "So what verdicts and sentences would *you* like to see, Commander?"

"They should both be found guilty – which they are; equally guilty. The verdict should be broadcast far and wide. And they should be released into the community."

Winkle thought this through; his academic rigour and balance returning. After a while he said, "Oh that is cruel Commander. That *is* cruel. ...It almost certainly would mean an old fashioned form of banishment – one of the most feared of all sentences. They might get lynched. Or, most likely, sent to Coventry. ...But it has its merits."

"People punish themselves Winkle – we think!"

"We? Commander. ...Is that the royal we? Is it you and the captain? Or is it the entire fleet, you can now speak for?"

"We have held many debates about this Winkle. I think I can safely say it is the opinion of the whole fleet – ...the freely assented view of us all."

Winkle looked at Nicholson anew. Then he turned and looked at the men and women of the fleet – anew. Did military people have debates? Or did they, as up to that minute he had firmly believed, just march up and down shouting, polish cannons, run up flags and explode things? Then he turned back to look at Nicholson, deeply perplexed. "*Where have I, a thinker, a trained academic observer, been,*" he asked himself, "*while this social upheaval, this cultural revolution, has been taking place under my very nose – on my own doorstep? Has pretty Alice Whitaker done it? Did she get through? Will the new world really be so different?*" And a small butterfly of hope fluttered in his heart. But he said none of this and simply stared – absorbing the subtly different body language of the sailors, which confounded his unexamined expectations.

They were, he observed, changed. They were different. They were more dignified, more assured, more grave, less deferential, more empathetic to each other, than any bunch of institutionalised men and women he'd seen. *"I must discuss this with Blackmoor and Broadling."* Winkle thought – sensing the foundations of a new book.

In the packed courthouse Samuel Laing-Wootton stood with the taciturn bailiff Michael Staunton and six other silent men. They were all armed with pistols hidden under heavy coats. Outside, mingling in the crowds were five more of their company, also armed. They had expected Captain Cruickshank to appear and planned to shoot him and escape in the confusion. It was disappointing that the old man wasn't there. But they had two others to kill. Alex, of course, to avenge Doctor Goodge and to stop the spread of Alice Whitaker's seditious ideas; and the turncoat Nicholson – who'd pretended comradeship and agreement with Sir Randall then made fools of him and of them all.

Goodge and Sir Randall stood in the dock under guard. The room fell silent and everyone stood as the three judges took their seats. Then the jury came in through a side door and were seated on benches.

The jury's decisions were as Lawrence Nicholson had anticipated. Goodge was guilty of murder and attempted murder; Sir Randall Delawarr was "Not guilty" on all counts – though the jury explained they'd rather deliver the Scottish verdict of "Not Proven". Professor Blackmoor blanched a little as he realised Delawarr would go free from this court, but he hid it well; and then he adjusted his strategic and tactical plans.

The tribunal chairman made a long speech to the accused about wickedness, crime, community, the need for order and for law; the evil of killing; the evil of conspiring to kill or to harm another – and so on. When his address ended, he said "Sir Randall! You may step down, a free and

innocent man.” Though his summing up had implied the knight was less than totally innocent. But Sir Randall did walk free from the dock to a few gruff calls of “congratulations” from his supporters and hostile looks and a few angry shouts from his detractors.

Goodge stood alone, gracing the audience with one of his unreadable, magnetic smiles.

“...And now to the matter of sentencing...”

The court and the crowd outside became deathly quiet. But they were to be disappointed.

In his wisdom and applying his political instincts, Martin Blackmoor had become very uneasy about the size of the crowds compared to the small SPAT unit. He had bad dreams about mass riots – the crowd surging out of control if the wrong verdicts were given; perhaps even resorting to lynch-mob violence. And he had asked the judges – respectfully suggested to their Lordships - that after the verdicts from the jury, they should again retire to decide the sentencing. And that was what the chairman announced.

The crowds, inside and outside, groaned; but the tactic worked, defusing the tension and leaving a cold, disconsolate bunch to start to wander away and head off and disperse in the direction of their homes.

Jonathan Goodge, looking suddenly drained and unwell, was put back in the armoured van and taken back to prison. Sir Randall was welcomed by Samuel Laing-Wootton, bundled into a Range Rover and driven away. He again intended to be far from the epicentre when the trouble he hoped would occur, erupted.

Staunton’s men moved efficiently across the Common, spreading out and checking their weapons under cover of their coats. They were looking for Alex and for Commander Nicholson. It was after two o’clock and a cold wind had started to blow. If Sir Randall’s utterly determined

schemes worked out, there'd be two dead sailors before nightfall. Sacrificing Goodge to the people's court had not swayed him one inch from his ambition to do whatever was necessary to gain control of the submarine fleet and the Naval College.

Unmistakably countrymen, travelling in pairs, like twin sheepdogs working a flock without alarming the sheep, on the south, east and west sides of the common were Staunton's mates, mingling with the homebound Londoners and keeping the Naval detachment at the focus of their cross-bearings. Unlike sheepdogs, they were intent on savage slaughter.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Resolution

Ultimately all ownership and property rights have been maintained by force. Violence - from individual fights, to political assassinations, to world wars - has been a fundamental, necessary axiom of civilisation, in most cultures, for most of recorded history. We survivors of the old civilisation have the power and the knowledge to set a new direction for the new epoch. Our grandchildren will never forgive us if we do not seize this opportunity – *Writings of Alice Whitaker 2010 – Vol. 5.*

Alex linked arms with June, left the courtroom and started across the common towards Putney and their ferry. Their romantic intimacy was shattered as every sailor, about forty of them, including three captains, suddenly decided to join the couple; not only deciding to accompany them down to the boats but insisting on pressing them into the centre of the large and unwieldy group. Alex suddenly found Commander Nicholson on the other side of June and himself tripping over the heels of those in front of him, who couldn't walk fast enough to get out from under his feet. The troop refused to allow him any space. After fifteen minutes of having his heels stepped on and kicking the feet in front, Alex had had enough.

“...Ere! Wot's goin' on?” he complained, abandoning all the protocol he had learned of how to address senior and junior ranks.

Commander Nicholson obliged. “Gleick's scanning machine has picked up the scent of guns – at least of ammunition. And I guess we are the most likely targets – Marine Sub-Lieutenant Whitaker! ...So if you don't want to be shot by Delawarr's men – stay in the middle and keep your head down, keep that girl safe and keep your wits about you lad!”

“Ah! Yes Sir! I will Sir!”

Lieutenant Gleick walked near the back of the group, his head bent over a portable screen fed from an almost

invisible aerial on a small backpack. "There are guns all around us – apart from straight ahead in the north..."

Captain Mallalieu was whispering rapidly into a mobile phone. He finished and put it in his coat pocket with a grim pat of satisfaction. Like all the most senior officers he had been in the original Arctic crew and developed the uncanny understanding they all had with each other. Lawrence Nicholson looked across at him and they exchanged grim, wary smiles.

Alex was getting angry at being shepherded, frustrated at tripping over the man in front – and anxious about the dangers to June. "We're far more than them!" he said to any who would hear. "We shouldn't be running. Why don't we just go an' arrest them all. Hey! They should be running from us."

