

Murders in Milechester

by Richard B Young

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Murders in Milechester take place in the fictitious borough of that name, in the equally fictitious county of Midshire, in the mid-1970s. As the location is non-existent in reality, so are the characters who live in it.

Milechester can trace its origins to Roman times, when they had a staging camp here, on their way north. It is situated on the banks of the River Eddle and other places nearby are: Broadgates, a cathedral city, home to the Bishop of Broadgates; the town of Westerham; and the villages of Aldhampton, Braston and Eddleham.

It has some 150,00+ inhabitants, a town hall, branches of each of the ‘big 5’ banks and 2 building societies (Milechester BS and the larger Broadgates and District BS), 3 cinemas and a theatre, as well as several church and chapels of various denominations.

In addition, it has a weekly newspaper, the ‘Milechester Messenger’, a swimming baths and a weekly market, held each Thursday. Being a borough, it has a mayor, the present holder of that office being Jack Skelton, a one-time ‘red’ trade union shop steward in his birth county of Yorkshire, but now a successful local small businessman.

The town is policed by Midshire Police, based in the city of Northgate, with a divisional headquarters in Milechester. The Chief Constable is Adam Elden, an ex-military type who regards it as his own little army, an attitude which does not endear him to the County Police Committee – or the people under his command.

Death of a Good Man

Chapter One

It was 10:15 am on a quiet Saturday morning at Milechester Police Station. There had been the usual trickle of visitors; a lady who couldn't remember where she had parked her car, a man enquiring about a lost wallet, another man complaining about having been given a parking ticket and a couple of small boys brought in for stealing toys from Woolworths.

The telephone rang and was answered by the Duty Sergeant, Fred Lomas, as the PC on duty in the office had gone to the toilet. The caller was a woman who sounded very distressed, so much so that the Sergeant was having difficulty understanding what she was trying to tell him.

Calmly and gently, he said, "Just give yourself a moment to catch your breath, madam, then start again."

There was a brief pause, then, 'He's dead, he's dead! I just came in to do his cleaning and there he was, dead!'

'Who's dead?'

'It's Mr Ingold. He's just slumped in his chair and he's dead.'

'Are there any signs that there might have been a disturbance?'

'No, no, he's just dead!'

Recognising that the woman was on the verge of becoming hysterical, Fred asked, 'Can you tell me your name, please?'

'It's Ethel; Ethel Barton.'

'And what's the address? Please don't touch anything and I'll get an officer to come right away. He'll be with you in about 10 minutes.'

Fred put the ‘phone down and picked up the radio mic, ‘Alpha Mike to Alpha Mike 21.’

A somewhat crackly voice answered, ‘Alpha Mike 21 – go ahead.’ ‘Alpha Mike 21, we’ve had a report of a sudden death at The Limes on Broadgate Road. The cleaner found Mr Ingold dead when she got to the house. She says there are no signs anything is wrong, but we’d better check it out. Oh, and be gentle; she sounded on the verge of hysterics.’ (Under his breath, “Oh great; just what I need”) then, ‘OK, on my way.’

A few minutes later, the patrol car, driven by PC 349 Bill Jones, pulled into the driveway of The Limes and Bill got out, accompanied by PW 252 Gwen Adams. They rang the doorbell and Mrs Barton answered before it stopped ringing.

‘He’s in here,’ she said and took them into the front room, where she showed them the body of Mr Ingold, slumped in an armchair. He looked as though he had been fighting for breath. Bill noticed that there was a small table between the body and another chair. The table had a bottle of gin on it and two glasses, which had clearly been used. Bill gave Gwen a meaningful glance, then said, to Mrs Barton, ‘You haven’t touched anything, have you?’

‘No, I could see he was dead when I come in; gave me a nasty turn, I can tell you, so I rang the station.’

Seeing that Mrs Barton was still very upset and wanting her out of the room so that he could take a closer look around, he said,

‘Look, Mrs?’

‘Barton, Ethel Barton.’

‘Well, it’s like this, Mrs Barton, We’ve been on duty since 6am

and we haven't had a cup of tea. Do you think you could show my colleague where to make one? No hurry; take your time.'

Having made sure that she was safely out of the room, Bill knelt down to look at the glasses. There were no obvious prints on them, but that didn't mean that Scenes of Crime wouldn't be able to find any. He cautiously sniffed the glasses; the only smell was that of the gin.

He found his way to the kitchen, where Gwen and Mrs Barton had made a pot of tea and were enjoying a cup, together with a packet of biscuits which she had produced from a wall cupboard. Everything in the kitchen, and in fact in the rest of the house which he had seen, was clean and tidy. They stopped talking as he came in and offered him a cup.

Rita seemed to be calmer, so he said, 'I'm afraid that Mr Ingold isn't going to be needing you any more, so I suggest that you go home now. Do you live nearby?'

'No love, I live on the other side of town, over in Eastchurch.'

'Would you like PC Adams to give you a lift home? I'll have to stay here for a while, to see to some formalities which we have to go through when someone dies suddenly, but she could take you home and then come back for me. Oh, and would you let me have your key to the house so that I can lock up when I leave. I'll give you a receipt.'

'That's very kind. I am still a bit shaky. It was a terrible shock, seeing him like that.'

'Have you worked for him long?'

'Oh yes, it must be 10 or 12 years I suppose; ever since his wife died, poor man.'

'Thank you for the key. PC Adams will take you home now.'

Bill waited until they had left the house and he had heard the car being driven away, then called on his personal radio, 'Alpha Mike 349 to Alpha Mike.'

'Go ahead, 349.'

'I'm at Mr Ingold's and I'm not entirely happy that it was a natural death. The body's in an odd sort of position and there was a table with a bottle of gin and a couple of glasses next to the chair. If there was someone with him, why didn't they call an ambulance when he was taken ill? I'd like the plain clothes boys to take a look, just to be on the safe side. I'll be here to let them in when they arrive.'

At 10:45am, DCI Granley and DS Maiden arrived at the house and PC Jones let them in. He took them straight to the room where the body was and waited in silence while they made their inspection of the scene.

They took in the general look of the room, then Granley tentatively sniffed the bottle and the glasses. 'Nothing out of the ordinary there,' then both of them checked the glasses and bottle for any sign of fingerprints; none immediately apparent.

'Thank you for calling us in Bill,' DCI Granley said. 'On the face of it, it seems to be natural causes; perhaps a heart attack, but until there's been a PM, we can't be sure, so we'll treat it as a crime scene until then. You're right that it's odd about the gin and the glasses, but we won't jump to any sort of conclusion before we know how he died.'

We'll get the Scenes of Crime team to take some photos and check the glasses for any prints, then we'll have the body taken to the mortuary at the hospital so Dr McAllister can get busy on it as soon as possible.'

DS Maiden asked, “Would you like me to take a look around?”

‘Yes, if you would. Maybe start with the bedrooms to see if anything seems to have been disturbed. If someone else was involved, they may have wanted to look for something after’... and he looked at the body.

In the main front bedroom everything seemed to be in order. There was an old-fashioned double bed, with a small bedside cupboard to each side, and a wardrobe and dressing table. On that, there was a framed photograph of Mr Ingold with a woman; at a guess, the late Mrs Ingold. DS Maiden opened the drawer of the left-hand bedside cupboard and found a packet of indigestion tablets and a bottle of eye drops.

A quick look at the other bedrooms and the bathroom and separate toilet yielded no further information, so she returned to the DCI.

‘Sir, I found this in the main bedroom,’ showing him the eye drops.

‘Yes, and the significance of this is?’

‘My father uses these and I read the safety sheet which comes with them. As eye drops, used as prescribed, they’re fine and very effective, but if taken orally and in a high dose, they contain Atropine and can cause confusion, shortness of breath, heart problems and ultimately, death.’

‘And you are thinking maybe his visitor somehow managed to slip some into his drink?’

‘Surely it’s a possibility? He seems to have been fighting for breath, but there are no signs of a fight.’

‘Yes, it’s a possibility, but we’ll know better after the P.M.’ Turning to Bill, he said, ‘We need someone to stay at the house for now. If you can stay now, I’ll arrange for someone to relieve

you at 2pm. Is there somewhere you can make yourself a drink?’

‘I’m, fine, sir, thanks. The cleaner who found him, Mrs Barton, was a bit hysterical when we got her, so I asked her to make a cuppa for Gwen and me, to take her mind off it.’

‘Good man. Where is she now?’

‘She was still very upset, so I got Gwen to take her home. She lives over in Eastchurch.’

‘Good, well, I don’t think there’s anything more we can do here for the moment, so we’ll get back to the station, but the Scenes of Crime boys will be here soon. When they’ve finished, we’ll have him taken to the mortuary at the hospital and I’ll ask Dr McAllister if she’ll come in this afternoon to do the P.M., so that we can get the results as soon as possible.’

As they were leaving, DC ‘Ken’ Kendrew from Scenes of Crime arrived. He took his photos of the body and dusted the decanter and glasses for fingerprints.

‘Any joy, Ken?’

‘Ay, there’s a couple on the bottle and one of the glasses. They’re not very clear, but we might be able to find a match, if the owner is known to us.’

He left with a cheery, ‘I’m off now. Sooner you than me, mate, playing babysitter to a corpse. Have fun and don’t talk too much!’

The ambulance to remove the body arrived about 20 mins later, then Gwen called in to see if he needed anything. Soon after 2pm, he was relieved by PC 497 Tom Barkman who had just come on duty.

