

**THE ROAD TO EDEN
IS OVERGROWN**

Dan Wheatcroft

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NOTES

AWOL: Absent WithOut Leave

CCTV: Closed Circuit Television

COMMS: Communications

CROPS: Covert Rural Observation Posts

HUMINT: Human Intelligence

IPA: International Police Association

MIT: Major Investigation Team

OPPO: Colleague or friend

OSD: Operational Support Division

PNC: Police National Computer

PPU: Public Protection Unit

SFO: Specialist Firearms Officer

SK: Station Keeper

Holy Corner: junction in Liverpool's pedestrianised centre where Lord Street, Church Street, Paradise Street and Whitechapel all meet.

Matrix: Police unit specialising in overt/covert disruption of organised crime

Signalling stick: Wooden 'stick' approx 3ft (90cm) with flat metal tip. Traditionally used in many City Forces, pre-use of radios, to tap on pavement signalling to the 'Beat Officers' that their Supervisor required to meet them at the source of the tapping.

The Met: Metropolitan Police

West Mids: West Midlands Police

*Knowledge is sorrow, they who know the most
must mourn the deepest over the fatal truth*

Acknowledgement: Lord Byron

CHAPTER 1

Nicks took several mouthfuls of his Dreher beer, sat back and surveyed the bar. He liked this place, always had. A hint of 'student' reminded him of Keith's, on Lark Lane in his hometown of Liverpool.

Tonight it was not as vibrant as usual. A young couple sat at a small table on the far side, an old guy sat watching the TV and a group of four played pool in the back room.

The large, shaven-headed, middle-aged man had been looking at him intently. Foreign Legion, Nicks speculated. Never one to back out of a 'situation', he engaged him with eye contact and nodded. The barman nodded back and raised an empty glass. Nicks nodded again and downed his remaining beer.

He lit a cigarette and promised himself he would give up smoking soon then put the earphones to his iPod back in his ears. There was no music, just a vestige of the isolation he needed.

Placing a Dreher on the table, the 'Legionnaire' accepted payment with a hint of a smile. Nicks gulped the beer down, sucked heavily on the cigarette, rested his head wearily against the wall and closed his eyes.

He was remembering the letter she'd written, hidden amongst her things for him to find; when the time was right. Imprinted in his memory, each word bore the soft inflections of her voice, each sentence softly crushing his heart. The tears, almost imperceptibly,

filtered through his eyelashes, gathering together as if unsure where to go next.

He sat up with a start to the pain of the burning cigarette and self consciously eyed the room for any reaction. There was none. He was invisible to all but the barman who stood before him; another beer on the table. Nicks removed an earpiece and stared up at him. “You look as if you could do with this,” the Legionnaire said in Hungarian “It’s on me.”

The following day, he left the hotel, walking along Eötvös Utca to the Oktogon. The sun was shining and, with undertones of Paris, Budapest felt welcoming.

Usually, he’d spend time in Berlin, harvesting cash from the ATMs, but this time he *needed* to get home. He couldn’t linger in admiration; one more call to make and a train to catch.

He took the Metro to Batthyany tér station and walked across to the nearby man in the wall. It should be enough; anyone tracking the use of his bank cards would think he lived in the Buda part of the city or was on his way to Déli pályaudvar, the Budapest railway terminal serving the west of the country. Job done, he re-crossed the river.

As he entered Keleti station through the grand portico, he checked the departures board then bought a kávé from a small shop close to the entrance; walking with it to the side exit. He liked this coffee. It was strong, that’s why you didn’t get much of it. With two sugars it tasted near perfect. At the benches, he dropped the rucksack whilst he had a smoke and finished his drink.

He clicked a playlist and sat down to watch Budapest life trundle by. Ingrid Michaelson sang ‘Soldier’. It was the song he’d played the very first time he’d made this trip. He smiled.

She was waiting for him as he stepped down onto the platform. With barely time to drop his rucksack, she flung herself upon him, showering him with kisses.

