TEMPORTER

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Dedicated to
Junior Inventors of all ages

Never be afraid to fail.
We learn more if we allow ourselves to make mistakes.

Chapters

Part 1

How it started

Chapter 1

Where am I?

Beep!

Beep!

Beep

What is that noise? Some kind of monitor?
And what's that smell? Cleaning, antiseptic? It reminds me of something.
Why am I thinking of a maternity clinic?
Where am I?

A flickering bright fluorescent light.
I feel dizzy. My head hurts.
I try to move my hand to touch it but it feels too heavy to move.
I think I have a cannula; I'm attached to a drip.
My left arm is strapped up and in a plaster cast.

"Hello," I try to croak but my mouth's too dry to make much noise.

A curtain opens and a fuzzy black shape gets nearer, slowly forming an image of a person. She wears a normal nurse's uniform in the navy blue tunic top and trousers that I know, from somewhere, means she has a more senior rank and with a dark red trim which I think also denotes something. The young nurse seems very familiar, short and slim with an olive skin and black hair. Her face has typical East Asian features, with a cute button nose, and a lovely smile above a slightly pointed chin. I think she looks like she's in her young twenties but I expect she's a bit older than that.
"East Asian peoples always look young to a Westerner's eye," I hear someone saying in my head.

“You’re awake?”
“Thirsty,” I croak. She disappears to get some water, leaving the curtains ajar enabling me to see this is indeed a hospital. The corridor lined with a wide rail to prevent trolleys banging against the wall and coloured over-head indicator lights seem somehow familiar.
Moving my head slightly I can sense the bedside cupboard unit, the overbed table and chair beside the bed. I cannot see the other patients as the curtains block my view but I hear snoring and various beeps apart from those emitting from the monitoring equipment I’m attached to.
The corridor I can see through the open doors passes a nurses’ station. Standing beside the door is a policeman.
As the nurse reappears a few moments later with a plastic beaker and a straw, he follows her.
He is wearing the typical dark blue shirt and from the chevrons on his epaulettes, I assume he’s a sergeant.

“Hello. My name is Tala. Do you know where you are?” the nurse asks.
“I’m guessing in hospital?” I reply.
“You’re in St. Mary’s Hospital. You’ve had an accident.”
Glancing at a tablet she holds, she adds, “You were admitted last Tuesday.”

A sudden image floats through my mind of a similar tablet with a cracked screen and covered with blood.

“Can you tell me your name and date of birth?”
Try as I might, although the question sounds as if it should make sense, I have no idea.

The policeman steps forwards. He is a big man but built from muscle rather than fat.
“I believe you may be Mr Woods?”
I have no idea if that is right. He is starting to ask more but I cannot concentrate.

The nurse, Tala? Gives the him a stare.
“Enough for now,” said the nurse, “My patient needs some rest.”
Turning to me she adds, “We suspect you may have retrograde amnesia as a result of concussion. Hopefully it’s only temporary, but you need rest. Do you want any painkillers.”
Although there is a throbbing behind my eyes, I assure her I’m okay.
“If you change your mind, press this button,” she demonstrates. A robotic drugs trolley magically rolls in.
Something about that drugs robot seems to trigger some sort of alarm reaction making me recoil a bit.

Tala ushers the policeman out. “Look Sergeant Deacon, he’s in no shape to answer your questions. You didn’t tell me you knew who he was.”
“In his jacket, I found what appears to be the remains of a business card, though it’s pretty worn and faded, but I haven’t yet found out any more.”

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I want to know more but any movements cause pain. I lie back and close my eyes again but sleep doesn’t come immediately, there are too many questions.
“Apparently my name is Mr. Woods, this is St. Mary’s Hospital and I was involved in an accident.”

As I doze off, there’s something nagging at me about that antiseptic smell, the nurse, her tablet and that robot drugs trolley. As I sleep I have a nightmare involving a large electronic tablet that breaks in half with a bright flash of light and blood pours from it.

Chapter 2
The investigation

“You need some rest, Matt!” constable Johns arriving to cover the night shift, told her sergeant. “Any news, yet?”
“Well, he woke briefly and I asked him if his name was Douglas Woods but the nurse says she thinks he has amnesia.”

Sergeant Matt Deacon had served the force for nearly 30 years. He was a dedicated “copper” and although tempted on many occasions, had no real desire to make inspector as he enjoyed his job and the higher rank would probably mean him leaving this station and those he considered his “parishioners” with whom he would stop to chat whenever possible. Keeping himself fit, he was a well built man seen by most as a gentle giant who had gained the respect of the youngsters that congregated around the recreation ground most evenings and quickly stubbed out their joints before Matt noticed: except of course, he did know exactly what was going on and would have preferred to administer a clip round the ear, if it was permitted, than engage in paperwork, so he was more inclined to turn a blind eye but kept a lookout for the ringleaders.
He had seen some changes in his time. Originally a sleepy agricultural community, most changes had come about due to the proximity of the naval dockyard at Portsmouth and Southampton docks. More recently the small industrial estate to the north of the town had seen the development of new housing and an increase in population and concomitant crime, though mainly petty misdemeanours like vandalism and drunkenness. This was the first time he’d had to deal with anything as major as a possible murder. He was getting a kick out of the publicity but knew it wouldn’t be long before an inspector from Fareham was assigned to the case.