‘Anything to hand on to me?’

‘No, all quiet here after the body went. Just the usual; making sure no-one interferes with what may turn out to be a crime scene.

No-one really know until the results of the P.M. are in. Did you bring your snap (meal) with you?’

‘Aye, I’ve been on one or two of these stunts and you learn to come prepared for the long haul.’

‘Well, there’s the making for tea or coffee in the kitchen, together with what’s left of a packet of biscuits. I’m off now.’

Chapter Two

Milechester Hospital was one of many to have been built in the initial euphoria surrounding the introduction of the National Health Service in 1947 and, although there had been numerous additions and alterations to it in the intervening years, the Mortuary was one area which appeared to have remained untouched by time.

Its walls were faced with white tiles, probably bought cheaply to keep costs within budget, and the tables on which the post-mortem examinations were carried out were of stainless steel. In all, the place had an appearance of cold, clinical efficiency which fitted with well with the purpose for which it existed.

Dr Alice McAllister was scrubbing up, ready to carry out the post-mortem examination on the body of John Ingold, none too amused at having been called in on a Saturday afternoon to do so. She was a short, fiery Scot who ‘did not suffer fools gladly’ as the saying goes; in other words, woe betide anyone unfortunate enough to upset her! On this occasion, that someone was DCI Granley and she wasted no time in making it clear to him that she was, to put it mildly, displeased.

DCI Jack Granley was well acquainted with Dr McAllister’s outbursts, having encountered them on several previous occasions, but knew that her bark was worse than her bite, and was content to let her have her say as she prepared.

He knew that she was a thoroughly professional pathologist, who could be relied on to carry out a full examination, regardless of any personal feelings, and he had the greatest possible respect for her, both personally and professionally.

Jack was no stranger to post-mortem examinations, having attended many during his lengthy career. He was grateful to an older Sergeant who, when Jack was a young PC, had taken him to one when he was off duty,

The Sergeant had given him some valuable advice, ‘It’s the smell, young Jack; like nothing else you’ve ever smelt. It’s the smell of decay and rotting flesh, and the mistake most young coppers make on their first one, is trying not to breathe much so they won’t have to smell it. Trouble with that is that you pass out through lack of oxygen. Take a deep breath and then it will never be any worse.

I won’t say you’ll get used to it; at least I never have, but at least it helps you to deal with it. The sight isn’t too bad, unless you’re very squeamish. Try to look at it dispassionately and if you try to take an interest in what the doc is doing, and what they’re looking for, they’ll probably talk you through it and that seems to help.’

It had proved sound advice and the only one which had really got to him was one on a 14 year old girl who’d walked out from behind the school bus, straight into the path of a car coming the other way. The girl had been a pretty little thing, he remembered, and there had been hardly a mark on her. She had died of internal injuries and a massive loss of blood. He’d never forget that one.

In a way, it had been even worse than having to tell her parents that their beloved only daughter wouldn’t ever be coming home again. He had broken the news to them as gently as possible, but he knew for a fact that they never fully recovered from the shock, and both of them died at a fairly young age.

Dr McAllister was talking to him and so he had to drag his thoughts back to the present, to deal with the case in hand.

‘As you can see, there are no signs of violence, but he seems to have been fighting for breath.’

‘How long would you say he’d been dead?’

‘I gather that his cleaner found him this morning, but judging by the state of the body, I’d say since yesterday evening, between about 6pm and 9pm.’

‘And the likely cause of death?’

‘The fact that he’d been struggling for life suggests the possibility of a heart attack or a chest problem, but his heart and lungs are surprisingly good for a man of his age.’ Dr McAllister showed Jack the organs as she spoke and explained what she would have found if, for example, Mr Ingold had been a smoker.

‘I’ve managed to take some blood and urine samples from the body and we’ll have to send them and his stomach contents to the lab to see if there is anything there that shouldn’t have been.’

‘My DS found some eye drops in his bedroom and suggested that it may have been Atropine poisoning; I gather from her that it would have that sort of effect.’

‘Smart girl. She’ll go far. It’s a possibility I can’t rule out at this stage, thought it would take much more than you’d find in a bottle of eye drops to kill a healthy man. In any case, Atropine has a characteristic bitter taste, so you’d need to put it in something with a strong flavour to disguise it.’

‘There was a bottle of gin and a couple of glasses near the body. Would that do it?’

‘Not just one glass, but if he’d had one or two and then someone popped some in his glass, well, just maybe.’

‘You say that there wouldn’t be sufficient Atropine in eye drops to kill a man. Are there any other medical uses for it?’

‘Yes, it may be prescribed for Bradycardia.’

‘Forgive my ignorance, but what’s that?’

‘Bradycardia is simply the medical term for an abnormally slow pulse; below 60 beats per minute. It’s a problem which is not too uncommon in older men.’

‘Hmm. I think I need to find out who was Mr Ingold’s doctor and whether he had any problems with his heart.’

Dr McAllister said, ‘The heart appeared to be healthy for a man of his age, but that wouldn’t necessarily preclude the possibility of Bradycardia.’

‘And there is no apparent reason why an otherwise healthy man of 62 would die of what, to me as a layman, could have been a heart attack?’

‘Not from this initial examination, but we’ll only really know when the folks in the lab have been able to test the stomach contents.’

‘Well, thanks anyway. I’m sure you’ll let me know as soon as you get the results back from the lab. Thanks again for coming in on at short notice to do this PM.’

With a wry smile, she answered, ‘It’s OK. After all, what else would I be doing on a Saturday afternoon?’

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In common with many towns of a similar size, Milechester had a thriving Masonic Hall, used by three different lodges on separate nights. Many of the town’s notables were members of one or other, including Jack Granley.

He knew that Ingold had been a fellow Mason, though with a different lodge, and that he had introduced his legal clerk of many

years, Arthur Wenford, to his lodge. Jack had met Arthur socially and knew where he lived, so he decided to pay him a visit.

It was just before 4pm when Jack arrived at the house and Arthur invited him in, wondering about the purpose of the visit.

‘I’m sorry, Arthur, but I’m afraid I have some very sad news for you. John Ingold was found dead at his home this morning by his cleaner. To make matters worse, at this stage, we’re not sure that it was due to natural causes. I realise that all this must come as a shock, but I’m afraid I’m going to have to ask you a few questions about him.’

‘You’re right, it is a terrible shock, but if I can help in any way, I’ll be happy to do so. Before we start, would you like a drink?’

‘Thanks. I imagine you could maybe use something a bit stronger, but a cup of tea would be lovely for me.’

Arthur asked his wife to make the tea, then asked, ‘Now, what would you like to know?’

‘I believe you worked for him for over twenty years?’

‘Yes, twenty-three to be exact.’

‘Do you know who his doctor was?’

‘Yes, it’s James Bradwell. He’s a member of our lodge. In fact, I think he’s the one who got him to join.’

‘Can you give me his address?’

‘Yes, certainly, because he was our Grand Master a while back and we went to one or two get-togethers there. He lives at 29 Oakwell Road. It’s one of the bigger houses there.’

‘Do you know if he made a will?’

‘Yes, after his wife died; cancer, poor woman. He took it very badly. I know there was a will, because he asked me to witness his signature.’

‘Did you know much about his personal life?’

With a sad smile, Arthur said, ‘As I’m sure you’re well aware, there are few secrets in a town this size. He was well-known and equally well respected. He was a Mason, as you know, and was also a regular churchgoer, at Broadgate Methodist. I believe he was a Steward there, or at least had been for a while. He was a member of the Conservative Club and enjoyed an occasional drink and a game of snooker.’

‘I know you said he was well respected, but do you know if he had any enemies; anyone who might want to hurt him?’

‘No, he was liked as well as respected and to the best of my knowledge, he hadn’t any enemies.’

‘How many people worked for him?’

‘That’s an easy one; it’s only a small firm. There were two other solicitors when Mr Ingold joined, but they both died a while back. There’s me of course, his secretary, Margaret Brendon, who only works three days a week, as that’s all he did for the last couple of years. Then there’s a typist, Jenny, and a young lad, Robert, who’s only been with us a short while and is a sort of office boy. Mr Ingold had hopes of getting him to study law and maybe one day take over from him, but now...’

‘And none of them had any cause to bear him a grudge?’

‘No, as an employer, Mr Ingold was kind and considerate.’

Mrs Wenford appeared, bearing a tray with a teapot, milk and sugar, two cups and a plate of slices of fruit cake. Jack noticed that the cups and plate were fine china. Mrs Wenford clearly took pride in having the best.

‘The cake’s home-made,’ she said, ‘I’ll leave you to your talk.’

When she had closed the door, Jack continued, ‘How about an ex-employee?’

‘No, there weren’t any. It’s a tribute to the kind of man he was that when people came to work for him, they stayed.’

Over the tea and cake, which was delicious, Jack said, ‘I’m sorry I had to ask you all these questions, but I’ve nearly finished; just a couple more. You said he made a will; do you know where he kept it?’

‘Yes, it was always kept in the small safe in his office.’

‘Did anyone else have a key to it?’

‘Yes, I did, in case we needed anything from it on one of the days when he wasn’t in the office.’

‘And have you any idea what was in the will? You said you witnessed him signing it.’

‘I did, but all I saw was his signature. When I signed, everything else was covered by a blank sheet of paper, so I’ve no idea who benefits.’

