

Jason was just sitting comfortably in their swing deck chair, he had a large tumbler of beer clasped in his hand. Then he heard the door bell ring.

'Deb can you get that please. I've just sat down this minute.'

A few minutes later Debra his wife came out onto the garden balcony. She peered down at him. 'Its your cousin complete with haversack and bicycle.'

'What cousin?'

"I left him at the door, so give me the beer and pop it on the table here and go see your cousin.'

Now Jason came from a large family with a horrendous number of Aunts and Uncles so he lurched up from the swing seat and went to the front door.

'I'm your cousin Rick.' said the stranger, now inside with his bike leaning against the hall wall. 'Rick Welby.'

'But I don't have a cousin by that name you must have the wrong house.'

"Your names Dentine, Jason Dentine, my mother was a Susan Dentine married a Welby from down south.'

Jason thought for a minute and then invited Rick onto the back balcony.

'I only want to stay a couple of days as I've job interview in town to go to and I asked Mom if she had any relatives up here in the big smoke, and she mentioned you.'

by this time Jason was scratching his head, yes he had an Aunt Sue but there was never any mention of her moving south, so he turned round to this long lost cousin who was slurping into his beer glass.

'Great beer this you must have been expecting me guess Mom must have rung ahead.'

'Well you can stay a couple of days I'll get Deb my wife to prepare the spare bedroom.'

Rick looked around him. 'Nice place you have here, Mom said she came from a large family, I guess you are one of Uncle Richards tribe?'

Jason nodded. But his mind was still racing mainly about Aunt Sue moving south, wonder if David his brother, the family archivist knew this?

And so after three weeks and no sign of movement, a cooling off from near found relatives by Jason and Deb occurred, and it all started on the shopping expedition. Rick had invited himself along to help carry the packages, and just as Jason and Deb entered the supermarket Rick disappeared. After shopping they both wheeled the trolley over to the car but still no sign of Rick. They waited inside the car for an hour and eventually he turned up, glowing as ever as he had found a long lost friend in a store not far away.

That night Jason closed the door of his study and rang David. 'Dave do you have any record of a cousin called Rick one of Aunt Susan's children, by the way she moved down south and got married. '

'Really Jas! That's strange as she lives close to us in the same nursing home as Mum and to my knowledge she's never been married. What name does this long lost cousin

go under?'

'Rick Welby.'

'Wait on, I will go onto my listing and check it out, we do have a large family and I think there's a couple of W's in the south.' A few minutes went by, 'Jas we have a Wecome and a Wallis down there but no Welby. Just give me a few minutes you have to ring off and let me check an old mate of ours, do you remember our Dad's best man Uncle Syd?

'Yep deputy Mayor now I believe.' Jason rang off and went out to get a cup of coffee, Rick had helped himself to another beer and was lounging outside with a bag of crisps on the swing seat.

'Dinner will be ready soon Rick,' Jason called as he poured the coffee.

'By the by Jason that friend of mine I met in the shopping centre today wants me to go and stay with him for a week if that's all right. Off tomorrow OK?'

'Yes sure', said Jason but just then the telephone rang so he zoomed into his study to take it.

'Dave here Jas, I think you might have cookoo living with you so Syd has arranged a police visit first thing in the morning.'

'A what?', but Dave had gone.

Next morning as Rick was strapping up his haversack onto his bike Jason opened the door to allow him to wheel it out.

'Bye.' called Deb from the kitchen.

'See you in a week Jason thanks for the stay, don't change the bed sheets be back in a wink.'

'Oh I don't think so Mr. Deverell you'll be coming with us now.' And the two policemen guided Rick down the path and lifted his bike into the van, he was then handcuffed and led to the waiting car. One then returned to an amazed Jason and Deb at the open door.

'You and your brother are in for a tidy sum as reward, we've been chasing this conman all over the county, Good day to you both.'

-----

There lay beyond the fence line, a forest so thick even a person on hands and knees would have a struggle through the briar and fern undergrowth. But what made people hesitant were the low slung branches with spikes on every limb ready to peel back the skin of any who would trespass. It was late autumn or Fall as it was known hereabouts and the trees were in a bright reflective mode with every colour from red to bright purple bronze flashing in the swirling wind. They had predicted heavy winds for the area some days before and indeed they had come with a vengeance followed by heavy squalls of rain and cracking thunder besides. I suppose it was inevitable that a lightning strike would occur but only after the rain had eased considerably and the blasts of wind had once again dried the vegetation. The strike hit 'Old man Tatter tree' one of the highest in the forest and it blazed like a torch clearing out the undergrowth and neighbouring trees around. You could here the roar of the tree tops as they caught and the wind acting as a blow torch to the surrounding forest. There was a sentry post high up on 'Highwayman's hill' and they responded with the siren call which bought volunteers and police running to the Shire Brigade doors.

