

# ASK THE RIVER

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

ARV–Armed Response Vehicles  
Bod–Body  
Buck–Scally/someone engaged in criminal activities  
Buckess–Female equivalent of above  
Butcher’s–Rhyming slang–Butcher’s hook = Look.  
CBRN–Chemical,Biological,Radiological and Nuclear  
Civvies-Civilians/civilian clothes.  
CIA-Central Intelligence Agency  
CPS–Crown Prosecution Service  
CSI–Crime Scene Investigator  
Currywurst–sliced Bratwurst,tomato sauce,curry powder  
Do one–Leave  
DSU–Dedicated Surveillance Unit  
DWP–Department for Work and Pensions  
Fantasy Island–Police Headquarters  
FAP–Final Assault Position  
FLO–Family Liaison Officer – see Wikipedia  
Forty-seven three–PACE Act bail (to return to Police Station)  
GMP–Greater Manchester Police  
Gold Silver Bronze-Strategic Tactical+Operational Commanders  
Holy Corner- Lord, Church, Paradise Streets+Whitechapel  
ICRC-International Committee of the Red Cross  
IPCC–Independent Police Complaints Commission  
Jack–Liverpool Police term for a Detective  
Kneipe–German Pub  
Lancs County–Lancashire Constabulary

Mascați–Romanian Police special units.  
Maxim 9–Semi-auto pistol integrated suppressor  
MO–Modus Operandi (method of operating)  
NICHE–Electronic case file/case file management system  
Nightjack–Detective covering the Night shift  
OSS-Forerunner of the CIA  
Over the water–Wirral peninsular  
PACE–Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984  
Paddy’s wigwam-Liverpool’s R.C. Cathedral nickname  
Quadriga–statue on Brandenburg gate  
RSHA–Reichssicherheitshauptamt: Main Security Office  
SAS–(pron. Sass) St. Anne Street Police Station  
Scally–roguish,boisterous,disruptive,irresponsible person  
SD-Sicherheitsdienst-SS Security Service  
SFO-Specialist Firearms Officer  
SIS–Secret Intelligence Service. Official name of MI6.  
Sitrep–Situation Report  
TACAD–Tactical Advisor  
TAU–Tactical Aid Unit–SFOs-hostage rescue and raid  
TL–Team Leader

*Wanderer, your footsteps are the road, and nothing more.  
By walking, one makes the road and sees the path  
that will never be travelled again.*

Antonio Machado

## Prologue

### 2015

There were two things bothering him as he watched the telly, sat on the bed, sleeping bag unfurled beneath him in yet another hotel room. The programme about a bloke who'd had a stroke was one. There were closets in Nicks' head where dark matters were kept that should never see the light of day. Ordinarily, they'd no escape. But now all he could think was, '*what if I have a stroke?*' It would be like keeping the Devil in a paper cup and it frightened him.

He took his glasses off, rubbed his eyes then the back of his neck. Another headache. He cracked open the paracetamol blister pack and washed it down with the freebie mineral water. He'd get his eyes checked, when he got back from Germany. If it wasn't the specs? Well, then he'd ... he'd do something.

The other thing was Baddeley. The DCI had been on the news. It just served to remind him of how vulnerable he would be if their paths crossed, again. He'd hoped to be given longer before he was called back; a year wasn't long enough in his book.

In the end, it had been a needless risk. His new target's horoscope had said the day would end with a surprise and it did. His wife accidentally reversed into him, crushing him against a wall. He died the next day. Nicks got up, cleared the books from the bed, a quick wash and a clean T-shirt then he headed for the door. Fresh air ... and a pint. The Albert Dock.

# Chapter 1

Basking in the sunshine, Mickey Fenton sat in his immaculate garden and trimmed his fingernails, buffing them lightly with an emery board. A quick inspection and he picked up his cigar from the ashtray, a large crystal whisky tumbler beside him. A swish of the glass and a swig of single malt then smoke billowed skywards.

He wasn't an ostentatious man, hadn't bought into a move to the Wirral or Cheshire, wasn't into flashy TAG Heuer or Rolexes and there was no Roller on the drive. A local man, he liked having local neighbours. Anyway, the house prices in Sandfield Park kept the riff-raff away.

With a BMW and Mercedes sat on the drive of his six-bedroomed house in a much sought after area of Liverpool and a Blancpain Fifty Fathoms red gold watch on his wrist, he liked to keep it low key.