‘And you never noticed when you needed to get something from the safe?’

‘No. Even if I had wanted to, Mr Ingold put it in an envelope and sealed it with wax. He had a few old-fashioned ideas!’

‘In the circumstances, would you mind coming to the office with me and letting me have it?’ I could get a Court Order to obtain it, but I’m sure he wouldn’t mind now.’

‘It’s a little irregular, as you say, but if it helps...’

Arthur went to the hall, got his coat and hat, and called to his wife, ‘I’ve just got to go out with the Detective Chief Inspector to get something from the office, but I shan’t be long.’

Jack added, ‘Thank you for the tea and cake. I really enjoyed it.’

About 10 minutes later, Jack pulled the car up outside Mr Ingold’s office in the town centre and the two of them went in. Once inside, he led the way to Mr Ingold’s private office and opened the safe with a key which was part of a full set to all the doors in the office. He took out the will, with the seal still intact, and handed it to Jack, who said, ‘I’m going to break the seal and look at the will, Arthur, and I’d be grateful if you would officially witness me doing so.’

He picked up a letter opener from Mr Ingold’s desk, slit open the envelope and took out the will. He read it, gave a low whistle, and said, ‘I’m going to have to keep this for the moment, but I’ll give you an official receipt for it.’

Arthur asked, ‘Am I allowed to know the contents?’

‘I’m, sorry but not at this stage in the enquiry. I’m very grateful to you for your help, but for the moment, the will may be evidence and the contents will have to remain a secret. I’m sorry to have to ask you this, Arthur, but as there are no known living relatives of Mr Ingold, would you be willing to formally identify him to me? I know that it is not a pleasant task, and one which may seem trivial, as he died at home, but it will be necessary for someone to do it.’

‘That’s alright, Chief Inspector. I understand and I was probably the person who spent most time with him, at least at work, so yes, I’ll do it. Do you want to get it over with now?’

‘Thank you. That would be very helpful.’

Jack drove to the Mortuary at Milechester Hospital, where Jack arranged for Arthur to see the body. Jack was relieved to see that

the face had now been gently moulded so that the eyelids were now closed and the mouth no longer showed the signs of the struggle for breath.

The mortuary assistant lifted the cloth from the face and Arthur said, 'Yes, I can confirm that is, or at least was, John Ingold. He looks so peaceful. You could almost imagine he was sleeping, poor chap.'

Jack drove him home and a little while later was back in his office, showing the will to DS Maiden. Her reaction was similar to that of Jack's.

'Now there's a motive for murder if ever I saw one. I presume we're going to see Margaret Brendon?'

Before he had time to answer, the 'phone rang.

'Granley here.'

'Doc McAllister for you Sir.'

'Good. Put her through.'

'We've got the results back from the lab. There was Atropine in his stomach and a large amount at that, but also a fair amount of Hydroxyzine Hydrochloride, which can have a similar effect, so the two together would certainly have been enough to kill him.'

'Hydroxyzine? What would that be for?'

'It has a couple of uses, but my guess would be as a hay fever remedy.'

'Thanks again, Dr McAllister. That's very helpful.'

Jack put the 'phone down and passed on the news to DS Maiden. 'As for Mrs Brendon, I've been to Mr Ingold's office with his

clerk and he's given me a list of names and addresses of his employees. Mrs Brendon is certainly top of the list for us!'

Chapter Three

It had started as a perfectly ordinary day; one like any other in a perfectly ordinary life; the life of one who regarded herself as the most perfectly ordinary woman on the face of the planet.

Margaret Brendon, was in her mid-40s, of medium height and build, with medium length, medium brown hair and brown eyes; a secretary for a small solicitor's office in middle England. She was a person to whom nothing out of the ordinary had ever happened and, as far as she could see, was never likely to.

She lived with her husband, Bill, in an ordinary medium sized, middle-class semi in a respectable middle-class suburb of a perfectly ordinary medium sized town. It would be stretching the truth to say that she was happy, but she was, at least, content.

Admittedly, there were moments of weakness, as she would describe them, when she allowed herself to dream of having an adventure; for some dashing handsome man of means to come along, sweep her off her feet, and carry her away to a life of unimaginable wealth and luxury; a man who would make passionate love with her for hours, but always as a perfect gentleman of course. Equally of course, it never happened and life went on in its accustomed, untroubled way.

As far as she was aware, she and Bill had a steady income which supported a comfortable middle-class lifestyle in a 'nice' home, with no worries about where the next meal would come from. They had two holidays a year, one abroad and one somewhere in the UK.

All in all, there seemed to be no reason why they should not go on

as they were until one of them eventually died of terminal boredom; an almost inevitable result of their comfortable, respectable, middle-class lifestyle. After all, nothing had changed, so why would it now?

It was shortly after 5pm when it happened. Bill was out of the house, as usual on a Saturday, at his beloved allotment, and Margaret was in the kitchen, listening to the radio while preparing dinner, when the doorbell rang.

She opened the door to find two complete strangers standing in the small porch. She looked at them blankly for a moment, then said, 'Yes, can I help you?'

It was Jack Granley who answered, 'Good afternoon. I'm Detective Chief Inspector Granley and this is Detective Sergeant Maiden.'

The two briefly showed their warrant cards, then he went on, 'We should like to speak with you. May we come in?'

Taken aback, Margaret asked, 'Why? Is there something wrong? Has something happened to Bill?'

'No madam, It's about you. May we come in? I'm sure you would prefer our conversation to be in the comfort of your own home, rather than on your front doorstep.'

He smiled, but there was no warmth in it. The Sergeant made no attempt to smile.

Now sure that this must be a serious matter, she stood to one side and said, 'Of course, I'm sorry. Please go through to the dining room. It's the second door on the right. If you'll excuse me, I'll be with you in a moment.'

She hurried to the kitchen, turned off the radio, threw off her apron and went to join them.

As the two detectives had approached the house, Jack had noted, perhaps subconsciously, that it was the right-hand one of a pair of 1920s/30s semis; three bedroom he guessed, with a detached concrete garage to its right.

It was typical of its age, with a nod to the Arts and Crafts style in the gabled front bedroom, faux half-timbered front of the upper floor and the ground floor bay window.

Walking through the hall, he saw that probably little had changed since it was built. The floor was neatly kept parquet, the stairs partly carpeted but painted wood at either side of the steps and a banister rail of polished dark oak above turned spindles, was on the left-hand side.

The hall narrowed past the stairs to a passage leading directly to the small kitchen at the rear. A door to the right was partly open, giving him a glance into the sitting room, comfortably furnished but in an antiquated style; obviously a room used only for special occasions.

In the dining room, there was a slightly worn mahogany table and chairs which could seat four, or at a pinch six, people. By the open fireplace, which had an oak surround and was in the centre of the right-hand wall, were a couple of comfortable looking armchairs, which seemed to have been chosen to match the style of the house.

There was a sash window occupying most of the centre of the back wall of the house, with a fairly old console television in the right-hand corner.

Jack had taken all of this in by the time that Margaret joined them, invited them to sit in the armchairs and turned one of the dining chairs round for herself.

‘Right, please would you tell me what this is all about?’
It was Jack who answered, ‘We’d like to talk to you about your employer..’

‘Mr Ingold? Why, has something happened to him?’

‘We’ll come to that in a moment, and if you don’t mind, it will save time if you allow us to ask the questions. You work for Mr Ingold. In what capacity?’

‘I’m his secretary, part-time, three days a week. That’s Monday, Wednesday and Friday. It’s only a small firm, so there isn’t enough work for full time.’

‘So the last time you saw him would be yesterday?’

‘Yes, that’s right.’

‘And what time did you leave?’

‘Just after 4pm. We finish early on a Friday.’

‘What’s your opinion of Mr Ingold?’

‘He’s a good employer, a bit reserved maybe, but kind and considerate.’

‘I’m afraid I’m, going to have to ask you to prepare yourself for a shock. His cleaner went to the house this morning and found him dead.’

As Jack spoke, he looked at her carefully to see how she would react to the news. She stared at them in disbelief, then burst into

tears. Between sobs, she said, ‘Are you sure? He seemed fine when I left the office. What was it; a heart attack?’

Jack allowed her a moment to compose herself, then went on,

‘When his cleaner found him, he was in an armchair and there was a table near him with a bottle of gin and two glasses. Do you know if he was expecting a visitor?’

‘No, if he was, he didn’t mention it to me.’

‘Do you know if he had any health problems?’

‘No, but there again, if he had, he didn’t tell me, and he seemed to be in good health for a man of his age. Oh, apart from his eyes, that is.’

‘His eyes?’

‘Yes, he had some sort of a problem with his eyes and had to put drops in for it.’

‘Had he had the problem for long?’

‘I’m not sure; he kept his private life to himself, but I think it might have been about six months.’

DS Maiden asked, ‘Were you happy working for him?’

‘Yes, as I said, he was a good employer.’

‘Did you ever visit him at his home?’

‘Just once or twice. Occasionally he wanted me to take some papers round for him to sign on a day when he didn’t need to be in the office.’

Jack asked, ‘Do you happen to know if he had made a will?’

‘I think that he mentioned once that he had asked his partner in the firm to prepare it for him; Mr Bagnall that was, but he died some years ago, about five years. He was a lot older than Mr Ingold.’

‘Do you have any idea what was in the will?’