Lawrence Nicholson patted him on the arm, both urging him forward and to be reassuring. "It could be a real bloodbath Alex, if we start a fight. Sir Randall will have given them some training – and they may all be ex-army for all we know. They look like tough guys. ...But don't worry. We've prepared a surprise for them. Now keep up Alex – and bloody well obey orders for a change!"

Hundreds of North Londoners had moored boats on the shoreline which defined the margins of Putney hill. Small shops, long ago emptied of goods, still stood, high above the tide mark on the High Street, which funnelled the crowds down towards the sea. Residential streets laid to the left and right, running east-west, seemed untouched by floods or pestilence, sporting rows of neat, well maintained late Victorian terraces, lacking only the parking meter attendants and the buttoned up little families fiercely defending their few feet or even few inches of space between the locked front doors and the public pavement. Net curtains or Venetian blinds secured the privacy of the long empty living rooms – some still containing old, desiccated corpses of victims from the third wave of Glacier Flu.

Children skittered through the legs of adults and ran ahead, rattling door knockers to startle fat rats and wild cats into rapid retreats, along walls and over rooftops, from the sudden gang of invading humans. Feral dogs came to investigate the possibility of a meal, but stayed well back and slunk away when they saw the size of the approaching tribes.

The crowd spread out as it reached the shoreline and groups sought out their mooring lines to haul in the boats for embarkation. The tide was out, lapping at the ground floors of houses in Lytton Grove and Chartfield Avenue, requiring the passengers to slip and slide down what was now a grey beach but had once been suburban gardens. Many travellers had moored on Putney Hill where there were clusters of crafts, conveniently afloat with a clear way north; clear to sail, taking great care, out over the submerged Putney Bridge and across drowned Hammersmith and Fulham, making for the northern shore. The tightly packed houses had made for very difficult mooring; with no easy way to get from the boats to shore – or back again.

The falling tide had left some boats beached in awkward spots, high and dry, and it took a lot of cooperation of up to six or seven strong men, to slide them down to the water, negotiating the corners and fences of the Villas. Some of the homes had collapsed, their foundations washed away by the fast tides and by even faster currents emptying tidal pools and rushing between walls and old vehicles, back to the sea. Where a house had vanished, boats could get safely to shore – but tidal changes meant the unwary could all too often see their boats trapped in courtyards or caught on the rooftops of the houses further down the slope.

As the Royal Navy group walked rapidly down Putney Hill, sighting their four tenders with crews standing off in deeper water, away from the scrum of moored boats, they were shoulder to shoulder with a few hundred citizens going the same way, all channelled down the hill by the buildings and the restriction of the road width. Staunton's

men, needing room to manoeuvre, had fallen behind the crowd and all twelve of them, now an obvious unit, a military looking group, in the uniform of their heavy country clothes, hung back a few metres, above and behind the submariners. Michael Staunton was the largest of them and yet he padded menacingly and silently, like a hunting grizzly bear moving up on its unsuspecting prey.

But, unseen by the armed countrymen, three sailors had ducked into and hidden in a passageway off the street on the way down. They now emerged and joined the tail end of the queue for the boats, a few metres behind the enemy – and they were not at all unsuspecting. Each had a walkie-talkie and orders to shout “Guns” the instant any of the unit drew a pistol. These rear guards could see downhill, over the heads of Staunton’s men and the massed sailors; where Alex, in the centre, taller than most, was all too easily identifiable.

But Staunton’s men wanted to kill, confuse, and make a clean getaway. This crowd was too dense and might deliberately turn on them or, like stampeding cattle, accidentally block their escape – so they made no attacking moves, limiting themselves to moving out to span the street in a shallow semi-circle, to give each of them the chance of a shot at Alex or Nicholson.

The forty or so sailors, men and women, stopped near the water’s edge and waited quietly as Londoners retrieved their boats, skilfully or clumsily cast off and turned the prows towards the north shore. The sailors remained packed together and very still, letting the last of the crowd go round them to get at the moorings. Within a few minutes the street was almost empty and the estuary was full of small boats – as it might have been two or three hundred years earlier when it was the main artery of the city.

The air was cold and the sky had cleared. Judging from the sun, it was about three o’clock with an hour or so of good light left before dusk. At a whisper from Captain Mallalieu, the whole group turned to face the hill, their

backs to the sea; and they spread out, forming a semi-circle. Every one of them had drawn a service revolver. Alex, June and Lawrence Nicholson were hidden behind a wall of taller sailors – who were moving their charges backwards towards protective doorways at the side of the street.

The twelve men had stopped twenty or thirty metres back and taken cover in doorways or behind solid street furniture made of cast iron or concrete. It was not clear that they were a team nor that they meant any harm. Without Gleick's surveillance intelligence, these men might simply be innocent travellers. But Captain Mallalieu had Gleick's data and knew that these impassive men were armed – and dangerous.

Twenty metres was near enough for a marksman to score a hit but an average shot would miss the target – and injure or kill indiscriminately. At forty against twelve, it would obviously be madness to open fire. And yet the enemy, faced with an overwhelming force, looked far too confident and their bodies, coursing with adrenaline, the fight or flight hormone, broadcast their readiness to engage. Captain Mallalieu guessed they had more to threaten them with than hand-guns. And he didn't want any shots fired at all. There'd be no injuries and no deaths on his watch – if he could possibly avoid it.

Michael Staunton moved first. He leaned out from behind a shop door pillar, pointing not a small pistol but a submachine gun that could fire a hundred and fifty bullets a minute. His heavy coat had concealed this substantial lethal weapon. His move told the sailors that not only was Staunton and, they had to assume, his men, armed with automatic weapons, but also he was betting the pot – these twelve men felt capable of wiping out all of them – leaving no witnesses. Staunton had marked where Alex and Nicholson had gone to earth. Even if Staunton was wrong, Mallalieu knew any exchange would be a disaster with dozens of casualties.

“Cover” he shouted; and the submariners fell back into doorways or dropped to the pavements. At the same instant, Staunton yelled a command and another eleven ugly gun snouts poked out of hiding places. Captain Mallalieu wasted not a second. He shouted loudly; very loudly.

“Hold it. You! Sir Randall’s men! Hold it! And look at the skyline!”

From every high window, balcony and rooftop, ahead, behind and to the sides of the attackers, Royal Marine Commandos, in full combat gear and also armed with automatic rifles, showed a little of themselves; just enough to let Staunton’s men know they were there – in large numbers – but not enough to offer easy targets.

“Nobody – sailor, marine or Sir Randall’s men – move!” shouted Captain Mallalieu.

“We don’t want you Staunton. We want your weapons. Put your weapons down and walk away with your lives! ...Fire one shot and you’ll all be gunned down. I’ll count five!”

“One ...Two ...Three”

Guns clattered to the street and the twelve men stepped out uneasily – with their hands in the air. Lieutenant Gleick was frantically busy with his screen and keyboard. “Someone on the right, by the school entrance, is still armed. Could be a gun or maybe a grenade – or it might be a flare gun...”

Captain Mallalieu walked slowly towards the man in that place. He was thin with clever eyes and black hair, aged around forty, pinched and blue in the face from the cold.

“You still have a weapon on you.” The captain said carefully. “Give it up please.”