Ten minutes earlier, he'd kissed his wife on the cheek and waved her off to her mother's or maybe it was shopping, he didn't know, he hadn't been listening and frankly, he didn't care. He'd been lucky, managing to avoid all contact with his mother-in-law for the past two years, the only part of that particular relationship he looked forward to was the funeral.

He'd been married to Sharon for longer than he dared to remember and some might think they had an open marriage. They didn't; it was simply ajar.

Normally, he turned a blind eye; he was no saint himself, but he'd reached a turning point. Not only was Brannan shagging his wife but he was stealing his money as well. It was *too* much. He was

taking the piss and no one took the piss out of Mickey Fenton and got away with it. He needed to set an example.

He poured another whisky and put the lighter back in his trouser pocket, catching his finger as he did so. Inspecting it, he swore then picked up the emery board and began filing his nail. Yeah, he *had* to set an example.

The car loaded up with her shopping, she now relaxed with a large glass of chilled chardonnay on the terrace overlooking the Dock. A sip: golden apples and baked pear with just a hint of fig. She lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply; slowly and playfully blowing the smoke into the air. She hadn't been this happy, ever. She turned and smiled as she felt the hand on her shoulder.

“Hello, gorgeous.” John Brannan leaned down and kissed her gently and sensuously on the mouth.

She poured him a glass. They had things to talk about. She was going to be free of Mickey, soon. At last, her escape to a bright new future.

“Here's to us,” he said as he raised his drink and their glasses chinked together. Her eyes sparkled, her smile radiant and innocent. She was beautiful.



## Chapter 2

“What d’yer think?” Nicks gave him a sideways glance.

“Very nice. Tastes of curry,” Simon replied shovelling another forkful in his mouth.

He smiled. “Not the currywurst. The gate. What do you think of the gate?”

“A lot smaller than I thought it would be. Looks a bit like a Hollywood mock-up.” Simon leaned back on the bench next to the Brandenburger Tor U-Bahn station and wiped sauce from his jacket.

Nicks stood up and dumped his empty packaging in the bin. “It looks bigger from the other side. Come on, I’ll show you.”

They made their way through the crowds in Pariser Platz and under the Quadriga, emerging onto the large paved area opposite the Tiergarten.

Simon looked up. “Yep, you’re right it looks bigger.” He glanced around spotting the bicycle driven stall on the left-hand pavement next to an entrance to the park. “Hang on here, I’ll get us an ice cream. Vanilla?” Nicks nodded.

For several minutes, he stared up at the monument then turned to gaze down the wide avenue that disappeared into the western half of the city. He glanced over to see how Simon was doing at the stall. He was waving. In one hand he held his job’s smartphone whilst the other made frantic little circling motions in the air. Nicks lifted his phone from his inside pocket and pushed the search button. Suddenly his ears were filled with call signs talking.

“Lennéstrasse towards Kemperplatz.”

“Yes, yes. Call signs make the general area of the Tiergarten.”

The traffic was flowing; Nicks was stranded, he'd have to wait for the lights. He spread his arms out and shrugged then waved Simon into the park.

A German accent. "He is into Tiergarten, towards Bremer Weg from Kemperplatz. Still on phone."

More call signs: entering the park, plotting off at various exits. A vehicle stopped abruptly 150 metres to his right; a male and female spilled out and walked briskly through an entranceway. The car drove off. Two more brisk walkers directly ahead of him. He checked his tracker. The mark four version was alive with indicators showing the movement of the surveillance team. The traffic stopped, the lights changed.

"Elvis, Elvis." The call he should be ready to intercede. He was struggling to make up ground.

Deftly manipulating the balloons, the pavement twister wandered across to a family group. Behind him, his festooned bicycle swiftly disappeared into the Tiergarten as Nicks pedalled furiously away.

Simon was sitting on a bench. The man in the business suit gave him a hurried look before continuing towards the Brandenburg Gate.

"Janus five. He's stopped, central path towards Bremer Weg. Someone take the eyeball."

Simon quietly said, "Traveller, I have the eyeball."

The target stood ten metres away, having an animated phone discussion. Suddenly, he was moving again, past the bench. Simon readied himself to follow but had to check. He'd turned round and was coming back.

Heavily accented English. "This week. Do you hear me? This fucking week! If it doesn't happen you are fucked. You

understand?” He stopped, placed the phone in his jacket, lit a cigarette and began to walk slowly back towards Lennéstrasse.

Simon whispered urgently, “Elvis! Elvis! Where the fuck are you?”