It was deemed dangerous to venture close to the heart of the fire so a helicopter backup was called to draw water from local dams and swing it over the flaming area time and time again. Then the Brigade went in to damp down the embers and fallen trees. After a few miles of driving through the forest on the loggers trails they eventually reached the now blackened stump of 'Old man' and commenced damping down the area around.

Number two crew group came across a blackened shell of a late model vehicle and its number plate hardly readable. Inside were the dehydrated bodies of two people crouched together in the back, on the floor below a dogs skeleton so they taped over the windows they had to smash with polythene and raised up the local police. They were all shaken by the find so a tow truck was ordered and the volunteers hoisted the car and its contents onto the flatbed where it was roped and chained off. The metal was still hot and many a hand got burnt even when they wearing thick gloves but they persisted until the job was finished. Several troopers marked the original site with coloured tape and one patrol man started asking questions of the Firies.

'Which one of you opened the car doors', was the first, but the crew chief shook his head and pointed up the vehicle on the flat bed. 'Welded shut all four of them tight as a tin of sardines, we had to break in via the windows'. The patrol man hoisted his female assistant up onto the tray and she nodded agreement.

Then he called for a forensic team to visit the site first, just in case before too much disappeared under foot. As the Patrol officer walked carefully over to the ground he noticed where the vehicle had lain it was some distance to the rear of the Old Man. Plus the vegetation on the ground was still green in places so he called the Crew chief over and asked him why it was not incinerated like the front. Chief pointed to the sky 'The wind came from behind and blasted everything in front, by the looks of it Old Man got a direct lightning strike so the flames were driven to the front, you can see some damage to the tree tops here in the rear but they were caught by the limbs of Old Man burning.'

So the Firies continued damping down whilst the flat tray was driven out and passed the forensic team coming in. They found nothing of interest and the ground around had several car tracks presumably left by the police and troopers. As they were preparing to leave one of the team called out for the photographer.

'Gus take a photo of these tracks over here and whilst you are at it do the whole area.'

'Tom they look like tractor tyre marks and pretty old by the looks of it.'

'Who bought a tractor into this desolate spot and why.' Then Tom of forensics turned to the Chief, who shook his head.

'Not one of us, we only use dozer's to clear a trail on grass fires and we did not see any tractors.'

Forensic Tom then rang his colleague and told her to come down before inspecting the car and its contents. She was called locally Forensic Pot, her own name unpronounceable. They called her 'Pot' at college so she was stuck with it, friends and colleagues asked why? Someone who knew her said the stuff affected men's minds. No mention of women though and there she stopped, no explanation just a sort of hidden anger beneath those hazel eyes that could outglare anyone.

So Pot arrived in a four wheel drive and she and Tom examined the tracks then followed them behind Old Man. Then they set up a minute search along the tractor trail. A cigarette stub and nothing else in the singed grass lying close to the top soil.

'Stumped out with the heel of a boot.' Tom nodded to Pot who bent down for a closer look.

'OK take a plaster copy of that print please, steel heel flaps and an unusual pattern almost gone so very worn.' Pot stood up to let Tom mix and place the plaster.

'Did you get a chance to look at the vehicle yet?'

Pot shook her head, 'I stopped it on its way and a quick check confirmed the Firies that the doors and trunk were all welded. We'll take a look later under lights but first we'll raise it up and look underneath.'

'For?'

'I guess we should find chain or strap marks, if it was towed here or on a trailer they would be there.'

They finished their search then had the area cordoned off. They thanked the Chief for their prompt action and for help loading the vehicle onto the flatbed. The Chief acknowledged the hand grips and shook his head in puzzlement.

'Beats me how they could have driven with the doors all welded shut.'

'Well,' said Pot 'Easily done if you don't need to stop for petrol but we will examine the car carefully, on first look it was on a big wheeled trailer or pulled here by a tractor or some such it, don't think it was driven here.'

Eventually they all retired back to their separate departments and Tom and Pot went to the Forensic police garage to take a close look. Already the car was up on the lift and they walked under it with the mechanic who pointed out some chain marking both on the front and rear crash bumpers.