The man made to put his hand inside his coat. “Stop! Open your coat and show me where it is – I’ll take it.”

The man undid buttons and opened the coat, then nodded at an upper pocket in the jacket underneath. The captain moved closer, transferred his pistol and extended his right hand to search the pocket. As his hand went forward the man grabbed it, twisted him round, dropped a knife down his other sleeve into his hand and flashed it up to the captain's throat faster than the eye could follow. His body was protected by Captain Mallalieu's.

"Well Captain..." the man said evenly. "Parachute regiment training seems to have it over your Marine training – wouldn't you say?" and as he talked, without pause for thought, he took the captain's pistol and forced them both across the street towards the doorway where Alex and June crouched behind a guard of three colleagues.

The air was utterly still and silent. Not a mouse breathed.

"Shoot him – and me if you have to!" shouted Mallalieu at the combat troops. But nobody was willing to follow the order. Nearly a hundred armed sailors and marines faced off twelve men – one brandishing a knife, and nobody moved, and nobody spoke. The tension was unbearable.

"We *will* let you go – if you give up your weapons." Repeated Captain Mallalieu loudly, ignoring the razor sharp blade under his Adam's apple. His adversary ignored him – saw Alex behind the others and waved him to get up. Against restraining hands Alex rose, moving to his right as he stood and taking a further step away to leave June out of the line of fire.

"Hands up! My friends want a word with you!" the paratrooper told him keeping the pistol aimed at Alex's head. "You, mate, get up the street and see Mr Staunton – or I'll slit this throat and shoot ...that blonde girl there..." And now the pistol pointed straight at June.

Alex's defiant face collapsed. "I'm goin'" he muttered. "Leave 'em alone. I'm goin'." He might even have sobbed a little. And in his defeat his raised hands drooped down to

his shoulders as he took a step up the street. The paratrooper instinctively whipped the pistol back to cover Alex – and died.

In the split second it took for the gun to switch from June to Alex, Alex drew a knife, his favourite knife, from somewhere under his coat collar and flung it with explosive power across the few feet between them – nicking the captains' ear - straight through the man's left eye, piercing his brain and killing him in a micro-second. The soldier was too surprised to fall.

“Fuck-off – mate!”

The incident had taken less than a minute. Staunton and his men had not even contemplated picking up their weapons and Captain Mallalieu, shaking from the close shave – literally Alex's knife had been close enough to shave him - wasn't at all sure if he was alive or not. A Marine officer shouted instructions from above – Staunton and his gang moved away – leaving their automatics where they'd fallen, they were rapidly surrounded by combat marines – and the threat was over; this time.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Royal Mail

And so the heavenly soul kept on with its preparations for re-birth, including the inevitable form-filling, bureaucracy being the only universal activity that transcended the River Styx, Death, and all forms of total annihilation.

Chapter 19 – AD2516 – After Global Warming.

The drabness and poor quality of the buff envelope and letter had all the petty bureaucratic attributes which would make any recipient groan before opening it. Pre-flood, it would have been a final tax demand or a claw-back of social security, or a redundancy notice, or a speed-camera fine, or perhaps a notification of terminal illness – by second class postal delivery. It was the sort of letter that should not be opened before breakfast and never when alone.

Even though he had eaten his breakfast, James Cruickshank glumly studied the back of the envelope and was mildly depressed that in this post-flood time of continuing crisis for the whole human race, and with very scarce resources, someone, somewhere, struggling with incompatible techno-salvage and erratic electricity supplies, had wrestled with the irritating complexity of micro-chip driven computers and the perverse, counter-intuitive logic of computer printers; had applied their mind, energy, determination, creative skills, intellect and precious time; had chosen out of the millions of free, unused envelopes in London this meanest and flimsiest of them all, in a decayed fungus fawn colour, and had produced a printed envelope, presumably with some pride of authorship, that would make a saint weep with despair.

The printing, in a small, eyesight challenging block on the front left hand corner, and in a single faded ink row across the back flap, let the recipient know it was a communication from: *The Governing Council of London Criminal Court*; and that it had been delivered, and this

did surprise James Cruickshank, by the newly formed *GCLRMS – the Governing Council of London Royal Mail Service*. Had he thought about it he would have accurately conjectured that resuscitating “Royal Mail” had absorbed fourteen, three hour committee meetings, ten being debates about using the word “Royal”.

Nor was he alone with this envelope. He and six senior officers aboard HMS Rutherford had just polished off a full breakfast and were about to clear away the debris before reviewing the orders for the day. And it was a fine day – cold but sunny. But still he sat in glum contemplation of this clinically depressed designer artefact, the first letter he’d received in seven years.

The six officers deliberately did not look at the intriguing letter. After all, it may be a suicidally, terminal looking communication; but he had received a letter – and they had not. In fact in five years since the college opened, of the five-hundred-and-thirty-six personnel in the fleet, only Captain Cruickshank had received a letter by Royal Mail. Jealous they may have been, but curiosity was the stronger emotion; and they were not about to leave the room until the captain had opened it. They chatted nonchalantly among themselves about everything - except the letter.

James Cruickshank, with a heavy heart, slowly inserted his thumb under the flap. His companions fell silent and dropped all pretence of having more urgent or congenial business elsewhere. The captain read the letter. And his over burdened, Scottish, grizzled head hung more heavily on shoulders which already carried too much.

“It’s signed...” he said at last, “...by Professor Martin Blackmoor, ...on behalf of the Criminal Court...”

He pushed himself straighter in his chair and took a deep breath to add timbre to his voice.

“I’ll paraphrase – as what the man writes is partway between an order, a request and an apology.”

The officers adjusted their seats, their attention never wavering.

“In response to a ‘complaint’ – that’s an odd word to choose – from Sir Randall Delawarr – that one of his men, Kenneth Charles Baxter, a bailiff from Kenwood House ...was killed by Marine Sub-Lieutenant Alex Whitaker, of HMS Rutherford, in Putney ...etcetera ...the SPAT arm of the Governing Council requests or demands or orders or ...begs; it’s difficult to know which ...that we hand the ...‘suspect’ over to the custody of the ‘legally constituted civil authorities’ for ...‘examination’.

The captain sat completely still and let out a long deep, barely audible growling breath. After a while he said,

“What do you think of it – Officers?”

“We could spare one modestly small nuclear warhead – couldn’t we Sir. Delivered halfway between the BT Tower and Kenwood House; should sort them all out – at a stroke.”

They all gave small smiles at the thought.

“Ah! Yes. The energising and freeing simplicity of unrestrained mindless violence! ...But against our own countrymen, it isn’t the appropriate response to being netted, neutered and strangled in red tape.”

“You don’t mean to hand Whitaker over – do you Sir?”

Cruickshank looked his questioner in the eye. Then he looked at each of the men and women round the table, one by one. “Can we have a vote on that – ladies and gentlemen?”

“Should we hand Alex Whitaker over to the Governing Council? ...Hands up for ‘Yes’ ”

Not a hand was raised. "...then it is unanimously 'No' ...So how should we respond to this letter. They want to arrest one of our men?"

Twenty-four hours later Captain Mallalieu, with two of his officers, was at the Tower, facing Sir Randall and Professor Blackmoor, who had three of his academic colleagues with him. The Tower now stood permanently in the sea, at high and low tide, like a lighthouse – A beacon of civilisation – as Martin Blackmoor liked to romanticise it. A floating landing stage had been built around the tower's girth. The winter sky had clouded over in the night and snow threatened.