“Thank you for coming back to me.”

Every time, she thanked him, as if his returning home was a gift she never took for granted. Her eyes filled with tears that trickled down her cheeks as he hugged her as hard as he dared.

Anca was 36 years old, fluent in six languages and a sought after literary translator, so why she had chosen him, a man 20 years her senior, was beyond Nicks. Perhaps she’d chosen him because they were both broken, sharing a common bond of sadness; the feeling of needing to be saved from themselves.

They walked to the station’s small café where she bought them coffee. It was a little ritual of theirs. She always said it was like meeting each other for the first time over and over again. On the bench outside, Anca told him everything that had happened whilst he’d been away: the new neighbours, her progress translating yet another novel and the flowers she was planning to plant in the window boxes of the tiny flat they called home. And it *was* home. Anca and this quirky Romanian town. His refuge.

He of course told her the same story every time; visits to his parents, places he’d seen. She would listen attentively, nodding and smiling now and then. She neither wanted nor needed him to tell her more.

She'd never asked him what he did when he went away. It wasn't because she was foolish, or stupid, far from it, but simply because she loved him. He was her love, her best friend, her peace of mind. The rest was of no consequence.

CHAPTER 2

3rd February 2014

Derek Drayton returned to the MIT office in Police Headquarters with a cheese roll from the canteen.

“He’s here, in his office,” one of the staff said.

Derek nodded and went to his desk, placed the cheese roll in his top drawer and removed two sheets of A4 from the top of his in-tray.

The door was open, but he knocked anyway. “Good morning, Sir, Derek Drayton, Detective Sergeant. You probably don’t remember me.”

Thurstan Baddeley, his new DCI, looked up from the paperwork on his desk and smiled. “Derek. I remember you. Admiral Street, wasn’t it? I know I was a DS. Always thought you were a very promising trainee detective and I see I wasn’t wrong.” He got up and shook Derek’s hand.

“That’s right, Sir. Admiral Street. Happy days,” Derek replied. “Do you prefer we call you Sir or Boss?”

“I prefer Boss, Derek, but when the Chief and his mates are around it’ll need to be Sir,” Thurstan replied. “You know what they’re like,” he added.

“No problem, Boss,” Derek said, “I’ve got you a list of the personnel on the team. This one’s the team we actually have now, and this one’s a list of those who would normally be here if they hadn’t been drafted to the other syndicate working on the serial killings out in

St.Helens.” He handed his Detective Chief Inspector the two sheets of A4.

Thurstan perused them as Derek continued: “I’ve included their nicknames, Boss, because you’re going to hear them used around the office and I thought it would save any confusion.”

“Very sensible,” Thurstan murmured still reading the lists.

“It may help if I point them out to you. The only one not here at the moment is Chalkie White, he’s your DI. He’ll be in at twelve, had some family stuff to sort out.”

He walked across to a large window that looked out onto the main office. Thurstan followed him.

“Right. It’ll be easier if I do it in the same order as on the list if possible.”

Thurstan handed him the sheet of A4.

Derek looked at it briefly, then pointed to an individual sat at the desk nearest the DCI’s office, his sleeves rolled up exposing two hairy forearms. “This chap we call Chewbacca, or just Chewy. As in the Wookie from Star Wars. The very thin guy over there at the back is the Strolling Bone, but we only call him that when he’s out of earshot. Otherwise, it’s just Bob.

“The one eating the sandwich is Gandolph a.k.a The Wizard. He’s very good at finding evidence and intel the rest of us can’t seem to find, hence the name and the girls in the far office are Lizzie and Spud. Lizzie’s the black girl and she’s your other DS. She’s also called Lizzie the Bizzie, a nickname she picked up from the ‘bucks’ at Admiral Street.”

Bucks was a local name for people who provided the Police with most of their work. They in turn referred to the Police as ‘The Bizzies’.