'So now we have those marks which will give the size of chain and the one boot mark. Perhaps Tom you can get onto the net and look for a manufacturer tomorrow. Our

mechanic can work the chain size and now lets get the car down and look it over. They bought the lift down and studied the car exterior minutely. At the rear trunk they found a small twelve millimetre drilled hole.

'What do you suppose that was for?' Tom looked at Pot.

'Lets get a sample around the hole before we open the trunk lid, my guess is something like the input of a gas. Then get one of the guys to feed a hose in and take a sample of the air, then get it analysed. We don't open up until that's done Tom, by the look of those skeletons they have been there a some time so a couple of days won't matter. In the meantime I'll do a check on the number plate.'

'Strange, Pot. No clothes inside they must have been quite naked.'

'Yes I noticed, you can see their ribs poking though skin as well as just under the dogs fur, that will give a great indication on the age.'

Having ordered the careful removal of the welds but to leave the vehicle shut for now the two left for their separate desks and the investigation of boot and number plate.

Pot found the licence number plate very quickly, Tom's choice took longer but there was a positive reaction from the hole. The weld marks were studied before the were filed away and these were found to made by an amateur, horrible was the professional view, not a normal clean ripple. Eventually the bodies were lifted gently and taken into the Forensic lab where they were examined carefully. The dog turned out to be a Golden Labrador and Tom was sicked immediately he was told, he had the same type at home. Pot continued her examination and discovered drill marks on on the bones of both. Drill punctures on the left ankle bone of each, so she immediately called in the Sheriff.

'What you got Pot?' he asked on the phone.

'Not suicide as we suspected but torture and murder. I say looks like a boy and girl about mid teens but will get some scrapping done and a DNA on both. Tom is pretty upset about the dog but it seems just asphyxiation by gas for all.'

'I guess we better start looking for missing teenagers, I'll keep you posted, but a full report for any ancillary stuff would help.'

'Yes I will do fingernails and mouth parts next but it appears to be a violent trauma on both kids, I'll let you know by this evening. Some skin left around the torso's and what looks like duct tape around the ankles and the upper torso and arms, just that one piece around both so looks like they were strapped together.'

Pot rang again that evening.

'Tom's feeling much happier, we found somebody else's blood on the teeth of the dog, seems the killer or killers made an enemy of the Labrador. Tom's sent it over for DNA, and that may help you a lot, have you any news of the missing people?'

'No not a bight if you'll excuse the pun, which is odd so we have to put out feelers beyond the county boundary and any help you can give us on bone material could help. By the way we found the cars owner, it had been bought over eight months ago, seems it was a planned killing and they needed a coffin and maybe the owner.'

Pot stayed on the line until the Sheriff came back with

'What's up Pot come on spit it out.'

'I'd say a revenge killing Jack pure supposition I know but it really looks very ugly.'  
'Now we base things on facts, just the facts please Pot. What about the organs any use to you?'

'Well very shrivelled but we'll do some drug testing just for you.' knowing the Sheriff was a bit anti anyone under the age of thirty.

'I want a definite age from you both if you please, try the bones.'

'University types?'

'You got it in one Pot some of them can be real nasty, so I'll get my boys and girls to do some searching.'

'But Jack I have not aged them yet.'

'True but Pot I can sometimes read your intuition like a book, you suspect some source of jealous rage, what did Tom find around that hole?'

'Acetylene.'

'Now that is interesting. Ducting tape and acetylene. That and a bit of air, kaboom. Thanks Pot.'

'Wait Jack, no explosion, we had some gas in the lungs and no carbon. If you were insanely jealous would you kill the person whose affection you sought?'

'Suppose I might if I was a mad man or woman, but it sounds like a man to me, don't know many women in the welding trade.'

'There you go typical male chauvinist, bye Jack be in touch tomorrow.'

The police search did indeed find two likely victims in a University fifty miles away. A young couple had gone missing some six months before so a search was made of their apartment, a few photographs and parents addresses helped identify them the car owner matched the boy. Forensics also made the match though dental work on the male. Jack was sent to break the news to the parents, a job he hated. Then the questions began, the girls parents, still in shock, gradually opened up.

'We were told that they had eloped, by the university staff.'

'Who exactly told you that?' but they couldn't remember who it was, it came in a telephone message. But it was a man's voice they were sure.

