

The Letter

Chapter 1 - Asha

Asha lay on his back watching the plumes of smoke drift around the small dimly lit room. The children were asleep in the next room. His wife lay next to him cuddling into his side. They'd just finished making love.

Feeling safer than he'd felt for a long time, a long time since he'd felt this affectionate, at least since leaving Libya, largely through lack of privacy he thought.

He glanced down into her face which was tucked under his arm. All the worries and goings on at the embassy, the leaving, the long journey, then the queuing and the waiting and queuing and waiting. That was what had taken them here, to what now felt like safety, near the German border. But what had led to this, he had felt the rest of the family finally relaxing too.

The last bus trip had had to be the last; he had started to feel like they could go no further. This had to be the end. They had gone through the processing and been shown an apartment with showers, toilets and a working kitchen with a gas oven, (No-more lighting fires by the side of the road) which Gheeta his wife had immediately put to use and had straight away prepared a meal with what tins she'd been able to get her hands on and used up the last of her spices, (she'd been so careful protecting them the whole way. He assumed it was her hope that had driven her on. The dream of once again cooking for her family. Something normal to cling to). Well, that had been the meal, and after, Khalim and Shama (his son and daughter) started chasing each other round the table and a laugh broke through the quite chill that had been following them the whole way. This sort of felt normal again he thought.

It had been their first meal, just them as a family round a table, perhaps this normalness could continue. In the back of his mind, though, and coming quickly to the front, was that question again, what had led to this. He was brought suddenly back to the present by a gentle tock, tock at the door. He turned and glanced at his watch on the side table next to him. It was nearly 1 o'clock in the morning.

Sliding as gently as he could so as not to wake Gheeta from the bed, he pulled his trousers on. The tock tock repeated itself a bit harder and he noticed the eyes watching from the bed. Leaning over her he kissed her forehead gently, forcing a smile he gently whispered "its ok, I'll see what it is".

He opened the door to see two fellow Libyans he'd spent the last couple of weeks with.

"The imam has called for a meeting now we are here, are you coming?"

Wiping his eyes he stared at them. "What's it about?" he whispered, he saw the two men shrug and turn waving him quietly to follow.

"Just a minute".

He went back into the bedroom. “Just got to go out for a few minutes, it's nothing, don't worry”. He smiled again though he knew from the look returned it didn't work. He saw the fear returning to her eyes as he turned away.

Closing the door quietly behind him he slipped out and followed the other two. Up the stairs to the next floor they went and along the corridor. His heart was beating more noticeably as he saw the men in their thawbs hanging around a door. He heard whispers coming from within. As they got there they squeezed into the room, behind them the door was shut with a gentle thud.

Inside, he saw the imam sitting crossed legged on the bed. The room was small and now packed. The air was full thick with whispers and the heat heavy. Everyone else had to stand as there was no room. He counted seven faces he recognized and a few others he had never seen before. Staying at the back by the wall he tried to look as inconspicuous as possible.

He had been wondering since leaving his family, what could this be about?

The imam started chanting a prayer and the responses were whispered by the congregation. This was normal prayers, it comforted him a bit. After a few minutes, the prayers came to their end. “Allāhu Akbar”.

The imam opened his eyes and lifted his head passing his eyes for the first time around the crowd. “Good evening” he started with a bow to the crowd. With hands together, Asha bowed back in unison with the others. Everyone stood watching the imam, waiting for him to speak, he held his silence and waited. Slowly the whispers around Asha started: questions not aimed at anyone in particular, echoed round the room, the same questions he'd been asking himself. “Was this their final destination, what should they do now, questions of food, money, work and looking after their families” spread like a hum around the room.

Finally the imam opened his mouth “Did everyone see the shouting, banners and crowds around the buses as they came, the anger on their faces. Did any-one feel safe” he asked. The chatter started again. Listening carefully Asha felt the mood in the room turn from insecurity...to anger. These were people who hadn't had the place to vent their feelings for a while and now there were the first signs of the frustration and anger flowing out in public.

The imam called for quiet with his hands patting the air in front of him. The power of his office showed as the voices dissipated into a murmur, and then to silence.

The rhetoric Asha had heard before, started again. Trust in Allah, them (the infidels) and us. Highlighting the differences; it was comforting in a way though deep down he knew this was what he'd been running away from. Nodding where he needed to and bowing with deferential movements he followed along though his stomach was now turning. This continued for a while and Asha didn't want to hear the next bits, he had heard it all before. Squeezing past people he slipped back out of the door. He knew people would notice him leaving but he wanted to get back to the warm bed with his wife and the comfort and security of his family.

On the way back to his room, he turned quietly to the two who had knocked on his door and had also followed him. "This is ridiculous; we are here and whether we like it or not, we all made the decision when we left: we were heading for a new life....". The two others nodded: they each had a wife and children and he guessed they each felt the same as him. They wanted to spend time with their families.

Stopping at his door he looked the two men in the eyes he said "In England they have a saying, it is very simple and I think this occurs to all of us now, "don't shit on your own doorstep, this is now our doorstep!!" with a slight smile to lighten the mood a bit (though he didn't feel light in his soul). "As-Salamu alaykum", "Wa-Alaykum salaam" He opened the door and sneaked back in.

Asha had been a good student at school, and lucky. His grandfather had got to know a German writer/reporter when working at the restaurant at the ex-patriates golf club. He had asked him to teach his grandson and Asha had been happy to help his grandfather at work and obeyed him. He had accepted to learn German for this reason though he really didn't know why. "Just trust your Grandfather" his grandfather had said. "One day it might come in useful".

Through helping out there, listening intently, watching new things, his eyes had been opened wide by these strange infidels with their clothes, cars and the cultural mixes they brought with them; he saw Italians, English and the odd German. He had learned English quite well and having been taken under the wing of the German he had also learned some German. He was clever and soaked up everything he could. His grandfather had always encouraged him. His grandfather had been right, these two things, English and German had helped him get his job working at the embassy.

As he stepped in through his door he saw Gheeta standing by the stove, "tea?" she whispered trying to smile. He glanced at his watch, 2.30. He nodded glumly; he couldn't keep up the pretense.

As he sat heavily at the table, a picture was fixed in his head. As he sat, the picture took shape and he started to relive that painful day in his head.....

The letter that had passed his desk as a secretary at the embassy... it started coming back to him... that moment not of decision but panic that had started this all. That moment, as if from God, the explosion shattered the glass in the office, bombs exploding....whether from ISIS or another breakaway group from Al-Qaeda or France or England or was it the Americans or even from the Russians, he didn't know; it didn't really matter, the thing was, the destruction was all around. Almost unconsciously he took the letter that he had just opened and had started to read just as the bangs started, it was open and instinctively he folded it and put it into his pocket as he rushed for the door with the other office workers in a panic to get outside...

(he now saw how ridiculous it was; why had he taken it? Allah only knew)

...out of the walls that would crush them, into the hell outside, where others were rushing around in panic like ants running in every direction to get away from the dust and rubble choking the air, ducking and guessing where the next explosion would come from, running in a zigzag he headed roughly for his home, where his family was; would it still be there, their little home?

Eventually, he got there and found Gheeta holding the childrens' heads, protecting them under her hijab; all kneeling under the table. He heard the sobs emanating from under her cloth and the look of sheer horror on her face.

He joined them holding the mound, his family, in his shaking arms under the table knowing the complete futility of it. They had stayed like this for what seemed like an eternity till the silence started echoing after the barrage of explosions.

Through her tears she looked up at him, "take us away from this please, for the children" she begged, the sounds coming through blocked lungs as the dust was now swirling through the open door. "OK, OK" he promised, as he had tried to get hold of himself.

Sitting at the table now that rush of panic started coming back to him. Gheeta came over, distracting him as he felt the hairs on his back, the nightmare going on in his head, tears were trickling down his face. Gheeta came behind him and put the cup of tea on the table and put her arm round his shoulder; he looked up through his tears and saw her softening look at him. It almost made him feel worse. "What's the problem" she said. "We are safe now, there are no bombs and our children are safe, as you promised me, you have done" as if she read his mind, Her smile warmed him. It was what he loved her for, she always made him feel like everything was OK, he felt the comfort and the tears slow, his stomach relaxed a little, still once again. Then like an electric shock, deep in his gut he felt the stab of panic again. It had suddenly become tight inside him once again. He slipped a hand behind his pocket into the lining, with a useless hope that perhaps this was unreal; he felt the rough folded piece of paper in his pocket instantly, feeling it burning and his face fell again.

The softness in Gheeta's face hardened a bit as he felt the anxiousness taking hold of him again. "Is there something your not telling me, what was that meeting about?. What is it that is scaring you....". Asha looked deep into her eyes and felt the panic and tears whelling in his eyes again. He couldn't hold it to himself anymore..... "I guess its just the stress, we are OK now" he could feel it coming out as a question though he didn't want it to. She crouched now, looking up into his deep eyes, "what is it.....talk to me.....something isn't right....tell me" she pleaded. He felt the panic now, could he tell her? His whole body slumped as he pulled the paper from his pocket and placed it on the table. "Its a secret communication between Daesh, through my boss, I was reading it when the bombing started, I don't know why, I put it in my pocket in panic when I left the office that last time". He looked at her, she was staring at it. He saw her hand was starting to shake as it hesitantly approached the folded piece of paper on the table. It stopped suddenly and she pulled back her hand and placed them both firmly back in her pockets.

She turned her back and she went back to the sink.

“This is men's stuff, talk to the men. I don't want to know. We are safe and I don't want to know.” She left and walked out back to the bedroom without another word.

Asha sat still for a while longer before following her back to the room. He hesitated in the doorway, drawn back to the paper on the table; he turned back and re-pocketed the letter. A short while later when they'd finished washing up together in silence, him drying, they went back to their room. Climbing back onto the bed, with the comforting warmth of her body he touched her gently, she turned to him, his hand glided through her shalwar kameez towards her breast, following the round contours, they kissed and made love again though this time it wasn't like before. There was now a tension between them. He tried hard to block the other thoughts out and it felt quite mechanical till he slid off her and lay in silence staring at the ceiling.

The next morning it all seemed more distant, sitting in the courtyard behind the building he watched the mists clear over the mountains and pine trees that stretched in an ordered fashion into the distance. So unlike home he thought. Here there wasn't the dry dusty feeling.

Humid and cold, he shivered and let his eyes cross the courtyard. All the men hanging together, smoking and children running, playing. He felt claustrophobic. He had to get out of here. He went back to their apartment.

“Gheeta, where is my office suit” he shouted, “We did bring it didn't we”. A few minutes later she came out of the bedroom with the suit over her arm. “It's not quite as smart as when you bought it” she smiled remembering the look of pride on his face when they had bought it. It had been just before starting his job at the embassy. How long ago that seemed now, her smile cracked a little, “I have had to repair it a bit” she held out the arm and he could see the repair she'd made. She had used a thread that was as close to the original colour she'd been able to find though it was still easily visible.

“I need to get out of here for a bit,” he said. Putting on the suit he felt a flash of pride as he saw himself in the mirror. It gave him a feeling of being important again. Going down the back stairwell he hoped not to be seen by those inside. He opened the door at the bottom, stuck his head out and looked around. There were two small children playing on their own with a partly deflated football. “Pssst” he called to the two kids. He beckoned them over. “I am looking for a hole in the fence here at the back; any idea where I might find it?” he said in childish tones, trying not to scare them but make it more of a game. The children looked up, “The fence is broken over there, we use it when the ball goes over”; “thank you little ones. Does anyone see you when you collect your ball?”, they both turned and shook their heads, “go on back to your game and if I see your ball go over when I am the other side, I will collect it for you, ok?” “ok” They ran back to where they were playing.

Taking one last look around, he walked fast towards where the children had pointed. Slipping out carefully trying not to be seen, he left the building behind. It was nice to be alone again, walking; he didn't know where he was going, just followed the road.

Eventually, he found himself on the outskirts of the town. He was quickly aware of the glances in his direction and hoped his disguise made him fit in better or at least confuse

the townsfolk. He didn't want any trouble and was glad he had thought to get out of his normal garb. It seemed to be working, he got glances but generally people walked on past.

How he ended up in the church he didn't really know. Perhaps it was the bells sounding the hour that had drawn him. He came across it as he got to the center of the town, standing majestically with its spires reaching upwards towards the heavens. Being the tallest building, apart from the new modern office blocks, with the obvious age difference, he knew it to be a place of worship. He went in through the big arched doorway, similar but less curvy than the doorway to the mosques he'd been in, less colourful he thought.

It was empty as he walked in. Seeing the ordered rows of benches stretching out facing the front he was drawn down the central aisle. Eyes up, he took in the grandeur, feeling the strain on his neck halfway down, in awe as the pillars merged high above. He slid as quietly as possible (sensing the slightest rustle echoing round through the loud silence) into one of the rows and sat down.

He bathed in the light filtering through in the many colours of the stained glass and onto the altar at the front.

There was a familiar glow of calm now radiating inside him. He sat lost in his thoughts.

He was unaware of a few people that had started gathering in and near the doorway behind him.

There was a tapping on his shoulder and a gentle face with a voice to match brought him back from his thoughts. Noticing the white collar and black robe, the words floating in his direction starting to take form, he noticed the man's concerned look and, following his glance behind him, he picked up the crowd growing behind at the entrance to the church.

"Please," the reverend spoke in an accented English, waving with his hand towards a side door. (the entrance to the vestry).

Not hesitating, though unsure, Asha led the way. The smile had been friendly. Opening the door, the priest again said "please" with a gentle smile now. Asha timidly entered, he felt slightly uncomfortable in a church.

Once inside, holding out his hand, Johan introduced himself. Asha took his hand and shook it. "As- salaam alaykum". Johan said. A bit taken aback Asha replied, ""WaAlaykum salaam , Johan". Asha smiled. "Please" Johan waved his hand to the table in front of him, "would you like a cup of tea". Asha put his hands together as in prayer and bowed. "Thank you.....Johan". Pulling out a chair "please sit" Johan continued on to the little stove in the corner of the vestry. Taking the kettle off the stove he went to the deep porcelain sink. There was a large old kettle with a long spout and there was a dull clunk as he lifted off the lid. "I am sorry, they are good people, its just they have never

seen a Muslim, you are Muslim?" Asha nodded, " they have never seen a Muslim in here; you are the first to my knowledge".

He turned the tap on and water rushed out. He only let it run a couple of seconds. Putting back the lid he turned back to the stove. Asha was sitting down, gazing up at the ceiling. "This is the first church I've been in, it is very dark, though impressive". he added Johan placed the kettle on the oven. "I have to confess, I have never been into a mosque". He reached for a box of matches. Turning the gas handle on he then opened the box of matches and pulled one out.

"In the mosques I've been to, there is a lot of light and they are very open to the air. Here it is very different" noted Asha. "the feeling is very different. I guess it has to do with the different climate" he felt he had tactfully replied. Having stuck the match there was a whoosh that made Asha jump as Johan held it to the gas burner. "Different building material I guess as well" with a smile.

Johan went back to the table and sat next to Asha while waiting for the water to boil. Asha turned to Johan "I have seen many churches from the outside on my journey here through Europe and even in Tripoli. They seem to be all the same grey stone". Johan nodded with a serious look on his face, "Please describe to me a mosque; between us, you are the only one to have seen both". Asha's face lit up, "Back home the mosque we went to for prayers was open to the light and the air, the stone was marble all around, big open arches. As I walked in, there was a water fountain with a pool glittering with the marble pattern below, it was in front of the main archway, the entrance. The main hall doesn't have seats like here. There are a few shelves as you walk in for your shoes and nearby there is a sink for washing your hands from the dirt outside, part of the practice for prayer, you see. There is a lot of light that comes in from all sides. In the four corners are stairs leading to the towers from where people are called to prayer, I assume like your bells used to be for. I notice that people don't come any more to the call, why??". Johan sat back with a smile on his face, "the modern world I guess. The pings of computer games seem more appealing nowadays than the ring of church bells". "I have to admit I have seen the way communications have changed and everyone, even the old have phones, it can't be a bad thing the facility with which people can now communicate, keep in contact with family" Asha drifted away "things are changing but, too fast for.....I understand why there is a big push in Islam to go back to the original ways" he looked up at Johan.

Johan sat looking at him with a relaxed but serious face on him: "Faith is thought to be less needed nowadays here as well: I think I understand what you mean; our church too is fighting for ways to recapture the heart of communities". He hesitated "When I say fighting, we have had many truths come out about our church that gives the wrong image of Christianity and as you say, people have less need or time for religion with computers and phones, Christianity isn't cool any more, Christianity is dying according to the media here and there is a bit of truth in that, though I think it is not only Christianity. Having talked to other religious leaders here I hear the same thing from Jewish and Muslims. The young are going less and less to church. There is less need for faith, as you said, with communications and " he grinned "google, there are answers available to everyone on the internet". Asha too grinned, "Google, I know" his face became more serene.

“I think there is the same fear in Islam; there is still hunger, pain and war so I believe that keeps the need of faith going. There is also I think, with us, more connection in the family to pass on the ideas, Here I get the impression that there is less connection through generations to the wisdoms of the old. Religion is still carried on from father to son back home”.

Johan added in, “Respect for the wisdom of the old, “ he smiled ironically, “here family stays together less. Money I guess has given a freedom for the young; the old are not looked after by the young here, there are ways society now looks after the old. I think it is less personal and definitely less respectful, the curses of modernity” he laughed, continuing ” I can't blame the young for spreading their wings, I too, when I was young and hadn't joined the church, I travelled a bit...I suppose also that with less hunger and pain, the need for faith seems to be being replaced by spirituality. Modern spirituality seems to be lightly based around Buddhism. Once, when travelling, I found myself in Nepal, the home of Buddhism, I was interested in 'spirituality' back then and found myself drawn to Buddhism. I studied while I was there, Meditation , Yoga, and a few other things, compassion being a main draw that eventually led me to the church” Asha looked on intently. “Buddism is not really a religion and I find I am unsure exactly what to call it but it is more like a Philosophy.” “Asha butted in “Like your religion!” Johan laughed out loud. “It can be seen that way. I like to think that because Islam and Christianity believe in one God or Allah, as you call him, they are religions, Buddhism doesn't really have a God....well that part is actually a bit confusing there are many gods but they are also all the same god”. Asha looked confused. “In Nepal I found Buddhism was about learning to be good in oneself, leading to being able to pass that on to help others be good in themselves too. I have found this has warped a bit here in the West; there are many practices that have been converted for modern life: the result I feel has been diluted. The part of being good in oneself has led to Egoism, selfishness and the part that passes it on is lacking,.....“ he smiled to himself, “like politics, money is what it is about, there are two parties here: one believes in putting government help, money, to help businesses; the belief there is that it will filter through to the poor. Make their lives better. In a way it works but on the whole, it seems to be separating the rich from the poor. I think the same with Buddhism: it doesn't filter past the self, that seems to be the most important thing in real Buddhism as I saw it. What I think seems to be missing is the realization that happiness comes largely from giving not taking, though the modern world pushes that it is what you have or want that makes you happy. It is, unfortunately, a never-ending series of disappointments” he said with a smile on his face, Asha looked puzzled. Johan stopped and looked at Asha, “please forgive me, I can preach a bit to much, I am sorry, I am being rude, can I help you with anything”. Asha felt embarrassed “I...;I guess I am seeking some guidance; I don't know why I came here” after a second of thought he lowered his voice, “perhaps Allah led me to your door, it is the only explanation I can give“.

“what is your.....quandry,” he asked.

Asha was feeling a bit lost at this: “Errh, if you are asking, I am wondering, I am with the new arrivals at the hostel, I am from Libya, there are many others with us from home and Syria and a few other places, I think others like me have come to get away from the war, it is no place to bring up children, most are good people that just want to give the best

they can to their children. I was with the men in a meeting with our religious leader, our.....priest. There is a lot of discomfort and I feel....the priest is not guiding us correctly to integrate with our new neighbors, your people, I agree there are a few of your people that don't want us here. Most of us have seen similar problems back home and that is a disappointment to many of us but we understand. I don't really know why I am here but now that I am,.....perhaps one day you could pass by at the hostel and show the others that, sorry I don't know really how to say it but , show the others that the infidels are not monsters really, I just thought of it and perhaps it will help balance the people. I know we are new here and perhaps we need some help from people like you?, I am sorry to ask but perhaps...”,

"It is a bit different(??) but you are right, I would be happy to help and yes, it is my job to welcome new people into the community. I am grateful” he nodded “thank you for showing me the error of my ways. It should not be for you to ask but I should have thought of it sooner”, the water started whistling in the kettle. “Would you like a cup of tea and I will drive you back after and perhaps you can introduce me to some of the people”.

They stayed a while together and eventually Johan drove Asha back to the Hostel.

Chapter 2 – Harrald

Harrald stood in the long empty corridor. Glass wall on either side. Blinds all shut but what could he expect from the secret service. Private offices all down the corridor. He had short cut blonde hair and was dressed in a smart suit with a perfectly ironed shirt, he'd done it himself that morning. A tie in a knot that too was perfectly placed and the right size, he felt good. Immaculate and ready. He had woken up that morning, alone as usual in his small apartment. It was a rented one bedroom apartment. He'd promised himself he'd get somewhere bigger and nicer with a much better view when he had the chance; 6 months later and he was still there. His bedroom was a room, he still had boxes on the floor and no pictures or anything decorating the walls, there was a wardrobe where his shirts and suit hung in an orderly fashion. Across from his bedroom was the bathroom. It had a bath, no shower; he liked a shower and as yet had not used it preferring to shower each morning when he got to work and when he had done his exercises which he did every morning including the weekend. He lived for his work. As he had looked in the mirror that morning he was reflecting on his life as he had done a few times recently.

He'd had a Standard life growing up, an only child with parents who he'd felt had loved him and actually had doted on him. He'd done very well at school and passed all his exams with flying colours, then joined the army. Why he had moved straight into this life he often wondered and sometimes even regretted. He sometimes wondered what a normal life might be like though he knew that came with the job. It was what he heard his colleagues talking about a lot.

He loved his job and although his personal life was empty, his job took up almost all of his time and he was happy with that; when at the odd times he thought about it, he knew he was where he wanted to be, at the center of things.

It had been 6 months since he had been moved into the offices underground and he was feeling more and more at home. He was still learning. He knew the equipment that was used but still felt a bit out of place. The army part of him was still washing away. These were office workers he worked with now, pen pushers as he had always seen them, but now he felt he was able to flex his brain. It wasn't just numbers but also psychological. Personal. Looking in depth into the lives of real people, important people, those who had the power to change the world, for good or bad. His job was to try and make sure it was the good not the bad that succeeded.

He had an effect on things, on a global scale. Having spent time with NATO forces in the Gulf States, he had seen action and had got through it, he felt unscathed, physically and mentally.

Now working in the shadows so to speak he had flashes of ego, still new enough to have flashes of it, (he laughed to himself about this) able to see himself as almost a German James Bond.

Having had a lot of short relationships that never went more than 2 weeks, his humor focused on the caricature of spies and their women and. The women in his life these past

6 months were almost nonexistent. He had had a fling with a colleague a few months previously but that had been a nightmare. Not knowing what was real and what not. That was when he realized in himself his inability to reflect his emotion externally, it reflected back and it made his love life feel paper thin. No depth.

At least with work he had all the information available and his job was to look at all aspects surrounding the subjects he had. There he got his depth. Being able to look at someone's life from outside with all the details and the use of his own imagination, he often felt he knew them better than they knew themselves.

Today, with the image of a secret agent in mind he knew he had a meeting with the new head and wanted to make a good impression. Blocking out his personal life now he thought about that in relation to what he had been doing. Earlier that morning he had seen the news and knew about the fire in Bautzen where a bus with newly processed immigrants would be an issue.

He had been charged with the task of filtering the new arrivals who came mainly from Syria, Iraq, and Libya. With the technologies available, it was more a job of logistics. Making sure the processing power of the face recognition software was spread out in the right places. So far no main characters had shown up.

Standing in the corridor he heard footsteps, then the door opened. He was invited in. "OK, Agent Langfelt, report".

He hadn't met Robert before, who, having shaken hands, had gone back behind his desk and was now sitting, concentrating on the document before him on his desk. Harrauld who was still standing (straight-backed as he had learned in the army though he had started to relax a bit. This he had taught himself, the solid but relaxed look). His previous boss had been ex-army and he'd felt quite at home with his methods, the others under him in his team not so much so. He noticed a surprised look on Roberts' face. Surprised when looking up and realizing Harrauld was still standing, he pointed to the chair. Then returned to the document on his desk.

Harrauld sat. He waited till eventually Robert crossed his hands on the folder and looked up. There was an uncomfortable silence, Harrauld felt. Realising Robert was waiting, it only took him two or three seconds and then he started. "Agent Harrauld sir, head of surveillance at the border crossings".

"I know, my predecessor had good words to say about you, both ex-army so i guess you got on well, i am not army, please carry on."

Harrauld was a bit taken aback by this and hesitated for a moment,

"We have face recognition set up on all border entry stations on the southeastern border stations, centralized here where we have seven agents controlling. We have had reports near some crossings points, of local interference, but nothing seemingly significant till last night, the news reports in Bautzen, the Hostel-bus fire. The migrants involved have already been relocated to a dis-used hotel complex nearby. The processing has taken time but was speeded up to compensate. Local bus companies have been hired to transport a large majority of the entrants so processing can return as much to normal as possible, dealing with business travellers and tourists".

Robert looked up. "Ok. I am going to stop you there. I like things informal. This sounds like the sort of written report I would expect from the army; I want to know what you think, what you found out and when YOU feel I should know something, you contact me directly OK".

arrald checked himself, took a couple of seconds letting this sink in. He started again. "Ok," holding back the "errr" he felt coming to his mouth, he continued and jumped in, "It's hard, so many people, there is a delay in the ability to process the data. Nothing has come up in so far as to people on the known security lists, but I wonder if this is the right way"

He took a breath waiting for an interruption that didn't come.

"Any known character on our list wouldn't come through this way, not now. They'd know we are watching with a fine tooth comb and I guess they overestimate our ability to recognize them. If I was them, I'd be using a different method. Knowing Daesh, they are ahead with ideas about how to recruit, look at the number of European 2nd or 3rd generation people leaving for training out there. There they have reached into our heartland and are already working successfully within. Why not continue in the same vein". Robert nodded.

Harrald continued. "Apart from the chaos of processing, the thing that is starting to worry me is the local reactions. It could get in the way of our processing. Already as I said, the report from Bautzen, we have had to speed up the process there and that could mean errors. We have followed the security plan and there seem to be no holes but it does worry me. The speed in which it became an international media story I feel was unusual and it has hampered the security officers in the field I guess".

"Good, I was thinking the same thing and want some-one on the ground. I have contacted the local police in Bautzen and spoke to an Inspector Caroline Lehmann. She will be waiting for you. I want to get a feel of the atmosphere on the ground. I agree it is a bit unusual; I want recommendations as to how we can tighten up, I want to be prepared if this starts to happen at other border crossings. What is behind it? It might just be to do with the escalation of fear due to the immigration policies but I want to know. There is a helicopter waiting to take you there. I have information that there is local resistance that seems to be getting more organized than I would normally expect.

See what you can find out, how far is the local reaction going to go, talk to the immigrant officials see how they are feeling. The local resistance leaders, find out why it has escalated and also i am curious to find out how this is effecting the immigrants, there can't be a positive response from them.

There are others slipping through the net elsewhere, how big is this hole and can it be closed. More than that though, I have a feeling there is something new happening, you are right about their methodology, it seems to be about to take hold as you suggested. Adesh don't use the same tactics for long. They have learned from our business methods that as soon as a plan starts working, it is time to move on and find the next. What is this next system? I think we can start to expect more bombs and people publicly killed in our streets. How?? get a feel for it, OK".

“OK”, another hesitation from Harrald when he saw Roberts head going down and he changed the folder in front of him. He knew the meeting was finished so he got up and let himself out. Once outside having, closed the door, he fell backward against the wall and let out a long breath of relief. He was used to the military way, so much easier. Not so much thinking, just doing, though as he thought about it he felt a respect for Robert; he actually thought he might like this way, perhaps things would work out after all. (*He_delete*!) Reaching for his collar (*and_delete*) he released his tie just a touch. He stood up and started walking to the stairway. He knew where the helipad was on the roof and how to get there. He had never been out on an assignment on his own like this, not in civvies anyway. A flush of excitement went through him as his pace increased till he got to the area where the *elevators*?helicopters? started.

She sat in her car watching the helicopter touchdown. Unconsciously she ran her hands through her light mousy hair, glancing in the mirror. She didn't wear makeup, no time in the mornings.

Opening her car door, she put one foot on the tarmac and stood with her weight on that foot, hanging on the open door. She waited till she saw the man getting out of the helicopter look around and spot her. A quick wave with her hand to catch his attention and when sure he was heading in her direction she stepped back in and sat down. She reached over and opened the passenger door. She didn't like formality and wanted to get on her way. She had spent the early hours of the morning going through the report of the incident of the fire in the hostel.

She had also looked at the report that was still very thin about the group that had started it. There was no subterfuge, everything was open, there were photos of the group protesting the arrival of the newcomers as she liked to think of them. (They were new here and had been processed and were now on the list officially as potential German citizens, therefore under her care).

She hadn't thought about how she felt about it; it was just the way it was and in her book, the rules were made by others; she loved her job however hard it was and just got on with following the rule book.

It had been a long time since she had been in touch with her emotions. Ten years previously, as a detective, she had been emotionally involved with a man who she later found out was surreptitiously involved in smuggling hard drugs and using her to find out details of police movements.

She had had suspicions when a colleague had brought certain things to her attention and she had arranged a stake out. During this, she had refused to believe and only when she had personally opened the car boot and seen the bags of heroin, did she realise how gullible she was. When he had come out from the cabin with his partner shooting, he had knowingly shown his contempt for her and tried to shoot her, and she had been forced to use her weapon. She had taken aim and shot him in the head. She was a good shot and had hit him directly in the head and killed him instantly.

She had had therapy afterward which had been hard but having studied psychology at university she had known what were the right answers and had quickly moved on from that. Since then she had lived her life following her training. She regularly did yoga and

had found the beauty of meditation, and knew tricks to clear her mind whenever she found her emotions showing their face. She was cold and she knew it, she accepted why and had spent the last 10 years living her job. She had rarely been with anyone since and even then only one night stands. She had risen through the ranks because of her ability to focus and get the job done. She was proud of herself.

“Flying visit” she shot at him as his face appeared ducking into the car. She had remarked he had no bags with him. She held out her hand to him “Caroline”; “Harald” he (*replied as he _delete*) reciprocated. He climbed into the car and shut the door. “I’ve been informed to show you around,” she said curtly “I have things to attend to myself at the border post first and then we can visit the incident site, OK with you?”.

“OK with me” he replied. No more chit chat: she set off. She started to feel a tinge of nerves. This was the first time she had met with a secret service agent and she realized she was impressed. She had remarked he was attractive straight away; he seemed younger than she’d expected. He didn’t ask questions or try to make light conversation about the day which was horrible, wet and cold. He just sat; when going round a roundabout she threw a glance in his direction and though his face was stone-like, she thought she got the slight feeling there was a smile at the edge of his mouth. Saying nothing they arrived at the border post.

“How long are we here?” he asked as they parked.

“If 15 minutes is long enough, we could meet up here again”.

“Ok,” and he walked off in the direction of the entrance hall. There was a crowd already gathered of about 20 people, carrying banners. They had been there a while she guessed as they didn’t look very active any more. Finding shelter from the rain they were all huddled under an outcrop of the border post roof on the German side.

She was here just to check up on her officers. They were just there as a security presence. They were sheltering under the other end of the roof, in full view, as they were ordered to. Often she had found the presence of officers was enough of a deterrence to stop trouble from igniting and should any little skirmish start they were always there to stop it. Her worry was anything organized. Since she had had the call in the middle of the night about the hostel being torched she had been trying to track down the root of it. Although only a small incident, the speed at which the media had picked up on it and with it being on every news channel nationwide and even internationally there was something else behind it, she had concluded.

Having talked to her people on the ground she quickly knew the base cause though whether it went higher she was still not sure.

She had been aware for several years of a far-right nationalist group that she had classed as mainly football hooligans. Their leaders were mainly people she had knowledge of as having grown up in underprivileged areas and in their youth had been arrested for violence in the streets outside pubs or football grounds. Some had moved more into the

criminal side of things and formed gangs, dealing drugs (which through use by the notso-clever ones had quickly reduced their ranks). Those left were still involved politically and, though not personally so vicious, preferred to use strong-arm tactics as methods of persuasion.

Amongst the pictures she had received from her intelligence sources, she picked out her favourite candidate as an instigator of the current problems. Allan Werner.

She had ordered him to be detained for questioning in the hope that that would disperse a large majority of the group. She realized, looking at the photos, there were a lot of new faces she didn't recognize though a few she did; normally she wouldn't associate them with this group.

Realizing the question of immigration was a political hot potato she assumed the others had come protesting with a real belief in their cause. People had the right to protest and voice their opinions but when it broke criminal laws she knew where she stood. It was her job to keep the peace and to the best of her ability she was going to do just that. She went to her officers and checked they were ok, made sure they were up-to-date with the situation with the burning hotel 20 km's away and encouraged them to keep vigilant. If the number of protestors here grew significantly they were to contact central. That was one of her fears.

She decided when this was done to also show her presence to the protestors informing them of the situation and warning them at which point she would have to step in. She liked to have everyone know their place and that way it would be easier to enforce controlling measures if necessary. She believed in this type of situation in drawing a clear line.

Having talked to her officers, she approached the group of protestors. She scanned their faces one by one trying to assess who would be the leader of the group. Seeing no-one step forward as she approached, her assessment of the faces concluded they were but foot soldiers, making up the numbers.

Perhaps a distraction from the main group 20kms away, perhaps to lull her into a false sense of security, she wasn't sure. Having given orders to her officers, she felt she had done all the necessary preparation. Standing in front of this group just clear of the roof so getting rained on, she made her position clear. Scanning the faces again there was no-one clearly heading up the squad so, she concluded, her assumption was correct.

As she was finishing her *parlez* she noticed, in the crowd on the other side of the fencing Harrald knitting his way through the crowd in the courtyard of people waiting to enter. Only because he was heading the opposite direction to the others did she spot him. She finished her speech and moved off sideways. Talking, resisting the urge to press the button "send" on her shoulder walkie-talkie she refixed her gaze on Harrald.

He had stopped walking against the flow and was now in the middle of the group; she had lost him a couple of times as he melted in with the crowd huddled into their collars escaping the rain. Wondering, she questioned the coat he was wearing. It definitely wasn't what she had seen him in when he got in the car. She had remarked how smartly dressed he had been when he got in the car but now he had a long coat covering him. He seemed to be looking up and, with a few others, she noticed they were watching helicopter circling above. Press she concluded. Though as she watched, his head didn't

follow in the same line as the other around him who looked up, followed the splodge in the sky and intermittently dropped their heads again because of the rain drops. She looked up again following the direction of his gaze trying to see what he was looking at. Not seeing it she returned her gaze along the same trajectory. She saw nothing and retracing her view, she couldn't find him again. He had melted away. She spent a couple of minutes now

standing still scanning for him. The rain was dripping from her hair into her eyes and cursing slightly she ducked back into her collar and started heading back to the car. To her shock, as she lifted her head from the shelter of the warm cubby hole of her neck near her car to put the keys in the lock, he was standing there, huddled in the same fashion as her in a used overcoat. Trying to hide the surprise she knew she'd shown with almost a little jump she continued and inserted the keys into the lock and clunk, the central locking activated. She squeezed back into her seat as he simultaneously appeared next to her.

“Where did you get that coat” was her first reaction. “Trade secret” he replied with a slight smile that showed no look of superiority and disappeared just as quickly. She couldn't hold back the look that showed she was impressed and he noticed. A gentle smile spread across his face again though this time it stayed. “Realized I stood out a bit in my costume, so I appropriated the most ordinary coat off a hook in the hallway as I passed through. No one said anything and seeing as it might be useful at our next stop I thought I'd keep it..... ”.

Quietly She turned forwards again putting the key in the ignition. He hadn't shut his door yet and turning to ask him to, she was again surprised to see him sitting but still hanging out of the door bent over. It took her a few seconds to realize that he was rubbing wet dirt from the ground in his hands and then on his shoes. Without turning around “shoes are normally the first thing people notice and on the spur of the moment, this is the best I can do” he turned his head slightly in her direction shrugging this time with a little grin. “spy school!!”.

She raised an eyebrow at the same time as she turned the key and the engine kicked in with a slight roar as she tapped the pedal. “Makes me feel I should go back to school” she returned the grin.

With the ice feeling like it had been broken, the conversation on route to their next destination took a more serious tone.

“So what exactly are you doing down here,” she asked, “I think I have everything here under control or is there something I should know about?” she questioned, throwing a stern glance at him.

“Nothing I know of, just fishing really. You know how serious this immigrant situation is: later on, with the risk of terror attacks in Europe mounting, this could be an entry point. My boss wants me to get a feel, see if I can't work out their next move” he volunteered.

She took a couple of seconds where she looked to be concentrating on the road then asked “you allowed to tell me all this? I thought the word secret in your job title meant closed mouths”.

He turned to her and his smile had become a grin now. “You've been reading too many spy novels....I guess.....” his face returned to its serious image again.

“Where Europe stands at the moment I feel we all need to work together. Remember the problems the US had with their security services after 9/11.

I need to be able to work with services like yours to be able to stop similar things happening here. So *although I agree I'm not altogether in a majority with this view back at my office*, I think I've been given authority to try. It should work like this: I feel being open with you will hopefully mean you will be open and forward with me. The world is changing and I feel those up top on my side are tolerating new angles because, to be honest, this new world with the internet, global communications, travel and if you look at it in a certain light, new values all around, are changing boundaries.

We realize we have to try new methods. We use new technologies with old methods and we are realizing, in this case, the terrorists to are using the new technologies and they are using new methods. Morally the goal posts are changing too. I could be wrong, in a way I hope I am wrong but.....I don't think so; we will have to wait and see”.

Caroline was silent for a while, driving while the cogs upstairs turned. Harrald was deep in thought too. He had been surprised at the organization at the border control. Even with security at its heightened level, there were so many holes; anyone could slip in unseen, he realised. He was convinced though that that was too much of an obvious route.

In silence now they continued until turning off the main road into a thin long straight road with high fencing either side. He could see, looking down the road, a bus or what was left of a bus. From one end everything looked fine, but as they moved through the crowd of firemen and police cars flashing, blue bouncing around the buildings, as they went past, they saw the burnt out remains also of a building. Smoke funneling up through the still pouring rain, he could see the roof that had caved in, there was, from what he could make out, a bit left of the walls though even they were almost just piles of rubble. “Anyone hurt?” he asked. “No casualties” she replied. They were all orderly, didn't panic and all walked out. To be honest, from what I have read from the report I guess, they must have been through a lot. They are used to worse than this, kids, adults, and grandparents, completely calm. I have seen some of the pictures and I think the faces tell the stories. Hollow eyes, almost sleepwalking out of the building, just another catastrophe on their route”.

As the car continued passed, Harrald saw a group of people behind a fence, with banners saying simply things like “go home” and “we don't want you here”. From inside the car, he couldn't hear but could see the gesticulations and mouths moving. A group of about a hundred he guessed. He was surprised the local community could supply that many people seeing as it was still a work day, and raining cats and dogs. “Outside support I guess” he mumbled out loud.