‘No idea, I’m afraid. I don’t know who he would have left anything to; his wife was dead. They didn’t have any children as far as I know and I never heard him speak of any family.’

‘Why were you asking about a will?’

‘The reason is very simple, Mrs Brendon; We have learned that he did leave a will, and it names you as the sole beneficiary. Was your relationship anything more than a purely working one? After all, it wouldn’t be the first time that such a thing had happened; lonely old widower, working closely with a younger woman for a long time.’

‘It was just business; nothing more.’

DS Maiden asked, ‘Why would he leave everything to you then?’

‘I don’t know. I didn’t know that he had.’

Margaret felt as though her safe, cosy world was beginning to collapse around her. It was becoming increasingly clear to her, impossible as it seemed, that she was suspected of having killed Mr Ingold for his money.

DCI Granley spoke, ‘I think that we had better continue this conversation down at the station.’

‘Am I under arrest?’

‘No, at the moment you are just helping us with our enquiries. However, if you wish to have a solicitor present, you may have a ‘phone call when we get to there. Do you have a solicitor?’

‘No. At least, not now. Mr Ingold was my solicitor, but now he’s dead and you seem to be trying to find out whether I killed him.’

‘If you would like to get your handbag and anything you need, I’d like you to come with us now please.’

In a state of shocked disbelief, she went with them to their car and a few minutes later, they drove into the yard of the police station. Margaret was taken to an interview room and asked whether she would like a drink and a telephone call.

‘I don’t need anything to drink, thank you, but I’d like to call my husband. If he comes back and finds that I’m not in, he’ll wonder where I am. He’s gone to his allotment, but there’s a ‘phone box nearby. If you could find the number for me, I’ll ring it; it’s off a busy street and I’m sure someone will answer it and give him a message.’

‘If you would like him to be with you, we can arrange for a constable to bring him here.’

‘That would be good; we don’t have a car and it would be quite a walk for him to get here.’

‘If you tell me which allotment it is, we’ll get him brought here. In the meantime, please wait here until he arrives. DS Maiden will wait with you.’

‘It’s the large allotments, off George Street, and his is the last one on the left.’

‘Thank you. We’ll continue our conversation when he is here. What’s his name, by the way?’

‘William – Bill – Brendon.’

It was about twenty minutes later when he arrived, still in his gardening clothes and looking very flustered.

‘What is it, love; are you in some sort of trouble?’

It was DCI Granley who answered, ‘We’re making some enquiries about the sudden death of your wife’s employer, Mr Ingold. She is helping us to clear a few things up. If you would

like to have a seat next to your wife, we'll finish our talk and you can go home.'

'Now, Mrs Brendon, about Mr Ingold. You said that he had to use eye drops. Do you know if he had any other health problems?'

'No. Oh, except that he suffered with hay fever.'

'Did he take any medication for it?'

'I think so, but I don't know what it was.'

'Did he have many friends, do you know?'

'I suppose he must have had at his church, and he was a member of the local Conservative Club, but really, he was a very quiet, private sort of man.'

'Had he been doing anything out of his usual routine lately?'

'He went to London once or twice a month and stayed overnight. That was just in the last six months or so, but that's all, as far as I know. I only know that because he asked me to book the tickets and the hotel room for him.'

'Forgive me for having to ask you this, but did you ever accompany him on any of these trips?'

'No, never.'

'Do you know whether they were for business or pleasure?'

'I don't know for sure, but I always assumed they were just little trips to give him a break from routine.'

'You wouldn't happen to know if he met anyone while he was in London?'

'I'm sorry, I really don't know. He certainly never mentioned anyone to me.'

'You say you made the bookings for him. Where did he stay?'

'It was the Wentworth Hotel in Bayswater.'

'Well, I think that's all for now. You're free to leave, and thank

‘Well, thank you! As a matter of fact, after his wife died, he never showed any interest in ANY other woman.’

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Back at the station, Granley and Maiden were discussing their next move.

‘Where do we go from here, Sir?’

‘First thing Monday, we’ll have to get a Court Order to see Ingold’s bank statements, to try to get an idea of how much Mrs Brendon stands to inherit. Then we’ll know how much of a motive she would have.’

‘Do we know whether Ken found any prints anywhere?’

‘He said there were some partial prints on both glasses, but I suppose that as it was Ingold’s home, he would have handled both of them. Doc McAllister took some prints from the body so we can use them for elimination purposes. If it turns out that one set didn’t belong to him, we’ll get them checked against NCRO (National Criminal Records Office) files.’

‘And the London trips?’

‘We’ll give the Wentworth a call and try to find if he had any visitors while he was staying with them. Mrs Brendon said she booked the rooms for him and I’m sure she’s very good at her job, so she’ll be able to give us a list of the dates when he stayed there. Anyway, that can all wait until later. There’ll be a man at the house all the time, so no-one’s going to interfere with the scene and it’s been a long day. Let’s go home now.’

Chapter Four

They were back in the office early on Sunday and decided to pay a second visit to the house,

‘We’ll be looking for two things initially; a hay fever remedy, to see if it contains Hydroxyzine, and a personal diary, if he kept one. If he did, it might make interesting reading.’

It was not long before they were back at The Limes, being admitted by Tom Flanagan, the PC who was assigned for the early morning shift at the house. They found Mr Ingold’s study, which was just as they might have expected; neat and tidy, the home office of a 60 odd year old professional man.

There was an old-fashioned heavy mahogany bureau with three drawers to each side, and one central drawer, under a large flap which formed the sloping lid of the top section. When lowered, the flap became a writing surface, with a well worn leather inlay. This rested on two arms which came out automatically to support it when it was brought down.

Inside the top section, they found some smaller drawers to each side, and in the centre, an assortment of pens, pencils, a ruler and a bottle of ink. It seemed clear that there would be nothing of interest there, so they turned their attention to the right-hand set of drawers. The bottom one yielded what they were looking for; a small leather bound diary with ‘JI’ embossed in gold on the lower right-hand corner.

Carefully, DCI Granley opened it and flipped through a few of the middle pages. On a couple of them, he found ‘PF, London’ and

made a note of that. The entries were sparse and all the others seemed to be concerned with Masonic or church meetings.

Turning to DS Maiden, he said, 'I wonder what 'PF' signifies; a person, or a place maybe?' Anyway, we'll have to follow it up. Would you take another look in the bedroom, to see if you can find his hay fever medication, so we can see whether it contains Hydroxyzine. If you can't find it there, try the bathroom or the kitchen. People don't always keep things where you might expect.'

'Right Sir, bedroom it is then.'

The second search of the main bedroom proved fruitless, so she moved on to the other bedrooms, then the bathroom. There was a medicine cabinet on the wall above the washbasin and in it she found what she was seeking; a packet of 28 Hydroxyzine 10mg tablets.

The cabinet contained nothing else which seemed relevant to the case, so, for the sake of being thorough, she also checked the cupboards in the kitchen, one of which had another packet of the Hydroxyzine in it.

Returning to the study, she saw that Granley had found a bank statement and was studying it intensely.

'Anything of interest to the case, Sir?'

'Yes; there are a couple of bank statements, for last month and the month before. Ingold made a couple of large withdrawals; £100 each time. I think I'd better pay a visit to his bank as soon as I can get the Court Order. How did you get on?'

'I think these are what we needed to find; two packets and

they're both almost empty. There was one in the bathroom cabinet, and the other in a cupboard in the kitchen.'

They were interrupted by PC Flanagan, ‘Would you like a cuppa, Sir? I’ve just put the kettle on.’

‘No, it’s OK, thanks. I think we’ve finished here now. Before we go though, have you had any visitors other than us?’

‘No Sir. Silent as the grave, you might say!’

Ignoring the black humour, Granley continued, ‘And the chap who was here during the night; did he have anything to hand on to you?’

‘No Sir, nothing.’

‘Ah well, we’ll be off then. Enjoy your cuppa.’

* * * * *

Back in the office, Granley and Maiden reviewed what they had learned so far.

‘We now know that it was not death from natural causes, and that it was as a result of a combination of Atropine and Hydroxyzine.’

‘And that he had both in his house.’

‘I found that a couple of large withdrawals had been made from his bank account in the last two months.’

‘Then there’s that cryptic note in his diary; ‘PF, London’. Blackmail, do you think, Sir?’

‘It certainly looks like a strong possibility. Look, Sally, I’m well aware that you are young and keen to make a name for yourself. I know that feeling; I was the same when I was a young DC, and my DCI gave me a chance to get on. I think it’s time for me to pass on that favour. How would you fancy a trip to the

smoke to see what you can find out about PF?

The staff at the hotel might be more willing to talk face to face rather than over the 'phone. We'll get you a rail warrant tomorrow and you can stay a couple of days if you need to. Just let me know how you're getting on. You'll be operating on the Met's patch, so you'd better make yourself known to them. The station which covers Bayswater is Paddington Green; it's on Harrow Road. I know the DCI there; we were on a course together, so I'll let him know you'll be coming.

He's a good man, so he'll give you any help you might need. He may want to send one of his DCs with you, but it'll only be as an observer and a guide to the area. You'll be running the show.'

'Thank you, Sir. I appreciate you giving me this chance and I'll certainly keep you briefed on what I manage to dig up.'

'While you're down there, I'll get that Court Order sorted and we'll see if there were any other large payments in his earlier bank statements. I'll also have a word with his Church Minister and make some enquiries at the Con Club, to try to learn a bit more about his social life. It looks as though we're both going to be busy for the next few days, so let's have a coffee and then call it a day.'