Far from objecting to Laura Johns's informality, Matt liked people to call him by his first name except in those situations which demanded greater formality.
He considered Laura a good kid whose tireless determination would hopefully outrank him in time. Matt thought of her like the daughter he'd never had and wanted to give her as much encouragement as possible.

He wouldn't admit he was tired but Laura was right. However, with this bee buzzing in his bonnet, he returned to the station. "Douglas Woods Robotics" is what the card had said.
At eight o'clock, it was quiet. Little happened in this area and although an apparent murder had stirred up the local press for a couple of days, everything had died down for now.

Matt Deacon logged into his computer. "Douglas Woods" he typed into the database. Again with no result. 'You don't need to be Einstein to know doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results is the definition of insanity,' he thought. He didn't bother rechecking Companies House, there was no robotics nor electronics company registered with that name.
In frustration he turned to Google.
"Douglas" gave all sorts of results. Including the capital of the Isle of Man. There were a few towns called Douglas in Scotland and a village near Bristol. There were some Douglas Fir woods in Scotland. Would any of them provide a clue? he pondered wondering whether he could take a weekend trip.
He checked them out on Google maps but none had any signs of industry other than logging.
The Bristol village also bordered a small wooded area but there was nothing there apart from a few cottages, a church, an Inn and a primary school. It wasn't exactly Scotland but perhaps it was worth a visit though for now he ought to go home.

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The next day was Sunday. He called Laura. Having handed her supervisory duty over to the another constable, she had expected a day's rest. "WPC Johns," he said, "how do you fancy a day out?"
"You're very formal this morning sir. Is there something on?"
He explained he had a bit of a hunch about Douglas Woods near Bristol and would like her company if she was up to it. "It's not a date," he added, a little unnecessarily.

Half an hour later, he drove up in an ordinary saloon, rather than a police car, though he was wearing his uniform. WPC Laura Johns was in a plain pale blue trouser suit that complemented her red hair and green eyes.
"Should I be in uniform, too?" she inquired. Sargent Matt Deacon assured her it wasn't necessary and they set off for the west country.

On the way, Matt told Laura about his hunch that Douglas Woods may not be the name of the possible suspect under police guard in hospital but of a location. However he could find no connection with robotics.
He decided to take the old A4 road through Marlborough and Chippenham rather than the motorway. It was a beautiful sunny day in early May. There was no need to rush and this route brought out fond memories of his father taking him with his mother and his brother to Wales when they were children.
Although much had changed, he was glad to see the old familiar landmarks including Silbury Hill on their right that had always fascinated him.
"Did you know that's the largest artificial prehistoric mound in Europe?" he said. "Probably about four and a half thousand years old."
"So what's it for? Is it a burial mound?"
"Well, that's the thing. No-one really knows. It's not a burial mound; there are some barrows not far from here and there's also Avebury henge just up the road."

“Oh yes, I remember those ‘New Agers’ talking about henges. They used to believe they were situated on ‘Ley Lines’ that they described as energy pathways: a bit like an olden times National Power Grid?”
“Although, of course, much of their mumbo jumbo is just fanciful conjecture, there may well be some knowledge our prehistoric ancestors possessed that we no longer understand,” replied Matt.
“And in a couple of minutes, keep your eyes peeled on your left for a white horse. Not a real one of course but a chalk horse, though it’s not prehistoric: only about two hundred and fifty years old.”

They decided to stop for a drink at Calne. “I must have had breakfast too early,” Matt apologised. He found a little shop by the square where he purchased a Cornish Pasty and a ginger beer but Laura was happy with just a diet coke.
“This place was famous for it’s cured meats,” volunteered Matt, “I remember seeing the Harris bacon factory from the road when my father used to take us to Wales.”
Leaving the car, they walked to find an idyllic spot by the canal.

Although it was early May, the sun was warm and there were a few picnickers by the water and a couple of paddle boarders on the Kennet and Avon. It seemed an idyllic spot for R & R but,
“Onward and upward,” nagged Laura. “This is nice but we have work to do.”

An hour later they arrived at Douglas.

It only took a few minutes to drive around the area. There were the woods, next door to Douglas Woods Junior School, the church and the pub by the village green as if nothing had changed in a hundred years. There was no sign of any industry let alone electronics or robotics.

In this sleepy village the pub was quiet but managed to provide a ploughman's lunch for a hungry Matt, despite his pasty earlier, whilst Laura settled for scampi in a basket. She wondered where he put it all.

"Have you ever heard anything about an electronics company by the name of Douglas Woods Robotics?" Matt asked the landlord.
"There's no electronics firms around here and no places of work. Locals are usually either retired or commute to Bristol. Though some work from home nowadays. But I've never heard of anyone local doing any robotics. The only thing called Douglas Woods, apart from the copse, is just the junior school," he replied. "Although I do remember seeing the school on the news for some sort of engineering project the kiddies were doing about the time I arrived here."
"How long ago was that?"
"I've been here over 10 years now," he said.
When Matt enquired if there was anyone who could tell him more, he suggested Mrs Smith. "She's been cook at the school for ever," he said and directed him to one of the old cottages near the school.