They turned right at the end, in the direction where the mob were hurling their insults, into a hotel car park. "It used to be quite a high-class hotel complex a few years back but was shut down as the group went bust during the crisis in 2008" Caroline said, "This is where we are placing the newcomers till they get places allocated around Germany". She parked and they got out. As soon as he got out he heard the incomprehensible din that was coming from the other side of the fence. Even in the rain, these people were zealots he thought. "How long have they been here," he asked Caroline nodding with his head in the direction of the crowd. "All night from what I've been told: there was a crowd here before the fire though not as big; when the fire started, small additional groups started arriving. We thought in the rain and cold they would quickly get disenchanted and leave. I have got the impression they are here to stay now though!!".

Harrald turned to look into the crowd. Caroline stood next to him.

"OK," he said "so if I'm right, the leader of the group is a local" he turned and looked at her, "any idea who might be organizing it?" She looked at him with a squint of a smile "We know exactly who it is! We have him in the incident vehicle, under arrest. I know him from previous experience and not a nice guy. I pulled him in, in the hope that without a leader they would disperse, but no luck though as you can see. They really seem to be taking this seriously".

Harrald looked back at the crowd for one last look. He then turned and walked, following, Caroline towards the hotel complex adjoining the car park. "This is where the refugees are now placed I guess," he asked. She turned and with a straight smile she corrected him "They have all been processed and those not meeting the requirements have been moved ready to be returned to their country of origin. These people are now in the process of becoming German citizens, they are not refugees any more, sorry but I just feel I need to get this correct". Harrald smiled inside but his face stayed stone like. "I apologize, I realize it is important to know", looking up, he could see the faces at the window, that had been watching the crowd and were now all following Caroline and him as they approached the entranceway. It was a big block of a building, red brick face all around. He could see this must have been quite an impressive place in its day. Built in a u shape, he could see straight in to the central courtyard, the gardens that in their day when properly looked after must have been quite something he thought. Now, though, the plants were all dead and it looked like an inner city playgroun. A bit sad he thought. He stopped and scanned around. The whole complex almost gave the feel of a prison now. Two metre high fences all the way round the grounds; from where he stood he noticed where holes in the fences had been made by what he expected were bored youths from the local town, looking for something to do. He had already noticed patches of graffiti spray-painted on certain walls, some quite impressive pictures, others just marks. "Hotel rooms comfortable inside?" he asked. "This place was set-up for individual families, a good concept at the time, all rooms with in built kitchens, bathrooms. Small apartment self contained, perfect for our needs. We just needed to get the water and electricity turned on and hey presto, holiday flats for the new arrivals".

She knocked. The door opened showering them with light from within. To his complete surprise, the door was opened by a priest. "Good evening, come in" came from the priest. They came into a large hallway with a really high ceiling. Harrald imagined on a nice day

it would be well lit with the glass sections all around. Today though, it had a dark dank feel to it. Here all the people had gathered, The old reception desk was still there, in front amongst the pillars, and on the stairwells, people stood, all looking at the group that had now entered. Standing next to the priest Harrald saw a sea of people. Kids, adults, grandparents and perhaps even a few great grandparent from what he guessed. Harrald followed the priest who was now talking to Caroline who seemed equally surprised.

"May I ask what you are doing here?" she asked.

"I was asked here by someone. He felt it would be good for the others to see a friendly German face, I know it's a bit ironic, me being a priest in the current situation, but I thought: why not, we are all children of God even if we have a different name for him" he explained.

"My name is Johan by the way", it seemed the priest had arrived and had immediately been bombarded with questions as to what happens next.

The priest was explaining to Caroline that the people were waiting for information as to what was now going to happen. "Is there no-one here from immigration, to help them settle in?" she asked(?)

Johan shrugged his shoulders, "When I got here apart from the police at the gate who let me in, I have seen no-one of official status around. I was surprised too. I speak English, a few of the people here have one other language apart from their own which is English. They seem suspicious, (I guessed because of my connection to the church), though as they are only able to communicate with me, they have been asking nonstop questions as to what happens next. I don't know what to tell them".

Butting in with a loud enough voice to be heard by most in the room, so that the room stopped and the murmur became a silence. Harrald asked in English. "To whom should I talk to as the spokesperson for eh eh...the residents? Feeling himself blush and cursing himself for that blunder he smiled and looked around the room.

"There are not many in the room that speak German so if I may be of assistance" a voice came out in German from the middle of the group directly in front of him. Harrald watched as a young medium sized man with a medium sized beard came out from the crowd. He had a gentle smile with glistening eyes.

Although his nerves showed through his stuttering German, it soon turned to pride as the rest of the eyes in the room turned to him. pride to show the people around him his ability in German. "Mmmy name is Ikram. If you wish I can translate what you wish to say for everyone". He repeated it in Libyan and someone further back translated it into Syrian.

With a sound of approval coming from the crowd Harrald stepped forward now. *Ikram's father forced his little Ikram to study German saying you will never know when you will need it, although at the time wanting his father to be proud of him he never did think in Libya how German could ever be of a help him. Now he was thanking his dad in his heart.*

"To all the people in this room, I would like to start by welcoming you all, even in this time of stress and I know none of this can be easy for you and I would like to say from me and I believe from the majority of the German people an apology for the few ignorant people who are trying to scare you. I am sure you have similar back in your home

countries". He waited as Ikram translated and then next, the murmur started. Before it took hold he continued

"All of you have been accepted and your citizenship is being processed, so I hope this will be your future home country. Over the next few weeks, you will be individually allocated housing and job opportunities. There will be a certain amount of choice for you as to where you will go.

I know again this is very hard for you and I hope we can work together in the future so I wish to keep you informed as to what is happening. We have arrested the person responsible for organizing this very distasteful welcome and I hope during your stay you will see we are not all of like mind as him." He waited till the translating finished. "Johan here has kindly agreed to help you as much as you can" he turned and guided the eyes to Johan who stood next to him. Johan actually blushed he noticed. "We will arrange for some-one from the ministry to come and help you all settle in. I am glad to see you have organised yourselves with rooms and if you have any question's" he looked at Johan, "please pass them on to Johan who will pass them on to us or if you prefer, your Imam and he can pass them on to us". Raising his hands he said "thank you" and stepped back into the group behind him. The sound of chatter started echoing around the room. He turned and found the priest was standing on his right with a very serious face, watching the crowd intently.

"How do you think that went Father," he asked.

The priest waited a while then turned back to Harrald and a smile came back to his face.

"Very good I think, it's when they go quiet its time to worry I think" his smile turned to a grin. "That was very gracious of you sir" continued the priest. "First time I've seen someone from your group doing something like that."

"We've a need to keep communication going between us so I thought I'd make the first move" almost beneath his breath he followed that with "and I meant it". The priest heard the anger in his voice and was surprised. "One last thing, could the person who is responsible for organising the rooms, please come forwards". An old man started coming to the front, He talked to Ikram, Ikram translated. "This is the imam, he helped organise the rooms. Harrald nodded and put out his hand, the imam, suspiciously shook the hand, Harrald then turned and introduced Johan. The imam hesitantly shook his hand as well. "I wish to thank you for helping. Johan here is here to help as well and I would like you to get to know each other". He waited for the translation to go through. He had a feeling watching the face of the imam there was little chance this would work. There seemed to be a lot of animosity coming from the imam. After a quarter of an hour in which other introductions were made with a few other immigrants, by Johan and Caroline, Harrald turned and headed towards the door. Caroline followed suit and both were now back on the way across the courtyard and off to the police incident trucks.

Unknown to Harrald, Johan had followed. In tow behind him was another man. The priest came over to Harrald and tapped him on his shoulder, "err, sorry to disturb you, but there is someone who has asked me if he can talk to you". Harrald turned and looked quizzically, "Who is it?".

Asha who had been waiting a few paces away from the priest now came over. "Sorry to disturb you sir, but I was wondering if there was any chance I could talk to the man you have in custody." The priest turned and look at Asha. "I thought you wanted to speak tosorry how do I address you" he turned back to Harrald.

With a half smile "Please call me Harrald" he replied.

"I am sorry," Asha said to him "all will become clear" he turned from the priest to Harrald. "Please....I am one of the people who he is against, I can't make him hate us any worse, I just want to talk to him".

Harrald stood looking deeply into the face of Asha. "What exactly?" what are you planning to do?"

"Just curious....." realizing he needed to be a bit more convincing he continued. " I have not long come from Libya and have a feeling for the people in that region, I believe in the good of most of our people as in most, I believe, of yours too. I think I have no other choice now and having only recently arrived here I want to get to know the people here, both the good" he turned to the priest "and the bad" he turned his head to the police caravan ".....I am a Muslim, with a family....here in Germany. I would normally go to our religious man for advice and spiritual comfort, but now I feel a bit stuck, some of our spiritual guides, the imams, some I feel to be a bit.....confused. In my need to seek counsel I found myself in the hands of Johan" he pointed to the priest. "He listened with great politeness and ended up counselling me to go to the police. As you might know, we have a sense of not trusting police from our society so I felt a bit unsure about it. But now a situation has arisen and I feel Allah as I call him, God as you call him, I feel he has given me a task, I have to talk to him." he nodded again towards the caravan. "I assume you have him.....or her....in there?"

Harrald turned, started crossing the car park, deep in thought. The others followed behind. They got to a group of big white mobile home type vehicles all connected together. They were equipped with a mobile police station with interrogation rooms and communications rooms. All the latest high-tech surveillance equipment available. Harrald stopped, "Please wait here" he asked. Caroline followed him in, and he turned to her once out of earshot of the others. "It is your arrest, what do you want to do. I am not against it really, I am curious; part of my brief is to find out the feelings of both the protestors and the immigrants, this might be a bit hot, but....I guess a catalyst to find out. It is your choice though. I don't want to jump on your toes".

Caroline was unsure, this was very much out of the ordinary.....she thought about it, "If you think it will help, go ahead".

They went into the reception area. Harrald looked through a window into the room where a big bald angry bearded man sat, handcuffed and hands on the table with a defiant look on his face. Then he looked outside the other window at Asha, not tall, soft face and a smile that made Harralt almost laugh. He started having second thoughts, why was he doing this, he really didn't know. Glancing at Caroline, he went back to the door and

invited them both in. They both came in and looked in through the same window, Harrald turned back to Asha again, "And what do you hope to achieve?"

"I am not really sure but I hope for understanding.....for me.....and possibly for him as well, Allah only knows, i feel guided".

Looking at Caroline, he asked, "is he violent?" Caroline looked down at Asha. "I remember 15 years ago, I was one of the officers that had to meet him off the plane after he was banned from travelling for violence outside a football match in Portugal. It seems he took on 4 Portuguese fans armed with knives. He got stabbed 5 times but managed to put 3 in hospital with broken bones and the story goes the 4th ran off. Yes, he is violent" she looked seriously at Asha.

Asha's face hadn't changed a bit. "I see he is restrained, he cannot reach me I guess. What is the danger?"

Harrald then looked at the priest. "Can you see any harm?" the priest shook his head, "I am I guess as curious as you are. I don't see any harm, as he says....he's chained up"

Harrald looked back at the man in the room. He looked now at Caroline: indicating with a nod of his head he motioned towards the door leading back outside. She read the movement and together they went back outside. Closing the door so no one could hear Harrald turned to Caroline. "Ok, I'm going to go along with this, I will ask you to stand behind the suspect...."

"Allan"

"Yes, thank you, you position yourself behind him in case he makes any moves. I want to know what this is about, but I don't want an incident; this is to go no further. Just my curiosity". Caroline looked into his eyes. She thought she read something more but couldn't work out what. "Ok, she replied, I've got your back".

They went back in, Caroline following. She became the silent partner again. She had been in this position many times as she had been coming through the ranks, although she hadn't been in an interrogation for a while, she felt ready.

"OK Asha, here are the rules. You make any funny moves and I will jump on you OK" he hesitated a moment looking into Asha's eye's which didn't flinch. "Johan can be in there with us" turning and looking at Johan he continued " but not a word. Any movement from anyone that I don't like and we stop and no more chances, you got me???" They both nodded.

Harrald nodded at Caroline who led the way followed by Asha and then Johan; last was Harrald.

Tapping on the glass window into the interrogation room with her finger, the guard inside appeared and opened the door. "OK, take a rest, I will come and get you when we are

finished” she prompted the guard at the same time for the keys he was holding. He passed the keys and left. Caroline took her place as agreed behind Allan. Johan not quite sure where to go when he got in, hesitated till Harrald took him by the elbow taking a position to one side adjacent to the middle of the table. Before he sat in his chair Asha stood looking down at the man cuffed to table before him, pulling out the chair and without taking his eyes off Allan he sat down facing him.

Allan looked rapidly to both Johan and then Harrald; he then tilted his head back as he felt the presence of Caroline behind him. Returning his head to face in front of him he fixed on Asha who sat in front of him. A smile spread across his face “this is what you have brought to interrogate me, a fucking raghead” and putting his arms on the table he leaned forward. Harrald saw Caroline tense. “And what the fuck do you think you are doing here, go home” his face was now a grimace as he stared ferociously at Asha. Asha's face didn't budge, he didn't flinch, not a muscle, he just looked back with his soft gentle smile. His hands were sitting gently in his lap. He didn't say anything, just looked back. Harrald looked on, muscles tense waiting, ready to jump in, feeling the tension between the 2 set of eyes.

Asha was the first to move, he gently rotated his head to look around the small, empty, white, well lit room. There was a window high on the right wall, bars set in front of the glass giving a formidable cage feel. Not taking his eyes off the window he opened his mouth, in a heavily accented German voice “I remember sitting in your place in a room like this a few years ago”. He turned and looked back at Allan. His face still held a gentle smile, “the weather wasn't the same then, it was a lot hotter, though I remember it was night time, I was scared I will admit. You don't seem to be!.....I was also worried about my family, I have 2 children you know” Allan seemed puzzled but just sat still.

“I had been arrested by the Libyan police. Colonel Gaddafi was still in charge back then. I had been working late and was on my way home. I had the bad luck that day. I got caught in a crowd that was outside the embassy where I worked. It was a peaceful protest, with banners calling for the release of someone, a political prisoner, I can't remember his name. I remember I was just trying to cross the street when a crowd of police just charged in and arrested everyone, we were all taken to the police station. We were separated for a quick beating. Hands tied behind our back, on our knees.....” A tear rolled down Asha's cheek as he spoke but without a hesitation he continued “I was lucky and someone recognized me and I was released. Sorry, I just had a memory by being in this room”. A puzzled look appeared on Allan's face, “what the fu” was all he got out of his mouth as he stood up. With feline reflexes Caroline had moved and with a knee behind his knee, his right leg collapsed and a hand on the back of his head sent his face into the table and held it there. His face was turned sideways with his mouth screwed up and squeezed to one side, a final sound gurgled out of his mouth.

Asha too had jumped to his feet but not backward, with a look of horror. He leaned forwards, his hands fell onto Caroline's, still sitting on the back of Allan's head. “Please”,

he said “let him go” he looked pleading into Caroline’s eyes. Unsure she looked to Harrauld who, though not as quickly, had moved forward to the mellé; he had also quickly realised Caroline was in control, changed direction towards Asha’s movement. He held himself a foot from Asha, a surprised look spread on his face as Asha spoke. He saw Caroline’s glance and with a slight hesitation she picked up his blink and releasing Allan slowly and gently, she stepped back. Harrauld held his ground though. “Please, please, no more of this violence” Asha pleaded. “That is what I want to talk about”, Allan feeling his head freed now, keeping a side eye on Caroline, slowly slid back into his seat. Asha leaned further forward trying to catch the eye of Allan. “Are you OK....” he caught a glance. Allan’s eyes slowly shifted back to focus on Asha. The aggression on his face was now replaced by a sort of questioning look. The snarl returned as his mouth opened “what’s it to you, police brutality, happens all the time here”, he seemed to be getting his bravado back Harrauld noticed.

There was the hint of a smile on Asha though so minuscule Harrauld only just caught it before Asha, still standing, started moving back to his chair and started again. “you know that we have the same problems, I am sorry, I understand, when you were protesting, people are scared that they will lose their jobs because of us, you may not believe me but we too lose our jobs from immigrants, back home, we know very well, all that you are angry about and if I am honest I know of a few of us that have done exactly the same thing as you are doing, demonstrating, though I think it is more dangerous for us for fear of losing the ability to feed our families, in exactly the same way. I now bow my head in shame to say I too had nasty feelings for the Congolese who escaped from the war in their country to come to our country of Libya and took the most basic work from us. It was what pushed my parents to beat me when I was young, so to get educated. They had no education but they saw the dangers, they knew the education was the only way out“. Although he didn’t show it, Allan recognised this. He had got many a slap around the head from his dad, always followed by, “you stupid fuck, you don’t get it, no but one day, one day, you mark my words you’ll wish you had studied instead of fucking it all away like your mates, one day”. he could still hear it clanging round his head. He’d been right and just a couple of days ago, he’d been doing the same thing to his son. He wasn’t going to show it though.

Harrauld hadn’t moved, though he stood at the ready. Allan was now sitting back in his chair, listening. His hands were no longer on the table, he was now mimicking the submissive body language of Asha he noticed. He felt a twinge of surprise that he quashed immediately.

Asha continued “I have seen what people are capable of when scared, the brutality normally comes from fear.....on both sides. I realize also that you and your fellow Germans are scared, because of violent attacks as well” Allan’s hands moved up onto the table again, Caroline twitched but Harrauld gave a calming glance, and she stopped.

“If you think about it, we are actually on the same side here. That is what I find very sad. We, and I mean all of us, from Syria, Libya, and Iraq, what do you think we are running from? The same people that are scaring you here. It is what worries me most, their reach is far and it is fear that makes them grow. I am in no position to cast blame, I know my country under Gaddafi was guilty for many years of funding terrorism, I know, I worked

for the embassy so I can vouch that my government was very guilty. Your government and army are responsible here for many thousands more deaths, but that is not where I am getting to, sorry to have taken so long” he paused and looked round the room. Harrald aware of the pause realized he too had been hooked, listening. Caroline though, suddenly aware of the silence, looked up and around too. She had been so tense watching Allan, she hadn't been listening. Allan was sitting forwards now, listening, intently.

“Something has been bothering me since I left the embassy and started the journey here. Something new scares me: we are running from our homes because it is too dangerous; you are protecting yourselves from us who are not terrorists but because of our religion or ethnic background. When I hear the problems our peoples are facing.....I don't know how to get to this point.....I guess.....how would you feel if you knew bad people on your side were working with bad people from my side.....to create more havoc. A fear is growing amongst your people. For my people this fear has been there for all their lives and both groups are reaching for answers. This is where it gets dangerous, because with fear no-one knows where to turn. People are reaching for answers, those that cast blame for....I think your word for it is political gains....people dying, sometimes the more the better....”

He stopped and looked up at Allan, “You are for the Nationalists, right wing, protect your borders from the terrorists, whereas you are actually creating the atmosphere that helps the recruiters. My peoples have reached the end. They thought to start a new life away from the violence, they get here and see there is still violence, they aren't wanted at home, they aren't wanted here. It is not hard in this situation to feel that their life is worth nothing, why not die, for a cause is as good a reason as any, when you reach the end, you will be remembered forever, religion is strong, look at the martyrs in your history, these terrorists as you see them, see themselves as martyrs.....and you, Allan. are helping them.....”

He looked at Harrald who was quite close now and reached into his jacket pocket. He pulled out a tattered, finger worn envelope from his pocket. He looked at Harrald with pleading eyes, he protected the envelope close to his chest. “You trusted me, now I ask for you to still trust me.....even more. I can't show you this, please don't make me. It would be a betrayal for me and my family, not just here. They not just could, but would pay! I will tell you what is in it, Ok?”.

He hesitated, closed his eyes for a second and Harrald saw he whispered to himself what looked like a prayer. Opening his eyes, he opened the envelope and pulled out the document. It was only a page long. Looking now directly at Allan, he leaned forward, and placed the document in front of Allan. Harrald reached out quickly but Asha raised his arm across the front of Harrald, “Please....” Harrald felt lost. He knew he had to see the document, it was his job, but there was something making him hesitate, he knew this would break the trust that was growing and he knew this was an important moment. As if guessing the indecision of Harrald, Asha broke in again still with the pleading look at Harrald. “It is a document that passed by my desk the day your bombs started dropping, where I was working”. Allan had reached forwards and was delicately holding the document in his hands, he was reading it. Harrald glanced up at the hidden camera in the ceiling and then he held back.

“It is proof that someone here, with power, is connected to IS, calling for action to make our lives worse, with the intention of making US more likely to fight for THEIR cause!!!!”

Allan’s face was stern. He read and his face became pale as he got to the end. Still clinging to the letter, his hands dropped to the table. His bottom jaw slowly dropped. He sat staring at Asha,

“Is this for real?” looking back at the document he seemed to be looking closely at the bottom. “It is for real!” he whispered, he folded the letter up and handed it back to Asha. His mouth had closed and he now looked suspiciously at Harrald.

Asha continued “What has been bothering me since I first read the letter” he looked at Johan “dominos, the escalation, it all seems so inevitable, I go round in circles and come to the same answers, people have to change. Instead of giving in to the things that create the fear they have to embrace others, live through whatever is coming and work together. Not stop at what they think is right, go beyond that. It sounds too soft, I can't see it.

People actually living with what seems to have been proven to work. I am in despair!”.

Allan's whole demeanor had changed. “I don't quite understand what you are saying except that.....I know.....what I am doing is actually.....driving your people to be recruited, to do more attacks. I have been duped by people on my side. I promise not to continue with this demonstrating, I am going straight home, are you charging me with anything?” He looked from Harrald to Caroline, who looked to Harrald, who shrugged his shoulders. “We can release you but anything else happening here and we pick you up straight away”. “Don't worry, I'm out of this, no way...” and he raised his hand asking for his hands to be released.

Once the handcuffs were off, he turned to Asha putting his hands together and bowing he said: “Sorry and thank you for enlightening me to my errors” A slight grin appeared on Johan's face. Allan turned and walked towards the door, Caroline opened the door, he walked out into the still raining night.

Chapter 3 – A rainy night

Harrald and Caroline sat in the car in a lay-by. It was raining hard outside. In the car, Harrald who had been driving, sat staring out of the front window, the heater was running at full and the engine continued turning.

Caroline turned to him, “deep in thought”.

“Just turning things over in my head”, he turned and looked at her, a smile on his face.

“Seems too perfect”. He turned his head to Caroline “I need somewhere to look at the interview tape, I need to know what changed Allan’s mind, something in that letter”.

“Why didn’t you just confiscate the letter?”

“I have a feeling Asha might be more help. I can get everything I need from the tape, a close in of the letter. I just wonder.....” and he drifted into silent thought.

“Where are you staying tonight?” she broke the silence after a few minutes. He turned towards her, “Sorry, I’m forgetting myself. Could you get me to somewhere I can analyze the tape? Then you can get home, you must have had a long day”. His face became soft.

“I have some equipment, set-up at home. We could take a first look at it there if you like”.

Harrald sat on the sofa looking round the room. “You don’t spend too much time here I guess”. Caroline was just preparing a couple of whiskeys. “Ice,” she asked. “No thanks, straight, I need too warm my bones”. He had started to notice the damp encroaching through his clothes. Caroline passed him his whiskey before kneeling before the fireplace. She lit a match and turned the gas on. With a pooooof she lit the gas. “I spend most of my time out on the job, only here really for sleeping though I have an office setup in the back”.

Harrald had picked up that there were only 3 pictures around the room. One of an old couple, who he assumed were her parents, sitting on the television. Next to it was an old black and white of a young couple. He picked out the resembling features and guessed again that it was her parent when they were younger. Over on the window sill he had picked out a photo of what he assumed was Caroline and her parents when she was a teenager. “Any brothers or sisters” he asked though he already knew the answer was no. “No, only me, it will warm up quickly” she got up and joined him on the sofa. “You?”. “No, only child as well”, he grinned back at her. He took a sip of the whiskey, feeling the bite. He winced slightly. “ooh that’s good” he said putting the glass down.

“Where are you staying?” she asked.

“Not had time to sort something out yet. Not sure how long I will be here. Just came down to see how things are really!”.

“What do you mean? For a secret service agent, I would have thought a border disturbance with anti-Semitic trends seems a bit out of your way?”.

“Just getting a feel, you know”.

Har rald smiled looking down at his glass now on the table. Looking up at Caroline he picked up his glass. “Married?”.

“No, no time.....or not met the right guy” she replied looking down into her glass.

Harrald threw his head back with a jerk emptying the last of his whiskey down his throat.

“You?”

“Same story I guess”

“OK, I know you can't say much. Look, there is a spare room, if you want to take it for a couple of days, it would be nice to have a bit of company. I won't be here much but feel free to use it as a base if you like”.

“Thanks, I really don't know how long I will be here. There is a good chance I will be off soon” he glanced at his watch “sometime tomorrow possibly. I've seen all I need, though that Asha I have to admit is quite a character. I think I want to talk to Asha a bit more later. That was unbelievable how Allan changed sides” , he added under his breath “almost too unbelievable”. He was now looking at Caroline, who's face took on a bit of colour as she too finished her whiskey.

“Another she asked”

“Won't say no, been a cold damp night so far. You reacted quickly back there. I thought Asha was going to get a slap before you put Allan's face on the table”.

Caroline blushed. “I was waiting for something. I saw his muscles tense and a quick knee behind his with a bit of force on his head and I knew from training it would disable him”.

“But you reacted quickly, before I even moved he was face flat on the table”, laughing he continued “everyone was surprised, and did you see the look on the priest's face”.

Her cheeks reddened even more, “Thank you.”

Caroline had refilled the glasses and sat down next to him again.

“But that document of Asha's, why didn't you confiscate it”.

Har rald hesitated to look at Caroline. His face took a serious look for a second before he continued “I guess I am taking a gamble with it. I want him to give it to me. That way he might give me more details about it. If I had taken it by force I would get no co-operation from him and I think he will be more useful if he comes over of his own free will, anyway. If I can get a look at it from the camera footage, it will be almost as good”.

“Is that document what you are here for” Caroline questioned.

“Actually, I had no idea about its existence before. It's what it concerns that has caught my attention though. I can assume what I tell you here won't go any further” he asked.

She shook her head “Why are you here, and why are you telling me?”.

“You heard Asha; our government is obviously worried about terrorists crossing the border disguised as immigrants and we have been watching the border posts. You being here I believe could be useful so I want you to let me know of anything suspicious.

Asha's letter gives another angle that perhaps it's not the terrorist that will be coming but the recruiters. We both know that in a few months there will be many disappointed immigrants that will be easily turned and possibly turned into terrorists. Looking at how easily the young from here are being converted, I guess the conversion of many immigrants here is imminent.

All that makes sense, that letter of Asha's points to it being part of the big plan. Its very scary. What amazed me was how quickly, using common sense, Allan seemed to understand.

Asha's way made so much sense. It scares the shit out of me, and the secret service the possibilities of where we are in this war. The thing that scares me now is not their plans but how the German people will react. From past experience and what we see here, the immigrants will go through hell, and the more they are shown how unwelcome they are, the more likely they are to respond with hate. Hate breeds hate and that means hell here in Europe and our enemy knows this”.

Har rald felt the shiver start in his back and couldn't stop it reverberate round his body. "Shit, you are cold" She reacted to his shiver. "You need to have a hot shower and get out of those wet clothes".....

"Inspector Caroline here". He'd been woken by the sound of the phone ringing. He heard voices but couldn't make out the words on the other end, although he tried. He was on the couch in the room next door. "What!!" he heard Caroline exclaim "Where is he?" She asked.

Har rald was now fully awake and sat up. "Thank you, I'll be there in half an hour". She listened a bit, "OK, at the hospital, in half an hour" and she hung up. Having wrapped herself in a dressing gown, she appeared in the doorway, "Asha is in hospital, his wife reported him missing and while searching, the mobile officers found someone by the railway. It was Asha. He's been shot.

"What" exclaimed Harrald

I think we'd better get down there. Har rald was already jumping back into his clothes. Within minutes, they were in her car. "What exactly happened?" he asked.

"It seems Gheeta, his wife, and he had an argument, she said he had grabbed his jacket and walked out. After a few hours she was worried and asked one of the police officers I left on duty outside if they had seen him. That started a search.

Later, it seems a patrol car was going passed the railway when they saw a figure on the grass verge by the road. There was a car parked nearby but as the patrol car put on their siren the other car shot off. If it hadn't been for the fact that they saw the figure fall to the ground they would have followed. They got the plates and radioed it on. It was Asha. He was shot in the shoulder. He is in hospital now. Not life threatening".

"Any news on the other car?" Harrald exclaimed.

"None" was the reply.

"So where are we going now? I need to get to the hospital. The letter!!".

"I need to get to the scene, I need to talk to my officers. I can get you off to the hospital on the way. It's not too far out of the way."

"What was he doing outside of the grounds. He must know it was dangerous. It's not the nicest weather for a midnight stroll....., thinking about it, do you have an officer at the hospital?"

"I assume so, why?"

"The letter, we must get that letter. I am starting to think it might be more important. I might have made an error of trust.....Can you ask your officer to get hold of the clothes he was wearing, hang on.". He picked up his phone. Turning again to Caroline, he said: "I need his clothes". He tapped some numbers on his phone. "Hi, Nadia, sorry to wake you but I need some clothes picked up from the" he looked at Caroline who was already on the radio talking to her staff. "What hospital?"

"St Mary's Hospital, in Bautzen". He passed the information on. "There might be a document in the lining of the jacket, I need it fully analyzed, please, I will explain later, officer....." He was looking at Caroline, "Officer Muller, ask for him, he'll have the clothes with him, OK" and he hung up.

"What makes you think he had the document on him?" she asked, surprised, without looking up.

"You remember when we first went in and I talked to everyone?"

"Yes"

"Remember the jacket he was wearing at the time?". There was a pause, "to be honest, no I can't remember making note of that".

"Well, if you had, it was very like everyone else's, worn-out, I guess from being worn on the long trek, well to cut it short, he must have got changed while we talked to the others because in the interview room it was another jacket, a lot less worn. I saw where it had been repaired with not the same colour thread. I guessed at the time, his smart jacket because he wanted to make a good impression but now, I think, it was because the letter was in it. He planned on showing it from the beginning. I know it's a long shot but I guess he has two jackets and you said his wife said he grabbed his jacket. If you were travelling with not many things and you wanted to hide something: why not in the lining of your clothes? The jacket he wore in the interview room still had fold creases in. So I guess it has been packed away during their journey.....its a guess worth following. Besides, I would also assume, now he is keeping the letter on himself at all times. He is quite nervous about it. ". "Ok, that makes sense.....".

Caroline dropped Harrald off at the hospital. She went directly to the scene. On route she'd asked the officers in the Squad car to be present. She wanted to go through it in detail. She got to the railway and the squad car was there, waiting. There was another van with forensics to at the scene as she'd asked.

As she pulled up, the two officers in the squad car got out and approached her. "Officer Muller", she shook hands "Officer Weber".

They took her through the details explaining what they had seen, exactly where they had been when Asha had fallen. When asked, they couldn't say where the shot had come from except from roughly what direction. Then talking to the forensics team, she got a better idea as to where the shooter had been.

"Mr Sneider, can you confirm that this is where the shooter stood? I find it hard to believe".

"Excuse me Inspector?".

"Well look, OK, we accept that it is raining, it is night time, I am standing here, I have a pistol, looking up there, the light behind my target makes a silhouette, hhhmmmm. OK, if I was inexperienced, perhaps, but, the distance here, to where the target is.....i have some experience and...I find it difficult to see how....."

"How you missed, you mean, didn't manage to fire a couple of shots at least and hit the target more central you mean?"

"Yes"

"We came to the same conclusion. I wonder, though, perhaps the shooter was inexperienced, and/or perhaps it was the approaching police car that put them off! This is where we are assuming he was standing as this is where we found the cartridge. The gravel around this spot seems to be moved so we suspect the shooter turned here after taking his shot to run".

"You are sure only one bullet cartridge can be found".

"Yes Inspector, we will continue, when it is light, but from what we can see, that is the situation. Perhaps the CCTV footage might help", he pointed up and there was a camera.

It seems to be unfortunately pointing the wrong way but it might help".

"Thank you" she replied. She continued wandering around the scene for another while.

"Keep me informed if you find any thing else please. Thank you".

She thanked the officers as well and then headed off to the hotel, she really wanted to talk to Gheeta now.

Harrald got to the room Asha was in. He was in a room on his own. The big window besides the bed had the blinds closed. There was a print of Van Gogh's sun flowers hanging on the wall opposite the bed. There was a machine next to the bed with the beat of his heart showing in a continuous green mountain range type line that kept moving across the screen from right to left. Harrald winced at the hospital smell. It brought back memories of Middle Eastern battle field hospitals. He'd visited a few. He hated them. The room was, as expected, spotlessly clean, apart from the print, completely sterile, void of all character. What else did he expect? "OK, what happened, what made you go out?" said Harrald harshly. Asha moved to sit up, then groaned and his body crumpled back into his bed. In a voice strained with pain, "I was worried and wanted to talk to Johan" "What were you worried about?" butted in Harrald.

"There was a meeting with the imam and the men were letting out their misery. It is funny, we have just been on the longest trek most of them have ever done, it's been hard and they have been pushed to their limits with their families, now we are safe, here, they are complaining about the treatment. They are scared about the reactions from your people, eh, I don't mean you the police, sorry, but from the people outside. Your speech was good but there seems to be a feeling that most of the people out there are against them. They recognise in themselves how they would feel in the same situation, as I said before, I don't want to accuse them, but it wouldn't be a surprise if many of the men here were involved in the same sort of demonstrations against the Angolans. They understand very well the feeling coming from the other side now; they know what they would do if the roles were reversed, that is why they are scared. They understand we are in your country. But....the women seem to want to make the best of it and are very happy too" he added in "but there seems to be a bit of uncertainty amongst the men. The fire scared them a lot and I think there are those that are trying to influence others. I was worried about this and Johan eased my worries when I talked to him about it earlier. I thought talking to him might do the same. The English have a saying a problem shared is a problem halved. Being a religious man, I felt I could talk to him in confidence." "And did it help?"

"I never got the chance. He had explained where he lived, the rectory, next door to the church he said. There were no lights on, so I turned around and came back."

"Ok, so what happened?"

"It was raining and I followed the road, by the side of the railway. I felt cold so I pulled my collar up. I saw the lights of a car in front of me as it slowed down and stopped. I carried on walking and saw a man get out. I think it was from the front. I am guessing a chauffeur as he put up an umbrella then opened the door behind and another man stepped out.

I don't know what happened next because I heard someone calling me from down the bank by the railway line".

Harrald butted in, "Called you, how did he call you? By name or just a shout".

Asha hesitated "errr by name I think.....Yes, I remember it was by name, I stopped and looked down"

Harrald noticed a change in expression, some eye movement. That made him question the reply. He said nothing but made a mental note.

"I never made out who it was, I saw a flash and then I heard a bang, something hit me in the shoulder. I was thrown backwards to the ground. I heard car doors slam shut and then the engine of the car as it drove away. I also heard some footsteps in the gravel down the bank as if someone was coming towards me".

"Someone? Don't you mean the shooter?" shot Harrald inquisitively.

"Yes, I suppose it must have been the shooter, of course. Then straight away the sirens from a short distance away. I heard the footsteps go the other direction, running. I lay for a short while till the nice policewoman came over and talked to me. I remember hearing her on the radio but I think I must have then passed out. Next thing I remember was the lights here as I woke up in hospital".

"You have no idea who it was, either in the car or down the bank?"

"eerrrrrhhhh, no, who would I know here?....errrr, hhhmmm, now I come to think about it, yes. It was someone with an accent. From home, it was difficult, it was raining hard and I had my collar up to shelter from the rain. I'm sorry, I can't tell you who it was." His eyes closed slowly, Harrald saw a tear running out of one of his eyes". "I am really tired now. Is Gheeta here? I would like to see her". He shut both eyes, implying that was all he was going to say.

After a pause, Harrald thanked Asha: "You must be very tired, Gheeta isn't here yet but there is a police car on the way to pick her up. She must be here soon. Please, I must ask. The letter, is it safe?"

Asha's eyes opened again. He looked straight at Harrald with wide-awake eyes. "I took a risk showing that letter. Did you tell anyone? It is a bit of a coincidence.....". Weakened as he seemed, his eyes bored into Harrald's. Not flinching Harrald looked straight back at him. "No-one apart from those who were in that room as far as I know knows anything. I have talked with Caroline about it and she has been with me since so I can vouch for her. The priest is a friend of yours so that is up to you to judge. That leaves Allan, he, I would say, is a likely candidate. What do you think?"

Harrald pulled in the visitor's chair next to the bed and sat next to Asha. Asha stared into space thinking.

Finally, he turned his head to Harrald, "I trust Johan as a person, perhaps I could be wrong but no, I trust him. Allan..." His face widened, "I guess you could be right, though I thought his reaction to be genuine". Another pause. "It does make sense. I have been hiding that letter for weeks. I guess some-one on the route here could have found out about it though, how I wouldn't know. I never mentioned it to anyone, not even Gheeta." an image passed his mind's eye of opening the letter the other day and Gheeta not wanting to know.

He turned in the bed towards Harrald trying to get closer to whisper and immediately felt a pang of pain in his shoulder and winced.

“Please tell me honestly, being shot, I was scared, this must mean they know...” he waited for Harrald.

Harrald knew this was the moment he'd been waiting for but for a second he felt a rush of suspicion. “I would certainly assume so”.

“Please, if I give you the letter, can you promise to look after my wife and children? Protect them personally. I need your promise.....”

Harrald thought. “I personally promise I will do all I can. I will get them into protection and you as well as soon as you are better, but for this, I do need the letter and it has to be genuine” his eyes squinted, staring into Asha's eyes. “It is genuine isn't it?”

“I promise, it is the letter I picked up in the embassy, back in Libya, that I promise. Please, protect my family. I know you can't do anything for my family left behind but please, Gheeta, Kalim, and Shama, perhaps she can contact our grandparents and warn them if they are ok”. His eyes were pleading with Harrald, then he started nodding. “In my jacket, the one I was wearing when I came in here, in the lining, you will find the letter. Please, do what you can with it to stop this madness that is spreading and please.....my family”. Harrald stood without a word. The two men's eyes didn't break contact till Asha moved back in the bed wincing again and weariness took over and his eyes closed. “Please wake me when my family arrives. You are a good man Mr. Harrald, I trust you, please make my trust be placed in the right hands, praise Allah”.

Straight away Harrald phoned Caroline. She was on her way with Gheeta and the children. She decided the children couldn't be left on their own and decided to bring them all in herself.

Next call from Harrald was to Robert with whom he arranged protection for the family. At the same time, he asked if they had received the clothing from Asha yet. The reply was yes. They had also found the letter as he had previously told them, in the lining of the jacket. They were about to verify the letter and would inform him as soon as they found out.

On quick analysis, they confirmed the content was as Asha had told them in the interrogation room though the interesting information they were in the process of checking was the signatory at the bottom and they confirmed that, if the signature was correct, it was that of Andrew Holzter the deputy leader of the German National Front Party.

Harrald asked if he had any connection with the right wing party Allan was connected with and it turned out he was the head of the division from Bautzen. It was from where he had come to prominence. Also by coincidence, he was the registered user of the car that had been recognized at the scene of the shooting of Asha and there was now a hunt for the car. Things are starting to click into place, thought Harrald.

Sitting with Caroline in the car after she had delivered Gheeta and the kids to the Hospital. Caroline explained to Harrald what she'd found out. It didn't mean anything on its own or at least at the moment. They decided to question Allan first. Allan was the obvious suspect. Harrald wanted to see Allan's reaction face to face. It had all seemed too

good to be true, but Harrauld was puzzled, he'd felt it was real, he'd been convinced. Suspicion cogs were now turning. Asha turns up in the same zone as that which the politician named in the document came from. Allan being arrested and interrogated and changing his views just like that. It all seemed too much coincidence. But what about the shooting, what would be the point in shooting Asha except to make it all seem that much more convincing? But that was lame he thought.