Chapter Five

Monday morning found them back in the office; Granley making the promised 'phone call to DCI Bob Halloran at Paddington Green, and Sally Maiden obtaining a rail warrant from the Duty Sergeant.

She caught the bus to Broadgate, the first available train to London, and a taxi to Paddington Green. At the front desk, she showed her warrant card and was led through a series of corridors to the CID office.

Bob Halloran was there to greet her, 'Good morning. Welcome to our little patch. I'll get one of my lads to show you around and give you any help you may need. Jack Granley has filled me in on why you're here. I believe your first port of call is the Wentworth Hotel?'

'That's right, Sir.'

'It's only a small place; calls itself a hotel, but it's not much bigger than a B&B. Just eight guest rooms I believe, but it's a quiet, respectable place and I'm sure they'll be happy to help if they can. DC Townley will look after you while you're here, but he won't interfere unless you ask him to.'

'Thank you, Sir. That's very kind of you.'

DC Tim Townley introduced himself and said, 'Right, first things first. You'll want to get cracking, I know, but a spot of lunch wouldn't hurt if you've no objection?'

'Sounds sensible to me, so lead on. Where do you have in mind?'

'There's a nice friendly pub a couple of streets away, where they do good food and a decent pint.'

‘Sounds good. Let’s go.’

A short walk and a few minutes later found them sitting in the lounge bar of the Royal Albert, which had been built in the 1850s and looked as though it hadn’t changed much since.

There was a long dark oak bar with a brass rail in front of it for customers to put their feet on, racks overhead for glasses, and mirrors on the wall behind the bar, advertising local beers, some of which had long since been bought by larger brewers, or ceased to be made.

There were some obviously well-worn stools by the bar and the seating was in booths for four people; two either side with a table between. The seats were comfortable and had high backs, topped with leaded glass panels to give privacy. Sally could easily picture men in frock coats drinking and smoking, and some occasionally using the spittoons which would have originally been between the brass rail and the bar itself.

Being a Monday lunchtime, there were few customers and they had no problem finding an empty booth. Sally opted for fish and chips, while Tim went for a chicken curry. He ordered for them at the bar and made a show of offering to pay, but the landlord would have none of it, ‘Come on Tim, you know better than that. You lads are always welcome here; keeps the villains away.’

As he sat down again, Sally was obviously surprised that the meal was on the house, so he explained, ‘People have, shall we say, a more relaxed attitude to the rule book down here. We get a free pint or an occasional meal for nothing and the landlord doesn’t get anyone coming in trying to cause bother. I should also tell

you that we have a less formal attitude to ranks.

Officers are generally on first name terms, at least with others one rank either side of us. If you would like me to call you Sarge, I have no problem with that, but I just wonder whether, while you're here, it might be easier to call each other by our first names.'

'I don't see why not; when in Rome...and we're going to be working together for the next day or so. I'm Sally.'

'Right. Let's enjoy our food, then I'll take you round to the Wentworth and we'll see what they can tell you about your Mr Ingold.'

About an hour later, they left, suitably refreshed, and walked about a quarter of a mile to the hotel. As they walked, Tim told Sally about it, 'It's the Wentworth, because that's the name of the people who turned it into a hotel. Mr Wentworth died a few years back, so now Mrs Wentworth runs it on her own. She'll never be a millionaire, but it gives her a steady income and she has a flat at the top.'

When they arrived, it proved to be a three storey building, Georgian in style, but Sally found it hard to guess whether it was really that old. It looked as though it had been two houses once, but now had a central small portico. It was stone built and, as Bob Halloran had said, of a modest size, but well maintained.

Inside, there was a hallway with a small reception desk behind which a young woman sat. She greeted Tim with, 'Good afternoon, Tim. Come for a coffee?'

'No thanks, Annie. We've just had lunch and we're here on business. Is Mrs W around?'

‘She’s just in her office. I’ll tell her you’re here.’

She called Mrs W, who was in fact Mrs Wentworth, the owner, who appeared seconds later.

‘If you’re here on business, you’d better come into the lounge. It’s quiet at the moment, so we’re not likely to be disturbed.’

She led them to the left-hand room, which was comfortably furnished with several easy chairs, arranged in twos and threes with a low coffee table between each group.

‘Now, Sergeant Maiden, how can I help you?’

She was a smartly dressed woman, in her mid-50s, Sally guessed. She was quite slim and about 5’ 6” tall, with mid-brown hair cut fairly short. It was difficult for Sally to place where she was from, as she had no real regional accent.

‘I’m making some enquiries about a solicitor from our area, Mr John Ingold, and I believe he has stayed with you a few times.’

‘Oh yes, Mr Ingold. He’s stayed here about half a dozen times over the past year; a quiet, respectable sort older man and quite private. I hope he’s not in any kind of trouble.’

‘I’m afraid I have some sad news for you. He was found dead at his home on Saturday morning and we’re not sure that his death was due to natural causes.’

‘Oh, I’m so sorry to hear that but...I’m afraid that I can’t see what this has to do with us.’

‘We found his diary, in which he had written on a couple of dates ‘PF, London’. Did he have any visitors while he was here?’

‘No, as I said, he kept himself to himself, but of course he used to go out.’

‘Does ‘PF’ mean anything to you?’

‘No, I’m afraid not. London is a big place and just ‘PF’ might mean anything.’

‘Have your staff been with you long? Did anyone in particular have much to do with him?’

‘They’ve all been with us for a while and there is a young Spanish waiter, Carlos, who I know he talked to a few times. I think Mr Ingold spoke a little Spanish, so I suppose that’s why.’

‘Is he in just now? I’d like a word with him if you don’t mind.’

She went through to Reception.

‘Annie, is Carlos in today?’

‘Yes, he’s just having a break at the moment.’

‘Ask him to come to the lounge, would you? DS Maiden would like to talk to him about Mr Ingold.’

A few minutes later Carlos appeared. He was about the same height as Mrs Wentworth, with dark brown hair and eyes, and a faint moustache; good-looking in a slightly girlish way and in his early 20s.

‘Carlos, this is Detective Sergeant Maiden from Midshire Police. She’d like to ask you some questions about Mr Ingold, because he’s dead, I’m afraid.’

‘Oh, I’m sorry to hear. He was nice man.’

Carlos spoke English reasonably well, though with a strong Spanish accent and a very slight lisp.

‘I’m sorry to have to trouble you, Carlos, but we have to make some enquiries about Mr Ingold’s death. We found a note in his diary ‘PF, London’; do you know what it might mean?’

Carlos suddenly looked uneasy, but said, ‘Si, yes; is name of club in So-ho, Pink Flamingo. He ask me where I go meet other men

and I tell him, you go Pink Flamingo club, but I don't know if he go.'

'It's alright, Carlos, you're not in any trouble and you've been very helpful. Thank you.'

'I go now?'

'Yes, that's fine, Carlos. Thank you.'

When he had gone, Sally said, 'Well, that's a surprise. I certainly wasn't expecting that. He'd been married for years until his wife died a few years ago and there was nothing to suggest he had any kind of interest in homosexuality.'

Tim and Mrs Wentworth looked at one another and said, almost in unison, 'It's the quiet ones you have to watch!'

'Tim, have you heard of this Pink Flamingo place?'

'No, it's not my scene, but if it's in Soho I'll give the lads at 'C' Division, West End Central, and see what they know about it. Can I use your 'phone please, Mrs Wentworth?'

'Of course, Tim. You'd better use the one in the office.'

He was back in a couple of minutes.

'Yes, they know it. They said it's in a basement just off Berwick Street. I've arranged for one of their lads to meet us this evening to take us to it. You might find it a bit of an eye-opener, but 'all in the line of duty', eh? In the meantime, you'll need somewhere to stay.'

Mrs Wentworth was quick to seize the opportunity,

'We've got some rooms free tonight if you want one. You can have a double en-suite at single rate.'

'Thanks. That's good of you. I'll just have to get my case from the police station, then I'll be back.'

Sally and Tim walked back to Harrow Road, where Sally collected her case and arranged to meet Tim at the Oxford Street South exit from Tottenham Court Road tube station at 7pm.

She returned to the Wentworth, settled into her room, then asked for an outside 'phone line and called DCI Granley to tell him what she had learned so far, and find out from him what developments there had been back in Milechester.

'Well Sally, how are you getting on in the big city? Did Bob Halloran lend you one of his men to help you?'

'I'm, fine Sir, thanks. It was an easy journey and yes, as you suggested, one of his DCs, a young man called Tim Townley, is working with me. We went to the Wentworth – by the way I'm staying there for now if that's alright – and we now know that 'PF' isn't a person; it's a club for homosexuals in Soho. What's been happening with you?'

'That's something I'd never have guessed; that Ingold had developed homosexual tendencies at his age. However, as you'll imagine, I've not been idle either. I got a Court Order, went to Ingold's bank and obtained copies of his bank statements for the past six months. He's made a total of four unusual withdrawals for large amounts.'

'Did we have any luck with the prints from the glasses?'

'No, they were too smudged to be of any use. I've had the lads busy checking with the neighbours to find out whether they saw anyone calling on Ingold on Friday evening, so far no-one has been able to come up with anything.'

'Do we have a date for the Inquest yet?'

'Yes. That's fixed for a week on Tuesday. We'd better make sure that we're there. You can never tell who might turn up.'

