

Boadicea's Brooch

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Chapter 1

Fast Thick Pants

Tuesday 2 October 1989

Caragloose Head is a steep climb from the Portloe fishing village, with the track dipping up and down between coves, and at the top Charlie Roznick was sweating heavily. The Cornish coastal footpath negotiated a fine line between the sea-cliffs and the thick stone-walled hedges. Far below the tiny beaches looked pristine and untouched and Veryan Bay glittered with a dusting of early afternoon gold. The line of cliffs were peppered with colonies of shags and gulls, and at Caragloose Head there was a small stone seat.

Roznick licked the salt from his lips, put down his pack on the seat and unscrewed the water bottle, and said aloud to himself:

‘Geez, never figured that England was so up and down. A boy from Kansas isn’t used to this...’

He swigged generously from the bottle again and stared at the magnificent view, and then wrinkled his nose at the stink from the shag colony. He later remembered this small detail with great clarity, though the police never questioned him about that, which was a pity, for the rest of his memory of the next few minutes was muddled.

The police had got him to sign his statement of events, and on the page the facts looked oddly black and white. There was no hint of the golden day, the blue shine on Veryan Bay with the distant line of ships plodding into a horizon of possibilities. He could smell the shags, but also the purple lavender, still fragrant around the warm seat. An old hawthorn tree had clawed its way out of the stone wall and dripped with red husks. None of that was in the statement: no smell, no colour, no emotion.

All he said was:

‘My name is Charles Roznick, I’m 24 years old, an American back-packer. I’m doing a walking hike round Cornwall’.

‘At about 2 pm on Wednesday 2 October 1989 I was hiking along the Cornish footpath and stopped near a lookout close to Caragloose Head. Right

then, a woman, who I didn't know, rushed up to us and said that her husband had been murdered'.

Actually what she had said was:

'Harry's dead, Harry's been murdered'.

She did not rush at him in the way he described, but almost collapsed into him and he had caught her instinctively, dropping the water bottle that then languidly rolled off the path and over the cliff into oblivion. Roznick felt he was falling too, and he smelt the woman's hair in his face, and gripped her shoulders tightly to steady himself. When he looked down he saw two perfect staring tearless eyes.

The third sentence in his statement.

'She repeated that her husband had been murdered and that the murderer was still in the house'.

'Harry, oh God, I should have explained. He's my husband, oh please, please help me. Our house is just here'.

And the woman turned away out of Roznick's grip and stared back up the steps of the side-track. Roznick still had one hand on her bare shoulder which was white and shivering. Her top (a deep navy blue, like the sea he remembered) had come off that shoulder, and the buttons were undone. Her hair had fallen back and exactly matched the colour of her black bra, moving rhythmically to her breathing. In turning away, his hand slipped off her shoulder, and he regretted the loss of touch.

'I asked her what had happened and she said that her husband had been stabbed by a brooch'.

'Please can we get the police...'

She swung round again, pleading. She was lovely then too, but Roznick thought they were a long way from a phone. He realised the woman was barefoot, and there were cuts on her feet.

'Is he following you?' he asked

'I don't know'.

The woman stared at him and Roznick was bewildered, and made a clumsy attempt to calm her.

'Hell, he can't hurt you with me here'.

Perhaps he was being overly optimistic because his college judo skills were a mite rusty, but he was over six foot. She was not a woman in hysterics, or out of control, and it did not seem to Roznick in a suddenly clairvoyant moment, that she was a woman that would ever be out of control.

'He has a knife?' he asked again, trying to come to some sort of decision.

'No, not really a knife, a brooch, a terrible brooch, oh Harry, please help'.

The woman was beautiful, but unreal. Where was the house? Where was the madman with the killer brooch? Did he have a killer bracelet as well?

The fourth sentence in his statement read.

‘I suggested that we go and look at the house’.

Roznick was later puzzled as to why he had made this suggestion. Perhaps he was bewildered by the rapid turn of events, but the idea of a potential madman stabbing away with a piece of jewellery seemed ludicrous to him, so perhaps he just hadn’t believed her. Yeah, that would have been it. He didn’t believe her, though she was beautiful, and going back to her house would disprove the whole weird thing and he could carry on with his sweaty walk. Or maybe something else would happen.

Anyway they couldn’t just hang about here on the cliff edge. He looked at her again, hell she was beautiful. He never said that in his statement either, that the situation had erotic elements, hell, as if the cops were interested in that, but it did. Maybe this would be his overseas sexual adventure? Even in the gravity of this current situation he still had a piece of his brain that was peculiarly bothered about the lost water bottle. It had been a really good water bottle.

The woman still shivered in the sunshine and had clasped her top around her. He started going up the side-track, which was a narrow worn path between two deep stone walls.

‘I guess we could have a look’ Roznick said lamely to her, and she stared back calmly.

‘He is still there’.

‘You’re sure your husband is dead? I mean knife attacks..?’

Are not always fatal was how he intended to finish the sentence, though it sounded silly. She shook her head, and stated matter of factly.

‘No, I’m not sure. You are right, I’ll follow you. I was scared’.

Roznick held out his hand and she came up beside him, but did not take his hand. He wanted to say something like she was being a brave girl, but that sounded stupid, and she wasn’t really a girl anyway, she was older than him probably, so he walked up the alley and wondered if he wasn’t being needlessly brave just to impress her.

The sun has almost gone from the cliff top when they came out beside a grassy paddock, and the house was right there, twenty yards away, a large impressive stone manor. Roznick was surprised at how close it really was. They were looking down the front of the house to the sweep of yard, and the tall Lombardy pines by the front gate. The last glow of sunlight illuminated the grey stone carvings with precision.

‘He’s gone, the van’s gone’ she whispered, nodding at the gravel driveway.

‘Is that right?’ Roznick muttered aloud, feeling a little more reassured.

He could see the driveway was empty, and he glanced left and right along the stone walls that hedged out the cliff tops. There were worn paths alongside the walls, and

he felt an uneasy sense of presence, as if someone has just moments before disturbed the air. His statement continued.

‘We walked up to the house and the carpark was empty, and the front door open. I walked in and through the French windows we could see the slumped body of Harold Brackenbury...’

‘Oh Harry...’

The woman rushed into the front hall and lounge. Roznick followed, nervously, awkwardly looking this way and that, unhappy about being confronted with the death of a perfect stranger, and still wondering if the man with the brooch was in the house. So she hadn’t been making it up. She wasn’t mad at all, it was the day that was perfectly mad.

The sixth sentence in his statement was as monotone and predictable as the others.

‘He seemed to be dead and she asked me to ring the police.’

So far it had taken just a paragraph in his statement to cover what had taken several eternities to get through. He had no idea how to ring the police but vaguely remembered something in the guide-book about dialing 999. He tried it. The woman was kneeling by her husband in his wheelchair, and cradling his head, and Roznick did not see Harry Brackenbury’s face but the woman’s posture was all about mortality. Her top had fallen open again and the scene seemed raw to him.

The operator asked him a question.

‘Who do you want. Ambulance, police or fire service?’

Roznick had not expected this strange quiz, and almost said ambulance, but then of course dead men don’t need ambulances. Of course the husband might not be dead. He could also be dreaming the whole damned thing. So he stumbled over the words and then said uncertainly.

‘Err, police I guess’.

A few seconds later a male voice came on the phone.

‘Hallo sir, Sergeant Price of Truro Constabulary here, can you identify yourself?’

Roznick stammered a reply and then looked despairingly at the beautiful woman, who started to pass on her details, all the while cradling her husband’s head.

‘Perbagus Manor, the house of Harry and Helena Brackenbury. Harry Brackenbury has been killed by a knife attack. Dead, yes. No, we think he’s gone. My name is Charlie, eh Charles Roznick, on a hiking holiday.’

Some holiday. To Roznick, time seemed to have gone terminally slow, and he kept looking back to the front door, still anxious that the unknown assailant might turn up again. The police instructed him to wait and hold open the line and he stood there in the sunlit hallway, rubbing his chin, and looking through the open door at the dead man slumped in his wheelchair and at the raven haired woman who knelt beside him

holding the lifeless hand. There were tears now and he found their appearance on the woman's face shocking.

Helena was a lovely name he reflected. A long evening call of a song thrush came through the open French door, and Roznick was pleased to see that there was very little blood on the husband.

She looked at him and said softly.

‘Sorry, this is a terrible for you’.

Roznick tried not to stare at the tableau in the lounge and pretended to be fascinated by something through the open door. That damn bird again, singing away. He wasn't listening but he overheard her whisper again.

‘He raped me first, then killed Harry’.

Jeez, the cops were so slow to arrive, so damn slow. They were always faster in the movies.

Chapter 2

In Xanadu

Tuesday 2 October, 4-5 pm

In the corner of the community room sat a long, lanky, young man, with an already receding hairline, listening vaguely to the tall, almost totally bald, older speaker.

Gordon Micklethwaite was not that interested in poetry but out of politeness to his host, came along to listen to the lecture. His legs felt cramped behind the desk and the unheated room was cold. He wasn't exactly bored, but his note page had developed fantastic doodles of shapes and arabesques that had developed a life of their own, which in some odd way, matched the strange flourishes of Coleridge's most eccentric and peculiarly famous poem.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

A stately pleasure-dome decree:

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran

Through caverns measureless to man

Down to a sunless sea.

Claris Rolling coughed and paused, after speaking some of the most famous lines in English poetry. He made a satisfied glance around the room at the eleven people who had turned up to his late afternoon lecture. A hand waved at him.

'Scuse Rev but where was Xanadu?'

Now describing the Reverend Claris Rolling in such a manner might be deemed irreverent, but the clergyman was unperturbed.

'Ahhh, George'.

At eighty-one George Chapman had hair as white as his former trade, a china clay miner. He was an active parishioner, vocally at least, but the Reverend could not begrudge the interruption, being prone to considerable self-interruption himself.

'Xanadu was the summer capital of Kubla Khan, the emperor of China, and

Mongolia, The heat in Peking made it an uncomfortable city in summer, so a massive palace was built in northern China. Marco Polo, the great Venetian explorer, visited in, let me see my notes, in 1275, and it was he who described the palace and the gardens enclosed by walls over 16 miles long. Coleridge has described it beautifully, obviously borrowing from detailed historical sources’.

*So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.*

Micklethwaite wondered what a ‘sinuous rill’ was, and made a note to look it up. Claris smiled at him.

‘It sounds a pleasant place does it not? Yes, George?’.

‘Is it still there Rev?’

‘Oh, I would imagine not. The city is currently known as Shangdu I believe, but I doubt if any of Kubla Khan’s efforts have survived the thousand odd years since Marco Polo visited.’

He quickly moved on as George Chapman’s broad face was frowning into another dogged question.

‘Did any of you notice that marvelous line ‘ancient as the hills’, an expression that has utterly entered our own everyday language, simply through the unrivalled popularity of this poem. A poem so famous that scarcely anyone bothers to understand it, which is why I persuaded the Workers Education Institute to hold this short series of lectures...’ (Chapman’s face was still quivering with a question and Rolling hastened on) ‘...to better to understand this fantastical poem, written only a short distance away in Devon, near the village of Linton.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a man fascinated by the Orphic mysteries, and Celtic mysteries, and I will attempt to show that much of this poem is about the subterranean nature of human motives....’

An elderly woman poked her head through the door.

‘Yes Miss Claridge? A phone call, urgent, oh dear, excuse me’.

The Reverend hurried out and Micklethwaite turned around in his seat to watch the surprising exit. George Chapman looked disgruntled and muttered in an accent that had been smeared with thick Cornish cream.

‘We don’t pay ‘im to chatter down ‘one line’.

Micklethwaite was uncharitably doubting whether Mr Chapman had even donated his 'voluntary' gold coin, when Claris Rolling hurried back and stammered an explanation.

'I'm most sorry, I have an urgent call for help from one of my parishioners, and I must go. I will take a longer session, err next Tuesday, my apologies.

Micklethwaite folded away his notes as if they contained important material, and sidled up to Rolling, who was pushing his papers into a satchel with a flustered gesture.

'Is it serious Claris?'

Rolling glanced around as the last of the students left, then whispered.

'Extremely Gordon, murder apparently, murder most foul. Harry Brackenbury was killed this afternoon. That was Helena's sister, begging me to see Helena. She is beside herself. A lovely woman, oh dear, I do not like to drag a guest such as yourself into this horrible business, but can you drive me back, my nerves are upset I'm afraid.'

Micklethwaite did not mind at all, although he found driving the Reverend's old Riley quite a challenge in the narrow Cornish country lanes, and it struck him that he should investigate the quaint expression 'murder most foul'. Was it Shakespearean, or from Agatha Christie?

Chapter 3

The Mingled Measure

Tuesday 2 October

The scene looked to Mick Swain something like a waxworks, not that he'd ever been to a waxworks.

His first action at Perbagus Manor was to straighten up the umbrella pot from where it had partly rolled into and obstructed the porch, and he glanced at the front door lock to see if entry had been forced. He thought that the man in the hallway holding the phone in a stiff and self-conscious way could easily be a statue, except his skin was overly tanned for a Cornish autumn. Americans like to keep up their tans so this would be Charlie Roznick, and the woman still kneeling on the floor, with her head on her husband's dead lap must be Mrs Brackenbury. She had a soft and waxy sheen on her skin, which only enhanced her beauty. But they were both so uncannily still, and needed a jolt.

'Mrs Brackenbury? Roznick? Detective-Sergeant Swain, this is Constable Price. You can put down the phone now please Mr Roznick. Mrs Brackenbury, perhaps you could stand and we can check over your husband'.

That broke the spell. Swain didn't say 'can we see if your husband is alive' because the slumped head and open glazed eyes, showed very clearly that he wasn't. He was anxious not to disturb the crime scene, and already two forensics men were hovering at his shoulder, then there was a doctor behind them, and two ambulance drivers lurking outside. The whole shebang had bundled into cars, and police and hospital vehicles had made a splendid convoy of sirens and flashing lights as they hurtled through the quaint Cornish countryside. Murders in the Truro district were rare and no one wanted to miss out.

'Check Mr Brackenbury first doctor, then Mrs Brackenbury can I ask you if you know who killed your husband?'

That was a formality, as he expected that this was an intruder murder or a burglary gone wrong, and she was unlikely to know, but the answer was surprisingly prompt. Helena stood up, and looked about her in a bewildered yet calm motion.

‘It was Jacob Dunnett, he worked as a part-time gardener for us. I think he was after the brooch’.

Swain also looked around, the study looked relatively undisturbed.

‘Brooch?’

‘Boadicea’s brooch, it was used like a knife. He stabbed it into Harry, oh my poor Harry’.

Tears had come quickly to her face now, and Swain was pleased that they had a female constable present, who took hold of Helena’s hand and lead her to a seat. Swain looked closely at Harry Brackenbury’s chest but couldn’t see any implement sticking out and he was a little puzzled as to how someone could get killed by a piece of ladies jewellery.

‘No brooch’ whispered Swain to Constable Price.

‘No sir’.

‘Ok Pricey, put out a general alert for Jacob Dunnett, and bring him into Truro station’.

‘Sir’.

‘Doctor?’

‘Oh yes, Harry’s dead alright, some sort of knife wound here’.

He pointed unnecessarily.

‘You knew him?’

‘Of course. He was well known in the district, same bridge club as me’.

Helena was starting to sob quietly now that shock had set in and the female constable was holding her closely. Swain turned to the American.

‘Charles Roznick?’

‘Yeah?’

‘Can you tell me what happened, and about what time was it?’

As Roznick explained slowly, Price was back scribbling away. Good person Pricey, Swain hated taking notes, which he excused on the basis of his great retentive memory.

‘What was that? Say that again? ok. Where’s your backpack? Ok. Collins?’

He yelled to another constable, there were at least four of them hanging around out there enjoying the fame of murder.

‘Can you go down to the cliff lookout with Mr Roznick and retrieve his backpack? You others, start looking around the grounds carefully for any sign of a murder weapon, it’s a kind of brooch...?’

Swain could not finish this description without looking at Helena for help. She had wiped away her tears and walked over to a book on Harry's desk. She opened it at a page and showed it to him.

'It's this one here, it's almost eight inches long. It's Celtic' she added.

Swain could see it was both a beautiful and evil looking thing, and he glanced at the cover *The History of Celtic Jewellery*, C. Rolling, then he passed the book over to the waiting policeman.

'Here it is, almost a foot long. Look around the driveway, backs of hedges, plants, but carefully know eh? If you see footprints don't smudge them, and don't pick the bloody thing up, we want the prints. Are you ok Mrs Brackenbury?'

She nodded and sat down again. It crossed Swain's mind that she really was a beautiful woman, as elegant in grief as most people are when they head out to a night at the opera. She didn't have to pretend grace, it ran through her every movement of her body.

'I'd like to ask a couple of questions if that's ok? It's better to get the information down now whilst it's still fresh in your mind'.

Fortunately, the doctor had closed Harry's eyes, which no longer glared angrily at the scene, and Helena Brackenbury looked once quickly at her husband and nodded quietly.

'Tell me what happened?' Swain asked gently.

He was a bit shocked at the rape detail, but adopted a professional pose and assented now and again as Pricey's pen flew over the pages.

'Was Harry Brackenbury expecting Jacob Dunnett, it was a pre-arranged meeting?'

'No, I don't think so. Harry said he was waiting for some American buyer I think'.

Swain looked suspiciously at Roznik.

'A buyer of what?'

'The brooch I think. Then Jacob turned up'.

'Did Jacob Dunnett give any reasons for this attack Mrs Brackenbury?'

She shook her head and looked away into sunlight world.

'I'm not sure. I, don't know if I heard him correctly, it...'

'Yes Mrs Brackenbury...?' prompted Swain.

'It does not make much sense. Just as he killed Harry he shouted 'take that dad, take that, you made a bastard so die by the bastard dad'.

'You mean Jacob was Harry's son?'

‘No. He can’t be’.

Swain raised an eyebrow and waited.

‘Harry couldn’t have children’.

‘You’re sure of that Mrs Brackenbury’.

‘Well, yes, we tried long enough’.

Swain did not state the obvious as she pushed her hand through her long dark hair. Her eyes started to moisten again, and with a faint ‘excuse me’ and took out a handkerchief and dabbed them at her eyes. She made no other sound.

Then began one of those pauses which occurs when nothing much seems to happen, as if everyone is collectively taking stock.

When Swain looked around the study he saw some framed photos on the wall of Harry Brackenbury getting an award for Best BBC Programme of 1972, now he remembered! Harry was big on television and radio about twenty years ago, didn’t he have his own show on Cornish history? In fact Swain dimly recalled as a kid that he’d watched some of Harry’s Cornish stories, about wreckers, smugglers and pirate gold, all told in a racy way by a man who looked a bit like a pirate himself. A big built man with a blast of beard and black hair, and Swain inadvertently glanced at the corpse, now shrunken slightly in the wheel-chair and entirely silver haired, but still an impressive looking man, even dead.

Constable Collins came back with Charlie Roznick, who was carrying his backpack slung over one shoulder. Swain raised a eyebrow at Collins as a means of asking him if there was any thing else of note down at Caragloose Head lookout, but Collins was far too dull-witted to notice raised eyebrows. He turned back to the silent waiting women.

‘I’m sorry Mrs Brackenbury, we can’t shift your husband till we’ve done a thorough scene examination, is there anyone you can call who can come and see you? You’ll have to stay somewhere else tonight’.

‘My sister, in Plymouth... can I ring her?’

Swain’s eyebrows were getting plenty of exercise as he wiggled them in the direction of the female constable, whom he knew had a name, but for the life of him he couldn’t recall it. She took Mrs Brackenbury out into the hallway and helped her phone up her sister. Swain whispered to the constable as she passed ‘we need Mrs Brackenbury’s clothes for examination’, and passed her some plastic bags. Then they went upstairs to change into some clothes for Helena.

Price snapped his pocketbook away efficiently and was glancing around the murder scene looking for a job. The forensic boys were busy measuring up Harry’s corpse and dusting the table, and were shuffling people out of the study.

‘Are you ok Mr Roznick?’ Price asked in his formal voice.

The gangling American looked rather forlorn standing by the front door.

‘I’m all shook up, heh, like the song’ .

Roznick added unnecessarily, sensing the allusion to Elvis Presley was lost on Constable Price, which it was. Roznick had to try again.

‘Heh, you know anywhere I can stay around here?’

‘Dolly’s, down the road at Veryan. She’s got a bed and breakfast place, big breakfasts’.

‘Sounds great.’

‘We’ll have to get you to sign a statement Mr Roznick. Can you come this afternoon to Truro police station. Ask for me, Constable Price, and I’ll get your statement typed up and we can go over it’.

‘Yeah sure, I mean how long do I have to stay? I’ve gotta get back at London next week.’

Roznick looked puzzled, and tugged at his backpack as if hoping there might be ride in it somewhere.

‘We’ll need you to stay at Dolly’s for a few days I think’.

Price looked at Swain who confirmed this arrangement with a nod. Swain later realised that this simple nod was to have unforeseen consequences.

‘Thank you Mr Roznick’ said Price ‘we appreciate your help in this matter, Collins here will drop you off’.

‘Guess I was in the wrong place at the right time heh? Or the other way round’.

It was a lame attempt to lighten the weight of the day, Swain ignored him, and Roznick followed Constable Collins out to the waiting car.

Feeling relatively alone now, Swain prowled about Harry Brackenbury’s study to see if any obvious details had evaded him. He also glanced through the other downstairs rooms, which included the lounge, kitchen and bathroom, with a conservatory attached to the back of the lounge. The sun was pouring in and he could see over the well-kept and extensive garden, which obviously needed and received a lot of attention, especially since Harry Brackenbury was stuck in a wheelchair and Mrs Brackenbury didn’t look the gardening type. He returned to the hallway just as Mrs Brackenbury and the female constable were coming down the stairs, carrying a small suitcase.

This was a damned awkward moment, because the doctor was standing there as well. Swain rubbed his chin, a mannerism when he felt under stress.

‘Mrs Brackenbury, we should get the doctor here to examine you, or if you want, we can bring your own doctor here. You understand what I’m saying?’

She had changed her clothes and brushed her hair, and in the gloom of the panelled hallway it was hard to see her expression and Swain was not particularly keen to see

it anyway. There was nothing he could say to her, and nothing in police training that was any bloody good.

‘Is that alright Mrs Brackenbury?’ he repeated.

‘Yes, of course’.

The rape had to be professionally confirmed, if it could be. Price had been called outside urgently, and just then came bustling back in. When he was excited his Welsh side came out in an unusually melodic sing-song voice.

‘That was Truro base sir, they’ve already found Jacob Dunnett at The Green Man pub, making quite a scene he was, shouting and yelling’.

‘What was he yelling about?’ Swain asked.

‘Well apparently sir...’

Price dropped his voice conspiratorially when he became aware of Mrs Brackenbury.

‘He was boasting that he’d killed Harry Brackenbury, slaughtered him on the Queen’s orders or so he said. Took five of them to subdue him, practically broke up the pub sir’.

The statement ‘subdue him’ was polite police lingo for a real bust-up. It must have been quite a scene, and Mick Swain rubbed his bristled chin (that was the second time this week he’d forgotten to shave) and decided that this murder mystery was as good as over before it had begun.

Chapter 4

Ancestral Voices

Tuesday 2 October, evening

Jake the Rake was brought into the interview room, handcuffed, sullen and bruised. The bruising was a result of a violent struggle between himself, three police constables and four members of the public house in which he had made his last stand. The public bar of The Green Man was now a wreck, and one police constable had retired hurt to hospital in the fracas after being belted mistakenly on the head by a chair wielded by one of the patrons. At least the patron said it was mistake. In the stoush, Jake had come off surprisingly little damaged, except that he looked more wild and dishevelled than ever. He had shouted and screamed and bellowed as he lashed out at everyone in sight, before being subdued by two pairs of handcuffs.

‘He’s down but not out yet’.

Warned one of the policeman to Swain as he and Price came into the interview room.

‘Said much?’

‘Nothing now, Lord you should have seen ‘im before. Calling himself the bloody Celtic warrior ‘e was’.

Swain looked over the remains of the celtic warrior. A handsome beast alright, and it made Swain remember (of all things) a line from Jane Austen (or was it Leon Uris?) that ‘he was a man who knew every detail of his handsomeness’. Tall, dark and maybe something of a gypsy about him. A sort of proud furtiveness, and he stank. Not of death though, more of BO.

Jake sat hunched up, and did not respond to any questions. When a cup of tea was put before him he poured in half a bowlful of sugar and stirred it sluggishly, taking sips. The streetlights were flicking on already and a bright orange neon cast a back-light against one wall, giving the room a theatrical presence. Swain tried again.

‘Jacob Dunnnett, you have been formerly arrested and charged for the murder of Harold Brackenbury, do you wish to say anything’.

Dunnnett gazed vacantly at the clock on the wall. Silence. Swain shrugged and looked at Price, and sat down to wait. Then Dunnnett looked up and started to talk, and Price hastily switched on the recording machine and rapidly started taking notes as well.

‘I killed Harry Brackenbury, I enjoyed it. I took his wife too, and enjoyed her. She had sweet thighs, that’s what the celtic warriors did yer see? They killed the men and raped the women, and kept them as slaves...’

‘Why did you kill him?’ interrupted Swain.

Dunnnett did not look at him but continued staring at the clock.

‘He stole treasure from our people...’

‘The brooch?’

‘I mean our souls!’

Dunnnett looked around at them, lifted his head like an imitation lion lording over his pride. Swain was grateful that the handcuffs were still on.

‘Kept it, gloated over it. Showed it too me several times, the legless sod. He took me for a peasant, he didn’t see my warrior status. It was my duty to give the brooch back to Boadicea, she had asked for it several times’.

Swain and Price exchanged glances but that was lost on Dunnnett. His voice became more triumphant as he spoke, and he got louder, which usually raises a persons pitch but in Dunnnett’s case it deepened it, so that after a while it became a growl.

‘You don’t know what she’s like, the Queen, she commands and we obey. She said to me avenge this wrong that has been done to me and my family. Give me back my brooch, give it back to me Jake and I will reward you handsomely.’

‘Queen Boadicea told you this?’

Dunnnett smiled with a cunning grin.

‘You think I’m mad don’t you? I live to a different code. I know the Queen exists only in my head, but I’m sick of the Brackenbury’s sort and their greed. Hiding their stolen treasures away, denying the right of the people to see what is theirs’.

‘You wanted to steal the brooch?’ asked Swain quietly and quickly, hoping to keep the interview on track.

‘I wanted to give it back man, to the people, and I wanted to take life. His life. The celtic people revelled in life and death, they exalted in the hunt, and the kill. They drank the blood of their enemies to make them strong, yes, and drank from their skulls. Barbarians we call them, but they knew

how to live. No pity there, but Brackenbury was all pity and greed. His sort are not worthy of life, it's wasted on them. You understand? No, you are fools.'

'Who were you going to give the brooch to?'

Dunnett leaned forward and whispered.

'Bury it in her grave'.

'Boadiceas grave? Where is the brooch now?'

An odd look came over Dunnett's striking face, which Swain thought mingled savagery with idiocy.

'I left it in his stinking chest'.

'No you didn't Jacob, it's not there'.

'Maybe the she-devil took it. She was a sweet she-devil...'

'Where's the brooch Jacob?'

Dunnett stared at Swain with eyes of hatred.

'I'm like a barbarian knocking the gate, that's what I am. Fighting against the pestilence of civilisation. Give me a good honest sword and I'll cut away these sickly manners and pseudo-justice that we call society. I want to love and rage, and do both at the same time eh? It's god's game I'm playing, not that stupid Christian god, but the god of the fire and the blood.'

Swain tried again to bring the topic back to something more or less sane, but Jacob was wandering off into a celtic fog.

'On moon days I'm mad, on sun days I'm bad. Does your skull get hot? Mine does, it itches. Cities aren't our cure, they're our curse, men like Brackenbury are an offence against natural laws, a piece of town pus, like police'.

'Glad you have such a high opinion of us, where's the brooch Jacob?'

'I'm a man, who are you?'

'Detective-Sergeant Swain...'

That was the beginning of his reply, when Dunnett suddenly stood up, and started to declaim in an extraordinary manner.

'You want a confession? Here it is. My testament for the Queen. On this day I took my ripe sword and went to Perbagus Manor. I thundered on the door and burst it open and went into the room where the miserable beast was. I took the sword and held it the female's throat and demanded the return of the Queen's brooch. The beast prevaricated and gesticulated but I held the female and said 'she dies before your eyes then' and he went to desk and brought out the Queen's brooch. With this one hand I seized the females

long tresses, how she fought the tigress, but I twisted her hair about till it almost throttled her. With this hand I took his walking stick and rammed it between the fools wheels, I wanted him to see what would happen next. I wanted Brackenbury to suffer as we suffered. I never felt so good, so strong, I was a warrior then. Then like any other warrior I took out my instrument of pleasure, ripped off the bitches knickers and enjoyed her right on the desk inches away from Brackenbury's popping eyes. You should have seen the bastard stare. I cast her away once I'd done with her, and she ran off. I held up the brooch for the enemy to see. Held the brooch aloft like the warriors did the skulls of their enemies, and then I drove it in as deep as I could into my father's heart. It was glorious to take life...'

Dunnett was now shouting at the top of his voice and Price and Swain were trying to get hold of him and pull him down to the desk, and despite the handcuffs he was writhing like a wild animal with his eyes bursting out of his head. He lunged at the desk, sent it flying and with the two policemen hanging out to him crashed his head hard against the wall and collapsed. Swain yelled out for help and two more policemen came bundling in. But Dunnett had stopped moving.

'Get a doctor' Swain gasped 'we'll get the bastard sedated. Should have done that at the beginning, Jesus what a mad bugger'.

Price looked down carefully at the groaning figure.

'At least he hasn't died on us sir' and nodded towards the tape recorder still quietly spinning 'and we've got it all on tape sir'.

'Great' said Swain 'now all we have to do is get the bastard to sign it when he wakes up'.

Price looked pleased and hurried off with the tape recorder to the office, and almost immediately Swain could hear the machine being rewound.

'Thanks boys'.

He muttered an acknowledgment to the two policemen who dragged Jake the Rake out for a night in the cell, whilst Swain scraped a match against the metallic 'No Smoking' sign and drew two long drafts on his cigarette. The last of a packet of twenty, he was losing the battle. He sat down in the only chair that wasn't upside down and looked considerably at large dent Jake's head had made in the scrim wall. The typewriter was starting to clatter away next door, and Price he realise, had absolutely no sense of irony.

He walked back into their shared upstairs office, crammed full of filing cabinets, desks and rubbish bins. It had no redeeming features at all, and looked out over the carpark. Constable Price interrupted his thoughts, which had started to dwell unhealthily on the sexual images conjured up by Jake the Rake.

'Sir, do you think Jacob Dunnett meant 'father's heart' literally?' asked Price. Swain shrugged.

'I hope not'.

‘If Jacob Dunnett is Harry Brackenbury’s son, well...’ and Constable Price let out his breath ‘that’s a turn-up sir’.

The way he said ‘turn-up’ made it sound like ‘turnip’ and Swain was just about to reply with a witticism along the line of ‘we’ll I’m pleased it’s not a parsnip’, when at that inconvenient moment Ted Bingham poked his head through the open door, and from the exaggerated look of indifference on the journalists face, Swain immediately knew he had overheard.

‘You didn’t hear that Ted, and you can’t use it’.

‘Hear what me ol’ matey?’

Bingham always used a type of language that had gone out of fashion in the fifties, which treated everyone as a long-time, often-seen, deeply trusted, well-met friend.

Swain did not reply, and Bingham sidled into the chair opposite his, and brought out his cigarette packet and played with it. He was not allowed to smoke here, so he tossed it from hand to hand. Annoyingly.

‘Why can’t I use it? Witness statement? I can use that?’

‘No statement yet’.

‘Not even from Jake the Rake?’

Swain looked him over carefully. Bingham had his uses but was just too damn smarmy most of the time.

‘How did you know that?’

‘Whole bloody world knows it mate. I mean the bastard wasn’t subtle was he? Straight down to *The Green Man* and tells the world he’s a celtic warrior and slain an enemy of the Cornish people, do me a favour. Besides I live next door to the bastard. I’d be no bloody journalist if I hadn’t heard’.

The Green Man gave itself the title ‘Hotel’ on the basis of several cheap rooms it rented at the back. Swain knew that Bingham’s wife had kicked him out, mainly for his sleazy midnight habits.

‘You could have been in the brothel Ted, that’s where you normally are on Thursdays. You wouldn’t have heard in there’.

Bingham considered the idea without merit.

‘Those girls gossip while they screw you know. Shout through the walls, so bloody thin. Now Lara, lovely Russian babe she is, have you tried her Mick, lovely bitch.’

Bingham was not ashamed of his sexual weaknesses, indeed he exaggerated them, particularly to married men like Swain and Price. He knew all men were the same, and that they too would like to sample the lovely Lara, if they could get away with it. His wife did not care, and he did not care.

‘So not a byline there eh? What can I get?’

Swain had been thinking. He would by and large have preferred to give Bingham nothing, but like all police officers he had this irritating relationship with the news media. Every now and then they were useful, but you had to put up with all the clever shit in between.

‘Jacob Dunnett has been charged with the murder of Harold Brackenbury. Jacob Dunnett is an occasional gardener for the Brackenbury’s. That’s it’.

‘Not much me hearty, not bloody much at all’ then looked slyly at Swain, tossing his cigarette packet ‘without the daddy angle. What about Boadiceas Brooch eh?’

Swain sighed.

‘How much has the barman told you?’

‘Everything, talked like a canary. Where’s the brooch. Have you found it?’

‘No’.

‘Was it the murder weapon?’

‘Possibly’.

Bingham got out his notepad and looked hopefully at Swain.

‘I can use that?’

Swain nodded reluctantly.

‘Thanks my hearty, that’s bloody heaps. Actual, I dont mind about the daddy bit. It’ll come out in the statements for sure, and what a juicy lark for next week. Keeps the whole sodding thing rolling along eh?’

Bingham got up well satisfied, and headed for the door with a final shot.

‘Harry would have been bloody pleased you know...’

Swain looked him over as bibliophile inspects a less than satisfactory first edition.

‘You knew Harold Brackenbury of course’.

‘Sure did me little towser. Old drinking mates we was, way back. He always wanted kids, hah, yer gotta laugh. I could have told him, they’re more trouble than they’re worth. See ya me ol’ tosser’.

Constable Price rolled his eyes and shuffled his documents noisily as Bingham left. Swain watched him for a while.

‘What’s on your mind Thomas’.

Price stood up and gestured at Bingham’s shadow. His accent was soft with plenty of smokey Welsh valleys lingering in it.

‘Don’t know why you put up with him sir. Horrible little jerk.’

‘He’s the only crime reporter for the *Truro Times*, do I have any choice?’

‘Well, pardon me sir’.

Swain liked that, Thomas was very old-fashioned.

‘We could easily just send out a statement.’

‘You think it’s unprofessional of me to talk to Bingham?’

Constable Price hesitated as he filed the documents away. Very tidy was Thomas.

‘Well sir...’

‘You may be right Pricey, you may be right. But the fourth estate like their piece of flesh, as we do. Besides, I want all of Cornwall looking for that brooch. We have to find it.’

It had been a long afternoon and evening and Swain now phoned his long-suffering wife to tell her that finally he was on the way home. She didn’t seem very happy, though as a policeman’s wife you thought she would have got used to it by now. The casserole had apparently congealed.

‘Ok Pricey, I’m off, nothing to do now’.

Constable Price looked up and said with a slight hint of disapproval.

‘What’s that racket?’

Price lifted his eyebrows and grimaced. From down the corridor there was a loud outburst of female bile, and it was coming their way.

‘Betcha a fiver she’s drunk’ winked Swain at Price.

‘I’m not a gambling man sir’ said Price primly.

‘Neither am I Pricey, neither am I’.

Swain listened and groaned.

‘Oh God’.

The noise got closer.

‘Where’s my boy, where’s ‘e? You can’t keep a mother from seeing ‘er boy...’

The door burst open and a drunken old woman tumbled in.

Her stage name was Mary Malarchy, Gypsy Queen of the Guitar, often known as Bloody Mary, The Travelling Troubador, and much else besides, and she rushed in with a wild-eyed and theatrical glare of gestures and obscenities. She used to sing in bars, mostly lonesome gypsy songs and loud sea-shanties, and she had a good voice when she wasn’t drunk. But she was a wild, sentimental creature, nearer to death than she realised, and only her raucous voice and intense loyalty to her son kept her going.

‘Sorry sir’.

The apology was from the duty constable who was still vainly pulling on Mary’s

jerkin to stop her entrance, but instead got pulled along instead. Mary well knew the way to Swain's office and looked around with a certain declaiming triumph.

'Where's 'e gorn you buggers? Com'on now, let's see my boy'.

'He's locked up for the night Mary my love, you're drunk, and you're leaving'.

Malarchey's music career had been in abeyance for some years, and had slipped between the Victorian vices of gin and prostitution.

'I've a mother's right to see 'im, I'll go to the 'apers I will...'

She paused to momentarily adjust a sprig of lavender in her silver hair.

'He's been charged with murder Mary...'

She dismissed this as a mere matter of detail.

'arry Brackenbury was a bastard, a bloody little shit. Didn't pay me yer know? For my services?'

'Singing or sex?'

Swain was trying to guess whether it was gin or turps on her breath.

'My boy, my poor boy...'

The tears were suddenly flowing down Mary's cheeks like rivulets down a scarred hillside.

'Shall I toss her out sir?' asked the duty constable.

'Yes, no, wait'.

'My poor boy, such a good son...'

'Who was the father? The father of Jacob?'

Mary sobbed and pulled out a filthy rag, and looked surprisingly sly. Despite her age and poorly organised disposition of emotions, just then, in that few seconds, you could see a strong likeness between mother and son. A sort of primitive cunning and suspicion that comes from a lifetime of living on the margins of society.