But was Asha involved or was he just a pawn? He liked Asha for some reason, He needed to talk with Gheeta. He needed to find out more about how they got to this particular border crossing. There was also this question of Ikram the translator. Caroline had heard that he wasn't able to be found in the compound. They had looked for him when they needed to translate with Gheeta but they hadn't been able to find him.

Chapter 4 - The end of a career

“That is the house,” she said as they pulled up pointing at the third house in the row. It was a standard estate house, just like the two either side of it. It was dark and still raining. Caroline turned as once they were out of the car, “Not the safest of area's” she commented pressing the button on her key: thud click as the central locking system came alive, the lights flashed twice with a beep and then still and all was calm again in the street.

Caroline knocked on the door. Having waited a few moments, she knocked again. Harrald who had kept a bit of distance from the door looked up as a light on the first floor lit up. “They are coming” he stepped forwards again next to Caroline. They heard the heavy footsteps coming down the stairs. The sound of the chain being undone and then the door opened wide and the big figure of Allan stood in the doorway, light squeezing past him in the door frame. He was in his pyjamas, shades of blue, striped, top to bottom; this was covered by a navy blue dressing gown with gold-coloured edges, Admiral style. Bleary faced, his voice resounded round the cul de sac. “It's four in the morning, what the fuck.....I thought we had this all sorted” as he recognized Caroline. “You too!!” he shouted at Harrald who stood firm in front of his face that was now right up against his. “What do you want?”

Keeping her voice steady and forceful, Caroline said: “Asha is in the hospital, and we are here to ask you a few questions as I am sure you will understand?”. Watching carefully, Harrald was astounded as the face of Allan broke, “ehhr ehhr , is he alright. What happened?” stuttering. “Where have you been since leaving us, if you don't mind us asking” Caroline continued. “Please come in” and he opened the door wider. “How is he, what happened?” again. As they passed him, he poked his head out of the door and glanced both directions before closing the door and following, into the hallway and then into the sitting room.

“First may we ask you your movements since we saw you last?”.

“Ehhr, certainly”. Harrald was once again surprised at how this brute had turned into a kitten in front of his eyes, twice now! He thought this has to be an act, though inside he knew that was contrary to what his senses were telling him. “I went straight to the Golden Lion to meet my mates. I stayed there till about midnight and then came home. I have been here ever since. My wife will confirm that, and at the bar you just have to ask and they will verify my whereabouts. Now, how is he, not serious I hope”.

“Shot. He is out of the critical stage. He is now just resting and under police supervision”. Caroline carefully added in.

“And you suspect something dirty. What exactly are you accusing me of”.

“We are not accusing you of anything, just eliminating you from our inquiries. You must see how you would be a suspect and now, we will just confirm this and thank you for your cooperation”.

He shouted up the stairs “It's OK honey, go back to bed, I can deal with it”. Footsteps were heard stomping around. “Please, come in”, he guided them through to a cosy sitting room. There was a sofa where Harrald and Caroline sat, a large coffee table in front. Alan took the armchair and turned it from facing the large TV set to face the sofa. Looking around the room, there was a long cupboard, photos sitting in their frames. Harrald and Caroline took it in, the image of a family man. At each end was a photo of a boy and a girl. Alan saw them looking, “all grown up now, both left home, he's.....well, I have to keep an eye on him, I know the pitfalls and he seems to be jumping feet first into each one, Drugs, theft”. He pointed to one of the middle photos, “my wife, she got pregnant when we were young, it sort of drove me off the deep end at the time but eventually also brought me back, if it wasn't for her.....well I don't know”. Caroline picked up something else in his tone, he sounded proud of his family but there was a cracking in his voice towards the end. There the loud bang of a door being slammed upstairs. The thumping of footsteps as they came down. “Excuse me”, Alan got up, there was a look on his face now that Harrald couldn't make out.

“Where the fuck you going?”, “fuck you, you're just a grass, not the old Alan, the old Alan would have stood up for me, hard nut, haha, you've gone soft in your old age, can't even get it up anymore, oohhhh, don't look so hurt, I bet your new friends will look after you, I'm going to my sisters” and the door slammed shut.

Caroline looked at Harrald quickly, Alan walked back in. There were tears in his eyes; “I'm sorry, it's a bit of a confusing time at the moment, she's been seeing someone else, I have an idea.....but”. He sat down. Then getting up again, “either of you want a drink? I think I need one”. The question was directed at Harrald and he nodded “whatever you're having”

“Whiskey?” Harrald nodded. Alan threw a glance at Caroline, she shook her head and motioned with her hands, “driving”. Alan poured out 2 glasses, big ones. “Ice?” he motioned to Harrald. “No thanks”. Alan walked through into the smallish walk-in kitchen and opening the freezer section, took out an ice pack, put two blocks in his glass and came back into the lounge. He sat heavily in the armchair. The other two sat quietly for a few seconds, Harrald took a sip and the burn as the first sip went down felt good. Alan started “Look, I know, I've been a bit of a fool, I genuinely like him” I would not do anything to hurt him, if anything I think, I would go out of my way to help him out!”.

Harrald butted in here, “Come on, less than 12 hours ago you were crying out in public, trying to get people to hate and now you expect us to believe what you are saying”.

“Look, I understand what you mean and know it is not easy to believe me but he genuinely talked to me. He made me realize I was being just as bad as the jihadists and honestly I AM for doing the right thing. I have kids. I want them to have good jobs, my son, well he's wasting his life like I did. I don't wish the same thing on him as me, we had him when we were young, it tied us down. My daughter, her best chance is to meet someone nice who will take her away from thisthis estate, nothing good can ever

come from here. She I think has a chance, she's not stupid, she's continuing with her studies, accounting. I am really proud of her". He looked down into his glass and took a big sip. Looking up back at them now.

"Asha, well, he convinced me about where we are going. You must realise: I know what it was like as a kid, all we wanted was anarchy, no rules, just a whole load of madness, we were strong, violent, we could get what we wanted. Now, I have a family, I actually care about something, that world would be hell. I imagine what I had to do, how I got used to kicking someone's head in, the dog eat dog, the adrenalin, but then having to visit my friends, in hospital, they would grin at me, I saw the pain, I saw they were just trying to look hard: I was what their lives hinged on, I was their protection. Imagine, me, thick as shiit, and that is the world I am helping to create with this, this protesting. I actually thought, listening to Andrew, it was organized, we had the right to protest, OK we took things a bit further, 'just helping get the message through' Andrew told me. With Asha though, it all makes sense. I was telling Andrew Holzter just this evening in the bar what had happened and he just laughed. It made me want to shake some sense into him He doesn't have a family, only himself, only his career to worry about, I told him I resigned from the party and honestly you won't be having any problems from me anymore". Harrauld looked, squinting from the side of his face in disbelief. Caroline jumped in, "Andrew Holzter, the politician, A real government minister now, he was at the bar tonight, the Golden Lion". Puzzled, Allan nodded "errhhh" Harrauld guessed he was wondering if he would get into trouble from this. Realising it was his alibi, "YES" "What is he doing here??"

"Well, he was here organizing the demonstration of course".

"Look, I am sorry I am a bit bullish, it is my way. I haven't stopped thinking about what Asha said and.....Look, I am not a violent man. If someone wants to give it, I will stand up for myself but.....Ok, I see what I must look like to you but you've got it wrong. There was a crackle on Caroline's radio, she turned to Harrauld, he nodded. She went out into the hallway.

Harrauld who had now taken a seat next to Alan leaned over. "You actually expect me to believe you, you broke the law, arson to be exact, who's idea was that??"

Alan was looking nervous now. "Well it was more something that just happened, it was a sort of joint decision". "Was Mr. Holzter involved in that...joint decision?". Caroline came back in, "You know the car that was seen when Asha was shot?" both Alan and Harrauld turned to her. Not waiting for a reply she continued "It was Andrew Holzter's car, the plates were checked and the car is registered to him".

Alan's face started draining colour. Harrauld sat back, looking deep in thought. He turned to Alan again. "If you are so finished with all this, I am going to need your help". He let that hang for a moment. Alan moves further back in the armchair till there was no more room, "Now hang on, I am not a grass!!"

"It's starting to look like your colleague is involved in the shooting of Asha. Where do your loyalties lie now?"

Alan looked lost, "Give me a minute". He sat, drank two big gulps from his glass. He got up and went to the cupboard with the photos, he touched the picture of his son, moved on to the picture of his wife, he stopped, he caressed the frame. Putting it down again he went to the last one, his daughter, he picked it up, stood lost in thought, staring into the

face printed on the glossy paper. After a few seconds, without hesitation he went back to the picture of his wife, turned her picture face down on the cupboard, only the back with the brown leg flap sticking up. He kept the picture of his daughter in his hand and went back to his armchair, "I won't grass, but, what sort of help do you want?"

"I want to get into the Golden Lion, I want to know who will be in there and I want to know who would be useful to talk to".

Alan hesitated, "I can give you some names and stuff anyone would know. I am not a grass, so anything you get, didn't come from me".

A short while later Harrald got up "Thank you for your time. We will tell Asha you were worried about him. Sorry again to disturb you at this time of night". Looking at the face down photo on the cupboard he hung his head down. He felt sorry, but also had seen something he felt respect for, he didn't know what else to say, so he shook hands and left with Caroline.

Outside it was now early morning. The sun was just peeking through the trees. Caroline turned to Harrald, "I am guessing you want to go to the Golden Lion?". Harrald nodded "It's a bit early yet, though, could you drop me off nearby, I need to get some things". She pulled away and headed for the area of town where the Golden Lion was. "Be careful" she said as he stepped out of the car, "I'm a big boy now, you don't have to worry" he replied sarcastically though he noted her look of worry. "No, I know this area and please be careful!!". His face took on a serious tone and he nodded before closing the door.

Harrald sat in a café; it was a bit of a dingy place. His coffee came in a big mug, He was on his 3rd refill. He sat with the paper he'd bought at the newsagents first thing that morning. Having had sausage and cartofelpuffer with enough grease to oil a car, he had needed the coffee to help get it down.

He sat by a big window looking out onto a square. In the middle were park benches, the square was cut into quarters with paths passing through the middle from all 4 sides. In the middle of each quarter sat a tree. There was a hairdressers next to the café. Coming off that on the right hand side stood a small newsagents stand where he'd bought his paper. It sold the usual, sweets, tobacco, alcohol, newspapers and magazines. An estate agents next to that and across the street that lead into the square sat the Golden Lion pub. He liked to know the lay of the land. He'd got there first thing that morning to watch the comings and going at the pub. He'd worked out a cover story: his wife had just had a baby and he was killing time. There was nothing that made the pub look out of the ordinary, it had a heavy oak door sitting in between a big window on each side. Next to this was a betting shop.

Harrald had been sitting in the cafe for a couple of hours now. He'd been watching out of the window as the square slowly came to life. No-one in or out since he'd been watching but he knew that meant nothing. He'd walked passed the back before going into the cafe and checked out the back entrance to the pub.

As it came up to 11 O'clock he saw the first signs of life. Someone had come out and wiped the tables from the rain the night before. Now it looked like it might be a nice day.

Alan had described the landlord, slightly squat not that tall and with a beer belly as you'd expect from a landlord. He'd explained he was just a landlord, it was his clientele, rightwingers, that had decided on it being their local. Alan didn't really think 'Franz' was that politically minded and just served the clients. That was who he guessed it was. The next thing was the blackboard indicating the day's menu. The prices seemed quite cheap, Harrald thought to himself.

For a while, people passed, for haircuts, their cigarettes, newspapers and he'd seen a couple go into the estate agents. They hadn't come out yet. The square slowly came to life. Not the busiest square in the world, he noted, but then again, they were in the middle of a housing estate.

It was only when he saw what he made out to be an old skinhead, (There might have been a time where it was but now, at his age it was just bald). It was the clothes that made him out to be the man Harrald had been waiting for. Alan had told him the first usually to be at the bar was an old friend of Alan's from his 'football days'. He looked just as Alan had described him. Harrald had been slightly amused at this as he knew what it really had been, 'the football days'. The guy still wore his knee high Doctor Martins with tight jeans and green skinhead jacket. It looked out of place, from another era, and the being inside these clothes had aged enough to make it humorous, he thought to himself. The guy had obviously lost weight and walked bent over, time had not been kind to him. As Alan had given a few details about him he knew the alcohol and gang life had lead to a few side vices that had recently included heroin, from which he'd almost died from an overdose a few years back and now the shell of a man was all that remained. 'The wall' was his nickname, even now it stuck though it begged a vivid imagination to picture it. He walked straight into the pub and Harrald decided to give it another hour before he crossed the road.

A couple of others had crossed the threshold after him but apart from that no-one entered. Eventually, Harrald paid his bill and, tucking the newspaper under his arm, crossed the road. Glancing at his reflection in the estate agents window he was pleased with his half closed, red eyes, unkempt hair and still had the jacket he'd recuperated at the border crossing. He'd changed into an old pair of trainers Caroline had found for him in the back of the car on the way there. All in all, he looked nothing like the Harrald of a day ago now, just another out of work man in his 30's who hadn't slept the previous night. As he walked in he glanced quickly around and headed straight to the bar. He took a stool by the bar and ordered a beer. He sat on his own for quite a while. 'The wall' sat at the bar as well with the other two but further down. Apart from the odd glance in his direction (he watched in the mirror behind the bar) there was no other reaction. He sat patiently. Franz stayed in their corner behind the bar and came over from time to time to refill his glass. After a while, he added to his drink order, a whiskey chaser.

He must have been in there almost 2 hours and no-one else had come into the bar. When he ordered his third chaser he added "Quiet day". Franz looked up, glancing out the window where the sun was shining "who'd want to be in on a day like today?" sarcastically he said with no facial change. He served the drinks. It was now lunch time and he added "want anything to eat?" placing the sparse menu in front of him. "We stop serving at two". Harrald glanced quickly through the menu. Waiting till Franz was back with the others he looked over, "I'll take the scampi and can I buy any of you a drink?".

A look from the other two sent daggers across the room with no reply, though 'the wall' smiled and wobbled his glass at Franz who after a glance served him his usual ale. Whispers started amongst the three with the occasional glance over. Franz had gone into the back to prepare the food.

The food arrived and Harrald tucked in. He had started to feel the effect of the booze and was grateful. His breakfast had been filling though a long time ago.

Halfway through, the other two got up and walked out with a gruff thanks to Franz and a suspicious glance in the direction of Harrald who just continued eating and drinking.

Having finished eating he ordered another drink. Glancing out of the window "Looks like the weather is going to change, perhaps bring you some more custom" and he smiled.

He'd seen the sun shine dull as a cloud had obviously passed in front. The returning smile was quick as Franz took his empty plate and disappeared into the kitchen. A few minutes later the front door opened and three other people walked in, breaking the silence that had hung over the bar, like the smoke drifting casually round the bar. The rain started again and over the next half hour a steady influx of people started. The bar was soon a hum of chatter.

Harrald noticed 'The wall' had edged his way closer. Using the bar to steady himself he put out a hand. "Michel". Harrald took it and gave his name correctly.

"Thanks for the drink. What you up here for?" he was waiting for the call from his wife, he explained. "Congratulations, let me buy you a drink to celebrate" and he called over Franz giving him the good news. A quick smile and he offered the next one on the house. Harrald filled in his story about it being his first child and thanked Michel, it wasn't so much fun celebrating on his own.

After a few more Michel bought Harrald a cigar and Harrald was timidly impressed how Michel seemed to be holding out. He was still on his feet albeit hanging onto the bar and slurring a touch but he'd put back quite a few, he seemed to have an open tab and hadn't eaten a thing.

The bar was now getting quite full and having seen a couple of people he recognized from the protests thought about moving out of plain sight. He suggested taking a cubicle; leave some space at the bar was his excuse. Michel offered no resistance so ordering another round they went back into a cubicle in a corner by the window, not too far from the door in case he had to make a quick exit.

Harrald was careful not to ask too personal a question so talked a lot about his made up life. At one point Michel, who he could see was fighting to keep interested, saw someone across the pub and said, "I'll be back in a minute".

Harrald had a twinge of concern now and was wondering if it was not the time to make an exit. He was feeling quite tired himself and didn't want to push it. He waited though. Surprised, Michel came back a few minutes later, wide-eyed. His speech had completely changed, he sat down and started chatting, the slur had gone and it didn't take Harrald long to realize he'd taken some speed or something. Not stopping him, he let him talk, now it came out like an avalanche.

"You know where you are," he asked, not waiting for a reply he continued. "you're in the bar of Andrew Holtzer, you know the politician. Excellent guy, fighting to save our jobs from the niggers, or the ragheads who are now invading the place, potential terrorists, every-one of them" He started telling him that the people in the bar were from the

protests, organized by Andrew Holtzer, personally, just the night before he'd been here rallying the troops. Picking his moment Harraald asked where had they all come from, they didn't all seem the same type of people. This started Michel off, "You know it's all changing, I've been here fighting for our national rights for years, most of these are the new recruits" he said with a sneer. "Crazy thing is, these terrorist are working wonders for our party, they are coming in from all areas, accountants, computer geeks, estate agents, they are all starting to see what we've been saying for years, now, only now that it's coming to the crunch are people seeing the light". He was now talking nonstop and at times Harraald had to wait as he panted for breath. He stopped for a second and looked suspiciously around the room before continuing.

(Alan had been right, spend an evening with Michel and you eventually get all the info, a few drinks and he was anyone's).

"It's all happening now, if you want to join up, I can make it happen for you, it's happening now all around Europe, I was in Spain with the lads this summer and it was a riot, we joined up with that lots' patriots. They have had enough as well, you know. Europe, it's a mess. It's happening everywhere, Spain, Italy, France, Holland, even the fucking Swiss. France and Holland though, you'd better watch them. They could be in with a real chance of power. I heard a few speeches while there from the French leader, she was the tops, same with Hollands' leader and of course, Mr. Holtzer. They really brought the house down, there were standing ovations". Harraald hadn't said anything yet, wanting to hear confirmation, "What, you mean they are working together?".

"You got it, it's real organized now, secret meeting between our groups, you should join, now's the time, a few years time all these immigrants'll be sent home. It'll be like old times, Germany'll be for the GERMANS again". Harraald started to get a bit concerned, Michel had started raising the volume a bit and a few people were starting to look in their direction. He noticed someone he recognized from the protest pointing at him and talking to Franz. Time to get out of here he thought to himself, not finishing his drink he got to his feet.

"Oiiy, where you going?" Michel too was on his feet. Not waiting to reply, Harraald felt the noise descend into silence, apart from Michel who was now standing on his chair shouting at Harraald. He got to the door only to find his way blocked by two large Arian race type thugs. He turned to face the crowd, his heart was beating, the wooziness from the alcohol he'd been feeling a few moments before, disappeared like a flash as the adrenalin started flowing through his veins. Swinging his elbow with suddenness and precision into the midriff of the first gorilla behind him, he felt the air move as the second's arms came down to encircle his shoulders. Moving fast and ducking out of the ring, he turned and swung his fist with all his might into the groin of the second. "Bigger they are" he uttered to himself as both gorillas folded in on themselves. Ducking sideways he slipped by the one on the right and he got the door swinging and fell through. Just landing with enough balance to push back with his hand on the ground to propel himself away from the foot that was now swinging towards his head. He turned and made for the exit to the square. He'd already planned an escape if needed and now he needed. Something hit him on the back of his head and bounced off to smash on the floor. Ignoring the pain that shot through the back of his head, he instinctively sidestepped as a barrage of bottles now flew around him, a few hitting their intended

target but most flew past and smashed on the floor all around. There was broken glass sliding all around him as he ran. He turned left at the first corner. Immediately realizing his mistake: he was heading towards the street with the back entrance to the pub. He crossed the road, covering his head ducked back into the rain of bottles and glasses. He glanced back for a second and was glad to see the throwers had hesitated in following. Trying to avoid slipping over as his feet hit the glistening floor he continued. Knowing the glass would be as much of a problem for his pursuers he moved at full speed now. He crossed the tide of glass on tip toes trying not to slip. He could hear the voices behind him but he just went. He crossed two streets at full pelt. Luckily there wasn't any traffic and he had nothing to avoid. "Where the fuck are you?" he said into his hidden microphone in his collar.

He hoped Caroline had put someone nearby as he'd asked. He'd planned to get out before any trouble, but just in case he'd asked for some backup for the evening. He hadn't had an earpiece as that would have been too visible. It was in his pocket and now as he ran, he tried to fish it out. He glanced up at the street name he passed and said it out loud. He crossed another street when, from the other side, he heard the screech of tires and a car appear from another side street. The door flung open and he dived in. Looking back he saw a crowd of about 10 people, now screaming for blood as they saw him escaping. The car sped off and now he had time to see it was Caroline herself at the wheel. She sped off, turning left, then right and finally after about 10 minutes she pulled over into the parking for a parade of shops and stopped. She immediately reached for the radio and called in a disturbance in the area of the Golden Lion.

Harrald now managed to make eye contact and although he wanted to laugh he knew it would sound hysterical so threw a quick grin. Caroline's face instead of returning the grin had a look of concern. Only now did he feel something drip and realized the back of his shirt was wet and clammy. "You're bleeding," she said and started up again, he reached for the back of his head and touching the place where he now felt a numbing pain, he winced. Looking at his hand back in front of him he realized it was covered in blood. "Hospital for you" was all she said and concentrated on her driving which was now fast. It was only when a doctor was stitching up the back of his head did Caroline say anything else.

Harrald sat, on the edge of the bed, "Any dizziness, nausea?". "I'm ok, a bang to the head and my pride I guess, you said there was something important you wanted to tell me".

"Yes, I wanted to say they have stopped Andrew Holzter. He is in custody with the Dresden Police". Harrald turned his head. There was a slight smile on his face followed by a wince "Then what are we doing here?" his face got serious almost as quickly, "We have to hurry before he pulls strings" and he was up. She guided him to the car where he fell in. He pulled out his phone and dialled "Stefan, Harrald here. We have Andrew Holzter" Caroline heard talking from the other end but concentrated on the road, she had put on the sirens and was moving at speed.

"I want him held in solitary and no contact with lawyers." There was a pause "Good, that means we can hold him under the prevention of terrorism act, no contact for him, not even lawyers. OK, keep me informed of any changes, I'm on my way there". He hung up, they are pretty sure it's his signature but it will be dodgy in court. Seems a slightly unusual type of ink was used though....."

Harrald stood with Caroline looking through the 2- way glass at the Minister. "Has he said anything?" he directed at the senior officer who was with them. "Only that he wants his lawyer, he is fuming, I hope you know what you are doing.". Harrald turned "What did you find on him?"

"No weapons if that is what you are asking. In fact nothing that we can hold him on, nothing in his jacket except a mobile phone which we confiscated....oh he did have a very fancy pen, heavy. I bet solid gold, he is a bit of a bling man, looking at his rings". The officer looked at Harrald with his head all bandaged up. "All done according to the book" he added with seriousness on his voice. Harrald paused in thought, "A fancy gold pen you say, does he still have it on him?". The officer nodded. "Ok, I need to confirm that is his signature, something to be able to put a bit of a squeeze on him. He's been a bit of a bad boy and if I'm guessing correctly, a cocky fool as well. It's a bit of long shot" he said, almost to himself, "Any chance you have a pen that doesn't work?". He saw the puzzled look on everyone's face. "I need my suit please" he turned to Caroline. He found a piece of notepaper and started writing. After a few minutes he asked the officer if he could get it typed up. "I need it on official police paper. Caroline had got back with his clothes. He took off the bloody bandage from his head with a wince as the last layer stuck. He went into the toilets with Caroline who washed his head gently, making sure all the blood came off. He changed into his shirt and climbed back into his suit. A secretary returned with what he had asked for. Looking briefly in the mirror, he turned to the officer, "Sorry, no pen" replied the officer puzzled. Harrald reached into his inside pocket and pulled out a pen. He undid it and took out the spring. "OK, ready, let me in".

As the door closed behind him, he approached the minister. The minister was red in the face but apart from that he looked still very composed "Who are you? I want my lawyer and now" and he banged on the table. Harrald reached into his pocket and took out his Official Secret service Id badge, he put it on the table between them and took a seat. "I am terribly sorry for this minister. You have been arrested under the prevention of acts of terrorism. From what I have heard, it has something to do with you being witness to a shooting, for some reason they think you were involved". He let that hang for a few seconds. "You were seen leaving the scene in a hurry and seeing as the victim was under the protection of the state, linked to terrorism threats, they are treating this seriously. I have been asked by powers higher up that don't want this to get out to the press. I have no interest in what happened, just to get you out as fast as possible" he kept his face stonelike, no emotion showed. "I have been sent to try and get you released. The secret service need your signature so there can be no come back on us. I need you to sign this document for me and I will have you out as soon as I can" The minister looked at him suspiciously. "This is not normal procedure. I want out now. I am the leader of the National Democracy Party for Germany, in your government".

"I know Sir, I just need your signature". He left it at that, silence. He pushed the letter forwards across the desk and reached into his pocket. The minister kept his gaze on Harrald, Harrald kept his stony smile. He pulled out the pen. Clicking it, again and again, his smile broke into a grimace as he banged the pen on the desk "Useless shit, sorry sir" he apologized. "Just a minute", he turned to head back out, "I'll get you a pen. The minister, not saying anything reached into his pocket. Without showing it Harrald felt his

heart beat faster. "OK, I need to be out of here now" he pulled out his gold pen, looking down, he glanced quickly through the letter, with his pen in hand hovering over the bottom of the document he glanced up, stared at Harrald for a second then eyes back down and he signed. Harrald's heart almost stopped. Got you he thought.

"Thank you sir, I will have you out in a few minutes". He stood up and walked out without looking back.

As he got out he turned to the officer in charge, "Let him stew overnight, no visitors, definitely no lawyers, he is under arrest under the prevention of terrorist act so we can hold him a while He's been a very naughty boy". The officer nodded. He then called Stefan "I am going to send a copy of his signature by police courier, done on camera. Check his signature and there might be a possibility of a match with the ink as well. This guy is a cocky bastard and i don't think really that clever. If so, we have him. I want to let him contemplate overnight and will see what I can get out of him in the morning, then he is yours, you can send your special interrogator as I think he's got a lot more to tell us. Check out the secret meeting between the heads of any right wing groups around Europe. I think something big is happening". He listened to the reply and finished with "I will probably be back in the office tomorrow. I will explain in more detail then but I think the document is enough evidence, if confirmed, to hold him for quite a while".

They had found a cheap hotel nearby the police station. There had been a moment at the reception desk when the concierge had told them there was only a double room left. They had both looked at each other. She had not been able to read anything on his face but she trusted him. "I'm ok if you are" she said. "I'll take the floor" he added. They took the room. Harrald was now feeling the pain as he sat on the bed in the hotel room. Caroline sat opposite holding her glass of whiskey in both hands. She was glad to be able to relax now. She'd spent the whole day listening to the radio for a call to the area where Harrald had been. She knew it was a rough area and she knew about these thugs, as she had had dealings with them before. It had been not far from there she'd had to use her gun for the first time, with deadly consequences and the memory of that day still haunted her. It had been from the Golden Lion that they had followed her boyfriend. All day images of that day kept appearing in front of her eyes. She didn't know what she felt for Harrald but by the time Harrald had asked for someone to be there as back-up, she had already been nearby the area for an hour.

She listened intently as Harrald quickly went through his day. The adrenaline had now eased away and he felt tired. He'd passed on the whiskey and had a coke instead from the rooms fridge. She explained also what she'd gathered about the shooting. She explained she was experienced with shooting. She wondered how he had missed from so close with the body lined up with light behind. He lay back and pondered this.

She went out to get a take away, realising she had not eaten for a while. She guessed he hadn't either. By the time she got back he'd flaked out. Having laid down on the bed, he'd pulled the sheets over himself, still clothed, he was now gently breathing in calm sleeping rhythms. She sat and opened the carton with her Chinese food and started eating. As she ate, she gazed at him. The past hours had been hard, the problems were building and she knew the world was changing. Even through all her thoughts about this, she realised the

threat/*thread*? of terrorism. In a small way she realised this was the problem for the police as well. She'd spent the past years thinking about nothing but the welfare of others, upholding the law. She'd put up with standard abuse from the public to people in uniform, like her. She knew the police were called "pigs" and on the whole not liked. That came as part of the job. Naively, she remembered her image of police when a child and had first wanted to join the police, the people to whom you'd go to for help, ask directions if lost. That image had gone, the world was much more brutal place. Through all this now, she couldn't help thinking about her own life. She knew she was dealing with a personal problem. She'd put off for years, blanked it out. Like many fellow officers, she'd developed a hard skin. Now she realised she had been lonely. She wondered whether he would find her attractive. She went over to the mirror and gazed at herself for a while. She liked him she knew. She realised she was attracted to him. He was younger than her but did that make a difference, she wondered turning, looking at him sleeping. She felt herself soften a touch.

The following day, Harrald woke feeling fresh. He'd dropped off straight away into a deep sleep. Having got up before Caroline he'd made some coffee and managed to find some time on the small balcony looking out over the city of Dresden. One of the only luxuries he found in this small cramped hotel room, was that at least they had a view. Time to ponder the past few days' events. He felt not bad now as he thought about it. He'd managed to find evidence that would probably more than ruin the career of a highly placed politician (the last thing he'd thought when he'd left on this purely fact finding mission). Things had just moved forward at a lightning pace. As had been suspected, he now was nearly sure that Daesh was taking a new direction to destabilize the situation from the top here in Europe. He couldn't believe that he was now directly involved in it. It all seemed so big. He saw it as dangerous but had no idea what they could do about it and no idea really how far it went. Possibly it was just the faint dream of one corrupt official but it did make him worry that fear was pushing most people from the middle ground in politics to the edges. It felt like people were being pushed to decide where they stood. That scared him. He knew human nature, he'd seen it close up, in war, the ultimate place for fear. There were strong people out there, those who fought for the right thing, but he knew self was the name of the game. What had he heard since he was growing up, "the age of the self", that was where they were now. How could they move forwards now? It would take courage on the part of everyone in the world and that he couldn't picture. He didn't have much confidence where fear was involved.

Caroline came out sleepy-eyed onto the balcony with a cup of coffee, Harrald watched her in her tee-shirt and saw the form of her body beneath. "Morning, sleep well?" he asked. She smiled back "thanks for the coffee. Yes I slept well. You look fresh, I take it you did too". "Like a log, I'm ready and looking forward to today. I think I'm starting to understand a few things". He smiled back feeling a sense of something soft and sweet about her smile, Could be just waking up he corrected himself. He watched her stretch to wake up. He held back, a bit puzzled by what he felt. He took a few moments watching her. Somehow he felt it added some oomph, took him away from the dark thoughts he'd just been having. Perhaps a bit of self wasn't such a bad thing. He smiled back at her. He was looking forward to facing Mr Holtzer. Something in his stomach turned when he

thought about him and seeing Caroline just now, seemed to wipe away that dirty feeling. He turned back to look over the skyline.

He met the official interrogator sent by Robert. With Caroline they went to the station cafeteria and sat having croissants and coffee. He explained about the letter and the facts behind the shooting which he was investigating more closely. He had a few questions about that and wanted to be able to use the letter to lay a bit of pressure to get some answers. As to the letter and what that linked to, he said, that would be up to the interrogator himself as that he was sure would be a long, time-consuming job and his brief didn't cover that. He asked for advice on how to approach Mr. Holtzer for his own needs. The interrogator told him the report had come back confirming the handwriting and especially the ink used. They matched, leaving little room for doubt. Harrald then explained what he'd heard the day before at the Golden Lion adding that it was just rumor and the information he had had was from an ex-heroin addict who was fairly drunk at the time. Laughingly, he touched the back of his head and made some joke about how he'd got his stitches, making light of the whole affair.

The interrogator raised an eyebrow in surprise: "You have been busy these past few days", and he congratulated Harrald. "This is quite a coup, you've been busy". Harrald turned to Caroline and smiled, looking back he said, "Honestly, we've been led into this. It has all just sort of fallen into our lap. You know what it's like".

Harrald walked in feeling proud of himself. Confidently he placed his brown folder on the desk and looked Andrew Holtzer straight in the eyes.

"If you think I'm going to talk to you, think again" were the first words out of Holtzer's mouth. His eyes bloodshot, he looked tired and haggard. His appearance the night before had been one of shock with a certain amount of uncertainty. Now it was that of quiet volcanic anger. His tie was off and his shirt was dirty and soiled round the neck, the creases on his suit trousers had all but disappeared and by the look of him sleep had evaded him the whole night.

Harrald felt the seething hatred emanating from the other side of the table which fuelled him even further. He smiled back. He felt refreshed and pleased with himself. The results he had been waiting the night for had come back positive and now he knew he had him. He sat down opposite him, catching his eye. With a cool calmness he held the gaze, waited till he saw the anger show a hint of fear. "You realize you are in here under the prevention of terrorism act, which you were very loud in parliament in support of" He added in a different tone. He loved the irony of this. The look of anger came back and Harrald realized the effort that was being put in to keep it from overflowing. Harrald continued "We have police witnesses that confirm you were in the same location as an attempted murder two nights ago, the victim being someone who was helping us in the act of preventing a terrorist conspiracy. Have you anything to say to this?"

Silence

Harrald leaned forward now looking straight into the tired eyes, "Are you sure you wouldn't like to say anything about your involvement in the incident?"

Silence

“Ok, we realize you are a member of our government and you must also realize that, recognizing this, for us to be able to keep you here for 24 hours without allowing you to see your lawyer as you have demanded several times, means we have strong evidence.....”

“I want it officially recorded again: I will not speak until I have seen my lawyer!!”

Harrald sat back. He opened the dossier next to him and pulled out a copy of the letter from Asha's jacket. Without looking at it, he placed it directly in front of the now about-to-be ex-Minister Holzter.

With an air of indifference, he glanced down, his curiosity forcing him. Harrald watched closely as the tired eyes flashed with a sudden brilliance. The face cracked a look of shock. The eyes flowed down the page, he looked up. The ministerial air had now completely disappeared being replaced by a lost look. His mouth opened to say something, but nothing came out. It closed again and Harrald watched as the Minister tried to regain his composure. “That is not my.....where, did you get that.....not my signature” he finished with. He sat back and with a different level of control “What has that got to do with me?” Harrald saw a trickle of sweat roll down his forehead. Harrald thought a few seconds, then leaning forwards in the same manner, softly spoke

“Yesterday you signed a document for me, the analysis came back this morning and your signature fits exactly to that on the bottom of this letter, and...” he then paused to let it sink in. “...the analysis of the ink too corresponds. Your rolex type pen has a special quality of ink and that on this document matches completely Mr. Holzter. I will not be referring to you with your elected title anymore. I think you can see, this document confirms your connection with known terrorists, I feel you are now fighting for your life Mr. Holzter”. He sat back and waited.

Everything had changed. The anger and indignation had gone. In place was just an open mouth, a pale white blank face though upstairs the cogs were turning with an incredible forced velocity.

Harrald sat and waited. Nothing changed for at least a minute and then Harrald broke the silence “You are a clever man Mr Holzter. You realize what the error of your prideand stupidity... has put you in and you should be starting to see there are no more options open for you. I could be your only chance. Helping us out at this time, might help your cause. I only want a little information that can be easily found through other methods but your co-operation would be seen as beneficial to yourself. You now realize the severity of your situation, so I will leave you to think about it. Please take your time”. He stood up taking the letter back and putting it in the folder and headed to the door. “I had nothing to do with it, the shooting”. Harrald stopped with his hand on the door handle and turned back. “Go on...” “I just want to say that you asked about the shooting. I had nothing to do with that I swear. I needed a piss, it was raining and Saide my driver stopped when I asked him, he got out with an umbrella and let me out. I swear I was just having a piss by the railway. I saw a man on the railway pointing something. He was pointing it at someone else on the pavement way ahead of us. I was still trying to work out what was going on when, bang, you know, he fired, I saw the body fall further on and realised what was going on, I didn't have any time to react as Saide grabbed me and shoved me back in the car. I even pissed on myself in the rush.....please, I am still

wearing the same clothes, could you possibly arrange for some new ones, please?”

Harrald nodded, “Go on!”.

“That was all, I realized the police were there on the scene so I decided not to report it as someone was on it”. Harrald took his hand off the door handle.

“Anything else you can remember, did anyone say anything, anything else you can remember?”

“.....Well, the guy who got shot did shout something first, I think it was a name or something, sounded like....Ishuan or could have been Jonathan, I don't know. That was what it sounded like. Look, I am helping you with your enquiries, I have never seen the document before, I refuse to say anymore”.

Harrald waited a couple of seconds and realising that was all he was going to get, his hand went back to the handle, “As I said, I will give you some time to think about things, seeing as you are STARTING to help us with our enquiries. I will try and get a change of clothes sent up. A chance to clean yourself up, you look a mess.” He looked the man up and down again, with a sniff he opened the door and walked out.

Back in the corridor, he talked to a guard and the interrogator about new clothes, though he added with a grin, "Not too expensive clothes, jeans, and tee shirt", looking at Caroline he added: “That will be a change for him, bring him back to earth the fucker”. Caroline knew there was no love lost there. The guard, having been authorized by the interrogator, went to get some clothes, Turning to the interrogator he said with a satisfied air “All yours”.

Harrald was soon left with Caroline, “Not exactly what you expected?” she asked seeing the look on his face now which was thoughtful and although not morose, not the happy face he'd had earlier. “No, I don't know, I believe him about Asha. I was hoping for more on that though I am pleased we have him. He's going back to being scum from the street, without a suit.....but It leaves me with little....to.....go on”. He hesitated and took a couple more seconds. “Is the chauffeur still here? I want to talk to him. See if there are any discrepancies between their stories”.

“Still in the waiting room. He has been waiting since we got here. Seems very loyal, but you should know.....I'll let you see for yourself” and she walked off down the hall. He followed.

“Good morning” said Harrald and sat down. No reply from the chauffeur. “May I say I am quite surprised. You are Moroccan, aren't you, Saide? Saide nodded, “...and you are working for Mr Holzter are you not?” again a nod though there was a glimmer of a smile. Harrald stopped looking at him, he waited..... ”You want to know why I am working for a racist bastard, I guess”. No movement from Harrald, Saide continued “If you were to move to Morocco and got citizenship, to me you would still not be a Moroccan. I am a Moroccan living in Germany. I have a wife and family and Mr Holzter pays me well. I am not trying to migrate here, I am not going to say I want to be German. So you see I am a Moroccan. I just want to work here, not trying to migrate here, just as you Europeans go overseas and work but you are not migrating. I accept Mr Holzter uses me for his propaganda but also as I said I have a family and like to earn good money”. He sat back finished.

Harrald raised an eyebrow as he contemplated this. Leaning forwards again “Just between you and me for now: Mr Holzter will not be in a position to be A. needing a chauffeur let alone pay him and

B. out on the streets for quite a while now.

He carefully watched Saide. “I have just been to ask him about the night of Tuesday last week. I would like to confirm your side of the story”. Saide now had a puzzled look on his face. “You mean a couple of nights ago when he stopped for a piss?” He started laughing. “That was all it was. I pulled over as he asked because he needed a piss. I got out as it was raining and held the umbrella for him. I heard shouts, then a gunshot I think. Immediately after I rushed Mr Holzter back to the car”. A glint came to his eyes, “It was funny watching him trying to put his prick back in his pants as I rushed him back, the look on his face, he was in a panic. I think he pissed himself, that was nice to see”.

Harrald sat back, this was the same as Mr Holzter had said (without the humourous side). He thought for a moment. “You said you heard shouts, what did you hear? Was it in German?. Saide thought for a moment....”It was not German, I heard a man near the road shouting to someone I think the person below by the railway, it was a name.....Isman or something like that and 'What are you doing here? Then I heard the gunshot. That was when I grabbed Mr Holzter and we got on our way”.