‘I’ll make a point of being back well before then, Sir.’

‘What are you planning to do about this Pink Flamingo place?’

‘I’ve arranged to meet with Tim and another DC from West End Central, as it’s on their patch, tonight and the chap from the area is going to take us there. It will be a bit of a needle in a haystack job, but we may be lucky.’

‘Did you manage to get to see Mr Ingold’s doctor?’

‘Yes, but there was no history of Bradycardia, so the Hydroxyzine combination may have been an unfortunate, if that’s what we can call it, coincidence. Did you have anything else for me?’

‘No, that’s it for now, but I’ll call you tomorrow to bring you up to date on the Pink Flamingo. Goodbye Sir.’

Sally had arranged to meet Tim and the DC from ‘C’ Division at 7pm, but arrived a few minutes early, to find them already there.

‘We thought we’d better get here before you. We wouldn’t want anything to happen to you while you’re in our care.’

‘Very thoughtful of you, I’m sure. Shall we get going?’

As they walked, Sally asked the DC from West End Central, whose name was Alec Smart; usually known as Smart Alec, he admitted ruefully; about the Pink Flamingo. ‘It’s basically a pick-up joint. Men go to meet men and women to meet women, so you never know, you might get lucky!’

She laughed it off; she knew only too well that the attitude of most male officers was that female coppers were only good for one thing, and that wasn’t policing, but she had soon learned to ignore it.

They walked along Oxford Street, turned left into Berwick Street and down a couple of side streets, then came to a back alley with a set of steps leading down to a heavy door with a sliding flap set into it at eye level. There was a neon sign above the door in the form of a pink flamingo, but the paint on it had begun to peel off, and the light itself was flickering, so it did not seem very welcoming.

The three of them went down the steps and Alec knocked on the door. The flap slid across. Alec showed his warrant card and said, 'It's ok; it's not a raid. Can we come in? We're making some enquiries about a murder and we think your staff may be able to give us some information.'

The door was opened, reluctantly, Sally felt, and they went in. There was a steep, but thankfully short, further flight of steps down to what seemed to be a kind of hell to her. The lighting was dim and the music loud. There was a small dance floor, packed with same-sex couples dancing very close together, and to the left, a small bar with more same-sex couples leaning on it, chatting.

The three of them stood out from the usual run of members and all eyes at the bar were immediately turned towards them.

'What are you having?' the young girl behind the bar asked.'
Sally ordered a lager and lime. Tim and Alec had the same.

'Is your Manager in tonight?'

'Who's asking?'

'As if you didn't know! We need a word with him, or her, about someone who might have been here a few times.'

The girl behind the bar, whose hair was cropped so short that she was almost bald, gave Sally a withering look, then disappeared into a tiny office behind her. Seconds later, another girl; at least, they thought it was a girl, though she was dressed in a man's suit and had a deep voice, appeared.

'This is a respectable club. We don't want any trouble. What do you want?'

It was Sally who answered, 'I'm DS Maiden from Milechester, making some enquiries about a man who was murdered in our area. We know he used to come to London and we think he may have sometimes come here.'

'We don't get many casualls; it's usually our regulars, so I guess we'd remember if he'd been. What did he look like?'

'He was in his 60s, smartly dressed and 5' 8" tall. I imagine he would stick out even more than we do.'

'Yeah, yeah, I think know the guy you mean. He came here a few times, but not for a few weeks now.'

'Did he meet anyone?'

'First time he came, he seemed to hook up with Tommy; he's one of our regulars, but funny thing is, we haven't seen him for days.'

'Tommy? Do you know his other name?'

'We don't go in for surnames here. Tommy's all we ever called him.'

'Do you know where Tommy lives?'

'No idea, sweetheart, but Joe might know. He was quite sweet on Tommy until this older guy turned up. I got the idea the older guy had money, 'cause as soon as he showed up, Tommy didn't want to know Joe.'

‘Is Joe in tonight?’

‘Yeah. He’s on the dance floor. I’ll get him for you.’

She made her way through the couples surprisingly easily and was back in moments with a young man. He was very obviously young, quite possible under age to be there, and slim. They needed his help, so had to overlook any possible breach of the law relating to his age.

‘Don’t be shy, Joe. They won’t bite. They just want to ask you about Tommy.’

‘That miserable two-face little bleeder? What d’yer wanna know?’

‘Look Joe. We need to have a word with him. Do you know where he lives?’

‘I know where he used ter live, but I hear tell he moved out and I don’t know where he is now. If I never see him again, it’ll be too soon!’

‘Dou you know his other name?’

‘Nah, everyone just called him Tommy.’

‘Do you have a photo of Tommy? If you let us have one of him, we just might be able to turn a blind eye to the fact that you’re too young to be here.’

‘Yeah, I got one and he ain’t no mate of mine any more. There you go.’

He produced a crumpled and dog-eared snap of the two of them, obviously from a photo booth, and handed it over.

‘Nah what?’

‘Joe, you’ve been a great help and we’re very grateful to you, so we’ll wish you goodnight, but you’d better be more careful

about who you hook up with in future. We'll leave you to get back to your dancing.'

Sally was happy to leave, as she was attracting interested glances from some of the girls at the bar, so they finished their drinks, thanked the Manager and made their way back to the street, their ears ringing from the loud music.

As soon as they were back on the pavement, Alec said, 'To misquote the old saying, "Hell hath no fury like a queer scorned."' Sally said, 'I'll forget I heard that remark! We now know who we need to find and we have a fairly recent photo. Are there any more clubs like that?'

'I can think of a couple of them near here; the Celador – joke on 'Cellar door' – and the Cockatoo. I'll leave you to guess how that got its name!'

'I think I can probably guess! Can we pay them a visit? Tommy might be at one of them.'

'Yeah, why not? Might as well make a night of it and get it over.'

They went to the other clubs, but drew a blank. Tommy was known as he went to them both at times, but no-one could, or at least, would, say where he was living. The nearest they could get was that he was probably kipping on a mate's sofa in Camden Town. That wasn't much help, as Camden was really a large village; one of many swallowed up by the relentless growth of London over the past century or two.

'Tim, Alec, you've got his picture. Can you get it out to all the lads on the beat? If anyone spots him, I don't want him arrested; at least, not yet. I just need to know where he is staying. My DCI

wants to come down and interview him when he's been traced.'

'Yeah, sure, we can get that arranged and we'll let you know when you find him, then you can tell your boss.'

'Thanks. I'd appreciate that. Tim, you know where to find me.'

When Sally returned to the Wentworth, it was after 10pm, so she turned in for the night. After a good full English breakfast, she requested an outside line and rang Jack.

'Good morning Sally. Anything fresh in London? How did you get on at the Pink Flamingo?'

She gave him a brief version of the evening's events, but omitted the fact that she had been on the way to being propositioned.

'I think you're other new friend in the Met has probably earned his nickname. He sounds a right Smart Alec, but at least we now know that we need to have a good long talk with Tommy, to find out how deeply involved he is in all this.

Anyway, while you were visiting the fleshpots of London, I paid a visit to Ingold's church and the Con Club to see what I could learn. It was the same story in both places; he was a quiet sort, a good Steward at the church, and an enthusiastic, but not so good, snooker player at the club.

Inevitably, in a place this size, there were a few people who belonged to both. The only change anyone had noticed in him in the past few months was that he started to dress a little more casually. He seemed a bit withdrawn, a little anxious, in the week or two before his death.

That would certainly fit in if someone was putting the bite on him for money. In the meantime, what do you want to do? Do you think there is any point in you hanging on down there in case

Tommy is found, or do you want to come back here and wait for the Met boys to let us know when they have located him?’

‘To be honest, Sir, I can’t see the point in me cooling my heels down here. It could be days, or even weeks, and both they and I have other things we can be doing while we wait for news. I’ve eaten, so I’ll pack, which won’t take long, and I should be back in Milechester fairly early this afternoon. We can plan our next move then, if that’s OK with you.’

‘That sounds sensible to me, but please be sure to call in at Paddington Green on the way to the station and thank Bob and his lads for their help. Have you some money to pay Mrs Wentworth for the room?’

‘Yes, I’m fine, thanks. I’ll get a receipt and put in a claim when I get back. I’ll thank her as well; she and her staff have looked after me well while I’ve been staying here.’

‘Right. Do as you say and I’ll look forward to seeing you and catching up in more detail later today.’

As luck would have it, after settling up with Mrs Wentworth (‘Do call in and see us if you’re down this way.’) and calling in to thank Bob Halloran for his help, Sally got to Euston Station when there was a train to Broadgate in a few minutes’ time, so she was back in Milechester Police Station just after 1pm.

She had a lengthy catch-up session with Jack Granley, then he said, ‘Look, you had a busy night, and a noisy one, last night, by all accounts, and I’m sure you would welcome a little peace and quiet, so put your expenses claim in and then go home. We’ll meet up again tomorrow and decide what else we can do before we manage to get to interview Tommy.’

‘Thank you, Sir. I’d appreciate that. Oh, by the way, have we

had a date for the inquest yet?’

‘Yes, it’s been fixed for 10am on Tuesday, 20th July and of course it will be the Coroner, Mr Justice Braeburn, who will be presiding. I’ve had many dealings with him, so I think I’ll have a word with him before then and ask whether it is strictly necessary for it to come out about Ingold’s late liking for homosexuality. Ingold was a man with a good reputation here, and I wouldn’t wish that to be tarnished by this. There are still many people who take dim a very dim view of that kind of thing.’