'Orrr, that's long, long time past, great man, a great man indeed...'

'Harry Brackenbury?'

'I'm? Well, quite a man I'll say that for 'im, don't pay for his services, but still a man. A gentleman, yes that's it, he was a gentleman'.

As a description of Harry Brackenbury that did not seem convincing to Swain, so he raised his eyebrows and the duty constable took hold of Mary firmly, probably expecting another flurry of limbs. But her strings were broken, and a sort of spiritual resignation invaded her face.

'Tomorrow Mary, you can see him tomorrow, if he wakes up. He's got quite a headache I'd say'.

‘Bless you Mick Swain, bless you’.

They left, and Price sighed heavily. This time Swain put on his coat and said good night. It was 9.30 pm, his wife would kill him.

He walked down the empty corridor, down the stairs past the duty constable reading Best Bets, and out into the dark carpark. It was drizzling, and the streetlights were fuzzed over. He was only a short distance behind Mary Malarchey as she trailed across the wet asphalt, singing a song which he dimly recognised from his school days, a song for all the aged gypsy rovers who still whistled through green woods winning the hearts of ladies.

He started up the car and dug around in the glovebox for his secret stash of ciggies. Professionally speaking he should have been thinking of Harry Brackenbury, poor sod, but his mind instead kept returning to Mrs Brackenbury and her cool, controlled demeanor. Helena was a lovely name.

Chapter 5

A Miracle of Rare Device

Wednesday 3 October

The hall was a cavernous and mostly windowless room, crammed full of adzes and pottery bowls in glass cases, with a fierce standing celtic warrior waving a sword in one corner, a pterodactyl dangling from the ceiling and an enormous oil painting of cows on one wall. It must have been twenty years since Swain had been into the museum and he remembered the cows most of all, and the tattooed warrior, and it was comforting to see that in a world of unceasing change, within the detritus of Truro museum, nothing had changed. The curator he recalled was a tall thin bespectacled man, and someone such was striding fussily towards him now, surely not the same man?

‘Mr Swain, a pleasure to see you, I hope it’s not serious. We’ve already had a reporter in here this morning. Your phone call didn’t say, and we have had no thefts, as far as I know, but one can never be sure’.

‘Mr Jones? Were you here twenty years ago?’

He looked pleased rather than offended.

‘Why yes, I found my niche, as you can see. An exhibit in my own museum my wife says’.

‘Have you seen this morning’s headlines?’

Swain unrolled the newspaper and showed the curator the *Truro Times* with a banner headline.

‘Murder in the Manor: Boadicea’s Brooch stolen. Jacob Dunnett, also known as ‘Jake the Rake’, has been charged with the murder of Harry Brack-enbury’.

Ted Bingham had got his byline.

‘Oh yes, terrible, that’s the reporter that came in this morning, so you also want to know about the brooch? Well of course we held it here, in Truro Museum for a while did you know that? About 1970 I believe. I had just been appointed and the brooch was a centrepiece, please step this way’.

Mr Jones ushered Swain around the labyrinth of glass cases to a particularly large one, full of daggers and pieces of jewellery.

‘Our celtic display, tho you realise of course that it doesn’t have any especial connection with Queen Boadicea herself? It was manufactured much later, perhaps 500 years later. We had it on loan from the Brackenbury’s, till there was a bit of a fuss about it’.

Some people enjoy history and some people are bored to tears by it, and Swain could never decide which camp he was in. The curator rambled on.

‘The church, that is the Bishop of Truro suggested that the brooch really belonged to the church estate, and had been taken illegally from St Tristans church many years ago when one of the Brackenbury’s, hmmm, ‘borrowed it’ shall we say? At any rate Harry Brackenbury withdrew the exhibit, but really you should not be talking to me, but to Claris Rolling, he is one of England’s and the world’s leading experts on celtic jewellery. I always consult him, see this book’.

Swain recognised it immediately, Harry Brackenbury had a copy sitting on his desk.

‘Where can I find this Claris (a rather odd name thought Swain) Rolling?’

‘Couldn’t be easier’ said the curator triumphantly ‘he resides in St Tristan’s church vicarage, in Portloe, only a mile or so from Perbagus Manor’.

Swain filed away the curious fact that the world’s expert on celtic jewellery lived only a mile away from one of it’s most celebrated pieces, and happened to be a vicar in the same church that once owned the brooch. Swain did not believe in coincidence, or luck for that matter. People make their own luck, and construct their own coincidences. Mr Rolling was deserving of an interview.

He became vaguely aware of another man hovering in the room with them, and the curator seemed to know him.

‘I say Gordon, is Claris in town too?’

‘No, he’s working’.

The new man was youngish and tall and already slightly balding, and had an accent that Swain thought was Australian.

‘Mr Swain, let me introduce you. Gordon Micklethwaite is staying with Claris at the vicarage. How did the lecture go?’

‘Not very well, Claris got called away. This murder...’

‘Of course! He knows the Brackenbury’s well, Helena goes to his church services. What a terrible thing to have happened. Have you found the brooch yet inspector?’

Swain was not an inspector but had long given up trying to explain the complex police hierarchy of titles to outsiders, and anyway he didn’t understand the bloody

system himself.

‘No. Can you show me an equivalent brooch?’

‘We can do better than that’.

The curator brought out a key and opened the case, and handed the policeman a beautiful brooch, glittering gold even in the half-light of the museum, and embedded with small garnets. Strange patterns and swirls were carved over the main body and when Swain undid the clasp the long bronzed prong of the brooch swung free.

‘That is an exact replica. We had it made before Harry Brackenbury took the real one away, insurance purposes, that sort of thing. Everything is exact, although the gold is painted and the gemstones are glass. Isn’t it beautiful?’

Swain turned it over in his hands. It was, and it could certainly kill.

‘How much is it worth?’

The curator mistook him.

‘Only ten pounds or so, oh, the real one? Well, many thousands, why possible more than a hundred thousand.’

The policeman blew through his lips to show he was impressed and passed the brooch over to Micklethwaite who was still lurking near by.

‘Can I borrow this book?’

‘Surely, and anything else you need inspector.’

‘You couldn’t sell that brooch on the black market could you?’

‘Impossible, quite impossible, although there are wealthy Americans who be prepared to buy it, illegally of course. The problem is that the church might well make a formal claim, I’ve heard the bishop say this, so that would complicate matters considerably’.

Micklethwaite passed the brooch back to the curator and said obscurely.

‘A miracle of rare device...’

The curator looked pleased at the reference which flew right past Swain’s head.

‘Are you Australian?’

Swain heard the accent again and was curious.

‘New Zealand’.

‘Oh Gordon I forgot!’ interrupted the curator ‘you wanted to see Kubla Khan. Gordon is a bit of an antiquarian like me Inspector and is helping Claris with a series of lectures he’s giving on the famous poem by Coleridge. You know it was written just across the border from here in Linton? Look we have an original draft, which he sent to a friend’.

The policeman desperately wanted to make his escape now, but the curator had taken his arm and dragged him over to another dusty case. By peering at the manuscript he could make out a line or two, and since he didn't know a thing about the famous poem, he gave the game away immediately. He muttered under his breath.

'In Zanawoo did Kubla Khan a treasure home...'

'Pleasure dome inspector. I think you should go to one of Claris's lectures. Think of the benefits'.

A suggestion that made Swain take his leave hastily, and walk down the crisp narrow lanes of Truro and around to the central police station. Price was waiting.

'He's awake sir, but sore, and not talking. Phone's have been going mad sir, London calling, newspapers and stuff. Even the BBC.'

As if prompted the phone rang and Swain found a London reporter at the other end.

'No. Yes. No. No. Maybe. Can't say. Goodbye'.

Swain didn't like reporters.

'It's been like that since 7 o'clock this morning sir'.

'You start at 7?'

'Yes sir, all those notes to type up. I have all of Jacob Dunnett's statement ready, though some of the language is hard to understand'.

Thomas was super efficient, though Swain doubted whether Jake the Rake's rant could be called a statement in the technical sense.

'Why is he called Jake the Rake sir?'

Price was pointing to the newspaper and Bingham's story.

'The girls Pricey, the girls liked him, and he liked them'.

Swain threw his coat over the hook, where it fell off and slumped in a nasty heap. Price picked it up as Swain answered another phone call with another rude set of replies.

'I've had the *Daily Mail* sir, and I've the *Times* and *Mirror*. It's that brooch sir, it's captured the imagination of the journalists'.

Swain grunted and the phone rang again.

'No comment at this stage, there will be a court appearance tomorrow morning of a man in connection with our inquiries. Oh, hallo Jimmy.'

This was the *Daily Express* man who Swain vaguely knew. They'd been in the Cornish darts team, did pretty well too. Got into the quarter finals.

'How's London? Yeah Bingham's beaten you to it'.

'Amazing that, who'd have thought it. Bloody Bingham' said Jimmy with a laugh 'tell me Mick, is this story going to go anywhere? I mean develop?'

‘Shouldn’t think so Jimmy. The bloke’s confessed, we’re still looking for the murder weapon, yeah the brooch, but that’s probably been tossed over a hedge somewhere. We’re searching the grounds now. Between you and me the guys a nutter. He’ll have to get examined and probably tucked away somewhere. Bingham will get his five minutes of fame and that will be it’.

‘Bingham’s already had that Mick. You know the story? I knew Bingham as cub reporter and he got hold of this story of a black panther stalking Hampstead Heath, he had several witness, but he made them all up! Story ran for two weeks before some other newspaper, must have been the *Mirror*, got suspicious and tracked Bingham down. The *Express* was furious of course, and they had to come out with a grovelling apology and they sacked Bingham. So he ended up at the *Truro Times* eh? Funny old world, heh you’ve got me worried now. This story is all true isn’t it? Good, good, heh that reminds me. There was a joke going the rounds of the newspaper staff after Bingham’s great hoax. If someone got into a bit of trouble or made up a source (has been known you know) we used to say ‘going bung like Bingham’, ta ta’.

Pricey was waving frantically with another phone on his hand, Jeez the place was going berserk today.

‘Hallo Swain’ he said testily, then apologised.

‘Sorry George, I’ve been plagued by media this morning’.

Sir George Blain was the surgeon performing the post mortem on Harry Brackenbury. He’d been knighted for establishing the Truro Charity Hospital, and various other good deeds. He was ok George, didn’t put on too many airs and must be close to retirement, but he liked to keep his hand in, and happened to be the duty surgeon when Harry Brackenbury was brought in. Swain thought it must be pretty weird cutting open the body of a friend. Blain’s voice boomed down the line.

‘Sorry Mick, you’re not going to like this. The weapon, brooch, or whatever it was did not cause the death. Harry had a heart attack, a massive one’.

‘But that was brought on by the attack surely?’

‘Maybe, maybe, not for me to say. He had a weak heart, I know his doctor. The extraordinary thing is that the weapon missed every single artery, organ and vein. Missed the lot, only just missed mind you, but not an important or unimportant organ pierced for that matter. There are only two places in the human chest wall that you could do that and get away with it’.

Swain had to admit it was bad news. They had already charged Jake the Rake with murder, but now they might have to make it attempted murder or manslaughter or something. Blain boomed on cheerily.

‘If the attacker had used a different sort of weapon, like a sword, then certainly Harry Brackenbury would be dead by that injury, but the weapon must have been a very fine instrument indeed, more like a surgeon’s implement. It

left a very neat mark in Harry's chest, I wouldn't even call it a hole'.

'Is there an exit wound?'

'No. Harry had a broad, deep chest. The weapon penetrated to near the back of the spine, but missed that as well. It is quite astounding. In thirty years of post mortems I've never seen anything so freakish.'

The conversation paused and the surgeon added.

'In court, under oath, I'll have to state that the weapon did not cause death itself. Perhaps the shock of the attack, but that is hypothetical and I do not think I would be able even to suggest that. That's the prosecutors job'.

'What caused Harry Brackenbury paralysis?'

'What? The man wasn't paralysed at all. Not at all, there was nothing wrong with the man. He was a hypochondriac, he could walk as well as you and me'.

Now that was surprising. If Harry could walk, then why didn't he fight off his attacker? He was still a big man, and could have put up quite a fight with his SAS background. Why would he just watch his wife being raped and do nothing?

'Really?'

'Yes, it was all a sham, you ask his doctor'.

'Was Harry impotent?'

'What an extraordinary question, I couldn't say. Not physically I suppose, he wasn't paralysed, but you'll have to ask his wife'.

Swain rubbed his chin and wondered how to put his next question. He knew that Blain knew the Brackenbury's quite well, but didn't want to offend him. Somewhere in the dirty cubbyholes of his police mind he was getting a notion that this murder might not be as straightforward as it looked.

'I can read your mind Mick, what's on it?'

'About Harry, was he in financial difficulties?'

There was a pause in Blain's voice and he suddenly became careful.

'Possibly'.

'Care to expand sir? Off the record?'

'Nothing is ever off the police record in my experience Mick, but I don't believe it will do much harm for Helena. It was Helena I knew, quite well, more than Harry, she helped on the Charity Hospital. Harry could be difficult at times, rather hot tempered, anyway, it was common knowledge amongst their group of friends that Harry had financial problems. Harry even asked me for money'.

'Did you give him some?'

‘Certainly not, I did not particularly trust him, but I felt sorry for Helena. I knew it would break her heart to leave Perbagus Manor.’

It was her heart that Sir George seemed particularly careful about, and Swain picked up the resonances.

‘Why, were they leaving?’

‘They were running out of money. There was a demand from Lloyds of London, you know Harry was a ‘Name’?’

‘No’.

‘You know what a Name is of course?’

Sir George was patronising him.

‘No’.

‘Insurance in Lloyds is pooled together under different broking firms and they parcel out the risk amongst themselves. They in turn parcel out their slither of risk amongst people who want to invest in Lloyds, and these people could be anyone, you or me for example, and these people are called ‘Names’. Oh, Harry was full of his get rich quick schemes and this was one of his worst. The ‘Names’ have unlimited liability, which could mean everything. So if they need your money they can take all your money, your house, your valuables...’

‘Jewellery?’ interrupted Swain.

‘Everything that is deemed an asset, yes. When those two oil tankers ran aground off the Alaskan coast last year they cost the insurance business millions, even a billion I heard.’

‘And they wanted more money off Harry?’

‘That’s the idea. Lloyds give extraordinary good dividends in the good years, but a few disasters and they want more money off their ‘Names’. It’s high risk, I warned Harry of that, not that he noticed. That’s what unlimited liability means, you pay and pay and pay’.

‘How much did you give to Harry?’.

There was a pause as Blain thought.

‘Well, that’s neither here nor there. I gave the money to Helena actually’.

‘But Harry was in trouble?’

‘Yes, but it was Helena’s money at risk. She bought Perbagus Manor you realise, not Harry. She didn’t buy it outright they had a hefty mortgage, and then the silly woman transfers the title to Harry. Don’t get me wrong, Helena is a very clever woman, but not when it comes to money. Very few women are clever at money, and I suppose Harry sweet talked her into changing the title deeds so he could use the mortgage money for absurd reason. I’ve chat-

ted enough I think’.

Sir George finished abruptly, realising that his gossip had gone much further than he intended. Swain swung in a googly.

‘Did Helena have a lover?’

There was silence at the other end.

‘I would not know’.

‘Were you in love with her?’

There was another silence, although it seemed to Swain intuitively that this silence was different from the first. As a policeman you get to recognise the different types of silence.

‘Everyone was, she was that kind of woman’.

Chapter 6

The Shadow (of the dome of pleasure)

Thursday 4 October, evening

‘Harry Brackenbury? Who doesn’t know ‘im? Great booming voice, cigar waving about in one hand like a firecracker, whisky in the other. They don’t make ‘em like that way anymore, not hard men, not like that. ‘King Harry’ they called him here, after the ferry you know, just lorded it over the bar with his war yarns. Parachuted into Yugoslavia with the SAS, fought in Burma, then the Middle East (he called it the ‘muddle east’) and worked for Shell after the war, made a fortune in options they reckon. Larger than life, oh yes we all knew Harry, half of Cornwall knew him. ‘E was on the telly an’ everything was Harry, and radio, boy he could tell a good yarn, wreckers and tin miners, you know. Looked like a bloody wrecker too, and you remember that bar he broke up once? Bloody barman had a sore head for a week. Hard man Harry, good man though. Liked his booze too much and his women. Seen his wife? She’s a looker, thirty years younger at least. Not that stopped Harry from still sniffing around you know, I bumped into ‘im coming out from a brothel in Falmouth. Highly charged was Harry. Potent.’

‘Didn’t know you hung about the girls Bert?’

‘Couldn’t keep me away from ‘em Ted. Learnt everything from you. After a month hunting bloody ‘erring, and smelling like ‘em too, what wouldn’t yer do to wrap your legs around a lovely thigh eh, ream ‘er out’.

‘Quieten down boys, this is a family place. Saw the headlines mate, sensational stuff. Haven’t they found that bloody brooch yet?’

‘ope not, keeps the whole thing rolling along. Every dog has his day Joe, and this is mine, as the bishop said to the actress’.

‘Another pint Joe, so tell me Ted, what are yer garnering all this stuff for huh? His obituary? Well I tell yer something, ‘ere come closer, that Harry was into drugs, big time. Yeah, hashish they called it durin’ the war, opium.

Reckoned he got a taste for the stuff in Burma or some yellow-eyed place, a real demon for it 'e was. That sickness of 'is was just a put-up job, 'e wasn't paralysed. His willy worked as well as yours and mine Ted, or maybe yours has had it. Couldn't get enough of the stuff, yer know 'ow he wangled it? Prescription! Bastard had a tame doctor and he dished out the stuff like a blimmin' waterfall so I 'eard. Go 'orn, chuck that in the obituary! Hah, hah!

'Here's yours Ted, that's three bob'.

'You're bloody overcharging us again Joe. Half the Fal River in this drop. So come on Bert, I've gotta say something nice about Harry, that don't offend his family. Can't put the drugs and girls in can I?'

'Well, you were his mate too weren't you Ted? I saw you blokes knocking it back in *The Green Man* many a time, and then after a session didn't you always go down and knock on the Purple Door? What did his wife make 'o that? Didn't she know? Lovely bit of fluff eh? Ok sorry Ted, yer touchy on that. It's been twenty years, time to move on I reckon. If yer didn't get it then you won't get it now. You stick to the pros, less hassle all round I say. Drink up, I gotta go. Missus has something on the stove'.

'Yer a tosser Bert, a bloody hypocrite'.

'No mate, clever. I keep the wife for the cooking and then nip down for a quick one when I say I'm in the pub chatting to you, hah. Didn't your wife throw you out Ted?'

'She did me a favour there. Nothing wrong with The Green Man, nice tidy rooms and ten foot away from the booze. Pity they can't put a pipe through into my room as well, anyway my ol' hearty I'm off. You weren't much bloody good on the obits'.

'Make it up Ted, like yer usually do'.

'Of course I make stuff up. Every bastard in this game does. Make whole stories up to, and they print 'em. There's a lot of bloody lies in this business mate, masquerading under journalistic ethics. Ha, there's no such bloody thing. Attack the media and we'll bleat fourth estate, gotta protect the fourth estate, but who protects people from us eh? No bastard. Makes yer laugh don't it?'

'Didn't yer make up that gossip column yer wrote, what didja call yourself? It was 'onimo's wern't it?'

'Anonymous you dickhead, not dominos, don't make me laugh. Here's to King Harry'.

'Cheers'.

'They don't make 'em like that Bert, not any more'.

'Thank bloody God, see ya Ted'.

'See ya Bert'.

Chapter 7

Ancient as the Hills

Friday 5 October

It was an autumn morning of early fogs and an orange sun, of wet hungover grass, red dots of hawthorn berries and the standing stones of cattle, that gazed sorrowfully at the new day. The sunlight gathered speed over the landscape and pounced on the mirrors of parked cars, with dazzling shards of second-hand sun bouncing onto the dark stone walls of the houses. Very soon the cars would start up, and grunt their way down narrow lanes with a backward hiss of steam. The full blue day would arrive and the lemmings would miss it, and that was a pity, but then you couldn't earn money out of perfect mornings.

The detective-sergeant stamped his feet in the cold St Just visitor centre carpark, and was about to head into the steamy warmth of the 'Cosy Cafe' opposite, when an old black Riley chugged around the corner and parked with a nervy jerk or two beside his car. Claris Rolling and Gordon Micklethwaite got out, with Claris's silver-hair covered with a woolen hat and his fingers encased in gloves with the tops cut off.

'Good to see you made it Mr Swain, the car heater stopped working this morning. Rather a cold trip, but what a splendid morning'.

Swain hated walking, and it was a rather deviant sense of humour on his wife's part that led to them arriving near Lands End for the purpose of a morning's exercise. She would suffer for this.

'Perhaps you should get an answer phone Mr Rolling, or at least answer your phone'.

They shook hands, for this was the first time they had met in the flesh. Claris was easily a head taller, upright and almost athletic in build.

'Yes I am truly sorry, but we missed every time? But fortunately I rang your wife last night, and she insisted that you would be delighted to join us, so you see the message got through to me in the end. Now that could be material for a sermon Gordon? Mr Swain, you have met? Excellent, now shall we walk from here?'

‘Call me Mick’.

‘Is that short for Michael?’

Swain shrugged, no one had called him Michael since his school days in Plymouth. He glanced sideways at Gordon, who also looked bloody fit. If his wife hadn’t had the cheek to agree to a walk he would have evaded this.

‘We will walk through Tregeseal, and then up towards Bostraze farm, but we must turn left at a certain point. What a glorious day’.

‘Did you see today’s paper Mr Rolling?’

‘Oh please, Claris, yes indeed’.

‘You were quoted’.

‘Hmmm, misquoted rather, but still rather flattering in it’s way. The first few paragraphs are almost verbatim quotations from my book, although he has left a good deal out, including many of the best parts. Do you think that is a fate of all author’s, to be misquoted out of context?’

‘It’s the fate of cops’ Swain mumbled and Rolling did not quite hear.

The *Truro Times* had a long piece under the page six headline ‘Still Searching for Murder Weapon: ancient brooch never owned by Queen Boadicea according to world expert’ by Ted Bingham.

‘Boadicea’s Brooch is dated between the 600-700 AD period by Claris Rolling, one of England’s leading experts on early Celtic jewellery. Since Queen Boadicea’s revolt took place in 60 AD, and there is no possibility that the brooch could have an association with that period. The brooch first came to called ‘Boeddeceas Brooche’ by the German antiquarian Johann Parce, who drew a sketch in 1768. It was in the then possession of the St. Tristans parish church, but in 1864 when the new vicar Derrard Brackenbury took possession of the vicarage, the brooch was transferred to the Brackenbury family, supposedly to pay a debt that the church owed.

Local people complained about this action, and the Bishop of Truro launched an investigation into the matter that was never satisfactorily resolved, because the brooch disappeared, and Derrard Brackenbury resigned some months later.

‘The brooch is celtic, and encrusted with gold and jewells. It is 10 inches long and five inches wide, and has some extravagant ornamentation that is similar to the famous ‘Tara’ brooch of Ireland.

In 1954 the brooch reappeared in the Brackenbury family. The re-discovery attracted considerable interest and between 1971 and 1972 the brooch was kept on display in Truro Museum. It was examined by several experts, and even sent briefly to the British Museum. All agreed it possessed the distinctive ornamentation features found only on Celtic jewellery and ironware from around the first century’.

They turned up the narrow lane, with tall dry-stone walls on each side, and either the sun was kicking out some heat, or Swain was finding the exercise warming, because he had to take his jacket off. His short legs were struggling to keep up with Rolling's long stride. Micklethwaite, who hadn't said a word yet, was following politely behind.

'Did Derrard Brackenbury steal the brooch?'

'Well, he certainly had some claim upon it, but it would take a good deal of archival research to prove the matter one way or the other I believe'.

'Then the Brackenbury's had the brooch on display for a while and then removed it, why?'

'Ahh, Gordon here has been doing some work there, reading the newspapers of the time'.

Micklethwaite oblidgingly hurried to catch up with them.

'There was a story written anonymously in 1972, it was a sort of gossip column, called 'The Man from Porlock', and it claimed that the Brackenbury's had stolen the brooch and the Bishop of Truro wanted it back'.

'Turn here I believe, yes' and Rolling raced on ahead.

'Well it turned out the Bishop had said no such thing, denied it in an interview a few days later. But Harry Brackenbury had already removed the brooch from display in the museum. The curator showed me the various news stories on it'.

'Who wrote the original story?' asked Swain.

Micklethwaite paused, and there was a faint smile in the silence.

'The curator said it was a local reporter called Edward Bingham'.

Swain shook his head.

'Jesus, same ol' bloody Ted, a leopard doesn't change his spots, and now he's writing about Harry's death and the brooch all over again'.

'Mr Swain, now I have a surprise for you'.

Rolling had stopped before a low stone wall with a stile set in it. A flock of goldfinches dashed by, and Swain thought he saw a lizard flick into a hole between the stones. With considerable agility Rolling hopped over the old stile and strode across the pink and purple shrub field into a clear circle of grass, and swept his hand out in an expansive un-Anglican gesture.

'The nine merry maids of Tregeseal, cast into stone for dancing on Sunday'
Rolling said solemnly.

Swain had trotted after the vicar and found himself in the middle of a dozen or so small rocks arranged in a circle. He started counting them.

‘Now it’s terribly bad form to count them Mr Swain, and if you succeed bad luck will surely follow’.

‘Nineteen, and call me Mick’.

It was a lovely setting, and the autumn sun was warming. Swain slung his jacket over his shoulder, and fondled one of the stones.

‘I would say, Christian superstition aside, they were erected in the Bronze Age. There are remains of Bronze Age settlements all around her, Cornwall is a very ancient landscape’.

Swain nodded vaguely.

‘Bronze Age?’

‘2000 to 1000 or 750 years ago, anno domino of course’.

‘Of course. Aren’t there other stone circles of frozen maidens?’ asked Swain loudly.

‘Yes, it was a common name for them...’

‘Lots of maidens must have been going to hell in those days vicar’

Swain was being cheeky, hoping for a bite. He was disappointed. Rolling looked about him eagerly and a skylark burst out and gushed out a liquid web of noise that filled the air with music. Micklethwaite had perched himself on top of one of the stones.

‘Would you like to go to Carn Kenidjack Gordon? Good’.

Rolling pointed out a low mound of rocks almost a mile away. Bugger that muttered Swain under his breath, and he noted that his opinion was not sought. He lumbered after Rolling and along the moist heather path, and cursed his bad luck he had got stranded with one of those muscular Christians.

As they walked Rolling would stop and show off this feature, or that outlook, and despite himself Swain was intrigued. The moors were a landscape that he never bothered to look at, except to flick a cigarette butt at it.

‘See those rocks there, with the holes in them? Granite. Now imagine cutting a hole in such irremovable rock. No one knows their purpose, now over there, that low mound is a barrow, a bronze age burial chamber. One of the Giant’s Graves. You see Mr Swain, I’m sorry, I find it hard to call a police officer by their Christian name, every object discovered by the early Britons was attributed to being made by giants or gods. They could not appreciate why these objects were made and so in their fashion gave them sacred and devilish connotations. All to the good I have to say, for if they had not rendered them sacred then these rocks would have been turned into houses, or walls’.

Rolling was enjoying himself and he seemed to stretch taller as he peered over the heather fields and pointed out what to Swain looked like piles of old rock.

‘Everything in this land is significant’.

Swain threw out some questions to Rolling in an effort to slow the reverend down.

‘Tell me Claris, how does an Anglican minister like you get to be an expert on all these pagans’

He waved vaguely over the sun-warmed Bronze Age fields.

‘A good point’ and Rolling paused in his stride ‘the sort of direct inquiry I would expect from a police officer Mr Swain, well, perhaps a lack of ambition? Gordon here is staying with his mother in Wandesbury, and his mother works in the Bishop of Wandesbury’s office, is that correct Gordon? When the bishop learnt that you were walking in Cornwall, and were interested in celtic history, the bishop said, why you must go and see my friend Claris! Is this right?’

‘Yes’.

Swain looked bored, and glanced at Micklethwaite who was smiling slightly at the long-winded story.

‘Now I am coming to the point Mr Swain, the Bishop and I are old friends, from RAF days in fact. I was a chaplain and he was a pilot, and only became a chaplain after the war. Well he is now a bishop and I am still a vicar, which I’m afraid says a great deal about my ambition. I have been too interested in the past to pay much attention to the present. The bishop gave me this small parish out of kindness I’m sure, it suits me because of it’s history, and needs little pastoral maintenance. My congregation is old, and I am old. Mostly I visit them in their homes, or as the case may be, rest homes or the Falmouth hospice. St Tristan’s is a very small old parish as you can see. The bishop intends to merge the parishes here, in two years I believe, and match them with a younger vicar who can do justice to the congregation. In two years I can retire, my race is run.’

His voice had drifted off into sadness, so Micklethwaite gently out him back on track.

‘You need to be ambitious to be a bishop?’ suggested Micklethwaite helpfully.

‘Exactly Gordon. I was much too disinterested in the paperwork, so many committees and meetings and minutes to read, it is a dreadful business being a bishop. I remained a lowly vicar by choice, certainly the stipend is poor, but you have so much considerable spare time in a small parish like mine. Does that answer the question Mr Swain? No, well perhaps it is more accurate to state that I was better interested in the celts than in the Anglicans, though I would never tell my parishioners that.’

Rolling laughed a self-mocking laugh and gazed around at the view.

‘Let us get to the top shall we?’

The path had grown narrower and steeper as it toiled up to the largest pile of rocks called Carn Kenidjack. Swain found himself clambering up behind Rolling and Micklethwaite who had quickly reached the summit.

‘Dear dear, these louts’.

Tutted Rolling as he picked up two beer bottles, and discreetly pushed away with his boot an almost new condom under a rock.

‘I bet they didn’t come up for the view’ grunted Swain.

‘But look at what they missed Mr Swain, look, the Scilly Isles’.

The puplish hues of the moorlands were on all sides of them, with here and there squat granite houses sticking out, and low stone hedges zig-zagging aimlessly like cracks in a mosaic. Cornwall was like the plump exposed leg of a substantial English lady, with Lands End as a sort of nervously hooked toe, testing the cold waters of the Atlantic as if ready to flinch back in a moment.

Far out over a heavily coloured deep blue sea, were several smudgy dots, that Swain supposed were the famed Scilly Islands, the last disconnected point of England before the New World.

‘It’s amazing view Claris, well worth it on a day like this’.

Micklethwaite was impressed. Rolling leaned against a rock and gazed reflectively out into the distance.

‘Thank you Gordon, it is one of my favourite places. It is a strange subtlety of the ancient Cornish people that they occupied these places, these remote and rocky heights’.

Swain was puffed, and sat down, his legs dangling over a boulder, and unthinkingly rolled a cigarette and offered one mutely to Rolling, who shook his head.

‘Hardly Mr Swain. It is time you gave them up’.

If his wife had said that Swain would have snapped her head off, but with a stranger he could agree.

‘Five a day now, I’m down to. It’s the fresh air Claris, gets my lungs moving’.

The sun burnt away the idiocy of that remark, but it reminded Swain that he was supposed to be on duty. The Cornwall that he inhabited was full of small rooms, dour courts, and seedy complainants. Oh, it was pretty, but he’d rather have a good session in his local playing darts with the team. Views like this left him a bit cold.

‘So tell me Claris, you’ve seen Boadicea’s Brooch?’

‘Yes, once. It’s been hidden away for many years, but once, well of course you know that Helena Brackenbury comes to our local church, well she I think persuaded Harry to show it too me, knowing of my great interest in celtic jewellery. I think it was a great favour because Harry is a curiously

secretive man. Helena said that he was in the SAS during the war so perhaps he learnt to be discreet there?’

Swain digested the remark.

‘Isn’t a bit big for a brooch? It’s a lethal bloody thing?’

‘As Harry Brackenbury found out’ said Micklethwaite.

‘Yes, terrible terrible, I was called away from my lecture on Kubla Khan to see Helena, she was beside herself.’

Swain remembered that she looked rather calm, but charitably that could be just the calm before the shock set in.

‘Harry Brackenbury didn’t go to church?’

‘Oh no, now about the brooch, yes it’s a mistake to think of it as a simple ornament. These celtic brooches were designed to hold a huge heavy cloak together, that’s why the shaft is so long. And it was a status symbol, certainly if not for a Queen than an important chieftain. It was a beautiful thing, to be used in that way...’

Rolling good humour had faded a trifle, and he shook his silver hair and looked old in the sunlight, which had unkindly etched the lines of his face deeper. Swain realised that the reverend must be in his mid-sixties at least, close to retirement, or did vicars ever retire? Swain obviously hadn’t been listening to Rolling’s previous conversation that he was due to retire in two years.

‘What’s that Gordon? Oh yes, travellers, I see them now’.

Swain stood up and Micklethwaite pointed out the small circle of caravans hunched protectively in a meadow, just a hundred feet or so below the hill they stood on. He could see some kids running about (no school for them!) and two women hanging up washing.

‘Gipsys huh?’

Swain disliked the word ‘Travellers’, which to his mind gave the gypsies a sort of authenticity which he didn’t think they deserved.

‘Every time they’re in the district there’s trouble of some kind. Complaints, noise, smell, barking dogs, dead sheep, kids skiving from school, washing missing, they’re a lot of work for us’.

Claris Rolling seemed far away.

‘Isn’t that harsh Mr Swain, yes I know they cause work for you but they have a romantic life don’t you think? One we would wish to lead if we but could’.

This mushy comment made Swain throw his second cigarette away and snort. He just saw squalor, barking dogs and kids running wild. Micklethwaite seemed to be more in tune with the reverend and asked gently.

‘You told me of a gypsy girl once Claris’.

‘Yes Gordon, indeed, she was lovely. You see Mr Swain I have loved twice, only twice. The first was a long time ago, a rash summer in the moorland by our base. England was fighting for her life and I was chasing a girl through the button daisies. She was 15 and I was 22. Her name was Flora, and she was a wild gypsy girl. I do not know if I was her first, somehow I do not think so, but she was my first.

I won, to put it crudely, and England won, but, if you have a mind for philosophical extrapolation, in a sense England lost, for she was economically and socially bankrupted by the war. I too lost, the girl disappeared from my life, or in fact it is truer to say I disappeared from her life. I was transferred to North Africa a week later, and I never saw her again, but one’s first loves are special aren’t they?’

‘I sinned once, and yet I preach goodness to good folk. I regret my sin, mostly, for I am human and we humans are a weak species. I would not have survived long in the celtic world, and perhaps that is why I am fascinated by them. Their energy, rawness, cruelty, passion.’

The others were silent. Swain was trying to remember his first love, which he thought happened was on a park bench somewhere. Molly, or Milly? Micklethwaite had drifted back in his mind to New Zealand in Golden Bay watching a girl running on the beach, and now she seemed so far away.

‘I have to shove off’.

Someone had to break the spell, and Swain thought this romantic mooning of gypsies and first loves up on Carn Kenidjack overly indulgent.

‘Yes of course, did you ask all the questions you wanted Mr Swain?’

‘So far, so good. I’ll probably think of others, but thanks rev, it’s been a good walk’

Swallow your pride man, even if you don’t mean it, but it did seem to cheer Claris up.

‘A pleasure, we should do it again. Gordon and I have a series of walks planned, don’t we Gordon?’

They walked down mostly in silence for Rolling seemed to have become reflective and walked on his alone. Swain talked to Micklethwaite.

‘Are you staying long with the rev?’

‘A week or two’.

‘Have I upset him?’

Swain flicked his head back at the figure of Rolling trailing behind.

‘Oh no, at least I don’t think so. It was a terrible shock, Harry Brackenbury getting murdered, and then Mrs Brackenbury... well, getting raped. Has the

brooch been found yet?’

‘Nope’.

That ‘nope’ really meant ‘I’m the one that asks the questions’.

‘Has the body been released?’

That was an oddly technical question, and Swain was surprised by it.

‘Errr, Harry Brackenbury? Yes’.

‘Ted Bingham rang up Claris, and got him rather upset. He said that Jake the Rake had left the brooch buried in Harry Brackenbury’s chest. Seems strange that it’s disappeared?’

They hopped back over the stile and Swain turned to Micklethwaite with a false smile.

‘After all your recent researches Mr Micklethwaite do you believe everything Ted Bingham says?’

The New Zealander smiled awkwardly and said nothing.

As Swain drove back into Truro he had a little nagging thought that perhaps Micklethwaite had been hinting at something, but he brushed it off with the cigarette ashes he flicked out of the window. Even his bloody darts team had been giving him advice on where to find the bloody brooch. Hell he had a murder, and a murderer, and it wasn’t the first time a murder weapon had disappeared. Ok, it was worth a lot of money, but something like that didn’t vanish for ever — it would turn up.

As he drove into the main police carpark, it immediately bothered him that part of it was fenced off with police tape and a large metal object was lying on the ground. He walked over to it and saw it was a drainpipe. He grinned.

‘Useless cheapskates, now they’ll have to build us a proper station’.

He was quite cheered up by the prospect of a nice shiny new police station with proper offices for all of them, instead of shared rabbit hutches, but one look at Price’s face wiped away the humour gurgling inside him.

‘Sorry sir bad news. Jacob Dunnett was brought up to the interview room to meet his mother and he tried to escape out of the window and down the drainpipe’.

‘That lump of metal on the carpark?’

‘Yes sir, it collapsed. Jacob landed on his head and has been taken to hospital. Done himself a terrible head injury. In a coma now they say sir, it’s not good news is it sir?’

His day was suddenly full of troubles and woe. Price then quite unnecessarily prattled into the gory details.

‘I just left the room to get Mary and he jumped out of the window sir. He’s

so tall if he'd lowered himself down he would have half touched the ground and be off, but he leapt out like Tarzan and grabbed the pole which snapped at the top, and it swung him into the ground with a terrible squelch sir. Blood everywhere sir'.