The bicycle took him by surprise as it rushed past him, balloons flapping wildly in its wake. A rapid Klak!Klak!Klak! from the suppressed CZ 75 and the target slapped himself into compacted sand and grit to lay motionless, blood spilling from his head as smoke from the fallen cigarette curled around his feet.

Nicks thrust the weapon through the magnetic easy access slot of the small messenger bag slung from his neck and turned left at the joining of the paths, then left again.

Round a bend, he artfully avoided a startled elderly couple and raced across the intersection, giving a glance to the small crowd already gathering fifty metres away. He left them behind, instantly applying his mind to an opportunity to safely abandon the bike.

They were speaking to him, instructing him to go ‘*back* to the Brandenburger Tor’. It was against his better judgement and he was about to tell whoever it was where *they* could go when he looked down at the smartphone attached to the handlebars; he’d not paid it any attention before. Its map of the Tiergarten had multiple little markers flashing as they moved outwards from the centre in all directions. The balloon artist nodded almost imperceptibly as Nicks left the bike and walked past him.

The messenger bag in his left hand, he stood at the pedestrian crossing, eyes searching for a young woman in a polka dot dress.

A light touch on the small of his back. “Hello darling,” she said as he turned then, on her tiptoes, kissed him lightly on the cheek. “This

will be for me,” she whispered in his ear as she slid the bag from his hand. Beautiful and elegant, she walked away, glancing back to give him a smile and a wave.

Five minutes later, sirens still sounding in the distance, he'd made it back to Unter den Linden and the Schnell Imbiss, with its garden seats and tables. An uncapped bottle of Hefe-Weisse Dunkel beer in front of him, he drank from another and smoked a cigarette.

A hand on his shoulder and a gruff voice: “Polizei! Das Spiel ist aus!” (*Police! The game is up!*)

Heart pounding, Nicks looked up. “Fuck you Si! I thought you'd be coming from the Gate,” he said sullenly.

“Had to make a little detour. Is that mine?” He pointed at the beer, sat down and took a mouthful. “You nearly shat yourself,” he laughed. Nicks didn't answer.

## Chapter 3

DCI Baddeley sat back in his swivel chair, loosened his tie, undid the top button of his shirt and enjoyed the cool air blowing over him from his newly arrived fan. He closed his eyes. The papers held captive in the folder on his desk fluttered helplessly.

Detective Inspector Derek 'Degsy' Drayton tapped on the open door. "Boss? Sorry to disturb you."

He opened one eye. "Derek." He opened the other then sat forward. "It's Thurstan. Come on. It's been long enough now. Have a go."

"Sorry, Bo..." He fleetingly looked flustered. "Thurstan." He smiled. "I'll get there but you know how it is?"

"Well, it's only been a year. Keep up the good work." He smiled back. "So, what news do you bring?"

Degsy grabbed a seat. "Sammy's currently charging our man. The interview went nicely. He knows he's screwed. His brief does as well but I think they're holding out for full disclosure in case there's any straws they can cling to in the unused material. When they see it I'm fairly certain they'll go for the early guilty plea recognition. Nice fan by the way."

"Yes, it's the deluxe version. You should get yourself one."

Degsy brushed his trousers as he hid a smile. "I did. It's been in my office for a week."

Thurstan scowled. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"I thought you'd seen it."

"Do you know what, Derek? There are no privileges to rank anymore. I seem to be the last person to get anything. Didn't you

have to put in a written report to the stores' manager, what's his name, Neville?"

Degsy grinned. "Big Nev? No, I just phoned Denzil. He sorted it for me."

Thurstan shook his head, sadly. "I don't know why I bother sometimes, Derek. Next time, try sharing this sort of thing. I could have had that fan before anyone else if I'd known all I needed to do was make a bloody phone call." He levered himself out of his chair. "Fancy a cold drink from the canteen before I pop up to Southport to see Chalkie? I'm buying."

Degsy stood up. "That's good of you, Boss." He grimaced.

The DCI shook his head again. "Come on! We can practice in the lift."

A tap on the door. It was Sandy. "Just thought I'd tell you, Boss, there's a new guy on his way up."

"Well, he'll have to be quick, Sandeep, because I'm on my way out," he said slipping into his jacket, mobile in hand. He closed the door and headed for the exit.

Signed out, he turned and bumped into a smartly dressed individual, early thirties, full head of collar-length hair.

"Sorry, mate." The new guy brushed his locks from his face. "Do us a favour, have you seen the DCI?" he said.

"I see him every day," Thurstan replied straightening his tie.