"...The man had a knife at my throat and a pistol pointing at June Goldblythe, one of our cadets..."

"Ken – Kenneth Baxter. He had a name. The victim was 'Ken' to his friends," corrected Sir Randall.

"Victim – Huh! Hired killer more like!"

"But why – What made you think these farm bailiffs intended to kill anyone – and why specifically Commander Nicholson and Alex? What evidence did you have?"

Captain Mallalieu was a practical man; brusque to the point of being rude; with no time for diplomacy or half-truths. Blackmoor's question annoyed him.

"Don't be damned silly man. It was all discussed at the trial. ...This 'friend' of yours..." he pointed his thumb at Sir Randall; putting Martin Blackmoor in the awful dilemma of either denying Sir Randall was his friend – angering Kenwood House – or of embracing the frightening man, and risk alienating the Royal Navy.

He kept his face bland and entirely neutral; not smiling nor scowling at either; agreeing with no one; and running quickly along the top of a very thin fence.

Fortunately Mallalieu was uninterested in such finessing and ploughed on rapidly, carrying all before him. "...Sir Randall here – sent Goodge to murder Captain Cruickshank, tried to seduce Commander Nicholson into betrayal – and murder – and ordered Goodge to kill Alex Whitaker..."

"That is not what the Court found!" interjected Sir Randall sharply.

"...and on the Common it was clear that his men – led by that big heavy chap; the smelly one who had been with Goodge?"

"Michael Staunton," supplied Professor Blackmoor helpfully.

"Yes. Staunton! ...Were 'A' armed and 'B' stalking us – and particularly Whitaker and Nicholson."

"And you could tell this from... What! The way they walked? What they said?"

"It was self-evident man! If you'd ever been under fire in close combat you'd know when an enemy force is manoeuvring round you. There could be no doubt."

Sir Randall, as cool as ever, let Martin Blackmoor, who was genuinely intrigued and wanted to hear the full story, make the running.

"But – with respect Captain. Nobody, as I understand it, fired a shot. The only attack was when Alex stuck a knife in this man ...Ken's eye?"

Captain Mallalieu winced instinctively at the memory of Alex's twenty four inch knife jetting past his ear and thudding into his captor's eye socket.

"But they were all armed Professor. Twelve men armed to the teeth with automatic weapons. Concealed automatic

weapons! What do you think they were carrying those for?"

"...Well – weren't all of your submariners ...armed? And you presumably didn't intend to murder anyone?"

"We had holstered pistols. Hand guns. And we are legally entitled to carry such weapons..."

"Ah! You fall back on the ...old ...existing laws? Then you must abide by them also," murmured Sir Randall, "...and yet you won't allow Whitaker to be questioned."

"Custody is what we won't agree to, Delawarr – you can come and question him at the college. ...Good God man! You've tried to kill him twice. Do you think we'd hand him over into your charge!"

Sir Randall bristled. Professor Blackmoor paled at the bluntness. He was also piqued at being sidelined by the assumption that Sir Randall called the shots when it came to SPAT and Governing Council justice.

"We, the Governing Council, will warrant his safety. ...He'll be returned to you in good health; if Alex is innocent of course," said Blackmoor portentously; overbalancing in a desperate attempt to reclaim his authority. After all, damn it! He was the founder and chief executive of the SPAT unit – and of the whole Council.

Captain Mallalieu didn't even pretend to consider the possibility. "He wouldn't survive the first day, Blackmoor. Don't be an idiot."

Blackmoor jumped with suppressed anger. Having his authority challenged was one thing. Being labelled "an idiot" by an IQ challenged, bloody minded sailor, who crept around under the oceans in an iron tube for a living – was insupportable. He drew a breath to deliver a devastating counter blow to destroy the ego of this crass, uniformed vulgarian – when he caught the expression in Sir Randall's eyes, and froze in fear.

It was that same look, which he had first seen at Kenwood House; the cold calculating conscienceless look of a deadly poisonous snake eyeing its helpless victim. The man was definitely a psychopath. And he, Blackmoor, conducted business with this creature.

He was in danger of allying his Governing Council with the land-owners and of alienating the far saner relationships they enjoyed with the submariners at the Naval College. Where, after all, did they get their electric power from? Who did Londoners, without a second thought, rely on to protect the estuary from wandering pirates or deliberate invaders? Where else, in a few short years, had such a centre of great excellence and learning been built? On the other hand, Kenwood House and its acquired lands, was becoming a significant provider of food – fresh meat – real milk – eggs – green vegetables, fruit and extremely good potatoes. And people visited the estate to learn how to be effective smallholders – able to feed themselves. Londoners were far more aware of the immediate benefits of the Kenwood House estate than of the advantages of the remote Naval College.

He – and his Governing Council, on behalf of their constituents – seventy-five thousand of them at the latest count in the data-base for the new mail service - could not afford to lose either group. He had to keep trust with them both. And it was not going to be easy. Blackmoor was temporarily paralysed by indecision and fright. His neck and arm started to ache again.

“It’s their utter brass necked determination that irks me, Sir! ...that man Delawarr and his pretend landed gentry pals simply will not rest until they’ve got control of this fleet – and despatched you, Whitaker and Commander Nicholson. ...They are beyond reason.” Captain Mallalieu was reporting his encounter to James Cruickshank and other officers, aboard HMS Rutherford. “...And Professor Blackmoor told me that now they have restarted the Royal

Mail; they are about to get a new currency going. We don't need to look far to see who'll have control of the money – do we, Sir?”

“Hmm! High social ambition usually is beyond reason, Captain. It's the pursuit of power ...and of course, as you say, the wealth that goes with it. It becomes an obsession – a kind of madness – and however much a man has; enough is never enough.”

Captain Mallalieu wouldn't be drawn into philosophical discussion; but James Cruickshank pressed on; “No – he will, as you say, never rest until he has total control. And he'll do whatever it takes to get it. ...Which includes annihilating uncooperative people such as me and Lawrence here...”

Lawrence Nicholson joined in. “Sir Randall knows he can control the Council. Blackmoor and his colleagues are frightened of the man. And there's the food. Kenwood House is becoming very popular. They're clever populists as well as ruthless operators. ...I'd be surprised if they don't find a way to release Goodge from prison.”

“Yes – and it's an expensive business keeping a man locked up. A marginal society will find maintaining a prison comes very low on the list of priorities,” mused Cruickshank.

“We can't see that murdering bastard go free, Sir. Alex for one wouldn't be able to countenance it. And I don't think I could either...”

“Vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord,” Cruickshank replied.

“Should we take them out, before they act again, Sir?”

James Cruickshank became very still and looked inwards, deep inside his soul. After a long silence he said “The warrior in me likes that idea Commander. I'd love to strike. To 'smite the enemy'; and we have all the manpower and firepower to do it successfully. ...But we

are, as Alice reasoned, on the threshold of a new era for mankind..." he caught a small cough from one of the women and corrected himself, "...a new era for *humankind* – thank you Lieutenant," he acknowledged, "...and every decision we take; all our actions, will set precedents and will reverberate down the generations. ...We must be very careful. They are fixated on rebuilding the old society, with the old rules – and it will take us all round the same old routes and loops. The greedy monkeys will once again get their fat fists stuck in the jars and go to war to acquire more power – for dominion. We have to find a new solution; we must redefine our destinies. From now on – it has to be done differently."