“Her real name’s Elizabeth, but she doesn’t like it and Betty’s not a name she responds well to either. We only use them when we want to ‘wind’ her up and then only from a safe distance.”

“The other girl’s DC Murphy I take it?” Thurstan offered.

“That’s right and the guy sat on the desk is Mark Sandon, a.k.a. Sando, or as we’re currently calling him, Glando the Strolling Erection. Let’s just say he’s *very* fond of the ladies.”

“I see. Why not have done with it and just call him Shagger?” ventured Thurstan.

“Already taken by someone on the other team, Boss” Derek replied matter of factly.

“Morning, Sir, *and* you, Sarge!” chirped a happy looking chap as he passed by carrying a pile of papers.

“That’s Soapy,” Derek said, then added, “Don’t ask, Boss.”

Thurstan frowned in thought then chuckled. “I suspect I know where you’re going with that one. Are the girls aware?”

“Possibly not, but it’s not something I feel the need to clarify, Boss,” he grinned back before pointing once more. “That guy, on the far desk to the right, is Sparky, used to be an electrician. If you ever need something doing, he does a great job at *very* decent rates. On his left is Polo, after the ‘mint with a hole’. Give it a couple of days and you’ll get that one.” Thurstan nodded.

“Then there’s the group over by the water cooler. Left to right: Fast Eddie, very meticulous but if you’re in a rush give it to someone else.

Fred, the bald guy, weightlifter, looks like the singer from the group Right Said Fred. The chap next to him we just call Arthur.”

“Why Arthur?” Thurstan asked.

“It’s his name, Boss,” smiled Derek.

Thurstan raised his eyebrows in a gesture of surrender. “Ah, well, fair enough. How old is he? He looks about seventy-five?”

“I know,” Derek laughed, “but he’s a good ten years younger. Ex DS, retired now and the Office Manager. I’d suggest, if we get a job whilst the other enquiry is still at full speed, we use him as the House to House enquiries co-ordinator, running the control, especially if the local uniformed sergeants haven’t done it before. We won’t be able to use Matrix Disruption because they’re tasked to the other enquiry. Anyway, Arthur’s very good and a stickler for detail. Next to him is Taff, Welshman, unpronounceable first name. There’s some dispute as to whether even he’s pronouncing it properly.”

He pointed to the two officers who had just walked out. “The black lad is Devon – as you might have noticed, another weightlifter. He and Fred like to take the same lunch breaks so they can train together. The other guy is Ikky. Iqbal Hameed.” He looked around the main office and then said, “Ahh! And over there – the Indian lad is Sandy. Short for Sandeep. The other one is the newest and youngest on the team, the Foetus.” He didn’t add anything further, preferring to wait for the response.

“Good grief!” Thurstan exclaimed. “How long have we been employing twelve-year-olds?”

“I know,” he laughed again. “No point sending him up to the bar to get a round in if we go for drinks, he keeps getting refused. Well, that’s it, Boss. They’re a good bunch. All very keen, and they know their stuff.”

“Well, thank you for that invaluable information,” Thurstan replied with a smile, then added in a more businesslike tone of voice: “Right, Derek. Can you get the team together, including those that’ve just left the office?”

“Yes, Boss. Not a problem. They’ll only have gone to the canteen for an iced bun or a sandwich. No one’s due out anywhere today. We’re putting the finishing touches this week to the last job. I’ll ring the canteen.” He looked at his watch. “Shall we say... 15 minutes?”

“Fine,” Thurstan replied as he returned to his desk. He hadn’t needed to ask his DS what his nickname was. Coming from Liverpool, he already knew Derek would be called ‘Degsy’.

CHAPTER 3

3rd March 2014

He was sitting outside Costa's at the corner of Old Hall Street and Tithebarn. Chewing the last of his almond slice, he sipped the remains of his caramel Latte and tapped his foot in rhythm to the music in his earphones.