Jack left them very deflated, they had got the message on the machine and had wiped it. They were pretty sure that it was genuine as their daughter had advised the parents of their intention to marry and the the parents were opposed to any formal engagement until the children had finished their education.

The police then searched the garage and property on the off chance of finding oxyacetylene equipment. But nothing found. Jack had asked about the dog and apparently it had been the boy friends Labrador.

He then went to visit the the boys parents and found them to be just as unhelpful. The car was the boys, given as a birthday present by the parents, brand spanking new. All this he related to Pot on his return.

'This is weird but I agree with Tom, its obviously a nasty piece of male shit all over this crime scene, who on earth would leave a brand new vehicle to rust away in the undergrowth. It shows an intense dislike of both the lad and his car, look Jack I think you need to check out friends and enemies at that Uni and don't forget any of the big wigs they could be involved.'

'There you go Pot using that infernal nose of yours so how about sticking to the facts, of course if you are so fired up about the whole thing how about you join my investigation team and we go up there tomorrow and pull the place apart.'

'Make it the day after tomorrow, Tom and I have not quite finished on the autopsy and we have to complete that poor dog.'

'I reckon its the dog that really affects you both.'

'Yep, so I'll beg and borrow a gun from you and shoot the bastard who did this.'

'There you go again making assumptions just count the number of people needed to load a trailer and drive a tractor fifty miles and know this spot. So we look at the kids contacts and fathom out who is local and has the ability to hire, steal or own a trailer and tractor.'

'And we have a footprint.'

'Yes I guess some kid with well worn sneakers, that can be your job on hands and knees looking at the treads while I interview those kids.'

'Thanks, and what about the gun.'

'No way, just be ready in two days meantime I will organise an interview room and collect those we need to see. I have someone up there already seeking out who we might be interested in. The boys father came up with some of his friends who had visited, that will be a start.'

'You really don't like kids Jack!'

'Can't stand them. Bye for now, and Pot just keep that mind of yours on a scientific level.' With that and a wave Jack departed for his car, but Pot suddenly had an idea. 'Jack' she yelled, 'Take me with you next time you see the parents.'

'Tomorrow be ready at ten' and he flicked his glove back at her.

Tomorrow came and Pot checked with Tom on the footprint search and he had come with a name but was awaiting confirmation. Jack turned up on the stroke of ten and Pot got in beside him.

'Why the parents?'

'Got a premonition Jack.'

'Oh Pot you really are a choice specimen, now you'll be consulting the Tarot or is it a glass ball you have in the office.'

'OK laugh but there is one question neither you your officers have asked.'

'OK shoot.'

'Not until we get there. Who's first?'

'The girl.'

They drove on in complete silence until they reached the parents house, Jack introduced Pot as his assistant in the case and after shaking hands Pot got down to business. First she produced a photo of the worn shoe and asked if they recognised it but they both shook their heads, then she asked if their daughter had bought any specific friend or friends home in the past year. They looked at one another and mentioned the missing university lad.

'Oh, the lad bought his dog with him, it was a Labrador, lovely creature'. Pot nodded.

'Any specific people?' She asked but they both shook their heads.

'Thank you, are you ready Jack.' She indicated that they should leave and they drove

on to the boys parents with Jack in a chilly mood.

Soon they were in with the boys parents and they got a negative reaction to the photo of the shoe but when it came to friends both the girl and someone called Ant was mentioned. They were great friends were Ant and Mark, as boys they went everywhere together, up hill and down dale so to speak said the boys Father, then something happened, they both went to the same Uni at the same time and suddenly they split seeing one another regularly.

'Mark said to me he saw Ant most days and at term break Ant just wanted to get home to his own parents. Thought nothing of it but Mark bought his girl home soon after and Marge here thought it might be a bit of jealousy.'

'She is or rather was really nice and we were happy for Mark.'

'When did Mark acquire the Labrador, did you buy the dog for him?' Pot asked gently.

'No, it was a bitch, his girl bought him a pup last year.' The mother clasped her hands.

'The officer who interviewed us told us there was a diseased dog in the car.'

'Did you recognise the car the dog was found in?'

'Yes, it was new one I gave to Mark for his getting into Uni so he could get back here whenever he wanted, I told the officer all this.'

'Thank you, were there any other people that Mark may have bought home, new friends for example, I am nearly finished.'

'Thank the lord.' whispered Jack whilst the two parents thought hard.