They were in the office next day when the ‘phone rang and Jack answered it, ‘Hello Bob, this is an unexpected pleasure. Have you found Tommy? What? Oh, I see. Well, thanks for letting me know. Give my regards to Mary.’

‘DCI Halloran, Sir?’

‘Yes, but it wasn’t good news. The River Police fished Tommy’s body out of the Thames early this morning. They’re not sure whether he jumped, fell or was pushed, but officially they’re treating it as accidental death or suicide.

It makes no difference which, as far as we’re concerned, but we certainly won’t be able to interview him now. At least it will add weight to my discussion with the Coroner, as the one person who might have had something to say about Ingold’s conversion to homosexuality is now not in any state to say anything.’

Chapter Six

The day of the inquest came; just another in a succession of very hot days that year. The Coroner, James Braeburn QC, was a man known for his thoroughness and painstaking attention to detail, so Sally wondered how DCI Grantley's talk with him had gone.

The inquest was to be held in the hall of a school and the doors were opened at 9:30am. All the available public seats were taken well before the starting time, as Mr Ingold had been a well-known local figure, well respected and well liked.

The Usher had initially left a door open and opened a couple of windows to try to introduce some cool air, as the day was already hot and likely to become more so. However, the windows opened onto a busy road and, in addition, workmen were carrying out repairs to the road, using a pneumatic drill. As soon as he entered, Braeburn ordered the door and windows to be closed.

The members of the jury were sworn in; 6 men and 4 women, then the Coroner briefly explained the purpose of the Inquest; to hear evidence relating to the death of Mr Ingold and agree on a probable cause of death.

The first witness to be called was Ethel Barton. She took the oath and the Coroner began,

‘I understand that you were the person who discovered the body of your late employer, Mrs Barton?’

She burst into tears and Braeburn, peering at her over his half-rimmed spectacles, said, ‘I realise that this must have been a very distressing experience for you, but please try to compose yourself and speak as calmly as possible. There will not be many

questions and then you will be able to sit down, or leave if you wish.'

Her crying gradually subsided and he repeated his initial question.

'Yes, I let myself in as usual and there he was, dead!'

'Please would you tell us, briefly, how you found Mr Ingold?'

'I told you, I just went in and there he was, dead.'

There was a ripple of laughter from the public seats, which quickly ceased when Braeburn gave a hard look over his spectacles.

'Let me put the question another way; what did Mr Ingold look like when you found him?'

'He was sort of slumped in his chair, with his mouth open.'

'And did you notice anything unusual in the room?'

'Yes, I saw there was a table near him, with a bottle and a couple of glasses on it.'

'And that was out of the ordinary?'

'Yes, he was a very tidy man. He would normally have cleared anything like that away so that I could get on with my work.'

'What did you do then, Mrs Barton?'

'I called the police and they come round.'

'Thank you, Mrs Barton. You've been most helpful. You may stand down now.'

Braeburn glanced down at the papers in front of him and spoke to the Usher, 'Call Police Constable Jones.'

Bill Jones was duly called, took the oath and gave his evidence. He had gone to The Limes as a result of a telephone call from Mrs Barton. On his arrival, she had been in a distressed state, but had taken him to the sitting room, where he had found the body of

Mr Ingold. As the presence of the bottle and glasses suggested that someone else had been present when Mr Ingold had died, he had requested the attendance of officers from the CID.

The Coroner thanked him and Bill was also allowed to stand down. Mr Braeburn looked at his papers again to see which witness to call next, but then looked up again sharply, clearly irritated, as there was a disturbance at the rear of the public seats.

The Usher whispered to him, 'I'm sorry, Sir. It seems that a member of the public has been taken ill, possibly as a result of the heat.'

'This inquest will be adjourned for 15 minutes.' Then, in an aside to the Usher before he left the room, 'Would you see whether there are any fans in the building which we may be permitted to use?'

The Usher managed to find the caretaker, who happened to be in the building, carrying out some minor repairs, and he in turn was able to locate two electric fans, which he placed on either side of the Coroner's chair, pointing towards the public seats.

The Coroner returned after precisely 15 minutes, resumed his seat, rapped on the desk with his gavel and called for the next witness, who was DCI Granley.

'You were requested to attend The Limes as PC Jones felt there might be some unusual factors connected with the death of Mr Ingold. Is that correct?'

'Yes Sir, that is correct.'

'Please would you tell this inquest what you found on your arrival?'

‘Yes Sir. PC Jones admitted me to the house and took me to Mr Ingold’s sitting room. I found two armchairs, in one of which was the body of Mr Ingold. He was slumped in a chair, his mouth was open and he appeared to have been gasping for breath. There was a small table between the two chairs, with a bottle and two glasses on it.’

‘Were there any other signs to indicate that a second person might have been present in the room?’

‘No Sir, only the two glasses.’

‘Did you make a search of the premises?’

‘I did, with the assistance of Detective Sergeant Maiden, who had accompanied me to the house.’

‘Did you find anything which might have indicated a possible cause of death?’

‘In the principal bedroom, Sergeant Maiden discovered a bottle of eye drops containing Atropine, a substance which, you will be aware, has, in a sufficient quantity, been known to cause the taker to suffer breathing difficulties, heart irregularities, confusion and eventual death.

Detective Sergeant Maiden and I noted that there was in the front garden of Mr Ingold’s house a plant which is commonly referred to as ‘Deadly Nightshade’ but the Latin name for which is *Atropa Belladonna*, all parts of which are deadly, and which is a source of Atropine.’

There was an audible gasp from the public seats, again quickly silenced by a glowering look from the Coroner.

‘Have you discovered anything else which might have a bearing on this matter?’

‘Yes, Sir. I spoke with Mr Arthur Wenford, a legal clerk in the

employment of Mr Ingold. He accompanied me to the office of Mr Ingold, where he opened a wall safe and produced a Will made by Mr Ingold some years previously.'

'Are you able to tell us the content of that Will?'

'Yes. There was only one named beneficiary, Mrs Margaret Brendon.'

'Thank you, Chief Inspector. You may stand down now.'

Jack had just taken a seat on one of the few chairs reserved for witnesses when they had given their evidence, when DC Dick Robinson came in, bowed to the Coroner, and handed Jack a note, then left.

He read it, then beckoned to the Usher and whispered to him. The Usher in turn spoke quietly with the Coroner, who said,

'Detective Chief Inspector, I understand that you wish to return to the stand. Do you wish to add something to the evidence which you have just given?'

'Yes, Sir. I have just been informed that in clearing Mr Ingold's desk, Mr Wenford discovered a second Will, made by Mr Ingold only a matter of days before he died.'

'May we know the content of that Will?'

'There was again a sole beneficiary, this time a young man from London, and I regret to inform this inquest that I have been notified that the person in question was found dead by the River Police Division of the Metropolitan Police, having drowned in the River Thames. So far as can be ascertained, this man was not involved in the death of Mr Ingold.'

'Before I ask you to stand down again, Chief Inspector, is there anything further which you wish to add?'

‘No Sir, nothing further.’

‘In that case, you may stand down. Call Dr McAllister.’

She was called to the witness stand, the Usher asked her to repeat the oath and she gave her evidence.

‘You are the Pathologist at Milechester Hospital?’

‘I am.’

‘And you were asked to examine the body of the deceased?’

‘That is correct.’

‘Please tell us what you found as a result of that examination.’

‘I found the deceased to be a man, in his 60s and in good health for his age. He had been dead for several hours and I was able to place the time of death at between 6pm and 9pm.

The face showed signs of a struggle for breath, but on inspecting his lungs, I found no indication of disease. The heart showed some signs of ageing, as one would expect in a man of his age, but again, no signs of disease.

I obtained post-mortem samples of blood and urine and these, together with the contents of his stomach, were sent to the laboratory for analysis.’

‘And are you able to give us the results of that analysis?’

‘I am. All revealed the presence of Atropine and Hydroxyzine Hydrochloride. The quantity of Atropine was sufficient to cause death within a matter of minutes. The quantity of Hydroxyzine was minimal; unlikely to cause any serious effects in itself, but it would have potentiated the effects of the Atropine.’

‘Thank you, Dr McAllister. For the members of the jury, please would you explain what those effects would be?’

‘Yes Sir.’ Turning to face the jury, she explained, ‘Atropine

affects the central nervous system and the autonomic nerves, which govern the heart, lungs and gut. It interferes with the neurotransmitter acetylcholine, blocking the receptors which this is meant to activate. As a result, the Atropine would have caused difficulties with breathing, an irregular heart action, confusion and then death.'

'Thank you, Dr McAllister. You may stand down now.'

Addressing his remarks to the jury, the Coroner said, 'You have heard the evidence which has been given before this inquest. The deceased had suffered symptoms consistent with those which would have been expected from the ingestion of a large enough quantity of Atropine to have caused death.

Detective Chief Inspector Granley has told us that a bottle of gin and two glasses were found near the body and that partial fingerprints were found on a glass, but these were smeared and of no value in identification.

You have heard that the deceased had made a Will in favour of Mrs Brendon as sole beneficiary, but that she would have been unaware of the contents of that Will. You have further heard that a second Will was later made by Mr Ingold, and that the sole beneficiary under that Will has since been found drowned.

It is now your duty to retire to consider, and reach a verdict, on how Mr Granley died and whether any other person was responsible for causing his death. You may now retire to consider that verdict.'