The surveillance team interrupted: "Subject approaching Fazakerley Street. Fifty metres."

He stood up; with the strap over his left shoulder the messenger bag lay on his right hip. Across the pavement into Old Hall, he walked casually away from the city then stopped outside a sandwich bar, took out his spare phone and pretended to make a call as he took in the surroundings.

Within seconds he'd identified his target: White male, 40s, muscular build, shaven head, casual sports jacket, merino jumper, jeans and shades. He named him 'Sunglasses'.

"Subject crossing Old Hall ...entering Fazakerley Street ... now."

A voice: "Yes, yes."

It was narrow, one car's width, a thin footpath on either side. A hundred metres long, it connected Rumford Place to Old Hall carrying one-way traffic towards the latter. Stepping into it he said quietly: "Elvis has entered the building," and activated the CCTV disruption device he carried in his pocket. Sunglasses was ahead of him. Nobody else was in sight. It was all down to him now. The voice: "Yes, yes."

He took out the smartphone, clicked music, playlist, then ‘Fly With Vampires’ *play all* and put it back in his pocket. Immediately the opening chords of ‘Puppet Master’ resounded through his head.

With twenty metres between them, he knew Sunglasses was heading for his car in the little side street at the far end, to his right. He knew exactly how it was parked. He’d seen it earlier. The cul-de-sac had once been bounded on three sides by buildings, but the left and far-end boundaries had long been demolished. The BMW sat about fifty feet from the junction.

Sunglasses was in a happy place. His recent meeting had gone well. The problem of his ex-mistress would soon be resolved, permanently, leaving him to concentrate fully on his current business interests and plans for early retirement. He looked back and saw only a businessman talking on his phone. That reminded him, he needed to speak to Tommy, his main enforcer and close friend. They needed to sort out that weasel Kehoe before he caused them any further problems. Then *he* needed to sort out Tommy. He was getting too cocky, assuming too many things. Sunglasses felt uneasy. He felt possible change in the air. He took out his mobile and turned the corner.

Quickening his pace as Sunglasses disappeared, he narrowed the gap between them back to fifteen metres. It gave him accuracy yet distanced him from the result and provided an adequate space between him and the target in which to react. He crossed over to the left-hand pavement opening up his view. Sunglasses was walking towards the

driver's side of the car, keys in his right hand, phone to his left ear. The vehicle's indicators flashed.

He registered both the scene *and* his peripheral vision. No immediate threats; three workmen off to his left across the wasteland and adjoining road, one stood in a hole, the other two standing idly by. A white van drew up alongside them, obscuring him from view.

Briskly now, he crossed back over the narrow roadway, stuffed the phone into his trouser pocket and took the suppressed Sig 226 from the messenger bag. Taking two paces from the junction into the cul-de-sac, hidden from anyone looking up the 'alley' from Old Hall Street, he brought the weapon up in a weaver stance, paused momentarily then gently squeezed the trigger.

Tommy wasn't picking up. Sunglasses placed his hand on the car door handle glancing back along the street at the businessman who was pointing at him. No. He *wasn't* pointing. It was the last thought he had. His phone bounced off the cobblestoned roadway and into the gutter.

Walking unhurriedly towards the city centre, the weapon replaced in the messenger bag, left hand to his lapel, he whispered: "Elvis is leaving the building." He didn't look back. The white van drove past him, heading in the same direction.

On the opposite pavement, he dropped the messenger bag into a street cleaner's cart and continued without pause or acknowledgement. Turning right at the junction, he passed the 'Pig and Whistle' pub and walked calmly into a side street, softly announcing: "Elvis has left the building."

Thirty metres later, he stopped and selected another playlist, nonchalantly checking the street behind him before continuing.

The street cleaner closed the lid to his cart and trundled it off. Occasionally stopping to brush something up, he reached a quiet side street less than half a mile away. Within 30 seconds, both he and the cart had been loaded into the rear of a white van and driven away.

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