'Well there were those two last spring, mates he had made at Uni only came the once, now Marge what were their names?'

'Well,' Marge rose from her seat, 'I have a photo of them together, we took before they all left, I'll fetch it as I printed their names on the back.'

'Very efficient my wife puts everything in its place.'

'Thank you, I would like to keep this if I may, I will return it after we copy it.' Pot reached across and she and Jack quickly looked at the print. They shook hands and left.

In the car just as Jack switched on the motor, Pot leaned across.

'You gave a reaction back there, you recognised someone in the photo, and you've just pocketed it so come on Jack tell me.'

'Well first thing, I do submit that ability to drag something out of those poor folk did in fact reveal a piece of information we had not found before.'

'And?'

'When we get back to you office we will take a copy and blow it up on the scanner then we might find out who this is.' Jack patted his pocket with a knowing smile.

'Oh, Pot one thing I already asked both parents for a recent photograph of their children, I'm surprised you did not, bone structures flesh type etc. Am I treading on you toes?'

'No dear Jack, Tom and one of you valiant officers already acquired these self same pictures and yes we have them on file in the office!'

'Good then perhaps we will make a match, yes Pot we work well as a team I'll ask the board to take you on as an officer of the law.'



'Now that's kind, will I get two salaries as well?' And they both laughed but Jack refused to say what really was on his mind.

They arrived back at the office and Pot called Tom in and to bring the kids photo's in, then they all viewed the large scanned photo of Mark and his two friends.

"Do you see that Pot?" Jack pointed behind the group of three. There was another person behind one of the visitors, it was definitely a blond girl, half her face hidden. 'Could it be, at least lets do a scan same size and check the right side cheek. What do you think it means?' Pot raised her eyes from the photo.

'Well for you Pot it means you have to get tested for new glasses.'

'Well I guess your eye sight is better than mine but you use yours for checking out moving number plates all the time.'

'Wrong division Pot!' Tom handed him the resized copy and he cut out the head and placed them over the group photo.

'There Pot, they match, now isn't that interesting. I now have a lead of three people to check out. Can you get me a foolscap of the group and one with this new cut-out, Then a copy of the girls portrait photo, I'll need them tomorrow and before you ask no you are not coming to the University with me, you've done enough damage already, its my fishing day tomorrow and I am not well pleased at going to work!'

'I would have liked to but Tom and I need to check out that shoe and the tractor prints they may tie in what you may find on the morrow, but thanks for putting up with me you cantankerous old servant of the law.'

'Not so much about the old, so good afternoon you two and thanks for the excitement.' Jack left after the new photo's had been printed and were safely placed in a polythene bag.

On the Monday Tom eventually found the Adidas shoe sole, with their help, it belonged to a group made in the early eighties so he called into Pots office and she had found the tyre, not for a tractor but a heavy goods lorry. They both spoke at once so Pot put up her hand.

'Me first Tom, tyre belongs to a specific lorry large rear wheel single hub and probably an old Ford used in the thirties, now yours.'

'Adidas, eighties, male.'

'Elder male I bet, too old for a young one.'

'Could be a hand me down!'

'Could be, lets wait now for Jack's information, but I'll try him on his phone.' She did and it was switched off so she left a message at the station with a brief summary of the sole and tread details.

It was late noon that Jack eventually turned up with his news.

'Well you two I got the message but this is getting bizarre. Both the guys standing in front of the girl say she was Marks girl at the time but Ant the old friend said Mark did not know her. He reckons she was the girl friend of the big fellow, Cubby Bellows. Well named because he really had a bad mouth on him. The other guy, his cousin, confirmed it. If I went by your glass ball I'd say it was the load mouth Cubby

but I'll get the guys down town to do the official follow up on both of your findings. We don't want to scare them off so we'll do this quietly by the book.'

But they could not, there was fire at Gums farm that night and the Firies managed to save an old Ford lorry.

Pot rang Jack as soon as she heard of the fire and arranged a quick trip to the farm with Tom in tow to examine the truck and its wheels. Jack picked them up and by mid morning they were at the farm. An ambulance was there already and they were attending an old man barely alive. Pot gave him a brief examination but the ambulance women insisted on getting to hospital intermediately.

'She found the Firies chief still inside the farm outer building, there was a lot of burnt hay bales which his men had doused with water.

'Well Chief where did you find the old man?'