No one spoke – but no one disagreed.

"We are, beyond argument..." Cruickshank continued slowly, feeling his way, "...the most militarily powerful group in Britain; possibly in Europe, and maybe in the world. ...And we are well educated and technologically sophisticated. ...And we may have the most powerful communications," he looked round the group. "...Agree so far?" nobody disagreed.

"We have taken care to balance our personnel; male-female, brown-black-and-white; age-groups; and mixed skills and intelligences..."

The other officers drew in, tense and expectant.

"...Few, if any of us have family or friends outside of the fleet, in London – but most Londoners rely on us for electricity and fuel. ...True?"

"Yes Sir! Less than five percent have surviving family; I'd say, Sir."

Cruickshank looked around the group once again; seeking consensus and he seemed to find it. He took the risk.

"...So here is what I suggest we should do..."

Chapter Thirty-Five

The New Order

We can't turn history back. Yet I do not wish to abandon the belief that a world which is a reasonably peaceful coat of many colours, each portion of which develops its own distinct cultural identity and is tolerant of others, is not a Utopian dream.

Isaiah Berlin – Oxford – from John Gray's 'False Dawn'.

It was a cruel and long winter. Few travelled. Necessary outdoors tasks were done in a hurry. Everyone stayed indoors. Indoors and outdoors, most wore heavy, arctic clothing. Nobody wanted to sail on the estuary where splashes of water, whipped up by the east winds, froze on contact with the boats.

The Governing Council's Tower was warm. They had sealed the rough new door hacked into the concrete above the water line, to stop bitter air seeping in. Warm air percolated up all the floors from oil fired heaters set on the lowest floor.

Most homes were already established in or were urgently moved to buildings with fireplaces and chimneys, which were reopened. Other buildings were cannibalised for their timber which was cut into logs at hastily equipped local sawmills. The circular saws and other machines were run on electricity generated by the massively powerful engines of the nuclear submarines. On still days, the streets of occupied London were filled with a haze of blue wood smoke, reminiscent of earlier centuries.

Uncounted numbers of lone dwellers; tramps and hermits, lunatics and paranoiacs, scavengers by land and water – the looters, supermarket trolley pushers, bag-ladies and rough-sleepers of the new society - huddled in their lonely dens, bundled up over stoves. Some were warm, most were cold. But, in their isolation, they felt safe from Glacier Flu.

Kenwood House, large, old and draughty though it was, burned tree trunks and stumps in the huge fireplaces of the main rooms, kept kitchen ranges and Victorian boilers fed with faggots, and kept the house and animal quarters above freezing. Some reception rooms and bedrooms were warmed enough for people to dress and undress and even bathe in comfort.

Driven indoors for days on end, Londoners were very glad to have at least one channel of BBC Radio functioning. Recordings of past programmes were broadcast on long-wave by a team of three, along with news of local government business and what little could be gleaned from further afield. Some new broadcast material was created.

One dark January afternoon as the light failed and all God fearing souls scuttled or sculled to their homes and bolted their doors and windows, the telephone in Professor Blackmoor's sitting room rang. If it could have been endowed with anthropomorphic qualities, the phone would have rung furiously. It was obvious to anyone in the room that it was a wildly furious telephone.

Martin Blackmoor, snoozing by a fire made from sawn floorboards, lifted his head, eased his aching shoulder and picked up the phone gingerly.

"What the bloody hell is going on Blackmoor?" demanded a familiar, harsh, punitive voice.

"Ah! Sir Randall. How nice of you to call. What can I do to help you?" The professor was in no mood to be bullied.

"Put on your radio Professor! Switch on your damn radio. ...Is it you? Is it the Council? Are you putting this stuff out?"

"I don't have a radio near by, Sir Randall. What is it?"

"They are broadcasting that damn girl's speeches; her damn silly, seditious, communist ideas. You've got to stop

it Blackmoor! Where the devil does it come from? Broadcasting House? Isn't that where they are?"

Blackmoor sighed silently. Why had he picked up the phone? "Mostly, Sir Randall. Most programmes come from the old broadcasting house transmitters – but some of it will be direct from the fleet – on the same wavelength, up-linked to one of the satellites..."

Blackmoor allowed himself a small smirk in the privacy and safety of his darkened room.

"It's dangerous and treasonable, Professor. It's got to be stopped. ...She's preaching individual responsibility – decentralised power. No hierarchy. All that stuff!"

Blackmoor fully agreed that it was dangerous rubbish – but this afternoon, he wasn't inclined to kowtow to Delawarr.

"...Well what can we do?" he parried.

Sir Randall paused; a dangerous pause. It really didn't do to obstruct this man. "...You can get one of your SPAT teams up there – and switch off the transmitter – Blackmoor!"

"That will be wholly unpopular, Sir Randall. And, thinking about it, it will make no difference..."

"Just switch it off man. What do mean it'll make no difference?"

"Not if it is from one of the submarines or the Naval College, Sir Randall. They can broadcast direct to our radios via the satellites."

"Those BBC transmitters must be very powerful! Override them. Blast their signals into oblivion..."

"We draw our electric power from the fleet – Sir Randall."

Sir Randall Delawarr slammed down his phone.

Citizens who had developed fishing skills on the estuary, landing large catches of eels – which, if one could put aside any dark imaginings about what the eels were feeding on, made delicious meals – reported back to the Council that there was an unusual amount of activity around the Naval College and the submarine moorings. The Royal Navy were undertaking some major re-engineering.

Professor Winkle was asked to quiz his fleet contacts for news. Bravely, given the arctic weather, Winkle got himself and two colleagues invited out to the college for a lunch meeting with Lawrence Nicholson. The six mile journey across open water from the Tower to Canary Wharf was as cold and challenging as he had expected. Spray from the bow of their inflatable froze in mid air, creating a shower of unpredictable and downright dangerous particles which whipped back at the passengers. The prow was iced up, looking like a melted candle. Touching any metal with a bare hand risked an ice burn. Novel, exciting and bracing as it was on the way out – Winkle was not looking forward to the homeward journey in the darkening afternoon.

Nicholson made and served lunch – roast chicken – in an annex off the main college dining room. With a plain but heavy pudding and a passable bottle of wine they had a convivial two hours of swapping news and complaining about the weather; though the college was enviably as warm as toast – even in the washrooms.

“Its all part of the usual training,” Winkle told the Council later. “They are just stepping it up to counteract the cold and dark. ...People get bored and lethargic so the fleet Captains have invented some new maintenance and practice schedules – and some quite innovative new education courses – which keep everyone trotting along.”

“...And those Alice Whitaker broadcasts?” asked Blackmoor.

“Oh yes! It seems Alex Whitaker’s team has just about finished transcribing his sister’s work – so they’ve got it all electronically; Nicholson told me. And they have much of it in voice format. ...And, well! They’re broadcasting it!”

Professor Winkle knew this would be unwelcome news. But he had worse to impart. He hesitated – then plunged in.