“Did you not stop to ask what it was about or even try to help??”

“My job was to protect Mr Holzter. I did that and my thoughts stopped there”. He paused, Harrald waited.

“Is this the reason why you arrested Mr Holzter?”

Harrald leaned forward and turned off the voice recorder. “Initially that is why the police detained him but my inquiries reach further”. He stopped for a moment. “Thank you for your help, Saide. I may need to ask you a few questions later on. Would that be OK?” he asked very politely thinking Saide seemed to be being very genuine. Saide replied, “I can give you my mobile number if you like.” “An address too would be more useful”. Saide reached into the side pocket of his jacket and pulled out a business card and gave it to him.

Looking at the black card with yellow writing 'High-class Chauffers Ltd', two phone numbers and an address. He looked up.

“It is my cousin who runs the firm. If you need to contact me, just ask for me by name, he will know how to get hold of me.....don't say you are police or anything though”. Harrald stood up and offered his hand, Saide hesitated, “Am I free to go?” “You have been free to go when you wanted. I thank you for your help. You have been very useful, thank you again”. He still held his hand out. Saide a bit hesitantly reached out his own and took Harralds, “I am a good man, I want to do what is right”. Harrald was happily surprised at the grip, strong and firm but not squeezing. He felt he liked this man. He led the way out. Once in the car, Caroline asked: “Where to?”. “How about a drink, you know any good bar round here?.....with nice people this time!!!!”.

They found a bar just round the corner from the Station. The bar was now heaving with people. It was almost lunch time and the office workers were congregating for their business chat and for some liquid lunch. Once they were sitting down, he in front of his pilsner, she having a vodka and tonic, Caroline asked “Ok, what is going on?”

“Well, there are a few things starting to ring bells and I need to get this in order so let me run this by you. We need to go through this step by step because it is all looking a bit confusing. There are too many coincidences for my liking and I need your input. "Ok, fire away"”.

1. We have Asha who seems a nice guy, turning up at the border where, it just so happens, the leader of the right-wing party is, organizing a protest, that makes headlines faster than it should do!! and who ??? is connected to ISIS.
2. Asha has on him a document signed by the politician himself connecting him to the jihadists, a rather large coincidence there.....
3. We have same leader stop for a piss right at the time and place where Asha gets shot!!!
4. You and me in the same area at the same time.....
5. Asha by chance speaks German and Ikram too, both from Libya where not too many people speak German.....
6. Ikram disappears.....
7. From what I found out in the Golden Lion, most of the right wing parties in the Europe are heavily recruiting. Something else is going on there...

Hmmmm” Harrald took a sip of his beer, “I think I am starting to see something now!” Caroline looked at him, “Explain. I see as you said, lots of coincidences...If I go through the first, 1 and 2, yes, rather questionable. 3, that I agree, too much to be coincidence though you say you believe him, and the chauffeur confirms it. 4 you and me well I don't know about you but I am here because of the fire in the hostel and you too I guess. That seems to be the pulling factor there. 5 Asha and Ikram speaking German, well that is stretching it a bit, there are I bet more people in Libya that speak German but I see what you mean, them both being in the same travelling party. Ikram disappearing: well if you believe it was him that shot Asha, there is your reason why he disappeared. And as to the last one, that is pretty much inevitable, time of war and patriotism linked with fear and political rhetoric!”.

“You've got it,” said Harrald as he got halfway through his beer, “First stop, hospital, I need to talk to Gheeta.” He downed his beer. Caroline looking puzzled, looked at her glass, hesitated and decided to leave it, “is hat do you mean?” she said as she grabbed her coat. Looking up she realised Harrald was not listening. He had already left. She rushed after the back of Harrald who was already going out the door.

Chapter 5 – Some truth

They got to the hospital and found Gheeta with the children and Asha lying in bed looking much better. There was an out-of-uniform officer at the door which pleased Harrald. Now his train of thought was that this was becoming more immediately a serious matter. Having said hello to them all, he asked Caroline if she could take the children out for a drink for a few minutes. He needed to speak to Asha and Gheeta alone. He gave her a droopy dog look, "Sorry, it's important and I will let you in when I can". Slightly miffed because she wanted to know what was happening, she did as asked.

Pulling up a chair next to Asha and in front of Gheeta he started. "Asha, you asked me to protect your family and I have, but you have been holding out on me haven't you?" he looked seriously at Asha.

"Errr what do you mean?" he responded meekishly.

"You know who it was that shot you don't you!! You could have saved me a lot of trouble" he glared, not trying to keep it nice. "First I want you to translate for me and remember, I speak enough Arabic to get by so no funnies OK?"

Asha looked back solemnly, "I do not mean to have caused you any trouble, I just needed my family safe. I know I have put them in trouble but now they are here, I will do anything you ask".

"Now I want Gheeta's answer please...so please....." he threw a sideways glance at Asha before turning to Gheeta. He smiled and gently started "When and how did your family decide where to cross the border here into Germany?" He now threw a warning glance at Asha who had a look of shock on his face. "PLEASE" he threw again at Asha before turning back to Gheeta. Asha started talking in Arabic to his wife. She looked puzzled. Asha threw his eyes desperately at Harrauld. She gave a reply to Asha then turned back to Harrauld. "I can answer your questions, it would be quicker." Harrauld just lowered his eyebrows, "It's OK, that was what I wanted to know. Now Asha, so you decided to cross into Germany here a couple of weeks ago. Perhaps that is about the time you met Ikram.....again??"

He stared accusingly now at Asha. Asha understood. "Please...let me explain, I know I should have told you all this earlier. Ikram learned German from the same person I did. I didn't put the connection together until last night after you left, I promise, or I would have told you then". "OK, Ok, tell me now and don't leave anything out this time".

Asha slowly leaned backward until he was resting against the pillow behind his back.

"Ok, but please, not in front of Gheeta. It would only put her in danger knowing this".

Harrauld now knew Asha had the answers he was seeking. "OK", he dropped his head as Asha broke into Arabic. Although she objected slightly, she got up and went to the door. Picking up his mobile he called Caroline. He knew this would please her. He asked if she could spare a minute. She was there in seconds replacing Gheeta in the vacant seat next to Asha. "OK, please carry on" he turned to Asha who was looking deflated, weary and the look of worry was clearly dented into his face.

"It was two weeks ago as Gheeta said. We were walking up through Italy when Shama came up to us, with Ikram, they were holding hands. She had recognized him from Tripoli, where we came from. We were just walking through the city of Perugia. I knew him slightly as we were both from the same city. I knew also we had both had the same German teacher. *(Even in a big city like Tripoli, people gossipped, we were I guess from roughly the same quarter)* Ikram was as shocked as I was at the meeting it seemed. His face showed as much and I got the hint at first he didn't want to join us, Because of Shama, and I suppose being in a foreign place, it was nice to see some-one you recognised. In the real desert there is a custom, you so rarely meet anyone, even if you just see them on the horizon, you meet and have a cup of tea. It is a traditional way of passing on news. I guess old habits die hard. I think this sentiment is what brought us together that day.

It wasn't at the same time we were taught German. I had seen him a few times. Gossip as I said told me he had studied with Herr Schmidt as well. Anyway, he came over while we walked and we conversed. I liked him and we had things in common. It seemed natural that we walked together after that. I guessed at some point our paths would separate but was happy to continue together till then. I was a bit surprised as he had never seemed to be the sort of person to emigrate. I assumed I guessed wrong. We all have different reasons. I never asked him why. I found him very serious at first so kept the conversation light. It was also good for me to get my mind off things. I tried to raise his spirits. He was funny with the children and they loved him. Gheeta too was fond of him. He was very generous, helpful and polite. It was after a few days and nights that we were sitting together. There was no-one else around and the fire was burning, you know what it is like. The hypnotising effect it has, it makes you calm and, I don't know, sort of creates a closeness. He talked a bit about his wife. She died after giving birth to his daughter. She too died but he never said how. We got on to talking about the wars, inevitable when you come from where we come from. I got the impression he had seen a lot of things, not very nice things at that, and though he didn't give me any details, I got the feeling he was angry. Like....ehr Alan was, similar. I talked about the same things, we did the other night, with Alan I think his name was”.

Neither Harrauld or Caroline stopped the flow. They both were flooding with questions now but held back. Harrauld noticed Asha's eyes dropped.

“I showed him the letter!!”, looking up with a look of innocence he continued ”No-one else I promise. Like with Alan I felt showing the letter would back up my arguments, *perhaps it was why I felt I needed to show it to Alan*, it had quite an effect on Ikram, again, *similar to Alan*”.

“OK, let me stop you there. How much later did he start to suggest crossing here at this border?”

Asha frowned, a puzzled look on his face, “Well, if I remember” and he looked up as if fishing for the answer. His gaze returned to Harrauld, “It was a few days later. It was an evening again. We had no fire so as not to attract attention. We were crossing the mountains near Villach in Austria. The children and Gheeta were asleep. Just the two of us and we were talking about the future. He seemed happier, more relaxed than when we met, I guessed because of travelling with company. I had said we were heading towards Germany as I spoke German and he told me the same for him. He asked where we planned to cross and I told him I had no idea. I had been looking at maps but really was waiting till we got nearer. He suggested a place called Bautzen, on the border with the Czech Republic. I remember he had a map with him. He showed me where it was and I remember I was unsure. It was so much further and I was thinking about taking the shortest possible route, but he assured me that friends of his had told me this was the best place to cross because of where they placed us afterwards. He also said it would be easier than at the big border posts as there would be so many other people there being processed. He was right about that. When I hear stories.....Is that what you wanted to know?” he turned between Harrauld and Caroline.

“For the moment that is what I wanted to know. I must ask one more thing though. This German, Mr Smidt, where could I find him?”

Asha shook his head, "That was so long ago, I would guess he wouldn't be there anymore. It was about 25 years ago, I was working at the Tripoli Golf Club when I met him and that was where he taught me my German. Though I do remember a few times, three or four times, I went with him and my grandfather into the desert. I would have been about 14. eerrrrr" he rocked back in his bed, eyes screwed up wracking his memory "Near Asbi'ah, I think. I remember because he took us to some friends of his where we had a feast the first time. I remember this time, the man who held the feast took me and another boy about my age round the back of his house. He showed us how to shoot. I had never held a gun or rifle before in my life and I was not very good. My grandfather had always kept me away from guns. He said it only caused trouble. I remember wondering why had he changed his mind. I guessed it was because we had heard of an Aunt and family that had been killed in the middle of a battle somewhere. I never knew them so it didn't mean much to me but I remember my Grandfather crying a lot then.

We had to try and shoot some fruit that were laid out on dunes. I remember because, from the city, I thought they must be rich to be so extravagant as to waste food like this. Water melons, coconuts, you know what I mean?" he turned to Caroline. His face had a childish smile.

The recollection of childish memories, she thought.

"I went back there two or three times, though there were no feasts after that. My grandfather had said it was to visit some friends he had made, so I went with him. Funnily enough, now I think about it, I had no more lessons after those visits. It was just through listening, and speaking with other German tourists at the club that my German continued." he stopped and turned to Harrald. His smile had gone and a more sad look was back on his face.

"Is this to do with Ikram? He too went through the same process he told me. It was not until talking to him about it that I thought about these things again. As a child, I never thought anymore about it, but now, talking to you like this, I start to see why you are asking.....and now the significance of this". He leaned in closer to the other two in the room. He glanced suspiciously toward the door and whispered, "You think they were recruiting, you think Ikram might have been a soldier for Daesh....." he let out a sigh as he fell back into his bed followed by a wince as his shoulder hit the pillow. "Yes, that is it" his eyes met Harrald. "Is there anything else I can help you with, I am getting tired?" "What was the name of the club you worked at with your Grandfather?"

"The Tripoli Golf Club"

"Is there anything else you can remember about that night you didn't tell me before?"

Asha opened his eyes again tiredly "I am sorry about before but now you have made my family safe, I thank you so much, I wouldn't lie anymore, I have told you everything I can remember. He looked sadly at Harrald "I left to get away from this sort of thing, make my family safe. I am sorry I have brought this all on you. You think they know about me bringing the letter.....that was why they tried to kill me I guess".

"I am not sure about that. It is possible, but I am going to double the security on your door"

He glanced at Caroline and she nodded. "Please think about this: anything, from when you met Ikram in Italy, till now. Anything you talked about in the past, anything that might help us work out Ikram's whereabouts or movements. He has gone missing and we

need to find him. Please sleep on it. I will be back later". He got up and returned the chair to the corner of the room. Caroline did the same. Asha lay back and closed his eyes.

Back in the car, Caroline could see Harrald was excited. "Come on what gives? I think I start to realize what that means".

Harrald turned in his seat and faced Caroline. "OK, do you really? Continue, tell me!". Caroline hesitated. She too turned to face him. She needed to see his reactions. "Someone was recruiting young kids in Tripoli 25 years ago and has been doing so for many years. You suspect the German was involved". She waited. Harrald just looked at her "You have the answer to one of your coincidences. How they came to be at our border crossing, you already suspected but why would Ikram want to cross here, and why inform Asha?.....OK, it would be better to be like part of a family crossing but surely he would not want to cross with anyone who knew him unless.....OK he planned to kill him when across.....which he did try to do!!.....okayyy and you knew that already!!"

Harrald was screwing up part of his face "Almost there but you've taken a wrong turning. You could be right but....." he hesitated in thought, he looked down towards his feet, thinking. He slowly started lifting his head. He stared straight at Caroline. He stared straight into her eyes. Turning forwards again he sat normally. I think you have most of it but I need to check up a few things. He got his phone out of his pocket "I'll be just a minute", he got out of the car. "Hello, Nadia, Harrald here, I need to get back, could you arrange a helicopter please? I am back in Bautzen". He waited a couple of minutes. "Thank you, and could you tell Robert I need to see him". He hung up and climbed back into the car.

"I think we need to find Ikram, I have access to the video files of who crossed the border when Ikram did and the tape at the railway, where the shooting took place. I need to find out who he really is. Can you take me to the field where you met me?", His face changed. He wasn't sitting as straight as he normally did. Caroline thought he looked more relaxed, or was it worried. She was starting to get to know him but still there was a lot she couldn't work out about him. She almost felt he was keeping something from her, a thought had started, he doesn't trust me?

"Sure." She turned. She was slightly pissed off. He had not finished his sentence. She started the car and pulled away. They drove in silence for about 10 minutes till Harrald broke it. "Thank you. I have an idea, but, you have grounded me with another possibility. You are right. What you are saying, makes sense, but, try imagining one further step, other things fall into place but I don't know if it's wishful thinking, possibly. Can I ask you one more thing?" he turned and looked at her "Are you happy....with your job? Would you like to follow this a bit further?"

A bit flustered she glanced at him: "What, a bit further?", now she went a bit red in the face. She knew she'd thought something else. "Sorry" he felt himself flush "I don't mean that, eehhrr, what I mean is, look forget it".

"If what you mean is am I happy with my job, yes" she stopped and thought a moment "I haven't actually thought about it you know. Not since....." she glanced at him again. It had been raining again and suddenly the heavens opened, it was like thunder on the windscreen and she turned the wipers on to full speed. She fell into a silence and all that

could be heard was the constant clattering of rain off the car. The constant loud noise and the sound of the wiper motor on full speed.

“If I get the chance and my intuition is telling me there will be the need, I remember I always hated getting into something, then having to drop it halfway through, never really knowing what happened till I read it in the papers. I feel you have earned it. If I can wangle a place on the next part of this, would you be interested.....and available?” The rain outside was now torrential and a mist had gathered. Visibility had dropped. Caroline had started slowing down. Suddenly out of the weather appeared a cyclist. Harrauld saw it, but Caroline reacted faster. She swerved into the middle of the road giving a little gasp as she came back from the depth of memory she had just been visiting. Headlights appeared in front of them on the other side. She swerved back, this time her face changed instantly back from the shock to being calm, almost Zen-like. The bike and car both missed, she casually glanced at Harrauld now hanging onto the hand grip high above him and on the edge of the chair. He had a calm look and even a grin as he looked back at her. She had slowed down now and through the adrenalin, she turned to see his grin. She broke out with a laugh that surprised even herself. She hadn't laughed in such a long time, except for nervous laughs. This one was from deep, a relaxed laugh. “Sure”, she replied through the laugh, “Of course I want to see the end. I want to see what you see that I can't. To be honest, you have made me realize something. I have been closed off for such a long time because of an old memory. I've been trying to get away from it and have ended up living in it. A break from it would be good”.

“I can't promise anything”.

They carried on driving for a while. The weather started clearing. She speeded up a bit.

“Are you a good shot?” he eventually said with a hint of humor.

She felt her stomach seize. She forced a smile and in a laughing though slightly cracking voice she replied “Not bad I think my record will show” and followed it with one of her forced laughs, back to the polite ones she thought to herself.

He sensed something change in her reply so dropped it. They sat in silence for the rest of the journey. They got to the patch of ground where a black helicopter stood. He turned to her, “I'll be in touch”. Grabbing the coat he had appropriated back at the station from the back seat, he got out of the car. Leaning down before closing the door he waved the arm he had draped the coat over. “Perhaps the last time I might need this” and swung it over his back. It was still raining though not heavy now and the mist had cleared. Leaning down again he smiled closing the door behind him. Looking over to the helicopter he saw the side door slide open and a figure waving him over. Holding the coat over his head he ran over to it.

He walked straight into the epicenter as he saw it. It was open, several desks facing screens separators. On each desk sat a screen and a keyboard. Big black comfortable swivel chairs, occupied each desk. The room was well lit and on the far side wall sat one big screen for all to see. Above each desk, visible to all in the room but controlled by each desk, was a set of three screens. These were each constantly playing feed from camera's at border crossings under their control. On each screen, a yellow square moved in on individuals faces, targetting faces then zooming in on each. At the side of each screen was a square box that flashed through faces from a database, searching for

matches to these faces. It took a few seconds for each face on the main screen to be picked up and focused in on. Then when it froze, a longer few seconds to flick through the database looking for matches.

His four colleagues were sitting tapping away quietly as he crossed the room. Hanging his jacket on the back of one of the spare chairs he turned back to the room. Nadia had stopped what she was doing and turned to face him. He went over to her straight away.

“Any change?”

“No change. We are still processing the backlog of footage through the face recognition software and still no matches”.

“OK, keep that going but get me the footage of the processing of the refugees, I am looking for the processing of Asha Mamani”.

“The guy that was shot you mean?”

“You are up to date with this? Yes, him, his wife and children and there should be someone else who travelled part of the way with them, look for someone hanging in the background”.

“Ok, it'll take a few minutes”.

Harrald had an idea, “Hang on. You could use the CCTV footage from the train line the night he was shot!! The shooter is who I want. Could be extremely important”.

“I'll see what I can do though the footage from the CCTV was pretty obscure and he wore a scarf. Perhaps with a retinal scan though I think it's a bit too blurred. He was careful and he knew where the cameras were. He kept his face turned away, I've been through it a few times and no luck so far”. He tapped her on the shoulder encouragingly. “By the way, Robert was in here and passed on that he was waiting for you when you came in”. Smiling he thanked her. Turning he crossed the room.

“Stefan, I need you to find someone for me. You might have to go to the archives. I am looking for a German who goes by the name Herr Schmidt”, he saw the ironic look on Stefan's face, “I know but I can narrow it further” He smiled “Living In or near Tripoli, he would be between the ages of 80 and lets say 90 now at a guess. He might have been registered at the Tripoli Golf Club. He might be on record as a recruiter/trainer or even a mercenary contractor. I am guessing ex-German army”. He stopped and thought for a moment “I will see if I can get an artists likeness to you, ok?. I know it's not much to go on but it could be very important”.

“No problem”

Harrald turned next to Philip who stopped typing and turned to Harrald as he sat down next to him. “And for me boss?..” he said with a grin on his face.

“Shut-up and listen” Harrald looked back stonefaced.

“I need to find out the whereabouts of all the European leaders from right wing parties over the past few months who might have had a chance to have a meeting with Andrew Holzter. I am really looking for a window where Andrew Holzter might have had a meeting with them all together, perhaps in Spain as a starting point. Might it have happened?”.

“Ok boss” and Phillip returned to tapping away on his keyboard.

Back across the room next to Nadia sat Jason.

“I have two things I need you to check on: one is the priest at St Michael's Church in

Bautzen. Is there anything suspicious about him? The other, a Moroccan by the name of Saïde [Bensaïd](#). He was the chauffeur of Andrew Holzter so I guess he has had a ministerial clearance check already”.

Not saying a word or facial expression change, Jason turned back to his screen and started tapping away. “Oh and one more thing” he called across the room to Philip, “Can you get me the latest political polls in the EU for how popular individual politicians are and their parties? I am more interested in the right wing parties and if there seems to be a popular swing towards them”. Thank you. He saw the sideways glance Phillip threw him at the last request.

“I know the obvious but I am curious to the extent of the shift. Is there anything unusual about it?”

As he entered the room, Robert was behind his desk, looking through a folder, as usual, he thought. He glanced up and calmly motioned to the chair in front of him. Harrald came in and sat. Robert returned to his reading.

“Well?”

“We might have a situation” Robert didn't move and continued reading.

Harrald told him his story, Robert looked up and lay his arms on the desk when he got to explaining about his excursion in the Golden Lion and Andrew Holzter. Then he got to the coincidence/fact of the meeting between Asha and Ikram. He then sat back and laid his arms on that of the chairs.

When he got through it there was a pause,

“There seem to be two problems from what I can make out. One immediate, the other perhaps more damaging and a larger problem, that being the political one. The first, Ikram, is it an immediate threat?”.

Harrald took a couple of seconds, “I believe there are two ways of seeing that: one being the obvious. Ikram is here to recruit and assassinate. He tried to kill Asha because of his letter and to cover his tracks.

The second Sir, is a more personal opinion. I believe Asha put doubts in the head of Ikram, I saw how he worked with Alan and it was incredible. The letter made a huge difference and I don't think it was entirely coincidental, that meeting. I will explain. Let's say Ikram was as unsure of himself as Alan was after the talk, perhaps he'd been having some doubt or question of his own before but that is pure conjecture. Lets say he didn't pass on the message to ISIS about the letter. He liked Asha and felt a connection. He calculated the chance of getting Asha safe by taking him to where the letter might be seen by our authorities and some action taken. That way Asha and family would be out of the hands of ISIS”.

“That is a bit of a wild chance to take!”,

“Let's look at this from his side; he is unsure about how his side is working, with the enemy. He doesn't know how to deal with this. He is strongly influenced by his religious beliefs. Why not help the hand of Allah, the all seeing, and see what happens. Perhaps it would create the opportunity for a sign that would help guide him!!”.

“Then why shoot him??”

“same plan. Look Sir: the distance that night by the railway that Ikram was from Asha; you don't have to be a marksman to have caused more damage than was done to Asha. In

fact, you have to be pretty good to be able to have hit Asha not fatally, and just in the shoulder, especially with just a pistol. That way he is in the hands of the authorities and hopefully the letter as well. Perhaps... this is my long shot... he might want us to know about him to stop him”.

“Hhmmm” Robert, leaning forwards, arms propped up by the desk, had his hands together, two index fingers in his mouth propping up his top jaw. In thought, he replied, “That is a lot of conjecture. You want to tell me Ikram was pushing things and then trusting in God...sorry, Allah”.

“Exactly. He wants to create a level playing field where everyone knows the same, objectives are different, let them play chess and see what happens, that must be the will of Allah”.

“Ok, so what do you plan to do?”

“We need to find Ikram...Asha knows him better than any of us and has also been trained in a similar way so might know some of his tricks/moves. I need Asha by my side on this. If possible I would like to have Caroline with him, which reminds me: any chance I can have the file on her? I need to check a few things out if I may”.

“Answer to both requests, yes. What else?”

“I will ask as I go along if that's ok. For the moment your approval to carry on as I see fit”.

There was a pause, “So far I think, if everything turns out with Mr. Holtzer as it seems to be, you have been both lucky but also aware of seeing it. I think your current thinking a bit wild but seeing as it means you have to find him, I see your logic as sound. Keep me informed every step now. I don't want your theories getting in the way. I see what we could gain if you are right, but the consequences could be equally disastrous. You have my approval so far. By the way, if no-one has said it so far, good work!!” he had finished and looked back down reaching for the next brown folder on his desk. Harrauld turned and walked out.

Chapter 6 - Ikram's side of the story

He sat looking up at the sky. It was a clear night and he could see the stars twinkling away. He felt cold, the sound of traffic had reduced from earlier but still there was the occasional car, van or bus passing overhead. He sat, knees to his chest, back against a pillar under a series of pirouetting flyovers, He felt he now understood the infidel meaning of the words “concrete jungle”. Unlike a real jungle though there was no sign of life here, no birds singing, not the sound of animal calls, not even the sound of people, just a silence, like he imagined death.

The damp cold was getting through to his bones, so unlike home, so unlike on his journey here. Out there, in the forests or fields they had slept in on their way to Germany, he had felt free, nature all around, openness. Whereas, here, now, he felt trapped, closed in, and something else, he had not really had time for before, he now felt depressed. There was once a time, when he'd been a young boy, he had had memories of love, of family and friends, the giving he had seen in the streets of Tripoli, from the not so well off to the poor, those living on the streets. He had seen generosity from strangers to stranger, (a custom of the desert), just because... But all that was before. Now, anger was never far from his mind, seeing the things he'd held dearly, quite destroyed by war, by the enemy.

Bombs, guns, greed... Death had not been far from his side for quite a time. It had been his food, his nutrition, and then this madness.

He had thought about joining the others, not far away in their cardboard boxes, dirty and grimy. But he felt there was something else at work there. He smelled the alcohol and had seen the people swaying drunkenly, but there was also something else here at work. The young he saw, smoking what he knew to be drugs from silver paper, like the heroin addicts back home in war zones.

He had seen a lot of homeless back home, but again there was something different here. Back there the children went about hassling people for money for food, there was still an energy, but here he felt hope was lost. Here it was as if the feeling that something better could happen just wasn't there. It seemed like people were just waiting to die. No spirit: it had left them. They were like people with no soul, he thought.

There was also an aggression. He had been approached by a man he first thought to be almost 50 but as he got closer, he put in his 30's, beard, dirty clothes and thin. Inebriated he noted with a fierce look on his face. Ikram had only had to show his knife and the man had gone back to his box. The fierce look had disappeared straight away, replaced by the distant lost look he had seen before, after a battle, the tired and lost look, looking through everything. No fight left: he too remembered this feeling of emptiness.

"Why?" He remembered thinking back to when he had last seen this look, just after a battle, those that remained alive amongst all the killing.....

the same lost look he saw now on most of the faces here. There were men, women, girls, boys, old and middle-aged (though here the middle-aged looked like the old from back home, toothless, wild hair and beards, more like the crazies back home, but here they all seemed that way, even the young). More than that, he saw no-one taking any notice. That was why he realized he had been told this was the place to hide. No-one looked twice at these people. People didn't want to know that they existed, was what he had been told. He believed that now, though he had always thought that like back home there was always someone who had got out, and remembered, someone who came back to help.

As he sat there he tried to think of something good, something to warm his soul again. Something to take him away from this waiting room of death.

He thought of Asha and that feeling of life started to come back to him. He felt good about what he had done. At least now Asha and his family would be safe. He remembered the police car arriving just after he had shot him. The other car that pulled away, he had no idea who that was, but seeing the flashing lights stop as he ran off back into the tunnel had relieved him. He had feared that Asha would bleed to death, not his intention. Now he knew that wouldn't have happened. "It was the only way," he thought to himself. When the imam had taken him to one side, suspicious of Asha, and knowing Ikram's background, had asked him to do something about it, that had been the only way he had known to save his friend. Yes, friend, that was how he thought of him, friend and man of peace. That night outside under the stars when Asha had talked to him, really talked to him, like the father, he had once known, along time ago. He trusted him, (very naïve he thought) to have shown him his proof that this was not the right way, working with the enemy to create all out destruction as he had seen it. "Where was the end" were

the words Asha had used. This now rang round his head, and what about that letter, Asha's saviour he thought. That was wrong, not the way to fight, it was not honorable. *He had come from a nomad family. Life had been tough and the punishments harsh, because life was harsh and to survive in the desert the teaching had to be harsh as well. But this, the letter and how the battles were now going to be fought, felt cowardly. He saw the cowardice of the enemy, hiding behind unmanned weapons, on a computer screen, not seeing the horrors modern soldiers or real war caused. Like the entertainment on the TV he had seen, the American way of life as it was displayed on the boxes in bars.*

His feeling of depression returned, he knew he didn't want this life to go to his people, what he saw around him, the walking dead, that was what democracy was about. It never talked about the other side, the forgotten people. what this future world did to the people it had no use for. No he didn't want this to become true of his people. He wanted to fight this....but.....but.....what he was going to do, how could that help, he had been asking himself. There is no honor on either side. He could see no hope for either people, the enemy or his.

He sat there clinging to his knees, falling deeper and deeper into the darkness.

He felt this falling and realized he needed to pull himself out of this. His mission: he had an objective. This turning things around in his head wasn't helping. The Koran said Allah saw all and guided. If this was the way of Allah, so be it. His mission. He had done all he could to help Allah stop this. What happened now was Allah's will.

He had seen a likely candidate, a girl, couldn't have been more than 16, sitting or more lying over by a pillar some distance in front of him. He saw the light of a fire someone else had lit, dancing on her. She wasn't quite unconscious. He saw her flinch from time to time as the shadow of another inebriated passerby fell over her. She was on her own, but no-one took any notice of her. He wondered why. He knew the sad side of life and a single woman, on her own would quickly be taken advantage of, raped, pushed into prostitution. That was the way back home, sad he admitted to himself. There was this dark side for the women back home too. But it was another form of survival he guessed. Then he had the answer. He'd heard about this disease sent by Allah to those that strayed from the path, Aids. He heard it was a disease spread by sex and drugs. He saw this girl for what she was, a prostitute and drug addict. Probably got Aids, that is why she is being treated like a leper. The curse of the modern world, Allah's revenge he had heard it called. He knew it also afflicted many from his side of the world as well but not the Bedouin tribes, somehow; Allah's protection he guessed.

He sat watching her for the rest of the night and processed what he had to do and how he was going to do it.

It was a long night but eventually he saw the night slowly fade away to the dull light of day. He stayed and watched her until she moved. It wasn't late in the morning when she started to stir. During the night she had fallen from a sitting position to lying down. She lifted her head and sat up. She looked around. By this time most of cardboard city had already packed up for the day and had splintered off around the city. There were still a few bodies lying around, her and Ikram. He tried to look as inconspicuous as possible, he even moved around the other side of the pillar he leaned against to a point where he could still watch her without being seen to be watching her. She eventually got up and

wandered off. He followed at a distance. She went off down a few side streets. She found a spot by the entrance to an underground station and sat down. She laid out her scarf in front of her and dropped her head as if falling asleep. He kept his distance. It took him a few minutes to realize she was begging from the passers-by. A constant herd of people passed on their way to work in their different styles of wear. The occasional slight turn of a head followed normally by head down and then disappearing into the network of tunnels. Every once in a while, he noticed people throwing coins into the scarf and then also disappearing into the rabbit warren. Keeping his distance he kept himself mixed up in the flock that was scattering in all directions. Keeping from being seen wasn't that difficult. She rarely looked up, only occasionally to move and pick up the shrapnel that had ended up in or around the scarf and pocketing it.

After a long while, he guessed about an hour, the crowd thinned to being just an occasional tourist passing by looking a bit lost. At this point, she picked up the remaining coins and scarf and headed off in another direction. He followed. She went into a bakers, came out again with a loaf of bread. He followed her as she went down to the canal. It was now difficult to stay hidden as there were not that many people around. He guessed that was why she had chosen this spot, somewhere calm to eat her breakfast.

He had to take the risk of losing her now and hoped she would return the same way. He waited half an hour before she came back past. He acted as if he was still asleep.

Throwing him a quick nonchalant glance, she actually threw a coin in his direction which shocked him enough to look up at her passing figure. She wasn't looking back, just carried on head down, scratching her arm.

Waiting till she had gone round the corner he pocketed the coin, got up and continued to follow. He had put his poncho around his head to avoid her seeing his face and now he wrapped it round his waist to change his look again. He noticed that now the sun was getting high. It was still quite cloudy and there was a city smog hanging around. It was not easy to follow her as now she seemed to be wandering aimlessly. This carried on for quite a while till he noticed the streets around started filling up again. He guessed it was nearly lunchtime now.

She stopped and popped into the public toilets. Quite a few moments later she came out again. He almost missed her this time as she had done something to herself, splashed water on her hair and washed herself he guessed.

This time she headed off with a direction in mind. He had to be a bit less careful as she was moving with a plan. Her mind was obviously occupied because she didn't look around except to cross the road. Eventually, she ducked into a side alley. He got to the beginning of the alley and glanced quickly down it. She was standing with three men. They had a menacing look about them but she seemed to be flirting with them and there were a few laughs. He hung around the corner and listened. The joking continued for a few minutes till he heard her voice starting to become more pleading "Go on, a free shot won't hurt you at all",

"If I do a free shot for all of you, it would start to make a dent in my pocket, you'll have to work for it, ready to go!!".

"Ohh go on, I'm not feeling too good today, just for today a freebie. I won't tell anyone". There was no reply, "OK, how many do I have to do?" Again, no reply. "Give me some

before I start though, really, I can't face it today". Still no answer. "You are real fuckers" and he started to sense it getting more heated.

"Stop fucking around and get in there, I haven't got time for this and the clients are waiting, I'll give you a quick snort but only because I'm feeling in a good mood today". He heard the clang of a door opening and then closing. Another quick glance around the corner before he took off. He was now ready to put the first part of his mission into action. Having already checked out the address and where to go to for his contact, he headed off there.

A couple of hours later he returned to the same street in a car with a driver. "I'll only be a few moments," Ikram said as he went down the same alleyway he'd been before. There were only two gorillas this time, waiting outside. They stood at full height, shoving out their chest as they saw him approaching. They closed ranks as he got closer. Ikram had the hilt of his knife that sat up his sleeve in one hand. He came close and dodging left then coming quickly back right, he brought out his knife slashing at the throat of the guard on the left. He moved so fast the gorilla on the right had only enough time for the look of shock to appear on his face before the knife found its way up to the hilt in his belly. With blood spitting out of the neck from the one on the left, his hand came up to the big slash on his throat. Blood spewed out between his fingers as the bulk of his body leaned slowly over, falling like the trunk of a tree. Eyes gaping wide open he fell face down to the floor. The second on the right was now trying to plug the hole that had appeared in his stomach with his hand, eyes having the same uncomprehending expression, as the knife made one final swipe cutting his throat in the same way. Not hanging around to see the results, Ikram grabbed the door handle the two had been protecting and pulled the door open with the same scraping sound as earlier. Moving in, Ikram found himself in a dark corridor with sets of curtains to the left and right. Each had a dim red light ambling through the side and bottom. At the end of the corridor, he saw the third man, now getting to his feet. He approached him, not running but at a steady walk. "What you doiii" was all he got out before, with the same result as outside, he too was holding the slash in his neck with blood spurting out between his fingers as he too fell. Swiping each curtain to one side as he passed quickly, left and then right, Ikram poked his head into each cubicle as he flung the curtain open, searching for his girl. He was surprised to see the girl he was looking for lying on her back in a cubicle halfway down on the left. She was on her own lying back on a bed with a syringe still sticking in her arm. The rubber cord still wrapped around the arm just above the syringe. Her eyes were hardly open and there was no movement from any limbs. For a millisecond a sprig of panic crossed his mind as he thought she might be dead. Testing for a pulse, he found it, weak but there. Wrapping her naked body in the blanket she was lying on, he effortlessly threw her over his shoulder and left, back by the door he'd come in. At the end of the alley the back door to the car flung open. He placed her inside, then, Slamming the door, he climbed in the front next to the driver. The car moved away without a screech of tires but at a steady pace. Not panicking and without a word from the occupants inside they pulled into the traffic on the main road. Having to stop at several red lights and passing a few green, they carried on for 20 minutes. Eventually, pulling off onto a labyrinth of back streets, they ended up at an old empty block of flats that was

encircled by 2-metre high fencing. The building was ready for demolition though that had been waiting for several months already. The passenger in the back seat got out when they got to a section of gate that was chained together. Unlocking the padlock she opened the gate wide for the car to go in and closed after re-doing the chain and padlock. The car then continued into a tunnel that led to an old underground parking. The woman with the scarf round her face opened the next padlocked gate and again closed it after the car had disappeared, into its underground hiding place.

Ikram got out of the front seat. Then he opened the door behind, reached in and again put the limp body over his shoulder. The driver who had got out at the same time, disappeared over the fencing and up the tunnel. The woman led the way now to a staircase. Ikram followed, up several flights of stairs. Eventually, having counted 6 levels, he was glad that instead of going up the next flight of stairs, she turned right and led the way along a corridor. Three doors down, she put a key in the lock, turned and opened the door. There was a dark corridor in the flat and she led them to a small room with a bed, but no window and flicked the light switch on. The wallpaper was bland and had the signs of rotting at the edges. Dropping the body of the girl on the bed, carefully now the woman found her hands and handcuffed them to the bed with cuffs that were waiting on the bed. "Have you clothes to dress her?" he asked. She nodded. She motioned with her hands "to sleep", she pointed to the wall, he realized she was pointing to a room next door if he wanted to sleep.

Leaving the two women together, he followed her directions and found a similar room next door. There was a plain hemp sack hanging on the headboard and he looked in. There he found bread and cheese and he tucked in. Having finished eating, the sleep that had evaded him the past couple of days came rushing over him and he fell back onto the mattress, falling asleep.

He didn't know how long he had been asleep. He didn't know if it was night or day in the room as there were no windows. He woke from a vision of the desert: there had been a big battle he'd been involved in, images still floated through his head. As his eyes open, he felt the clammy sweat covering him. At first, not knowing what had brought him out of the nightmare, he felt the presence of someone close. The light came on and his eyes adjusted to the suddenness of it. The Muslim woman had entered the room and had switched on the light. She had a plastic basin in her hands, it was filled with water and she placed it next to him, still lying on the mattress. She knelt by his side. Taking a cloth from the clean lukewarm water, she motioned to him that she wanted to wash him. Still a bit dazed by the sudden light and coming straight from the horrors in his head to this quiet closed space, he started to relax. He felt a softness return to his muscles and fighting the urge to sit up he lay back again into the comfortable mattress.

She started by cleaning his face with the cloth. He felt the warmth of the water and the gentle softness of the cloth passing, caressingly over his face and around his neck. She expertly continued. He closed his eyes and started to float away. One arm was lifted and the cloth passed over his skin. He felt the cloth being damp but not too much water, no tickling as no drops fell running down his body. With an expertise that only a Bedouin woman from the desert had, the knowledge of the full value of water. First, one arm was cleaned followed by the soft dry towel, Then the other arm. She was sitting on the bed

next to him. This continued over his body, his chest, his abdomen. She motioned him to lift up so she could do his back. As he sat up he noticed a warm fragrance like a soft perfume hit his nostrils. He sat up and the caress continued over his shoulders and back. He felt the tension slowly ooze away.