'The fire was started in the early hours of the morning, we got called out about two am, the bales were alight but the truck stopped us getting to them so we pulled it out into the yard and started dousing the hay which was well alight, a section had fallen towards the rear so we left that and dragged out the worst behind where the lorry had stood and left the rest undamaged until the morning. When we came back about eight we searched the whole building for evidence and in doing so some of the men lifted back the fallen bales and underneath was poor old Dan Spiller with a big crack on his skull.'

'Caused by the fallen bales?' asked Pot.

'You the expert Pot but I hardly think a bale of straw could do that, yes pin him on the floor but it looks like it tumbled slowly, it did not crush the old git, it just held him firmly. He was lucky not to suffocate with that weight on him guess he's a strong little git.'

Jack came back from looking at the lorry,

'Been driven recently so its in working condition.'

'Yep, old man Spiller used it regular like around the place.' The chief looked at it appraisingly. 'Grand old bus, he's had the beast some forty years or more.'

'Could tow a car no doubt, What's over there in the small shed Chief.'

'Take a look yourself Jack you'll find a small smithy, these farmers always do their own repairs.'

Jack did as he was bid and he called Pot and Tom over, they opened the door and they found a quantity of tools and an oxyacetylene bottles and torch. On the rack behind the door were several lengths of chains. Jack knocked both bottles with his knuckles.

'Well you two I have to get off to hospital to see what I can get from Dan if he is awake, meantime go up to the Uni and hold young Ant for me. Keep him close and take him back to the station, book him in to the Duty Sargent not as a suspect but as someone to be protected.'

'Ah you have a crystal ball Jack and you did not tell.'

'A nose Pot, just a coppers nose, I'll order you a highway car.'

'For Tom, I want to look at old Dan's head if they will allow me. So I'll come with you.'

'Tom when you go in to find young Ant, you take the officer with you, you hear.'

Then Jack and Pot drove off to the hospital leaving Tom to take a sample from the acetylene cylinder and bagged the drill plus a bit box he found on the bench.

When they arrived at the hospital old Dan was barely alive but the surgeon was close to operating, but he said it looked like a round steel bar at the rear of the head. And turning to Pot

'I doubt Pot he had no idea what hit him.'

'So Jack where to now, I presume we follow Tom to the Uni?'

'Not so quick young Pot. I expect some reaction when your Tom and my officer get there. Whilst you talked to that Doctor I rang though to the Department for some back up from our heavies. So yes we go but by the back way if there is such a thing and darn it Pot you stay right in this car when we get there.'

'Expecting trouble are we.'

'There's no real proof it was Cubby could have been the small one, the ones with the brains.'

'Jack you need brains to get accepted into Uni and I'm sure they both have them.'

'Maybe but we assume that the girl was with Cubby only because she was closer to him, could have been pure fluke, we will take both in and shake them up a bit and I really do hate kids.'

'Yes so you've said.' So Pot sat back as Jack drove carefully up towards the back of the Uni buildings where he was stopped by one of the heavy mob dressed all in black.

'Can't let the lady through Jack.'

'She's one of us, sharp shooter Nell.'

'Well I'll be damned, I have heard of Bang Bang Nell, she's all the talk of the Depot and you detectives won't let us get to see her, you keep all to yourselves, OK go through.'

As they gently rolled forward Pot took his arm,

'When do I get my gun then Jack.'

'Nell was somebody my old boss thought up years ago and you fit the bill. Not very sharp are our special heavy mob, if you really were a sharp shooter there surely would be a rifle in the back!'

'Trunk. Now slow down I can see Tom going into that hall over there.'

Indeed Tom and his attendant officer appeared some minutes later with Ant between they had gone no more than a dozen yards when two figures raced toward them, the smaller had a gun and he was yelling the word murderer several times. Then came two sharp retorts, both fell to the ground then a surge of black suited grabbed and cuffed them.'

'There just as well they bought their Bang Bang Nell with them,' he looked across to Pot, 'Yes she really exists but she works for them under another name of course!'

'Of course now lets get my poor Tom into this car and I guess its safe to release Ant back to his studies. By the way Jack who was the murderer, don't leave me in suspense.'

'I guess whose ever fingerprint was on that drill I asked Tom to bag, the drills should show metal from Marks car and then we have the truth!'

'Well can I offer you a position in Forensic, Tom and I could do with some help!'

Jack laughed and they drove on to pick Tom up, and was decidedly upset at that last incident.

'Jack you ever do that again I'll I'll.' He stopped. 'Pot we never took any soil from that trucks tyres.'