Mrs Smith was a cheery, grey haired woman for whom the adjective buxom was invented. An archetypal mother figure who welcomed them in and hustled around making tea.
"Call me Edie, short for Edith," she said.
"My granddaughter, Frances, was a pupil in the school back in Mrs Willis's day. She was such a lovely headteacher, not like that Mr Welsh we have now. He is much stricter, mind, and everyone knows where they stand with him, but he doesn't get along with everyone." She paused long enough to ask if the two wanted milk or sugar and poured as she continued,
"Then there was that lovely Mr Miller, Jane Willis's deputy who left just a year after Mr Welsh's appointment. Frances had been in his class and went on to the secondary school at the same time as Mr Miller left. She's at Imperial now studying electronic and mechanical engineering."

She would have rambled on all day but Laura interrupted.
“Do you know anything about Douglas Woods Robotics?”
“Oh Yes. It was the big story at the time. The BBC sent a film crew. Mr Miller had had the children making models of bridges. The television people coined the term when they saw the opening bridges they’d made. They were so inventive. It’s what inspired Frances to go on to doing the course she’s on. She’s really creative and loving her time there. She’s taken a particular interest recently in bio something-or-other using her talents to do with medical machines.”
“Can you tell us more about the school projects, though,” prompted Laura.
“I think I’ve still got a copy of the local rag somewhere” and disappeared for a few minutes.
“What a lovely woman,” remarked Matt. “Don’t rush her. I think she’s enjoying having someone to talk to.”

When she returned she brandished a yellowed newspaper cutting. “That’s my granddaughter there.” She pointed proudly to a photo of a group of children, their teacher and some models of bridges.
“And that’s her friend Saanvi. They’ve stayed together through school and are both on the same engineering course and sharing a flat in Bayswater. They can walk to lectures through Hyde Park or take the tube if it’s raining. It’s a lovely spot. The flat’s expensive but Saanvi’s dad helps them with the rent. I don’t know what he does but he’s interested in electricals and isn’t short of a bob or two. Some say he’s something to do with the government.”
“And is that Mr Miller?” asked Matt.
“Yes,” Mrs Smith affirmed. “Michael Miller or Mike. The kids called him Dusty Miller behind his back; Mr Miller knew but didn’t mind.”

“Can we take this?” Matt asked about the paper. Edith agreed but said she would like it back so Laura took out her phone and took a couple of photographs of the article instead.

“You couldn’t give us Laura’s number by any chance, just in case we need to talk to her?”
Having convinced her her granddaughter wasn’t in any trouble, she copied it to Matt’s phone.

A few minutes later, sitting back in Matt’s car, they were looking at the story of the Douglas Woods Robotics club for junior inventors and a photo of the children. Laura had copied the pictures to Matt’s phone too.

ENGINEERS OF TOMORROW

The children of Douglas Woods primary school show off their talents to the world.
BBC television’s Points West programme on Wednesday evening looked at the amazing work of children in class 6M. As part of a science project, the children were challenged to make realistic models of the bridges they chose. We were treated to images of their models of the old Severn Bridge and Newport’s Transporter Bridge along with models of the Forth Rail Bridge and Tower Bridge.
Their teacher, Mr Michael Miller, told us more.
“If you ask children to make a bridge,” he told us, “they will just place a ruler over a gap between two books but I wanted them to “feel” the forces involved and make their models more realistic by only using materials that were to scale.
“The children divided into four groups, each choosing a different bridge. Out of 10cm squares of paper, drinking straws, paper clips and cotton they were tasked to make their bridges as authentic as possible to scan one metre in length.”
The children were so caught up in the project most of them volunteered to stay on after school in Mr Miller’s Junior Inventors’ club to continue making them.

> The groups modelling Tower Bridge and the Transporter Bridge added motors and remote control which led to Alison Rogers of Points West calling them the “Douglas Woods Robotics” group.

And there was a photo of a class of children with Mr Miller centre flanked on either side by Saanvi Patel and Frances Smith, team leaders of Transporter and Tower Bridge teams respectfully.

Could that man with them be their possible killer? The article named him as Mr Michael Miller.

“Hopefully this will stir some memories in our murderer?” said Matt.
“*Possible* murderer,” corrected Laura as they headed homewards.

The next day Laura phoned the school but didn’t really learn much more. Mr Welsh, the headmaster, confirmed that Michael Miller had taught there until shortly after he was appointed head. “I must admit, we never got on very well and I was pleased when he offered his resignation. The children liked him well enough and his classes always did well in the SATs.”

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Matt let Laura take the lead in confronting the patient. She had phoned him to tell him of her conversation with the headteacher and Matt had felt a surge of pride in the way his protege was getting to grips with her first real case.

She had relieved the PC on duty at the hospital who had told her there was nothing new to report.

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