Having done his back she pushed gently on his shoulder. Before he lay back down he looked up at her, she was not looking him in the face. She was still wearing her hijab, her face rounded in it. She was smiling. Having played back, she continued round the inside of his left thigh. One leg and continued down, to his foot where she massaged a little, then the other leg and foot. He felt the bed rise as she stood up. The light went out but he didn't hear the door. Next minute he felt the pressure on the bed as she sat back down on it. He slept in his kilottat (underpants) and feeling her hands now sliding down his belly he felt them slip under his underpants. He raised his midriff and let her slip them off. Hearing the splash as she wrung out the cloth in the basin, he then felt the warm cloth slide between his legs and wrap around cleaning his sex, down and gently around his balls. He felt his organ stir and come alive. Her hands changed the cloth for the dry towel and he felt her drying him. He felt her rubbing and he felt himself rising. She lifted up off the bed again and with his eyes still closed he heard the rustle of cloth as she removed her dress and let it fall to the floor. He felt the pressure on the bed as she returned. She lifted the bed sheet and climbed in. Kissing his chest her hand went down and felt his erection.

Ikram woke up feeling refreshed. He had fallen asleep again. He was alone in the room now. The woman had left. He realized he had never heard her speak. He didn't even know her name.

He got up, dressed and left the room. He knew where the door was from memory and found the door handle in the dark. There was a dull light in the hall, sunlight that found its way through from the window in the entrance door, or what was left of it. It was day outside. He felt the cold air that came from the broken window on his face as he went into the hall. Looking down the corridor, he opened the other door to the room next to the one he'd slept in. He peeked in. The girl was still handcuffed to the head of the bed and was obviously still asleep.

The other woman was also in there, she was sitting on some cushions on the floor, she was reading a book. He half expected it to be the Koran but was happily surprised when he bent to look at the cover. It looked like a novel. He didn't look any closer. He entered the room and closed the door behind him. He went to the girl asleep on the bed and looked down at her. She looked peaceful and calm. It did look uncomfortable with her hands attached to the headboard. Taking the handcuffs in his hand, he looked at the woman and gently shook them. She looked back and severely shook her head. He tried again insisting. She hesitated then reached into her pocket and pulled out a set of keys. Getting up she took them to him. She looked sternly at him and he looked back even sterner. She gave him the keys and she looked down as she did it.

Going back to the bed he undid the cuffs, releasing her hands, then gently placed them under the cover next to her.

There was a chair by the wall in the far corner. He went and got the chair and placed it next to the bed. Glancing around, he now took in the room. It was a small room. He saw damp marks in the corners on the walls which were a faded green colour. Apart from the

cushions, chair, and bed, the only other bit of furniture was a bedside table behind the bed. He noticed there was a syringe sitting on a plate with a little bottle next to it. He turned to the woman who was now back sitting on the cushions against the wall. She hadn't picked up the book, just sat looking at him. He wanted to ask about the syringe. He made a motion with his hands, writing on his palm with his finger. She picked up her handbag next to her and fished out a pen. She delved a bit more and eventually came out with an opened envelope. Turning it to the back with the pen she handed it to him. He wrote "what is in the syringe?" in Arabic. She read, writing from right to left in Arabic as well, she handed it back to him. "Sleeping medicine. 24-48 hours. She will have convulsions in her sleep during this period and it will save her lots of pain" he read. He sat down and gazed at the girl. Writing on the envelope again "what is your name?". "Desertstar," she wrote.

"Beautiful name," he wrote.

He turned back to the girl on the bed. He sat looking at her face. He sat for a while like this. He had previously had experience with the nomads and was now sure the woman was from the desert. It wasn't unknown for the Bedouins to use girls that were mute, something that helped keep secrets secret. Here he felt it was especially useful. It made him think of home. He sat gazing at the girl's face. His daughter came to mind. She had been seven when she had been killed. Thinking about it, so many thoughts started whizzing through his head. He didn't notice Desertstar pick up her book and start reading again. They sat like this in silence for the rest of the day. At one point the girl started to stir and immediately let out a groan of pain and her body quivered. Opening her eyes, they started to focus. He saw panic on her face as she stared back at him. Desertstar was the first to react, she quickly got up, picking up the syringe from the plate, she turned and grabbed the girl's arm where she sunk the syringe and squeezed. The girl struggled with unforeseen strength and Ikram had to grab her and hold her still. He tried to talk calmly to the girl at the same time but feeling her struggle he too had to put in a lot of force to keep her still. He was surprised. "Where am I?" screamed the girl "Who are you?.....aargh" It didn't take long before the tranquilizer took effect and the girl with a look of panic still on her face drifted off and Ikram felt the struggle slowly ease away. He was surprised at how shook up by it he was. He felt the adrenaline pulsing through his veins. When the girl was asleep again he left the room and went back to what was his room now. He lay down staring at the ceiling for a long time before he too fell asleep.

Chapter 7 – Searching for clues

Although Caroline had never been in a helicopter before, she hardly noticed the takeoff. As usual, it had been a cold grey day when they left. It had only been a day since Harr to had left but her mind kept finding him as subject matter.

He had asked her if she was a good shot. She knew she was an excellent shot. She thought about when she had answered his question and winced to herself.

She had not had to take her gun out of its holster since and she was thankful for that.

Since then she had managed always to push back thoughts about it and to get busy occupying herself with her current case or the next. She had even got to the point where weeks went past and she didn't think about it. *(Except when putting on her gun every morning which she had managed to control. As she walked out of the door each morning*

she got into the routine of picturing the dossier probably sitting on her desk of the case she was on or the case that had just come up).

Since being asked about her shooting skills by Harrauld though, it had hardly left her. She was almost panicking. Sitting in the helicopter, she was trying to remember what had been going through her head that day. She remembered the few days before the denial of what she felt to be true.

It had only been when opening the trunk of the car and finding the bags of white powder lying under the carpet in there that she realized what a fool she'd been. This was where she found no way of remembering if she had been angry or calm. Things had then happened so fast she didn't know what had driven her to take the head shot. She told herself it had been training and automatic reaction but now reliving the moment here in the helicopter, she realized what had been nagging her all this time. She had always avoided the question in her head but sitting there now she knew what she'd been avoiding all these years. Why had she aimed straight at his head? She thought about it, she could see herself there, looking down her arms lining up the target. She wondered why she hadn't aimed to wound. She had been under fire and even now with the whirr, and slight bumping about in the air that she was oblivious to, she wondered. It hadn't been that difficult. He was moving steadily in the same direction. She could see in her mind's eye the other places she could have aimed. She hadn't thought about it at the time. There had been no thought behind it. She had just aimed straight at his temple and without hesitation pulled the trigger. So cold she'd been, or had it been hot, anger? She was going through this thought when she jumped. She felt someone taking her hand. Looking sideways she saw Asha. He was looking straight at her. At first, she thought it might have been to distract her. She quickly realized from the white of his face though, the look in his eyes, he was terrified. She forced a smile onto her face to reassure him and squeezed his hand now sitting in her palm. She clicked back to the present and where she was and what she was heading towards. "Ever been in a helicopter?" she shouted through the noise across at Asha. He tapped his ears as if he hadn't heard. She just smiled and sat back to look out of the window. The scenery had been scarcely visible through the cloud though an occasional gap showed thick green pine forest. She felt a pulling at her arm and turned back. She saw his lips moving but heard nothing. She saw what she felt were the words "Harrauld" and "be there". She made the same motion he had tapping her ears. He managed to force a nervous smile back to her and apart from the occasional turbulence nothing else happened for the rest of the trip.

She thought about Harrauld. She liked him, He was clever. He had little tricks that had kept her attention. He seemed to be able to pick out whom to be nice to. He had shown very obviously who he didn't like. He was able to treat people right. He was brave she thought. The Golden Lion scared her, perhaps because she knew what was involved. She found him good looking too, that she didn't doubt. As she thought about it, she realized her doubts were about herself and when this became obvious, she tried to stop thinking about him though she knew she was looking forwards to meeting him. She hated herself for that. She also realized he was the one who had asked her or for her It was nice this change of direction in her thoughts as she looked out of the side window. She didn't know what she was feeling. She was unsure what her feelings said to her. That felt like a copout. She realized she was smiling. Looking out now, the cloud had dissipated a bit

and she could see they were flying over urban areas. The buildings started getting bigger and she noticed they gained height. They were now approaching the centre. The buildings became skyscrapers and she started to feel a bit nervous as the wind bashed their helicopter, she felt like an insect being bashed around by draughts. She noticed a building they were approaching, almost hidden amongst the high risers. There was a big H on the roof of this smaller squat building. Asha's hand was now squeezing so hard it started to hurt her hand. The landing though bumpy was safe. Someone was on the roof and jerked open the door. She felt the downdraft straight away. The person there to receive them motioned them to duck which instinctively they did. Running in a crouched position they got to the door across from them and clambered through. The door was shut behind them and suddenly the calm and silence was so welcome.

Harrald had had a chance to look at the file on Caroline that morning. He knew she was arriving with Asha and that was one thing he really needed. He felt things were going nowhere and needed Asha to help push things forwards in the direction of Ikram. He knew he needed to know more on that subject. He had a gut feeling, but as he had realized when brainstorming with Caroline, (that was how he had seen it), that his gut instincts were only that. He needed a second opinion and help with that question, Asha. Caroline's file was impressive, she was an excellent shot. Her record showed that. She was very good at her job and it was obvious to him why she had climbed the ranks quickly. As he read up more, he started realizing there was little room for a private life. He had finished the file from front to back and felt he hadn't found what he'd been looking for. As he stood in front of the mirror checking his tie was perfect, he remembered her drinking coffee in her T-shirt on the balcony that morning before the interrogation of Mr. Holtzer. That same soft feeling returned and he felt himself smile. He decided to look through the file once more. Perhaps he'd missed something. He felt there was something else. Her face when he'd asked about being a good shot... it had been a joke... but he'd sensed she had hardened at it.

Now in the central control room with his colleagues, the CCTV footage came up on one of the big screens. Nadia had explained just beforehand that this was taken from an illegal backstreet brothel in Berlin the day before. The police had recuperated the tapes when investigating the violent murder of three small time hoods. The footage had reached them because of the type of violence, and the perpetrator. There had been an assumed connection to terrorists. She had pieced together the scenes from outside and inside.

There were gasps from some of the experienced professionals watching. The speed at which he had taken out all three was astonishing. There was silence for a couple of seconds when it was finished. Harrald was the first to react. He turned to Nadia first, "Can you get me a still, one where we see the assassin's face best? I need to confirm it is our man. Patch together the scene from the border crossing and the railway footage. So far I know they look similar but we can get more confirmation from Asha I think. Perhaps we will get a match from this footage and get to know who this man is. That attack is so clinical, he is not just a jihadist. Run the recognition software with known mercenaries or assassins. We must find out something about him!!" he insisted. "Stefan,

any more luck on Herr Schmidt? I know you have confirmed he existed 10 years ago but that was when his membership finished with the club. Anything after??, his whereabouts for the last 10 years would be useful and anyone we know that might have had dealings with him, again try linking him to mercenary organizations, If this guy is linked to Herr Schmidt, he moves like he's had special forces training. Try German special forces, secret ops going back from our first data on him in Libya". "On it sir!".

Turning to Jason he asked, "We need to know who that girl was, the one he took away, and any identification of the other people or the car itself. Get in contact with the police involved to find out if there was any information about the girl, with her clothes for example. She was naked when she left so where were/are her clothes? Get on with that for now. Oh, Philip, Jason, I need the two of you in ten minutes. We have a meeting with Robert. I need that info on what I asked you to research, the priest and the chauffeur".

They both nodded turning back to their laptops.

"Nadia, run all those clips together please". The door opened and Robert walked in.

Harrald turned. Asha and Caroline were with him. They crossed the room and stood with Harrald. He smiled at Caroline first, then at Asha. He greeted them, shaking hands,

"thank you for coming. Please, I am sorry to do this, but I need to do this right now.

Could you concentrate? Are we OK with those clips Nadia?".

"Two minutes" she replied.

Harrald turned to Robert: "I guess you have heard about the clips we've just had?"

"Heard about them, though, not seen them yet." "This guy is good, cool and fast".

"Where are we with your other inquiries?".

Harrald turned to Jason, "If I'm right, we have checked out the priest and he seems clean....as I felt". Jason nodded. Jason added in, "The chauffeur is proving harder to track. Nothing to go on so far but I am checking with customs for details of his entry.

That is proving to be quite a job. There are a lot of Saïde [Bensaïd](#) from where he is from. It's almost as common as the name Herr Schmidt" he continued with a grin on his face.

He turned back to his PC and started tapping the keyboard. "We were just coming to see you, about the political situation" he added with his head facing the screen.

Nadia called out "Ready". They all turned back to the big screen.

The first section was in stills, it was only a few seconds long. The footage showed six stills, in black and white. The figure of a man coming, out of a tunnel till he was past the camera. There was nothing of the shooting itself. Half a minute later the same figure walking not running back into the tunnel. "Cool character" Robert muttered to himself.

Nadia paused it there. "As you can see, he kept his face from being seen directly by the camera. Could have been intentional or not, we don't know but impossible to get close to his features". Harrald turned to Asha, He was looking up at the big screen. There was a look on his face like a child at Christmas. Caroline watched and guessed that this situation was so far removed from his reality it didn't sink in. This was when he had been close to being killed. "The second clip is from the frontier". Asha pointed up as a scene came up of him and his family. He opened his mouth to say something. Harrald was watching, Asha suddenly realized where he was and looking around the room, his hand hesitantly dropped and his mouth shut. Nadia stopped the footage. With a mouse on the screen she started pointing out someone in the background. "This person here seems to resemble the man from the first clip, height, size and hair length. Remember, there are

only a few days between both clips". In slow motion, they watched the figure, huddled in his coat collar. This was nothing out of the ordinary as others too on the platform were hiding from the rain and cold. "Re-run at normal speed" Harrauld turned to Nadia.

Returning to the beginning of the clip, she ran it again at normal speed. Turning to Asha, Harrauld asked, "Is that Ikram? Watch his movements, the way he walks, do you recognise him". Asha turned to Harrauld with a puzzled look on his face. "Errr, you want to know if that is Ikram? I thought you were looking for something else. Of course, that's Ikram". "That is the man you traveled with on your way here?" Asha, a bit nervous now that everyone was looking at him, simply nodded. They all turned back and watched the clip to the end. At the end of the clip, Nadia had taken an excerpt from the footage and zoomed right in. You could see the features now clearly. She moved on one frame and there was a passport photo of the man. "This is the picture taken while processing him". Asha nodded, "that is Ikram".

Harrauld turned to Nadia. Could you hold it there?" He turned to Asha, "I need to talk to you" he looked over to Caroline. He smiled "Thank you for coming." He turned to Robert "Sir, I need to prepare them both for the next clip. If it's OK with you, I will go and have a coffee with them and explain. Would you like to come or would you like to watch the clip"? Robert turned back "Hmmm, I need to see the clip, but I think for now we do need to talk" he passed his eyes over Asha and Caroline. "OK, my office". He walked purposefully with a serious look on his face. Harrauld opened his arms around Asha and Caroline and ushered them to follow. Robert turned to Nadia "Can you get the final clip so we can see it on the screen in my office?". He didn't wait for a reply. He held the doors open for those behind.

In Robert's office, they all sat around the desk. There was a big screen on the wall and all the chairs were turned towards it. Robert leaned forwards on his desk. He was looking at Asha. "Thank you for coming" there was a pause as he sat back. "How are your family doing?".

Asha nervously leaned forward nodding in appreciation "Thank you, Thank you, they are fine, I saw them this morning. I realize you are preparing something for them". "I personally want to reassure you they will be leaving the country this evening for a secret destination where they will be safe" Robert continued "You can talk to them before they leave this evening and once they have reached their destination you will be able to talk whenever you want, within reason. It is better for you that you don't know where, as what we are asking you to help us with will be very sensitive, and that way there will be no possibility that anyone in this room can wittingly or unwittingly pass on that information".

Asha suddenly looked really nervous. Caroline, sitting next to him, leaned forwards and took his hand. She was surprised at herself. She wasn't used to being supportive in this way. She felt friendly towards this man she'd only met a few days ago. Perhaps it was his effect on her that was creating a change. She also realized she too was in an unusual environment and could feel the awe. She was used to similar situations back in Bautzen but this was at another level. She empathised with him. She didn't think about it but added a reassuring smile to her face as she looked at him and him at her.

"What are you asking of me," he asked.

“I will let Harrald explain that” Robert waved a hand at Harrald.

Harrald was nervous. He wasn't sure what he was going to say and had imagined playing it by ear in a relaxed place, but here in front of Robert, it was so formal. “OK.....well let's start with this next clip. We have had some footage of someone we presume is Ikram. It could be quite upsetting so I am warning you now. You know him better than any of us, who have really no idea about him. Firstly we need to know if you recognize him from his movements, anything you feel familiar with”. He was starting to relax. “As you guessed at the hospital, we fear he is going to do something, in short, we have to find out what it is and try and stop it. You, however little, had similar contacts when you were young with this Herr Schmidt and anything, however little it is, we need to know. You are the only person who has had contact with him that we know of. I want you to follow me around over the next few days. Don't worry, Caroline will always be with you and as you saw, I have confidence in her”. He looked across at her now, she blushed. He smiled at Asha with a touch of humour. “She is your personal bodyguard as well as someone to help me keep my feet on the ground. I don't want to say too much right now but the first thing we need you to do is confirm if this is him. Please let me warn you again, it might be upsetting. I just want to prepare you”. He nodded to Robert. Robert clicked on his intercom on his desk. “OK, roll the film”. He let go of the button.

The screen lit up. It started with the scene of a man walking up the alleyway. Caroline felt her hand squeezed as the violence started.

After the final scene was played, there was a hesitation before anyone moved. Harrald was the only one there who had seen the clips so far and though still a bit stunned, moved first. He was at first surprised by the look on Roberts' face. He couldn't make it out. Looking back at Caroline she was shocked. Asha's face had gone white. Harrald wondered if he was going to be sick. “Do you want something to drink? A glass of water?” Asha didn't manage to get out a sound and just nodded. His eyes were still fixed on the screen. Caroline reacted. Standing up, she offered to take Asha out for a drink of water. Robert turned, “Before you go, can you confirm this is Ikram” he directed this at Asha. Eyes glazed, he nodded “I..I think so”. Robert nodded to Caroline who taking Asha's arm lead him gently out of the room.

Harrald was about to get up. “Wait a minute” Robert commanded. Harrald sat back down. When they were on their own, he sat back in his comfy chair and started rocking in thought. “We have a big problem here. That man is a cold blooded killer and loose about in Germany....on a mission for his God, a well trained fanatic, our worst nightmare!!!. A well-trained soldier. Those moves, that experience, the training, with a sense of purpose, we have to take him out!!!”. He was now looking directly at Harrald, “and you are telling me you think he is hesitating, you think you can turn him”. He said with ridicule in his voice.

“I agree, watching the clip, I too have my doubts. But I can't get it out of my head: why would he miss such an easy shot? You saw, when he walked away, down the train tunnel, that was not a man in panic. He didn't miss what he was aiming at. That was a man who had done what he set out to do!!”.

“You are taking a risk with possibly thousands of lives!!”.

“What risk? I know we have to find him, as soon as possible, before he can do anything. That is our priority I know. If there is the chance, we take him out. I just want to know, if there is a chance without taking a risk, you will be behind me to just try and talk to him?. You have not seen Asha in action” he added finally.

Robert butted in, “That man.....that man who has just walked out.....”. I couldn't see him arguing his way out of a paper bag, to be honest”.

“He doesn't argue. He has a way of persuasion. It's a sort of logic that he points out. He lets whoever it is make up their own mind. I agree, the letter is so important to him and I understand why he didn't want to let go of it. It was his way of proving how crazy this all is. I know it's weird. But look, as I said, we have to find this man first and that man is our only connection. I trust him to try and help us, especially with what he has just seen. What this man Ikram is capable of we don't know: at the moment our other loose ends haven't come up with anything!!”.

“This Herr Schmidt, what are you looking for?”.

“Well, we are looking into special forces here from back in his day. There was a Herr Schmitt registered at the club in Tripoli. We are looking into organized mercenary groups from that area of the world and any known assassins or hit men. All are pulling up a blank and I am getting the impression there has been a training program going on for years that I guess has been operating solely in areas we have no knowledge. This Herr Schmitt seems key, but they have managed to keep it under the radar for a long time. Perhaps they are linked heavily with the Caliphate. Ultimately we are getting nothing from all our searches. This man” he exaggerated that part showing how he felt about Robert's comments “has spent 4 days when he was young in the presence of these recruiters. He didn't meet the grade but I want to check out some photos of people going back to that date we have on record to see if he can put us onto a lead but, but, the immediate danger has also something to do with that girl he has carried off, where, why and who she is. That side I am checking out. I don't suppose we got anything from Mr Holtzer that might help us?”

“That side is very interesting, he is not talking much. You have given us a trace of something happening, what have you got?”. “That is Jason's and Andrew's area, should I call them in?” Robert used his intercom and soon they both came in.

Not sitting down, Philip started. “I have been cross referencing the whereabouts of the main European right wing politicians and there was a window back in June. I have confirmed there was a meeting as Harralt pointed to from the information in the Golden Lion, in Spain. Right wing leaders from the Netherlands, Spain itself obviously, Italy, Greece, and France have a hole in their calendars for that particular week. In Valencia we have checked up on police reports and there was a huge number of visitors during that time though according to the police it was all very well behaved. Crime was down during that period which they tell me was a surprise. With the heat and number of visitors, they expected a lot of trouble but apart from the usual bar brawls, there was a reasonable amount of calm, so”, he turned to Harrald, “it is possible that there was a big right wing meeting there and Mr Holtzer, if I am correct, has confirmed he was at a meeting there so I think we can presume the information is correct”. Robert nodded.

Jason stepped forwards, “Here too, there is a surprising number of people joining right wing organizations. Usually, during conflict, there is a surge into these groups and since

the bombings around Europe, it has been steadily increasing to the point that the number now registered is unprecedented. The surprising thing is that even middle ground voters are not timid in saying they have feelings for the right wing and state their reasons openly, closing borders being the main reason given, protection. I think we have assumed that to be the case but honestly, I am surprised what the polls are saying. If there was a general election now in the main European countries, the right-wing parties could actually take power in the Netherlands, France, Spain, Italy and Greece. But you know what is my biggest surprise....there are a large number of first and second generation immigrants actually registering for these parties. The people who would be on the boats back home to wherever, are actually giving reasons. They don't believe the propaganda they are hearing about deportation but actually believe it won't affect them. That is what they are being told in the background. I know it is usual for immigrants to try and show they belong by being more nationalist but at the moment, it is getting ridiculous. There is also apathy playing a major role, that there is no-one else to vote for. The major parties have been there too long and people want change That is a large contributing factor to these statistics. On the whole, there is a reason to believe that the political picture is changing....fast. I have also been looking into the side of the Balkans and there is a decided shift to the left in these areas as well. People seem to be moving to both extremes with their views and away from the center, this seems to be the trend throughout the world. People feel they are having to decide which side they are on. Personally, I think it is quite scary!"

"Thank you both". He waited till they were both out of the room. "OK, it's not looking good. But our job is protection, not to direct politics, is it?" Robert stated.

He was looking a bit flustered Harrauld thought. "I agree. I am not a politician. I just want to find out what Ikram is planning and stop it. I think there is a chance we could turn him and it would help us work out where the ISIS situation is going!!".

"Yes, sure" Getting hold of himself "I agree, that is the priority, I have some contacts I need to question about this Herr Schmidt that might help. There is something nagging me about it. Keep me informed as you get more information and especially, before making any moves on Ikram when you locate him. And yes, you have my backing."

Chapter 8 - Liz

Ikram's routine was much the same for the next couple of days. The girl woke up a few times over the next 48 hours with panic attack and asking who they were, she was immediately put back to sleep.

The time after that, when she woke up, Ikram was there. Desertstar was sleeping in the other room at the time. She opened her eyes wide, as she had the past few times. She sat up and started screaming. Ikram let her. He knew normally no-one could hear her. He just sat and watched. The door opened suddenly and Desertstar walked in. Ikram waved to her to stay where she was. With his hand he motioned her to sit down. Putting his eyes back on the girl, he started talking calmly over her screams. The girl didn't make a move to get up, just sat screaming and staring at Ikram. He continued calmly talking.

Desertstar sat and picked up her book. Eventually, the girl stopped screaming. "If you like something to eat or drink...or anything, please ask.....let me explain.....I know you must be scared but we mean you no harm. We are trying to help clean you up from your

drug problem". She sat staring at him, tears were running down her cheeks, she looked terrified. There was silence. He couldn't think of anything to say, "My name is Ikram" he eventually thought of, "She is Desertstar". Still nothing. She just sat staring at him. Eventually she turned her head and looked at Desertstar sitting on her cushions. She turned back to Ikram for a second then turned her back and lay down facing the wall. She curled up into a ball and just lay there. Ikram realized he'd had no idea what he'd been expecting but this seemed so surreal, he just stayed sitting looking at her curled up body, back to him, for quite a while waiting for something else. Nothing happened. "If you have any pain, please ask, we have pills for that if you need. There was a stir, she lifted and turned her head." "What you got?". Ikram turned to Desertstar who picked up a notepad and pen. (When she'd gone out shopping the last time, she remembered to buy a pad, her envelope was getting full). Having written the name of the drug, Buprenorphine, she passed it to Ikram. Ikram passed it on to the girl. She read it and nodded. Desert star got up and left the room to get the drugs. "What's wrong with her" she nodded to the door. "Can't speak, she's mute". Desert start came back and handed the pills to Ikram who got two pills out of the box and handed them to the girl. He took a glass that was filled with water from the table behind the bed and handed that to her. Both pills got thrown into her mouth followed by a gulp of water and she handed back the glass, "Liz" she said turning her back on him again, "I'm cold" and she returned to her fetal position. Ikram turned to Desertstar but she was already up. She came back from the other room with the blanket from their bed. She didn't sit down. She indicated she wanted to write something. He passed her the pad. She asked if he wanted anything in particular. She had to get some new blankets and food. He replied he didn't and she went out. He sat looking at Liz curled up on the bed, alone for the first time with her. He moved over to the cushions by the wall and sat looking at her, his mind drifted off.

Liz woke up, her stomach in cramps. Her head ached. She felt like shit. Her eyes opened and her first thoughts were "Where was she?". She was facing a blank wall holding her stomach. It hurt. She felt uncomfortable and she hugged the blanket a while before she moved. She felt clammy. Her second thought was "I need a fix", she turned over. There was a woman sitting by the wall who was staring at her, she started prodding the man laying on his side next to her. "I need a fix," Liz said. The man opened his eyes and looked. She felt her stomach turn and she wretched. The woman jumped up and grabbing a blue plastic basin approached her, putting the basin on the bed next to her, she vomited into the basin. The woman had a cloth ready in her hands and gently wiped the strings of spittle hanging from her mouth. "I need a fix" she croaked again, the cramps in her stomach intensifying. She couldn't work out which was worse, the headaches or her cramps. The woman said nothing next to her, just stroked her head and her hair. It felt gentle but also uncomfortable. "I need a fix" she started shouting, and still no-one moved. "aahhhhhh" she started screaming and still the same. She felt the sweat dripping off her head. The eyes in the room looked mournfully at her now. She felt weak again and dropped back into the mattress. The woman reached under the bed and opened a bottle of pills, getting a glass of water from behind the headboard and a couple of pills she passed them to Liz. Throwing the pills into her mouth followed by water she turned

her back again holding her stomach and lay there facing the wall again. She couldn't get to sleep. Her mind turned, "Who were these people, who cared?" she started trying to remember where she'd been, what were her last memories but it was so difficult to concentrate. Unable to sleep and unable to think, the swirl in her head, every part of her body itching. She scratched her arms, legs, and neck all the while the woman sat next to her and stroked her hair. WHO were they. No knowing how much later, she fell asleep. When she woke up it was to see the woman, the basin now had hot water, She could see the steam coming off it. She glanced to where the man had sat. He wasn't there this time. The woman started washing her face, gently. The warmth of the cloth was nice. The woman indicated to take off her top. She didn't recognize the top. She hesitated, there was a panic forming in her stomach or was it the cramps again. She realized what was happening, she was going cold turkey.

She had thought about it many times on the streets, but it was to kill the memory, what she was doing, the cold, everything. All those memories came hauntingly back. She started shaking. The woman put her arms round her shoulders, took her head in her arms and started stroking her hair. It felt soft, it had been such a long time since she had felt this, as soon as a warm memory started oozing in, she blocked it, the panicky feeling came rushing back. She pushed the woman away, grabbed the pillow, hugging it, returned to her curled up position and felt her eyes water, hugging the cushion so tightly she felt an agitated darkness coming over her. She clung to the cushion pushing away everything else. The woman stayed and continued caressing her hair. She hated it, she liked it, she couldn't do anything about it, she just stayed blocking everything out, hugging the cushion as if her life depended on it. She felt alone, where was her dad. *She remembered, they'd died in a car crash. An obnoxious teenager, she'd been horrible to them and then they'd gone and got killed... her aunt and her young kids... horrible again she'd been to them... she hadn't stayed long... the streets. Her train of thought continued: the dark alley, where she'd been attacked and raped... no-one cared... someone had tried to help she started to remember, she thought, then she realized no, they had locked her away, injected her... kept her for days, raped her again and again. The nightmare had just continued, a blur from that point on, cold, pain, the helplessness and then the dulling of drugs. She didn't know how long it had all gone on, how long she'd been like this.* She hugged the cushion wanting to sink into it and disappear. She wanted to die. In the background though she felt this gentle stroking of her head. It brought back memories of her little bed, her dad stroking her head, sending her to sleep. These thoughts interchanged in her head, the panic building up, the caressing relaxing her till she drifted off again into a fitful sleep.

It had been 4 days now since they had got here. Ikram felt empty. This felt never-ending. The screaming, the crying, vomiting, pain and sadness. The look of panic sometimes in her eyes, he'd not been able to do anything, just sit and watch. Desertstar, he was in awe of her now. He'd had to slip out to the balcony many times, smoke, take in some air, listen to the buzz of cars, people, all in the distance, the sounds creeping through the nomans land of rubble that separated them from.....from what? Life....he wondered standing there watching the smoke drift lazily up, off the balcony. They were in the middle of a city, with a girl going through hell inside and out here the world just carried on as if nothing was happening. He heard occasionally the sirens of police and the first

few times felt panic seized him. He wasn't prone to panic but stuck here, locked away with a petrified girl going through what he saw. He felt on edge. His mission looked further and further away. He couldn't focus on what he was going to have to do to this girl. He felt he must be a monster. There had been something different on the battlefield, a heat, an anger, fighting for your life, taking others, then the lull, it was over, but this, no action, just sitting watching pain and panic, in a young girl, what had happened to her. He was almost glad his daughter had died. She wouldn't have to go through this pain of living.

For her at least it had been quick. He had suffered though, he was still suffering. He returned inside, pushing all the pressure he felt back down into the depths of his stomach. He opened the door, he heard the scream and a quick peek told him to close the door and disappear. The girl was naked and getting washed by Desertstar. It warmed him; there could be gentleness. It took a woman though. He returned to the room next door and lay down in his darkness.

Harrald sat with Caroline. They sat looking in through a window into the doctor's consultancy room. When a sketch artist had tried to do a drawing of Herr Schmidt, Asha had not been able to come up with anything so they had asked him if he would have anything against being hypnotized to try and remember the features of the famous Herr Schmidt. He had agreed nervously, though only after asking Caroline's advice. She seemed to be his trusted angel.

She could relate to this. Between the two of them, they were outsiders here and the feeling of sticking together was now strong. There was an official police sketch artist drawing from his descriptions. From outside Harrald and Caroline could hear Asha talking as if in his sleep. The doctor kept having to bring him back to what the German looked like, as he drifted off into his childish descriptions of the feast, the foods, and the smells.

Harrald's phone rang. It was Phillip. Having talked for a while he hung up and turned to Caroline, "They have been tracking all possibilities of the whereabouts of the getaway car from the kidnapping. They have a car similar caught on CCTV heading out of the center and no record of it after a certain point. Phillip wants me up there. The police are searching the area. He says he has an idea. If you want to come up after Asha has finished.....". "OK," she didn't take her eyes off Asha. She felt for him. She had heard the stress in his voice as he'd talked to his family that morning. They had arrived wherever they were going and the children sounded ecstatic. She'd been able to hear their laughter and shouting from a distance. Gheeta, his wife had sounded worried, Asha had told her. Caroline wondered what had got such a family caught up in this. ...this intrigue,.....this deadly game of spies and terrorists.

It was the 5th day in their flat. Desertstar had left for shopping. Ikram sat in the cushions watching Liz sleeping. She seemed more settled than the day before. Over the past few days, thoughts of his dead daughter haunted him. That morning, sitting waiting for Desertstar to return, he had picked up the notepad and started writing a letter to her. He

didn't really know what had made him do it. He guessed he just wanted to talk to her, having felt the company of Liz perhaps.

Dear Arshiya,

I am writing to you because I am hoping we will see each other again soon. I have been thinking of you. There is a girl in my company that makes me think of you: was I a good father? I never had much time but when we did, I remember flying a kite with you, playing catch with a ball. I remember you were good at catching at your young age, even better than the boys. How much I miss you. I have thought of you every day since you left. I will be coming to meet you soon if Allah sees it in his plan. I would love to see you again. Allah has held my hand down a path that has led me to meet someone that makes me think of you. I am sitting here by her bedside looking down at her as I write to you my dear.

I keep seeing that day you left, in my dreams, that day so clearly. We walked to the market. It was a sunny day. There were many people, happy, meeting each other, drinking tea, and I stopped. I was distracted, I watched you running off to play with your friends. I hold my head still in my hands and weep when I remember.

I wonder and fear sometimes if I will see you again up in paradise. You are an innocent and I fear there is a special paradise for those who leave as innocents. I have blood on my hands, lots of blood. I have killed through my anger at what happened to you. I still get so angry.

I have killed on the battlefield in the heat, I have also killed here in cold blood. I cannot see how Allah could allow such a man as me, dirtied with blood, into a paradise to see such an angel as you. What Allah is asking of me now, I dread, the taking of more innocent lives. I try not to let my anger at what has happened to you control my thoughts in this task. I do not want to sully the memory of you with this evil that is happening here. I keep that...

He stopped writing as he saw Liz stir. He went and sat on the bed. "How are you feeling", he looked down at her. Her face had turned up and her eyes red from tears looked up at him, "Are you going to save me?" she asked?" her eyes not focusing; she was still in a dream. He had watched Desertstar stroking her head .He lowered his hand now and cupped the back of her head in his hand. He felt his throat tighten. He opened his mouth to utter what he knew were lies. He couldn't. He shut his mouth and started stroking her hair. He managed a weak smile but felt his eyes starting to water. Luckily, she lowered her eyelids and turned her head back onto the pillow. He continued stroking her head on the pillow, glad she could not see the tears that were now dripping down his cheeks. With the stress of the past few days, and seeing those gentle blue eyes looking at him, it had pulled a few drops from the well deep within him. It had been shut and he thought buried forever. Now it leaked.

He was sitting there, stroking the head of this angel when the door opened and a flustered, Desertstar came in.

She looked for the pad. He still had it with him and it was on the bed next to him. He didn't want to let go as she motioned for it. She noticed the red round his eyes and hesitated. Her face changed, he noticed it. Tearing out the page with the letter he had been writing from the pad, he shoved it in his pocket. He recovered himself. He passed the pen and the pad. She hesitated. She stood staring at him. She had not seen this before, a grown man, a ferocious warrior, crying. She was shocked. Ikram took stock of the situation and growled at her, pulling deep again at the monster within. "What?" he said, tapping the pad that sat motionless in her hand now. He clicked his fingers in front of her eyes and that seemed to do the trick, she started writing.

"We have to go. There will be a car at the back". He felt his heart speed up again. He didn't wait, he reached under the bed and found the syringe and the bottle. Putting the syringe into the bottle he pulled out on the plunger and watched the glass tube fill with the clear liquid. Pulling it out he looked at Desertstar. "Is that enough?" she was still staring at him. He had to shake her with his spare hand to bring her back. She looked at the syringe. With her fingers she motioned less. He squirted a bit out into the air holding the syringe as he had seen doctors do, he knew to get out the air. He looked back at her, she nodded.

"What is happening", Liz had woken up and was looking at them both. She spotted the needle, "Noooo" she cried weakly as Ikram grabbed her arm and sunk the needle into her vein. They both sat and watched as the petrified look returned and then just as quickly ebbed away as the sleeping drug took action. Without hesitation, Ikram laid the body down and then wrapped up the body in the blanket. Picking her up, without effort, he put her onto his shoulder. Looking round the room, Desertstar was quickly throwing all that was left of medication and any other remnants of their being there into a black bin bag. Carrying Liz out on his shoulder he left the flat. Desertstar had ducked back into the room next door doing the same thing. She followed him outside onto the balcony. Ikram remembered the way they had come and moving carefully so as not to bang the body on his shoulder, he followed the stairs down with Desertstar quickly behind him. Instead of going back into the basement, Desertstar grabbed his arm and tugged, she pointed the other way. He let her past and followed. They went out the opposite side to which they had come in. Ikram was expecting a bullet or something any minute but kept moving. His eyes were now scanning the perimeter for anything moving and found nothing. He saw the hole in the fencing and there behind it was a car. It was difficult maneuvering the body on his shoulder through the gap cut into the fencing but someone was on the other side and helped guide them through. The door to the car opened and passing the body in through the back door, he climbed in as well, next to her. Desertstar took the seat in the front and before a few seconds had passed, they were in the flow of traffic.

There was a man sitting on the other side in the back, someone who had helped them through the fence and to pull the load through. A foot was sticking out of the other side of the blanket and it was sitting on the other man's lap. The driver and him were looking agitatedly around to see if they were being followed, Ikram noticed and started searching as well. Outside there seemed to be no sudden movements. Ikram looked again at the man opposite him. He held a pistol in one hand as he agitatedly scanned the surrounding area. This went on for a while. Ikram at one point looked down and lifted a flap of the blanket to see the face of Liz lying there, looking like she didn't have a care in the world.

Making sure it didn't show on his face he felt a warm glow inside. Looking up he caught the eye of Desertstar looking at him through the sun visor mirror. She was stone-faced, staring straight at him, directly in the eyes. He felt a pang of worry.

There was a tension in the air that didn't leave. Not a word was said and even an hour later when Ikram noticed the landscape changing from big grey buildings, slowly reducing in size to green fields and pine forests. He read on the faces of his travel companions they were still on full alert. Not a word had been said and Desertstar was still glancing at him through the mirror in her sun visor. He couldn't read her. He had pulled himself together now. He was chastising himself for letting his weakness get the better of him. He was back with men now and he knew it was life or death for them all, Liz and Desertstar. He didn't care about the others, or himself.

He felt his thoughts drifting for a second, questioning what he was doing. He pulled himself back, "Where are we going?" he directed at the passenger opposite. The man looked at him, Ikram felt a suspicion. There was a delay. He took hold of himself, He looked the man directly and repeated the question. "I need to know what has happened. My mission is on the line. Tell me in case anything happens: I need to know". There was a hesitation, and serious suspicious eyes were heavy on him. Not flinching he leaned forwards and tapped the driver on the shoulder. He knew he had to take control of this situation. He was feeling weakened. "Pull over here, that is an order". The other man's face shattered as wrinkles spread out and the look softened. "As-Salamu alaykum", Ikram returned, sitting back he felt the tension start to break a little. The man leaned forwards and tapped the driver on the shoulder, "Carry on", he turned back to Ikram. "You have certainly stirred something up. We have been hearing reports that the police have been asking questions around. They are following the car used the other day. They recorded it and have been narrowing down their search. They started a long way away but we felt they were getting too close so we decided to move you, sir". He nodded deferentially. "Please forgive me my concerns. I know how devoted you are, but as you know this is a delicate situation. We have never used an Infidel, especially a girl. My bosses want to know how are things going?". Ikram surveyed the road in front, lifted up the flap and looked at Liz's face. "Not here", They were now going through a section of deep pine forest, on both sides of the road. "Pull over," he said again, with a comfortable, more commanding tone, he felt.