'I don't need the sound effects Pricey, and stop calling me 'sir' every bloody second sentence'.

'Ohh, sorry s...'

Chapter 8

Meandering with a Mazy Motion

Saturday 6 October, evening

The warm evening had drawn in early, and Micklethwaite jotted ‘drawn’ into his notebook, and pondered the curious fact that both evenings and baths were ‘drawn’.

The manse’s bath was a grim ivory beast, deep with chipped enamel and four tiger-like feet, and filling it was almost an act of devil worship. Boiling torrents of water spat into the tin with rattling angry coughs, and white steam rushed around the walls and misted the dark windows. Micklethwaite had eased one small part of his body in, then another, and piece by piece each adjusted to the heat until he could slink in with a gratified sense of entombment. He tried not to remind himself that cannibals probably cooked their dinners in this way, and settled into the bliss of wet heat.

When his mother said to him ‘go round Cornwall, have a few weeks exploring and a bit of an adventure Gordon’ she meant a walking adventure.

She quickly realised that it was not much fun for him, doing odd jobs around the house, and watching his aunt slowly die of cancer. His mother had flown over from New Zealand two months previously, and then sent Gordon money so that he could come over to England as well. He came partly to keep her company, as well as trying to rid himself of the ghost of Jessica. He hadn’t been particularly successful at either.

He had explored the cathedral streets of Wandersbury, and fixed up most things in the house that needed fixing, but like most young people he was puzzled and suffocated by death. Jessica’s death had been sudden, but watching Auntie George was a grim, slow process of disintegration. His mother quickly realised that it would do Gordon good to get away, and candidly, thought that her sister might well die in the next two or three weeks.

‘What if Auntie George dies when I’m away?’ asked Gordon.

Aunt George was actually ‘Georgina’.

‘I can always get you at the Reverend Rollings place. The bishop knows Claris well and has already written to him, to say you are coming to stay.’

So that was that. Claris Rolling had a pocket parish, which he described with relish as ‘a sort of a pasture for decrepit vicars who are due for the great knackers yard in the sky’.

They immediately discovered a mutual fascination with words, a love of the outdoors, and a pleasure in conversation. The Reverend Rolling spoke a long-winded English, from a time when people did not feel such an urgency to arrive at the full stop. His sentences were carefully articulated, and as long as the strides that the reverend used to make along the Cornish coastal path. On the first afternoon after Micklethwaite had arrived they talked and walked from the vicarage at Portloe right onto Caragloose Head. Claris Rolling would later shake his head in bewilderment.

‘Gordon, who knows if we had taken that walk on that day, and I’d decided to visit my dear friend Ellen, who knows Gordon? Harry Brackenbury might still be alive. We are shaped by coincidences are we not, and did I tell you of the Austrian physicist, Paul Kammerer, who believed in a law of coincidences — he called it a special word — synchronicity’.

Gordon twisted his foot firmly against the hot tap and let the beast gurgle some more.

Every day since that terrible Tuesday he had been drawn into the Brackenbury’s world by Claris’s confidences. It was the reverend who told him that Harry Brackenbury’s business dealings had landed him in serious financial difficulties. The manor house was heavily mortgaged, and Helena might well lose it if the brooch was not found.

‘It was her house in point of fact Gordon, which she bought for Harry. She has no means to pay the debt on the manor’ he said somberly.

After they had returned from their walk to Carn Kenidjack on Friday, Mrs Helena Brackenbury had been waiting in Claris’s study.

There was a scent in the air, almost as if spring had arrived several months too early, and her smile carried a million soft summers in it. It was the briefest of introductions, but it was enough. Part of his shock was due to the expectation of an older, middle-aged woman, greying with grief. Not this elegant person who still had more than a hint of girl in her figure. He shook her hand, and became convinced that Harry Brackenbury was a useless bastard for leaving his lovely wife so economically bereft. Gordon Micklethwaite’s experience of love was limited, so he did not yet understand that an attractive, intelligent woman might well fall in love with an unsuitable man. In fact women had been following just such an activity for thousands of years.

He sighed, and slopped hot water lazily over the portions of him not immersed, but then a new thought brightened him. Helena had wanted to meet him again, she needed, so Claris said, a ‘helper’.

‘She is under enormous strain Gordon, yet she hardly shows it. If you can help I’m sure she will be very obliged’.

No genuine white knight could refuse this offer, so of course he’d said yes, and Cla-

ris had gone over the dark fields that evening to see Mrs Brackenbury. For a near-retiring country parson, he still took his parishioners welfare very seriously.

Gordon manipulated the plug with his toes and watch the water expose bits and pieces of an unappetising body. After towelling himself vigorously and putting on his pyjamas Micklethwaite looked at his folding alarm clock, got into bed and switched off the light at exactly 9.30 pm. It was a warm night. At that moment he had an odd thought.

If Helena didn't take the brooch, or Jake, was there a third man there in the room? He switched on the light and wrote 'third person' which looked odd on the page. These days you had to destroy the English language so as not to offend the women's libbers, but technically, he had to admit, they could be right. He slept like a baby.

Chapter 9

That Deep Romantic Chasm

Saturday 6 October, evening

In his pretty part of Cornwall Charlie Roznick wasn't sleeping particularly well. The night around Veryan village was thick and muggy, more summer than autumn and he had pushed up the sash window which gave little relief, as the outside air seemed stickier out than in. Across the road in the dim moonlight he could see the unusual two round houses, built so Dolly had told him, so the devil couldn't a grip on them. There was a small cross on top of each. Cornwall was full of history, brim full, and Charlie was getting overwhelmed. His God-fearing parents would be concerned that the devil might have got a grip on their son, and they would be quite right to be concerned. It was only Tuesday afternoon that he had been deposited at Dolly Pendgarvens 'Bed and Breakfast', and he was still recovering. Dolly Pendgarven was a force of nature and Charlie Roznick had never met anything like her before.

'Ooh my lover, you saw that terrible murder up manor?'

She yelled brashly in a Cornish accent so colourful that on average, he understood every second paragraph. His arrival in a police car had been sensational, and Myffanwy, the landlady's daughter, had wiggled her pert bottom and stated that he was an 'outright hero', and winked at him from under her Woolworth's stick-on eyelashes.

A greasy little man from the Truro Times had interviewed him for extra details and it's true, he might have exaggerated a tad, but he'd never been famous before. He'd made a trip to Truro police station on Thursday to sign his statement, which looked desolate on paper, read about Boadiceas Brooch in the newspaper, and got a real pleasure in seeing his name printed alongside words such as 'Murder Drama at Perbagus Manor' and 'Kansas Backpacker Comes to the Rescue'.

'Ooooh them Brackenbury's, Harry was wicked you know, right wicked from war. I worked right up to last spring for em, housekeeping and cleaning you know, 'fore I started this place'.

Dolly swung her fat arms around at the consequence of her fishing husband's untimely death on the mackerel boats. The insurance had paid for a nice little place,

with a trimming of begonias by the front step and printed curtains of Cornish folk scenes on the windows. Of course it did lack customers, which frankly surprised Roznick. Under Dolly's beneficial regime of huge breakfasts, gargantuan lunches, and vast afternoon teas, he was plumping up rapidly. Her scones, poor devils, swam desperately and then eventually drowned, under the weight of jam and cream.

Of course she did talk a lot.

'Now that err Mrs Brackenbury, fine lady she is, but dark and secret like, like a Cornish well. Never know what she's thinking, beauty, ooooooh beauty in barrells my lover, but Harry was a master of the ladies, sweet he was. Did I see that brooch? Why certain sure I did, 'ee brought it out many's a time. Wicked thing, you know it's truly belongs to the church don't yer? Round here they say the Brackenbury's stole it years ago, that's why they kept it 'idden'.

It was all too much, and the rambling and shouted discourses from the kitchen wore thin, even on a polite boy from Kansas. Probably he would have left earlier but Miffy went back and forth in many colourful and revealing mini skirts and bulging halter tops, and he couldn't quite work out if that was for his special benefit or for the whole male tribe of Cornwall.

Dolly unfortunately watched over her daughter like a fire-eating dragon and woe betide any man that took any detailed interest, except that as far as Roznick could tell, every man in the village did. Basically, Miffy was the reason he'd stayed more nights than was sensible, eaten too much for his stomach, and was now having weird dreams about men prowling the moorlands with pieces of jewellery.

He tossed and turned and must have eventually drifted off, when he was suddenly awoken by a dark lumpy shadow tearing at his window.

Two hands appeared and grasped the sash and there was heavy breathing as the thing tried to squeeze through the gap. For some elongated seconds Roznick thought a horrible Cornish demon was trying to get in, then he realised that the dark lumps seemed familiar, and feminine. Miffy made a clumsy effort of silence ruined by two expletives, and her final heave was far too strong, and her body popped through the sash window and fell with squawk on top of the bed and on top of him.

Roznick sat up with a 'what the hell are you doing?' and Miffy giggled.

'Sorry about that but I's came that way, this was once my bedroom yer know? Oh yeah and I saw it open and I thought yer wouldn't mind eh?'

Roznick didn't mind, although it occurred to him that Miffy's final landing position had straddled him in an oddly erotic way. She was drunk.

'I've been out, hooo' and she brushed her hair into place.

'I see. The butchers boy?'

He'd heard something already about Bruce the butchers boy. A randy and lucky little bugger by all accounts.

‘Yeah, great bloke’.

‘He’s young isn’t he? Sixteen?’

Miffy had told him she was only seventeen.

‘Yeah, but fun eh. We ‘ad a good laugh at the pub then went on down to the Helford on his bike. You know, under the stars. He’s quite romantic, what’s the time?’

‘Two’.

She laughed.

‘Hooo, yer not say anything will yer? Me mum will kill me. Still thinks I’m a virgin’.

Somehow Roznick doubted this.

‘Doesn’t she like you seeing boys?’ said Roznick, wondering when it would occur to Miffy that she was still squashing him.

‘Well, mum’s funny, ‘spose they all are. ‘My little girl’ yer know. Won’t let me out after ‘hat murder of Harry up the road! They got Jake didn’t they. Scared the pants off me Jake did. I always thought the house was spooky, they should bloody well exercise the place’.

‘Exorcise’.

‘Yeah...’

‘Did you go out with him’ Roznick was surprised.

‘Oh yeah, quite a man. I mean wild, the things ‘ee wanted me to do to him, bit weird I’d say but great sex you know. Real wild stuff yer know. Once we did it in a stone circle, like one of those ancient ones eh, the druid stuff, real freaky eh.’

Miffy had conversationally adjusted her position on Roznick’s body and pulled up her little bit of skirt to reveal the top of an old fashioned stocking, and she tugged away at it until her hand dragged out a parcel. She unrolled the package which in the moonlight Roznick saw two were two mishapen cigarettes.

‘I always keep em there, you know the cops. They’d have to strip search you. You want one?’

‘I don’t smoke’.

Miffy shook her great blonde hair scattering backwards and laughed. Without her mother towering on her shoulder Miffy lost her delicacy of expression.

‘Yer think I’d hide ciggys up me fanny? They aint baccy, you know they’re wacky backy’ and she laughed louder at her joke ‘go orn try one’.

Without waiting for Roznick’s answer she pulled out a lighter from somewhere else and lit one marijuana cigarette, handed it to Roznick, then started the other. A sweet,

not unpleasant perfume filled the small room. Miffy dragged on one with exaggeration.

‘But he scared me, you know Jake. Celtic gods and celtic demons, he was daft, and bloody dangerous when he got roused up’ she giggled again, ‘not that I’m complaining, but mad as a meat axe my mum would say, and that’s the truth. Honest the things he said’.

She then mimicked Jake’s voice rather well.

‘Don’t get to close to me girl, for I’ll stroke your impudence, and rip off that little black number before the moon has risen. You want truth? Then stroke this honest ancient weapon and you will get impregnated with some celtic seed tonight’, corr, he was all talking like that, Shakespeare sort of stuff yer know, hoo, some man alright when he was roused up I’m telling you’.

Roznick wasn’t listening and doubted whether Miffy would know a ‘Shakespeare’ if she fell over one in the dark. He puffed cautiously on his reefer, and then coughed as the smoke he inhaled went the wrong way.

‘Quite a spot I ended up in. On top of a man an’ all, eh?’

‘I’m getting used to it’ Roznick hinted.

‘Yer got a girl? I mean I could fix you up. Got a mate at the factory, she’s lonely too’.

Roznick slightly resented the accusation that he was lonely and would therefore succumb to any cheap factory tart, but then realised that in truth she was probably right. He probably would succumb. I mean, he was travelling for adventure right?

‘When did you know Jake?’

Miffy wiggled a bit as she thought and blew a pall of marijuana smoke over Roznick. Mercifully his had gone out, but not before giving him a headache.

‘Now that’ll be, let’s think now, yep last year. Yep, he was gardening at the Brackenbury’s he was then. Came down here for a pint at the Snail and Lettuce when I was serving, that’s ‘ow we met. God he ‘ad muscles that guy. Heh, shall I tell you something, it’s a secret’

Miffy leaned confidentially towards him, and Roznick got the full benefit of her drunken breath, smoking reefer and cheap perfume.

‘He planted dope, yer know dope in their garden’.

‘Marijuana?’.

‘Yeah, he was a scream that Jake. Said ‘ee planted stuff in every garden he worked in, no one ever found out. He would sneak the seeds in somehow and use there hose to water his dope. Quite a laugh eh? There’s a ton of plants there. He showed me them once when I was dropping off stuff to Mrs Brackenbury. She weren’t there but Jake showed me down the back of the garden there’s a sort of lower garden, all grown over and wild it is. It’s all

in there, be huge now. Worth a bob or two, yeah. Be bloody massive yer know’.

Miffy became thoughtful again, and melancholy, as the alcohol wore off and the cannabis kicked in.

‘Yer wont tell?’

Roznick realised that for all her men friends and swear words and drinking she was just a kid. Sex had given her a veneer of age but her mind was still fifteen, and she was worried about being told off.

‘No. You should cut it, harvest it’.

She looked inspired.

‘Bloody well should, I could get Bruce out there on ‘is bike. Be a lark eh? Be worth a ton’.

‘You’ve talked to Mrs Brackenbury?’

Miffy looked bored and a bit tired now.

‘Yeah, oh she’s nice, but I bet she’s knocked up a few men in her time. You can tell, ok she’s a looker but not smart, yer know, not like street smart like me. Sort of arty-farty smart I spose. You know my real name’s Myffanwy eh? Means ‘rare and beautiful one’, honest, the Rev told me that. Used to go to bible class’.

She giggled, and looked down on him generously.

‘Better get off eh? That’s if you want me to?’ she said coolly.

It was a good offer and Roznick appreciated it. Her plump legs were squat over his body, and her top buttons were undone.

‘I’ve got a girl, in Kansas’ he said slowly.

‘Oh’.

‘Kansas is a long way from here’ and he ran his hand along her leg.

Miffy grinned and slumped down on top of Roznick with satisfaction.

‘You’re be my second tonight’ she whispered romantically.

It was almost enough to deflate him, but not quite.

Chapter 10

Her Symphony and Song

Sunday 7 October

They met as had been arranged, at the Society of Friends Meeting in Truro. Gordon had mentioned his occasional Quaker leanings to the reverend and Claris said ‘why, Helena goes to their Meetings too?’ Micklethwaite was pleased by this and did not put up any resistance to the idea that they could go together. They chatted in the car but Helena seemed distracted and didn’t quite get to the point in her usual manner.

‘Thank you Gordon, it’s awkward I know. I could have asked Claris to help but the poor man is quite upset, and I could not think of anyone else to ask’.

Now that phrase to Micklethwaite’s ears sounded cliched, and although he was already half prepared to die for the lovely Helena Brackenbury he thought he should put up a mite of resistance.

‘Your solicitor?’

She smiled at him and gazed steadily into his eyes until he thought he was in danger of melting.

‘My solicitor is a man well aware of his own importance. Actually, he is Harry’s solicitor’.

‘He’s a pompous fart in fact?’

She laughed.

‘Are all New Zealanders so blunt? I thought that was an Australian characteristic.’

‘I’d love to help Mrs Brackenbury’.

So that sealed his doom, and he knew that resistance was useless against that torrent of dark hair and clear blue-green eyes that reminded him of the inside of paua shells he’d seen broken apart on the New Zealand shore.

‘Helena’.

She pulled up the car outside the meeting room and they joined the Quakers and sat in silence for an hour. Although two speakers stood up and gave testimony, it was by and large a quiet Meeting. The shaking of hands broke the spell and after two cups of tea, Gordon and Helena walked out of the Society of Friends room and alongside the Fal River. There was a seat and it was just possible in the pale autumn sunshine to think that it was warm enough to sit down. Almost like lovers Micklethwaite thought and then told himself to grow up.

‘Its been a blissful autumn, St Luke’s little summer they call it here’.

She gazed at the river with flecks of gold leaves drifting by. She said dramatically.

‘So much beauty and here am I in the midst of death’.

‘When’s the funeral?’

‘Tomorrow. Did Claris tell you why I wanted your help?’

Micklethwaite shook his head.

‘As Harry’ she hesitated slightly ‘as Harry was killed by that man, he shouted ‘take that dad, take that’. Now I don’t really believe that Harry was Jacob’s father, but it scares me’ she added ‘I know Jacob’s mother was a prostitute and I know Harry has seen prostitute’s in the past, but...’ she looked at him ‘you see we tried to have children but Harry proved infertile’.

Micklethwaite nodded as if he understood, and cared, but she had plunged so resolutely into this darkened belly of men’s desires and her own personal pain, that he felt nothing but embarrassment.

‘I see’.

‘Could you search the records for me, or perhaps talk to Jacob’s mother? I have her name. Mary Malarchey, but I don’t know where she lives. I could not see her, and I do so need to know Gordon, please?’

He nodded, and began to collect his thoughts from the mushy swamp they had fallen into.

‘They haven’t found the brooch Helena?’

‘No’.

‘Why was it out, I mean, I heard that your husband usually locked it away? Kept it hidden?’

‘Yes, I told the police this, it was strange. Harry said that an American was interested in buying the brooch, was going to make him an offer in fact. This was the time they had arranged, Tuesday afternoon, so Harry was waiting, and Jake turned up...’

‘That backpacker was American’.

She looked surprised as though the connection had not occurred to her, and brushed her hair in a mannerism that charmed Micklethwaite.

‘No, but, yes I see what you mean, but no the brooch was gone when we arrived back at the manor. I’m sure it was, because I was holding Harry and I didn’t see it. Oh Harry, I wish he’d told me more about the American, but he was secretive, he loved secrets. I think it was a habit from his SAS days’.

‘Clariss said that he was in debt. Is that why he wanted to sell the brooch?’

She did not mind the question and gazed dreamily at the river.

‘Yes’.

‘Had Jake seen the brooch before?’

‘Well, I think so, yes I’m certain of it. He had been gardening for us for two to three years, yes I think he had. He must be mad’.

Micklethwaite could not disagree with that, but there was a question he wanted to ask but dared not.

‘Well, I’ll do what I can Helena’.

She looked at him brightly and Micklethwaite could suddenly see the strain in her face. This was a brave woman who was trying to hold things together. He wished she would cry and then he would have an excuse to hold her, but she didn’t, so he changed the subject as she stood up.

‘How long have you been a Friend?’

‘Oh, ten years I suppose, off and on. I’m rather mix and match on the spiritual side, I take the comfort where I can get it’.

She looked a little shamefaced.

‘Actually I alternate churches, isn’t it weird? I wanted the Society of Friends this week, just silence, not hymns, no this week, but sometimes I want to sing, so I go to St. Tristans to see Clariss. I have even been a Catholic on some months, I know this sounds peculiar’.

He shook his head. It made perfect sense to him. His loyalty to the Quakers was shaky, in fact it was mostly a loyalty to his father’s name that made him come to Meeting, and even then he only made it once in a blue moon. He reached for his notebook then checked himself. The ‘blue moon’ entry would have to wait, as would ‘St Luke’s little summer’.

They shook hands rather formally, as if some contract had been agreed to, and after she dropped him off at St Tristans, he saw her wave from the car. He knew that he would do whatever he could to help her, but it was difficult to know where to start, or even what he actually could do. Apart from falling in love with her of course, but it was too late to prevent that.

Chapter 11

Weave a Circle Round Him

Monday 8 October

The paper boy took aim and as usual missed the driveway by a country mile and sent the rolled up missile banging into the hedge, where it rolled down the back and lodged itself behind the rose bush. Mondays were not his favourite day anyway, and it took Swain five minutes to locate the paper and two juicy thorns got him as he cursed the rose bush, cursed the paper boy, and unravelled the Truro Times to find the lead headline that made his temper get worse by the minute.

‘Murder Suspect Attempts Escape: Induced into Coma’.

‘Jacob Dunnett also known as ‘Jake the Rake’, the man charged with the murder of ‘Harold Brackenbury two days ago, suffered severe head injuries when he attempted to escape from police custody yesterday.

‘He was rushed into the Emergency Ward and induced into a coma to prevent further deterioration.

‘The doctor said that Dunnett’s condition had stabilised but would not comment directly on how soon the patient would recover consciousness.

‘It could be days, it could be weeks’.

Swain swore and swatted his head with the newspaper to relieve the pressure on his brain, and his feelings. He lit a cigarette and dared his wife to say something but she was busy getting Gabrielle into her school coat and Dean into his shorts and shoving parcels of food and equipment into their bulging school bags.

‘Bye dad’.

Gabrielle skipped off, followed by Dean whose bag was half open and trailing a scarf.

‘Tuck your scarf in’ he yelled to no effect.

‘I’m late too dear’ his wife gave him a quick kiss ‘bad news about that Jake fellah?’

He nodded and stared at the stubble on his chin in the kitchen window. His wife worked as an administrative assistant at the hospital, so he would probably see her if he checked in on Jake today, not that there seemed much point. He was a gonna, and so was his case. Constable Price had a mournful look on his face as he walked into the office.

‘Getting a good face on for Harry’s funeral are we Pricey?’

He threw the disagreeable newspaper on the chair and ignored the large collection of documents in his in-box. Another day, another dollar, and he lit up his second cigarette and blew smoke into the open filing cabinet. He would be able to charge Jake on the evidence of his rantings so far, but if the bugger died, or lost his mind, there wouldn’t be much pleasure in it, and they wouldn’t be able to find the brooch. The search teams were working on that again yesterday. Getting sick of it.

‘Something came in from yesterday’s search sir’ and Price slid a small tape onto Swain’s desk ‘it’s a bit awkward I feel’.

‘What’s that?’

Swain asked though he already knew; it was small dictaphone tape.

‘Was this in Harry’s machine?’

‘Yes sir’.

Price looked odd.

‘You’ve listened to it?’

‘Yes sir’.

‘Jesus Price, what’s up?’

The constable put the tape into a small dictaphone machine and switched it on.

‘You’re not going to like it sir. I ran it through once this morning’.

It was Harry Brackenbury, speaking from the grave, and as his voice sawed through the air Swain slowly began to swallow his cigarette.

‘Errr, bloody thing, yes, that’s it. Hope the bloody thing’s going, my name is Harry Brackenbury, God knows what the time is. I’ve been stabbed by Boadiceas Brooch and I’m probably dying, or losing blood anyway. I can see it pouring it of me. Can’t have got my heart, otherwise I would be dead now. This louse, ruddy madman Jacob, he used to garden for us, no bloody good at that either. Can’t kill a man, can’t bloody garden. He came in with a sword, threatened to kill me if I didn’t give him the brooch. So I gave him the brooch then my wife came in. She looked at him like she was expected him, no surprise on her face at all. They did it front of me. The witch. Hoisted up her skirts and he got stuck in. She looked at me as he did his thing, smiling at me. Oh it hurts, this bloody thing in my chest. Smiled the bitch did, like it was all planned out, then she took the brooch and pointed at my body and took his hand and put it on the brooch and said, Jesus I can’t

remember properly, but it was something like ‘let’s prick the balloon Jake’ and they pushed the thing right in. Didn’t get me though, I’m still here. Oh, it hurts though. Helena must have been having it off with Jake for months, after all my love and loyalty. I hope you get them, just get them. Finish now, there’s someone coming, it hurts... hurts so much.... there’s a... the man from... poor... lock...’

The last words were hardly discernable and there were a few more grunts before the dictaphone tape went silent.

The voice sounded rough but educated, a Devonshire type of speech, punctuated by heavy breaths and ‘uhs’ and ‘ahs’ as if the speaker was having trouble breathing. Since they knew Harry Brackenbury had a foot long celtic brooch sticking in his body, this assumption was probably correct, but they also knew that the brooch had missed his lungs, and every part of his vital organs then the difficulty with breathing might be shock, or even asthma. There was a sense of urgency and softness in the voice, perhaps he was afraid that Jake the Rake would coming back and might overhear. Or perhaps it was his wife that Harry was afraid of.

Price switched off the recorder incredulously and looked at Swain whose cigarette was out and cold. The ripe guts were there, moments after the murder Harry Brackenbury was telling it how it was.

‘Play it again sir?’

They listened again. Swain rubbed his chin.

‘Get it typed up Price’.

‘It’s a completely different story sir’.

Price liked to state the obvious, and then repeated himself.

‘It’s completely different version from Jake’s story and the wife’s story.’

‘Yup’.

‘It doesn’t make any sense sir’ and his Methodist Welsh soul was offended. ‘Jacob Dunnett said he did the murder on his own, then raped Mrs Brackenbury. Mrs Brackenbury said she tried to stop Jake and gave in to him to save Harry, and then tried to grab the brooch. Mr Brackenbury’s claiming it was a plot to murder him. Why would they do that?’

‘Would you believe a dying man Pricey?’

‘I think so, well...’

‘Why would he lie’ Swain was teasing Price a little.

‘He’s got nothing to gain by lying sir’.

‘Has he got anything to gain if he tells the truth?’

Price stumbled over that one.

‘I’m sorry sir, I don’t understand that. That we can’t trust Brackenbury’s evidence, whatever he says?’

Swain brought his cigarette packet out again and looked into it. Only three left and it was not even lunchtime. He’d never break the habit if he kept up this pace.

‘Is there anyone in this case whose evidence we can trust?’

Swain rubbed his head as if it were hurting and Price stood there and stared at the dictaphone.

‘Should we talk to Mrs Brackenbury again sir?’

‘Well we can’t talk to Harry can we?’ he added quickly for Price’s benefit ‘that’s a joke Price’.

‘I see sir’.

‘Bad taste’.

‘Yes sir’.

The constable’s typewriter started clattering as he noted down Harry Brackenbury’s last dying words. Swain half-listened and half-stared out of the window, noting the brand new drainpipe, which didn’t look any stronger than the last one. He’d always wanted a juicy murder, well now he’d got one.

Wasn’t he complaining the other day that nothing happened in Truro? Now he had a murder with three different versions, not utterly different maybe, but different enough. Harry’s story changed everything, but why didn’t he stand up and do something about the matter? If you saw your wife and lover having sex in front of you wouldn’t you be enraged? He was a big powerful man and by all accounts not used to taking any nonsense.

Swain rubbed his chin and went over to the whiteboard, wiped the whole thing clean and scrawled Harry Brackenbury’s name in the middle and out a circle round it. Then he wrote Helena Brackenbury’s name, circled it and opposite he wrote Jake’s name. Between the two circles he drew a line and wrote ‘lovers?’ It would explain the disappearance of the brooch, if Helena had pulled it out first he mused. By killing her husband she would have got rid of a nuisance, secured the brooch, and would be able to pay off the mortgage.

‘Do you really think so?’ asked Price, looking at the word ‘lovers?’

‘Why does an attractive woman, twenty-five years younger than her husband, stay with a crippled man? Jake the Rake is a handsome bastard, no mistake about it, maybe she was tempted? Solve all her problems at once?’

‘We’ll have to interview her sir?’

‘Hmmm, let’s go to the funeral.’

Swain suddenly smiled and clapped and rubbed his hands together enthusiastically.

‘Pricey, this is going to be fun’.

Constable Price looked horrified.

Chapter 12

A Mighty Fountain

Tuesday 9 October, 5-6 pm?

Only eight people this week were prepared to listen to the Reverend Claris Rolling as he read through the entire poem of Kubla Khan. The loss of three of the audience was worse than it seemed, because in fact four members had skittled off, and one new member had been added. Micklethwaite looked at him and thought he seemed vaguely familiar but not could place him.

‘At the last lecture was cut horribly short, so at this lecture I have to virtually compress two lectures together, so ladies and gentlemen we have to bustle. First I shall read the poem through, and then we will study some of the imagery’.

Rolling paused and coughed then read Kubla Khan, and as Pric elsiteend he was entranced by the rhythm and singing in the words. He had always read poetry in his head so to hear it loud was something of a revelation.

*But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By women wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever*

It flung up momentarily the sacred river.

Five miles meandering with a mazy motion

There was no stopping the Reverend now and he was pacing up and down, all eloquence expressed in his tall stride and long armed gestures.

Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,

Then reached the caverns measureless to man,

And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:

And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far

Ancestral voices prophesying war!

Constable Price was impressed. For some absurd reason he had put on a tie and realised that it made him stand out amidst the nondescript group of working class men and women who sat in their own little desk islands scribbling away. His presence at the Reverend Rolling's lecture on Kubla Khan was best explained by what he had observed at Harry Brackenbury's funeral.

It was quite a turn-out, and Constable Price began to realise how well Harry Brackenbury was known from his numerous radio and television performances. There were over six hundred people, with local big-wigs an all, including the major and mayoress, Sir Giles Chapman, several military men from the army (they had a rifle line-up and volley of shots, very impressive!), and even the local Member of Parliament. It made you reflect on the power of television thought Constable Price, who did not own a television, and was by nature a reflective man.

He took notes, carefully wrote down the speeches, some very moving, and he saw one or two gestures between Mrs Brackenbury and the Reverend Rolling that made him curious. There was the briefest of touches of the Reverend's hand on her shoulder, and the manner of their standing together. Was it rather too close? Or the normal comfort offered between a minister of religion and a parishioner at her husband's tragic death?

'What yer saying Pricey, that they're having it off? scoffed Swain afterwards.

'Oh no sir' Price was shocked at the idea 'but Mr Rolling knows a great deal about the brooch, and it's history. It belonged to the church, so perhaps he wanted it back for the church?'

Swain stared at his constable.

'That she and him got together to knock off Harry and steal the brooch? That's a pretty weird bloody conspiracy theory Pricey, ok, we'll keep an eye on him. Heh, isn't he doing those lectures on that poetry bloke? Koobli what'sit? Why don't you go along and take notes?'

When he demurred, it emerged that the detective-sergeant's off-hand suggestion amounted to an order. So that's what he was doing here, but so far his notes were

entirely about the poem. Rolling was on a gallop as if determined to make up for lost time from the last lecture.

‘Coleridge was fascinated by the underworld ‘a savage place!’, by the Orphic mysteries of death and rebirth, and the celtic rituals and ruins, of which their monuments lay all around him on the lonely Exmoor where he took his many walks, all of these were reminders to Coleridge of the power of the aspect of the unconscious. As a poet he was intrigued by the creative processes that would spring forth astonishing ideas that were not apparent to the conscious mind. It is quite clear that Coleridge took opium, to cure a dysentery he claimed, but I suspect that surely Coleridge’s use of opium was deliberate and not medication. This poem is about the exploration of the unconscious world, a very early attempt to see into the mind using small doses of drugs, a sort of experiment upon himself, and surely the most successful drug-induced experiment in all of the history of English literature’.

Pricey’s pen scribbled away with the best of them and Rolling went on to demonstrate his thesis by utilising key sentences from the poem ‘caverns measureless to man’ (‘mentioned twice’), ‘deep romantic chasm’ (‘the well-spring of poetry’) ‘and from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething, A mighty fountain momentarily was forced’ (‘the creative force erupting’).

‘Is Kubla Khan a masterpiece? ‘A mighty fountain’ of poetic prose? Yet it seems so strange and disjointed? A drug-induced fantasy by a man pre-occupied with the underworld? Or could it be both in fact? How can we take such a piece of poetry seriously when we know that Coleridge took opium immediately before it. Personally I believe it is a masterpiece, and, oh yes, it is over time, you have a bus Mrs Carter, my apologies, I got carried away’.

As a strict Methodist Price had not come much into contact with the passionate side of man, and Samuel Coleridge was ostensibly a man whom he should dislike. A dilettante, a wordsmith, who dodged debtors, wandered moors, took drugs and generally engaged in anti-social activities while decent people worked. Yet the power of Rollings words quite carried him away, and it was not until the hour was up, and people were scrabbling for the door to catch the next bus home, that he realised belatedly that he had made no effective study of the Reverend Rolling from the point of view of any desire or conspiracy to murder.

‘Mr Rolling’ he asked the reverend as he was leaving ‘ did Samuel Taylor Coleridge use drugs for any of his other poems?’

Rolling was delighted to be asked.

‘No, in fact he seemed to regard Kubla Khan as something of a failure, he was not even sure about publishing the poem, because it did not seem to have the coherence of a normal poem. That is why he made it clear to the readers about the slightly unusual nature of it’s genesis. It does seem ironical in these days torrid days, with people taking large portions of drugs to generate fantasies, that Coleridge felt obliged to almost apologise for the chaotic nature of his poem don’t you feel?’

‘Yes sir, but the damsel with the dulcimer is that part of the underworld you spoke of?’ Price asked eagerly.

Rolling ushered Price ahead of him through the door and their voices faded.

‘Well, I was going to talk about her next week, but since you asked....’

Micklethwaite glanced around the room, picked up Claris’s reading glasses, and switched off the lights. It was the ‘sir’ that gave Constable Price away.

Chapter 13

The Threshers Flail

Wednesday 10 October

‘Murder Victim in Financial Difficulties’

‘Harry Brackenbury was indebted to Lloyds insurers was a considerable sum, and he had mortgaged Perbagus Manor.

Neither the headline nor the first paragraph of this morning’s Truro Times pleased Mick Swain. It was as if he was in a race against Ted Bingham, and the bastard was winning.

‘How the hell did he know about Harry Brackenbury’s financial difficulties Pricey?’

Swain looked accusingly at Constable Price who resented it.

‘Certainly not sir, but he must have talked to Mrs Brackenbury surely sir?’

‘Stop calling me sir! Bingham is scraping my scabs and I don’t like it. Soon he’ll be telling us the plot. He’s making us look stupid and he knows it. I bet the little bleeder knows more than he’s let on, and we’ll going to see more of this stuff. We need to get something out of this interview Pricey, and it’s going to be messy, ok? One of them is a liar, but which one?’

‘I presume you are referring to Mr or Mrs Brackenbury sir’.

‘Well I’m not talking about the Queen. What’s the guts on Reverend Rolling, learn anything last night?’.

Price perked up.

‘Indeed I did sir. He’s a fine speaker sir, perfectly eloquent if you know what I mean, an orator in my opinion, and Kubla Khan is a fascinating poem, I’ve never looked at poetry like that before. It’s all the underlying meaning sir, all the metaphors and layers of meaning, very fascinating. A real underworld it is.’

Swain looked exasperated. He said coldly and spaced out his words with venom.

‘I meant did you learn anything about Rolling and this case Pricey, I don’t

want to know about the sodding poem’.

‘I think you’re really missing something sir, it’s a fas...’

‘Talking of underworld have you got her knickers?’

‘Oh, yes sir, right here’ and Pricey lifted up the plastic bag.

‘Let’s go’.

The four chairs in the interview room were ranged on either side of the formica table. Two chairs were occupied by Helena Brackenbury and her solicitor, Mr Tobias Bradshaw, and in the opposite two chairs sat Detective Sergeant Mick Swain and Constable Peter Price, with a whiteboard behind them. One wall had a window, another a door and fourth was blank. A tape recorder sat on the table between the antagonists, and there was nothing else in the room. The effect of the stark room was chilling, which a psychologist might interpret as deliberate social intimidation, designed to empower the police and disempower witnesses and criminals.

Actually, it was all thanks to budget cutbacks. The Cornish police department would have been happy to clutter the walls with gay photos of fine Cornish beaches, or provide padded seats and a coffee machine but there was no money for such fripperies. Unbelievably crime had gone down in Cornwall in the last year and a sharp government accountant had noticed that drop and trimmed 5% off ‘station improvements’, and 4% off ‘computer purchases’, which left Constable Price with his old typewriter and the interview room looking like a monk’s cell.

Swain switched on the tape recorder and self-consciously spoke into it.

‘Time is 11.20 am on Thursday, sorry Wednesday 10th October 1989. Second interview with Mrs Helena Brackenbury regarding her husbands murder...’

‘Second interview?’ interrupted Mr. Bradshaw stentoriously ‘may I ask when was the first?’

Swain blinked at Bradshaw and replied slowly. Tobias Bradshaw was a large man, who breathed heavily even as he sat down. Swain did not like him, but then he philosophically reminded himself, he hadn’t met a solicitor he had liked.

‘At the Brackenbury’s house, an hour or so after the murder’.

‘I don’t think that was a formal interview as such Mr Swain. She was given no formal warning then and it amounted to hardly more than five or six questions, mainly to answer ascertain details of the event and where Mr Dunnett might be. I will record this as the first proper interview. Are you giving a warning this time?’

‘I’m getting there Mr Bradshaw... Mrs Brackenbury, anything you say in this room is recorded and may be used in a trial as evidence against you’.

Helena looked puzzled. She was dressed soberly with a black top and dark trousers on, and it occurred to Swain that officially she was in mourning, that’s if people ob-

served the niceties these days.

‘Why would my evidence be used against me?’ she asked ingenuously.

‘It’s a legal rigmarole Helena. What the sergeant is trying to say that the defence, if Mr Malarchey or Dunnett or whatever he’s called, offers a defence, his defence team may try to shift the blame off his shoulders and put some blame on you, and they will have access to this police file, as we have of course. It’s really not likely’ Bradshaw puffed.