“Nicholson said that they are printing all her work into a single volume – like the collected works of Shakespeare...” he couldn’t help grinning nervously at the hubris of it, “...and they’re going to give one to every London household.”

Martin Blackmoor paled – yet again – at the reaction he could expect from Sir Randall.

“They intend...” went on Winkle – charging once more unto the breach – “to use our Royal Mail to deliver them all.”

“No! They can’t do that!” huffed Blackmoor, appalled at the very thought. “We simply won’t do it!”

“He pointed out that it’s damn cold – and that they supply most of our energy...”

Blackmoor breathed hard but held his tongue.

Winkle had one more gem to deliver.

“...And they’ve pressed a hundred-thousand CD’s – to put one in each book. ...It’s all illustrated too. See they presented us with copies.”

Martin Blackmoor took the proffered book, *The Works of Alice Whitaker – The Second Epoch*. It was printed in hard covers, like a Gideon Bible in small print on wafer thin

paper and, inside the shining gold leaf cover a silver CD nestled in a neat circular depression. The professor thought it might be the last book he would ever handle – when Sir Randall saw it.

He found his voice at last. “And I suppose you are going to tell us that they are transmitting this all over the world.”

Winkle nodded, suddenly feeling afraid. He was picking up Professor Blackmoor’s imagined next meeting at Kenwood House.

“They’ll be incandescent – won’t they?” he said hoarsely, his eyes wide, not needing to explain to anyone in the room who “they” were.

Blackmoor felt a heavy lump in the pit of his stomach. He gulped silently. Eventually he said:

“And the engineering, Professor Winkle; did you find out what they’re doing?”

“Oh Yes. They’re fixing the main transformers and switch gear; the ones that feed electricity from the submarines’ generators to us; high up on the side of Canada Tower – above the highest possible future sea level – as they explained. They’re making some permanent, weather protected platforms; engine rooms really – for themselves at the Naval College – as well as for us...”

“They’ve chosen damned cold weather for it.”

“Commander Nicholson told me to expect a jump or two in supply when they switch the system over.”

It was still as cold, if not colder than before, when a few weeks later a large enclosed launch, an old river bus, carrying fifty armed men, ploughed downriver from the west, from central London, towards the Naval College and the Queen Elizabeth the Second Bridge – now fully

immersed – where the five Orcinus Class submarines were moored.

The issuing of *The Works of Alice Whitaker – The Second Epoch*, delivered to all addresses north and south of the estuary, and to every person at those addresses, which were listed on the residents' data-base, was a crucial point, a point of no return in the tacit war of words – the battle for hearts and minds. Captain Cruickshank had rescued The Governing Council from out and out confrontation with Kenwood House, much to Martin Blackmoor's relief, through a compromise whereby BT Tower 'leaked' a copy of the data-base and most of the five-hundred naval personnel were organised to make a blitz delivery. Within three days all the deliveries were made. On the fourth day Sir Randall Delawarr was, simply with the power of his gimlet eyes, pinning Martin Blackmoor and five Councillors to their chairs as he interrogated them in the library at Kenwood House.

While none of them openly admitted any part in the mass mailing and anxiously protested their solidarity with Sir Randall about the, according to their accuser, 'treasonable and illegal' deliveries – the subterfuge was obvious within minutes – and the councillors felt lucky to escape intact or at all. They hurried home in fear and bolted themselves in.

Within a few weeks, Sir Randall, cold, calculating and deadly; unremittingly angry about the books and unswervingly determined to overthrow Cruickshank, had persuaded Martin Blackmoor that the information and the answers coming back from the fleet were incomplete and that a surprise, or at least an uninvited, visit was needed.

He knew they would be tracked on radar and their size and numbers fully assessed long before they arrived – but, having himself studied the Council's data base and suddenly realising they could raise a small army of Londoners if needed, Sir Randall wanted to make a show of force, to make the point that Captain Cruickshank was not the only man with a significant armed force.

Most of the men on the launch were SPAT constables and officers. Professor Blackmoor had been very reluctantly pushed into the journey, with three other councillors, and from the farm estates were drawn four hefty men, led again by Michael Staunton and commanded by Sir Randall.

Only a week earlier The Governing Council of London had issued its currency. They had paid these troops in the new notes and coins and were struggling towards placing money valuations on the familiar assets of everyday life; deciding wage rates and writing the rules for a central bank. With a postal service, pound notes and food 'for sale' at Kenwood Hall, life was perceived to be returning to normal.

After almost an hour on the water, cruising against the tide, the launch pulled in to the Naval College jetty. Two sailors, in arctic parkas, helped them to tie up and one asked their business. The tall building, still thirty stories or more above the water, loomed over them. Lights were showing on several floors and on the open water side of the building, ten stories up, a large cantilevered floor overhung them – presumably the new generator housing. Red plastic cables marked with, *Danger High Voltage*, notices, were clamped down the walls, to disappear under the water and head east along the bed of the estuary out to the moorings. New cables had been attached at the top of Canada Tower, connected to the transformers and feeding off to the north-west, to carry the power to Londoners.

Sir Randall took charge, asking the sentries for Captain Cruickshank or the most senior duty officer.

The sailors eyed the armed troop and exchanged unfathomable glances – which did not assure the visitors of a warm welcome. One of them doubled away round the corner of the building. In two minutes he returned with an officer wrapped in a hooded fur lined jacket.

“Lieutenant Timbs! ...Sir ...Randall?”

“Yes that’s it, Sir Randall Delawarr; and this is Professor Martin Blackmoor leader of the Governing Council for London. ...Sorry to drop in on you, but it’s fairly urgent that we speak with Captain Cruickshank.”

“Ah! He’s away – out on manoeuvres Sir Randall. Most of the fleet is away.”

“That’s awkward. Perhaps we can come in and get a cup of tea – and let my men get warmed up? ...When will Captain Cruickshank return?”

“Are these men armed? I cannot authorise – how many – forty or fifty armed men coming into the college. ...But I can organise some hot drinks to be brought out – if that’s okay, Sir Randall.”

“It’s not ideal Lieutenant. Not really acceptable to me at all. ...And you didn’t say when Cruickshank will be back!”

“*Captain Cruickshank.*”

“Yes, Captain Cruickshank. When is he expected? ...Today, tomorrow? Is it worth our while waiting?”

“...I don’t think so Sir. It could be some time until the fleet returns.”

The SPAT troopers and Staunton’s men started to make for the gang-plank and the jetty. The Lieutenant raised his voice.

“You men! Stay where you are. We cannot permit you to land. Do not attempt to disembark!”

“Don’t try to command my men, Lieutenant. They follow my orders not yours.”

“Then I suggest you order them to stay on board, Sir Randall. And if you and the professor would be so kind as to embark?”

“You have a nerve young man. ...But though I very rarely do this - I am afraid I have to pull rank. ...I am a senior officer at the Admiralty – with the rank of Vice-Admiral – and I have been requested and authorised by the government, the Governing Council, to assume command of the fleet; working of course in harmony with Captain Cruickshank. Professor Blackmoor, here, will confirm my recent orders and will be able to furnish you with any papers you may require.”