'Too late Tom Mr. Spiller used it regularly, but if you want you can try, get the mechanic up here and take a look at those chains in the shed. but not today its been exhausting to ride with Jack!'

' Ok Clever Clogs which do you pick as the culprit? ' Jack turned to Pot.

'Well its a case of pure evil jealousy and I guess the smaller one egged on the big guy to do the dirty work.'

'How do you work that out?'

Pot thought for a while,

'Jack he was the one who had a gun and shouted out thus venting his anger.'

'Yes I guess that's pretty close, and sorry Tom for making you a provisional goat.'

'That's not the right word Jack I think its sacrificial, but we will leave at that.' And Tom closed his eyes in exhaustion.

-----

## BLACKOUT.

Copyright 2014 Paul Audcent

A short story about having an argument with your better half, but who said they were better? Nasty perhaps, but it gets worse.

It was dark, pitch black. Grayson stopped and felt in his pocket but the torch was not there. It normally resided in his side pocket where he kept his keys, they were there as he jangled them between his fingers but no torch. A car came past at some speed and he stepped back onto the footpath. The headlights allowed him briefly to see where he was going and he spotted a gate belonging to Farmer Jackson it had its broken slat, the third down if he remembered correctly so at least he was in the right direction. He looked around to find any more incoming vehicles, he was on a side road and yes he could see them travelling on the main highway flashing by in the distance, well at least he was close to home and knew that around an unseen bend ahead there was the three cottages, a pub and the Saxon church further on. He quickened his stride to reach the bend where the path stopped where he had to use the roadway. He came to the edge of the kerb and stepped down cautiously so as not to trip, he swore about losing his torch. He thought for one moment that Jennie had removed it, they had had a row that morning, a violent one and he had slapped her hard on her face, for her tongue was unnerving him and she was getting hurtful, so he then and there accused her of fancying Tom their next door but one neighbour. So she turned onto their kitchen table and aimed his breakfast plate at his head, instead she changed her mind and threw it directly at his chest, it missed but he picked his coat off the hook and dashed outside to meet his lift to the station.

As he came close to Mrs Compton's the first cottage he passed by her high pine hedge and his hand outstretched to find the gate he then felt a blow on the back of his head and he sank to the ground his hand slipping down the wet slats of the gate, he tried to grab the bottom rail but a kick in the stomach rolled him into the road. Unconscious he remained for several hours until he was collected by a fast car swinging around the bend which did not stop. Mrs Compton found him next morning across the lane and rang the police.

-----

I was passing by in my car and listening to the whine in my drive shaft, I looked to my right and slowed down. Ahead was an old green car parked badly by the verge with its backside hanging well into the road. I stopped behind it and got out ready to berate the owner. All I could see were a couple of heads, one white and the other brown bobbing up and down amongst some metal posts and standing stones.

'Hey you two', I called and they stopped abruptly and looked in my direction. 'Your car is poking out into the road!'

'Can you move it for us please' came the reply and their bobbing commenced again. I looked inside and shook my head in disbelief, they had left the keys in the ignition for anyone to steal. So I got in, started it and moved it fully onto the grass.

I then tried to lock the car but the latch was broken so I left the keys on the seat and hopped over the fence to find the bobbing heads.

They were weeding alongside the graves and at first they did not notice me so I looked around and read some of the stones, at least those that were standing almost erect, until I came across a small grave with a lovely stone child mounted on a granite pedestal all by itself.

'Not from around here then.' They both came up to me, every so often dipping down and pulling a weed.

'No. You left your car keys in the car and the door wont lock' I said.

The elderly silver haired one smiled, 'Not worth pinching.'

I pointed to the stone child. 'alabaster?'

'Marble, the finest they told me.' said silver head.

'Maise Dell' said the little brown lady.

'But there's no name or date on the column.'

'Don't need to be, everyone knows wee Maise.' And both nodded.

'They thought the little angel was a fitting piece for little Maise. Well Council did and everyone subscribed, back in the eighteen hundreds it were.'

'Its a beautiful piece without a doubt and carved by a real professional, must be worth a bit of money now!'

'You from the city I guess, what with you worrying about my car and now this sculpture, with you wondering no doubt why it hasn't been stolen, its the country our country, we leave things as they are.'

'That might be up here but where I come from it would be gone in a trice. Still tell me what young Maise did to receive the bounty of a beautiful memorial?'

'Just go around the back of the column there is an inscription.'