‘On one matter before we continue Sergeant, my client has been through a great deal in the last few days. The funeral for Harry took a lot out of her. She has had little sleep, and has been staying with her sister for three days. She has not returned to Perbagus Manor, except to gather some personal belongings. So she is fragile’.

Swain glanced at Helena who seemed faintly amused.

‘I’m not a dandelion Toby, likely to blow away in the wind. I just cry a great deal. I’d like to go back to Perbagus soon sergeant, tomorrow if possible, so what is it you wanted to talk to me about?’

She was too polite to say ‘question’ instead of ‘talk’. Swain coughed. Her eyes had gazed directly into his and not for the first time he had found them a disconcertingly clear green with flecks of blue. He was cursed with hazel eyes, the eyes of a nobody.

‘Well, mainly today, we would like to formally record your story of events, for the record. As you know we have arrested and charged Jacob Dunnett with your husband’s murder, however there are some inconsistencies in the case which we would like to clear up. There’s no easy way to put this, but some of those inconsistencies may involve details of a highly personal nature, matters to do with the rape’.

Mrs Brackenbury nodded and looked down. Her hands clenched briefly then opened.

‘Yes, I understand’.

‘Really Mr Swain it all seems very plain to me’ panted Bradshaw ‘Helena there may be no need to answer these questions at all. Mr Dunnett has made a confession. There will be no trial. Once Mr Dunnett recovers his senses’.

Swain looked awkward.

‘Mr Dunnett did not sign his statement and currently is in a coma in hospital. We have several witnesses who will state that he murdered Harry Brackenbury, that’s no big deal, but if he doesn’t recover his memory it could be awkward. He might deny what he said, he might claim it was got under duress. Your evidence Mrs Brackenbury becomes more important, and inconsistencies can be used by a defence to weaken the police case’.

Bradshaw sighed heavily and glanced at Helena.

‘Entirely up to you m’dear. My recommendation is this interview will be personally difficult and likely impose a great stress for you. We should wait until Mr Dunnnett recovers. He may sign away his guilt and we will have nothing further to do’.

‘No Toby, I want to proceed’.

Swain nodded to her.

‘Ok?’

He pulled out a plastic bag with a pair of black ladies underwear in it.

‘Is this your underwear?’

‘Really sergeant...’ Bradshaw put in.

Helena looked at it.

‘What is the label?’

‘Marks and Sparks miss. There’s a laundry tag ‘Brack’ on it miss’ said Price.

‘Well, it must be’.

‘Dunnnett claimed he ripped your underwear off before raping you. We found this in his pocket shortly after he was arrested’.

Helena did not blush, but looked surprised.

‘I don’t recall, but...’

‘Yes?’

‘I think he pulled my underwear down, and after he was finished...’

‘Did you change your underwear afterwards? If Dunnnett pulled them off did you put on a fresh pair?’

Not for the first time did it strike Swain as odd that a single item of underwear was called a ‘pair’.

‘No I don’t think so, there wouldn’t have been time...’

‘Because you immediately ran out of the house?’

‘Yes. I was terrified he would kill me next’.

‘Perfectly understandable Helena, really sergeant what on earth are all these questions about? This is utterly ridiculous, you’ve clearly heard Mrs Brack-enbury’s account. I think you had better cease this line of questioning.’

Price was quite sure that Swain would react angrily to this remark of Bradshaw’s, but instead he obligingly changed topic. Was his chief getting sensitive in his old age?

‘How long was Jacob Dunnnett your gardener?’

‘Well, some two years I think, on a casual basis, but we had not seen him for several months. He was a bit erratic, Harry of course could not garden and I

found it too hard to manage on my own’.

‘It’s a fine garden Helena’ Bradshaw said portentously.

‘He worked well? No problems?’

‘Yes he was good, I mean he never worked more than a day or two a month, but he was a nice man’.

The incongruity of that remark echoed in the room. Bradshaw coughed meaningfully.

‘You must clarify that remark Helena, you don’t mean it’.

‘Well I do’ Helena disagreed ‘he was nice man, then, I didn’t think he was going to murder Harry. I am shocked. Jake had a strange mythic way of speaking, as if he was talking in the language of another time’.

‘Jake?’

‘He seemed to prefer that name’.

‘He had no arguments with Harry?’

‘No, I don’t think so. He got on rather well with Harry I think, in fact that might have been the problem. Harry showed him the brooch once or twice’.

‘How long ago was this?’

Helena thought.

‘Perhaps early this year. It might have been more than once’.

‘So you have no idea why Dunnett attacked you both?’

‘None’.

‘You just said that Harry Brackenbury couldn’t garden, but he wasn’t actually paralysed was he? He was able to walk?’

Helena looked sad and nodded.

‘Yes, Harry liked to pretend he was sicker than he really was’.

‘A hypochondriac?’

‘A little’.

‘Why?’

‘You don’t have to answer these questions Helena’ interrupted Bradshaw again.

‘But I might as well Toby. Harry was under a good deal of stress, and that made him a bit hypochondriac. We had financial problems’.

‘You said when you were first questioned that Harry was waiting for an American buyer for Boadicea’s Brooch, do you know who that was?’

‘No. He never told me, he rarely did on business matters’.

‘In your own words, tell me what happened that afternoon’ Swain asked quietly.

Helena straightened up, glanced at Bradshaw, stared at the formica table, and one of her elegant fingers started to trace a circle on the table, and kept on doing so as she spoke. Round and round until she finished, Swain couldn’t take his eyes off it.

‘It must have been about 2 pm, or somewhere around that time. After lunch, I had cleaned the dishes and was lying down upstairs reading and Harry was in his study typing and talking to himself. He has a dictaphone. He was starting an autobiography, and getting quite excited about it. I could hear him chattering away. Then I heard a car come up the driveway and I thought I should go and see who it was, but as I was coming down the stairs I heard the front door slam open and someone charge in yelling at the top of their voice. I saw a figure with a large sword rush into the lounge and heard Harry call out. I was perhaps foolish and should have rung the police then, but I was terrified Harry was going to be attacked and I ran into the study.

I recognised Jacob at once and he swung round and grabbed me and put the sword to my neck. I was petrified, it had happened in seconds. Jacob was shouting at Harry who was trying to stand up from the wheelchair ‘leave her alone’ I think he said and Jacob kept demanding ‘where is it? Give it to me’ or words like that. I do not think I struggled, his arm has pushed my arm up behind my back and it was very painful. I could hardly breathe for pain. I said ‘what do you want Jacob’ and he looked at me and said ‘I want you’. I think my bowels turned to water then. Harry had collapsed back in his chair but said ‘hear it is, take it and go you swine’ and he threw a package across to Jacob, who caught it and opened it. It was the brooch of course.’

She paused but her finger kept moving.

‘There was a strange sort of silence then, I can’t easily explain it. We were all wondering what was going to happen next, even Jake seemed to be thinking. Then he kept hold of me again and grabbed one of Harry’s walking sticks and pushed it through the wheels of the wheelchair and said something like ‘now watch this, I’m going to squire your wife’. I know it was a strange word to say, but that’s what he said, I still clearly remember it. I started to struggle and he was flailing this sword about. He said, I think, ‘if you don’t give me your sweetmeats love then he gets it’.

Well, I knew what he meant and I stopped struggling. He pushed me back to the table, and I looked at Harry and lifted up my skirt. I did not feel I had any choice’.

Helena stopped speaking, and Bradshaw started to say something but Helena just shook her head.

‘Let’s finish it. He raped me. Right before Harry. I looked at Harry trying to tell him with my eyes that it meant nothing to me but I’m not sure Harry understood. He just stared and his face got redder. Then when Jake was done he simply threw me down, grabbed the brooch and held it up high

and said something like, I'm not sure exactly, but it sounded like 'this is from one ancient heart to one black heart'. It almost sounded as if it were rehearsed. I suddenly realised what he was going to do and made a grab for the brooch, but he was too strong for me and he plunged it into Harry. Jacob was shouting all the time. I just fled. I thought Harry was dead and I ran out onto the driveway then down the track to the cliff. I don't know why I ran that way, no that's not true, I do know...'

She paused but did not look up at the three men.

'Helena...' Bradshaw tried to interrupt 'we must stop this'.

'It is stopped Toby. I ran straight into that American, poor man. Well that's my story sergeant. It's the best I can do'.

'You told me that Jacon said certain words to you' Swain asked, more gently than he'd intended

'Oh yes, I haven't forgotten them, as he killed Harry he said 'take that dad, take that, you made a bastard so die by the bastard dad'.

'We've found no evidence that Jacob is Harry's son, have you?'

'No, I can't believe it. Harry was infertile I believe'.

'Do you have any evidence for this? Tests for example?'

'No, but Harry told me and we never had children, though we certainly tried'.

She looked up then, and her finger stopped her circling and there was a tear in each eye.

'Thank you Mrs Brackenbury' said Swain.

'Can we go now?' demanded Bradshaw 'you've got your record and your pound of flesh?'

Bradshaw had decided to adopt the high moral ground, an area of landscape he was accustomed to .

'What purpose was it to make this woman say all this?' he made to stand up.

Now Swain already felt bad about dragging Helena Brackenbury through this personal tragedy again, and also knew he was going to feel very rotten about the next thing he was going to do to her. But it had to be done. He was a good cop, and knew that this chance might not come again. Sometimes a cops life was just a load of offal which he had to shovel, and that wasn't a bad metaphor because this whole thing stank.

'One moment Mr Bradshaw, before you go Mrs Brackenbury. We have a difficulty, as I said before there are inconsistencies in some of the stories. Your story does not match Jacob Dunnetts's...'

'He's a lunatic' Bradshaw shouted 'how can you trust him?'

‘Agreed’ Swain said softly ‘but is Harry Brackenbury a lunatic?’

Bradshaw looked baffled, and Helena stared at Swain.

‘You see’ and Swain pulled out of an envelope the black dictaphone ‘we found this tape in the dictaphone in Harry’s study. He recorded it. Mr Brackenbury didn’t die straight away. The post mortem shows that the brooch missed every single artery and organ. In fact Mrs Brackenbury your husband died from a heart attack, not from the brooch itself, shall I play you the tape? It was made in the minutes after you left’.

Bradshaw stuttered completely (and rarely) at a loss for words. He started to splutter.

‘It’s outrageous, what’s on that tape?’

‘I have a transcript here if you prefer, but I think you will want to hear the tape as well’.

Swain ignored Bradshaw and spoke directly to Helena Brackenbury.

‘Mrs Brackenbury, I have to warn you. It’s a different story from yours’.

‘How different can it be?’

‘I suggest you read the transcript first’.

‘Helena don’t, this is a trap’.

Swain lost his temper at the pompous git.

‘Don’t be stupid Bradshaw! I’m not trying to trap Mrs Brackenbury Bradshaw, I’m trying to get at the truth. Read the bloody typescript yourself. His story is totally different from hers, go on read it’.

Bradshaw had stood up, but Helena remained seated.

‘This is unheard of behaviour. You don’t badger victims like this. I know your superindendent personally and I shall tell what I think. You’re cruel, unprofessional and sex obsessed with all this talk of underwear, I’ve never been to such an outrageous interview. Mrs Brackenbury needs our support and help in this extraordinary time and you are baiting her as if she was a’ Bradshaw searched in the heavens for a metaphor and came up with an out-standingly cliched one ‘Christian in the lion pit. She is the victim.’

Swain interrupted the posturing with deadly effect.

‘That’s not what Harry Brackenbury says’ and he switched on the tape.

As Harry’s voice came growling over a look of stunned shock came on Helena’s face. Bradshaw was still standing, with one hand transfixed up in the air like a Roman senator in the middle of his last speech and the other hand rested on Helena’s shoulders. The four people were frozen into a contrived tableau by the gradually unwheeling tape and the wheedling, desperate gasp of Harry Brackenbury’s voice as he outlined his wives perfidy in short blunt sentences. The tape was about thirty

seconds long and no one said a word.

Price switched it off with a loud click and looked around nervously, but still no one spoke. Swain had watched Mrs Brackenbury's face and saw only horror. He was a bastard alright, but then someone had to be.

'That's Harry, that's Harry. He was still alive' she murmured disbelieving.

'Yes. Do you want to hear it again'.

Swain wasn't trying to be cruel it just sounded that way.

'But that makes no sense' whispered Helena 'he is saying I killed him? That makes no sense? I tried to save him?'

'He claims you were having an affair with Jacob Dunnett, is that true?'

She shook her head numbly.

'He claims you helped murder him?'

She shook her head again.

'I was trying to stop the brooch from going in, I had my hand on it...'

Bradshaw at last had found his voice and pulled Helena to her feet.

'Helena we must go. These are the words of a dying man, a dead man. A lunatic, out of his head. He loved you, of course he did. We must go now...'

He steered her determinedly towards the door, and grabbed a copy of Harry Brackenbury's transcript as he left and blustered.

'You'll be hearing from me Sergeant Swain, by God you will. I won't forget this, what you've done to this woman'.

Neither of the two policeman looked at each other or made any attempt to stop the bulky solicitor tug his slender silent client out of the room. The door closed, and Swain sighed, and leaned back.

'Worth a shot eh Pricey?'

'I don't know sir' Price shook his head sorrowfully 'I just don't know'.

Chapter 14

Chaffy Grain

Thursday 11 October

‘Allo my old tosser ‘ow can I help?’

It was the usual garrulous voice that answered the phone, but Swain was not in a chatty mood.

‘Bingham, how the hell did you know the details of Harry Brackenbury’s statement on the tape?’

Bingham was unfazed.

‘Well that’ll be telling your Lordship, could be confidential eh, protect my sources, can’t giveaway stuff like that not even to a copper of your status eh?’

‘Was it Fat Toby?’

‘Orr, I’ll tell him that’ and Bingham chuckled ‘he’s a porky beast all right is our Toby, lots of dudgeon about him you know? Very high and mighty dudgeon, still couldn’t say my old mate’.

‘I’m not your mate. I could have you in here for jeopardising police inquiries’.

Bingham knew it was an empty threat. After thirty years as a crime reporter he knew police procedure better than they did.

‘Go ‘orn my matey, see if I care. Make a great little story that, I can see it now, Journalist Arrested in Klink’.

‘You call yourself a journalist now?’

‘Yeah, I’m getting posh. Found the pretty brooch yet?’

Bingham knew the surest way to get up Swain’s nose.

‘Bingham you’re a prick!’

Even as he slammed the phone down he heard the rasping, disagreeable chuckle. There was a long silence in the police room as Price gazed studiously at his papers and Swain let loose with a volley of colourful oaths learnt in those hard sweaty rugby days. The *Truro Times* was face up with the embarrassing headlines displayed:

‘Harry Brackenbury’s dying words, and Mrs Brackenbury questioned intensively and a titillating sub-heading Police recover missing underwear’.

Not all of it was there. There was no mention of Harry’s accusations against his wife, but plenty on police harassment, so Swain guessed the likely source of the story.

‘You shouldn’t let him upset you so sir, he’s just doing his job’.

‘I thought you said he was a slimey git Pricey? You’re defending him now?’

‘It’s really the solicitor we should complain about sir, why would he tell the newspapers that?’

‘He didn’t like the way things are going. Who’s the public going to believe? A live wife or a dead husband? Who would you believe?’

‘But he’s made it harder for his client, Mrs Brackenbury, surely sir?’

‘Pricey, you think Ted Bingham ever writes what people want him to? I tell you Fat Toby ran off to his mate Mawson, you know the editor, and complained about police brutality, and Mawson put Bingham on the job. Toby raved away and Bingham scribbled away, but Bingham wrote down stuff that wasn’t supposed to be written down. Notice he’s kept the real juicy stuff back? Bingham knows how to keep a story going. Doesn’t help us, but I suppose it doesn’t matter. The issue is we have to decide Pricey, eh? Who’s telling us whoppers? Who do you believe?’

Swain rubbed out the old whiteboard and drew three circles and wrote in each ‘Helena Brackenbury’s story’, ‘Jake the Rake’s story’ and ‘Harry Brackenbury’s story’.

He then drew lines between them and on the line linking Harry Brackenbury and Helena Brackenbury he wrote ‘completely contradicted accounts’, and on the line between Jake and Helena he wrote ‘underwear’. Then he stood back and gazed at it. Price coughed and raised the matter tactfully.

‘About the underwear sir, I’m not sure I...’

‘See the point?’

‘Yes sir’.

‘Read the statements, or the ravings of Jacob Dunnett’.

Swain walked over to Price’s tidy desk and snatched up the painstakingly typewritten notes.

‘Here ‘Then like any other warrior I took out my instrument of pleasure, ripped off the bitches knickers and enjoyed her right on the desk inches away from Brackenbury’s popping eyes. You should have seen the bastard stare. I

cast her away once I'd done with her, and she ran off. I held up the brooch for the enemy to see...' blah blah'.

'Look at what was in his pockets, a pair of black womans underwear. Soiled, not freshly laundered as if they were stolen from a washing line, but used. So how did Helena Brackenbury find time to put on new undies if she sprinted out to the cliff, and knocked into Charlie Roznick? In fact in her statement she specifically said she did not have time to put on new undies, so, where does that leave us?'

'Do we know she had underwear on sir, when we arrived?'

'Yes we do Pricey, I saw them'.

Price raised his Methodist eyebrows and Swain defended himself

'I'm a man that notices these things Pricey. Must be the peasant blood'.

Swain stared at the whiteboard for more inspiration, but nothing happened. His brain was moribund.

'If we could find that brooch sir?' Price suggested.

'Hmmm, what's the guts on Jake?'

Price perked up.

'I rang the matron this morning. He's awake and talking according to her sir. Quite lively. Almost a full recovery she says'.

'Well we better talk to the bastard, get another confession I suppose, fill in time' he said gloomily

Constable Price started to pull on his jacket but looked at his boss with a puzzled air.

'Even if Jacob confesses sir, we still have evidence that is different from that confession?'

'I ask the question again Pricey, would you believe a dying man?'

'I think I would sir.'

'Why?'

Price looked confused.

'He has no reason to lie'.

'Unless he wanted to get back at her?'

'But only if Mrs Brackenbury really was cheating on him, surely sir?'

Swain ruminated to himself.

'Do we know it was a happy marriage?'

The interview with Jacob Dunnet was brief and went badly. He looked well enough,

with his beard trimmed, his hair combed, sitting up in bed eating his lunch surrounded by a bevy of nurses who fluttered around him as if they liked handling his splendid body. Certainly Jacob accepted the attention as if it was his right, and he smiled when the police officers approached, and introduced themselves, and Swain momentarily took this as a good sign.

Each question was responded to politely and quietly. No, he couldn't remember what had happened. A drainpipe, no his mind was a blank. Mrs Brackenbury? No, he had no idea who they meant. Boadiccea's Brooch, he'd never heard of it. He'd murdered Harry Brackenbury? Well that must be true, but he couldn't remember it. Swain got annoyed.

'Come off it Jacob, you're telling me you've forgotten everything?'

Jake the Rake assumed the face of a saint and nodded politely.

'You were charged with the murder of Harry Brackenbury, you remember nothing?'

'Indeed, that is the case. I can see your anger, but my memories have gone to the four winds, if it's a confession you want, I'll confess. Anything you want?'

Swain's jaw dropped and he lost his temper.

'Don't play smart arse with me Jake, we have your statement and the evidence of Mrs Brackenbury.'

Jake the Rake kept eating his lunch with gusto and nodded agreeably.

'Then it must be so gentleman, I will sign whatever you wish. These maidens are healthy beauties aren't they? Splendid virgins for a chief such as me.'

The matron tugged on Swain's jacket coat and pulled him out in the corridor. The Detective-Sergeant was far from happy and told the matron in no uncertain words what he thought, but she stood her ground.

'I think Jacob is still quite unwell, after a fall memory often gets lost'.

'Lost his marbles? Nah, I don't believe it, it's a fake'.

'Really Mr Swain, what else would you expect? After a fall like that? And induced into a coma?'

The two policeman returned to their office glum and Swain wrote 'mad' beside Jake's name on the whiteboard, and then put a question mark beside it.

'You think he's making it up sir?' queried Price.

'I'm bloody sure of it Pricey, but if he sticks to his story we're stuffed. Look at that pretty bunch of witnesses eh? One a dead man, one a mad man, and another a distraught widow. Do we any hope of getting to the bottom of this?'

He slumped in his chair and looked the picture of misery, and Price wondered what he could do to cheer his boss up. After a long silence Swain started thinking aloud.

‘Police investigation is a rational business Pricey, it works on building up evidence slowly and fitting the pieces together. I don’t expect every piece to fit you know, but you don’t need all the pieces of the jigsaw, just enough of them, and eventually you see a picture right? But this case is on another planet. It’s like we don’t know whose evidence is more or less rational than somebody’s else’s. Which pieces fit where? What motive would Harry Brackenbury possibly have for dobbing in his wife, unless she really was screwing around? But Jake reckons he was just a one man band, an avenging angel, helping the world get rid of Harry Brackenbury.

Mrs Brackenbury protests love and honour to her husband, tried to save him in fact, and there isn’t much evidence to doubt it, yet. We’ve got three bloody murder stories but they don’t agree, not even slightly. And no damned brooch. Where is it, eh Pricey, we have to find it. If we find it tossed over a stone wall like he did with his sword, or in Jacob’s room, then we can believe his story right, but if we find it in Helena Brackenbury’s boudoir then she’s been telling fibs. I can’t make the stories fit together and I can’t make them cancel each other out: each story stands alone, yet you can’t have three different stories, its impossible. Two people are telling us lies, not one person, but two!’

Swain walked about in frustration, for he could see the crux of the problem clearly now. With some agreement between the stories he could have eliminated one of them, but if none of them agreed, then it was impossible to eliminate any one story. And the only person that could be realistically interviewed was Helena Brackenbury.

‘I’m gonna have to talk to her again, this time without tubby Tobias’.

‘Mrs Brackenbury? I think I agree sir’.

‘Thank you Price’.

‘It’s like Kubla Khan the poem sir, I mean it’s full of hidden meanings and subtleties. The evidence we see on the surface of this murder is only a partial view I believe sir, and once we understand the unconscious motives of these intertwined people, then we will get to the heart of it. Their actions will then resonant with meaning I believe sir’.

Swain just stared at him as if one of them was mad, and he was not sure which one.

Chapter 15

Floated Midway on the Waves

Friday 12 October

The county police department had an internal management session every month at Falmouth, and Mick Swain surfaced at noon after a gloomy immersion with police budgets, building maintenance and recruitment programmes, into a gorgeous sunny day and walked down to the docks. Two ladies of the street were wobbling over the cobblestones on their high heels, and he could see that a grey naval frigate had just manoeuvred in with encouraging puffs of black steam from the funnel.

‘Good business today girls’ he shouted in mock encouragement.

‘Oh hiya Mick, yeah, gotta get there quick before the girls at Nancy’s. See yer!’

He must have arrested both of them a dozen times, but had no hard feelings, it was just a game. Good girls really, one was even bringing up two kids on her own.

At the ferry wharf he leaned over the railings and watched three boys fishing for spotties off the harbourside steps. They should be at school of course but today he didn’t feel like playing truant officer and remembered when he too played hookey, and went with his mates down to the river. Funny he ended up a cop, he’d been in trouble a bit at school, but like St. Paul had a conversion or something. The sun felt warm on his neck and he went through another cigarette as the boys landed a dog-fish, and he glanced at a couple along the railing from him giving each other a short embrace, and then he quickly turned his face away. It was Helena Brackenbury and Gordon Micklethwaite, very friendly like.

Lovers? He looked sharply again, but there seemed to be a gap between them now and they weren’t holding hands. Helena was rummaging in her bag and gave some documents to Micklethwaite who thanked her and shook her hand. He walked off up into the town and she bought a ticket on the ferry to Truro and boarded the boat. In for a penny in for pound, Swain did the same, and as the ferry chugged out gently into the vast Fal harbour the sun glittered on the waters and the seagulls screamed.

Helena Brackenbury was sitting on the sunny side, and there was no one else near.

He sat down beside her.

‘Oh inspector, I didn’t recognise you at first. I thought I might have to deal with one of those annoying men’.

He corrected her.

‘I’m actually a detective-sergeant Mrs Brackenbury, Mick, Mick Swain’.

She shook his hand.

‘Helena’.

She had on a sort of dark coloured jerkin over a blue top, with black slacks. Of course he knew bugger all about clothes, but he could at a glance that they suited her, and that she had good taste.

‘Do you often get strange men chatting you up’

He meant this as a joke, to cover his awkwardness at the meeting, but she took it seriously.

‘I have this strange allure to men it seems, you cannot believe how many approach me, even if I wave my marriage finger at them. Doesn’t seem to discourage them. I try saying I’m a lesbian but that doesn’t seem to work either’.

She laughed at the absurdity of it. Mick Swain found it perfectly reasonable that men were drawn to her, he was too, but he had not analysed exactly what her secret was.

‘I was going to give you a ring anyway Mrs Brackenbury’ he couldn’t quite bring himself to say ‘Helena’, ‘have you moved back into Perbagus Manor?’

‘Yes, it feels very strange, but I have to come to terms with it’.

‘You won’t sell up?’

‘I might, but I don’t want to. It would be like admitting I was truly defeated, and I don’t want to feel defeated’.

The ferry had pushed right into the harbour now and was making good time up the Fal River. The banks looked far away, like a foreign country. The side of her face was bright with sunshine and it looked lovely, unblemished even if she was forty-five, she was a gorgeous forty-five. Get on with it Mick, this was work.

‘The problem is Helena that we have three different stories, and only one can be true. Why would your husband say those things about you?’

She shook her head sorrowfully and cupped her hand around her chin and rested her head on it.

‘I have asked myself again and again, I do not know, I simply do not know. Perhaps he had a lover? But I don’t think so, he visited prostitutes from time to time so I suppose that our sex life was not very extraordinary. I shouldn’t

tell you this, but I was not in love with Harry, but I was loyal to him. I like mens minds, better than their bodies really. Why one cannot get both the lover and the true companion in one person I don't know, but perhaps men complain of the same thing? I think they do'.

'Do you know how many men I have slept with Mr Swain? Just two, it hardly qualifies me as a femme fatale does it? I was a twenty-four and still a virgin when I met Harry, though it was not through lack of offers. I have said no to almost everyone else before then, but I seem to have this strange attraction for men. They see me as a sex object, even though, the truth be known, my sex drive is not particularly high. Even you Mick, would like to sleep with me. I can tell'.

Swain was left numb at this directness. If he had been less in control of his emotions he would have blushed to the roots of his hair. What could he say? Deny it? Deny the truth? But she didn't seem to be waiting for his denial anyway, so perhaps she had heard it all before.

'That was Harry's real grief, he couldn't have children. He tried hard enough, with me of course, but also other women. He used to brag that at least he did not need to wear a condom, but inside, it hurt him. He came from a large family and wanted kids, wanted them desperately. But isn't it the way, inspector, that you always want the thing you cannot get?'

He felt mesmerised and couldn't take his eyes off her.

'Perhaps Harry hated himself for not being able to have children, and so hated me. I don't know. He was dying and I'm inclined to believe that he wasn't himself at that point, otherwise how can I live with his accusations?'

Suddenly the ferry gave a blast on it's horn to a careless yacht that was wallowing into it's path. Swain stood up to see what the yelling was all about then sat down again. At least it broke the spell. She looked at him with an amused eye.

'Surely you don't believe I'm having an affair with the gardener Mr Swain? That's just ridiculous'.

Helena looked at him appealingly, and he could see that she honestly wasn't trying to manipulate him, just pleading with her eyes. He coughed and muttered.

'We've talked to Jake the Rake again, I mean Jacob Dunnett, but he says he remembers nothing now. That bang on the head seems to have destroyed his memory. As for your husband, well he's dead and we can hardly ask him. You are the only person who we can really ask questions of anymore'.

'So why don't you believe me then?'

He was disconcerted by her straightforwardness.

'Well, we do, but there is contrary evidence Mrs Brackenbury'.

When he talked formally like that he started to slip back into formal titles. The river had narrowed and soon the ferry would be docking at Truro quayside. He made a

good attempt at a lie.

‘I don’t really want to sleep with you’.

She smiled.

‘I’m pleased Mick, now we can be friends’.

She held out her hand and he accepted it, and then changed the subject.

‘You saw the Truro Times yesterday?’

‘Yes. He makes me sound like a depraved widow who loses her underwear easily’.

‘Ted Bingham seems to have it in for you’.

‘Yes’ she sighed ‘we were engaged once’.

Swain was shocked more than incredulous.

‘What, you and Ted Bingham?’

‘It is surprising isn’t it? But I was very young and naive, eighteen and he was a dashing young reporter, and I thought writers, any writers, were special’.

She gazed into the distance whilst Swain digested the barely credible fact that Mrs Brackenbury and Ted Bingham had once been lovers.

‘We were only engaged for only a month, 1962, I broke it off, came to my senses I suppose. My parents had separated when I was young, and I hardly knew my father. Perhaps I was searching for a father figure, perhaps I still am. Yes, probably I am’ and her voice drifted off dreamily

Swain coughed, the next question seemed indelicate.

‘Helena, you just said you were a virgin when you married Harry?’

She laughed.

‘That question shows you are a good policeman Mick. You see engagements in 1962 were still very proper in Cornwall. The Beatles and hippies and free love did not quite make it down to here. No sex until marriage, goodness me no, so Ted had to wait, and in the end he missed out. Poor Ted’.

Swain was relieved for some reason, and made a joke.

‘Ted can cope, he’s got a thick skin’.

Helena turned to him quickly.

‘Oh no! You’re completely wrong’ she said as the ferry nudged the wharf
‘Ted feels every slight, he remembers every hurt. That jolly language of his, it’s just a shield, I know him Mick, I know him very well’.

Swain was nonplussed by this but had no time to reply. She held out her hand again.

‘Please come and see me, at Perbagus. I want to end this affair too, for my own sake of course, but I will help anyway I can. I’ve looked for the brooch myself but I don’t know where it went. Jake must have taken it’.

The ferry graunched a little against the row of car tyres, and the few passengers were slow to step off, as if reluctant to leave the clean quiet waters of the Fal and rejoin the poisonous land. The boatman had to chivvy them along.

‘Thank you Helena, I mean Mrs Bracken...’ he was completely muddled.

She nodded and smiled and stepped off onto the quay and walked into the town.

Mick Swain followed for a short distance then turned along the road to the police station. He nodded to a colleague and for only a few steps wondered what it would be like to make love to her. That was a crazy aching thought, and he made a deliberate effort to change the topic in his head by staring hard into the first shop window he found, but his aim was poor. It turned out to be a window full of exotic women’s lingerie, which didn’t help at all.

Chapter 16

Her Dulcimer She Played

Friday 12 October

After Gordon Micklethwaite left Helena Brackenbury he sat down at a sticky table in a small coffee bar, where the music was playing an old song by Adam Faith, and flicked through the transcript that Helena had given him. It was Harry's last speech, and a good one. He certainly went out with a bang.

The 'Births, Deaths and Marriages' department had been a long slog yesterday and he'd nothing much to show for it. He had shown Jacob Dunnett's birth certificate apologetically to Helena, for in the space allowed for fathers name, it just had one word 'unknown'. But Helena saw something immediately, the date.

'Look at that Gordon' she said excitedly 'Jacob Dunnett, born November 1944, well Harry wasn't even in England then. He was in Burma I think, I could look up his war record. I'm sure he was overseas almost entirely from 1940 to 1948, because he told me he missed the Blitz and everything'.

She gave him a spontaneous hug, which ended rather too quickly from his point of view.

'Thank you Gordon, I'll look up Harry's war record, but I think you've helped me enormously, oh I must dash, the ferry's leaving, thank you again'.

Even in a rush Helena managed to look elegant, and he returned to the memory of her hug several times in a peaceful daydream.

He felt a little guilty thinking about Helena, because as well as researching Jake the Rake's birth, he looked up the marriage certificate of the Brackenburys. He was quite taken aback to find that 'Harold David Brackenbury' had taken for his wife one 'Eleanor Mary Trotter'. Then of course one thing led to another and he looked up Eleanor Trotter's birth certificate, and found that she was the daughter of Major John Trotter and his wife Edna, born in 1944. That made her forty-five, a pretty well-kept forty-five too.

'Another cuppa love?'

‘Oh, yes, thanks’.

With an effort Gordon focussed his mind back on Jacob. Ok, he had sorted out that Jake probably wasn’t the son of Harry Brackenbury, but why did Jake believe that? Did Harry tell him? Or someone else, his mother perhaps? And the brooch was still missing and he couldn’t quite shake off a niggling doubt that perhaps there was a third person lurking amongst the crowded shrubbery of Perbagus Manor that day. Where was Claris on that day?

The implications of this horrible thought did not please Micklethwaite at all, and he gulped down the coffee too quickly and it burnt his tongue. To distract himself from the notion that the Reverend Rolling might have something to do with the disappearance of the brooch he started reading the cafe noticeboard, and immediately saw a faded advert for ‘Bloody Mary: Gypsy Queen of the Guitar: sea-shanties, songs and squeeze-box’. The advert was strong on alliteration, and she’d been playing in this cafe three years ago or so.

When the tea lady came round again to move the sticky from one table to another he asked her about the ‘Gypsy Queen’.

‘Oh her? Nah, I wasn’t working then’ she yelled out ‘Doris! Yeah Doris you remember that Gypsy women, Malarchey was her name, yeah. Drunk as a skunk, heh. No, what you want to know love? Where she lives? You know where she lives Doris!’

The conversation was held by exchanging powerful yells between the tea lady and the hidden women in the kitchen doing the dishes. Micklethwaite cringed.

‘Yup, ok, Dorcas Lane? Yeah up the hill. A caravan you say? Ok, yeah, he wants to know? Why do you want to know love? She’s a bit old for the game you know, you can get lots younger here’.

This brought a guffaw from two lorry drivers opposite and Micklethwaite hastily paid up and exited. The town information map didn’t show a Dorcas Lane so he asked a taxi driver.

‘Dorcas sure, that’ll be two quid’.

The taxi wound about the one-way system of the town then started a steep climb out through the suburbs and into farmland with copses of woodland and flashes of brilliant views over the Fal.

‘Anyone in particular you’re after? They don’t ‘ave numbers here. Oh Bloody Mary, yeah, sure I know her’.

The taxi turned abruptly at a junction and Micklethwaite caught a glimpse of a signpost and they were edging down a tree-lined lane, gloomy even on this bright day. At a broken gate the taxi stopped,.

‘There you’re, that caravan there? Shall I wait?’ he asked hopefully.

‘I’ll walk back thanks’.

The driver leaned out.

‘I’ll tell yer something for nothing, you won’t get any sense out of her, I never did. Still owes me for rides years back. A community bloody service for old whores I am’.

He did a grumpy three point turn and took off down the hill and Micklethwaite unlatched the gate and watched it fall with a pathetic thump onto the wet earth. In hindsight it was obvious that the latch had been holding the gate up.

It was still, strangely still, and the old caravan looked deserted, though Micklethwaite smelt a hint of woodsmoke in the air. A big old oak tree half shaded the caravan which was painted a vibrant purple, and there was some sort of faded mural on the side with the words ‘Gypsy Girl’ legible but the rest had flaked off. Both wheels had fallen to the ground and the caravan was propped up by blocks of wood, but not very well, for there was a distinct east-west lean. A sort of vegetable garden had been abandoned by the door and a huge stand of silver beet was turning into a shrubbery. A large white cat sat on a pile of firewood, soaking up the remains of the day. It looked like a witches cat, but as Micklethwaite went to stroke it it stood up, arched its back and purred vigorously. Cats had always liked him.

‘Hallo? Anyone home?’

Silence. He knocked on the door and heard a vague stirring inside.

‘Hallo’ he shouted again, and a face peered out at him. The door creaked open.

‘Hallo dearie, ‘ow can I help. Malarchey the name, Mary Malarchey, though I’ve given up the game you know?’

Micklethwaite was relieved to hear it. To say that Mary had a well-travelled face was to state the obvious. The lines that ran around those saddish eyes, were sculptured deep and hard. Her skin was blotchy and over red, the sign of a drinker Micklethwaite supposed, and her hair was grey and unwashed with a dead flower stuck behind her ear. Her clothes were an assemblage of odd layers, like an over-loved doll, with a little head sticking out the top of a padded jacket. It must be cold in her little caravan.

‘Can I ask you a few questions Mary, about your music career. I’m from the *Falmouth Gazette*’.

The improvement in Mary’s face at this remarkable news was immense. Her eyes had a spark inside them, and she hastily waved him grandly into the caravan tidying as she went, and selecting the best seat after turfing out another cat. Micklethwaite sat down and produced a very professional little notebook, which he had just bought at Smiths twenty minutes ago, and adopted a suitable pose with the pen poised. For Mary it was a vision of utmost felicity.

‘Well, my dearies, I can’t say I’m that surprised you’ve wanted to talk to me at last. missed me out you have, and with a wonderful career an’ all. What’s your name? Desmond? I had a cat called Desmond, got run over by a truck,

bit stupid ‘e was, but now, so what do you want to know?’

‘The whole thing, you know when your career started?’

Mary sat down and hugged her knees in absolute delight. There were some strange smells in the caravan, probably cat meat mostly, so Micklethwaite breathed through his mouth and got ready for a long session.

‘Where did it start my lover, can I call you Des? Well, oh such a long time ago. This calls for a celebration, a tipples?’

Mary reached back and pulled out a small whiskey bottle, half full, and poured into daintily into two dirty glasses standing on the tiny dresser.

‘Cheery Des, now where did it start? Gypsy, I was, call us travellers in those days, but we always called ourselves Romees, Romanies you know. It was a life on the road, a wonderful life. Now my mother, she could sing, oh yes, and play flute an all’.