He sat back still trying to get more control of himself. He was trying to pull at the anger but found it for an instant(???), not so easy to get hold of. When a road, turning off, came up, the driver pulled left into it and carried on a few hundred meters. He pulled over and stopped. Ikram opened the door and got out, the man opposite did the same his side. Ikram looked around quickly and leaving the car behind went off the road into the darkness of the woods. He walked for a few minutes looking around carefully all the time. He was followed. They had entered the depths and could see the car still parked on the edge.

"Things are going according to plan. I knew we wouldn't be able to stay long in Berlin. We have a few more days to clean her up and then the work will begin, I have to be sure I have her confidence. Do I have yours?" he glared back at the man.

Bowing the man replied, "It is an honor to be with you. I have been asked to stay with you for the next stage. It will now be dangerous". "Where are we going, have you found a quiet place for us?"

The man bowed again "My name is Souma",

"Welcome Souma" Ikram held out his hand. Souma was hesitant at first, then with a big smile that lit up his face took the hand. Ikram at the same time placed a hand on his shoulder. Once the greetings were over, Souma pulled out a map and unfolded it. He crouched on the ground and pulled out a small pentorch from the inside pocket of his jacket. In the midst of the forest, there was little light creeping through. The torch was needed and Ikram thought Souma was well prepared. He would be a good man on a battle field. He had not shown the slightest sign of panic for such a young man.

The map was laid down and Ikram too crouched down over the map.

He smelled the damp air mixed with the smell of pine, just like the night he had spent with Asha. He felt sheltered. Not sure of the reasons, he did feel an uncertainty with Souma though. Why?... he pushed this question away for later.

Crouching over the map, Souma pointed out the forest they were in. They were headed into the Naturpark Niederlausitzer Heidelandschaft. There was a cabin that they could use for a while. It was in the middle of no-where, where they would not be disturbed.

"Have we an event decided on for this.....occasion or attack?" Ikram asked. "Nothing particular, they are waiting for you to say when you are ready. They do not want to push you. They still don't know how you are going to pressure her. Trick her or convince her. What method are you going to use?". Ikram had been thinking about this. Before meeting her, he had had no idea which method he was going to use, had just decided to play it by ear.

"I have not decided" he replied "which brings me to you: why are you here, to check on me?".

"No sir, we have complete faith in you. We thought you might need protection, help, if anything went wrong".

"I work alone. The woman was a necessity but now I am unsure. You will make the girls nervous. I don't want you anywhere near".

"I can stay out of sight when we get there. I can stay on the perimeter and guard". Ikram thought about this for a few minutes. He looked up, "I am sure you are good at what you do. I want you to stay a few kilometers away, survey the roads coming and going but I don't want you anywhere near. I don't want her to get suspicious. Do you understand me"?

"I think so sir, and the explosives. I have them in the car".

"When we get there I want you to bury them. We may need to get at them quickly so not too deep, but I also don't want anyone coming across them by accident. Ok?" "OK sir", Ikram felt he had things back under control. He didn't like working with anyone. That was always where things went wrong.

They had taken a few paces when Ikram turned. He hesitated. He turned to Souma, "You said it is an honor. What have you heard about me?" he held his gaze to the floor when he asked this question. Souma, stopped, he looked at the bowed head of Ikram,. Pride went through him, "You are known as the lion of the battlefield, you are the panther that sneaks into the enemy camps and chops off the head of the snake. Then you disappear

silently into the night, a brave soldier and a deadly assassin. You are unknown but your deeds are known to all, I bow in your presence” and he bowed.

Ikram didn't look up or say a word. He just nodded and turned back and moved towards the car, “ We must hurry. I don't want the girl waking up on the way”.

When they got back to the car, Ikram gently lifted Liz's head and placed it again on his lap. He wanted to know if she stirred. He didn't want any unforeseen surprises, not now anyway. He was in control again. He felt his conviction coming back. He was glad, he had his direction again he thought. Looking at the gentle sleeping face in his lap he started stroking the top of her head again. He hid the gentle smile he felt deep inside and managed to keep his face like stone. Talking to Souma, the memories of the battlefield had enabled him to retouch his monster within.

Chapter 9 – the hunt gets warmer

The chasing of a black car around Berlin using CCTV footage had led to little. Harrald was starting to get frustrated. They were still getting nowhere. This Ikram was leaving no trace. Somehow he'd been able to kidnap a young prostitute, drug addict, and homeless girl off the streets. They still had no idea who she was. Ikram had a plan and they had no idea what that plan was. They had no idea who he was apart from that he was battle experienced, worked like a trained assassin. They weren't even sure whether he was a fanatic or a mercenary.

He was almost sure, though, that he had been affected by Asha. His gut instinct told him this but it left him with a churning in his stomach. He wasn't certain. Asha, this quiet peaceful family man, somehow.....he didn't fit into this, or did he. When he thought about the big picture, if it hadn't been for Asha (he could even turn it to say without Ikram's own intervention) they would have no idea that there was something going on. At least they knew that, and how this had come about: a letter that by chance came across Asha's desk. He started wondering about this chance.....this damning letter that had almost certainly now sent a high-ranking politician to prison and, and ...could it be possible... was making a committed terrorist sway.

His thoughts drifted even further. Was it possible that ISIS were now so desperate to cause havoc that they were prepared to conspire with the enemy? The more he thought about it, he realized that to conspire with the enemy hidden within the enemy was quite logical for them. He saw what they had to gain. Perhaps even, he could see now, how the desperate edge of the political scale could see a gain from colluding: now was their opportunity. The difference was that ISIS saw it as the opening of Pandora's box, but somehow, the politicians here thought that they could control it, find a solution, closing the borders. Curfews all would turn out well. Monsters never saw themselves as monsters, only as saviours he thought to himself.

The door behind him slid open. He turned from the view of Berlin laid out in front of him to see Caroline coming out onto the balcony. She too had a glass in her hand. "A penny for them!". He smiled, "Asha?"

"He is sleeping. I think it's hard for him, being away from his family. He has started asking where I think they might be. It's hard". Harrald nodded. He was still deep in his thoughts.

"Do you want me to leave?"

"Eehhrrr, no, no" pulling himself away, he looked at her. Distracted, he said the first thing that came to mind "You're looking beautiful" he felt himself go red. (This never happened in James Bond he thought embarrassed). She too felt herself flush. "I mean it," he said as he looked into her eyes. He realised this was the first time they had really been alone together since she'd come to Berlin. She dropped her gaze, then immediately lifted it back into his eyes. She didn't want to look like just another flirt. She wasn't, she didn't want to play that game, she knew she wasn't any good at it, she just wanted to be herself, she wanted to stay real to herself (whoever that was). She was serious, good at her job and.....she felt his eyes boring into her. Confused she looked into her glass and took a

sip. She decided to hit it straight on, "You have seen my file I guess", he nodded. "So what did you find?"

It was now his turn to feel uncertain. "I had to read it twice. I found what I was looking for",

She surprised herself with her tone. It became hard, "What was that?"

He didn't flinch from her gaze, "That must have been quite a confusing situation".

"What?" she realized she was attacking and physically stepped back.

"I am sorry, I realized in the car something in you is still quite raw, I am reading between the lines but, it would affect anyone having to kill someone you are...." he searched for the tactful phrase, "connected with personally". He felt bad, that sounded completely wrong he thought.

She defended "It was a long time ago.....".

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really.....it won't affect me.....you know.....out there". She stepped forwards again and waved her hand at the city laid out before them. She felt herself shaking inside. She smiled. "I...I" he butted in "Let's drop it. I have complete confidence in you,...you know, out there. Whenever you do feel ready....to talk, I know something about it, saw a lot of things in the Gulf, friends. It can affect people in many ways. From what I see you have got on with your job, with flying colours" he smiled. "Your report was very praising of you". Inside he felt a bit of doubt in what he'd said, he realised. How WOULD she react? He truly believed that like with what he'd seen with other soldiers, her training would kick in. He decided though to try and keep her away as much as possible from armed contact.

"Do you know Berlin at all?" he changed the subject.

"Been with my family as a child, seen the sights, Brandenburg gate, Alexanderplatz, The Wall, Checkpoint Charlie obviously" she had moved to the balcony and started scanning the city for any landmarks she knew. He could feel the warmth emanating from standing next to her. They stood in silence for a few seconds,

"Any idea what sort of target he would choose?" she broke in.

"Something big we can be certain. He wouldn't waste himself on something small". "Do you think he would sacrifice himself? You mentioned he was here to recruit". She hesitated as something came to her, "Perhaps he's not recruiting Muslims!"

Harrald turned to her, he looked at her. He felt as if he'd been knocked in the head. It rebounded in his head. A smile came to his face. Something lit up she thought. He surprised her then by leaning forwards and kissing her gently on the cheek, "You are a genius", she was smiling, a bit taken aback. She looked at him. She could almost hear the cogs clicking in his head,

"What if it makes sense, imagine the coup, everyone would be a suspect. It would make our job impossible....., complete havoc, fear of everyone".

Caroline added in, "A homeless person, off the grid, a prostitute, drug addict, impossible to find, lost, easy to convert". She too was starting to see the alarming conclusion they were coming to. Harrald grabbed his phone from his pocket.

"Hello, Nadia, I need you to follow sightings of the girl that was kidnapped, where she came from, where she slept the night before. Anything as far back as you can. Follow CCTV Footage backward. It's urgent we know who she is. Get any still where we can see

her face clearly. She won't be hiding her face I guess. We might have to ask for the public's help. It is a top priority. Call me back when you have anything". He hung up. "Another drink" he turned excited to Caroline, "I'm going to have one. It will take a few hours before Nadia can do that" and he turned and went back inside. Caroline felt left out again, she stayed on the balcony. Harrald came back out, "I'm ravenous, have you eaten? We can get room service", she turned back to him, "No, I'm ok" and returned to the city spanned out in front of her. She didn't hear him coming up behind her. She almost jumped when she felt his hand on her waist. He felt the twitch and almost took back his hand. She turned. He looked at her. His face was soft, close to hers, she felt herself stiffen. "You are wonderful," he said falling into her eyes. He took her face in his hands and started leaning forwards. "Anyone there?" came from inside. It was Asha. Frozen, Harrald stayed looking into her eyes, frozen. Caroline leaned forwards, she put her hands on his waist, she pecked him on the lips and smiled softly. She didn't know why but she almost felt relieved, "Out here" she shouted back and went in through the doors. Asha had a smile on his face, "I think they are in Canada", Harrald came in "What makes you think that?"

"I don't know", he bowed his head, Caroline would almost have said he was blushing "I have no idea, I just.....i guess that is what I hope" he raised his head and smiled. "I was wondering, how do we go about getting something to eat, my stomach is rumbling". Harrald almost laughed and with a big smile on his face, "I was thinking the same thing. What would you like?"

"What do you mean? Shouldn't we go shopping?, I didn't notice a kitchen" he said turning round the apartment, motioning with his hands.

Caroline laughed "Room service, we are in a top hotel and everything will be paid for, here let me show you how it works". There was a phone sitting on the lounge table in the middle of the room.

She picked up the handset, "OK, normally in a high-class hotel like this, you dial 0 for reception, someone will answer and you can ask what you want. What would you like to eat, chicken, beef, lamb, a soup or even if you want you can just have a dessert", she smiled, "You should take advantage. I have never been in a place like this on expenses. That means the bill is taken care of" she looked up at Harrald and he nodded. "For example, let me show you". She smiled up at Harrald "I am feeling hungry now". She dialled 0 and waited, the phone was answered, "Hello, this is room 812, I would like to order room service", she waited, looking at Asha, "They are putting me through to the kitchen now. Hello, yes, room 812, I would like to order a prawn cocktail for starter, followed by a goats cheese salad, and a carafe of wine for.." she looked at Harrald who nodded and she turned to Asha, with a childish smile; he nodded too. "for 3, thank you, 20 minutes, Ok". She hung up. Looking at Asha she now smiled, "Now your turn".

"What do you mean, my turn?"

"Yes, your turn, do the same as me, when they put you through to the kitchen, ask to add to the order of room 812 and tell them what you want".

"No, no, I can't", he looked embarrassed now.

Harrald stepped in "What would you like? I will show you, next time if you want anything, you can do it yourself. I am going to start with scampi and follow it up with a steak. What about you,"

Asha nodded, almost dancing on the spot, "the same please."

When Harrald was talking on the phone, adding the order Asha turned to Caroline and whispered: "What is scampi?"

She laughed aloud, "Scampi is....well...it a bit like, imagine prawns or shrimps, out of its shell".

Asha turned again to Caroline, "I hope I didn't disturb anything, you know, when you were on the balcony". She shook her head, "Nothing, just looking at the view". She glanced at Harrald who was still on the phone. "Can I see?" and he went out through the doors straight to the barriers and looked out. He quickly came back from the edge. "Oh my, we are quite high up" then he slowly took one step at a time and went back to the edge. He looked out. Harrald and Caroline had joined him, "Quite a sight" Harrald pointed out, "Do you want me to show you?" he approached Asha and started pointing out the sights visible.

They sat around the knee-high table, laying back now on the comfy chairs, empty plates and cutlery now littering the table, the carafe was empty and their stomachs had that pleasantly full feeling.

"So how did it go, did the artist managed to get a good likeness?"

"Well it looks like him but it isn't exactly a photo, I sort of recognise him from it, it was a long time ago. Would you like to see it, I have a copy. There is also one with Nadia". He jumped up and went to his room. He returned seconds later and placed it on the table in front of Harrald who studied it for a few seconds. Not taking his eyes off it, "not easy really, though....I....don't know. Sort of looks familiar, though how.....no, " he continued looking though sat back now. Cradling the large wine glass in his hand he swirled what was left in it around. "Not bad", he felt quite relaxed now. A couple of hours had now passed and night had come in.

He knew there was nothing he could do. Everyone and every computer at the office was working at full power to processing the photos of the girl, Ikram and the artists drawing through face-recognition software. They were checking through every database they had and as many as they could from the MI6, FBI and the CIA. He was trying to think of something he could do but also knew the best thing he could do was not think about it and something might come to him.

Caroline turned to Asha "Would you like to see Berlin at night? I have always found cities at night take on a different air". She got up and went to the door. She noticed Harrald didn't move. She had got to know when he was thinking, knew he probably had a lot to think about. She offered Asha her hand. He stood up and took it. Together they went out onto the balcony. While pointing out certain areas of Berlin, she heard the high trill of Harrald's mobile from the balcony and then voices. She leaned on the barriers outside on the balcony. Asha did the same, "I wish my wife was here to see this, she would love it, very romantic. They stood in silence for a while longer before Caroline noticed Asha shiver. "Should we go in?". He nodded.

She looked at Harrald, he hadn't moved and was still gazing at the drawing, she thought he had a puzzled look on his face. "Anything important?"

"Err..hmm", he looked up. "You won't believe it. Mr Holtzer has asked to see me. There is something he wants to tell me. He insists on me, it seem's".

“What, now?”

“Well, he is being held here in Berlin. Now is as good a time as any. Don't worry, you two get some sleep. I have a feeling tomorrow is going to be a busy day”. He smiled at them both. Standing he took his jacket off the back of a bar stool, “Don't wait up”, he joked and was off.

It only took 10 minutes in the car sent for him to get there. He stood looking through the big window looking into the well lit room. There sat Mr. Holtzer, looking all the worse for a few days of interrogation. He was now dressed in a blue convict uniform, a badge with his prisoner number pinned to his right breast pocket. He was alone and looking quite dejected.

Harrald turned to the interrogator he'd met the last time he'd seen Mr Holtzer. “Any idea why he asked for me?”

“He hasn't said much since I took over, nothing that I can see of importance. He confirmed he was in Madrid for his party conference and the other information we already knew but he's been quite morose. I understand why. Earlier this afternoon he said he would talk, but he would only talk to you. I pushed him further but he insisted. I think.....I think he sees you as someone he can do a deal with,” the interrogator replied. “Me! You have the authority, the same as me don't you, I can make no deals except through Robert Schneider”.

“I do, that is correct, but he insists on you”.

Harrald stood a short while, looking. Finally: “OK let's go”.

He entered the room and noticed just how haggard he was, the stubble from not shaving and red eyes from not sleeping. “Hello Mr. Holtzer, it looks like your situation, has finally sunk in. How can I help you?” He sat down.

“Please, enough of the sarcasm”. He looked at Harrald. “I asked for you because I thought perhaps you could put in a word for me. I know I've been stupid” “You are confessing, you don't need me for that”.

His face took on a white glaze and Harrald almost felt sorry for him, “Ok, what do you want to tell me?”

“Look, if I explain to you, you will see it's not me....not exactly my fault. In a way.....I've been set up. Look I can help you. I regret what I've done. I realize now, I got a bit carried away but, but, but, my fucking family! You got a family.....?”

Harrald just stared at him, “OK, I guess you won't tell me anyway. Look, I come from a housing estate, you know the same background as Alan: you know Alan, the guy you arrested?” He looked up at Harrald for confirmation and got none, but he continued.

“You know the story, nothing special about it, poor family, on a housing estate, rough. One of those places where if you come from it, you know your life is set up before you've even started. Graffiti everywhere, the flats where there are lifts always smell of piss, dog crap everywhere, children's playgrounds used by pushers, drunken brawls every weekend.....Well you know, as you grow up, you end up in a gang, we were called the Bautzen Brawlers, corny I know. Alan was there. He always had my back and I always had his. Anyway, we started getting into football and fights. That was the way of life. You always had your mates back and they yours.....” he paused, waiting for

sympathy, Harrald guessed. He had none. He knew the backgrounds and also knew many that worked their way out, he'd met many in the army.

Good guys, he knew the army had straightened some of them out, fucked others up even further, he had to admit, but, this guy in front of him, he couldn't see him as the hard nut. He'd hidden behind his mates, used his mates, climbed on their backs to get higher. He knew the type of person. He was surprised, though, how had someone like him got to his position. That he thought he'd never know. Alan he'd been surprised about, the same sort of background but...something different. He'd seen the photo's when he'd visited, family, kids, a wife, he wondered, perhaps that was what had made him different, caring about someone else. This man sitting in front of him didn't care for anyone except himself. Here he was, about to rat on someone, all to save his own skin. At least Alan had had the courage to protect his mates as much as he could. Perhaps that was what had made him see things differently from this man here. Alan seemed the sort of man that cared for others. This man here though, sitting in front of him, he had to use all his inner control not to let the man see his disdain. Perhaps he did have something that might help him, perhaps not. He was just here to listen.

"Well, I got into politics. After the football...people started turning to me for help, jobs were scarce and I knew a few people and, well, I liked to help out. People started coming to me with problems they had, violence on the estates. I was able to calm things down, you know, take control of the situation and, well, the crime rates went down". Harrald felt his stomach turning. He knew the method: violence stopped by the threat of more violence; crime dropped because it all came under one roof, his; he controlled the petty crimes. He had probably also taken hold of the drug crimes as well. Somehow he'd been able to keep his face clean.

"I don't know why, but somehow we had a following. We all had the same opinions.....and well, one thing led to another. Eventually, we all saw the errors of our ways and I.....well, that's what I want to talk to you about.....You see, family, you can never get away from them however hard you try". Harrald couldn't see where this was going. He just sat.

"I was a leader of our area, right wing politics rang something for me and, when I was starting to get popular, I got this phone call one day. An uncle, my dad's brother, he'd been kicked out of the army and left Germany. No-one knew where to or really cared. I'd heard a few stories about him, but, as I said, one day out of the blue, I got this phone call. He was in Tripoli, he had landed on his feet, met a few people and he said, as he'd always promised my Dad, his brother, he'd look after me".

Harrald almost fell out of his chair.

"We chatted for a while. He eventually told me to go to this right wing meeting in Berlin. I was to look up a particular guy, I can't remember his name now, but I was to introduce myself".

"What was his name?"

"What, my uncle?"

"No, yes, the man you were to meet".

A small smile crept onto Mr. Holtzer's face, "I thought you'd be interested"

Harrald cursed himself. He'd shown one of his cards. He vowed he wouldn't again.

"First the man you were to meet!"

“I told you, I can't remember”.

“Your uncle then, don't tell me you can't remember that”.

“Look, I know I've been stupid. I let it all go to my head. I'm not that clever. How I got to where I am.....I was, just following orders, and paths were laid out for me. I got cocky, I know, that pen thing, that was so stupid of me, I knew it at the time. I... I just wanted to show off. It all went to my head, parties, presents, women, you know, gold, jewels, power. I really had power for a while. People jumped when I told them to! If only you knew how that felt, not just druggies, skinheads and the like, real people, famous people, actors, singers, stars, you'd be surprised at how many of them follow my party, fall over backwards to make me happy. I was Jack the Lad, from the gutter making it big. I was really big, and getting bigger. It was down to him, my uncle, somehow he was pulling strings. I didn't know how, I didn't care, I even really started to think it WAS me”. He drifted off for a split second “it was in Italy”.

“What?”

“Where I got that pen, it was an ambassador from somewhere, I can't remember. Me, little old me from a housing estate in Bautzen, meeting a real life foreign ambassador, and him giving me a gold pen. He told me about it, how it was unique, pure gold, it would never let me down, what a fucking joke that is: fucking put me in here didn't it. I carried it everywhere, I showed it off, I always used it to sign stuff, you know, it would never let me down. I was going to check that out. He was right, it always worked perfectly, on a plane, in cold weather, stinking hot weather, even upside down, I tested it, fucking thing. I even tested it in the bath, underwater, it still wrote”.

Harrald was getting impatient, but suddenly something hit him. The drawing, it had been nagging him since he'd seen it. He'd felt like he'd seen the face before. Now he realized, he was looking at a version of it here, right in front of him. He felt himself getting excited. His mind was racing. It was all he could do not to jump up and shake the guy in front of him by the neck. “What was his name?” kept racing through his brain. He'd already shown his eagerness in error once, he wasn't going to do it again. He kept quiet, “Let him rant,” he thought, mentally gritting his teeth.

“What did you ask again?” Harrald was watching him closely now. Was he winding him up? He had enough to go on anyway. He could look up family records, that would be easy enough. He wanted to get out, start checking facts. He just sat. Was this guy really that stupid? He was starting to think so. He couldn't be though, to be able to manipulate, as he had evidently done back on the estates.

“His name.....Hans Gunther Holtzer; that was it. Anyway” He leaned forwards now,

“That was what you wanted, wasn't it? It was him that got me to write the letter, he set me up”, he sat back,

Harrald watched him. He looked puzzled now, “I can't work out why!! That is why I wanted to talk to you. You can see I was pushed into that letter, I was sure I could trust him. I just can't work out why!!....”

His face got serious now, and angry. Gritting his teeth he now leaned forwards, “You can do what you want. I know I'm fucked, I fucked it up....but”, his face changed as he sat back, he genuinely looked puzzled again, “How? Why?. It doesn't make sense. I had nothing to do with the murder of that terrorist guy you asked about, what was his

name?.....you never said. Believe me, I had nothing to do with that!!”. “Explain, how did that come about?” “Well, it was through Saide”.

“Saide!” exclaimed Harrald.

“Yes, you know, my chauffeur. I never chose him. I suppose you could say he came with the car. I wouldn't have chosen a wog. What do you take me for? It was the party that chose him. I complained, believe me I did, but my uncle explained it was for higher purposes. I talked to him regularly, every few months, you know. He wanted to know how things were going. He gave me information about things I could use, you know, inside information about people once they had killed themselves in some stupid bombing, nothing that would hurt them, racist rhetoric, where they'd come from, things I could use in meeting with my party, heat them up and stuff, *not for media consumption*, stuff that helped me rise.....I just don't get it. To lift me up like he did, use me like a puppet, then just to drop me in it like that.....” “Saide” Harrald prompted him.

“Well, my uncle said I would get a letter, it would be sensitive and delivered by hand. Imagine my shock when Saide gave it to me. I read it. It gave me a date, where, and told me to create problems using my people”.

“How did he talk to you?”

“Phone, Saide had the phone, a mobile, you know one you can just chuck away after. I was to return an official letter addressed to the writer of that one confirming I'd got the message and that I'd do as asked. I burned it, well Saide burned it in front of me. Saide had the letter all typed up. All I had to do was sign it, the letter to be sent back. My uncle had told me before that nowadays every thing sensitive was to be delivered by hand, he told me he could work it through diplomatic channels. No-one would be able to touch it, trust him. I fucking did.....why? I don't get it. Just get me that answer. Even if they do me in for treason, I get that, I guess I deserve it. I just don't get why! It's fucking me up. All I do all day is sit and try and work out why and how. I did as they asked”

He was running his hands through his hair at this point, almost tugging it out. Harrald felt he might as well not be there. He sensed the madness. Days on his own, no-one but the interrogator to talk to and this incessant question going through his head. He didn't feel sorry for him, he deserved worse.

Leaning forward, Harrald whispered now, “You remember the name of who you contacted that first time and I promise, if I find out why, I'll come here and I'll tell you why”.

“Thank you, thank you. Mr Holtzer offered his hand. Harrald with uncertainty shook it and left.

“He's really losing it isn't he?” he asked the interrogator. A solemn nod was his reply. Harrald turned and left. In the car on the way back to the hotel, he was kicking himself. He'd made a big fuck-up. He'd had him in his hands, the go-between, Saide. He must have been laughing at him all that time. He'd already got Nadia on the phone and asked her to follow up the business card contact details. He reminded her jokingly not to say who she was and to see if she could get hold of him. He knew it was a hopeless waste of time, he'd be long gone by now. He also asked for an immediate meeting with Robert. He was on his way. Other things were now clicking into place. He thought he knew the answer to Mr. Holtzer's ”why” but he'd be damned if he'd give it up that easily.

Chapter 10 - Wilderness

The rest of the journey had passed without incident or words. In silence, like a wake, they travelled. They had gone through patches of forest like the one they had stopped in. These always came out into rolling hills, but now, they'd been travelling for over 20 minutes through nothing but these tall pines on either side. The road had been cut into the hills and most of the time was reasonably flat with the odd tunnel, not long. Signs constantly appeared showing pictures of deer in red triangles. The sun was not far off setting when they turned off the main road and disappeared down a track. They had to get out just after turning off, to open a gate to let them through. Souma got out of the car here. Ikram got out with him. He thanked him and asked that he stay not far from here. That way he could stop anything coming in or out. He also asked how they had found this place. Souma explained it was donated by a wealthy Arab, sympathetic to the cause. It had been his private hideaway for whenever he wanted to disappear with one of his mistresses. He promised it was a well kept secret, officially even. It didn't exist on any map.

A 5 minute drive followed along a bumpy, dirt track that would eventually lead to a cabin. Ikram was quite amazed that they had found somewhere like this. It had been perfectly chosen, a perfect to hide away. It was now dark and they couldn't see outside except for the headlights showing small plants in the middle that indicating it was rarely used. On the either side of the track as they went round bends the lights showed what Ikram knew, it was nothing but deep forest all around.

When they arrived at the cabin Liz was luckily still asleep. Ikram carried her on his shoulders into the cabin lit up by the headlights.

Desert star went in and started preparing something to eat straight away. Having laid Liz down on the bed Ikram went back to the car and unloaded all the shopping they had done, enough for a long time, enabling them not to have to leave the forest. Having dumped the bags of shopping on the main table he went back outside. He talked politely to the driver who was a young Iraqi about 20 and thanked him. He knew it was unnecessary but asked what he would be doing after.

"I have been told I must cross into Italy where I must disappear. Ikram knew he would have no idea who they were or anything about his mission. The driver turned the car around and headed off. Ikram watched the headlights disappear through the trees until there was nothing but pitch black again.

He turned and went back into the cabin. The smell coming from the Kitchen made his stomach growl. He decided to go and watch Liz. She couldn't sleep much longer. It had been a good five hours since they had injected her and he had been worried over the past half hour that she would wake up. He didn't want her to wake up alone and start panicking. He knew no-one would hear but for his plan to work, *whatever it was going to be*, she had to trust him. The bed sat against the wall, just under a big bay window. The curtains, a deep orange colour, were closed. There was a wardrobe against the far wall and what looked like an old oak table and chair against the wall where the door was. The cabin was built in the traditional style of an old Canadian log cabin. The two outside walls of the room were just big tree trunks up to the ceiling, filled in with a chalk plaster to seal any gaps. There was a fireplace and chimney rising to the triangle in the roof.

Ikram occupied himself while waiting for Liz to wake up, by lighting the fire. He had the first few flames creeping through the dry logs, when he heard the first movements from the bed. He turned, to see a head lift off the cushion. Standing up, he went and got the chair from the table and moved it next to the bed. She was now sitting up. She looked dazed,

“Is this part of the treatment?” she asked as she looked around the room.

He nodded, “You must be hungry. Desertstar is just preparing some soup. There is a working toilet through there” and he pointed to the door, “Just across the corridor. You can move as you wish now. How are you feeling?”

“Like shit” she nervously grinned at him. Then suddenly her face changed, “Are you going to inject me again? I don't like it!”.

He smiled gently, “No more. We can stay here for a while now. Tomorrow we can go outside. I haven't been out myself yet. There is a forest and I think there is a lake. We can walk around it if you like”.

She looked at him uncertainly now. She shrank back against the wall. “Why are you doing this?” Still smiling he replied, “Don't you want to get better?”

She nodded “Do you want me? Is that why you are doing this? Please don't hurt me. I don't want to hurt anymore.” Tears started flowing down her cheeks. She looked scared again and she pulled her legs up underneath her. She became a ball again.

“You remind me of my daughter, I only want to help you”.

“Why me, why are you treating me alone? Was it Frederick, did he ask you to do this? He was nice, he always gave me stuff before he fucked me? Was it Frederick?”.

Ikram couldn't help getting angry when he thought of what people must have done to this child. The door opened behind them and Desertstar came in with a tray. The smell wafted over. Liz opened her eyes a little to try and see. There was a can of Orangina next to a white bowl. A whisp of vapour came from the tomato soup. There were a few slices of bread next to it. Ikram got up and gave the seat to Desertstar. She had her usual straight face on. She didn't look at him, just sat down and put the tray on the ground next to the bed. She opened the can and gave it to Liz who reached out and took it before retreating to her corner on the bed. Taking a spoon from the tray and the bowl, Desertstar spooned out some soup. She blew on it and the smell wafted over to Liz. Liz leaned forwards to smell and look into the bowl. Desertstar offered it like to a baby across at Liz. Tentatively Liz looked at her and then the spoon, at her again and not taking her gaze off, leaned forwards. She opened her mouth and put the spoon into her mouth. With a slurping sound she sucked it in. “Ohhhmm” as she made a hole with her mouth and started waving air in while breathing out. “Hot”. Desertstar tried again. This time Liz blew on the spoon first before the slurp and before long the bowl was empty. Desertstar offered her the bowl with a hand motion of eating. Ikram guessed “Do you want some more?”, Liz nodded retreating again remembering he was still in the room. She took a drink of her Orangina. Desertstar turned and with a stern face passed the bowl to Ikram. He wasn't sure at first. He saw the serious look on her face and defeatedly, took the bowl, he went to the kitchen to refill it.

When he came back Liz was looking more relaxed and between mouthfuls of bread, sipped at the can. Ikram made to pass the bowl to Desertstar who shrank back and motioned him to give the bowl directly to Liz. He offered the bowl and Liz dropped the

last bit of bread into the bowl, took the bowl in one hand. She placed the can between her knees and using her other hand started scooping the soup into her mouth with the spoon. Ikram stayed where he was, he felt uncomfortable. He hadn't thought she would be scared of him because he was a man. He was prepared that she might be scared because she didn't know him or because he was Muslim with all the connotations that brought, but that he might rape her!! He left the room.

Desertstar stayed most of the night in the room. He took a chair into the living/kitchen area. He'd lit a fire and sat alone watching the flames. That had always calmed him in the desert. Somehow it wasn't working so well now.

He started thinking about the mission he had. He knew what he had to do and why. Somehow Asha's arguments kept turning in his head. It seemed like an endless circle. He knew what he was going to do was part of Allah's plan. Why else would his life have led him down the path it did lead him? His father taking him to meet the German, him learning German, him being such a good shot had to be a gift from Allah and why else but to revenge his people.

His wife had been a gift after his first job, Hhe'd been 18 then.

The family he'd been given to after his training had been Bedouin. He still saw them as his family. They had travelled as a caravan in the desert for weeks. He had lived with them, played with the little brother. They had fed him and continued to train him. One day in a town, they had discussed with Herr Schmidt and himself the behaviour of a merchant that had been discourteous to Allah. He had shown them no respect either. He had used Allah's name in vain as was pointed out at the meeting.

Herr Schmidt had taken a standard fee for Ikram's services, what he'd been trained for. He'd been free to plan himself how to issue justice. He'd consulted with Herr Schmidt how he planned to climb the wall in the night and wait in the garden till he saw the target go to the outhouse. It was a little hut detached from the house in the garden, the man was a wealthy merchant from the town and lived just outside, so there would be no disturbances. Herr Schmidt had approved the plan and it had all gone well. As planned the man had finished his business in the outhouse, he had exited and Ikram had come up behind him and cut his throat. He had let the body drop and then silently crossed back across the wall. He had crossed the two to three miles of desert to the oasis that had been agreed as the meeting place. They had met up and the caravan had disappeared into the desert night.

A few days later, in the middle of the desert where they set up camp again, the Bedouin family had given him a wife. He had shown her respect and they had stayed together for several weeks. He had left when Herr Schmidt had had need of his services again, for a sheik this time. Life had gone on like this for several years, him doing jobs for Herr Schmidt's clients and then returning to the caravan. Sometimes the jobs were for his nomad family. Years passed happily and eventually Ashiya had been born. He had loved her from the first moment he saw her little baby head on the cushions in his tent. He had loved his wife for what she had given him.

He still thought of her sometimes although the memory of her had fade. She had not lived long after the birth. She had been weak straight after and had never really recovered. She had suffered an illness and not having regained the strength to fight it, she had died.

They had had a proper funeral for her in the desert. Life was harsh and he had made a decision then that he didn't want this to happen to his Ashiya.

He had discussed his worry with his family and Herr Schmidt, who together agreed to find a place for him. It had been there that he had passed the best years of his life.

There had been a woman that looked after the house. This had been arranged between Herr Schmidt and his Bedouin family. He had settled there, a quiet little town, in the desert. He'd done a few jobs for Herr Schmidt and the rest of the time he'd been able to spend with Ashiya. He'd become a respected member of the village, a village in the mountains. He'd helped them fight when called upon, gave them advice tactically about how to attack and defend. It had been a good life. All until that fateful day when at the market, he'd let her go and play with her friends. She'd been seven. He'd stopped and drunk tea with his neighbors when the laughing and chatting had been shattered, out of no-where by the big explosion. Many other children had been killed as well that day. He had mourned, as was tradition, but it was still all just a daze.

He looked back now and realized his life since had just been a nightmare of fury and silent mourning. He'd lost friends since but nothing hurt like the loss of Ashiya. He'd felt alone since. A loneliness he'd never felt before and that still clung to him. As he sat there and thought about it, the feeling of anger came back, the impossible pain. Turning of images in his head, it took all his strength even now not to start tearing his hair out, anything to try and turn off this madness that still gripped him. Then the memory of that evening with Asha in the mountains came back.

The letter, how had he got the letter? He knew it existed, it was supposed to be on its way to the Caliphate itself. It would go through diplomatic mail to a go-between at the embassy, who would then hand it on to someone to deliver it to the head of Planning who would consult with Herr Schmidt himself, BUT, somehow, it had made it's way to Asha. Asha had explained how during a raid he'd pocketed it the day he left with his family. He couldn't help feel that somehow the hand of Allah was involved. Allah was the guiding hand of all things. Allah could not make an error!! It must have been part of Allah's plan that Asha got the letter. Why? Asha had used the letter to point out the madness that was being proposed, working with the infidel to create chaos, which he knew as the opening of pandora's box.

This did feel like the opening of hell, he knew his mission. It had been partly the idea of Herr Schmidt and the leader of Daesh in the region. It had been OK'd by the caliphate itself. Somehow Allah had changed things. It was now unclear, what was he supposed to do.

He planned to carry out the mission and if Allah wanted it to fail it would. He had felt right saving Asha and his family. It had been like it was meant to be.

Seeing Liz under the bridge that night in hell. He'd been waiting for the lightning of Allah to fall on his head anytime since, to stop this madness, but no, nothing had changed. They had not got caught, Allah had been protecting them since, and here he was now, living with at a likeness of his daughter. He had to befriend her, show her love, give her back a normal happy life then, take it all away again, send her into a packed sports stadium with explosives. Whether she knew or not, that was up to Ikram himself. It sounded crazy.

He'd had the plan to lie to her once he had befriended her, tell her they were for him. He would explain he could not get through with them himself. He knew she would

understand the fear a Muslim man signified. They would check him. He planned to explain he wanted to die and take revenge for his daughter. She was weak-minded. She would do as he asked. He would press the buttons and take her and thousands of the infidels with her. The message would be strong, fear would take over and there would be so much chaos, the advantages Daesh could take would be enormous.

He stared at the flames. Allah had not stopped him. He sort of felt betrayed. Now he had to take the life of his daughter again. Had he been right, saving Asha? Perhaps that was what he had done wrong, he was now thinking. Was this Allah now punishing him for his weakness? He felt the craziness turning again in his head. His fingers were now running through his hair, he started pulling, a grimace took over his face, he pulled and he felt the pain, but this turning in his head was not going away. He saw Asha's face now, not the calm face in the mountains that night, but the face in the rain, when he'd taken aim at his head. He'd moved to his shoulder. That face had not been the gentle face, in the rain. He started to picture it there, now, splashed and blurred, it started grinning at him, it glowed. There in the flames, in front of him now he saw the face dancing, looking at him. It became that of a devil laughing at him. He lifted himself up, tore himself away from the dancing hypnotising flames, he ran out of the door, into the forest, any direction, it didn't matter. He ran, between the trees, off, into the darkness. He dodged the shadows of trees just as they appeared before his eyes, he felt the branches scratching his face. Still he ran, it was only when he cleared the forest, still running he fell. In the dark he'd run straight into the lake. The cold gripped him and the weight of water on his legs made him tumble headfirst into the lake. The shock brought him round. The madness disappeared with the onrushing shock of the freezing cold as his head went under the water. As he came up, on his knees in the water, a manic laugh came from his mouth.

He looked up at the sky, a smile was back on his face "Allah Akhbar", he prayed knee deep in the water. This was Allah at his best, he thought, his madness had gone and here he was forced to his knees under the starry sky, the eyes of Allah on him again. "I trust in you", he looked up and bowed again into the water.

He eventually pulled himself up and waded out of the water and found his way back to the cabin. He took his clothes off and hung them up around the fire, he lay down wrapped in a blanket facing the fire, a calm had come over him. He fell asleep.