So supremely confident was his delivery and his physical stance, facing out the sentries and Lieutenant Timbs on the jetty, that the three young seamen were thrown off centre. They looked at each other, then back at Sir Randall, then again at each other. Had they cast a glance at Martin Blackmoor they would have seen his astonishment at Sir Randall’s miraculous elevation to a high naval rank. But, before they looked to him for confirmation, he quickly firmed up his sagging jaw line and also assumed an air of quiet political authority, tacitly affirming Sir Randall’s audacious claims.

“...Even so, Sir!” said Lieutenant Timbs cautiously, “...We have our orders from Captain Cruickshank and I have to follow them – unless he personally instructs me to take your orders, Sir.”

“Yes of course Lieutenant. Good man! ...I wouldn’t expect you to do otherwise. But where any orders I may give do not conflict with or contradict the standing orders left by the captain...” he did not need to finish the sentence. Timbs could figure out the next line for himself.

Martin Blackmoor was impressed by Sir Randall’s tactic. He was offering this now uncertain and unsettled young man a way to honour both God and Caesar. He could stick to the letter of Cruickshank’s law and accept additional orders from the Vice-Admiral. After all – he might reason – there’d be no disobeying the captain’s orders and he was in a hell of a dilemma if this politely calm aristocratic

gentleman did indeed turn out to be a Vice-Admiral; albeit a desk bound officer in the Senior Service.

Sir Randall saw the man's resolve waver. "Well, I hope that Captain Cruickshank, one of the most generous hosts I know, hasn't ordered you to deny a hot cup of tea to any visiting officers – particularly in this perishing weather. We've come quite a long way?"

Lieutenant Timbs wasn't going to let himself be seduced or bamboozled – but Sir Randall's bluff and his own natural sense of hospitality swayed him. "...Er! Of course not Sir! I'm sure Captain Cruickshank would extend every courtesy. ...But we do draw the line at admitting a platoon of armed men."

Sir Randall let his eyes twinkle in friendly intimacy. "They could leave their weapons here on the boat. ...Then they'd simply be a bunch of very cold, indeed frozen, constables in need of shelter..."

The lieutenant was very glad to be offered the compromise; "Ah! Yes Sir. I think we could live with that; as long as they disarm."

"Good! Well come along then. Let's get out of the cold. ...Mr Staunton!" he called "...tell the men to leave all their weapons on the boat – and come inside for a cup of tea!"

And Sir Randall swept the lieutenant and the professor ahead of him towards where he thought the entrance must be. Letting onto the jetty around the next side of the building was a neat wide gangplank to a door replacing an upper story window. They ducked to get in – and the marvellous warmth of the building enveloped them.

The canteen was higher up the building. The lifts no longer functioned so they used the stairs and as they climbed they passed floors with signs to classrooms, laboratories and accommodation. It was very clearly a

place of education – a vital and active centre of learning. But it was eerily empty.

It was empty not only of students, tutors and staff – which could be understood if all the submarines had gone on manoeuvres with their full crews – but also empty of personal items – and of portable equipment. It could be that everything of use was stowed away under lock and key. It was a large and relatively open building – a potential magnet to casual pilfering and so it made sense for valuables to be locked away.

On the canteen floor there was much more life. Sir Randall reckoned there were about thirty sailors sprinkled around the area with three or four behind the counters briskly making tea and putting out bread and biscuits. Most were young, probably under twenty-five, and the genders were about equal. They had more the air of serious postgraduates than of a fighting force. Yet they looked fit enough to go into battle.

The SPAT team and Staunton's group settled at tables and gratefully took off their coats, soaking in the warmth. On the far side were a radio and a blank wall-mounted screen next to a music centre that was playing popular songs. Sailors put steaming tea-pots on each table and loaves of fresh bread with Kenwood House butter – part of the previous season's dairy production. The views from east and south were spectacular, revealing the extent of the estuary and the flooding across south London. The visitors could see out to the North Sea, though the division between estuary and ocean was ill defined, and the submarine moorings were visible in the distance.

At the five substantially constructed moorings only one submarine was docked. The other four were empty.

Sir Randall and the councillors sat with Lieutenant Timbs at a round table by a window. Sir Randall quizzed the officer while methodically studying everything he could see inside and outside. There was something wrong,

something that didn't fit his anticipations of what the college and the moorings would be like.

"Should I address you as 'Sir Randall' or 'Vice-Admiral', Sir?"

Sir Randall's mind was elsewhere – making logical connections, which didn't quite connect or compute.

"...Er! Ah Yes! Sorry! I was thinking of that lone submarine. ...Sir Randall will be fine, Lieutenant, ...just fine."

"Yes Sir."

"Our power?" queried Professor Blackmoor, "It's as strong as ever in London ...but you've only the one submarine. I thought it needed two or three engines to produce the electricity we need?"

"We've made improvements in the past six months. Now it's all driven by HMS Maxwell – out there - with generating capacity to spare." He nodded at the distant submarine.

"...and the fuel you pump ashore for us?"

"Yes. Maxwell is doing all that. ...If you borrow my glasses you can see the blue pipes coming up from the drowned tanks on the south side and floating out on the north side..." he handed Blackmoor a pair of binoculars "...and if you follow that north it goes all the way to that white storage tank up there... ...that's thirty feet above high tide... And then the Londoners pipe it west to the residential area."

"So..." said Sir Randall slowly "...with the other four away on manoeuvres; ...in the North Sea, I imagine?"

But Timbs wouldn't be drawn; so after a pause Delawarr carried on, "...and HMS Maxwell with just a skeleton crew... Doesn't that leave one of our nuclear submarines

vulnerable to hi-jack ...to pirates coming up or down the estuary?"

"We don't believe so, Sir."

"Then without a full crew - how is it protected Lieutenant?"

"It's not for me to say, Sir. But it is well protected."

Sir Randall had had enough of being side-stepped. He got up and went quickly over to Michael Staunton and the other Kenwood House men who were on their second cups of tea and chatting easily with several sailors. Professor Blackmoor breathed deeply and started a new line of conversation with Timbs, drawing in his fellow councillors. They all seemed relieved to be rid of Delawarr's suppressed rage and threatening presence.

For the next fifteen minutes, the canteen area was somnolent and sounds were subdued; a hubbub of polite conversation.

Suddenly a roar erupted and Sir Randall jumped to his feet. He strode, quickly but without running, back to the councillors.

He stood over the table, clearly incensed but taking control of himself before speaking. The councillors and Timbs waited – some more tremulous than others.

"Cruickshank has gone!" he spat.

"He's pulled up stumps and gone! He's taken the whole bloody fleet. They don't plan to return."

Martin Blackmoor gasped as did the others – but he found his voice first.

"...But! ...but, what about all these people?" he asked, including the whole canteen.

"That's just it. These are all that's left. They're just the rump. A skeleton crew. ...These are ...Damn it!"

Lieutenant Timbs intervened. "We all have families here. We're recruits who joined up but with London homes to go back to."

"...And all the rest have ...gone?"

"Yes Professor."

"But where?"

"We don't know, Sir. But we are in radio and surveillance contact at all times."

"Including NOW!" raged Sir Randall, rounding on Timbs.

"Yes, Sir Randall." And Timbs pointed at the ceiling corners of the area where small red lights indicated the lenses scanning the room were 'On'.