The story was told, gradually, with many inbetween tipples, of a girl born on the back of a wooden waggon in the 1930’s, moving constantly, with a father more in prison than out and a mother with many admirers. Dancing and music around the campfires, selling trinkets in the markets. No schooling of course, and she learnt to read by stealing children’s books from the Mechanics Lending Libraries. They travelled all over England, but in the winter stuck to the south west in Devon and Cornwall. Often they’d camp on the edge of the moorlands, which were common lands, or on army land that the soldiers weren’t occupying, and they provided a good source of rabbits, till they were moved on. Evidently, they were always moved on. Some vicarages were kind, some vicious, and they were frequently hungry. Men from town used to arrive on an evening at her mother’s waggon, so it was little wonder that young Mary learnt the ways of the world. At ten she was playing in the ‘Gypsy Orchestra’, ‘making grand money dearie’, and she had a natural talent for singing so at fifteen had professional photos taken and set herself up as the ‘Gypsy Queen of the Guitar’ working the town markets and workingmen’s clubs. At some point she adopted the stage name ‘Bloody Mary’, probably at the same time she started to get a taste for the bottle.

Micklethwaite scribbled away, mostly nothing, just scrawls that looked vaguely like shorthand writing he’d seen. So far he hadn’t learnt much and soon she was going to be flaked out. The half bottle of whiskey was gone and her speech was slurred, with heavy lids threatening to extinguish the daylight. She was starting to ramble.

‘I live love, love is my philosophy. Oh yes my dear, it could be a sailor, a farmer, or a clergyman. They all have stiffies my dear, and I take their energy and transfers it into love’

She looked at him slyly and Micklethwaite hastily changed the subject.

‘Do you have any photos Mary, of your early days?’

‘Oh my treasures they are’.

She hooked a finger around her neck and flicked out a silver little key.

‘All my treasures are in my treasure box, oh yes, I was a fine lookin’ girl, and could have my pick of men you know? And did’.

She giggled, and Micklethwaite glanced around and guessed that the key might fit into a small locked drawer in the cabinet by her bed.

‘With men, you know, handsome is as handsome does I always say’.

‘Can I see a photo Mary, of your early days, I mean one that could be printed in the newspaper, Mary? Mrs Malarchey?’

A deep snore came as reply and Mary Malarchey had her mouth wide open and eyes firmly shut. Micklethwaite snapped his notebook shut and sighed.

What a waste of time! He hadn’t even asked about Jacob’s paternity, though he doubted if he’d get a straight answer. Of course there was that key.

He looked around nervously and shut the caravan door firmly. Getting the key off her neck was no easy task, she had so many layers of clothing on, but eventually he twisted the chain around until he could unhook it. Initially the key didn’t want too work, and then Micklethwaite realised the drawer was already open!

He found a small pile of money as well as her ‘treasures’. Jacob’s birth certificate, though it still said father ‘unknown’. He couldn’t find her birth certificate, if there ever was one, but there was a promotional picture of her taken about 1946 or so in her gypsy queen costume and manhandling a guitar. She was ‘Mary Malarchey’ now, not Mary Dunnett, and a striking girl. Long dark hair and a bold attractive face, yes the men would like to look at her. Quite a beauty. There were two copies and Micklethwaite spontaneously slipped one of them in his pocket. There was also a picture of Jake taken on his 21st birthday, dated 1965, Micklethwaite looked at it closely, then pocketed that as well. He made a mental note to ring his mum about that photo on the wall.

Now, how to get the chain back? It was a struggle because Mary had slumped forward and buried her head into her chest. After a struggle with her lolling head he succeeded, and got out of the caravan hastily. The cat was still sitting on the wood pile and looked up hopefully at Micklethwaite, but he was eager to leave the smell of cat meat and decay behind, and he didn’t even bother to resurrect the gate, but stepped over it. It was a gonna anyway, and somehow he didn’t think Mary Malarchey would be around much longer either.

Chapter 17

A Waning Moon

Sunday 14 October, night

A sombre parade of scudding clouds moved across the dark headlands. Here and there pools of starlight, and then a full moon that broke through to pour a cold light on the icy seas. Birds rustled in the hedgerows and at one point Roznick heard something coughing ominously very close by.

‘What’s that?’ Roznick whispered nervously.

‘Don’t be bloody daft, that’s a sheep that is’ giggled back Miffy.

‘This is crazy’ whispered Roznick

But her torchlight was already away and bouncing along the narrow coastal path. He stuttered along behind, hitting overhanging branches and terrified of tripping over a tree root and plunging down the cliff face to a watery doom. He wiped the sweat away and glanced at his watch which said 2.15 am.

He couldn’t believe Miffy had taken him seriously about a midnight raid, I mean couldn’t they just buy the stuff from a dealer or something? Miffy seemed to have eyes like a bat as she ran along the cliff path and he couldn’t keep up. He banged his torch several times because the contacts were loose, and nearly jumped halfway to the moon when a voice said colloquially in his ear.

‘Want a fag?’

‘Jeez Mif, don’t do that!’

She giggled, then said loudly.

‘We’re almost there you know, this is Caragloose Head this is’.

That was the scary moment. Roznick couldn’t see a thing until suddenly the moon broke out from behind a cloud and he saw the same seat he rested on nearly a week ago, and the dark spot where he stood when Mrs Brackenbury ran into him saying her husband had been murdered. Murdered in fact by the man who Miffy had been

having hot sex with only a month or so before. Now that was really weird.

‘Keep your voice down’ he hissed.

‘Who’s ‘ere? That tart will be asleep, romantic isn’t it?’

Just his luck to be saddled with a nymphomaniac. Myfanwy Pendgarven would sleep with any man, in any position, in any location, anywhere, but Roznick was not feeling erotic tonight. He could still remember Mrs Brackenbury disheveled eyes, and smooth dark hair, and he could remember the slow steps he took as they walked back up the path to Perbagus Manor. The moon was sucked away again, and he pulled hard on Miffy’s arm who was starting to stride up the path.

‘Hey wait girl, where’s the garden?’ he whispered.

‘It’s right here, behind this wall, look through this gate ‘ere’.

A long stone wall ran beside the path, all the way to the manor in fact, which looked blacked out and grim. Miffy fumbled open the gate and they were inside the walled garden.

‘I came and ‘ad a look yesterday’ Miffy giggled ‘ere they are’.

A long row of old tomato plants stood against the southern wall, catching every piece of sunlight. Roznick’s torch ran along them and swept around the rest of the garden, until he realised that this was a dead giveaway and he hastily switched off. He was still sweating, and getting cold.

‘Oi, I can’t see now’ complained Miffy.

She was ripping up the plants roots and all and stuffing them into a large canvas bag, but Roznick didn’t want to switch the torch back on, and waited anxiously as Miffy got stuck in.

‘Yer saving yer strength or something?’ she complained.

‘Hurry up, haven’t you got enough?’

‘More ‘ere’ she muttered,

Her strong arms wrenched out two more plants. Roznick was looking around and suddenly noticed a dim light down near the coastal path. He grabbed Miffy and tumbled her down on the wet soil.

‘Quiet!’

He hissed out and put his hand over her mouth. She bit his fingers and he grimaced, and decided to kiss her to keep her quiet. That seemed to work, in fact it worked too well. By peering round Miffy’s compliant body he saw the strange light move up the path beside the wall, and sweet Jesus the light was getting closer! As a well-brought up Baptist boy his sotto voce language would have appalled his parents.

Meanwhile Miffy had been fondling something in his groin area but now she too saw the light, and froze. They were mesmerised, as the dull flickering light moved slowly along path, but was hidden from them by the stone wall. It sounded as if

someone was softly singing. As the light reached the gate, it paused and Roznick saw an old-fashioned lantern placed on the top of the wall, and he desperately pushed Miffy down firmer into the mud to shut her up. He distinctly saw a long arm reach out and snip the gate. In that moment he saw the light shining distinctly on the face of Mrs Brackenbury, and in her other hand she was holding a flower, a sort of lily. Underneath him Miffy was complaining in low grunts, but he kept his weight firmly on her in the only satisfactory moment of the night.

The lady of Pebagus Manor would only have had to turn her head fractionally to see the prone figures in her vegetable garden, but she seemed to have no reason to do so. Roznick thought she looked as if she was in another world, a lady of the lamp, floating along at midnight. Her hand picked up the lantern and moved on up the path and got swallowed into the darkness around the manor house. Then a light came on in the house and Roznick started breathing again.

‘Who was that?’

Whispered Miffy, who had struggled out out from underneath Roznick’s body and managed to see the phantom lady .

‘A bloody ghost, that’s what it was, let’s get out of ‘ere Charlie. It’s not right’.

She was a superstitious Cornish lass through and through, and although Roznick thought there was some perfectly reasonable explanation for Mrs Brackenbury wandering around on the dark cliffs of Cornwall, he was equally happy to foot it behind Myfanwy who had made a fast trot back down the path and along the cliff track again, scattering tomato plants as she went.

Almost twenty minutes later, when they crossed over the stile back onto the lane that led to the village of Veryan, Miffy slowed down enough to get her ciggies out and puffed away.

‘Did yer see that! A real ghost, wreckers I know, me mum’s seen them as well. Ghosts of wreckers with lights an’ all’.

Roznick borrowed her fag for a puff or two.

‘Oh Charlie, that was something eh? You and me, funny you fancying me like that eh? There’s a barn ‘ere you know, used it before, how about it heh?’

Roznick was still not feeling erotic but allowed himself to be pulled into an old barn, and perhaps stimulated by the evening’s exercise, did a competent job. Then they argued over what to do with the weed they had gathered, and eventually threw it over a bank. An hour later they crept through the dark streets of Veryan, and Miffy slowly unocked the rear kitchen door.

‘It’s ok, me mum’s still snoring, betcha’.

They were halfway across the kitchen when the light suddenly clicked on and illuminated them as startled rabbits. Miffy screamed, and Dolly Pendgarven was looming formidably in the doorway with a broom waving above her head. Roznick was

frozen stiff until the broom whacked him about the head, and as he tried to protect himself he got more whacks on his body. Dolly was yelling.

‘You dirty little yank, you leave my daughter alone! What time is this! You come creeping in like a rat, you’d better not have touched my darling...’

‘Mrs Pendgarven I can explain...’

Roznick retreated backward under the blows, and knew presciently that no explanation regarding ‘her darling’ was going to suffice. Then Miffy really helped the situation by screaming out at the top of her voice.

‘Well I love him mum, I love him, an I’m gonna have his baby. Pregnant I am, you’re gonna be a father Charlie’.

The broom stopped walloping him, but only because Dolly was so flabbergasted by her daughter’s confession that she couldn’t bring any strength to her arms, and in the middle of frozen family tableau Charles Roznick made his escape, and in his mind had already booked an urgent passage back to Kansas.

Chapter 18

Sank in Tumult

Monday 15 October

*'In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea'.*

Constable Price overheard the poetic language before he'd arrived at the office door, and he was most surprised to see his superior officer reading aloud from a book of poetry. His face was a picture.

'A man is allowed to educate himself Pricey' said Swain defensively 'who was Kubla Khan anyway?'

'A Chinese Emperor sir'.

'Ok smarty-pants, what about this sacred river huh? Alf now, was he a relation of George or Ted?'

'I don't think so sir' said Price in his best Welsh sing-song, ignoring Swain's deliberate baiting 'it is a reference to Alpheus, a beautiful nymph who in order to avoid the advances of Arethusa, changed herself into a spring to evade him, but he changed himself into a river and mingled with her. Very romantic sir'.

Swain was impressed and baffled.

'Do you know everything Price?'

'I try to sir'.

'You want my job?'

‘Eventually sir’.

‘Hmm, got the paper? The bloody paper boy missed again, I’ll kill the little bastard one day’.

Price passed over today’s copy of the Truro Times and Swain found the headline he was after on page three.

‘Self-Confessed ‘Celtic Warrior’ Jake the Rake Recovering in Hospital’.

‘Boadiceas Brooch still missing, police searching grounds with metal detectors’.

‘At least it’s not on the front page anymore’.

‘I don’t think that’s a consolation sir’.

‘You mean we’re losing the plot?’

Swain had spent most of Saturday, ringing up antique dealers, and plodding around their shops trying to find if anyone had been approach by a mysterious American buyer, but it was a thin day all round.

‘Are we searching the grounds of Perbagus Manor Pricey?’

‘We did that last week sir, three times. And all around the stone hedges, everywhere I think’.

‘Oh. Did we use metal detectors?’

‘No’.

‘Let’s do it’.

‘Is Edward Bingham leading this investigation sir?’

‘No Pricey, but he might as well be. He’s got better ideas. Get on with it’.

A head poked around the door and an American mid-west twang came with it.

‘Mr Swain? Hi, Charlie Roznick, they sent me up here. Yeah, hey I’m off up to London on the train, but I thought I’d just kinda drop in and say good-bye. Yeah, can I put down this backpack... ahmm you don’t need me again huh?’

Swain was somewhat surprised.

‘No I don’t think so Mr Roznick. He’s signed up hasn’t he Price?’

‘Yes sir, right here’

Price whisked the statement out of thin-air from his immaculate filing system.

‘Sometimes you’re just too efficient Pricey’ as Swain glanced over it ‘you want to add something to the statement Mr Roznick?’

‘No, no, yeah, well. Look, since then, you know that murder, I did something pretty stupid sir, well a couple of things I guess. I wanted to tell you

sir’.

Swain looked oddly at him, then waved to a seat. Americans were so often determined on self-mortification.

‘One stupid thing at a time, what was the first?’

Roznick looked embarrassed and glanced at Constable Price hammering away at his typewriter.

‘You know, I guess, Dollys got a daughter? Miffy, yeah well, she and me, well we got together. An item’.

Swain was trying hard to suppress a smile. He forced his serious face on.

‘Are you confessing to fornication Mr Roznick? I don’t think we have got that crime on the books’.

Roznick grinned sheepishly.

‘Yeah ok, give me a hard time. I deserve it, I mean she’s under-age.’

‘Miffy Pendgarven?’ interrupted Price ‘what age has she been telling you boy? She’s at least nineteen’.

Roznick looked shocked.

‘Hell! She told me she was sixteen, I mean, I guess I believed her. I mean she acted sixteen’.

Swain was enjoying this.

‘Well looks like you’re off the hook Mr Roznick. We can’t get even you for underage sex. What’s that plaster on your head?’

Roznick touched it sensitively.

‘It’s sure sore. Dolly found out last night about me and Miffy, and banged me with her broom’.

‘The witch’.

Swain was grinning now.

‘It’s not so funny...’

Swain begged to differ.

‘You shagged the landlady’s daughter and she walloped you with a broom. Do you wish to lay charges?’

Even stiff-necked Price was smiling around the tensed corners of his mouth.

‘Hell no, I mean, that’s not what I came to tell you about’

He half got out of his seat in annoyance, but Swain waved him down.

‘Sit down Mr Roznick. Myffanwy Pendgarven is not a virgin, she’s well past sixteen and well known for her addiction to the vice of men and booze.

You're not telling us anything we didn't already know.'

'She likes her dope too'.

'I can see that'.

Roznick completely missed this irony, which only confirmed Mick Swain's poor opinion of Americans.

'I mean, I think she hooked up with that Jake the Rake. You know the guy you did for the murder of Mr Brackenbury...'

Swain nodded, and only the tightening of his interlocked fingers gave any indication of his heightened alertness.

'He plants dope everywhere. In the places he gardens, you know, that's what she told me anyhow'.

Price had stopped typing and was scribbling down notes behind Roznick's back.

'So?'

'It was her idea, I mean if I'd thought about it I'd have said I was crazy. We went back to Perbagus Manor, the Brackenburys place to pick some of the grass.'

'Grass?'

'Not real grass, you know, dope, weed, cannabis stuff'.

'What day was this?'

'It wasn't day, it was night, last night. Just after midnight. Gee I know it sounds crazy, we were drunk, but we sure sobered up when we saw Mrs Brackenbury'.

Swain glanced at Price.

'She came out of the house?'

'No, the house was all dark...'

He explained how they'd crept up the path, got into the garden over the stone wall, and in the middle of their pruning saw the jiggling light approaching them.

'And you are sure it was Mrs Brackenbury?'

'Yeah, got a really good look. The moon was up a bit and she had this weird old-fashioned lantern, jeez it gave us the creeps, holding it up like a kerosine lantern or something, so it spread light all over her face. She looked like Lady Macbeth'.

'And she was carrying a flower you said?'

'Yeah, sort of one of those lilies.'

Swain looked at Roznick for a long time.

‘Anything else?’

‘We just ran. Once she went up the path to the house, we just dumped the weed and we helled out of there like buck-rabbits. Man it was scary, like seeing a ghost. I didn’t think I was a scaredy cat but we blew off that cliff like bats’.

‘And went home?’

‘Yeah...’

Roznick hesitated, he didn’t particularly want to mention the next part, but it all came out. About the quick sex bout in the back of the haybarn, then a big argument with Miffy and they crept back at 5.30 in the morning, trying to sneak in when Dolly came at them. Miffy burst into hysterics, proclaimed she was pregnant at which point Dolly whacked him with the aforementioned broom and he just ran up to his room grabbed his backpack and cleared out.

‘Miffy said she was pregnant sir’.

Swain put his head in his hand and Price wasn’t sure if he was crying or shaking with laughter. His next comment was muffled.

‘Then it looks like a good time to leave Mr Roznick. Anything else?’

‘No. You can think the worst of me if you like, but I saw Mrs Brackenbury, that was all true, and Miffy, hell I’m not the only one you know. I don’t think it’s my kid, hell I don’t even know if Miffy was telling the truth anyway’.

He looked embarrassed and stood up to leave. Swain stood up too. Roznick pulled out his wallet and laid some pound notes on the table

‘Look, I feel bad I didn’t pay Dolly what I owe her, but I can’t go back. Can you pass it on to her?’

‘We’re not a rent collection agency Mr Roznick’.

‘Yeah I know, but I don’t know anyone else, and I’ve gotta catch the train. I don’t want you guys to think I’ve tried to skip without paying’.

Swain nodded and picked up the money, and passed it over to Price.

‘Mr Roznick’ Roznick paused as he was pulling on his backpack ‘I read your statement, but there’s one more question I wanted to ask you. Did Mrs Brackenbury have any underwear on when she ran into you?’

‘I beg your pardon sir?’

‘I’m sure you heard me mate the first time. Knickers, did she have any knickers on?’

Roznick looked between Price and Swain, bewildered by the investigative methods of the English police.

‘I, I didn’t see, I mean why the hell would I know...’

‘She’s an attractive woman, you might have noticed’.

‘Sure, but I don’t go round looking to see if girls have got their underwear on’.

‘I do. Look, don’t stand on your yankee pride. Did she or didn’t she? Mr Roznick you don’t have any difficulty getting into girls knickers so I thought you might have noticed one way or the other’.

Roznick looked confused.

‘She did...’

‘What colour?’

‘Eh?’

‘What colour?’.

‘Black, no that was her bra. No her knickers were black too, yeah’.

‘Matching set’.

‘Yeah’.

‘Thank you for that information, have a pleasant journey’.

Roznick looked as if he expected some more smart remarks, so Swain obliged.

‘In our country Mr Roznick there is no law against putting a bun in the oven of the landlady’s daughter. You’re free to go’.

Roznick gave one dirty look at Swain, grabbed his backpack and left. Swain shook his head and burst out laughing.

‘What do you make of that eh Pricey? A bloody comedy’.

Price however, begged to differ.

‘What about child support sir? If it’s his?’

‘Are you going to bother to prove it? No, we can forget that. This is not the Sperm Detective Agency but’ and his voice changed from mirth to mirthlessness in a half second ‘but a murder inquiry. What was Lady Macbeth doing wandering the cliff ramparts at midnight?’

‘A guilty conscious sir’ said Price in his clear Welsh voice.

‘Well, you don’t like her, but that’s how Shakespeare saw it, and he understood the frailties of humans better than policeman, not that I ever understood Shakespeare’.

‘You never read him sir?’

‘I’m a peasant Pricey, you know that. I dig in the dirt’.

A silence descended on the room as Price started scribbling notes from the interview

with Roznick.

Swain rubbed his chin and stared out of the window, looking down at the black asphalt where Jake the Rake had plummeted.

Not for the last time did he wonder: what would you be thinking if you jumped off a cliff like that? Would there even be time to think? Would you enjoy the moment of flying? Your last few moments on planet Earth would be a pleasant fantasy, no, no, it wouldn't be like that. You would be petrified, screaming your head off surely, but maybe not. People had witnessed jumpers from buildings and swore that they heard screaming, yet when other people were interviewed it turned out to be the crowd that was screaming. The jumper fell in a deathly silence, whilst the watchers felt compelled to live the fear vicariously. Just showed you how stupid people were.

'Here they are lovey, the terrible twins'.

Edward Bingham poked his head around the door and shattered Swain's reverie, and he pulled a rather forlorn looking Mary Malarchey after him.

'Come on, yer gonna say your piece eh? She's had a mysterious visitor haven't you Mary.'

'What's this about Ted, we're busy'.

Bingham feigned surprise.

'Of course you are, I can see that, as the blind man said to the deaf man. Well Mary here told me yesterday that this bloke visited her, poking about, asking questions'.

'He did, spoke nicely he did' said Mary absentmindedly 'but you know fine words don't butter no parsnips'.

'I've never heard it called a parsnip before my love. She wants to lay a complaint don't you Mary?'

She looked at Price and Swain, her eyes improving with this attention.

'He said his name was Desmond, from the *Falmouth Gazette*'.

'No such bloody bloke Mary' interpolated Bingham.

'What did he look like Mrs Malarchey?' asked Price soothingly.

'Oh, young, nice and young, Desmond 'e said. That's what he said, sure as eggs is eggs. Desmond, wanted to know all about me'.

She preened herself a little, then Constable Price, who had not quite grasped the essentially absurdity of the situation, said a peculiar old-fashioned voice.

'Did he threaten you?'

Swain rolled his eyes skyward.

'Well, you might say that dearie, no 'e was nice, but he dishevelled me you know. 'e fondled my treasures'.

Price looked alarmed, and reached for his notebook

‘Really. Go on Mrs Malarchey’.

Mary had perked up considerably under this favourable attention, and whispered low, as if to take only him into her confidence.

‘Found the key to my treasures he did, took it off, put it back, but it was all back to front you see?’

She hooked out the little key from around her neck and wiggled it. Price looked puzzled as Bingham scoffed.

‘She keeps stuff in a little box, it’s her ‘treasures’ she calls it. Reckons the geezer raided it, though I can’t see what for. It’s just photos and knick knacks, she lost her real treasure years ago, and her marbles’.

‘Try and be kind Ted’.

‘What with this old fart? I thought it was you blueberry boys up to your tricks, but it wasn’t. Dunno who this geezer was, impersonalising a journalist, that’s not right’.

‘You’ve been impersonating a journalist for years Ted’.

Swain was pleased with this witticism, and sat on his desk and swung his leg.

‘So sharp Mr Swain, so bloody sharp, mind you don’t cut yourself. I’m been running a good story on this brooch, been a country mile ahead of you plodders I reckon’.

That was uncomfortably true but Swain wasn’t going to admit it, so he abruptly changed the subject and addressed Mary Malarchey, who had gone all mooney eyed.

‘Who was Jacob’s father Mary? Harry, Harry Brackenbury?’

Mary face creased in reminscenses

‘Eee’ was in the forces yer know, an handsome man, an’ a lovely uniform’

She giggled and drank another mouthful of tea and muttered ‘handsome is as handsome does’.

‘Jacob must have asked you, what did you tell him?’

‘Good boy Jacob, good boy, you’re going to set him free?’

She now became maudlin and the next cruel thing Swain said made her cry.

‘He’s never going to be free again Mary’.

A sort of disagreeable wailing noise started to come from her and she looked like a wizened old witch. Swain got tired off the performance before the curtain was half lifted.

‘Get her out of here Pricey. Bingham, I’d like a word’.

Constable Price cajoled and pulled Mary Malarchey out of the room and Swain reached for another cigarette and then remembered the ten-step plan he was supposed to be on. Oh stuff it, he lit up.

‘So how can I help my old tosser?’

Bingham laid a friendly paw on Swain’s shoulder and Swain looked at it as if it was a poisonous toad. A shrug disposed of the hand.

‘Why you’d bring her in?’

‘She’s daft as a brush right? Still, I thought my old matey there’s something strange about a bloke poking around her’.

‘You knew Harry Brackenbury pretty well, was he trying to sell the brooch?’

Bingham pretended to be serious.

‘Maybe, maybe not, didn’t mention to me me hearty, but secretive he was’.

‘We’ve been told he was waiting for a buyer, the afternoon he was killed’.

Bingham thought about this as if he was thinking.

‘No, can’t see he said anything to me, me old chopsticks, can I use that?’

His face looked up, for all the world like a well-greased ferret. Swain would dearly like to punch Ted Bingham right in his oily moosh, but nodded instead.

‘This story’s has made you hasn’t it Ted?’

Bingham looked pleased with himself.

‘I’d heard you were close to getting the chop’.

The features editor of the *Truro Times* was in Swain’s darts team. The rumour was that Bingham had been put on notice, either put up or get out. Harry Brackenbury’s murder couldn’t have been more timely.

‘Now who’s been telling you that? I’m a ‘valued part of he team’, that’s what his nibs Mawson told me the other day’

Mawson was the editor, an obsequious little prat in Swain’s opinion.

‘Yep this Brooch thing ain’t done me no harm at all, as the actress said to the bishop. Buggers from London have been ringing me up all day, hallo Mr Bingham, nice Mr Bingham, got any goss Mr Bingham? Hey, I’m doing bloody marvellous you know, free beers every lunchtime, pork pies every day...’

‘Pork pies is rhyming slang for lies Ted’.

‘Yeah well, there’s a few creep in...’

‘Old habits die hard’.

Bingham looked a little offended, genuinely offended, which surprised Swain. May-

be Helena was right after all, the bloke did have feelings. He had never found a weak spot in Ted Bingham's armoury before, which was often the case with worms. Every spot was weak, and yet every spot could somehow sprout again.

'Am I treading on yer toes a bit Swainy?' this was needle now, personal.

'You haven't learned much in thirty years have you Ted?'

Bingham got aggressive.

'That's where your wrong me old cobber, I've learnt heaps. A lad like you wouldn't know much about my trade. Cops only want journo's when they're after something, you know? Here journo, journo, just write this. Put this in the paper for me, spread the word, get this little sod. Titbits, that's all I've had from you, and not much credit, but this stuff is different. I know these people better than you, and I know a few things that you don't. I'm on top of my game with this matey, and you better be me nice to me, or you'll see some headlines that will make your boss gag and get you a right boot up the bum.'

'Sod off Ted'.

'Sure me ol' chum, but you'll see. Ted Bingham's going to give you a nasty surprise one day soon, see you matey'.

Constable Price came in the door as Ted Bingham went out with a cheery 'have a nice day'.

'What's that all about sir?'

'War Pricey, ancestral voices prophesying war'.

Swain simply could not get a grip on this case: a simple case of murder it wasn't, but what the hell was it?

Strange men chasing Mary Malarchey the half-mad Gypsy Queen. A beautiful femme fatal with no sex drive and who wanders the cliffs of Cornwall at night. A dead opium eater with a debt management problem. A completely mad Celtic warrior... he sighed a note of self-pity. What ever happened to all the normal people in the world? And now something was eating Ted Bingham, boasting of things he knew, but seriously, would anyone trust a small-time reporter with a long history of making up stories?

Swain gazed at the whiteboard for inspiration.

Fact one: no jury would accept Harry Brackenbury's accusations, not once they had gazed into the lovely Helena's eyes. Fact two: even if he was to disbelieve her, how could he charge her with accessory to the murder without Jake the Rake's evidence? There was going to be no joy in that direction, so it was better to keep it simple, if he could. Fact three, he could ask Jake why he killed Harry Brackenbury, but even before he cracked his noggin Swain doubted if Jake would make any sense, so coming right back round in a massive bloody circle, he had to keep it simple.

Jake the Rake would be arraigned before the court, the charge sustained based on his first statement, and the evidence of what he said in *The Green Man*, and he would be convicted, and deposited into an asylum. Fact four, the only missing piece was Boadicea's Brooch, if he found that, everyone would be happy. Including the super, since his other work was suffering, though Pricey looked after most of it anyway. He needed to bring the case of Boadicea's Brooch to a close, that was all he wanted, apart from Helena of course, so perhaps he should see her again. Oh God.

'What the hell happened to it?' he said this out loud by mistake.

'I'm sorry sir?'

'Nothing Pricey.'

If Jake threw it away they would have found it. If Helena had lied they would have found it. Unless, someone else was there? What a busy little place Perbagus Manor was on that murderous afternoon. He tried this idea on Pricey.

'Do we have any evidence for a fourth person sir?' asked Pricey doubtfully.

'Nope'.

Pricey's eyes suddenly widened.

'Oh yes we do sir' Pricey corrected him eagerly 'I remember Harry Brackenbury's statement, right at the end, he says'

Pricey then whipped out the aforesaid document just like that, pure genius that Pricey.

'The man from... poor... lock... the man', see sir, what man sir? Had someone turned up?'

'That could have been Roznick?' objected Swain.

'He is American sir. Though he arrived with Helena'.

'Yeah, and he's interested in sixteen year old virgins, not antiques Pricey. Still, a man... It's not much to go on is it?'

In the juice of his police marrow Mick Swain knew that he had no rational reason to support his new theory, yet he was tempted by it. He picked up the poetry book again and read.

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

Weave a circle round him thrice

And close your eyes with holy dread,

For he on honey-dew hath fed,

And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Call me a peasant, he muttered to himself, but quietly so that Pricey wouldn't be offended, but this poem, like this case, don't make the slightest bit of sense.

Chapter 19

Ceaseless Turmoil Seething

Monday 15 and Tuesday 16 October

Bingham's wife had booted him out four months ago, and he'd shifted into a back room of *The Green Man*. Well good riddance to bad rubbish. He wasn't particularly sorry about it, they hadn't been having sex for years, and the kids were all grown up and bugged off. She didn't like him and he didn't like her. Surprised it had lasted as long as it had.

'The way I see it Bert is that it's my natural right, to have a bit hokey pokey eh, she can't deny me. So if she ain't delivering then there's no reason why I can't sample some of those lovely Russian tarts down at the docks eh. Fairs fair'.

'Absolutely Ted'.

'She kicked me out 'cause she said I was having an affair?! Doesn't it make you laugh? How can you have an affair with a pro, I ask you? Well she did me a favour. Nice little room, no hassles, good pub meals, I'm rich as a king Bert. All me mates here, yeah she did me a favour'.

'Yer gonna get a divorce then Ted?'

'Nah mate, can't be bothered'.

Yet when Ted Bingham went up to his room late that Monday evening, he looked at it and knew it was just a small crummy room in a run-down pub. The flowery wallpaper had stains on it, and his one window looked over the rubbish skip, not that he ever pulled the curtains aside to look down. The tap in the corner had seized up. The neighbours were a bit odd too. The next door room had been Jake the Rake's, till he went mad, and there was a dodgy real estate dealer who kept trying to flog off some Caribbean plots he'd got dirt cheap. Well, it would have to do, soon, maybe very soon, he'd get better than this. Like all men who live on their own, after a while he had got into the habit of talking to himself.

'Bloody Swain, cocky little bastard ain't 'e. Jumped up cop, no bloody idea really. Yeah, you show him Ted, you show him what's what'.

He reached under the bed and found a small bottle of whiskey, and poured himself a generous nightcap. Despite hanging around pubs most of his life, Bingham rarely drank heavily. Too much alcohol made him sick, as he'd discovered too often, so he faked it with his mates. They didn't seem to notice, or care as long as he kept his share of the shouts going. But this whiskey was good stuff, and lately he'd had trouble sleeping, so this served as sleeping pill, though each week he seemed to need a bit more to do the trick.

'Bloody Swain, still they don't know' he chuckled 'stupid bastards. If they knew they would have done me by now, so they don't know, and with Jake half barmy they probably aren't gonna know anyway'.

This got Bingham thinking about Jake and the brooch.

'Wouldn't do no harm to ask 'im, but use yer nut me boy, remember what e' said about the Queen? That's the way to get 'im'.

With this little bit of inspiration Bingham yawned, pulled off his trousers and rolled awkwardly into bed. He was getting a bit stiff these days. On the bedside table there was a small photo wallet, and he flicked it open and something fell out and rolled on the floor. He picked it up and looked at the portrait for a long time.

It was a black and white photo of a young pretty girl, with long dark hair, in long baggy shorts which she had closed together primly. She looked happily at the world, which was full of promise but undoubtedly she was ignorant of it. Her face had an unfinished quality, not yet hardened by life's experiences. Perhaps she was only seventeen? Her hand was displayed carefully to the front of the picture, that was the point of the photo, for it had a ring on it.

That was the object that had fallen out, and Bingham turned it over in his hand. It was a sweet little thing, a bit of ruby in a 15 carat gold band, all he could afford on his wages as a cub reporter. Bingham slipped it back into the wallet and looked at the photo again, then turned it over, as he had done for many years and would in all likelihood be turning it over for many years to come. The inscription said: 'Eleanor Trotter, 1969'.

II

Next morning, late, Bingham drove his rusty Anglia around to Veryan to have a chat to Dolly Pendgarven. Didn't know why he hadn't thought of it before, but not much got past Dolly's eyes and ears, and hadn't she worked for the Brackenbury's as a housekeeper once? He was not very pleased with today's story, 'Mysterious American buyer for Boadicea's Brooch', which only got onto the fourth page because the Mayor had delayed the ratepayers meeting on the sewage outfall. He sniffed, sewage was more important than murder, but he took the hint and thought that he better start to come up with some more hard stuff to keep the story rolling along. He had one good headline left but he was saving it up. Saving it up for sweet Eleanor.

Suddenly he changed gear and direction, Dolly could wait, and he drove up the short driveway to Perbagus Manor. He pushed the doorbell nervously, and even straightened his tweed jacket. She opened it.

‘Hallo Edward’.

‘Eleanor, or is it Helena now?’

It was a sort of faint smile in reply, and she motioned him into the drawing room, where Harry Brackenbury had died. Bingham glanced around, it looked the same.

‘I wondered when you would come’ she said simply, and sat down.

Bingham felt awkward, but then he always had done before her.

‘Well Eleanor, you know, Harry being killed and what not, didn’t seem right’.

‘Those stories in the paper were not very fair Ted’.

‘Oh, those stories, its just newspaper stuff, you know? Editor on my back everyday, people forget that sort of stuff, anyway most of it’s true, bit hyped up I suppose. That’s the subbies that do that, chose the headline an’ all. Tabloid stuff’.

‘What do you want Ted?’

Bingham rubbed his lips and looked around.

‘Always was a nice place here you got, real nice. Heard that Harry was in a bit of debt you know, can you keep this place?’

She shrugged.

‘I don’t have any money’.

Helena knew that with a reporter like Ted Bingham she should be careful in what she said, perhaps warn him that this conversation was off the record, but she constitutionally was not built like that. She was forthright.

‘But the brooch be worth a bob or two eh?’ he suggested.

‘But I don’t have it Ted, is that what you wanted to know? Besides, I think it belongs to the church’.

‘What you reckon Harry stole it?’

Bingham sensed a story, though that wasn’t why he had come.

‘No, but Derrard Brackenbury, his great grandfather probably did. You know the history, you wrote about it from Claris’s book’.

‘Oh yeah, Claris Rolling, he’s a friend of yours?’

‘A good friend’.

Now Bingham wasn’t stupid. He knew that when people said a ‘good friend’ they might mean a whole lot more, but he also knew that Eleanor was not like that. She

said what she meant, she always had done.

‘You know Jake said Harry was his father?’

‘Yes, but I do not believe that. Gordon found the birth certificate...’

‘Father unknown, yeah I know.’

Helena was curious.

‘What is she like, Mary I mean?’

‘She’s a drunken whore’ Bingham replied affably ‘that’s all she is. She’s ‘ad so many men, I don’t suppose she hardly knows ‘erself. This Gordon bloke, has been doing work for you, asking around like?’

‘He just looked up the archives for me. I’m almost sure Harry was away in Burma at the time Jake was born, but I wanted someone to find out. It’s ugly what Jake said, I don’t how he could have said that’.

‘You’re still lovely Eleanor’.

She looked at him steadily, and it made him flustered.

‘Been a long time you know, me and you’.

She nodded as if this was obvious, and he made his move by standing up and placing his hand on her shoulder.

‘We used to have more than just a chat once Eleanor.’

She didn’t look at his hand.

‘But not everything Ted’.

‘I know, don’t remind me. But I want everything. I’ve wanted everything for a long time. You know I haven’t put it in the paper about what Jake said, nor have I put Harry’s statement in the paper. I can keep it out you know’.

‘So are you blackmailing me?’

‘I’m saying that Harry wasn’t loyal to you, my dearie, at any time. The girls down at the ‘The Sailors Retreat’ can tell you that’.

‘And you are loyal?’

‘I never stopped loving you Eleanor.’

‘Loving or desiring?’

‘What’s the difference lovey, you know there’s no difference? Don’t tease me Eleanor, otherwise I’ll print it. That Jacob was Harry’s father, now how would that look eh? And Harry reckoned you murdered him, sensational stuff’.

Helena looked startled and brushed her dark hair back over her shoulder. It was not intended to please anyone but the movement enraptured Bingham. He felt he was that close to having her now.

‘You think I’m capable of murder?’

‘You’re a beauty, but you’ve got brains there lovey. Not like most I know. Clever they are, but not deep like you’.

She looked at him with the clear eyes of someone who was beginning to lose hope that anyone would understand her. The old game of flattery that Harry played so well, little suited Ted Bingham. No matter how many of his personal attributes Bingham turned on, the charm still oozed out as if squeezed from a grease-gun.

‘What do you want Ted’ she said tired of the game.