It was in the early hours of the morning when he felt the warm naked body of Desertstar climbing in under the blanket next to him. He turned to her, kissed her on the mouth, kissed down her neck and around her shoulders. Eagerly he ran his hand over her left breast, feeling her now erect nipple between the groove of his fingers. He bowed his head and kissed the top of her breast, he followed the contour into the gully of her neck, he let his lips follow the valley between her breasts and felt their warm roundness on his cheeks. She laid a hand on the back of his head and slowly lying back pulled him with her. His lips found the perfect roundness under her breast and he heard a guttural sound emit from her mouth, the first sound he'd ever heard from her. It drove him on, he was erect he knew and felt the throbbing down below. Continuing down with his lips feeling the warmth becoming hot now under the blanket, his lips sucking on the bulbous roundness, he found her nipple. It shuddered as his dry lips rubbed past. His hand had now followed her body down and was encircling her belly. More sounds were now coming from her mouth outside the blanket. His hand took in the shape, feeling the

emptiness where her belly button was, lower it went, there was a scent now overpowering him under the covers coming from below, his hand felt the edge of the forest of hair. Sliding on, in between her legs, which parted effortlessly, invitingly, his hand drifted over the rough bush and found their target. As his finger slid between her lips, he felt the moistness and a groan now uttered from above vibrating down her. Moving up, he climbed between her legs with his and the throbbing that was rushing around his body was now needing release. Separating the warm lips between her thighs with his fingers he felt a rush of hot welcoming warmth and feeling the now throbbing brush his hand he slipped forwards and then inside, into the warm enclosing darkness around the throbbing coming from below his waist. He found her mouth outside in the cool air and pressed his lips to hers, her tongue came out to meet his and slowly his body started its rhythmic grinding. Her body beneath his joined his movements, sometimes moving against his rhythm, sometimes with him, all the while, he heard moans coming from her deep inside her. The rhythm got faster and faster and holding back the urge to just let go he held on, till finally, he heard a deep moan and a tensing of muscles, he felt he could hold on no more and the release reverberated around the muscles below his waist. He felt the ripple rise through his body as everything else disappeared and all he was, was an explosion in his groin and a wave went outwards, through his body. He heard her release air from her mouth and with a couple of tingles, her muscles tightened and released as her body twitched beneath his. Feeling drained, empty, without strength, he lowered his lips to hers and kissed her. Sliding off her, he let his hand delay and plucked at her erect nipples a couple more times, releasing two more muscle spasms that panged through her body. He lay, spent, next to her on his back. She rolled halfway to be side on to him, She kissed his shoulder and pulling the blanket tight around them she slid a leg over his and an arm over his chest. She tucked her head into the space between his heart and arm. He laid his hand on her head, staring at the ceiling and started stroking her head. He felt her pull in closer to him and he to held her that little bit tighter. The flickering light from the dancing flames bounced magically around the room, creating its own rhythmic story on the walls. He watched the life of the room till his eyes closed and he fell under its hypnotizing spell. He felt released of all human woes.

His brain tingled into light the next morning and quickly he felt instinctive pangs of precaution, he felt the presence of someone else in the room, Desertstar was still in his arms but there was someone else, his hand that was now moving underneath his body to where he always kept his knife. It wasn't there, the memory from the night before helped him reason why not and then he was working instinctively now what his next action would be. Years of sleeping with death just around the corner had taught him that. He hadn't opened his eyes yet or moved except for his hand. Desertstar had felt his body tense. She hadn't moved either, though she was awake and he felt it. Imagining someone just about to plant a knife into him or her he opening his eyes to adjust to the light, almost immediately he reacted fast, accurately, pulling on the arm of Desertstar, over his body, freeing the space where he expected the attack to come from and like a bolt of lightning he was half up and had his other hand ready to catch the hand approaching with the knife that he expected to be descending on them. He saw the shape in the light across the room

at a distance. It wasn't moving. He had to change his defense stance and was on one knee, hands either side ready for anything. No attack came. He heard the gasp from across the room and slowly his eyes focused. Liz stood there, frozen, fear spreading across her face. Desertstar was the next to react. Standing up, naked she raised her hands and smiled. Pulling the blanket up after, she covered herself up. Ikram sat alone now, on the floor, naked with his hands covering himself in his lap. He felt the cold immediately. A shiver shoot up his back. Liz just stood there. Desertstar now with the blanket wrapped around her approached Liz and slowly placed her arm around the shoulders of Liz, comforting her. Now she closed in on her face, she wrapped a corner of the blanket enclosing Liz in the warm comfortable safe space, hugging Liz she turned to Ikram, who, now crouching, was climbing into the fireplace to grab his shirt. It all felt very awkward till Liz moved, putting her arm round Desertstars waist, and let out a giggle. It was defensive but was enough to break the ice. Desertstar taking the lead, with Liz in her arms made their way back to Liz's room where she closed the door behind her. Ikram, feeling his clothes still damp from the night before started feeling embarrassed as the memory of madness went through him. Leaving his clothes where they were he found another blanket and wrapped himself up in it. He went outside to the woodpile. He stopped and took in the view. The light was slightly up and light was everywhere. There was a slight breeze ruffling the tops of the pine trees. Over to his right he saw that it wasn't a lake but a calm flowing river. He wasn't sure why he'd thought it was a lake, it was now audibly clear with the constant gurgling that it was moving water. He dropped the blanket and spread out his arm to let the sunlight bathe his body. He felt good now, nothing to hide from Allah. He saw all and had cleansed him the night before. It was all his will. He stood like this for a while, watching the flow. He spotted a fish jump and the ripples that flowed out from where it re-submerged. In the distance he heard the chattering of birds, he could see them flitting between the branches but couldn't make out what type they were. As he gazed, he thought back to standing on the balcony back in Berlin and thought, why do we do what we do when all we have to do is breath in this life of nature. It was so calming. He picked up his blanket and held it together with one hand, filling his spare arm with logs, and went back in and lit the fire. Crouched before the fire place he could see through the paradise he was creating to the inevitable truth of what he had to do. It was inescapable. He just thinking the nice thoughts of how to gain Liz's trust. The reason why was creating an irritating feeling. It seemed like a dream, the madness of what happened the night before and it came back in haunting excerpts.

It felt like a dream though he knew it had happened. His wet clothes confirmed it. He had a sudden attack of panic as he wondered if Souma had seen him. He had no way of knowing, he just hoped not.

He was feeling out of his depth, he was feeling unsure now. He'd never been in this situation, having to make up his own mind. He'd had targets, he'd planned, he'd even just jumped into battle, but this was the first time he had no-one to turn to, to ask what to do, only Allah but that was always a one sided conversation. He'd placed chance in Allah's hands and was now scared he would not somehow stop this from happening. He started realising he couldn't do this. He couldn't lie to this girl. She had brought back happy memories, happy feelings. There was also anguish. He realized there, then, in the cold light of day, he couldn't go through with this. He wanted to protect her. He now didn't

know what to do. What would Desertstar say? He remembered floating away with her in his arms the night before. What would....how would she react?

Could he talk to her? He remembered her reaction back in the flat in Berlin when she had seen his first cracks. What had she read into it? The image of her looking through the mirror at him in the car? He wondered if she would run to Souma. If she did, they would kill him and Liz. If he told her, would he have to kill her?

He felt the madness coming back. Having to choose. That was the moment Desertstar came back into the room, her smile calmed him instantly. She was still wrapped in the blanket and for the first time, he saw her face soft, not stone-like as he had until now. She looked sweet. He felt the pangs of affection for her. She couldn't turn on him. He knew.....He watched as she dropped the blanket, standing naked. She turned her head and was looking at him. She blushed and closing her arms around her nakedness she reached for her clothes. He smiled back with a gentleness he hadn't felt before. He wondered what was happening to him. He sat wrapped in his blanket watching her dressing. He knew she felt his gaze and perhaps she didn't want him to watch but he couldn't help it. In Arabic he said "you are beautiful". She smiled back, embarrassed, but her smile had grown. She went over to a bag with stuff she'd bought back at the shop. She fished out some clothes for him, holding them tentatively towards him. He got up and approached her. She bowed her head. Putting a hand under her chin he lifted her face, her eyes lifted slowly till they met his. He bowed and gently kissed her on the lips. Her eyes closed and she kissed him back. He felt the slight sucking of air on his lips. He felt relieved. He took the shirt that hung from her hand. Dropping the blanket that was wrapped around him he put the shirt on. Looking down into the bag he found some trouser and socks. He dressed. All the time he was aware that she was watching him. Having dressed he stood up straight and opened his arms, looking for her opinion. She nodded shyly. There was a sound behind that distracted them and there was Liz. She too was dressed now. All three stood for a few seconds still, looking at each other. It wasn't an uncomfortable moment, they were all smiling. Desertstar was the first to move, heading for the kitchen area. Lighting the gas, she started heating water for tea. The other two sat around the table and watched as she opened cupboards. She eventually found some mugs and a teapot. Placing three on the table, she then started sifting through another bag. She brought out some tea, sugar, and bread. Finally she brought out a pot of strawberry jam. Before long they were sitting, although without much being said, slurping hot tea and eating bread and jam.

Liz did the washing up. Ikram, having put a few more logs on the fire, went outside. After several days of grey weather, the sun was now shining through. He felt the warmth on his face as he stood on the porch looking out. He saw the river meandering off into the distance by the side of the cabin. The forest on either side green and shining in the sunshine on both sides. He saw the beauty of nature and although completely different from what he was used to, felt the same calm and peace wash over him as he had been used to when alone in the desert. He listened to the gurgling sound of the water and started picking out birds, chirping around again. He liked birds. He'd spent time in the desert studying them, finding out their names and where and how they nested. He sat on the edge of the porch. He took his place and watched the motions of wildlife all around.

So rich he felt it was. In the desert he would see the skitting of lizards darting between rocks and occasionally a bird high up in the sky, hovering, searching out prey. Here though it was bustling with life. The trees were alive with little birds, darting, and singing, flirting with each other and hunting for insects. He heard a splash and just caught the tail of another fish as it went under the water leaving momentary ripples that quickly disappeared in the flow of the river.

As he sat, taking it all in, he heard the footsteps behind as the other two joined him.

“Anyone fancy a walk, take in some nature?” He looked at Liz. She was pale but there was now a sparkle returning to her eyes. Desertstar just nodded. She seemed calm. He stood up and the three of them now headed off down the riverside. There was a cold breeze in the air, but the sun added a warmth that as long as they stayed out of the shade they kept warm and in good spirits. As they walked, Ikram pointed out movements in the trees. He didn't know the species of birds or fish as they jumped but the other two were attentive and started noticing things themselves and started pointing them out to each other as well. They followed the river past the point where they couldn't see the cabin anymore. In the back of Ikram's head, he kept an eye out for any sign that Souma was around, perhaps following. He knew that at his age he would play games, using his training trying to keep out of sight and keeping a distance but always within viewing distance of his pretend targets. He thought Souma must be pretty good or was following orders and staying away as he got no notion that there was anyone out there except them. They walked for an hour or so. It was only when Ikram noticed Liz start to shiver that he decided it was time to head back. He passed his jumper to her and took the lead at a brisk pace. He didn't want her to catch any illness. He knew her immune system would be weak and memories of his wife made him aware of the dangers.

When they got back, Desertstar prepared some sandwiches and they sat around the fire.

There was a moment when Liz, wrapped up and hugging her mug of hot chocolate, turned to Ikram and asked: “You said you had a daughter, what happened to her?”. Ikram was taken aback by the sudden intrusion into his thoughts. He hesitated. With a sadness to his voice he replied simply, “She died”.

There was silence, Ikram, feeling the opportunity slipping away, wanted to say more but found it stuck in his throat. “She was seven when she passed. I was very sad at the time”. He was trying to think of a way to talk about it without getting into the anger of how she had died. He knew he couldn't lie. That would lead him down a path of mistrust. He wanted her to trust him. He felt he had to start opening some doors but didn't know where. Desertstar came to his rescue. She found the notepad and pen. She started writing. “I have a daughter. She is with my parents”. She looked up at Ikram, then passed her gaze to Liz. She wrote again, “You lost your parents didn't you?”. Liz looked at her shocked, “How do you know?”. On the pad she wrote, “My neighbours died, their daughter was left alone, our family took her in but she couldn't settle. She left. I met her later. She had the same look as you, a lost look”. Liz read, she looked almost on the verge of crying. Desertstar reached over and put an arm round her shoulders. Liz sank in and did start crying. Ikram just sat there. He was taken aback by the revelation Desertstar had given. He first wondered if she had made it up to show empathy but quickly realized it was probably true. He wanted to ask her so many questions now, to both of them. He felt a bit lost but sat quietly. The two women continued to communicate in this fashion,

Desertstar writing and Liz talking. He learned about Liz and how she ended up where she had. Desertstar, how she had been given in marriage to a local man from the village when she was 13. Ikram gathered he had been quite violent towards her and made her pregnant at 14. It was then that he had left to fight for Al Quaeda. He had not come back. Unable to feed her daughter, she had been forced to join a Bedouin caravan. An agreement was arranged whereby a generous sum be given to her family to look after her daughter. She had then left with the caravan into the desert and had never seen her daughter again. There were moments of emotion between the two women. Tears and hugs were shared. Ikram just sat there, silently learning about women, their lives.

He had felt something similar when he had been little. He had been the third son. There were three older sisters as well and sometimes when he'd been growing up, his brothers and father had left for days on end, and he had been left with the women. There he had seen similar interactions. They had not meant much to him at the time. He had just wanted to be with the men and had been impatient, hassling the women to play with him he now remembered. As he sat there listening to the two recount their lives, he compared the times he had spent with men, drinking tea or after a battle. Those were the times of closeness between males.

As he watched the women he saw emotions flow freely between the two. His experiences had always been the opposite, men had to protect their feelings. It was seen as weakness and with the harshness of life, men couldn't be seen to be weak. It would only be taken advantage of and that could mean death for their families. That was the way of his world.

Chapter 11 – Herr Schmidt

Robert was sitting at his desk as Harrald walked in, head over an open folder as usual. Without looking up, he started: “I have been contacted by Gunther Weber, the interrogator and he told me what passed between you two. I have his file here. I am just going through it right now. Quite interesting,” he slid over the folder underneath, “A copy for you”. Harrald opened it up and started reading. It was headed:

“Hans Gunther Holtzer. Born - 6 April 1930”.

In 1947, his record started, 17 years old and he'd been arrested, involved with smuggling illegal contraband. No more details than that, Post-war Germany was rife with smuggling of American goods between the west and the east.

There were still hard-core right wing groups that since the war, having been driven underground, had taken to criminal activities, Hans had been involved, although lightly because of his age. The CIA had been heavily into recruiting at the time, wanting information on everything that was going on, wanting an informant in every conspiracy. It seemed they had got him released from his punishment and had taken him under their wing. They had trained him in basic counter-espionage. What they didn't realize was that he wasn't turned and still worked for the extreme right wing organisations. Worked as a double agent. Eventually, the German government found out, through the CIA, that he was working against them. He obviously was told and he then disappeared. No one knew where to....till now.

“So the protests were arranged to distract us. They knew Ikram was a ghost, nothing is known about him. It also gave Holtzer a platform to get more voice, bet he loved that”. Harrald asked “What about the media coverage, how did that get built up so quickly, and so internationally. There must be a way of tracking that lead down. How did the news agencies get the stories?”

“Already checked that one out. They seem to be ahead of us in many ways. The internet carried the story and anonymous tip-offs to all the major news channels where to find the stories. That was how the story got so big so quickly, they are clever”.

“Can we get the CIA records from the past?”

“Already onto that. I am waiting for them to come back to me. It has only been 20 minutes since I was in touch with a contact at Langley. So what do you make of it now?” Harrald still perused the folder for a while, “It makes sense: CIA trained, he knew how to stay under the radar, he set up a training camp for mercenaries, he recruited them himself using CIA techniques, young enough to mould them to his needs. Discreet, lucrative, and I'm now guessing, as things changed in the region, he took advantage of contacts he made at the club to stay in connection with Europe. In Tripoli he made local and regional contacts. I see how contact with ISIS could be mutually beneficial and ultimately inevitable, seeing his line of trade. There was the added bonus of someone on the inside politically here in Germany, a relative, extremely useful. Information passing through diplomatic post between Europe and ISIS, no way of tracing it. What a system, ingenious really”.

Robert asked: “Hhmmm, so where is he now? Tripoli would have been getting hot for him recently or for a while possibly.....so a hideaway, in the desert, would make sense. But how does any of this help us?”.

Harald replied: “Well, breaking the connection here will be a dent. I have wondered if we could perhaps turn the situation to our needs, but how, seeing as Saide has got away? All connections down that line will now be cut”.

Robert went on: “OK, Ikram, what about him? He won't have any way of direct contact either I presume”.

“I wonder about that: with whom was he connected? If suicide bombers and recruiting were his tasks, I would guess that he may have been trained by Hans but control was handed over to ISIS. I am of the impression he is Muslim first, mercenary after” mused Harald

“What make you think that?” asked Robert.

“Just his movements since he has been on our screens. He is moving under his own steam, helped by others here and I would guess that is the jihadist networks, not a right wing organisation, too much suspicion for him. He would need to be able to trust implicitly. It would be useful to know the contact Mr. Holtzer was given. That way we would have something to go on there but no luck, I presume. That would be one way of reaching him, IF that were the case, which I doubt. No, I think the Jihadist connections would be our best bet there. I don't suppose we have had any hints to jihadist plots that might be related?” went on Harald.

“Nothing on email, mobile or any other electronic communications. That area does seem to have gone a bit quiet lately. We could pull in a few of those suspected of connections and lean heavily on them. Rattle their cages, see what drops out” said Robert.

“That would be a good idea. Stick to the Berlin area, though. On the ground, it looks like he has been getting help and I suspect it has been local, especially with the kidnapping of the girl” replied Harald

Robert said: “Ok I'll get onto that. What about you?”.

Harald sat back and looked at the ceiling, “The girl who has been kidnapped. I am wondering how much it will help us knowing who she is. I want to know but in catching him I see no way she would have any say in the matter. She is a junkie, or ex-junkie so either we follow that addiction but I am suspecting something else”.

“What are you onto?” asked Robert.

“Well Caroline said it last night. What if instead of recruiting Muslims, he was recruiting Germans, people who could move around freely, not suspicious, get anywhere? Imagine the media coup that even enemies were seeing the light and destroying their own countries. That would be the ideal candidate, ex-addict: she is young, has seen the worst part of our society, the first part is to clean her up. A Westerner being converted to the cause for a fix would be seen as not too much of a task, but imagine, they clean up a junkie, show her the light. She is, in other words a model citizen, then she kills hundreds or even thousands of people. I hate to point it out but that is the sort of picture that would drive panic into our society. Who could you trust then? It would be like opening the doors of hell to a jihadist, the ultimate weapon!!!”

“Jeeesus, that is a scary thought, and you think that is what is happening now?” asked Robert

Harrald said "It is all just an idea but....I can't think of any other reason why kidnapping a homeless, prostitute, junkie that no-one cares about, no one seems to know who she is. No-one would miss her, anonymous and impossible to trace: perfect from their point of view. I have thought about putting out her photo to the general public and see if we can identify her".

Robert thought about it, "Sounds good, can't see a problem, what can go wrong with that plan??"

"If they found out and they would, they could just kill her, dump her body and then start again. Then we'd have to start again as well. We could keep delaying the inevitable through this method.

"And if we don't ask for help??" asked Robert.

Harrald wondered aloud: "If we just set out with facial recognition, say nothing; well that would be risking lives but it would give us a chance to catch Ikram. If we stop it here, it might make them think again But the more I think about it, the more I am convinced it would be best if we could stop it first time. It would at least make them question the benefits and hopefully they wouldn't see how it could be our biggest nightmare scenario, I say might!!".

Robert broke in "For now let keep this amongst ourselves. Let's see what angle we can get through the CIA. See if that sheds any light!!".

"OK".

The phone rang, Robert picked up the phone. Harrald was standing up to leave but Robert waved him to stay. He pressed the loudspeaker button. "Hi, John, could you just repeat what you are saying? I have my agent here and I think he needs to hear it".

"Ok, well, we have been suspecting there was an organisation working in the Tripoli area. For years now there have been internal problems sorted out through assassinations, under the radar targets and we have suspected it to be quite organised. They have been working outside all normal channels, no electronic communications, we just find the bodies and when we look into it, we find out there was a problem for some-one. It get's sorted out but there is no way of tracking things. It seems it was internal strife or personal problems. First we thought they were connected with an Islamicist group but, we have now come to the conclusion, from the methodology, it is under the control of a European or American organisation or person. It had had bells ringing that echo, CIA training of sorts. Until now we have not been able to directly link it anywhere but perhaps, thanks to you, we might now be onto something. We are putting all our resources to try and find a way of targeting this Hans Gunther Hotlzer now".

Harrald stepped forward to the microphone, "We have the alias Herr Schmidt if that is of any help. Also there is some-one we believe to be connected closely with him, Saide Bensaid, a Moroccan we believe. We can send you a photo of him. An artists impression of Hans Gunther Holzter also. It is quite old and I guess he has changed quite a lot by now, he will be 86 by now".

"That would be very useful. We have photos of him at the age of 17/18" came back the CIA.

Harald went on "I do have to ask though, if you do get to find him, or have any more information: we have some important questions to ask him. We believe there is an

imminent attack here in Berlin and we believe the perpetrator is some-one closely connected to him. Any information is quite urgent as you can guess”.

The CIA officer replied “No problem. Any information we have, you have now and anything else we get we will be in contact immediately”.

“Thank you” said Haraqld.

“No problem; thank you, this could fill in a large hole in our intelligence from the region. Be in contact” and then the phone went dead.

Robert commented: “Well, you do seem to have pleased the CIA! Well done again. You are proving to be quite impressive, Mr Harrald”, Robert crossed his arms on his desk and looked up at Harrald.

Harrald nodded, “I’ll be getting on”. He turned and left the office. Walking back to the epicenter he frowned to himself. He was getting lots of kudos here but he actually felt it was just falling into his lap. Asha and the letter had just come to him. Mr Holtz too: somehow he didn't feel he merited all this. He knew they were having some big coups but the big problem was still out there, he hadn't actually solved that. He knew also he'd made quite a few mistakes as well. Saide was something he felt was still grinding in his stomach: he'd let him go. His judgement there had been so wrong and he was wondering if it could have some really serious consequences.

Harrald went back to the hotel after his meeting with Robert. He knocked lightly on the door to Caroline’s bedroom, “Come in” he heard the sleepy voice. He opened the door and saw her still under the covers, the top of her head was poking out, her hair wild. He thought she looked ravishing. He had a cup of coffee in his hands. She sat up wiping the sleep from her eyes, “What's up?”

“I have a lot to tell you” he approached the bed with the coffee. She tapped the bed next to her motioning him to sit down. He placed the coffee on the bedside table. She looked at him, her eyes wide awake, “What has happened?”

“When you get up, I will tell you both together”. She caught his hand as he got up to leave her, “I'm sorry about last night”, she blushed. He sat down. “I like you and.....but.....”

“No please, it was my fault”, he was blushing now. “I know what happened, I was insensitive. I shouldn't have pushed”.

She smiled at him “I am glad you did, I wanted to, I was relieved Asha turned up when he did...but.... I want to get over the past, I have been quite insensitive. You have helped me realise how cold I have been. It isn't easy, I can't just let go like that. I want to.....”

She reached forwards, she took the end of his tie in her hand and slowly pulled him forward. She placed her lips gently on his, her hand slipped up over his chest past his shoulders and around the back of his head. They held the kiss for a few seconds.

Sitting back after, he felt himself soften. They held each others gaze, not saying anything. It was a few seconds before, “Anyone about?”, came from outside the door. They both burst out laughing. When the sniggering had finished he smiled at her, “Take your time”. He got up and left her.

Asha was in the lounge pouring himself a coffee. "Should I ring for breakfast, room service?" Harrald looked. He was in good humour, "No, when Caroline is up I'll treat you both to breakfast downstairs. There is coffee ready if you want some, in the flask over there. I have a few things to tell you as well. I found out a lot last night and your Artist impression was excellent, its done its job and is now with the CIA would you believe. Did you sleep well?"

Asha's look was that of someone stunned. "The CIA" was all he could say for a moment. He recovered and shook his head to wake it up. "Eehhhrrrr, like a log I think is the expression. The wine helped a lot. I didn't disturb anything did I? The CIA!" he repeated with a concerned look on his face.

Harrald shook his head, "No", his face showed no malice, "Get dressed in warm clothes today. I think it's going to be cold". He poured himself a coffee and together they sat waiting for Caroline. He asked if Asha wanted to talk to his family. Asha said he could wait till the evening. He had had a good chat the night before and they had explained they were going to be busy that morning, organising things. Harrald sensed he was missing them and would have liked to be, there helping with the organising. He knew it was their new life that was being sorted out. He felt left out. Harrald felt sorry for him.

"I don't know if I have said it yet but thank you for helping. Your help has been invaluable, I will explain later". He started asking about the life they had had before. Asha was happy to talk about this and Harrald saw his face lighten up as he talked. He realised that though not easy they had been happy with their lot before. If it hadn't been for the troubles, they would still be there enjoying their life. It was just another story like many he had heard where war had changed things, re-arranged lives. The upheaval for all was never easy. He hoped this one would have a happy ending.

He sat and listened.

In the Café he explained. They all had croissant and jam with more coffee though not much was consumed till he finished explaining how Asha had ended up with the letter and how much that had messed up the plans of ISIS. He told them he had found out who the mysterious German was and what they now suspected him of having been occupied with over the past few years. Asha gasped when he realised what he could have got into if only he'd been a good shot.

"Thanks be to Allah, I was short-sighted. That is probably why I was no good at it, made for clerical duties" he exclaimed with a big grin. Harrald stopped him there, "I think you have more in you than you realise. If it hadn't been for you, the way you managed to get through to Ikram on his own, that was quite a task. He has a lot of hate and anger. You were able to get through where no-one else has. I think, Congratulations, your family should be proud of you" Asha glowed.

Chapter 12 – Family life

Ikram left the women at one point. He went down to the river with a towel. Desertstar had decided to take a shower and Liz had starting feeling tired. She said she wanted to take a shower after, but needed to lie down.

As Ikram left the house he reflected on the day. After lunch and after the deep chat, they had had another nice walk. He had seen a kingfisher and pointed it out. It was a bird he knew from the desert. They migrated south and he had seen them fishing by rivers. The colours always amazed people and Liz had been blown away. She really had shown her ignorance, having lived in the city all her life. The country takes a while to get used to, he thought, to break through the barriers of self-interest. She had complained about her hair and her clothes, but he had seen glimpses of attention towards nature. It had been the Kingfisher that had drawn her out of herself. That had been when she had started asking questions about the trees, fish and other animals they had seen. A squirrel had stopped and looked at them from a tree nearby and she had found it sooo cute. Obviously, she wanted to caress the creature and she had been disappointed when she scared it up the tree. She wanted to follow but stepping off the path, she'd hesitated and had come straight back.

There had been a moment when, walking along, his hand had brushed that of Desertstar. There had been a sort of electricity, they had ended up holding hands. He had stopped looking for Souma in the trees and thought, even if he did see, it was part of the act, a family out for a country walk.....only, to him he had liked that feeling. He was sure she too had enjoyed the contact. Once, when they had stopped, to watch something moving by the side of the path, he was sure she leant in closer to him. They had enjoyed watching Liz reacting like a little girl again, running forwards and back. The talk had broken boundaries like he hadn't imagined.

Now he crouched down and washed his hands. He had not had not been able to put much time aside to really pray since leaving the hostel without drawing attention to himself. In the flat he'd tried to be quite regular in his praying but now, after his impromptu closeness to Allah the night before, and his day as a normal person, he felt like praying. He had no mat but used his jacket, he knew which way west was, the sun was setting there now. He knelt and started chanting.

He finished his prayers, thanked Allah then he took his clothes off on the banks of the river, He had a smile on his face, he shivered as his feet first touched the water but he braved it and carried on in. He splashed and washed, he was feeling young again, carefree. He didn't feel alone anymore.

Having washed, he walked back to the house, Desertstar was dressed and back in the kitchen, Liz was still asleep, he opened the door and looked in. He remembered doing this for his little Arshiya. Going back to the kitchen he came up behind Desertstar. She was stirring a stew she had made. His hand touched her back between the shoulder blades and stroked caressingly. She leant back ever so slightly, turned her head looking up, and he saw into her deep green eyes. She was smiling and her lips seemed to be inviting him in. He leant down and kissed her. It was long and passionate. Feeling warmed inside, he turned and went to the fireplace. He added a few more logs and stoked it a bit. He then checked his clothes hanging, drying since the night before. They were dry. He wanted to keep his new clothes clean so decided to change back into them. He dropped his trousers and took off his shirt, and folding them he placed them in the chair. Taking his old shirt from its hook he was about to put it on, when he felt a hand on his back. He turned and there was Desertstar. She stroked his back, round his sides, he turned to face her. Her

hands now started on his chest, she followed her hands with her eyes, running her fingers through the hair on his chest, around the muscles of his arms, then she looked up into his eyes, he bowed down and kissed her. He felt the softness, her hands still travelling around his body, the heat from the fire behind warmed his buttocks, and a hand found their way there. He felt a stirring.

Desertstar felt a comfort with him, a feeling of safety, his muscles big, rounded. She liked the feel of his back, slim and sinewy. His bottom was firm and she wanted him close, to feel his body against her's. She freed a hand and slipped off the shoulder strap of her dress, then the other one. She let her dress fall and the air was brushing gently against her nakedness. Gently pushing him, he lay down, she watched him looking at her, his eyes not leaving hers except when she felt them stray and sensed his eyes caressing her body. As she bent over to take off her underwear, she saw his erectness, she wanted it inside her, she was feeling warm inside herself, moist. She had never felt this way about anyone. With her husband it had been duty, she had never really enjoyed it, but the night before, she had been able to let go, willingly she had been caressed by him, enjoyed every nip and brush of his lips, his firm hands following the contours of her breasts.

She had felt like a part of him, an extension of him, more than just herself, her silent self, the sounds she'd made had come from below, they had surprised her. She never made a sound, not from her mouth. He had freed her, she still felt that vibrating as the sound rose from her belly up to her throat and out of her mouth. She had not had to do anything, just release herself to him, the sound coming out had just happened, him inside her. She wanted to feel it again.

She climbed out of her pants and crouched down on him, above his penis. She felt it touching her lower back, his hands came up to her, they held her midriff, her waist, so strong, she let him take her weight. She trusted his hold, feeling his body between her legs, his hands slowly moving up her front, there was a feeling, not a tickling but a feeling her body was coming alive from her hips, her belly and between her legs. She was giving into the feeling, it spread like a warmth, she opened her mouth, his hand reached her breast, curling around, under, supporting. She felt him squeeze, pump that tingling sensation, up, out, she felt her nipples stiffen and grow, he pulled her forwards with his other hand upon her shoulder. She gave in gently, her body bowed, down. She felt his breath as his mouth approached her nipple, her eyes were closed, her mouth open. His lips closed around her nipple and she felt the sound rise from her belly again, up it came till she felt the groan vibrate up through her throat and into her mouth, the sound feeling like an explosion as it came out. He continued sucking her sensitive nipple, his tongue tickled the end and she felt a shiver cover her body, followed by a heat and involuntarily she shivered. She reached behind her and took his erection in her hand. Rising a little she slid it between her buttocks then her legs, her thighs and she placed it between her lips and sank down slowly feeling the warm hardness enter her, another groan grew from inside and rose like lava pushing out of a volcano.

She started moving her hips, forwards and backwards, feeling the rubbing inside. She felt it fill her and touch her and rub her inside, his hand still squeezing her breast, the other her waist. She was on a wave, riding the wave, forwards and backwards. She lifted her back and felt him deeper, the sound were now flowing like waves splashing on a beach,

she rocked. His hands were now around her waist. She opened her eyes and he was looking deep into her own. The look on his face was that of a lost soul, just feeling, like her, not in control. Her hand on his chest, firmly she pushed, arching her back to get him in deeper. Her breasts were tingling, calling, her free hand followed a wave rising from below her thighs, up it came and her hand found her breast, she squeezed the tingle out to her nipple, her palm closed around the nipple, the wave burst out of her mouth and the groan reverberated, she didn't want it to stop. She squeezed with her hand, on her breast, her other hand clawed at his chest, she rocked and swayed, swiveling on his pole deep inside her making it rub her inside, she felt him tense, she moved faster, she was feeling a wave, a big wave was coming, she wriggled and moaned, it came closer and closer, lower and lower towards the tip of his rod, then she felt it twitch and deep inside she felt the eruption, his spasm and the liquid shot up inside. The wave arrived in a spasm, she felt it from her thighs to her toes, together they shook in an uncontrolled release of muscle spasm. He groaned beneath her and she felt it on her hands that were now clinging to his chest. He back arched again as the aftershocks continued, then with a mix of release and fatigue, her muscles turned to jelly, she flopped down onto his chest, her arms unable to take her weight. His arm circled behind her and held her to him. She heard him pant gently between her faster breathing. She felt his hand slide up her back. She twitched again reminding her he was still inside her, softening but still big. His big hand slid up past the back of her neck and took the back of her head into his palm. They lay like this, she couldn't say for how long, but she didn't want to move. His hand started rubbing gently, she felt the smile throughout her body, the blood still pumping around. She felt one with him, one entity. She raised her head a little to see his eyes. He was there looking at her, relief on his face. She lifted her face to join with his lips and kissed long and hard. Her hands on his shoulders then she sank back into the cradle of his arms.

As she lay there in his arms, running her finger over his chest, she thought about love, she thought about her daughter, she hadn't in a long time, she'd been so busy at the time, she hadn't known what to do. Had she loved her? She remembered holding her in her arms, suckling her with her little breasts, she had felt a similar warmth but this was the first time she felt this kind of being held, she felt safe, protected. Her eyes opened. She heard something. Having been blissful and unaware of anything but him and her she now realised there was a world out there. She wanted to stay, like this forever. The sound of Liz in the bathroom had brought her back. She didn't want to move, she'd never thought like this before. It had always been without question. She had done what she had to do but now....she didn't want to move. She felt Ikram stirring beneath her. The bliss was slowly running away like water in sand. She clung for a couple more seconds then kissing his chest, she slipped off. She glanced at him and he grabbed for her hand. She gave it and he kissed the back of it. His smile said it all, there was still something there between them. It would never go away she hoped.

She pulled free and he released her. The shower was running and with a quick glance through the window, she saw it was now dark. Having dressed, she went to the cooker and stirred the stew she started preparing the rice.

He put on his clothes now. He felt at ease. No thoughts of his mission, his past or his future. Here and now was all that mattered. Having put on his clothes he instinctively put

his hands in his trouser pockets. His hand closed around something in there. Puzzled he pulled out the scrumpled up leaf of flattened paper. It had got wet the night before in the river. It was a bit stuck together. He took a place by the table and carefully unfolded it, pulled it open and smoothed it out on the surface of the table. He'd forgotten all about it since they had left in a rush the day before. He looked over to the fire still spluttering away. It was the letter he'd written to his daughter. Having been trained to think and work in the language he lived in, it was written in German and it was still legible, the accents had smudged but the rest was still there. He picked out words, not wanting to go to that place in his head. He left the sense of the sentences behind. He knew what was there but as he physically folded it up and placed it back in his trouser pocket, mentally he did the same. Looking up he saw Desertstar, her back to him. He gazed at her like a boy who had fallen in love for the first time.

"Ok you love birds" distracted him. He saw Liz standing at the edge of the room. There was a grin on her face, he saw as she entered the room and sat at the table near Ikram. He felt a blush and smiled. He wasn't ashamed. Liz stood back up and putting her head over Desertstars shoulder she sniffed, "What's cooking?" she enquired "Aahhhh, stew and rice, my favourite". Not asking, she started opening the cupboards at head height and eventually finding the plates and bowls, she started laying the table, "I'm starving. How about after dinner we play some cards?" She produced a pack of playing cards from her pocket. "I found them in the table drawer in my room. Know any games?" Ikram shook his head. Desertstar turned round and shook her head as well. Liz looked at them both, one after the other, "If you want to be alone, just say. I heard you both earlier and didn't want to disturb you. It looks to me like a romance just starting. Desertstar blushed now and turned away back to stir the stew. Ikram looked at her, "How old are you?" he asked.

The humour left her face, "15, why?" Ikram had not wanted to interrogate her but was just being curious. He knew with what she'd been through she had had to grow up fast. Still, the childish desire to play but the knowledge, probably more than his, he ventured to guess, about love or probably better put, the urges of people and what they would do to get them quenched. He wanted just to see the child, "Show me a game while we wait!" The playfulness returned to her face immediately, "OK, this game is called speed".

Having eaten they played or tried to play. Liz got frustrated trying to teach them the rules and, finding them too difficult to teach, impatiently she kept changing the game trying to find one they knew, which proved impossible.

Time passed and the fire died down. Eventually, Liz said she was tired and was going to bed. Ikram waited a while till he thought she would be in bed and then, went through. The light was still on and Liz was in bed. He went to the bed and sitting directly on the bed, he pulled up on a leg of his trousers and lay his leg on the bed, it was how he remembered doing with his daughter. He noticed the look of uncertainty in her eyes and quickly got off. "Sorry, I didn't want to startle you...I just wanted to say thank you. I have had a nice time today. I am sorry it has been under these funny circumstances but thanks to.....Frederick", he was glad he had fished out the name, "I have got to know Desertstar.

Thank you and hopefully the next few days will be as enjoyable. Please sleep well”, Liz smiled, “You going to read me a bedtime story as well?” she sarcastically added in jest. Ikram got the message and left, do you want the light out and the door closed?” he smiled back, “Light off, door open”.

He didn't know why he did that. He guessed the day had made him soft. He wanted to show how he felt. He was feeling happy again. So long since he'd felt like that, back when his daughter was alive....

It was in the middle of the night when something woke him. They had made love again and then he'd fallen asleep. He looked around the cabin. Liz's door was now closed. He saw light coming from the crack under her door. He heard a sound from inside. He couldn't work out what it was and he felt tense so he decided to get up and investigate. Trying and failing not to wake Desertstar, he slid out from under the blanket and put his trousers on.

Careful not to make too much sound he crept to the door and slowly swung open. His heart started beating fast. The room was empty and her clothes and shoes were gone. The big bay window was open. He was frozen for a second.

“Get up” he shouted to the other room, “She's gone”. The quilt on the bed had been thrown back and there lying in the middle were some scraps of torn up paper. He moved towards them. Somehow he couldn't comprehend. They had had a good night, she hadn't seemed to be effected from not having drugs but he guessed she must have had a nightmare or something but to run away, it didn't make any sense.

He approached the bed and his fingers started turning over the scraps of paper trying to work out what they were. Then it hit him, It was his letter, his message to his dead daughter. In his head he could hear “no, no, no” turning into a scream, though no sound came from his lips. Time stopped. He checked his pocket, still not believing it was possible. Then it hit him: it must have fallen out of his pocket when he was saying thank you for the best day he'd just had.

The screaming got louder in his head. He then ran back. The other room was empty. The front door was standing ajar. He grabbed his knife, shoes and shirt, hopping through the door with the knife under his arm. Putting the shoes on he saw the faint figure of Desertstar running off down the road.

He slipped into his shoes and he started running after her. How could this be happening? The gravity of the situation slowly grew and his stomach became tighter and tighter. What a mistake to have made. He started cursing himself as he ran. How could they get back what they had just worked so hard on? He was working out how he could explain it, so many different ways past through his head. He continued chasing. He could see a dark shadow in front of him and heard the tapping of footsteps. He knew he was catching Desertstar but he had no idea how far ahead Liz was. The track was lit up just enough to see by the moon, just being able to make out the edges of the road,

He heard screaming way up ahead, and his heart stopped beating. It was Liz's voice. Souma. He hadn't thought about it but could still hear the patting of Desertstar's footstep

so knew it couldn't be her. It must be Souma. He must have caught her. He quickened his pace, he heard the scream again, though it started moving again, off in the direction of the forest now. He heard the cracking of branches off the track and then the figure in front of him too darted off in the direction of the sounds.

Then he heard it, the crack of a pistol. "Nooooo", he heard the whisper coming from his lips. He carried on, his heart beating again though now at such a pace he could feel the beating against his chest. He didn't want to imagine what was happening, he just continued.