"...So!" reasoned the professor, his mind racing to assimilate it all, "HMS Maxwell has been – left – abandoned – gifted for our use as a power station. ...A fully armed nuclear submarine parked in the estuary a few miles from central London?"

"No! Blackmoor! No!" hissed Sir Randall. "They've left nothing of value. It's just a shell. An empty shell. Stripped! All the telecoms. All the weapons. All the guidance. All gone. It won't even sail anymore. It's damned useless..."

"If you discount the one-hundred-and-fifty-thousand horse power nuclear fuelled engine, gentlemen; which at this minute is keeping us all warm!"

"...Ah! Yes. London will be grateful for that gift, I think. ...Er! How do we ensure it keeps working?"

"We have all the skills, Professor and we crew the submarine day and night on a rota with five personnel –

and Captain Cruickshank has left us with the duty of refilling the college...”

“For naval training, Lieutenant?”

“Yes professor. Lieutenant Commander Hymers has been made up to the rank of Commodore and she will be heading up the initiative. ...The Commodore is out at present – but if you made an appointment...”

“It’ll continue only if we say so!” snapped Sir Randall.

“It’s probably a good time, a necessary moment, for you to speak with Captain Cruickshank, Sir – Gentlemen.”

Timbs ushered the six men across the room to the blank screen up on the far wall. They gathered below, noting four cameras watching them, and watched the screen as it switched on. Everyone in the canteen gathered close around the display.

Captain Cruickshank, flanked by Commander Nicholson and other officers, came into focus and looked calmly down on the men and women.

Sir Randall spoke first in an icy tone. “Where the devil do you think you are taking the British nuclear fleet – Cruickshank?”

“That’s classified, Sir Randall. ...Good morning, Professor – Welcome gentlemen. I see you’ve been enjoying tea and toast at our Naval College...”

“Don’t think we’ll let this building fill with more rebels, Cruickshank. You’ve gone. We’re taking over.”

James Cruickshank remained completely calm, nodding some instruction to someone off-screen.

“Let’s be fair Sir Randall. Or is it Vice-Admiral this morning? You have Kenwood House...”

A picture of the great white mansion, in its acres of green lawns, took over the screen.

"I can see the herd..." growled Michael Staunton. "That must be ...now!"

"Yes – it's live. Must be from a satellite..." murmured Professor Blackmoor. The picture was suddenly partially obscured by grey mist. "...and that's cloud cover."

Captain Cruickshank continued, "...And the London Council has its well equipped headquarters..."

The picture changed to show the Tower from above, surrounded by water. Some mist drifted across the scene.

"...And here, gentlemen, is the launch you sailed in earlier today..."

The river bus, now a SPAT transport, leapt into focus. It refocused and the audience could see the bridge and wheel – and ropes curled on the foredeck.

"I am strongly suggesting gentlemen that we each defend our own. You, Sir Randall, look to your farms and grand house. Professor Blackmoor and the Council may wish to secure the Tower and its buildings – and your SPAT officers can protect their launch. ...My fleet..."

"Your fleet!" snorted Sir Randall.

"...will look after our own.
...Here's a minor demonstration. It'll help you to gather firewood Sir Randall."

The screen filled again with Kenwood House. Impenetrable mist swirled across but the house and grounds kept reappearing, reminding the viewers that the camera was very, very high. The screen refocused on a large tree standing alone in the middle of one of the formal lawns.

A disembodied voice said "Fire!"

The canteen fell into stunned silence.

A few seconds elapsed then the fine old tree shattered and exploded in an eruption of fire and debris. The next second it was scattered across the grass in great shards, branches and splinters. Five seconds later again, the audience was still shocked and silent.

Captain Cruickshank reappeared.

“Sorry about the tree. But we needed a demonstration – and you will be able to use the timber. ...We have some of the most powerful surveillance capabilities on the planet. We can monitor everything that is important to us. We can defend HMS Maxwell” – a corner of the screen pictured the moored submarine – “...from any unauthorised approaches.”

He paused to let the information sink in.

“That was a small missile; a very small, conventional missile; fired in a spirit of persuasion rather than anger. ...We don’t want to ever have to use any larger deterrent.”

Sir Randall was literally biting his lip; furious but impotent and mute. He stood in rigid, useless resistance.

“We do not believe that rebuilding communities and societies on the old models – will lead to anything but the same mistakes. We believe ...Well you know what we believe. ...And we and you will not reach agreement on this – in our lifetimes. ...And you will not cease your attempts to control our submarines, these Orcinus Class vessels, which are pinnacles of mankind’s technical achievements. They have come from the old system.”

Cruickshank paused and accepted a cup which he took a sip from. Nobody tried to speak as he paused.

“...Much of what we have created is good – and will be developed further. Much of our relationships, our

transactions with each other, are ...frankly, primitive. It must be improved; reshaped, reengineered and reborn..."

"New age claptrap!" sniffed Blackmoor.

"Yes Professor. We well know each other's views. ...So we are withdrawing. ...We will start again – and do it our way. You can try it – again – your way. And history will judge the outcome!"

Sir Randall – his great intelligence informing him that his arch enemy was indeed out of reach – for the foreseeable future, cast his eyes around for another competitor. His frozen chilling gaze settled on Martin Blackmoor – who shivered violently. But the professor was no push over. Sociopaths and psychopaths had their weak spots. His mind was already churning over the pro's and con's of the revised order. He could almost smell and feel the power shifting from place to place. But, for the moment, he could play possum, he could pretend to yield. But there would be some surprises in store for this upstart, would-be aristocratic pretender.

Cruickshank was speaking again.

"...So my crew and I would be most obliged if you would go home gentlemen. You go home – remember our installations are protected at all times – and should not, must not be visited without invitation – and we can all get on with our lives..."

"...But – just where are you going, James? All your years of work; this excellent college you've created – all lost to you. Where will you go? What will you do?"

James Cruickshank smiled. He suddenly seemed very relaxed. "We are going to start a new society. Where would you go, Martin, with all your friends and family, if you could choose any location, anywhere in the world?"

The screen went blank.

As the SPAT launch churned back upriver, now against the outgoing tide, Sir Randall turned to Martin Blackmoor, "Professor! ...Don't you think that, all things considered, it would be sensible to release Doctor Goodge? It's hellish expensive with our scarce resources to keep the man in prison. And we don't want to reintroduce the death penalty – do we?"

Martin Blackmoor was not happy with the idea that Sir Randall's hit-man, assassin, sniper and spy should be freed. "...But the man's a convicted killer. I mean he brutally murdered Alice. He ripped her open with a hunting knife. ...What will the people think if we let him out?"

"The people will think what we tell them to think, Professor; just as it has always been. ...And the man, after all, acted in our best interests. He rid the world of a dissident who was in danger of becoming a terrorist or of leading a revolt – wouldn't you say?"

Sir Randall put an arm over Martin Blackmoor's shoulder – and smiled into his face. It was like being snagged by a single lethal claw of a man-eating tiger, temporarily fed and pacific but toying with the idea of having a second helping.

"In the final analysis Blackmoor, Jonathan Goodge is an intelligence agent, simply keeping his oath of allegiance, doing his duty, who was loyally serving Queen and Country...

After all; ...he was only following orders."

THE END

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