‘I want you, I always did. I never got you, remember? So I want you now, that’s not too much to ask is it? A favour to your old fiancée, where’s the harm in a night of fun. I’ve waited a long time eh’.

She looked at him, and there was nothing in her look that suggested she found him either attractive or repellent. He kept talking, ever hopeful, but failing to realise that she had lost interest and that his words were only dribbling into empty air. She stood up.

‘No Ted, print what you like. You’d better leave now’.

Bingham didn’t say anything, grabbed his jacket and went to the door. He looked at Helena as if to say more, but he didn’t. Helena locked the door carefully behind him. Bingham walked back to his car, and turned towards Veryan.

III

‘Now of course I shouldn’t say, but Harry Brackenbury he’s got his secrets, oh yes. Another tea love? That Helena, quite something I say. The men follow her with huge saucer eyes, oh yes. Bewitching I reckon. She’s a Christian though, I’ll say that for her, and believes. Well, it’s a strange tragedy I suppose, and where’s that brooch Ted?’

‘Dunno lovey, yeah pour me another one’.

Bingham was sitting in Dolly’s kitchen, with a large pile of fresh-baked fuggan before him, into which she was tucking into at a great rate.

‘Go on. You look parky, help yourself’.

‘Thanks Dolly, how’s that girl of yours?’

Dolly threw up her hands in horror.

‘Says she’s pregnant with that yank, oh Gawd! And he’s packed his bags and left for Kansas. Miffy says she’s going to follow him, oh she breaks my heart that girl. Makes no sense at all. You talk to her Ted, you’re a family friend. Tell her to tell me the truth’.

Ted Bingham liked this idea immensely.

‘I’ll do my best, sort of father-like eh? Shoulder to cry on. You can rely on Teddy Bingham to comfort the girl, give her support you know’.

‘Your sons all grown up now?’ she asked slyly.

‘Yeah, and before you ask the missus kicked me out and I don’t care’.

‘You’re just saying that, it must hurt you Ted. Thirty years of marriage?’

Bingham felt uncomfortable and moved the topic on.

‘Didn’t you tell me that you cleaned for that reverend chappie, Rolling?’

Dolly’s mouth was full of fuggan but with a big gulp she got there.

‘Oh yes, real gentlemen he is, of the old school, beautiful manners, you could learn something from him, you could Ted. Vegetarian he is, eats poorly though, teddies and points, gawd my George would have had a dozen fits if I served him that’.

‘Teddies’ were potatoes, and ‘points’ were if you could see the meat ‘point’ to it, suggesting it was a mean, meatless meal.

‘Can’t teach an old dog you know, what’s ‘e do all day?’

‘Well he walks, walks a lot and writes, you know historical stuff. He’s not usually about when I clean in the mornings, goes for long walks, very healthy he is’.

Now Bingham had not been a reporter for years without being able to detect nuances in the way people said things, and he knew Dolly from years past. His wife and Dolly used to go to school together.

‘Any goss for me ol’ girl?’

‘Now Ted, what would I know?’ she said teasingly.

‘You might fossick around a bit you know, papers left out all that sort of thing. You’ve helped me a lot over the years Dolly’.

She was born to gossip and could no more help it than the wind could stop itself from blowing. She looked around conspiratorially, stood up and opened up a small tin jar called ‘Malt Extracts’. She took out an envelope and handed it to Bingham, then snatched it back.

‘This is ‘tween you and me isn’t Ted? You won’t take it no further? Promise?’

‘Promise love, cross my heart and hope to die’.

‘Ok then.’

He got the envelope back and unfolded the note, which was written in carefully elegant phrases. He swore under his breath in his excitement.

‘Got the bitch on a plate now!’

Dolly protested.

‘Ted, I found it, you know, by the back door in the bushes. Must have been blown there, and it’d had opened up, you see all the mud. Well look at the date, it’s an old note ain’t it?’

She pleaded these excuses for her voyeurism. Bingham reassured her, and slipped the note into his pocket

‘It’s between you, me and the lampost Dolly you beauty. You’ve come up trumps.’

‘Heh, that’s mine’ Dolly protested as Bingham stood up.

‘You’re get it back, promise my love, now I gotta go’.

‘We’re you’re going Ted?’

‘Business Dolly, business. Not a day for dawdling eh. See yer’.

And Ted Bingham was out of the kitchen and up the driveway before Dolly could say another word. She heard him whistling as he went, and then tried another piece of fuggan to comfort herself.

Chapter 20

Through Caverns

Tuesday 16 October, 5-6 pm

It was cold and raining that afternoon, the third of Claris Rolling's lectures on Kubla Khan, and the charitably disposed might well have decided that the weather had put off the customers, for only four people turned up. Micklethwaite, Price (still heavily disguised with a tie and jacket), and two older ladies, one of whom disconcertingly, took out her knitting and set to with a vigorous clicking sound.

The Reverend looked about him eagerly, apparently unaware that his audience had declined by 50% since the previous week.

'Last week I covered the poem in depth, but several of you asked me about the background of the poem, and of Coleridge himself. So in a way I have rather put the cart before the horse today and I should have set the scene first.

'So this afternoon I want explain some of the background of the poem. It was written in 1797, not far from in here on the border of Devon and Somerset. All poets chose quiet places to meditate and Coleridge was no exception. He was living in a lonely farm-house halfway between Porlock and Linton. This is what he wrote at the start of the poem:

'This fragment with a good deal more, not recoverable, composed, in a sort of Reverie brought on by two grains of Opium taken to check a dysentery, at a Farm House between Porlock and Linton, a quarter of a mile from Colborne Church, in the fall of the year 1797'.

'Many people have found that the poem ends somewhat abruptly and this is a crucial point. Coleridge was interrupted, in his own words, 'by a person on business from Porlock'. Porlock is on the Exmoor border and there is an old RAF aerodrome there of course, I remember it well, which reminds me, now... ermm, what was I saying?'

Claris was thinking of two things simultaneously and had momentarily lost his thread.

'Ah yes, Coleridge, on returning to his poem some time later, found that the rest of his vision had deserted him, but what a vision it is!'

Micklethwaite suddenly rubbed his balding patch vigorously, and made an extraordinary effort to conceal an inspirational thought by studying a drab print of Falmouth not far behind Constable Price's left ear.

'Of course Coleridge felt obliged to explain the sudden ending of the poem, perhaps he felt uneasy that the poem seemed incomplete, and several poets of his era made this very point, and criticised the poem, Lord Byron included'.

The policeman had glanced up at Micklethwaite, perhaps sensing he was being watched, but then looked away again and continue to scribble notes. Please, please, please, let him not twig was Micklethwaite's silent and urgent psychic appeal. Perhaps this worked, because Price seemed engrossed in the reverend's words and Micklethwaite started to feel easier in his mind.

Of course it was Porlock, what an idiot not to have realised that! And who came from Porlock? That question put a chill in Micklethwaite's heart he furtively fossicked in his bag and brought out a scrunched copy of the Truro Times. On page eight he found the reference he was after, and then hastily folded it away when Constable Price gave him a dirty look for rustling the paper. The rest of the hour's lecture went right past him. He still had not heard back from his mum and was half beginning to wish that she would ignore his request, but it did all seem to make a horrible sense — but then that meant that it was planned?

He heard chairs being scraped, and raincoats being pulled on, but he still sat gazing off into the middle distance.

'Gordon?'

Micklethwaite started.

'You were in a reverie' Claris chuckled 'why yes, Peter isn't it?'

Rolling had turned to Constable Price, as Micklethwaite shook off his daydream and pulled on his coat.

'Sir, you mentioned the 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner', is that a poem?'

If Rolling was astonished that this man had not heard of this famous poem, he hid it masterfully.

'Why yes Peter, look I have a book here of Coleridge's collected poems perhaps you would care to borrow it? Excellent! You can return it next week'.

Constable Price was pleased with his prize and hurried off, and Micklethwaite also felt relieved, as it appeared that Peter Price had only come for the poetry.

'You do not mind driving Gordon? Rain and dark nights are not my forte I'm afraid, and how extraordinary that that man had not heard of the Ancient Mariner. You do wonder what they teach as schools these days, although I must say I'm pleased he chose to come to my lectures. One convert I'm sure. Are you feeling well Gordon, you look pale? It has not been much a walking holiday for you has it?'

Chapter 21

“Twould Win Me

Wednesday 17 October

After a perfectly gorgeous autumn, an ‘Indian summer’, the eternal drizzle and mist of Cornwall had finally and permanently arrived. Summer was gone, and Micklethwaite saw his breath as he walked along the coastal path. He could not see surf as the sea-mist eddied around the base of the cliffs, but he could hear it, crumping against the rocks. Yet it was just as beautiful on a foggy day as on a fine day, and he doubted that there would never be a time when the Cornish coastal path was a disappointment. He stood at Caragloose Head and pretended to see the view, then turned up the narrow pathway to Perbagus Manor and knocked on the old-fashioned door knocker. Helena opened it immediately, and smiled with a radiance that cut through the fog and turned him into mush.

‘Daphne du Maurier weather I call this Gordon, fogs and wreckers, pirates and smugglers. Have you read her? No? But you should. You would understand Cornwall better. We won’t see decent sunny weather again till spring I expect, and yet I don’t really mind. I like the fog, but that’s silly isn’t it?’

Mrs Brackenbury seemed lively and talkative and the drawing room was warmed by a large wood fire in the grate.

‘Thank you for coming’ and she noticed the wet newspaper stuck under his arm ‘yes I saw the headline too’.

It wasn’t the lead story but it was on the front page ‘Jacob Dunnett’s mother confirms that Harry Brackenbury was father’.

‘That’s just not true’ said Micklethwaite.

On Monday he had made a special trip to Portsmouth and had located a copy of Harry Brackenbury’s record of service. Between 1940 and 1944 he’d been in Burma. He told Helena by phone on Monday evening and she had been relieved. He gave her the war record documents.

‘I know. Ted Bingham was here yesterday, he tried to blackmail me’.

That stopped Gordon's heart.

'You're joking Helena?'

She shook her head sorrowfully.

'What did he want from you?'

'Sex, I think, or perhaps an attempt to heal the wounds of rejection'.

Helena had already told Micklethwaite of her previous engagement to Bingham, but Micklethwaite was struggling to understand.

'But he's already printed it now, what more can he do?'

She sat down near the fire and warmed herself.

'He also threatened to publish Harry's statement, where Harry accuses me of murder'.

Gordon sat down opposite her, and leaned deliberately towards the fire. They were quite close now, and he wanted to hold her.

'Can he do that? I mean without police permission. They have never released the statement'.

'Ted wants to hurt me badly, as I hurt him'.

Micklethwaite stretched out his hand and held hers, and gave it a hesitant squeeze. She smiled at him warmly, squeezed it back and then stood up.

'Tea?'

Perhaps it was at that moment that Micklethwaite's heart died a little. There are squeezes and squeezes, and in his limited experience that last one didn't add up to much, it just meant friendship. His love was going to remain unrequited. She came back briskly with a tray of tea things.

'Now this is something very strange Gordon, I told Claris, but did you hear? Someone pulled out all my tomato plants. I found them in the garden, and oddly, all along the coastal path, heading towards Veryan. Why would they do that? They had already fruited, most of them'.

Gordon poured two teaspoons of sugar into the tea and if he was thinking of anything, it was whether a declaration of love at this point would still be of any use.

'I have enemies I suppose' said Helena sadly.

Micklethwaite felt uncomfortable: was he the enemy within? Pretending to be a supporter yet having doubts about her integrity, but that didn't make any sense. How he could love someone and yet doubt her? He sipped his tea and gazed into the flames.

'If Bingham published Harry's statement it would make things very awkward for you Helena. I wonder why the police haven't made the statement public, perhaps they don't believe it?'

‘Do you believe it Gordon?’

That put him on the spot so he lied.

‘No’.

‘That hurts the most, that Harry would say that’.

Micklethwaite wasn’t sure what to say, so he tried something else.

‘Why didn’t Harry stand up and fight? He wasn’t paralysed was he?’

‘No, that was a sham really, but he was paralysed by hypochondria. We laughed at it as a sort of indulgence, but Harry was under enormous stress, financial stress, and any stress like that seemed to make him morbid about his health. He really did believe he was sick, and the opium didn’t help’.

‘He was addicted?’

‘Yes, I tried to get rid of it when I saw it, but Harry was always a step or so ahead of me. I think he had taken some that morning, and it made him quite torpid, is that the word?’

‘Helena, I don’t really have the right to ask this, but...’

She read his thoughts as if they were broadcast on loudspeakers.

‘Was it a happy marriage?’

He watched her carefully.

‘Well, until recently I think it was.’

She smiled, as if hearing his gravelely voice through the air.

‘Harry was a born storyteller, and but he was hopeless at organising his life. So I became Harry’s secretary in a sense, organised his material, researched the historical backgrounds for his stories, that sort of thing. It was my idea for him to go on radio, and he became very popular’.

‘Then there was that television series, you wouldn’t have seen it, but it was called ‘Cornish Mysteries’ and Harry was the front man, a perfect Cornish character with his wild looks. I did most of the research. We wrote quite a few books as well, but Harry’s name was on the cover, well it was easier that way. But of course nothing lasts long in television. By about 1975 his career started to fade, and I think Harry struggled with that. He liked fame and attention, but I haven’t answered your question have I?. We couldn’t have children and that disappointed us, and well, perhaps we drifted apart in the last year or two. His health was not that good. The difference in ages started to hurt him I think. He wondered if I might be attracted to younger men, he was nearly 75. He got terribly jealous if I talked to any young man, even you Gordon’.

Micklethwaite wasn’t quite sure how to take that.

‘Was he violent?’

She became quieter and pushed another log onto the fire.

‘No, sometimes verbally violent perhaps, but his bark was always a lot worse than his bite. He told me once, he was scared of my beauty’.

Her voice trailed off and Micklethwaite was disconcerted that her thoughts had drifted this way.

‘Everyone wants to be beautiful, but it’s like having money. It’s only if you have beauty or money that the disadvantages become apparent. People judge me for what I look like, I mean would Ted Bingham still be chasing me if I was ugly?’

‘But if someone offered you ugliness as an alternative, would you take it?’ he asked.

She looked startled and intrigued.

‘What a choice! No, I would probably run away of course’.

Micklethwaite considered that she might have more courage than that, so he told her a story he had read once.

‘There’s a Zen story from Japan about a beautiful nun, who simply wants to get on with being a nun, and working for the poor, and worshipping, but all the time, the other monks and novices fall in love with her. Her beauty was interfering with her work, so one day she puts a hot iron to her face, and her beauty was gone forever. And no one fell in love with her again’.

‘Oh my God, that’s a horrible story! It’s a beautiful story too’.

The clock on the wall chimed midday, twelve long musical notes. Since both Helena and Micklethwaite had a tendency to conversational silences, it was easy for them to develop and then overwhelm the atmosphere. The clock ticked solemnly as neither spoke. Good conversation is mostly about momentum, and their talk had run out of steam. Micklethwaite stood up to go.

‘I’m not sure there’s much more I can do now Helena’.

‘You’ve already helped me a great deal, more than you know Gordon. I like your story, it’s stopped me feeling sorry for myself’.

‘You should go to the police about Ted Bingham’.

‘Yes. My sister wants me to go to the south of France with her. She has a cottage there. I rather feel that it’s running away, but perhaps that is the best thing to do’.

She looked wistful and vulnerable then, and Micklethwaite realised in a moment of clarity that it was her disconcerting honesty that attracted him, and probably the other men as well. It was as if she was naked. At the front door he shook her hand again but she dismissed it as too impersonal and gave him a quick hug, and he walked back

into the fog feeling lonely.

At Caragloose Head he could hear the shags scuffling, and the surf far below. He started to walk more quickly, since it was cold, but also to escape a thought or two. He was pleased that he'd told Helena the truth about doing his best, but what he was planning to do next was probably not at all in her best interest. How could he be such a rat? Claris after had invited him into his home, befriended him?

His father, if he was alive, might have given him a few tips on how to balance truth to one's friends as against truth to one's self. There was no easy pathway anywhere he decided — love, truth, honesty — and he walked briskly along the cliff edge path to give himself the illusion of warmth.

Chapter 22

The Green Hill

Thursday 18 October

On Thursday Micklethwaite drove the black Riley to Porlock, a distance of seventy miles. He wasn't sure where the airfield was, but at the end of a narrow road called 'Airfield Lane' he found a dilapidated sign and a gate across the driveway. He unlatched the gate and drove through and to his surprise found himself trundling along the actual sealed runway, which was sprouting tall grass out of every crack. He scattered the sheep and drove across to what looked like the remains of a aircraft hanger. He walked around a bit and considered his options.

On the far side of the runway the scrubland gave way to moorland, and then the Exmoor National Reserve, which climbed up with dull flanks of heather and gorse, broken by stone hedges. That was where Coleridge went walking, two hundred years ago, and probably the hedges and stone circles were much the same as when he and his fellow nature poets sought inspiration from the landscape. It wasn't actually raining, but if the grey air got any heavier, then it would. He needed inspiration as well, for now that he was here, what was he going to do?

It was lack of courage that made him lie to Claris, and he borrowed the Riley with the pretence of visiting Padstow. That was despicable, and he felt ashamed, but he also felt excited at putting the pieces together. He already had a shrewd idea of what had happened that day in Perbagus Manor, but there were holes in the narrative, and Micklethwaite needed a gypsy to fill one of the holes. He looked around but he still couldn't see any gypsies. Two days ago the paper had made a real fuss over a complaint by the local rural councillor that the 'gippos' had moved back to Porlock airfield again, and were settling in for the winter, and it was high time something was done about them.

'Every year it's the same, winter they move in. Last year they were here for five months, and the War Department Ministry does nothing'

The councillor was quoted as saying.

‘It used to be a Royal Air Force base but was transferred to the army several years ago, and since then has become an overgrown rubbish dump. Local farmers complain that their sheep disappear when the gippos turn up, and the woods get a real hammering’.

Woods? Where were the woods? Gosworth spotted a grove of woods at the far end of the runway and at the same time noticed a wisp of smoke. He started up the Riley and drove carefully down the full length of the aerodrome to a group of three caravans, arranged in a kind of circle around an open fire. He was disappointed that they weren’t the old fashioned and colourful horse-drawn caravans he’d seen in pictures, but just ordinary metallic caravans, and a Bedford truck parked beside one. A stout woman was chopping firewood and looked suspiciously as the black Riley crept up. Several dogs came barking out excitedly, and Micklethwaite realised that he must look like another busybody government officer in his black official car.

He stepped out, nervous of the dogs, and the women shouted at them to little effect. They clustered around him but at least they didn’t bite. She was about fifty he guessed, with big creases in her skin, which looked leathery and dark after a life led outdoors.

‘Hallo, my name’s Gordon Micklethwaite. I’m not from the government or anything. I’m just researching the history of the old airfield here’.

He waved his hand optimistically at the landscape. The woman did not look particularly convinced, but nodded.

‘Do you know much about this area?’

‘Nah, Tom does. Tom!’

She yelled, and an old man poked his head out and hobbled over. He looked about seventy at least, much more promising from Gordon’s point of view, so he introduced himself again, and handed over the two bottles of ale he’d brought with him. His father had been careful with his instructions on that point: if you’re after information, a little gift goes a long way. Beer for men, something for the kids, food for women.

‘Ahh, thankee, a good drop that. So yer interested in the Porlock aerodrome eh? We’ve been coming here bloody nigh fifty years, me and the missus and the tribe. This is my daughter here, Meg, the son’s away. Tom’s the name, Tom Barsley’

He spoke with rather a London accent though the name sounded from Yorkshire.

‘Thought you might be from the bloody council, going to turn us off again’.

Tom ran a genial obscenity of some sorts through practically every sentence.

‘No, it’s not my car, I borrowed it’.

Micklethwaite had little interest in Porlock aerodrome but got a good potted history straightaway from Tom, who seemed to know his stuff. They sat down on freshly cut

tree stumps and Tom wasted no time in prising the top off and taking an appreciative swig.

‘Good stuff’.

An old woman also came out of the caravan and hailed them.

‘This is my wife, Elsie, this here’s Gordon, history fellah, studying the aerodrome and such’.

‘You’re not from the council are yeah?’ she asked sceptically.

Suspicion must be in the blood for travellers, which might be how they got their name, always being moved on.

‘No’.

‘Brought us these beers he did Elsie, now would a council man do that?’

This reminded Gordon of his manners. He shook her hand and offered a bag with some cakes that he brought at Linton.

‘You’re giving me your time and I appreciate it’ he managed to say clumsily.

She poked about the paper bag and made very favourable noises as she discovered two bakewell tarts and two cream doughnuts.

‘I’ll mash some tea, you want some?’

Micklethwaite nodded and one dog had started to lick his hand optimistically, so it looked like he’d been accepted. They chatted, and tea came out courtesy of Elsie, and Tom was getting garrulous.

‘Over there, can’t see it under the scrub now, is a long barrow. It’s a sort of grave you know, but was robbed centuries ago. ‘an up there, on the hill you can see an old chimney? Tin mine, my grandfather worked in one of those, all over here there are. They say gippos don’t have a right to live here, we’ve worked everywhere here, bloody practically own it you know?’

There was a good deal of conversation on these lines, but finally Gordon managed to turn the questioning the way he wanted.

‘You’ve been coming here a long time?’

‘Yes, fifty years, and my father before that. I remember forty gypsy caravans once, ‘an horse-drawn ones too, all ranged up and down here. Used to be open moorland then, but the RAF boys took it over for the war and booted us out, and now it’s army land, not that I can see any soldiers here. Common land you know, that’s what it was, and we’ve a perfect right to be here, bloody councillors’.

Gordon now came to the crucial moment. He drew from his pocket the promotional photograph of Mary Malarchey as a young girl written on the back.

‘Do you recognise her?’

Tom squinted.

‘Now where’s my glasses Elsie? Oh here, in my bloody pocket. Let’s see, heh well that’s Edith’s girl isn’t it. Mary Malarchey, never heard of her’.

Elsie took the picture and immediately knew who it was.

‘That’s Flora that is, Flora Dunnett her name was then, not Mary Malarchey. Oh she’s the girl that sang, you know Tom? On the guitar ‘an all? Edith was so proud of her. That must be her stage name or somethin’.

‘You’re sure it’s Flora?’ asked Micklethwaite, trying to keep the excitement from his voice.

‘Yeah, I know her now’ said Tom ‘bloody name threw me, that’s Flora all right. Good looker, that wur it’.

Now it started to rain, and Micklethwaite got wet, not that he cared. Sheer politeness made him sit there as Tom downed the second beer and the cakes got snaffled up and they got stuck into the Council and policemen generally.

After another thirty minutes he discreetly repossessed the photograph and took a polite leave. They seemed surprised, but as he started up the Riley Tom waved to him. Elsie and Meg had disappeared inside, and the dogs had slouched back under the trees out of the rain that was getting steady. He drove back to the vicarage and found Claris was out. There was a letter from his mum, efficient as usual, quite a large envelope, so he knew what was in it. He’d only phoned her on Friday. He slid out a large black and white photograph, which was an exact copy of a photo that hung prominently in the Bishop of Wandersbury’s office.

Chapter 23

Half Intermitted Burst

Friday 19 October, morning

Swain's darts team got beaten last night, thrashed in fact. He'd played as if he was cross-eyed, and then got drunk in disgust and when he eventually got home his wife gave him such a good telling off that he slept on the sofa and woke up stinking of beer and vomit. The kids tip-toed around him on their way off to school. He showered, and managed to place a conciliatory peck on a half-frosted wifely cheek. It was raining, the newspaper was sodden, Price was hammering away at the typewriter and his head hurt.

'I have to warn you sir, the tabloids are ringing up. We've had *The Sun*, *Mirror* and *Times* already'.

Swain looked at Price as if he was from another planet, which at times he suspected he was. Price passed over the office newspaper, and pointed to the front page headline. Harry Brackenbury accuses wife of murder. Jake the Rake accused of being accomplice and lover. All of Harry's statement was here, every damned letter of it. Bingham was having a ball.

'Not unexpected sir' said Price primly as he folded the *Truro Times* away neatly 'the Superintendent wants a word I think sir'.

Swain groaned and stood up.

'I need a coffee'.

He then walked straight into Gordon Micklethwaite, who had arrived at the door simultaneously, but Swain made a sort of greeting that sounded like a snarl and kept walking down to the cafe. Then he ordered a double strong coffee and arrived back as Micklethwaite and Price were chatting amicably about Kubla Khan.

'I am impressed by the Reverend's reading of the poem, it makes it so alive'.

Price was affirming enthusiastically.

'These moorlands can be inspiring I think, and I can see why the Reverend...'

‘Cut the crap Price, what do you want Mr Micklethwaite?’

Micklethwaite did not have to be well acquainted with Swain to realise that the policeman was in a foul mood.

‘The sergeant sent me up’.

‘Of course, of course. You’ve come to enlighten me?’

Micklethwaite looked puzzled.

‘About your relationship with Helena Brackenbury’ Swain asked ‘you looked very affectionate that day in Falmouth, by the quayside’.

Micklethwaite blushed and said nothing, which Swain took as guilt. Surely Helena wouldn’t go for this bloke? He motioned with his hand and Micklethwaite obediently followed it into the seat opposite him, and leaned forward, as if trying to keep their conversation confidential.

‘I wanted to tell you that I went and spoke to Mary Malarchy.’

Swain perked up.

‘So you were ‘Desmond’, the mysterious reporter from the Falmouth Gazette? Bingham was there after you, me, I just the got the arse end of the story’.

‘She was drunk for me’ said Micklethwaite ruefully, ‘actually she passed out’.

‘Did Helena Brackenbury ask you to go?’

Swain could say her Christian name with such ease.

‘Not exactly, I offered to search the Births and Deaths records to see who was Jacob’s father. She was troubled that it could be Harry, but she did not really believe it’.

Swain poked around in the cigarette packet and found the last one, and enjoyed the plume of acrid smoke that spilled over the desk onto his guest.

‘Are you and Helena lovers?’.

Might as well ask, but Micklethwaite shook his head, but then said bravely.

‘She’s lovely, no’.

Swain also felt this regret but hid it behind a veil of smoke.

‘Anyway, Mary talked about herself mostly, and gave me this picture of herself at 16’.

He passed it to Swain. It was a dark-haired and pretty girl, dressed in a shawl and smiling in a posed seductive way. Although Mary Malarchey was now blond and wrinkled all over, there just enough information in the picture to recognise her, if you had already been told.

‘Ever tried being a private eye?’

Micklethwaite sighed.

‘I noticed that she kept a box by the window, ‘her treasures’ she called it. That’s where she got the picture from, and the key was round her neck’.

‘Good on you Mr Micklethwaite’.

Said Swain sarcastically and stubbed out the cigarette, of course he could have done that too but frankly had not been interested enough in the sozzled woman. Then the detective in him came out of him.

‘What did you find?’

‘Not much. There were several photos and news clippings. Mary Malarchey is her stage name, but her original name was Dunnnett. There was a photo of Jacob, when he was about twenty-one’.

Swain looked at this. It was the first time he’d ever seen Jake without his trademark flowing locks and straggly beard. He almost looked presentable.

‘Handsome dude wasn’t he?’ he remarked.

‘Yes, and it reminded me of someone’.

At last Micklethwaite was getting to the point.

‘You know I’m staying with Claris because he’s a friend of the Bishop of Wandersbury, my mother works in the bishops office. The Bishop and Claris were together in an RAF squadron during the war, and I remembered there was picture of the squadron in the bishop’s office. I asked mum to send me a copy. It arrived yesterday’.

Micklethwaite slid it over and Swain glanced rapidly along the names captioned neatly underneath. They were all young men, in their early twenties, smiling and relaxed, some with pipes stuck out at jaunty angles. Third from the left at the back was C. W. Rolling, and dressed as a chaplain.

‘Which one’s the bishop?’

Micklethwaite leaned over and pointed.

‘He’s a bit fatter now, but Claris is the same’.

Swain took the photo of Jacob Dunnnett and laid it beside the group of RAF men, particularly the tall man in the back row. There was no need for either of them to state the obvious.

‘You think Rolling’s the father?’ Swain asked abruptly ‘what about Harry Brackenbury?’

‘The service record shows that Harry Brackenbury was in Burma most of 1940 through to 1945. That’s where he got his opium habit I think’.

He slid across a copy of the war record.

‘My, my, you have been busy Mr Micklethwaite. So the reverend’s been telling me fibs?’

Micklethwaite coughed meaningfully.

‘He doesn’t know’

Swain gave him an old-fashioned look.

‘Run that past me again?’

‘That RAF base isn’t far from here. I went out to the airfield and looked around. There were gypsies camping there and I showed them the picture of Mary Malarchey, only they didn’t call her Mary then, they called her ‘Flora’.’

The detective-sergeant remembered the conversation up on Carn Kenidjack, of how an old man talked about his first love some four decades ago. Micklethwaite rushed to explain.

‘It was forty years ago. You remember his story, he had an affair with a 15 year old Flora, not Mary, and they were posted to the Middle East a week later and never saw her again. How would he know she was pregnant? I don’t think he ever knew that’.

Micklethwaite pulled a strand of hair down over the receding hairline. Swain got up and stretched in the pale sunlight, then suddenly turned and thumped the desk, which made Micklethwaite jump, which of course it had been designed to do.

‘Have you told him?’

Micklethwaite drew back, then shrugged as if it was obvious.

‘No, I only found out yesterday. Claris has been kind to me, so it’s awkward. I feel as if I’ve betrayed him’.

‘Awkward, I’ll say, oh the papers will love it. Local vicar is father of man that murdered Harry Brackenbury. Bingham will be smacking his lips’.

Micklethwaite shook his head.

‘So you’ve chickened out, so I’m supposed to tell him? Cops are good at the dirty work aren’t we?’

Both glanced at each other. Swain was obviously hostile but Micklethwaite felt he had to continue.

‘There’s something else’.

Swain’s eyebrows twitched.

‘I saw a copy of Harry Brackenbury’s statement, Helena gave it to me. Right at the end the transcript says ‘poor lock’ but I don’t think he’s talking about the front door at all’.

It was Price who spoke up, for he had been listening to every word.

‘Porlock sir, the place!’

Swain grasped what he meant.

‘Porlock. Where is it Pricey?’

‘It’s in Devon sir’.

Micklethwaite pointed to the RAF picture again, and Swain noticed there was a date in the corner, 17 June 1943, RAF Porlock. He swore again.

‘Harry Brackenbury is waiting for a man from Porlock, and who comes from Porlock? Claris Rolling, the world expert on celtic jewellery. Let’s listen to that tape again’.

The same old voice growling and grimacing. Micklethwaite had never heard the tape before so it shocked him.

Price repeatedly played back the last few words, and Micklethwaite listened carefully but kept his face from showing the puzzlement he was feeling. Something did not seem quite right here, those final words did not sound right.

‘So Claris Rolling was there you think sir? He might have the brooch?’ asked Price.

‘Let’s go and see. I can keep these?’

He waved the photos in Micklethwaite’s face, who nodded, suddenly sick of everything. Swain grabbed his jacket and ordered a car on the phone, before turning to Micklethwaite.

‘I should thank you I ‘spose, don’t be too hard on yourself. We get used to it. By the way, where were you on the day Harry Brackenbury was killed?’

‘I was out walking all day, near Cawsand...’

‘So you wouldn’t know if Claris Rolling was at home or not?’

‘No’.

‘Can you prove where you were?’

Swain struggled into the jacket that was getting too tight. Micklethwaite thought for a moment.

‘I had a pie in a pub...’

‘You kept the pie as proof? It’s a joke Mr Micklethwaite, is Claris at home? Good, do you want a lift? No?’

It was odd how they left him in the office like that, just took off, and left him to a lonely silence. Micklethwaite looked around and noticed the tape recorder sitting there, and he glanced around again, nervously. It was an opportunity, and he couldn’t really be blamed for listening again could he?

He switched it on and carefully rewound to the last part of Harry’s speech. He turned

up the volume as loud as it could go. He listened carefully, even placing his head closer to the gently revolving machine. He rewound two more times, cracking his ears to hear every nuance in the words, and wondering at what moment someone would enquire sarcastically as to what right he had to listen to police evidence like this, although of course the whole thing had been published in the paper for the world to see.

That was it! He hastily picked up Price's carefully folded newspaper and read the news item carefully, particularly Harry's full and final statement. Everything was there except for those five final words, and he realised with an enormous sense of relief why those five words were absent. They told the whole story.

Micklethwaite suddenly cheered up as if a great weight had lifted from him, and although not given to whistling, because in fact he had never worked out how to do it, he managed a tuneless ditty as he left the police station.

Chapter 24

Holy and Enchanted

Friday 19 October, afternoon

The small parish of St Tristan of Portloe was established in 1356 by the Earl of Penrose who had extensive estates in the district. Essentially it was his private church and priest, and he built a large stone vicarage, to accommodate what were the usually large families of the parson and his wife. It was true then that the vicar of St Tristans had a light workload and in 600 years or so very little had changed, except the Earl supported the wrong side during the Cornish rebellion of 1741, and his estates were confiscated, and then later reinstated, but much diminished. It was a poor district, farming and fishing barely sustained a living, so the relative decorative affluence of the church, with its prized stained glass windows and substantial organ, seemed completely at odds with its congregation. Many Cornish emigrated in the middle 1860's and the original estates of Tregony fell into neglect, as did the church, locked up indeed for some years. In 1868 an industrial coal magnate from south Wales bought land in the area and revitalised the district with his lavish spending, restoring both the his manor house at Penrose, the church and the vicarage. That was probably the last amount of money spent on the vicarage as the tiny parish once again slipped through the twentieth century in genteel neglect. The Anglican diocese had decided that certain rationalisations (a very 1980 type of word) would have to occur and Claris Rolling would almost certainly be the last vicar of St Tristan's.

Mick Swain pulled up outside the hawthorn hedge that shielded the vicarage from the peasantry outside, and pulled hard on the old fashioned bell rope that hung by the door. The sun was weakly shining through the elms and oaks, and he could hear the bell as it boomed through the vicarage. No one home apparently, then he thought he heard a low musical sound which he suspected must be the church organ. A short way led through to the beautifully proportioned church, which was surrounded by oak trees of a vast size. The chapel door was open and the music was edging out. Swain peered round and saw Rolling with his back to him, engrossed in his playing. Personally he put the sounds of the organ next to the bagpipe in order of nastiness, but there was no doubt a certain vigour and grandness to the music. Suddenly he stopped playing, and looked up.

‘Why Mr Swain, how are you?’

Swain was puzzled.

‘How did you know I was here?’

Claris smiled as Swain walked over. He pointed to the small mirror set by the organ.

‘I cannot claim I have eyes in the back of my head inspector. This mirror was out in by my predecessor to keep an eye on his congregation, I suppose to make sure none of them slipped out during the service’.

‘He must be dull, as well as a tyrant’.

Swain wondered why he felt obliged to make polite small talk first. The last church he’d been in was at his own wedding, though he vaguely remembered his Sunday school days before rebellion took over. It was extraordinarily calm inside St. Tristans church, a centuries old silence, once the organ’s reverberations had been absorbed by the walls and high roof. Swain felt he was something of a swine to shatter this.

‘Harry Brackenbury made a statement before he died, and at the end of the statement he said he was waiting for a man from Porlock. Were you that man?’

The detective realised that it might be a difficult matter to prove if Rolling denied it, but it never occurred to him that the vicar would.

‘Why, gracious no. I was out walking. I hardly come from Porlock’.

‘But you lived at the RAF station at Porlock’.

Rolling was surprised by this overly forceful interrogation.

‘Why yes, that’s true but’ he struggled to make the obvious point ‘it was almost forty years ago Inspector’.

‘You see Mr Rolling we believe that on the day Harry Brackenbury was murdered someone else was there, beside Mrs Brackenbury and Jacob Dunnett, someone who removed Boadiceas Brooch. It’s still missing and we’ve searched everywhere. Even run metal detectors over the grounds. Someone removed the brooch after Helena Brackenbury escaped, it wasn’t Jake, was it you?’

To say that Claris Rolling was taken aback would be an understatement.

‘I was out visiting my parishioners that day, in the morning...’

‘And the afternoon?’ interrupted Swain.

‘I came back to prepare my notes for the lecture on Kubla Khan, and then I drove over to Truro. My lecture was at four’.

‘Essentially no one can prove your whereabouts that early afternoon time between one and four? Which is the precise time of Harry Brackenbury’s

murder. Where is the brooch Mr Rolling?’

Anybody who knew Swain would have realised that his line of questioning was tinged with desperation. He also thought the link with Prolock was tenuous (bloody Micklethwaite and his stupid ideas) but it was always worth trying to shock someone into a revealing comment. Well nearly always. The reverend was still seated on the organ seat and looked completely astonished at this turn of events.

‘Surely you don’t think I had anything to do with Harry’s murder, why that’s absurd.’

‘Is it? You knew the Brackenbury’s well, knew of the brooch, knew of it’s history and significance, knew that it should belong to the church?’

‘This is perfectly true but...’

Rolling waved his long arms about in protestation.

‘But I have no interest in stealing the brooch.’

‘You have read Harry Brackenbury’s statement? Has Helena Brackenbury showed you?’

Rolling nodded cautiously.

‘My guest Gordon was given a copy by Helena and I did read it, shocking quite shocking. Why Harry would say that of Helena I cannot imagine’.

‘As far as you know there was no relationship between Jake the Rake and Mrs Brackenbury?’

Claris looked horrified.

‘Good God no, why it’s unthinkable’.

‘Harry Brackenbury thought it, claimed he witnessed it. Reverend I’m not trying to bully you’ (actually he was) ‘but we have three different accounts of this murder, by three different people, and they don’t mesh, they don’t make sense. It means that two people, not one, but two people, are lying?’

The frustration was showing in Swain’s face but the Reverend almost looked relieved as Swain spoke.