"No, I mean, where is he?"

"You're talking to him."

The new guy blushed. "Oh! I'm sorry. You're not how you were described to me. You're not, err ... well ..."

“Black?” Thurstan interrupted. “No, well observed. I think you’re looking for DCI White. He’s out at Southport running the enquiries into the serial rapes we’ve had out there. *You*, however, will not be joining him just yet because you’re going to spend the next few days, at least, acclimatising yourself to how things are done. We don’t want any bad habits creeping in. Follow me. I’ll introduce you to the Office Manager, Arthur, ex DS, knows virtually everything there is to know about anything.” He paused. “What’s your name then?”

He looked startled, this hadn’t gone as smoothly as he’d intended. “Oh, didn’t I say? Sorry. It’s Mike. Mike Patterson.”

Thurstan smiled inwardly. It was always best to keep the new ones on their toes for a while, it kept them receptive.

“Arthur, this is Michael, the new DS on DCI White’s team. Show him the necessary and introduce him to DS Nolan who’ll cover the other stuff.” He turned to Patterson. “Well, I’ll leave you in Arthur’s capable hands, make sure you listen and you’ve just learnt the first lesson.”

Mike Patterson looked slightly bewildered, he thought he’d just learnt several.

Thurstan smiled. “Ask the right questions and you’ll get the right answers.” Turning to leave, he halted and beckoned the new DS to him then said quietly, indicating his hair, “Oh, and trim something off whatever it is you’ve got going at the front. People like to see the face of the person questioning them.” He smiled thinly and left.

Southport’s ornate Lord Street provided the bench where they ate their burgers and sipped coffee.

“Nothing for two months now, Thurstan. There’s a pattern there. Granted it’s disjointed but I still think it’s there. We’re just missing

something.” He shook his head. “He’s a local lad, or he’s been local at some point. He’s got too much knowledge of the area not to be.” Chalkie put his cup on the bench, between them, and took another bite of his lunch.

Thurstan looked at him. “Time for some localised DNA sampling? The house to house area, then reassess?”

Chalkie released a tired smile. “I’m leaving that as a last resort, if I can. It’s the logistics. Not something I look forward to but it’s a possibility.”

Thurstan got up, placed his food wrapper in the nearby bin, returned and took another mouthful of coffee then sat back. “Why not return to the original house to house information and make sure it’s been input into the system properly. I worked on a job some years ago, early days, where there’d been an error by one of the indexers. Going back to the original material sorted the issue. Total pain in the arse for those doing it *and* I took a lot of flak for suggesting it *but* it worked. Needs must, you know.”

Chalkie finished his drink. “I think I’ll have to.” He pointed at the container on the bench. “You want to finish my chips?”

“Yeah, go on, I’ll have a handful.”

Walking away from the bin Thurstan tapped Chalkie’s arm. “Just a thought. Before you revisit the house to house sheets have a good look through the office the control was using, behind all the drawers and cabinets. Won’t be the first time stuff has slipped down the back of something like that. Might save a bit of time, if you’re lucky.” He smiled.

“Thanks, I’ll give it a shot.” Chalkie paused. “Fancy walking up Neville Street to the top and back to the nick that way?”



“Yeah, why not. By the way, your new DS arrived today.”

“Mike Patterson? I’ve heard he’s a good bloke. Good work ethic, I believe. I left word for him to get his hair cut. He’s been on the surveillance unit, well, you can imagine.”

Thurstan laughed. “I just suggested he might want to give it another try. Anyway, Arthur and Sammy will be showing him the ropes so he’ll be with you in a couple of days or do you need him up here now?”

Chalkie grinned. “No, I’d rather have him fully functional. It’ll do him the world of good.”

Twenty minutes later they stood outside Southport Police Station, an interesting building, its glory days long gone.

“You coming up?” Chalkie asked.

Thurstan shook his head. “Nah. I’ve got to get back and do some urgent paperwork. The Super stuck his nose in and made promises I’m struggling to keep.”

Chalkie smiled broadly. “I’m glad I’m off his radar at the moment. I doubt it’ll last long. Anyway, thanks. I needed that chat. Just wanted an opinion I trust.”

Thurstan nodded his appreciation. “How’s the new house going by the way?”

“Fine. Everyone’s thrilled. I’m not too happy about the mortgage but ...”

“Well, that *was* an anniversary to remember. I did tell you to use a condom, if you recall?”

Chalkie laughed. “Passion and party blind our eyes, mate.”

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