I walked around and indeed there was a small panel hardly eligible now but by getting close I could make out the words. 'To dear Maise Dell my sincere apologies, John Webster, Mayor.' 'Well, it told me nothing, how old was Maise when she died?'

'Ninety three.'

'So why the apology?'

'It will take a little time, we have a flask of tea, so lets sit over there on John Webster's flat slab shall we.' The silver haired lady pulled a flask from her bag and both old ladies went over and sat on Webster's flat grave.

'Not to flash this slab, just a flat stone and his name carved roughly at the top,' said I. 'Well he spent most of all he had on that marble girl statue, had it shipped out by a sculptor in Italy, cost a fortune so people said. The Council and residents paid for the column. Now sit down and listen. ' So I did.

' Maise and seven children went over to the lagoon looking for tadpoles.' She pointed past the cemetery with her finger, 'about a mile down there in the dip. Young Ricky Gallop slipped down the mud embankment and only Maise spotted him, so she dashed across the bank and grabbed him by the hand then dug her other hand into the oozing clay. Apparently she shouted and held on the Ricky until the others came across and helped drag both of them to safety. Of course the children were scared of what Ricky's parents would say him now covered in the red slime so John Webster made the story up that he had rescued Ricky, which they all agreed to.'

'Why not give the girl her due?'

'Well, she was brown, dark brown like me.' Said the other lady and drank her tea slowly.

'It was like it those days, Maise would have got a thrashing as a thank you.' said silver hair.

I looked across at the column with its beautiful statue perched on top and instantly felt a great sadness. ' How awful that Maise did not see this beautiful thing.'

'Oh rumour has it that the Mayor bought it several years before her death and had it placed in her little orchard just down the road, you can just see the tops of her plum trees over that brow.'

'We are saving up to have a new marble inscription to replace that old wooden one at the back of the column, plus rewrite some of the older stones.' Said the little brown lady.

They had finished their tea and handed me one of the cups with the last of the tea, and in return I gave them some notes to help pay for the refurbishing. Well the story was worth every penny. And no, I won't tell you where it is, I reckon the Yobs round our way would either smash it or steal it, so let it stand, a testament to a brave young lady.

-----

Mr Johnson sat quietly reading from the Sports magazine he had picked up from the table filled with magazines, many as old as he was. Clip Clip in the background plus a gentle hum of voices as the Barber talked to his customer. Johnson shifted his seat to be closer to the action still reading about the sports scandal, drug taking to increase the physical action or some such. Johnson shook his head in disbelief, this had been going on for decades, it was absolutely not a shock to him but still to the average punter, I expect it caused some distress.

The Barber called him. Not by name just a 'Next Sir' as he brushed down the customer whose hair now lay scattered around the chair. So Johnson took his overcoat off, hung it on a peg and sliding his hand beneath his suit coat switched on the digital recorder and sat down in the ample barbers chair.

“Now how do you want it, by the way I haven't seen you here before?”

“No I was passing, going to visit my Sis, I thought I would pop in just for a trim please.”

“Certainly Sir.” The barber went away to return with a brush and pan to clear the old hair of the floor. Whilst the barbers back was turned Johnson felt below the patent leather arms until he found it, a small switch. Reynolds had been here yesterday and had found it, mark you it had been the dead of night and a locksmith had got him in. So Johnson felt the black cape spread over his body and relaxed.

“Just a trim was it Sir.”

“Yes please, its a bit long over the ears.”

And so the snipping commenced, as did the interrogation, starting with the compulsory 'and where do you come from Sir?' and then very gently almost in the same rhythm as the scissors, the persuasive questions of what work was he in and was he married and where did he live. The work reply certainly caused a reaction, a skimp in the rhythm, but that was all. Of course what Johnson was telling the barber was total eyewash set up by his colleagues at the office. But as the barber delved deeper into the Johnson history, suddenly Johnston's mobile phone went off. The barber stopped and Johnson retrieved his mobile. “Yes now” he said into the microphone.

“You've been a very naughty barber, amazing how much damage you have caused this shipyard.”

The Barber looked at him, the scissors poised above his head, a brief look of fear crossed his face as two Federal agents entered the shop. Johnson raised himself up from the chair and held the Barbers wrist and twisted it with the scissors away from him. He turned to the sailors waiting their turn and said quietly,

“I'm afraid gentlemen you will need to find another barber, this one works for the enemy. He records everything you tell him.”





## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