‘Ah Mr Swain how I understand your dilemma. You are not a Christian are you? No, I did not think so, but you can still read the gospels. Did you know that on the cross as he hung dying Jesus said several things ‘My god, why do you forsake me’, that’s in Mark, then in Luke he says ‘Forgive them father for they no not what they do’, and in John he says ‘commend my soul’.

Swain was listening despite himself.

‘The difficulty for Christian scholars is that some words are spoken in some gospels, but not in others. This arises the question: did he say all of those words, or some of them? Some early Christian scholars tried to meld the

words into a cohesive soul, but they will not be melded. So instead the scholars simply allowed the contradictions to stand, neither apologising for them or excusing them.

Perhaps you have to do the same? There is no way to reconcile them is there? One man dead, another mad, a woman bereft. Do the three stories have to tally, Christians have to accept these ambiguities every day of their lives, the Bible is littered with such ambiguity, and so Christians have simply to believe’.

‘I’m not in the believing business rev’.

Frustration builds in people, like steam in a kettle. For days Swain had been brooding about nothing else, staring at his whiteboard with multiple squiggles that all lead eradically to the same conclusion, that he was getting nowhere.

He felt he was the one stuck on a cross, and was now being tortured by idiotic vicars about Christian beliefs. He was going to be subtle, break the news gently, but instead he lashed out.

‘Jake the Rake is your son’.

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘You heard me Claris. Jacob Dunnet is the son of Mary Malarchey. That’s her stage name, her real name is Flora Dunnett’.

‘Flora!’

The word hang in the air of the silent church, like a mote of dust caught in sunlight. Now Swain felt sorry, for he saw an old man starting to crumble.

‘Flora Dunnett was a gypsy girl who lived near Porlock airfield. We have a picture of her, taken at 17’.

Rolling gasped as he held up the picture to catch some of the poor light inside the church.

‘That’s Flora! Yes, it is, but...’

Swain kept up the slow destruction.

‘Here’s a photo of Jake at 21’.

‘Good God... I cannot believe it, why, it looks like me’.

By now Rolling had stood up, but he looked so shaken that Swain put a hand onto his shoulder to steady him.

‘Perhaps you should sit down rev?’

Claris shook his head and continued to stare at the photo of Flora Dunnett. He asked again ‘are you sure?’ and Swain had to explain once more, and still Claris looked as if been struck by lightning. Swain could imagine that if he had just heard of the

existence of a forty-year old son, he too would look like a stunned mullet. Several long minutes passed as Claris sat down and seemed to recover slightly.

‘Where is my son Inspector?’

‘At Truro Hospital. I’m going that way, do you want a lift?’

‘Yes, that would be kind. Does he know?’

‘No’.

‘Can he talk’.

‘Yup’.

‘How long have you known?’

‘Today’.

‘How extraordinary, I’m a father, how extraordinary. Poor boy’.

As tears started to come down his cheeks, Swain left the church hastily. He wasn’t good at grief, and he was angry with himself. He paced up and down the wooded lane and resigned from the police force for the umpteenth time, then tore open his cigarette packet and started to smoke furiously. Rooks were cawing in the trees, and he slowly calmed down as he waited for Claris Rolling to get himself ready for the longest journey of his life.

It was nearly twenty minutes before Rolling came out and ponderously locked the vicarage front door, and then carefully put the key under the door mat.

‘Gordon will come back later you see’ Claris explained.

‘And people wonder why there are so many burglaries’ muttered Swain softly.

The reverend looked like death warmed up but he was holding himself together, as he got into the police car and Swain started up.

‘I see now why you suspected me Mr Swain, but you are wrong of course. There are still things I must tell you soon, things that you cannot yet know, but would change your opinion of me I hope’ he said apologetically.

‘Look Claris I’m sorry about this, it’s just my job you know?’

‘Why should you be sorry? You delivered to me a son, that is not a cause for sorrow but a cause for rejoicing’.

Swain changed gear violently, and thought to himself cynically. Sure, sure Rev, but this son of yours is incarcerated in hospital, half-mad, with most of his memory shot, and charged with rape and murder. You could find a better son in a knackers yard.

Chapter 25

Fertile Ground

Friday 19 October, evening

He drove Claris Rolling back to Truro Hospital by 6 pm, then turned around and drove right back out to Perbagus Manor. He had nothing to do in the office and he just wanted to drive, and flicked his headlights on as the gloom descended. Swain half considered hanging around and listening to the meeting between father and son, but considered that too tasteless. He gave Claris the photos and left him too it. It was time to talk to Helena again, God knows what about, but he owed it to himself. He told his wife it was police business, and perhaps in a sense it was.

‘I’ll be late’

‘You always are. It’s Dean’s football tomorrow’.

‘Ok.’

‘And Gabrielle’s piano lesson’ she slipped that in as he groaned.

He was obviously still paying off the debt of his last little drinking episode. Of course he wasn’t in love with her, but are any husbands in love with their wives? He loved his kids, and was loyal to her. So why was going to see Mrs Brackenbury? It was simply a case of he couldn’t leave it alone. The curious affair of Boadiceas Brooch was haunting him in every way, from morning to evening. He didn’t sleep last night, and saw Helena in every shadow, even in his wife’s sleeping form. It was as if he was in love with her, yet Swain was not sure that he remembered what being in love was like. He never remembered it was so agonising. He had no answers, and no way apparently to create the final solution that he desperately needed. He spoke out loud.

‘Sweet Helen make me immortal with a kiss’.

Swain was proud of his working class background, and where he’d got to in the police force, but he actually knew more literature than he pretended to. He just found it easier playing the pleb to Pricey. He’d seen Shakespeare plays, and Marlowe’s play

in London, though that was the only line he could remember.

The lights were on at the manor house and Swain chewed on a mint to get rid of his smoker's breath. He knocked and she came to the door, and seemed puzzled to see him, but not at all shy.

'Come in Mick, has something happened?'

He sat down in the drawing room with its dark exotic art from Burma blending into the burnished burn panelling. The fire was roaring and Swain wondered whether Helena chopped it herself. He kept thinking of her as a shrinking violet, but that obviously wasn't true. This woman had seen through a storm of murder, passion and despair, and looked to be holding up rather well. Poised, self-assured, calm, God he fancied her.

'Coffee? I can put some whiskey in it and turn it Irish?'

He smiled.

'The Cornish get on well with Irish'.

She slipped off into the kitchen and he smelt the roasted coffee, and then she came back with a tray and cups. Everything she did was quiet and efficient, and yet underneath there was a sense of darkness. Perhaps it was her hair, or her blue-green eyes. There was a passion there somewhere.

'First a question, were you out walking on last Saturday night, about 2 am, on the cliff path?'

'Saturday?' no hesitation 'yes'.

'Holding a lantern?'

'Yes, my torch broke, so I was seen?'

Swain thought that was funny.

'Seen alright, scared the living daylights out of them. Miffy Pendgarven and her boyfriend Charlie Roznick, you know, the American you ran into that day?'

'I don't understand, are they lovers now? Dolly used to housekeep for us years ago'.

'Miffy sleeps with anyone Helena, she ain't fussy. Charlie needed a place to stay that day so we took him down to Dolly's, seems it all started there. Then they got a clever idea. Apparently Jake goes around planting cannabis plants in the gardens of people he works for. Miffy got to hear about this when she and Jake were an item, yeah I know, small bloody world. She's a tart, anyway, so her and Charlie decide to sneak up to your place at night and steal the cannabis plants...'

Helena burst out laughing.

'But they are tomatoes! It was very peculiar. Somebody had chopped down

all my tomato plants, and I found some of the stalks thrown on the cliff path. I could understand a brick through the window' she mused pensively 'as a local witch I suppose I deserve a brick or two, but where's the harm in tomatoes?'

Swain was still waiting.

'I can see your eyes asking Mick, well, its an old West Country superstition. I am a spiritual person, but in a broad way, I pick here and there, and even into folk religion. St Mark is apopular saint in the west country and they say that if your loved one dies, if you place a flower in the church porch during St Mark's day, and then return at midnight, on your way home you might see a funeral procession with the ghost of your husband, and I so wanted to see Harry.'

Swain was sceptical but people are weird, and drank the dregs of his coffee and wiped his mouth. That was the easy part out of the way.

'You scared them witless'.

'Well at least they had wits. I seem to be in a long daydream, and I never saw Harry, but I thought it was worth a try, then I could explain to him'.

Swain thought about going there, but then decided that they already had traversed that ground. Besides a widow's grief did not interest him, rather it was where she was going now.

'The reason I'm here, well it's all Gordon Micklethwaite's fault' he said quietly.

'Gordon?'

'He's a bit of archaeologist is our Gordon. When you got him to do a few jobs he rather got carried away'.

She sipped her coffe and waited.

'Turns out that Mary Malarchey is really called Flora Dunnett, a gypsy girl. Does that name seem familiar? Claris Rolling never told you the story of his first love...'

'Oh my God, do you mean that Flora is the same Flora?'

He nodded, and watched her lips move soundlessly.

'I can't show the photos, Rolling's got them. I told him this afternoon, and he's gone to see Jake in hospital this evening, but I showed him the picture of Flora when she was seventeen and he identified it as the Flora he knew. The next bit's a long shot but we have a photo of Jake at 21 and it's the spitting image of Claris at the same age. Take away Jake's hair, the resemblance is uncanny'.

She looked as stunned as Claris Rolling had only a few hours ago. It was hard to imagine anything could be worse than this.

'I was raped by Claris's son...' she said softly and exactly 'this isn't some sort of strange policeman's joke?' she pleaded with her eyes.

'Nope, Helena, I'm sorry, looks like it's true. There's no nice way to put it'.

Swain knew that he was tactless and brutal, his wife had remarked upon it often enough, but the pain he saw in her eyes made him want to resign for the second time today. It was a shit of a job. One policeman referred to himself as the 'bad news boy'. I mean if a policeman knocks at your door, chances are it's going to leave you unhappy.

'The newspapers are going to love it eh. Bingham will wet his pants when he finds out'.

'Ted came to see me, on Tuesday. I told you didn't I about our engagement, well he doesn't seem to have got over it. He still hurts, he started to blackmail me'.

Swain now grew very interested. If there was one bloke he wanted to shaft more than the superintendent, or Mawson, or for that matter fat Toby, it was Ted Bingham. She drained the remaining dregs of coffee in her cup, which must have been cold by now. The fire had lost its poke as well, but she made no move to add more fuel.

'He said he would say that Jacob was Harry's father, that he would print Harry's statement, and he has'.

'Pretty ineffective sort of blackmail?' grunted Swain 'what did he want from you?'

'Sex' she said it wryly 'a one night stand apparently, for old time's sake. He never did get any in the old days'.

'He wants to hurt you, but he didn't threaten you physically?'

'No, he isn't that kind of man really. Not a man of substance'.

She actually started to cry then and stopped herself with a huge effort. Her face was still crumpled, and she shook her lovely head. He wanted her all right, and wouldn't it be easy to reach out and comfort her now? Didn't women cry because they wanted the comfort of someone's arms?

'I can't believe this, oh this is awful, awful, poor Claris'.

'He's taking it fairly well actually...'

'But you don't understand'.

'No, you're right, I've not understood anything to do with this case. There's probably more jokers in the pack too'.

It was an attempt at self-deprecating humour. If he moved in now, would she yield?

'Claris and I' she looked at him 'we are lovers'.

Swain was floored, completely floored. His jaw dropped and he made no secret of it. He said the first thing that came into his head.

‘He’s an old man!’

She looked up.

‘He’s a fine man’.

Swain rued his romantic foolishness then, and hadn’t Rolling already told him he had loved twice? He should learn to listen more.

‘I thought you might have a lover, but I thought it was Micklethwaite. You seemed affectionate to him that day at Falmouth.’

‘Yes, he’s been a good friend’.

‘He fancies you’.

‘Yes I know, men always do. I cannot help that’.

‘Rolling!’

The name burst out of him in disbelief. She didn’t smile.

‘Are you jealous?’ she asked.

He didn’t answer.

‘Harry knew I was having an affair. It shocked him, it shocked me. This man...’

She hesitated, looking for the right word in the dark embers.

‘He seems to bring out in me a passion that I never felt before. And now... you see I know Claris is an honourable man. He would be utterly ashamed of his relationship with me, not ashamed of me, but of himself, that he had given into weakness. How cruel is it that he finds love and a son at the same time, but he will not give himself permission to have both. He is all I have now, I don’t want him to leave me, but he will feel that I’m contaminated by his son, can you understand that Michael?’

The policeman was observing all the time, and he still couldn’t help but admire her.

So calm considering her world had almost crumbled away in the last two weeks. Her husband dead. Raped by a man who turned out to be her lover’s son, how sordid was that for God’s sake? The house mortgaged to the hilt with no money to pay for it, and Boadicea’s brooch still missing. Her affair with Claris would probably be exposed in the papers. Perhaps she was too collected? A cold, calculating woman, yet it didn’t match those lovely eyes.

Swain’s professional experience of women was that they turned on waterworks all the time to get what they wanted, but Helena Brackenbury was holding back, simply herself, even if that was a strange person to be. Swain was mulling through his own thoughts rather than listening to her, and was still some way behind in this conver-

sation, but she was right of course. He was jealous, which was stupid. He had no rights to her, hardly knew her, she was a passing fancy in the parade, just a passing fancy. He decided to hurt himself a little bit more, grind his nose in his stupidity.

‘How long have you been lovers Helena?’

‘Six months. I told Harry, and he didn’t seem to mind really. But after listening to his words on the tape I realised that he did mind deeply, and lashed out in the only way he could’.

‘Did you conspire with Claris Rolling to murder Harry Brackenbury and steal the brooch?’.

That was the policeman talking now.

‘No Michael, and I never would have even thought of such a thing’.

‘You were going to leave Harry?’

‘Yes, soon, but Harry had many debts...’

‘Is that why he tried to sell the brooch?’

‘I think so, but Harry never told me these things’.

Swain was losing his temper and he stood up.

‘Helena! People will say that this was all a plot to murder Harry, grab the brooch, sell it off, run away with your lover, what would you say to them?’

She gave an infuriating look of childlike disbelief.

‘What can I say? It’s just not true. Jake came from nowhere, I tried to save Harry, and I don’t know where the brooch is, I honestly don’t. Please don’t get angry with me Mick’

She stood up and took his hands.

‘And don’t pity me either’.

‘You were right Helena. I want you’.

He seized her and kissed her. She did not pull away, but then neither did her lips soften.

‘Why did you do that?’

‘Because every man wants to, and I didn’t think the chance would come again’.

They looked at each other for a long time, still holding hands and Swain was at a loss as to what to say, or do, but finally police rigmarole kicked in. He let go of her hands.

‘I’m going to question Claris, and Bingham. I’ll need a statement from you too Helena, this all has to go down somewhere in black and white. Do you want to press charges against Bingham?’

She shook her head.

‘It doesn’t make any difference now’.

He went to the door and opened it, and saw it was cold, dark and wet outside.

‘Not very inviting is it?’

‘No, the beginning of winter I think’.

He looked at her and said nothing.

‘Goodbye Mick’.

The door closed quietly in front of him, and then he heard the door lock snib, and that made him angry.

Chapter 26

Beware! Beware!

Saturday 20 October, morning

The room was grubby inside and empty. Micklethwaite pushed open the door cautiously wider and peered around the corner. It wasn't empty after all, Ted Bingham was flat on his back in his trousers and vest, snoring. Micklethwaite coughed politely, then when that didn't work, cleared his throat with more volume. Still nothing, then he said 'Mr Bingham' and perhaps it was the unexpected note of 'Mr' that caused Ted to open one eye and peer suspiciously at his guest.

'Bugger off, I'm sleeping, can't yer see?'

Micklethwaite swallowed hard, but he was determined to do this, so he shut the door behind him and sat down on the only chair in the room. The sounds from The Green Man's bar trickled murkily into the room, mostly a sports broadcast, with a few raucous cheers from time to time. It was four o'clock, and the only light came from a curtain hooked across the small window with safety pins. It was a small seedy room and smelt of beer, cigarettes and underwear.

'Don't listen do yer? I'm asleep' said Bingham, contradicting himself in a grumpy voice.

'My names Gordon Micklethwaite, I'm staying with Claris Rolling'.

Bingham swung his legs over and peered at his guest.

'Turn on the light will yer? There, that's better, now haven't I seen you somewhere before me ol tosser?'

Binghams amiability was coming back in a rush as he realised that his guest might be here to impart information, which was true, but not exactly the kind he wanted to hear.

'I don't know. Maybe. My other names Desmond'.

Bingham looked utterly blank, until a light was switched on in the back of his

brain.

‘Ahhh, Mary’s little pal. From the *Falmouth Gazette* eh? So what’s your game then?’

Ted started to roll up a cigarette from a tobacco tin. Gordon rubbed his balding head and was thinking how best to get to the point. He did it by being subtle as a brick.

‘I think you were there when Harry Brackenbury got murdered’.

If Bingham was surprised by this accusation he certainly kept his cool

‘Do yer?’

‘Yes, your voice is on the tape, on the dictaphone that Harry was speaking into as he was dying’.

‘Come again? As the actress said to the bishop’.

‘It was you Mr Bingham, though I didn’t realise it at first. You are both Devon men with similar accents. When you came in you said ‘the man from Porlock’. That’s the joke name you have, after that gossip column you wrote. You called him ‘King Harry’ and he called you ‘The Man from Porlock’.

The smoke from Bingham’s cigarette was filling the room, an acrid yeasty smell that blended unpleasantly with all the other smells.

‘Me huh? You seem pretty sure my matey’.

Bingham certainly wasn’t bowled over by Micklethwaite’s accusation, and his eyes kept straight and cool, and they might have even been smiling.

‘Harry rarely took out the brooch for viewing, but he was waiting for an American buyer, so Helena said. But instead Jake turned up’.

‘Funny eh, good point. I could use that in my next story, a set up?’

Micklethwaite started to warm up.

‘Mr Bingham you aren’t going to use it because you were the person who set it up. You live next door to Jake, you knew Harry, and you knew he was a secretive man. He would need some persuading to bring out the brooch. Greed did it, and this American buyer was just a fiction. I don’t know why you set Jake onto Harry, maybe it all went wrong? I think you told Jake that Harry was his father, you got that from Mary Malarchey, but she’s wrong. But Jake believed it and he’s a wild man, hard to control, and he’s obsessed by the celts and Queen Boadicea. Gets her voice in his head and I don’t think anyone can stop him, and we know what happened. But the voice on the tape is yours Mr Bingham, when you listen carefully you can tell’.

‘You setting me up for something?’ asked Bingham

‘No, I haven’t told the police, they think it’s Harry’s voice’.

Bingham stubbed out his cigarette and looked a long time at his young guest.

‘What do you want matey?’

‘The brooch.’

‘Oh, so you think I’ve got it?’

‘Someone has to have it’.

‘True, true, but me?’

‘I think you turned up a little late, just after Jake had ran away. Perhaps you met him in the driveway and knew something had gone wrong. Jake drove off and you looked into Harry’s study, and you found Harry dying. Maybe it was your instinct to save his life, and pull the brooch out, I don’t know. Then you ran away too’.

Bingham scratched his unshaven chin.

‘Sounds bloody implausible to me my ol’ Sherlock Holmes, in fact’ he pushed his face nearer to Gordon’s ‘it sounds like a load of old codswallop’.

Gordon nodded in agreement and stood up.

‘Where you going?’

‘You won’t mind me going to see Mick Swain if it’s codswallop will you? He will be interested’.

This made Bingham exceedingly affable. He stood up and laid a friendly paw on Micklethwaite’s shoulder, who stood nearly a foot taller than the journalist.

‘No need to be hasty my mate, no need for hastiness, or nastiness. We can be friends and talk like’.

‘The brooch’.

‘Why ain’t you gone to Mick, he’s a mate of mine you know?’

‘He hates your guts’.

This had an effect.

‘Very likely, well he’s a bloody prick I’d say. Did he send you? No? Who sent you?’

‘It’s just me Mr Bingham, just me’.

‘Call me Ted, here’s my paw’.

Micklethwaite shook the object reluctantly.

‘Now take a seat, what can I do for you?’

‘The brooch’.

Bingham made a mock frown.

‘One track bloody mind haven’t you? Well I don’t have it here, I’m not saying you’re right or wrong, but suppose you’re right, then I’d be a fool to leave it ‘ere wouldn’t I?’

Micklethwaite had not really thought of that and was disappointed. He had hoped he could walk away with the brooch. Bingham tried another track to win the young man to his side.

‘Ellen, she’s a nice girl eh?’

So many of Bingham’s sentences ended with a question mark, perhaps a journalistic habit, but it sounded as if he was cadging something. The eternal cadger, sniffing, prowling, fossicking, a whole life lead with a series of question marks.

‘You mean Helena’.

‘Yeah well, she changed her name a bit’.

‘She was Eleanor Trotter when she was engaged to you’.

The little man looked a bit put out.

‘Oh you know about that? Quite a clever little sausage aren’t you, I mean digging here, looking up our Mary eh? See you and me we’re in the same game? We should be on the same side my little pal. Not working against each other. I can see you’ve got brains. Is Claris a mate of yours? Good man ain’t he? Good decent man’.

Gordon didn’t reply and thought he should leave before he threw up.

‘You got secrets, and I got secrets. See Claris and Eleanor, they got secrets too, you know?’

For the life of him Micklethwaite could not work out what Bingham was driving at.

‘Look I’m going to the police and tell them’.

‘Wait there a minute me young boyo, not so fast. You like Eleanor don’t you, I mean Helena, maybe she sent you? I know you like Claris, who doesn’t? Decent bloke, but wait...’

Micklethwaite was opening the door, but Bingham shut it again and pulled an envelope out of his pocket.

‘Look at this first matey before you go to the boys in blue’.

He took out the note and handed to Gordon who read it, quite bewildered.

‘Claris darling, please come and see me soon. I need you badly. I feel Harry is haunting me again, and I don’t like to be alone. All my true love, Helena’

There was a small ‘x’ underneath, and a kiss is a kiss in any language. Bingham retrieved his note quickly.

‘You get it matey? It’s a little love tyrst that’s what it is. Your mate Claris is ‘aving it off with darling Helena, got this note to prove it. So if you’re trying

to blackmail me, maybe you should think again. Wouldn't want this printed in the *Truro Times* would yer?'

Micklethwaite was appalled. He was not actually mentally prepared to believe what he had just read, and the words 'all my true love' kept echoing in his head. He couldn't hide his shock, either and Bingham edged away nervous, yet satisfied, and wheedling constantly.

'How about a deal, between mates eh? No cops or anything a straight deal. I get the brooch to Helena and she gets the note back? Fair?'

Even if everything that Micklethwaite had said to Bingham was true, and Bingham had hardly denied it, it was ashes in his mouth. Helena had said nothing, Claris had not even given a hint of the affair! It changed everything, and perhaps they were in league, perhaps he got it all wrong. He had been used by those beautiful paau eyes, and why should he have felt so guilty about betraying Claris, when they were so busy betraying him?

'I can see it's taken you hard like?'

Bingham was trying to bring Micklethwaite gently back into the wheeling and dealing, but Micklethwaite shook his head as if to rid himself of the head lice that were crawling in it.

'You get the brooch to Helena, and the note, tomorrow'.

'Sunday, I don't work...' was the beginning of a smart reply

'Sunday, or I'll go to the police on Monday'.

'That tidies it all up then, nothing more to say, I mean once the exchange has been made? Right?'

'Nothing' and Micklethwaite left.

With grubby fingernails Bingham scratched himself all over and wondered what he got himself in for.

He pulled on a shirt and said to himself, he was smart that fellah, yeah but a bit too smart. Micklethwaite had got most of the story straight, but there was one tiny wrong detail. Bingham had certainly got Jake properly worked up, overdone it in fact, and the bastard took off so fast that Bingham couldn't keep up in his old Anglia.

When he got to Perbagus Manor, he parked down the lane a short way, just in case someone spotted him. He was trying to be hasty and cautious in the same movement, sweating about what might have happened. He was halfway up the driveway Helena came running out and ran straight down towards the cliff. Bingham felt his jaw drop. Then Jake came bursting out of the front door like some sort of molten jet of magma, swinging his sword and swearing at the top of his voice. He didn't even notice the frozen Bingham, but threw his sword away and started up his van and roared off.

Almost in a panic now, Bingham started to run back to his car, then hesitated. Where was Helena? What about Harry? What had Jake done?

He bit his lip and then started to walk back slowly to the house. He stopped once when he thought he heard a noise, then stepped over the umbrella stand, and edged through the opened front door and peered into the study of Perbagus Manor. He looked straight into Harry Brackenbury dying, his eyes looking at him without realising who he was.

‘The man from Porlock’ explained Bingham nervously.

Harry’s eyes flickered and closed. Something fell from his hand with a clunk on the floor. Bingham stood there a few seconds, his heart chilled at the scene, but that smart arse Micklethwaite was wrong. There was no brooch in sight, and nothing sticking out of Harry’s chest. Then he thought he heard a voice, a male voice, and hurriedly scuttled down the driveway. When he peered back for a final look he saw Helena with a strange young man, then he hastily drove off, and deliberately took a side-road away from Truro. Even so, when he stopped to gather his thought he heard the distance sound of police sirens cutting through the damp Cornish air.

The Green Man provided a chipped mirror for guests to admire themselves. By and large Bingham liked what he saw, not a looker perhaps, a bit chubby, still, everyone was getting fatter these days. He read that in the newspaper. As he pulled on his jacket he made a pathetic attempt to brush more hair onto his bald head.

That male voice he heard must have been that American back-packer, coming back with Helena. Just as well he had skedaddled, or he’d have looked a right Charlie. But where was the brooch? They found the sword, but where was the brooch? What had Jacob done with the thing?

Micklethwaite was wrong there, but sure as eggs were eggs there could be only one person in the world who really knew what had happened to Boadicea’s brooch. He spoke out loud to himself.

‘Bloody Swain, still they don’t know’ he chuckled ‘stupid bastards. If they knew they would have done me by now, so they don’t know, and with Jake half barmy they probably aren’t gonna know anyway’.

This got Bingham thinking about Jake and the brooch. He had a clever idea.

‘Remember what e’ said about the Queen? I could tell I’m I ‘ad a dream, yeah a dream, that the Queen asked ‘im to find the brooch, heh. That’s the way to wake ‘im’ up’.

He liked this idea, and whistled a little as he left the room. If he got his hands on that brooch he’d be in paradise for life.

Chapter 27

A Sunless Sea

Monday 22 October

After a ‘family weekend’ visiting the in-laws, checking out the grandfather moribund in his rest home, and watching kids soccer, girl’s ballet and God knows what else, Detective-Sergeant Swain was pleased to escape to the office, and surveyed his empty in-tray with amazement.

‘Very quiet weekend sir. I took the liberty of clearing your tray, not much in it really’.

Price made this self-satisfied comment as Swain looked at him with astonishment.

‘Thanks’.

It was a grudging acknowledgment and Swain walked over to the whiteboard. It was headlined ‘Boadicea’s Brooch’ and the flow diagram had become a maze of lines, cross-outs, interpolations and cross-references that it resembled a particularly repulsive looking hairball that a cat might have thrown up.

Swain wrote ‘lovers’ beside a line linking Mrs Brackenbury and the Reverend Rolling and Price’s eyebrows went right to the top of his regulation trimmed police haircut.

‘Good God sir? That is true then? I saw the paper’.

Swain outlined his Friday night meeting with Helena Brackenbury and Price quickly grasped the main point, that despite all this fresh, and undoubtedly incestuously sordid information, they were still no closer than before to getting to the heart of the matter, or of finding the brooch.

‘Will you charge them sir?’

‘What with Pricey? Adultery? Not yet illegal, theft? No proof. Withholding information? Possibly. Stupidity, definitely’.

‘But they could have conspired as you say sir, to kill Harry Brackenbury’.

‘But they didn’t Pricey, Jake the Rake did that, and everyone agrees that he killed Harry Brackenbury. Besides, in the court of public opinion they have already been charged, you’ve seen the paper?’

Price nodded and the headline of the *Truro Times* blared out like a neon light into a grey Monday morning.

‘Murdered Man’s Wife’s Affair with Respected Local Vicar’.

‘Helena Brackenbury, the wife of Harry Brackenbury who was murdered ten days ago in his study, was having an affair with Claris Rolling, the local vicar of St Tristans.

The newspaper had even reproduced the actual note. Swain felt dirty reading it and flung down the paper on his desk.

‘So Bingham screwed her after all eh Pricey? By the way have you seen the oily little bastard lately?’

‘He’s a disgusting man sir.’

‘For once we agree. He was going to screw Helena one way or ther other. Either sex, or tell the world. Probably he was after both. Where did he get the juicy love note from eh? Even a sweet kiss at the end. How to destroy people. Policemen are amateurs, reporters have got it down to a fine art’.

The typing stopped as Price read the headlines carefully and then said something peculiar.

‘Hell hath no fury like a man scorned sir’.

Swain looked at Price as if he was mad.

‘You reckon? Bingham never forgave her for breaking off the engagement?’

Now the world would be astonished, so no wonder the tabloids were after them. *The Sun* had rung at 7 am, the *Mirror* shortly after. The phone rang again.

‘Tell ’em to sod off Price’ Swain said grumpily.

Price listened and nodded in a semi-serious fashion ‘yes, no, no we haven’t, certainly sir’.

‘Who’s that Pricey?’

‘It’s Mr Mawson, the editor of the *Truro Times*. Asks if we’ve seen Mr Bingham. I said no sir, should we be concerned?’

‘I hope you told him to look in the whore house first Pricey’ Swain guffawed.

‘I told him no such thing sir. He’s a Methodist you know.’

For an answer Swain grabbed the phone.

‘Swain’.

‘Yes Swain, it’s Mawson here, editor of the *Truro Times*. I was saying to your man there, that no one has seen Ted Bingham. One of our lads went round to his room on Sunday and his room was empty, and the landlord hadn’t seen him at all’.

‘You checked the brothels I suppose?’

‘We did no such thing’ Mawson sounded offended ‘it’s just that, well, he left some copy on Saturday with the sub-editor and...’

‘Local vicar shags Mrs Brackenbury?’

There was a pause.

‘We didn’t put it like that, as I’m sure you know’.

Mawson was a pompous git and Swain put his feet up on the table as a mark of disrespect.

‘Why did you want Ted in such a hurry, oh I get it’.

They were worried about the authenticity of the story.

‘You wanted to check Bingham’s story first, before you rushed it into print. Give the bishop a heart attack on Monday morning, it’s a juicy story eh? Better make sure Bingham hasn’t made it up, like he usually does’.

Swain was trying it on, and he could almost feel Mawson starting to sweat.

‘We went out on a limb there, but we had the evidence’ said Mawson.

‘Doesn’t matter if you destroy a few people on the way does it?’

‘Are you preaching morality to me sergeant?’

‘As a matter of fact Mawson, I am’.

Swain slammed the phone down, and looked dubiously at the packet of nicotine-substitute sweets he was supposed to chew on. Hmm, not bad. The phone rang again, and Price grimaced as he put down the receiver.

‘A journalist from the *Express* sir, wants to see you. He’s at the front desk’.

‘You do it Pricey, I’m off’.

Price called out plaintively as his chief scuttled out of the back door.

‘What do I tell them sir?’

‘Tell ‘em I’m queer’.

Swain wangled a police car from the hard-nosed sergeant on duty and drove out to Portloe, with no particular plan, but it wasn’t too bad a day. At the vicarage Swain’s heart sank, for parked there was a hired car and two men with cameras. They immediately jumped out and looked excited at the sight of the police car.

‘Sir, what’s happening...’

‘Nothing, shove off’.

‘Is the vicar going to resign?’

‘No, he’s starting a harem’

Swain pushed them out of the garden, and pulled the garden gate shut.

‘Oh come on sir..’

‘Bugger off’.

Swain turned his back and pulled the rope. Gordon Micklethwaite let him in.

‘They’ve been there since eight this morning. We’ve taken the phone off the hook’.

‘They’ll be tents there soon, aren’t you going away yourself?’

‘Next week’.

‘How’s the rev?’

‘Shattered, but upright’.

Swain realised that was quite a good description of Claris Rolling as the vicar was standing pensively by the window and sipping tea. The cup and saucer slightly rattled and Swain noticed a definite tremor in the old man’s hand. He looked much older than Friday, a couple of decades older in fact. I suppose he was handsome Swain admitted, though he grubbily wondered if his equipment was as upright as his posture.

‘Sort of a friendly visit Claris’ he explained.

‘All my sins are public now Inspector. I have rung the bishop and resigned, what else can I do?’

‘Have you seen Jacob lately?’

‘Yes on Sunday. It keeps me occupied, I have hardly been able to sleep since seeing my son’.

The reverend was relatively monosyllabic.

‘How is he?’

‘He’s well, he talks freely and seems happy. He has a pleasant room, a garden room with a view of Truro. You can open the window and hear the gulls, a very pleasant room in fact’.

Swain was tempted to be sarcastic.

‘Its supposed to be a secure unit’.

‘Well, he is watched I believe, and the doors might be locked at night’.

A sort of a holiday camp for murderers thought Swain.

‘What does he talke about?’

‘Oh, he talks about the Queen a good deal’.

‘Can’t imagine him as a royalist somehow’

Swain mused out loud as he made himself comfortable in the generous leather arm-chairs that lay scattered around.

‘Actually, Queen Boadicea’ Rolling explained wryly.

‘Oh’.

Clariss looked sad.

‘He hears voices, messages from her, all the time apparently. I met Flora as well, something of a shock as you can imagine. She has aged terribly. We went back to her caravan and talked’.

‘She identified you as Jacob’s father?’

An ancient smile crossed Rollings lips.

‘Perhaps, perhaps not. She wanders a lot in her mind’.

‘Like her son’ said Swain uncharitably.

‘You will still charge Jake with murder?’ asked Micklethwaite.

‘Yup, still stands, I mean he won’t go to prison or anything, just a mental home I suppose’.

‘Shall we go for a walk?’ suggested Rolling with a desperate note in his voice ‘I feel trapped by those horrible men out there, but there’s a back door, and a path leads onto the cliff’.

The policeman inwardly groaned but then it dawned on him that the walk would lead to Caragloose Head and Perbagus Manor, and Helena might be there. They were soon sweating up the hill from Portloe, with Rolling set a cracking pace.

‘Whoa there rev, hold back the horses. Have you seen Helena?’

They had stopped at a viewpoint, and the sun was tucked behind a series of layered clouds and did not look tempted to come out.

‘No’.

There was an enormous amount of detail in that simple ‘no’.

‘She’s been away at Portsmouth this weekend, I thought I might see her. It’s not possible for us to continue our relationship. She wants to, but I cannot in good conscience’.

Rolling sounded as if his heart was breaking and even Swain felt touched. Micklethwaite didn’t look at anyone in particular and slowly started to walk on, trying to drag Clariss after him. The ploy worked and they walked along the cliff path in silence to Caragloose Head, and Swain, puffing slightly, sat down on the same spot

that Charlie Roznick had done two weeks before. A hell of a lot had happened since then.

‘No sign of the brooch yet?’

Micklethwaite asked this unfortunate question, probably trying break the silence, but it irritated Swain considerably. Rolling had walked some yards away and was gazing pensively at the gloomy view. Helena would only be a minute away and perhaps he was thinking of her.

‘No’.

‘Does it matter really?’ said Micklethwaite quietly ‘perhaps it’s better lost’.

Micklethwaite had had time to reflect on the whole sordid business, though he could not really accept that Helena and Claris were lovers. After seeing Bingham he had wandered for hours through the dull Saturday, eventually walking all the way from Truro to Portloe. Took him six hours and it was almost dark when he got to the vicarage. He said nothing to Claris, pleaded a headache and went to bed. He still felt betrayed, and lay awake for hours, brooding over the irony that only days before he thought he was the betrayer. He continued talking to Swain.

‘Everyone’s been ruined by the brooch. Harry Brackenbury is dead, Jacob Dunnett is half mad. Poor Claris, well, and at the very least Helena will lose Perbagus Manor because of Harry’s debts. Men do strange things for her, and to her’ he added as an afterthought.

‘I’ve gotta go’ said Swain.

Swain did not particularly like this turn of conversation, but Micklethwaite wasn’t done with it yet.

‘You’re a policeman. You expect people to lie, and you expect that there is only one true story but I’m interested in history, and I know that everyone tells their story from a different perspective. They are not lying even if the stories don’t agree’.

Swain stood up and was a little angry, having heard this kind of argument already from Rolling, and he didn’t like it more than the first time.

‘Justice don’t work on partial truths, that’s letting the liars off too easily. Jails are full of people who delude themselves that they are innocent victims, no Mr Micklethwaite that won’t wash, it’s too clever. History might be written by people who make up stuff to suit themselves, but there’s one true account in here somewhere, and people know the difference between truth and lies. If you history fellahs don’t find truth, then you’ve failed, and then you cover it up by pretending that there’s no such thing as truth at all. You can’t tell me that a crime didn’t happen there. I’ve still got a dead murdered man in the morgue, that’s enough for me’.

Rolling had walked back to them as Swain finished his little rant.

‘I might go and see Helena, if you do not mind’.

Swain felt hot and bothered, he'd like to see Helena too. Micklethwaite felt duly crushed and was staring along the line of cliffs, and suddenly let out a small cry.

'Look!'

He pointed to something far below and Swain and Rolling came closer, but had to peer cautiously around him as they all stood somewhat precariously on the narrow lookout. With a small shove they'd all be gonners thought Swain, and then focussed his eyes on what Micklethwaite was pointing at. In the cove below them an odd brown object was caught halfway between the beach and the tide. It was a body, half submerged, but clearly a body, with it's arms outstretched as if trying to grasp the kelp in one final attempt to hang onto life. Swain breathed out, and rubbed his chin looking sideways at the tall man beside him.