There were a couple more shots, quite deep into the forest now. He let the sharp flashes be his guide, still moving, his head changed angle slightly as he hear some more shots. He wasn't counting. He was almost there. The cracking of branches had now stopped. He could just make out the figure of someone standing. He slowed, he got there and realised it was Souma. He stood there. He had his torch on now, it was shining down,

"I had her, I caught her, then she bit my hand, she got away. I couldn't catch her. I had to fire. I thought I had her, then, then, sorry, I didn't see her. She just jumped in the way". He saw now the body lying down on the ground. He couldn't believe it, he didn't want to believe it, face down and unmoving, it was Desertstar. He saw the blood in the flashlight as a red puddle started to stain the floor around her head. He fell to his knees. He couldn't take it in. It was her, his Desertstar, lying there. He started to see red, it wasn't the blood, it was a rage taking over him. He didn't know how but his long knife was in his hands. He heard the voice behind him, "I didn't know it was her". He started rising slowly. He didn't even see it himself. He didn't hear the message going through his head as his arm swung round with such speed and accuracy, training perhaps, he didn't know. All he knew was the look of shock on the face of Souma as the blood started flowing from his throat. He didn't watch the body fall. He dropped immediately back to his knees again in front of Desertstar. A light bounced amongst the trees, shadows dancing.

The torch had fallen from Souma's hand as it came up to his throat. His body was now on its buckled knees. There was a gurgle and then a thud as he fell forwards. Falling into the soft undergrowth, there was only a slight rustle as it hit the ground, the gurgling continued for a little while before going silent.

All Ikram could do was kneel and watch. It must be a dream, a nightmare. The Torch had stopped moving and the light was static. There was silence all around.

Then he heard a rustle a few yards away. He tried to ignore it at first, just staring, looking at the gory blood-filled sight that lay before him. His mind was blank. There was nothing now, the rage had come and gone. It abated and now there was just emptiness.

The rustling came again, followed by a slight groan. This time his body moved. His head was still blank but his body moved towards the sound. Somehow he didn't want to take his eyes away from the bodies lying in the pine needle that littered the floor. His legs moved towards the sound, but his eyes stayed fixed on the dress of Desertstar. He didn't want to leave her. He almost stopped and went back. He thought perhaps she is still alive but he knew. There was part of her face missing. The bullet had gone in the back of her head and her face wasn't there anymore. He'd seen this before on the battlefield. She was

just meat, she wasn't there anymore. She'd gone, to wherever she was going, she was already there. She wouldn't have known a thing, her spark went out without he knowing it.

He heard the rustling and the groan got louder this time. He couldn't help it, he turned and went back, he knelt down next to Desertstar's body, his knees sank into the puddle of blood. His fingers went to her throat, it was still warm, the tears were starting to drip from his eyes, but there was no pulse. He held his fingers there for a little longer. The groan from in the darkness beyond him became a whispered scream. There was the sound of pain.

Through the blur in his eyes, he picked up the gun and put it in his pocket, then he picked up the torch. His mind was slowly coming back into focus. Using the torch he scanned the forest for the source of the sounds of pain. There only a few yards away he saw the light-coloured skin of Liz. She was groaning. He didn't want to go closer, he was scared of what he'd find. If she was dead as well... she couldn't be dead, he realised. He couldn't bear to see her look at him. He got up and moved towards it.

It was a good sign, the pain. He approached the laid-out figure of her. He immediately saw one wound. It was in the leg, not life threatening. He felt a flash of hope. Then he saw another wound, on her side. That was where the pain was coming from, he realised, as that was where she was holding herself.

He crouched down over her checking to see if there were any other wounds. Not seeing any he looked at her face. It had never really got much colour back over the past day but now it was pale. She was losing blood fast he realised. Her eyes focused on him. There was just a look of panic there, not the look of daughter to father he'd half hoped for. Her arms started waving. With her fists she was weakly trying to fight him off. He knew she was weak, she was in shock and pain, the adrenaline would soon wear off. Going back to the pile of bodies, he rolled Souma over, took off his jacket. Tearing off the arm he first made a tourniquet and stopped the blood flowing out of the leg, then ripping off another bit of the jacket he placed it in the wound round her waist. He stripped off more of the jacket and managed to make something he could call a bandage. This he wrapped around Liz's waist and tied it, then, ignoring the sounds of pain and the "Leave me alone, don't hurt me, don't kill me", he picked her up and put her over his shoulder. He started making his way back to the road. He had an idea of the direction he came from. He was starting to think what he could do, There was the main road nearby. He could wave down a car, that was what he'd do.

As he got to the track, he started making his way towards the main road. It was after a few minutes walking that he saw the torchlight glint off something. He couldn't believe it, it didn't make sense, but there was a car, hidden under some branches. He placed Liz on the ground and ran in to investigate. It was, it was the car they came in, it couldn't be, it should be in Italy. Then the cold thought rushed through his head: Souma, no loose ends, that was the training, he'd killed the driver and hidden the car. Opening the driver's door now he climbed in, the light came on inside lighting up the forest in a flash. The driver was dead, bullet to the head. He was propped up in the passenger seat. The keys were still in the ignition. He turned the key and the engine roared awake. He climbed into the

driving seat and pulled out of the forest. The branches screeched as they scrapped down the side of the car till they got caught on something and fell off.

He stopped and picked up Liz, "I'm taking you to the hospital, just hold in there", he carried her to the car and laid her on the back seat. He took off as fast as he could. He checked the fuel gauge knowing it would be full. They had filled up when they had done the shopping. Before he got far, he leaned across and opened the passenger door and pushed the dead body out. He didn't have time to hide it. Anyway, it was all over now. He just wanted to get to the hospital, he didn't care about anything else.

He got to the main road. There was a sign, left to Berlin, 147 Km, right to Dresden 81 Km, He turned right, and put his foot down.

"Please don't kill me", he heard from the back,

"I won't, I'm taking you to the hospital, I'm going to save you",

"No your not, your going to kill me, blow yourself up, me with you, I don't want to die now. You saved me just to kill me. That was all false, you never loved me",

"I won't. I am escaping too. keep your strength, I'll get you there. You are like my daughter". "Where is she, Desertstar? That man he shot me: you killed him, I saw",

"Sshhhh keep your strength". He kept driving. He had to get there in time. As he drove, he listened for a sound from the back. He heard breathing, soft, but it was there. At each Junction he turned to see. Liz was still breathing but her eyes were closing. "Stay awake" he called back, "Keep your eyes open, stay awake". He followed the directions, the L651, then the B101.

The roads got bigger but it wasn't till he got to the A13 that he could really put his foot down, he was now on the Autoroute.

Chapter 13 - Carnage

It was about 5 in the morning when Harrauld got the call, It was Nadia, "We are getting rumours about something happening in a forest near the Naturpark Niederlausitzer Heidelandschaft. It seems three bodies have been found. It sounds like a suspected jihadist who's throat has been cut. There seem to be similarities to the attack in Berlin, you know the three bodyguards. Its on the wire from the police in Dresden. They were called out because some-one heard and saw flashes from the forest".

It took a few seconds for Harrauld to get his head round it, "OK, can you arrange for transport there, helicopter if possible? I'll get Caroline to check it out. She might have contacts in the police there. Call me back if you hear any more. I'll get a car to the office!".

Harrauld jumped out of bed, "There has been a set of killings" We have to go. He knocked on Asha's room, "Wake up, we have to go, hurry up". He hurried back to Caroline's room and dressed. They had to wait a few minutes for Asha to get ready, then they were on their way.

Caroline was on the phone in the car to some-one she knew in the Dresden police, "Thanks Friedrich. Can you tell me who is in charge on the ground there? We are on our

way right now. We'll be almost an hour, I'd like to find out some details.....OK, Otto Koch....can you text me the number...ok got it, thanks". She hung up and redialled the number she was sent.

"Hi, Otto Koch, My name is Caroline Lehmann from the force in Bautzen. I am involved in a case that has similar characteristics to what you have found. Could you give me more details please?.....,Ok, we are on our way and should be there in about 45 minutes, thanks".

It had not taken them long to get to the Office building and Nadia had told Harrald the helicopter was waiting for them on the roof. It wasn't long before they were in the air. Harrald had asked for headphones because he wanted to talk to Caroline on the way. He wanted to find out as much as she knew.

"It seems there were four of them. They were in a cabin, hidden in the woods. They had only been there a few days from what they found in the bins. They found the body of two young Arabic men, one throat slit, the other a bullet to the head. The one with the throat cut was found in the forest with the body of a woman, again Arabic origin. She had been shot in the back of the head, though it seems from a distance. The other was found openly lying by the road, it seemed he'd been thrown from a moving car. He was dead before being thrown out and had actually been dead for a while before, they assume more than a day. They found tyre tracks leading out; they assume they are fresh. It sounds like Ikram is on the move with the European girl. They have found other large traces of blood nearby in the forest. On quick analysis it is that of a young female, not that of the dead woman. That is all they have for the moment".

Harrald got straight on the phone, "Hi, Nadia, I need to know who could be a target, somewhere big, lots of people, I would guess, around Berlin or Dresden, probably a sports event, something that would make the headlines.....Yes, today it would have to be.

Make me a list and inform the police at all those possible events. Issue photos of Ikram and the girl, It might be imminent.....Ok, keep me informed".

He looked back. He was in the cockpit next to the pilot, Asha and Caroline in the back. Caroline was busy on her phone. Asha was just sitting, white-faced next to her, staring forwards. He caught Harrald's eye. He tried a forced smile. Harrald returned it. He asked the pilot to put him through to Head Office. A minute later he had Nadia on the line.

"Can you put me through to Robert please?.....Hi, Robert, it seem's to be happening, Nadia is getting a list of possible targets, I thought you'd better know. Three dead bodies, perhaps executed by Ikram, to cover his tracks, wouldn't put it passed him. There is something though that doesn't make sense It seems the girl has been shot as well.....yes the kidnapped girl....., yes thing are hotting up. Will keep you informed, we are on our way there, out".

Caroline put back on her headphones, Harrald heard the crack as she pressed the button to communicate, "I have just talked to a detective on the scene and he is of the impression something happened. It seems there are three sets of footprints, all running from the cabin. He checked out the cabin and although a guess, thinks the first set of prints show the girl jumping out of the window and running off, the second and third seem to have taken chase. There is a point where there are prints of a fourth person and a struggle

whereby the original set running from the house took off into the forest. There its gets difficult to work out he said”.

Harrald thought for a moment, “Ok, so it looks like the girl’s escaped, they chased, she got caught by a fourth, she escaped from him and then they went into the forest and the shooting started. We can assume the girl had no gun so she was the target. The throat cut, well we assume that was Ikram. Why??.....Hhhmmmm. OK, the second man, he had a gun, he shot both the woman and the girl.....they were both escaping and he had to stop them.....” Harrald stopped, “What if.....I know it’s a long shot, but what if Ikram was trying to stop.....no, why would the women run?”

Chapter 14 – Asha's fault??

Ikram was driving. He kept glancing round into the back to see and check on Liz. He talked over his shoulder to her. She replied, occasionally, but her voice got weaker and weaker. The last thing he heard from her was a request for some music. He didn't want to turn the radio on because he wanted to hear her but she had asked again. He just continued. He hadn't heard anything from her for 10 minutes and was starting to panic. He saw a petrol station. He was still 25 Km's from Dresden. He pulled in and parked in a dark space away from any other cars. The place was predictably empty at that time of night.

He climbed over the seat. Her eyes were just about open. Her face white. The seat was sticky as he sat down. It was her blood, he realised. He checked her wound in the side: it was oozing out blood still. He picked up her head and placed it in his lap. Tears were now dripping down his face. He knew she was going. He started stroking her hair, her eyes flickered, he knew she was going quick, he'd seen it before. She'd lost too much blood and there was nothing he could do. She had minutes left. “I'm dying aren't I?” He couldn't hold back the pain anymore. His stomach was grinding. “No, hold on.” he blubbered through the tears that were now blocking his mouth. He looked up and his body shuddered as he held back the flood inside that was now forcing its way out. He looked down again, still stroking her hair. .”Arshiya, don't leave me again”. He watched her eyes as the distant light within became more distant till finally it faded, her body went limp, whatever energy there was left was now drifting away. “AAhhhhrrrrrr” he screamed inside the car. He held her, pulled her to him “Don't gooo!” The quivering wreck that was left of him just sat in the back swaying, cuddling her head to his breast. Wailing alone in the dark, he sat. He didn't know how long he sat there. He was drained, his shirt was wet from a mix of tears and blood, his hands sticky, he stroked her face, “Arshiya, Arshiya.....” He kept repeating it, his body swaying, eyes closed, his stomach tight. Eventually, when he couldn't weep (??) anymore, he opened his eyes. He looked out of the window at the highway stretching before him. He also noticed the gun now, sitting on the passenger seat. He stared and stared. As if it was someone else's hand he watched it picked up the gun, he sat with the dead body of Liz cradled in his lap. He stared at the gun, held it in front of him with both hands. He started to feel a sort of peace as he knew what was happening. He had had enough of this pain and confusion. He started lifting it to his head, he placed the barrel against his temple. He looked again one final time down the motorway. Yellow lights glowing, he saw the blue sign glowing. Unconsciously, his

eyes were drawn in to a blue sign. He started to slowly focus, something started to come into view. He sat staring. Distantly it started to become clearer, it started to mean something to him. He couldn't work out why. He steadied his hand, the word started to register, written there in white he saw it, BAUTZEN, written clearly, glowing. The words around were faded but there was BAUTZEN standing out clearly. Something started to click.

An understanding started to form. He stared and stared. It couldn't be, that was where this had started. He saw Asha standing there, in the rain. He was there too, pointing a gun, at Asha's head. A thought started and picked up speed. Asha, it was all Asha's fault, he should have killed him then. If he had.....he looked down at the empty face of Liz. She would be.....The gun in his hand started to feel heavy. His hand gradually lowered, as an idea was forming in his head. Lifting the head off his lap, he moved purposefully forwards to the front seat again. He was going to pay, for the pain, the craziness, it would make all this go away. Desertstar, Liz, he could repair all this. Something started to feel right again, he turned the key and the engine that was still running made a grinding sound. He focussed on the sign as he slowly pulled away, off down the glowing highway. He followed the sign "BAUTZEN".

As he drove images floated around his head, the smiling Desertstar, with the river in the background, the kingfisher and Liz pointing. His mind was awash with the yellow glow of the road, the natural sunlight yesterday by the river. It became red, blood red, hazy with faces appearing in front. Asha, the German, the light became lighter and paler, he saw her clearly, Arshiya's young face, smiling back at his, the day the bomb fell, a flash of her mum.

The rest of the trip was like this, image after image, face after face, his past was drifting in front of him, though through it all he was able to follow the sign's to Bautzen. He had no idea how long it took. He just kept going.

Eventually, he was going through the town. He recognised the railway, where he should have killed Asha. He continued. He got to the building he was looking for. There was the church. He parked right in front of the steps. Grabbing the gun, he got out and walked up to the big wooden doors. He tried pushing but they wouldn't budge. He pulled on one of the big rings that hung there, he swung it back, and then felt the thud as it bashed against the door. A loud thud echoed inside. He waited. He tried again and again, till eventually he saw a light coming on inside the church. He waited, then again he thudded the black iron ring. He heard the turn of a key inside, the thud of a big lock, clunk. He started pushing and the door swung heavily open. Lifting the gun in his hand he pointed it straight at the face that appeared. It was the priest. He'd seen him before at the hostel. He'd been friends with Asha, he knew Asha. "Get Asha, I want him here, get Asha here". He knew there were tears running down his face, blood staining his clothes, he saw the body lying in the woods, in the car outside, Liz. All of them, the images in his head were getting confused, Arshiya was there as well. He pushed the gun to Johan's head. "I want Asha" and he pushed his way into the church. The priest backing away, a look of horror stuck to his visage.

“How?” Johan was in shock, he had seen this man before. He was trying to remember. Then it came to him. The young translator, that first night he'd gone here. This was the young man who had offered to translate for the others, but he was so different now. Full of rage, he could see that. He didn't resist, he was trying to understand. “Please, I want to help. What do you want me to do?” He was now backing down the central aisle. The gun was to his forehead. It took a short while but he started to get a grip of himself. There was an angry man who wanted to shoot Asha, he blamed him for something.

There was a creak from the back of the church. Ikram redirected the pistol towards it instantly. The vestry door opened. Johan had completely forgotten. Today he had his young assistant priest helping set-up. He was supposed to be helping him with the service. He moved in front of the pistol, he lifted his hands, “It's OK, he won't.....” he was lost for words.

Ikram was a bit surprised, the priest had blocked his vision. He pushed hard against the priest who fell to the stone floor. Still pointing at the person who had just turned up at the scene. pointing the gun, he shouted, “Get me Asha, I don't care how, get me Asha”.

Johan shouted out “Do as he says. Go get the police, get Asha, Asha, ask for.....” he searched his memory for the name of the special service agent, “Agent Harrald, ask for special agent Harrald. Secret service, go, do it, get out of here”.

The assistant priest was stunned. It wasn't what he'd been expecting that morning. There was a madman in the church. It didn't register at first. He wanted to go and help Johan. It took a short while to register that the man was waving a GUN. Once he realised, a fear took over, he froze. He heard Johan shouting at him, he didn't know.....he was shouting something, “Police” he registered,

Johan was now back on his feet standing. He was waving his hands in the air. The voice of Johan became calm. Ikram was taken aback. Johan lowered his arms knowing he had to calm things down a bit.

The situation was starting to register. He had no idea what this was about but he had to stop anyone else from getting caught in this madness. He didn't know where it came from but his voice was calm now.

“Go and call the Police. Ask for an Agent Harrald of the secret services. This man wants to speak to an Asha. He is from the Immigration hostel. Close the doors. Stop anyone else from coming to the service. Do as I say, remember, Agent Harrald, Asha, Go now!!”.

The young priest, did as he was told. He closed the door behind him, locked it and then ran back through the side door to the vestry and across the garden to Johan's house. The doors were unlocked and he ran straight in. He knew where the phone was and ran for it. He dialled the number for police. The phone was answered by a calm voice. He tried to keep his voice calm too, but it didn't work. “There is a gunman here, in the church,” he said too quickly. The voice at the other end “Where are you please, your name and your address”. Franz held back the panic. He'd seen Johan do it with a gun to his head and he tried to do the same. It wasn't so easy, “My name is Franz Huber, I am the assistant priest at St Michael's church in Bautzen. There is a gunman and he has the head priest at gunpoint”. He tried to remember the names Johan had given him. “The gunman is asking

to see a.....an Agent Harrald, Agent Harrald from the secret services. He is to bring an Asha, Asha, the gunman wants to see Asha". There was a silence from the other end for a second. "Hello, hello". The voice came back, "Ok, I have passed on the message", Franz heard the tapping of a keyboard; "If I could just confirm; you are Franz Huber, the assistant priest at St Michaels. You have a gunman holding the head priest. He is asking for a special agent Harrald of the secret services, is that correct?" Franz nodded, but realising quickly what he was doing, he said "Yes, that is correct, he is asking for an Asha. I have to go. Please send someone. I have to make sure none of the congregation arrive early. I must stop anyone else getting in the church. "The police are on the way, Don't hang up" he heard from the other end of the phone! He was about to put the phone down in its cradle. He stopped himself. He placed it next to the phone. He ran out, the adrenalin was starting to really pump through his system and he felt his heart beating. He got to the front of the church. There was a strange car parked there. He checked the big door to the church. He slid the big black metal bolt across with a thud. He had to make sure that no-one got in. He turned. The streets were empty, as usual at this time of the morning. He was now curious about the car. He went towards the car and started peeking through the window. There was something, or someone there, he started tapping at the window. No movement, he tried the door, it was unlocked. He pulled the handle, the door opened. He saw the figure of someone, it was a girl....he jumped back in horror when he realised she was dead. "Shit,...shit shit shit". He ran back to the house, the phone as still standing there, he picked it up, without any of the calm he'd found before. That was gone, "She's dead, there is a dead girl in the car", he knew he was breathing heavily, there was nothing he could do about it. A voice came back from the other end, "Who is dead sir, could you confirm, who is dead?"

Chapter 15 - Back in Bautzen

Harrald was in the helicopter when the message came through. They had been in the air for almost 45 minutes. He knew they were almost there. Caroline's phone rang first, she felt it vibrate on her lap, she picked it up. It was a colleague from the station in Bautzen.

Harrald, on his headphones, the pilot came through first. "Headquarters on the line for you, putting them through now sir".

"Hello"

"Hello, Robert here"

"Yes sir"

"We are getting a message through from the police in Bautzen. It seems an incident is occurring at the church of St Michaels, that is the church of your priest isn't it?"

Harrald was concentrating. It was hard with the sound of the Helicopter. "Yes sir, that is correct".

There is an armed man there, we are assuming it is Ikram from the description, he is asking to talk to Asha. He is holding a priest hostage but no others involved. You need to get down there right away. Your pilot is getting the co-ordinates".

It took a few moments for it to sink in, "Thank you sir".

"Keep directly in contact with me. There is no talk of explosives but I am contacting the bomb squad, you never know. There is a car parked outside. It seems there is the dead body of a girl in the car. Perhaps it is loaded with explosives so take care".

"Ok sir". "Good

luck, over" "Ok

sir, out".

Harrald sat there for a few seconds, then he talked to the pilot confirming they were changing course.

He turned and saw Caroline was on her phone, she was texting. He realised it was too loud, the engines, to really hear. Asha sat there. He knew nothing about what was going on. He wanted it to stay that way. Why was Ikram doing this? It wasn't a big target as they assumed. Could there be more to it? He tapped the shoulder of the pilot, "Headquarters please" and he tapped his headphones. Nadia came on the line, "Harrald, you know what's going on?"

"Yes, quick, could you check, there is nothing special about that church, nothing nearby that we don't know about, why would he choose here?....." please make sure we haven't overlooked anything, out".

Caroline came through on the headphones, "Have you finished? Any chance I could have a line out?" she asked. "Finished, all yours". Caroline asked the pilot to get Bautzen

station on the line. It took a few seconds before the crackle came through. Harrauld knew the communications system in the helicopter so linked in to hear the conversation. She asked for the SEK division. She got through "Commander Fuchs, Inspector Caroline Lehman here, what is the situation on the ground there, over".

We have just arrived at St. Michaels; we are checking for vantage points to see in the church but its not looking good without having to break some windows. There is only one hostage, the Priest, a Johan [Böhm](#). We have evacuated the area and the bomb squad is checking the car. The robot is at the car and they are checking inside; the door is open and we can see the body of a girl, over".

"Don't take any action unless necessary", she looked forwards to Harrauld. If you manage to keep the situation contained, keep out of sight. Don't try and contact the assailant. We are on our way and I have Special Agent Harrauld Becker with me. He will take command when we get there. Keep the area cordoned off. Keep the Journalists away. Let the bomb squad do what they have to do. There is a high chance there are explosives involved and I don't want unnecessary deaths. Keep your men back for the moment, thank you. We will be there in 15 minutes, over".

"Confirmed, Out".

The flight only took another quarter of an hour before they touched down, back where it had all started. Asha recognised the place straight away. The pilot cut the engines having landed in the car park by the river. The police had cleared the way beforehand.

First stop was inside to the rectory to talk to Frank the other priest who explained what had happened. Harrauld looked through the window through to the front. He could see that a crowd was starting to gather, parishioners coming for their regular Sunday service. Caroline was from here, this was her beat. She knew the police standing outside and having had a quick talk with Harrauld, she went to talk to Commander Fuchs.

It had been decided, just in case of explosives, to put the cordon a lot further away. The crazy part she knew was that as soon as they explained what was going on, even though there was the chance of getting blown up, the crowds would increase rapidly in size. That she thought was their own choice. She had to make sure that they were as far away as was safe for them.

Commander Fuchs was explaining that they had sharp shooters but it was difficult to get anywhere to shoot from. It was hard to see clearly inside because of the stained glass but they had set up on the tower next to the church and had a view of Ikram and Johan through the stained glass window. It wasn't clear but from what they could see things seemed relatively calm. They were still waiting for the bomb squad to give the all clear for the car parked in front. They couldn't confirm it but the shooter on the tower saw nothing to make him suspect Ikram was wearing a suicide vest.

Harrauld waited. He wanted the all clear. It was possible Ikram had a remote detonator and the explosives were hidden somewhere nearby. He didn't want to give him reason to activate them.

The town was starting to come to life. Rumour passed quickly in a town like this and he could see people starting to gather. The police were pushing them back as far as they could. After another 10 minutes the bomb squad, with their robot, had checked the car and gave the all clear.

Harrald decided to go in on his own as he was not going to risk the life of another civilian, let alone Asha. Nothing was going to happen to Asha. He knew Johan, who he was sure knew the dangers now and, on balance, probably knew that both their lives would be at risk but he, Harrald was responsible. His first objective was to find out what he wanted, then, then it was his decision. Try and turn him if he could, or just kill him. That would be his gamble.

Ikram had kept control. He'd not talked. Johan had tried but quickly got the message from a pistol whip. Ikram had moved the two of them to the front of the church. They sat on the steps leading to the altar, Johan, his head bleeding, on the bottom step, Ikram just behind on the step above.

Like this they waited. They heard movement outside the church but Ikram had taken no notice. He just sat and let things turn over in his head. He played the past few weeks in his head.

Johan turned after a while, expecting another bash to his head. He had to try. He knew this might be his last chance. He guessed there were no other hostages and who was he apart from a priest. He suspected there were sharpshooters all around and any minute.....“May I pray?” he asked. Ikram looked down at the priest in front of him. He didn't expect this. Perhaps the priest would beg for his life. He knew these were the last moments of his life. He was prepared, he'd been preparing for a long time he realised, but the priest.....he must have known he was in danger, probably his last moments as well. He knew he wouldn't hesitate. He nodded.

The priest sank to his knees in front of him, looking past Ikram at the cross raised high on the wall in the back. He put his hands together and then closed his eyes.

Ikram watched. There was still anger though sadness, and many other emotions were now passing through him. The tenseness seemed to be abating. Time was having an effect. He watched, he turned at one moment and looked at the cross behind him that Johan was praying to. The sun was now blazing through the stained glass window showering them both in light and colour. He turned back and looked around the empty church. He saw it lit up from all sides, a multitude of colour filling the high, empty spaces.

The priest, still kneeling before him started praying aloud, his head down, hands together.

“Thank you oh Lord, for this wonderful life I have lived. I once knew this man before me. Forgive him, he is guided by your hand. I know not why you wish this but if it is the will of God, I lay down my life if it be your intent”.

The words reverberated round Ikram's head, “the will of God, the will of Allah”, he thought and word appeared on his lips. Unconsciously he uttered, “But always the will of men”. He thought for a minute. The gun was still pointed at Johan. The door to the vestry

opened with a heavy creak. Harrauld came in, his hands above his head. He looked: he expected the faces of the two on the steps to be looking at him. They weren't. Ikram was looking down the aisle, at nothing. The priest was looking at Ikram. He felt he might as well not have been there. He watched as the gun pointed at Johan changed direction. It was all in slow motion. He had no time to react. Ikram at the last moment glance nonchalantly in his direction though it was as if he didn't see him. He seemed to be looking through him as the pistol moved. It went upwards. Harrauld couldn't believe it. Ikram was moving the gun to his own temple. Johan too was moving now though not away, but towards Ikram. He seemed to be moving towards his hand. The gun clicked, an echo in the silence. Again another click though this time Johan had pounced on the hand of Ikram and it looked like he was fighting the gun away from the head of Ikram.

There was a dazed look on Ikram's face as Harrauld moved fast now. Harrauld could see no reason behind what was happening. As he got to the mellé of the priest and Ikram, his body joined. He dived for the hand with the pistol as well and landed on it. He instinctively twisted the hand and the gun fell to the floor clunking down the stone steps. He heard movement behind him now. Someone must have been watching from the door and before he knew it there were several bodies now holding Ikram down. Somehow Johan had separated himself from it all and was just sitting on the steps, looking stunned. The same stunned look was on Ikram's face though he was being dragged away now, muttering to himself, "Is this paradise? This must be paradise. I want to see Arshiya", the last part he kept repeating over and over again.

Harrauld moved to Johan "Are you OK?" he asked looking for sign's apart from the blood on his face, for a wound or something. Johan, still looking puzzled, looked at Harrauld, "The will of man, those were his last words" He seemed to judder and then came back, "Ohh, sorry, yes, yes, I'm OK" the smile returned to his face though it wasn't his usual smile, Harrauld thought to himself.

Epilogue

Johan was sitting in a cafe in Berlin. The sun was shining. It was one of those rare early winter days when the sun was shining and thee was a clear blue sky, sitting outside in a chair watching the traffic pass by was a pleasure for him. The days after had been crazy, reporters wanting stories and offering him huge amounts of money for his. A Cardinal from the Vatican had been in contact and congratulated him. What for, he had wondered, surviving he guessed.

He had given the story to no-one. The more he'd thought about it, the more he realised how little he actually knew. That was why he'd contacted Harrald. It hadn't been easy but in the end, through the police and then Caroline, he'd been able to do so. Now here he sat, waiting. His coffee had gone cold but he didn't care. He'd been so busy going over what he knew in his head. What he'd forgotten about it. A shadow crossed his path and he looked up. There stood Harrald and Caroline. He was pleasantly surprised to see her with him and sensed something else as well. He stood up and shook their hands.

Harrald managed to catch the eye of a waiter. Johan was surprised. The place was packed and it was an almost impossible thing to do he thought and here having just arrived, hey presto, three more coffee's were ordered. He saw his stature and guessed that was why he'd been served so quickly, he gulped and felt put in his place in a weird way, having turned his back on his church, he wasn't sure who he was and felt a bit lost.

"So how have you been?" Caroline asked as she sat down. It had been difficult to find him when they'd first arrived. They had thought he'd stand out, looking for the long black shirt with white collar but instead, mingling with the crowd, he sat in a tee-shirt *with a shirt over the top* and jeans. "Look's like things have really changed for you" she exclaimed as she'd spotted him sitting alone at a table not far from where they stood. He smiled, shrugging it off and made no comment. Stood up and shook hands. He looked perturbed she thought feeling for him, obviously these past few days had had a severe effect on him.

"I'm fine. I am sorry to have disturbed you two; you must be really busy. I just.....wanted to see if I could fill in some of the gaps" he looked embarrassed, "I've read the news stories, but can't really make out the truth from it all. I was hoping you could help. Thank you, I know you probably can't tell me anything. I too was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. It's just.....was this really something that helped get rid of that horrible man from politics, you know Mr. Holtzer, and how is Asha, what about Ikram. I did feel sorry for the man, he seemed so confused. He lost a daughter I heard".

"Whoa there", Harrald interjected "Slow down. I can't answer all that at once" and he grinned. He saw the serious look on the priest's face and wanted to help. He leaned forwards, "You are right, it is all protected as secrets, but...", he whispered, "if I can't trust a man of the cross! *You can keep a secret, can't you?*"

Johan, with a serious face, nodded leaning forwards as well. Caroline gently punched Harrald on the shoulder with a grin. "Sorry" Harrald leaned back "I was just joking. It is under the secrets act, and it didn't come from us if you do decide to sell your story, but it will all come out in several years time and anyway, from what you've been through and how you helped us, I think you deserve an explanation. Actually, we have just come from seeing Ikram," his face took a sympathetic look again. "Unfortunately this whole thing has unhinged him to the point he is in a straight jacket, solitary and padded walls. He kept asking to see Desertstar and his daughter. Both are dead. He seems to have lost contact with what's in the past, the present and on the whole, is utterly confused. He will spend the rest of his life behind bars or in a psychiatric wing I guess."

Johan just nodded, seeming to have aken that in and accepted that was all he was going to get. "You mentioned his daughter. He did in the church as well, he muttered to himself a few times and I couldn't work it out. Liz was that his daughter?"

"No, his daughter's name was Arshiya. Liz was the poor girl he kidnapped. She was found dead in the car outside the church. He is still confused himself as to which one was his daughter. From what we can gather, one of his men shot Liz, and Desertstar, the latter we guess by accident. It seems he was emotionally involved with her. They spent two days in the forest and that was where he got confused. That is all I can say about that, sorry".

Johan, nodded. His head was lowered and he seemed deep in thought. He eventually lifted it, "And Asha, how is he".

Caroline started but had to stop as the waiter arrived and placed three fresh warm coffees in front of them. The wisp of vapour still coming off. "Asha seem's to be doing fine. He is with his family now, they are under protection. The children have started school and are... actually, I can't say too much. They are in a protection program, his wife has a job and he too has a job we think he will be happy with". She took a sip of her coffee.

Harrald had opened the tube of sugar and added it to his coffee, "I got a letter from him a couple of days ago actually, sent via the service. He asked me to pass on his thanks to you. It seems he really appreciated your chats and he sent his warmest greetings and hoped you were well".

Johan looked down into his coffee, the small thimble like coffee cup, dark liquid contrasting with the white of the porcelain. Harralt open his mouth to fill the momentary gap when he felt a gentle tap on his foot, he turned to see Caroline looking sideways with a shake that was almost unnoticeable. The sounds of paris life washed over them both but Johan deep in his own thoughts eventually lifted his head a touch, "Quite incredible really", he said as if to the table, neither of the other 2 said anything, hanging on the pause, "Asha,I wonder", and he lifted his eyes to meet Harralts. Unshifting, they almost unsettled Harralt, "Do you think he knew of the connection.....you know between Allan and the signature in his letter, seem's an impossible coincidence!!". Harralts eyes narrowed, he'd been dreading this question. He'd been expecting it from his superiors but it had never come, even after, he'd suspected they'd just been happy to draw a line under the incident, a sort of burying their heads in the sand. Like most people with this rise of populartist right-wing politics that seemed so similar in the lead up to the great wars. "I honestly don't know" he replied. He dropped kept his eyes on Johan and although he had a lot he wanted to add in, he couldn't get it out. "I'm just trying to work out", Johan picked up, "how does someone come to a point where having had to leave you home, having feared for the lives of your families, and I would guess having felt anger and even hate for the perpetrators, arrive at that point of compassion and empathy to be able to face those twisted against you, bigger than you and stand or in his case, sit meekly being insulted again, in front of them and calmly, calculatingly show in a way so as not to antagonise them, proof of error in their judgment in such a way as to create that miracle, I still can't get it through my head how Allan seemed to change", then as if a thought flitted through his brain, a grin came to his face, he looked up at the blue sky that was dotted with clouds now riding the currents of polluted air, "it almost makes me re-believe in a

higher power” and he looked back into the faces of Harralt and Caroline, they saw the glint of humour emanating from his now. As if a dark cloud that had been hanging since they’d arrived had lifted, Johan sat back, the seriousness left his face and he crossed his legs, a contented grin appeared. “Divine intervention or just an deeply thoughtful man, whichever way, there is hope....i think”. Caroline had sat back and was in thought at those words. Harralt smiled but felt it wasn’t natural, he searched for something to attach to that, to no avail.

Johan, half grinned, “You looked like you had a question to ask me” there was a pause before he finally added “I must ask, if asked, do you pose it to me as a member of the Catholic Church or just as a man?.....for I must warn you, I am leaving the Church”.

Both Harrald and Caroline sat up, they looked between each other and then back at Johan “That would explain the garb, sorry, your clothes”. Caroline was first to say, “Errr, should we say sorry, or....what?”. Johan smiled again, “I think I have had an experience that has moved me onto another plain of thought, doors to other questions have been opened and for that I feel a freedom to question, some old questions have been answered and I feel the walls, ie, the physical walls of the church have been removed, I can see the sunlight and hope shines from everywhere, I just don’t see why we restrict ourselves to one belief or another, we are free as individuals to explore and discuss, that was what I learned from Asha, to be able to see beyond the human restrictions of ur religions, see the true glory I guess”, he looked back at Harralt with a grin that was more human and less priestly than he’d felt in a long time, “ask away, I’ll do my best to answer”.

Harralts jaw had fallen open and only through Caroline showing him with a gesture, hand to mouth and closing it did he realise, and then he continued with “What else? Ohh yes, Mr. Holtzer: well what you have heard is correct. He is in prison now awaiting trial, charges of treason. I have to make a visit to him soon as well, a promise I made. He has remembered something I asked him and he wanted relief”.

Johan felt himself as the rock again, “Anything I can do, please ask”.

“Well, it's a matter of conscience really. I am wondering what I should do. I really didn't like the man and in a way I want him to suffer”. He stopped, regurgitating the question himself.

Johan pushed “Go on, your question: perhaps It will be my last bit of advice from the cloth”, he smiled his reverently smile again.

“Well, he is a man troubled by the question as to why and how he got caught. It seems to be causing him immense cerebral pain. I hold the key to this suffering and can alleviate it. I just don't know if he deserves it”.

“OK, first let me answer your question as I see it. Ikram had the same puzzle as you. Though he was a man who tried to effect the outcome he thought was his God’s place. That drove him mad, the weight of being god himself, he knew what was right but didn't have the courage to follow his heart, he left it up to other worldly powers. You are wondering, as a judge or a God if you like, what would be the right thing. But your answer is infinitely more simple than that. Would you prefer to see a man suffer or do something to take that suffering away? In my mind, if you create suffering or don't ease

some-one else's suffering, if it is in your power, at some point it will turn on you and you will suffer because of having let suffering continue. It is the ying and yang, the balance of all things. It is what love is about from what I see. Love creates love, suffering will in turn create suffering. Try and find a way to show love to this man. The simple act of relieving his suffering can only cause you to feel more love for yourself". He let this hang for a moment.

He looked at them both, "For me, it was a decision I guess I was wondering about before this whole incident. The conversations with Asha helped me make up my mind. I realised that day in the church, when I thought I was going to die, I had given my life to God, and there and then, I literally gave it to him. Somehow, perhaps it is just my way of looking at it, but I feel It was like he gave it back to me. That made up my mind. He wanted me to live my life.

I was praying in front of Ikram and said something like 'for the will of God', he said 'the will of Allah' and then followed that with 'but always the will of man'. I don't know what HE meant by that but I guessed we as men", he bowed and blushed slightly, "and women, are here to make our own lives, We choose how to live them. I always felt I liked the church because it was a way of giving help and advice, using my interpretations of the scripture, but that was the important part, My interpretations, the will of man: it is always through the will of man. Ikram, I guessed had been guided by his beliefs, and the men behind those with their interpretations. Look at the destruction that lead to. It always leads to....We make our decisions, and then we have to live with the results of them. That is what being human is about. I can live with the counsel I give, to those I know, personally. I do believe there is a God, or something, and I believe in the message of Jesus Christ as a way of treating others.....with love and compassion. But....importantly, he was a messenger, as were others, it is up to each individual to make what they can out of them.

But now it is so confusing, with technology, globalisation, finance and greed, people making rules for those whose ways of life that they have no idea about. It's all so confusing. I don't believe the church has the answers to those questions. I don't believe anyone does. For the moment I see them following, the term popularist is another for of lambs, and I hope not to slaughter or suicide as it almost seems some days, I just live with hope that we can learn to live in peace and share what we have. And learn to protect our planet, our home, I live in hope.....,"

He looked at the faces of Harrauld and Caroline; they had a serious look about them now. "Sorry, I guess I have a long way to go to be a normal man again. I am full of sermons and don't seem to be able to stop. What do I know though? You seemed full of joy when you arrived and now I've taken that away. Please forgive anything I said", He saw the blank lost looks coming from them both. "Asha had a way of making things clear. I seem only to cause confusion" he laughed. It was a pleasant gentle laugh.

He continued "What about you two? What are your plans? Forgive my intrusion but you look like you are a pair". It was now the turn of them both to blush.

Caroline was the first to react. With a big grin she looked at Harrauld. Johan picked up also a look of affection. Johan let out another laugh, "Funny" he added, "I am leaving the

church, a world of spirituality, for a world I guess to be more materially based, and you, if you don't mind me saying, are going the opposite way. I wish you both lots of luck”.

The end