'Ted Bingham'.

It was a good guess, based more on the brown raincoat as much as anything, but he could also see the bald patch gleaming with sea salt. Rolling peered over, and looked puzzled. Swain coughed and said self-consciously.

'Clariss Rolling, I arrest you on suspicion of the murder of Edward Bingham. I should warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you'.

Micklethwaite was stunned. Rolling however did not seem suprised by Swain's declaration, but seemed rather sad.

'I did not murder that man'.

'Yes, I know that, and I know who did, but you're prepared to take the blame for her I think'.

Rolling looked thoughtfully at the policeman, then said mirthlessly.

'After all I am old, and at the end of my life, and a prison cell is not so very different from a monk's cell. He could have fallen by accident?'

'Do you believe that?' questioned Swain.

'Yes I do' answered Rolling slowly 'but of course a man in love must'.

Swain had a queasy feeling in the pit of his professional stomach that the second attempt at a prosecution was going to be no more successful than the first one. Then, because none of them could think of anything to say or do, they both turned back to look at the body, being washed impassively back and forth in a sunless sea.

Chapter 28

A Savage Place!

Monday 22 October, afternoon

By the time Swain got down to quayside at Portloe he decided that his arrest of Claris Rolling was just plain silly.

For starters he didn't have a jot of evidence. For all he knew Bingham had got drunk and decided on an evening perambulation along the cliff edge, and maybe he wanted to be close to his old lover. That was so likely! He must have been pushed, and that would not be hard for it was a sheer drop of a two hundred feet at Caragloose Head, and the current must have eased his body round into the frosty dank cove. If the sea had been running higher Bingham would probably have been swept out to sea and discovered years later in France.

There was no practical way to get down to the cove, and it looked difficult by helicopter. He hurried back to his car and called up the police launch at Falmouth, then contacted Pricey, who manged by some feat to get down to the police launch in time, and was waving to him cheerfully as the boat approached Portloe fishing wharf as if he was on a holiday excursion. A few people collected to watch the interesting manouever of the police launch close to the wharf, and whether Swain would topple between the gap. Swain disappointed them, but he knew they were waiting for him to get a dunking which had not improved his temper.

'We're picking up a body Pricey, not candyfloss' he snarled at his constable.

'Sorry sir, but I hardly ever go on boats'.

'They make me sick'.

This was literally true and Swain felt dubious as the launch headed straight out to sea again to get around to Caragloose Head. It would take 10 minutes to get to the cove and by Swain's previous reckoning that was about all he needed to throw up his breakfast. He'd completely forgotten about the Reverend in his dash to retrieve the body. Price reminded him.

'What about Claris Rolling sir? You think it was him?'

Price had to shout above the launch's thunderous motor. Swain shook his head. He thought it was Helena Brackenbury.

It wouldn't be that difficult to lure Bingham down to the Point, then a stiff push in the back and he was a gonner. She had good reason to hate him: blackmail, harassment, exposure of her love affair. He'd have pushed the bastard himself if he had half the chance. Swain was feeling too queasy to explain this complex series of motivations to Price, but some sort of lovers triangle was now emerging. Harry Brackenbury was right after all, she was having an affair. He just got the wrong bloke.

The launch eased around Hartriza Point and the sea was running a light swell onto Caragloose Head, which looked impressive from this angle. The sun had finally broken through and made the cliffs look pretty with their swooping colonies of shags and tumbling gulls.

'Caragloose Head'

Yelled out the skipper, as he slowed the launch down and let the boat ease into the shore.

'That cove there sir' shouted Price excitedly.

The police launch dropped its speed to a mutter, and pressed slowly into the tiny pebbly cove. The surf was hardly showing, and with an athletic leap, Price sprang out from the bow and waded to the sliver of beach. Swain followed clumsily and looked up at Caragloose Head where he could see figures watching. Perhaps one of them was Helena? Claris would have told her by now. He probably should have got them taken to the station, but he didn't want to have this piece of evidence float away.

Actually the body had hardly moved, and the two men took hold of the man's sopping trench coat, and carefully rolled the body over onto the sliding shingle. Price leapt back with a startled look and Swain made a sick chuckle.

It was Bingham alright, and even a day or two in the water hadn't smoothed away his insidious little smile, although the pudgy eyes, that always looked too clever for their owner, now looked properly vacant. The abrasions on Bingham's face were mild, and not unexpected considering a two hundred foot fall down the cliff, indeed you'd have to say that Bingham looked rather well really, if it wasn't for the bejewelled object that glittered in the afternoon sun, and looked uncommonly pretty for something which was sunk several inches into Ted Bingham's chest.

It was Price who had to say the obvious.

'My God sir, Boadiceas brooch'.

Swain then broke every police rule, and took hold of the golden shaft and pulled it out gently.

He had been searching for this fabulous object for weeks now, and badly wanted to hold it, to see if it really was real. He held it up at arms length so that it continued to glitter in the pale sunshine. It was real, and so were the small drips of old blood that oozed down the long needle-like shaft of the brooch.

Chapter 29

Measureless to Man

Tuesday 24 October, morning

Swain flung down the paper and scoffed.

‘You have to admit to it Pricey, Bingham got his just desserts’.

Price looked shocked.

‘No man deserves to be murdered sir’ he protested.

‘Really Pricey?’ Swain looked uninterested ‘I can think of a few, Mawson maybe, or that pompous lawyer. Ok, we’ve got the whole gang coming in today. Helena Brackenbury, Claris Rolling, and Gordy Micklethwaite. Let’s nail this thing’.

‘Do we have a time of death sir?’

Swain shrugged. The post mortem was done.

‘About early Sunday morning, maybe very early’.

‘That’s a strange place to be walking sir, on Caragloose Head on Sunday morning? I thought street walkers were more his line than cliff walkers?’

For Constable Price that wasn’t a bad joke, but Swain was offended.

‘Leave the jokes to me Pricey, maybe he was after Mrs Brackenbury?’.

‘Is it that simple sir?’

Price voiced his doubts, and for once Swain had to agree.

‘It hasn’t been so far, so why should it change, but maybe our luck has turned eh? If I followed my instinct I would have arrested all of the buggers by now, but I’m following logic, and’s that’s not getting me anywhere either. By the way, have we found Bingham’s car yet?’

Price shook his head.

‘No sign of it anywhere near Caragloose Head sir, not at Perbagus Manor, or

Veryan, or Portloe or anywhere close. We checked *The Green Man*, no sign of it. It's rather strange isn't it sir'.

'He was driven there, and killed, but who was the driver? Unless he was killed and his car driven away to confuse us, but that's going to a lot of trouble'.

A thought occurred to Constable Price, not one of his better ones.

'Can you commit suicide sir, by plunging the brooch into your heart?'

'Japs do it all the time Pricey, hari kari or something'.

'But Ted Bingham sir.'

'It's about as likely as my willy dropping off from over-use'.

The station was abuzz with Bingham's death, and several top officers had already inspected the famous brooch. The *Truro Times* headline blazed Murdered Reporter: Ted Bingham found at bottom of cliff. They made him sound like a fallen hero. Various people had been rounded up and placed in small separate rooms to prevent collusion. Gordon Micklethwaite was reading a very old copy of *National Geographic*, Claris Rolling was holding a small bible, but wasn't reading it, and Helena Brackenbury, accompanied by her solicitor Tobias Bradshaw was staring into space. Each person was interviewed in turn, and Price was right, it wasn't simple at all.

Everyone, at least everyone who mattered, had a cast-iron, rock-solid, wouldn't be undermined if hell froze over, alibi.

Helena Brackenbury had been with her sister and her family in Plymouth, from Saturday morning to when the police asked her to come to Truro. The family could all back her up. Bingham had been alive on Saturday morning according to one report. Did she know why Bingham came out to Caragloose Head on Sunday or Sunday night?

'I really don't know Mick, but he lived by snooping, and prying'.

'You've seen the headline today?'

'Yes'.

'How does that make you feel?'

'Nothing, I feel nothing now'.

Swain could not think of any reply, smart or otherwise, but let her go. Even her solicitor said nothing, it was that kind of day. Gordon Micklethwaite had a more interesting story.

'You saw Ted Bingham on Saturday morning? What were you talking about?'

'Boadicea's brooch, and Harry Brackenbury's murder'.

Swain looked at Price and nodded, and Price slipped out his notebook.

‘I always thought it strange that Jake the Rake turned up exactly as Harry Brackenbury had Boadicea’s brooch out, he usually kept it locked away, and hidden, so Helena said’.

‘This so-called American buyer?’

‘Yes, I think that was Ted Bingham, and the buyer did not exist’.

‘Say that again?’

‘Ted Bingham had set up the whole thing, and the American buyer, the one he told Harry Brackenbury about was a myth, an invention. Ted lived next door to Jake, and got him stirred up on this brooch idea. I think it was Bingham who told Jake that Harry was his father, and somehow he wanted to put Jake and Harry in the same room with the brooch and see what happened’.

‘Why would he do that?’

‘I think he was after a great story, or maybe he was after Helena. He’s a creepy man. Helena told me he was still obsessed by her, anyway the situation got out of hand. Jake drove like a maniac and left poor Ted behind. He turned up after all the events, and saw Helena rushing away and Jake rushing off and poor Harry dead, well not quite dead’.

‘Did he tell you all this?’

‘No, but I can prove he was there’.

Swain looked old-fashioned and raised his eyebrows.

‘On the tape, it says ‘the man from Porlock’.

‘I thought you told me that was Claris Rolling?’

‘I was wrong. It’s not Harry Brackenbury’s voice at all, it’s Ted Bingham’s. They both have Devonshire accents, and they were old mates, and drank together for years. He called Harry by his nickname ‘King Harry’, and Brackenbury called Ted ‘The Man from Porlock’.

Price looked puzzled, and Gordon explained again in a tired voice. After being convinced that Helena must have killed Bingham, he had now discovered that it was impossible for her to have done so. That only left Claris.

‘It’s sometimes useful being interested in history. I found these in the museum archives, this is a photocopy of the *Truro Times* 1974, see the column ‘The Man from Porlock’. It’s a sort of gossip column, but there’s no writer acknowledged. It’s Bingham, but he got into trouble...’

‘Let me guess, he made things up?’

‘Yes, people complained. One of them was the curator at the museum, he knew this story because he had been one of the actual complainers’.

Swain leant back and studied Micklethwaite’s face.

‘Were you going to tell us this?’

‘Yes’.

‘I wish I could be sure of that Mr Micklethwaite, so where were you on Sunday?’

‘I was walking in the morning and with Claris in the afternoon, helping him’.

‘Get the tape Pricey’.

Constable Price put in the cassette and they all listened carefully to the voice, going over and over about ‘poor lock’, ‘poor lock’, ‘poor lock’. Swain had to admit that it could have been Bingham, but he wasn’t convinced.

‘When Bingham published Harry’s statement in the paper, he left out the last four words ‘the man from Porlock’ Micklethwaite emphasised ‘that’s really what made me realise...’

‘Paper Pricey!’

Yelled Swain and Price whisked out his books of cuttings from nowhere. Swain read the clipped out article carefully.

‘Ok, interesting, so Bingham left his own words out, maybe, maybe not. What else did Ted tell you?’

‘Well he didn’t admit much at all, but I think he pulled the brooch out of Harry, then ran away with it’.

Swain scraped at a pimple on his nose and drew a tiny spot of blood.

‘Why did you go and see him and not us?’

Micklethwaite looked sheepish.

‘I don’t know why. I thought if I could find the brooch, then Helena...’

‘You like her?’

‘Yes’.

‘In love with her?’

Micklethwaite struggled with that.

‘I’m fond of her’ and Swain knew he was lying.

‘Do anything for her?’

‘No, not anything’.

But he was still lying, and Swain knew that too. Micklethwaite was dismissed, told to write out a statement on his chat with Bingham, and ordered to stay some more days at the vicarage.

One more to go, and Rolling did not have such a good alibi as Helena’s, but his day was accounted for, if not the night. Sunday was a busy church day, St Tristan’s day

in fact. Prayers and a community lunch, followed by evensong. The reverend had also seen the newspaper and seemed in another world.

‘I was going to charge you with Bingham’s murder’.

‘Yes?’

‘You had motive. Perhaps you knew Bingham was going to make your affair with Helena Brackenbury public. You live close by, and there’s too much of a tangle of self-interest here. Bingham was Helena’s fiancée once, your son killed Harry Brackenbury for God’s sake! And killed with a type of brooch that you happen to be extremely knowledgeable about. Imagine that, the foremost authority on celtic jewellery living only two miles away?’

Part of the reason this frustration was welling out of Swain was there was far too much coincidence for his liking. Rolling listened quietly and shook his head.

‘Well, Mr Swain you must realise that I have been interested in celtic history all my life. In fact it was the bishop who pointed out the link that St Tristan’s had with Boadiceas brooch, and recommended the position to me, it is, you have to understand, a sunset vicarage. I’m a sort of caretaker until the parishes can be re-organised and I’m due to retire next spring, but I have, in fact, resigned’.

He looked an old man, not really defending himself but simply stating the obvious.

‘Edward Bingham is a difficult sort of man, he interviewed me once about the brooch, but I no other business with him’.

‘Someone murdered him Mr Rolling’.

‘I am really not sure that I can help...’

‘You know why I didn’t charge you?’

At this point Price interrupted, which wasn’t a bad thing, because humble pie was not Swain’s speciality. All Swain was going to say was that he had not charged the Reverend Claris Rolling because he had not one jot of evidence, apart from bucket-loads of suspicion, and that by the by, the Reverend made the most unlikely murderer he had ever met.

‘Sir it’s about the car, Bingham’s car. It’s been found at the hospital’.

‘Where?’

‘Constable Burrows from...’

Price started a long preamble as to how the Constable had found the car in the hospital carpark, still open with the keys in the ignition, but Swain wasn’t listening.

‘Price get me the night nurse for Saturday and Sunday morning, or the matron will do, she’ll have a roster’.

The matron herself came to the phone and said the night nurse was off duty and could she help. All matrons in Swain’s experience were formidable and so he aban-

done his charm and got to the point.

‘Were there any incidents at the hospital on Saturday or Sunday night, any intruders?’

‘No, certainly not’.

‘Is Jacob Dunnett held in a secure ward?’

‘He’s in a semi-secure ward...’

‘What does that mean?’

‘He is checked, regularly. Every four hours’.

‘Four hours? Could he walk out?’

‘Gracious no, the doors are locked’.

‘Do the windows open?’

‘Possibly’.

‘What floor is he kept on?’

‘The ground’.

Swain was determined to be sarcastic.

‘So you keep a madman charged for murder on the ground floor beside an open window?’

Claris Rolling was getting up to leave but Swain motioned him down. The matron was bristling at the other end.

‘Are you coming to the point Sergeant Swain?’ she asked acidly

‘Detective-Sergeant. Can you be sure Jacob Dunnett was in his bed all night?’

‘Certainly, I have the night nurses report before me. Every time a patient is checked on her rounds she makes a tick and... oh.’

Swain waited ominously.

‘It says Jacob Dunnet was checked at midnight on Sunday, and then at the next check four p.m. Monday morning he was absent, but according to the sheet he was in bed by 4.30 am’.

‘So he could have been absent half the bloody night?’

The matron was offended.

‘Certainly not, he doesn’t have any clothes anyway, unless he wanders around in his pyjamas, oh...’

Swain waited for the ‘oh’ to be explained. The matron coughed awkwardly.

‘There’s a note from the night nurse, it seems that, well, Jacob was asleep at

4.30 am, but he was found fully dressed. Now that is strange, where would he have got the clothes from?’

Swain knew immediately.

‘We’re coming round, now. We want to talk to Jake. I want to see that roster’.

As he put down the phone Price had a strange look on his face.

‘Yes Price?’

‘Jake doesn’t exactly like us sir, and I wonder if he will talk to us again.’

‘No, but he will talk to his father’.

Claris Rolling looked surprised.

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘Price, get Mr Rolling here wired up. We’re putting a microphone on you Claris and you will talk to your son and ask him some specific questions’.

The reverend looked bewildered.

‘What sort of questions?’

Swain was suddenly inspired.

‘Ask him about the Queen. What has Queen Boadicea been saying to him’.

Two hours later Claris Rolling was sitting beside his son’s bed in Truro hospital, and holding his son’s hand.

The conversation was two-sided in one sense, but two more people were listening in another room. Each had a head phone, Price was scribbling notes and Swain was smoking in flagrant disregard of the hospital’s strict non-smoking policy. The matron had made some huffy-puffy noises but instead got a right earful about letting murders wander the streets of Truro at night, and she had retreated in some confusion.

‘Sooner we get this done, sooner we’re out of here. What’s he saying Price?’

Swain knew in his blood that this would go somewhere, he even told Price in the car exactly what he expected Jake to say.

‘Have you had any other visitors Jacob? Has the Queen talked to you?’

Rolling asked a question already prepared by Swain. Jake looked around slyly, cleverly.

‘Well father, the Queen has been here, but don’t tell. The queen wanted me to find the brooch again, she said people were trying to steal it’.

‘Indeed, I have heard...’

Jake leaned forward to Rolling excitedly, improving reception into the microphone markedly.

‘It was Ted, he told me that the Queen might be frightened’.

‘Edward Bingham? He was here?’

Jake whispered.

‘He drove me away that night, to the place where I kept the brooch’.

‘You always knew where it was?’

Swain could imagine Jake smiling in a sick triumphant way.

‘But you had no clothes Jacob?’

‘The Queen provided, they were in the car’.

‘That’s Ted’s car?’

Jake now suddenly lost interest in the conversation and stroked his father’s hand. Rolling almost abandoned the reason why he came, for to continue would almost be a betrayal of his own son. Yet he too wanted to know, and felt that the finger of suspicion would always be pointed at him and Helena if Jacob never spoke, and in his growing madness he might not speak again.

‘Jacob, where did you go that night, where did the Queen take you?’

‘To where the brooch was father, in the pot. The pot by the door’.

Three rooms away Swain had thrown away the headset and stamped on the floor with a series of obscenities. Swain already knew what Jake meant. Then he hastily scrambled for the headset again so as not to miss a word.

‘Which door Jacob?’

‘The witches door, where the evil man was killed’.

Suddenly Rolling grasped what his son meant.

‘Perbagus Manor, the umbrella stand, I see, but...’

‘Father, you must not alarm yourself, it is all finished, quite finished. We went down to the cliff and the Queen said throw her gem to her, for she lives close in the sea does the Queen’.

‘And that is what you did?’

Jake looked puzzled, as if trying to recollect.

‘There was a silly little man there, he tried to stop me, but I wouldn’t be stopped. Something was getting in the way of the Queen, father, you know what it was?’

‘No Jacob’ but Rolling was beginning to be horrified.

‘His heart’.

‘I don’t understand Jacob.’

‘He was evil, the Queen told me that, so I took her brooch and pierced his

evil little heart’.

‘God, Jacob...’

‘Yes father, she is satisfied now’.

Rolling had nothing to say.

‘Then I drove back and went to bed. It’s very nice here father, can I stay here?’

Rolling was horrified and could only stammer a false answer.

‘I’m pleased Jacob, pleased.’

‘You look tired father, you should sleep more’.

‘Thank you Jacob’ said Rolling rising ‘I will’.

Rolling walked slowly down the corridor and was met by Swain.

‘Thanks Claris, that was tough, but we know what happened now’.

‘We do?’ asked the bewildered priest.

Swain nodded and lead him out towards the front door and sunshine. How much could the old guy take after all.

‘Bingham tricked Jake, or he thought he did. I think he used this idea of Queen Boadicea to see if Jake still knew where the brooch was. Bingham never had it. So he came here at midnight, Sunday, just after the nurses check, got Jacob out through the window and got him into some clothes, then drove to Perbagus Manor. It was in the bloody umbrella pot, the one I tripped over the day Brackenbury was murdered. Jesus we searched that place and those grounds, and you know not one police officer, not one of us thought to look in the pot by the front door. I even propped the bastard thing up in the corner’.

Price came out and stood on the other side of the vicar.

‘You got that all down Pricey? Not about me being an idiot of course. I dunno why Jake put it in the pot, anyway, he retrieves it and it sounds as if Bingham was trying to stop Jake throw it in the sea or something. They must have gone down to Caragloose Head, and I can see Bingham whining and wheedling away like a bloody mosquito, ‘give me the brooch me ol’ matey’ and Jake crushed him like a gnat. Straight in the heart and straight over’.

There was a dead silence as each of the three men could visualise the dark scene on the cliff, the controlled manic fury of Jacob Dunnett, and the surprise that would have appeared on Bingham’s face when his request for Boadicea’s Brooch was answered in such a savage way. Swain, who did not believe he had much imagination, could almost understand the shock of those few seconds as Bingham would have staggered back, maybe tipped over himself, or else Jacob’s broad hand would have

easily brushed him over the cliff like a dead stone.

‘I suppose so’ replied Rolling and Swain looked at him carefully.

He wondered if he had even heard a single word. Across the road from the hospital was a Catholic church, standing brightly in the sunshine. Rolling was transfixed by it, and started to walk towards it.

‘Are you ok Claris?’ asked Swain anxiously ‘I mean I appreciate what you did today. I’m sorry about those charges, that was stupid’.

It was as close to an apology that Detective-Sergeant Swain ever got to, and again it was doubtful if Claris Rolling heard.

‘I might go and pray, for my son, and myself’.

‘That’s a catholic church sir’ Price pointed out, alert to these nuances.

‘Thank you Peter, but I think it will probably suffice’.

They watched him walk awkwardly across the road to the church, with a slightly bent gait, as if he had been broken in several places. The two men watched in silence.

‘Tough day Price, and it’s nearly lunchtime. Want a pint?’

‘What sir?’

‘It’s all wrapped up Pricey. Got the brooch. We know who murdered who. Just the paperwork now’.

‘I’m not sure sir, I mean, it wasn’t Helena Brackenbury at all?’

‘No Price, you heard Jake’.

‘That’s not a confession we could admit as evidence in court is it?’

‘It’s all we’re gonna get Pricey, why not?’

‘But’ stammered Price ‘what about her underwear, Helena’s underwear?’

Swain was amused.

‘What about it? You’re still thinking about that?’

‘Well I noticed too sir, that day, she had her underwear on that day, yet there was a pair of her underwear in Jacob Dunnett’s pocket.’

‘So you noticed eh? I’m beginning to like you Pricey. What’s it matter, knickers on, knickers off? Sure it’s a contradiction, so is most witnesses evidence, who cares what witnesses say anyway. They never say anything you can rely on. So she lied, or Jake lied, or they both lied, or they both told the truth and she wore two pairs simultaneously. It doesn’t matter Pricey, does it really? We’ve got what we need, and you can never get witnesses to agree to anything. It amazes me sometimes we ever get anyone in the klink. Fancy a pint?’

‘Err, we’re on duty sir’.

‘It’s an order Price’.

Constable Price shrugged and as they walked up the road to the *House of the Rising Sun*, he made an unexpected remark.

‘Sir, Mr Rolling told me once, Jesus wouldn’t have made sense when he was being crucified...’

‘Yeah, Claris told me the same thing...’

A sudden thought made Swain pause, and when he spoke again it was in a different tone, as if a revelation had occurred to him.

‘You know what Pricey? Helena Brackenbury wouldn’t have made much sense in the middle of her cruxifixion either.’

‘I beg your pardon sir?’

Swain waved his words away, and paused at the pub door.

‘You know what gets me Pricey, is this Kubla Khan thing. What did that have to do with anything?’

‘It’s his last lecture this afternoon sir’

‘What Rollings? You’re not going?’

‘I will sir. It’s all he has left. Excuse me sir, I don’t feel like drinking. I might go and see after Mr Rollings. I think he needs someone’.

Swain stared, and it occurred to him that Price probably would get his job after all. Swain pushed open the bar door and deliberately let it slam behind him. He was sick of the job anyway.

Chapter 30

The Milk of Paradise

Tuesday 23 October, 5-6 pm

At four fifty-five the Reverend Claris Rolling walked into the lecture room of the Workers Information Association and found it empty. He looked at the clock and thought that although he was a little early, there should still be some customers. He sorted his papers on the desk and waited. At about five minutes past four o'clock Constable Peter Price walked in. They looked at each other and said nothing, as if acknowledging the empty room was a sort of rebuke to the sensational headlines of the past few days. Price sat down and tried to tuck his newspaper out of sight. He had followed Rolling into the church and prayed side by side with the reverend. The catholic priest of the church was certainly surprised to see a well-known member of the Anglican community in his church, but made no comment. After an hour Price walked Rolling to a teashop, and shouted him a doughnut. He hurried back to the office then, but he was still worried about the Reverend's mental state, and rushed to the 5 pm lecture.

'Well, Peter, I thought that all those sensational headlines would have encouraged a larger audience, but it seems to be just you and I. Should I continue?'

'You've prepared notes sir, I think you should. I want to hear what you say?'

'Good, good, you, me and God want to hear what I say'.

'Here's your book sir'.

'Ah, did you enjoy the Rime of the Ancient Mariner?'

'Very much, quite hymn-like I thought sir'.

'Interesting, well Coleridge was a believer of course, most people did believe in God in those days. The religious imagery in Kubla Khan is quite significant. Three times he mentions the word 'sacred', twice 'holy', then

there are those words scattered throughout the poem with a strong spiritual senses, such as ‘demon’, ‘miracle’, ‘vision’ and of course the last word of all, ‘paradise’. Sometimes I feel that Coleridge is indicating at the end of the poem that there is a vision of God, so powerful that one cannot bear to look at him. For example:

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

Weave a circle round him thrice,

And close your eyes with holy dread,

For he on honey-dew hath fed,

And drunk the milk of Paradise.

It is a poem of hope, I believe, hope in the face of darkness, but the last lines have always puzzled me as if a death has occurred. It is part of the fantastical nature of the poem that it is difficult to make sense of it, Coleridge I think, felt that confusion, and apologised for it, yet paradoxically it is that very ambiguity that is so attractive. What does the poet mean at the end?’

Clariss paused and looked out of the window that was almost dark now, with the edge of a blurry street light shining through it. The pause lengthened, and Price grew concerned, then the vicar turned and Price could see the beginning of a tear. He was breathing heavily as well.

‘Now where was I, yes the ambiguity. Peter, I always thought that at the end of the poem it was supposedly hopeful, an upbeat note, yet today, perhaps I’m influenced by all the terrible drama that has occurred, I see it more negatively. The poem ends on a despairing note, ‘close your eyes in holy dread’ what else can that mean but the extinguishment of life? God closes your eyes, and life...’

Rolling seemed to be struggling with his breathing.

‘I must have a drink, I feel short of breath’.

‘We can stop now Clariss, if you aren’t feeling well enough sir. I quite understand you know’.

‘Thank you Peter, I think it is stopped’.

He elegantly crumpled to the floor and Constable Price rushed over. His Red Cross training exercises came into play as he tested the old man’s pulse and tried to hear his breath. It was a heart attack! Price positioned himself carefully and started to do CPR on the vicar, and the only sounds in the deadly quietened room was the sound of Price’s laboured breathing from the effort to pump life back into a shattered body.

Chapter 31

On Honey-Dew Hath Fed

Friday 26 October

The railway halt at Little Coombe had long passed its useful purpose. It had been built by the Great North Western Railway Company as a personal favour to one of the company directors of the time, who had out of the great profits generated by railway companies then, had purchased an estate in Coombe, just outside the sprawl of St Austell. Sir Edward Rengard was not keen to disembark with the masses, and so this charming brick station building was established solely for his pleasure. Sir Edward (bless his pompous little heart) was now buried in Little Coombe churchyard, and his grandson had to sell the estate to pay off creditors after the railway boom bust. For years though, out of habit, all trains stopped at the little halt of Little Coombe, though few people stepped on or off.

But with the reduction of services under Dr Beeching in the 1960's, and the demand for express trains to London, Little Coombe Halt was obviously doomed within a year or so. But for some inexplicable railway reason, the 10.30 express train from Falmouth to London, might stop, if a request in the form of a pre-paid purchased ticket was made. Such a request was made on Friday, the 26th October, and two people strolled onto the long platform in the stillness of an ancient autumn day. Mist had fallen like a soup over the elm trees, and the leaves clung together between the wet railway sleepers.

The silence was not rare, for every day at Little Coombe Halt you could hear this silence, but for a while the man and the woman were seduced by it, and walked side by side without speaking.

‘Thanks for dropping me off’ said Micklethwaite.

‘I wanted to, I love this place, and I wanted to thank you again Gordon’.

Their steps echoed on a platform cracked with a hundred years of neglect. The halt was set somewhat in a cutting and the permanently wet ground grew a profusion of local weeds and mosses.

‘How is Claris?’

‘He’s fine, a little shaken. He did not realise he was having a heart attack, poor man. The hospital will let him out soon, but he needs the rest’.

‘It was lucky that Constable Price was there’.

Micklethwaite made that remark because he felt rather guilty that he hadn’t been there. He was still angry with Helena and Claris at their affair, but when he heard the news from Constable Price he rushed over to Truro Hospital. He found Helena already there holding Claris’ hand. Micklethwaite could see that they were deeply in love, and he suddenly understood, and forgave them.

‘Claris doesn’t think that we can continue with our love affair. He feels he cannot maintain a relationship with his son and with me, it is too difficult’.

She stood stock still and gazed out over the railway line.

‘He is devastated, oh Gordon what can I say to him? I said I still want him, and love him, but he cannot reconcile himself to the fact that his son raped me. I told him that that doesn’t hurt me anymore, and Jake is, well, hardly of this world. I’m trying to get him to agree to come to the south of France with me, my sister has a little cottage in Menton’.

Micklethwaite looked down at his toe and pushed at the weeds in the cracks.

‘He loves you’.

She stared at him happy and frightened.

‘You think so? I do so love him, and Jake did not change anything. I’ve never loved like this before, not even with Harry’.

This was very painful and Micklethwaite moved onto another topic.

‘Did you go to Bingham’s funeral?’

‘Yes. His wife was there, and he has three grown up children. Mick Swain was there too, sarcastic as usual’.

‘He fancies you?’

‘Gordon! I will never understand men. I cannot help it, what is it with them? Why can’t I be friends with them and not lovers?’

‘You’re one of those rare women Helena, you talk honestly to men, and they love you for it’.

‘Isn’t every women honest?’

Micklethwaite shook his head.

‘Not in your fashion. It comes directly out of your soul, there’s no love in the way at all. Most women hide behind love, they don’t need to, but they do’.

She hardly acknowledged the compliment, if that was what it was.

‘When did you realise Edward was there when Harry was killed?’ she asked.

Micklethwaite drew a breath.

‘I was looking through old copies of the *Truro Times*, and I came across a sort of gossip column called ‘The Man from Porlock’, which made me wonder. The curator at the museum knew Ted Bingham had written them, and when I read your husband’s statement those final words of leapt out at me’.

Helena was listening carefully, and brushed her hair away from her eyes.

‘When I listened to the tape I realised it was Bingham speaking at the end, not Harry, then it suddenly seemed obvious why Jake was at Perbagus Manor that day. It was a set up by Bingham. He’d told Jake Harry was his father. Stirred him up’.

‘But anything could have happened?’

‘Yes, and it did. Jake didn’t follow the plan. I thought Bingham pulled out the brooch from your husband’s chest, but I got that wrong’.

‘Isn’t it odd Gordon, that Jake had hidden the brooch in that old umbrella stand, and it was there it was all the time. Swain was furious with himself’.

Micklethwaite smiled at that and looked up at the old railway clock, which still kept reliable time. He was grateful BritRail was ten minutes late. They kept on walking.

‘Bingham wanted two things very badly’ he said slowly to Helena ‘one you know.’

She looked straight at him and did not blush.

‘The other I think was more important to him. Yes he wanted you, but I think he was also happy to destroy you, but most of all he wanted a great story, the sort of once in a lifetime story that would be the answer to all those clever people that put him down, and might even get him back to London.

He was a journalist through and through. That never changed. Swain told me that the *Truro Times* were just about to sack him, and then suddenly this story turns up. Quite a coincidence wasn’t it? I think Bingham invented this murder mystery. He made the murder happen, and eventually it caused his own death.’

Helena gripped Gordon’s arm tightly and Micklethwaite liked it, and placed his hand on hers. After some minutes of silence he asked quietly.

‘What about the brooch Helena?’

Micklethwaite had read in the newspaper that someone had estimated it’s value at over £300,000, and given all the sensational murders and the link (spurious or otherwise) with Queen Boadicea, it could fetch half a million pounds.

‘I’ve given it to the church. It hasn’t brought the Brackenbury’s much good fortune has it?’

‘But Helena, it could pay off the mortgage, and Harry’s debts to Lloyds?’

‘That’s the argument that the bishop gently reminded me off, but I just want to get rid of it. It only reminds me of Harry, and poor Harry is gone’.

Micklethwaite really did not want to ask this but in all probability this was the last time he would see Helena Brackenbury, so what the hell.

‘But you’re in love with Claris’.

‘Yes, I see what you mean’ she said without looking at him ‘why should I remember Harry so fondly when I betrayed him so badly? Well you can love two people at the same time, and strange as it is they are the only two people I ever loved. Harry knew about Claris, and as you know by now I am not a person to hide things from anyone. I will respect Claris’s wishes and we will have some separation from each other, and perhaps he might change his mind. I hope he will’.

They were still holding hands, and she squeezed his.

‘Thank you Gordon, you did everything you could and I will always be grateful for that’

He nodded and glanced at his watch again. A song thrush tootled away aimlessly, then stopped.

‘One thing I never asked you Helena’.

‘Yes’.

‘After Jake attacked you, why did you run in the direction of the cliff? Why not the driveway, or across the fields?’

‘I think you know the answer’.

She tilted her head a little to the side and waited as he nodded slowly

‘Would you have jumped?’

‘I wanted to, oh I don’t know what I felt. It’s what you said once. Most people who think for themselves think of suicide sometimes. It was lucky that boy was there, I just ran into him. I don’t know what would have happened if he hadn’t been there’.

She smiled faintly, beautifully, and sadly.

‘Everyone has suffered because of that brooch. Harry dead, Jake mad, now Ted dead. Claris and I, well who knows. The newspaper did not flatter us did they? The wicked widow, the lusty vicar, we don’t have much of a reputation left’.

‘Somehow, Helena I don’t think that bothers you in the slightest’ suggested

Micklethwaite.

‘Quite right’ she said with a mischievous look ‘it doesn’t, but it bothers Claris. You at least Gordon have escaped the curse of the brooch.’

He shook his head in disagreement, but he hesitated to speak his thoughts out loud.

‘Not really Helena, I met the perfect love of my life, but she isn’t interested’.

Helena did not look shocked, in fact she probably already knew his feelings.

‘Oh Gordon, what can I say, you know it would be false. Another time, another day, what does that mean?’

She pleaded with him and looked lovelier still. If he had an ounce of courage he would have kissed her, but he was just a gutless wonder with a train to catch, speaking of which, at last the rails were mumuring sweet nothings. She understood and touched him lightly with her hand.

‘You will go back to New Zealand?’

‘No, Wandersbury, the bishop wants me to write a book. A Year of Days, the Christian calendar explained, or something like that’.

Even then she did not say trite words like ‘I could see you there’, or ‘we could meet for a coffee sometime’.

‘I’m going to France, some sun, some sea air’.

‘You can sometimes get that in Cornwall.’

She smiled wryly at this remark, and he hoisted up his suitcase as the carriages trailed by. Predictably, he ended up midway between doors when the train stopped. He stepped in and slid the window down.

‘Goodbye Helena’.

‘Goodbye Gordon’.

She blew him a kiss and smiled as the train moved jerkily away, and that airborne kiss was the closest he ever got to the lips of Mrs Helena Brackenbury.

Notes

All the characters in this story are fictional and there is no intention to resemble any one living.

I have changed some of the Cornish landscape to suit my story. Caragloose Head is actually called Caragloose Point on the maps, and if you jumped off it you would probably land in a gorse bush. I have made the cliffs rather steeper than they really are, even so, you would not want to fall down them, or for that matter, be pushed.

But much of the Cornish setting of this story is accurate. The undulating headlands between Portloe and Portholland are wild and dramatic, a lonely coast where devilment might well happen. There is no such place as Perbagus Manor, but the pretty, tiny village of Portloe does exist, as does the county town of Truro, and of course the massive cliffs and dark luminous coves of the Cornish coastline. A walk there will replenish your soul.

The notion that Helena might see her dead husband in a funeral procession is a complete distortion of the original folk legend. April 25th is St Mark's Day, and was (or is) an important fair day in the west of England. Young unmarried women believed that if they left a flower at the church porch during the day and returned for it at midnight, they would see a wedding procession as they walked home, which would include the ghostly form of their future husband.

The central plot mechanism of the story, that several people can describe the same event in utterly differing ways, was derived from various sources.

The gospels retelling of Jesus' crucifixion, and the different accounts of the empty tomb stories, are obvious examples. Kurosawa's film *Rashomon* also uses this plot device to great dramatic effect. On a mundane level I was involved in a minor car crash many years ago where different witnesses all swore that the colour of the victims car was either blue, red or purple. A policeman's lot is not a happy one.

Boudica or Boadicea? Because of the general cultural knowledge of her name as Queen Boadicea, I have continued with the popular usage, but I apologise to historians.

'The name of the famous queen of the Iceni was actually Boudica, which meant precisely 'Victoria'... But this is not the version which has come down to us from the Latin historian Tacitus. First of all Tacitus himself got it wrong by giving the lady two 'c's calling her Boudicca; then someone copied a manuscript in the Middle Ages inscribed an 'a' instead of a 'u' and an 'e' instead of the second 'c' — quite easy mistakes to make. Thus the romantic Victorian poets helped to perpetrate this error which still remains with us, since most people know her as Queen Boadicea'.

Boudica: the British revolt against Rome AD60 (1978) Graham Webster.