He adjourned the hearing pending the result of their deliberations, but it was a matter of minutes before the jury came back into the hall.

'Members of the jury, have you reached a verdict?'

The foreman stood and said, 'Yes Sir.'

‘And your verdict is?’

‘That the deceased met his death as a result of murder by person or persons unknown.’

‘And that is the verdict of you all?’

‘It is.’

‘The members of the jury are now dismissed and their findings are now recorded.’

The evening after the inquest was Jack's Masonic Lodge night and one of the fellow members, Tom Gresford, was having a drink with him after the Communication (meeting). Tom was also a member of the other Lodge, the one of which Arthur Wenford was a member.

Jack asked how things were going in that Lodge, and Tom said, 'Oh, generally fine, but we had something a few days ago which was almost unheard of.'

‘Oh, what was that. You know old Arthur Wenford, Ingold’s clerk?’

‘Yes, I’ve met him socially once or twice.’

‘He’s usually our most punctual attender; as the saying goes, you could set your clock by him, but he was nearly half an hour late for the Communication and seemed a bit flustered when he did arrive.’

‘Was he indeed? Did anyone ask him why?’

‘Yes, I jokingly asked him if he’d been seeing another woman. He seemed very uneasy, but tried to laugh it off and didn’t really give me an answer.’

‘Can you remember exactly which day it was?’

‘Let me see. It wasn’t last week; no, it was the week before, the night poor old Ingold was killed. Why; you surely don’t think Arthur could have had anything to do with it?’

‘No,’ he laughed, ‘you know me; once a copper...’

Chapter Seven

On Thursday, 22st July, Granley was back in his office, conferring with DS Maiden about the inquest, when the ‘phone rang.

‘Sorry to disturb you Sir, but there’s a young man in the front office, saying that he needs to speak with you in private.’

‘Does this young man have a name?’

‘Oh, sorry Sir, yes. Robert Brownham. He says he worked for Mr Ingold.’

‘Then we’d better see him.’

Granley and Maiden went to the front office, met Brownham and took him to an interview room.

‘Now, Robert, I understand you worked for Mr Ingold?’

‘That’s right Sir.’

‘Do you have some information for us?’

‘Yes, but I’m not sure whether it has anything to do with Mr Ingold’s death.’

‘Why don’t you just tell us, and let us decide whether it is important?’

‘Well...it’s like this, see. I worked for Mr Ingold for a couple of years, straight from school. I think he thought he might be able to get me to go to college and learn about the law, so he asked me to get involved in all sorts of jobs to do with the firm. One of them was looking after the petty cash. It doesn’t sound very exciting, but sometimes there could be a couple of hundred quid in notes.

Anyway, I only looked at it once in a while, ‘cos there were other things to see to. Most of the time, Mr Wenford looked after it. When I looked at it a couple of weeks ago, I couldn’t make it add up. I’m not the best at sums – never have been – but there

seemed to be £50 missing.

I mentioned it to Mr Wenford and he said I shouldn't worry; it was probably just a case of somebody had forgotten to put a receipt with all the others. I probably wouldn't have given it another thought, only.....' He hesitated.

'Only...?'

'Only a couple of days later, I saw Mr Wenford coming out of a betting shop, and he didn't look as though he'd backed a winner. Did I do right to come? Only I don't want anyone thinking I took it, if money is missing.'

'Thank you, Robert. You'd better get back to work before someone misses you. Just leave it with us and any case, we know that if anything IS missing, you won't be the one we'll be asking about it.'

When Robert had left, Granley and Maiden returned to their office and, over a cup of coffee, Granley said, 'That certainly was interesting. Before we were interrupted, I was wondering whether to tell you something I heard last night at the Lodge. That talk with our young friend convinced me that I should.'

He gave DS Maiden the gist of what Tom Gresford had said, without mentioning him by name.

'Well Sir, that throws a new light on this case. Wenford is a respected man, but if he has developed a taste for betting, and has been dipping into the petty cash to pay for it, maybe he thought Ingold was about to find out and come to us.'

'It begins to look like a strong possibility, but what about the money Ingold drew from the bank? Was it just to fund his little trips to London? The fact of the new Will shows he had quickly become very fond of Tommy. Maybe he just wanted to show him

a good time, to keep him interested.'

'Well, what now, Sir?'

'We certainly don't want to jump the gun as far as Arthur Wenford is concerned. Let's get the lads to spread the house to house enquiries beyond Broadgate Road. It's the kind of area where there are often people walking their prized dogs. Maybe, just maybe, someone living in one of the streets nearby may have seen someone answering Wenford's description on the night Ingold was murdered.

We'll also do some digging to try to learn if he has any hobbies that might tie in; is he a gardener, or an amateur botanist – or even a toxicologist!'

'Be good to think so, but it's probably too much to hope for. Anyway, I'll organise the wider house to house enquiries.'

'Get them to check the bookies as well; see if our Arthur has been having a losing streak.'

'Will do. I'll get on to it right away.'

A couple of days went by and it seemed that the renewed enquiries had brought nothing new, then DC Jenkins, an excitable Welshman, knocked and almost immediately burst into Granley's office.

'Got it, Sir. A Mrs Burford, who lives three streets away from The Limes, was on her way to walk her little Yorkie – sweet little thing it is – on the common. She went via Broadgate Road and saw a man fittin' Mr Wenford's description, about quarter to eight. At least, she thinks it was about then, but she was sure it was that night, and she can say for sure she was home by nine o'clock.'

'Well done, Jenkins!'

'Thank you Sir,' and he left, smiling broadly.

About an hour later, DC Bob Roberts brought the news that one of the local back street bookies knew Wenford as a regular customer, and that he had been losing steadily for weeks. He also happened to mention that he knew Wenford slightly, as he had a plot adjacent to him, at the allotments off George Street.

‘Keen gardener, is he?’

‘Not as keen as he might be. There are quite a lot of weeds between his patch and Bill Brendon’s.’

‘Are there now? Thanks, Bob.’

Turning to Sally Maiden, he asked, ‘How’s your plant knowledge?’ Following his line of thought, she said, ‘Not my specialist subject, but I reckon I could find out what deadly nightshade looks like.’

‘Good. I think it’s time we took an interest in gardening. Let’s start with the George Street allotments, but we’ll call in at the Library on the way and see if they have anything on how to identify weeds – particularly poisonous ones!’

‘I’m right with you Sir, and there’s no time like the present.’

The Library had a book on how to tell the difference between plants and common weeds, with illustrations of the more deadly ones, including Belladonna – deadly nightshade.

At the allotments, there was a young woman working on a plot near the entrance.

‘I’m sorry to disturb you, but do you happen to know which plot is Bill Brendon’s?’

‘Yes, it’s the one down at the far end, on the left, but you won’t find him there today. He only comes at weekends.’

Granley showed her his warrant card and said, ‘That’s OK. We

just need to take a look at his plot. Thanks for your help. We'll let you get back to your weeding.'

They walked between the rows of allotments, most of which were well looked after, until they reached the far end, where Bill Brendon and Arthur Wenford had their plots. As Bob Roberts had said, the area at the end had lots of weeds next to Arthur's plot, and in particular one which they both recognised from the description and photo in the book.

'Right Sir, better get a sample then.'

'Yes, but be careful; the book said every part of it can be highly toxic.'

'It's OK. I came prepared.'

She produced a pair of rubber gloves and a large plastic bag. Taking care not to damage it, she pulled up the plant, placed it in the bag, labelled it, and took off the gloves, pulling them inside out as she did so.

Back in the office, Granley telephoned Ingold's office and asked to speak to Wenford.

'I'm sorry to trouble you, but there are one or two points I'd like to clear up. Could you possibly come round to the station now?'

'Yes, of course. We're just in the process of closing down the office, so I can come now. I'll be with you in about ten minutes.' When he had put the 'phone down, he said, to Maiden, 'It could be awkward, because I know Wenford socially. Would you like to interview him?'

'I understand, Sir. I'll do the talking, if you wouldn't mind just sitting in.'

She collected him from the front office when he arrived and took him to an interview room, where Granley joined them.

‘We’re sorry to have had to ask you to come in, but we need a little more information. When Chief Inspector Granley spoke with you, we were not sure that Mr Ingold’s death was the result of murder. Now we know that it was, we need to ask you where you were between 6pm and 9pm on the night it happened?’

‘I understand; routine. Between 6pm and 9pm? Is that when...?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, between 6pm and 7:30pm I would have been at home with my wife, then I set off to walk to the Lodge. I remember I arrived late, because I’d been knocked over in Broadgate Road and my spectacles had flown off. Took me ages to find them.’

‘Knocked over? By a car?’

‘No, nothing as dramatic as that. Just some clumsy fool running.’

‘You say this was in Broadgate Road? That’s a bit of an unusual route from your house to the Lodge?’

‘It’s a bit of a detour, I know, but I sometimes used to call in on Mr Ingold and we’d walk to the Lodge together.’

‘But not that night?’

‘No, we didn’t always. He would say beforehand if he wanted me to.’

‘But you still walked that way?’

He smiled. ‘I’m a creature of habit. Once I get into a certain routine, I tend to stick to it.’

‘Why didn’t you mention it before?’

‘You hadn’t asked me where I’d been and it didn’t seem important.’

‘Can you describe the man who ran into you?’

‘It all happened in a flash, but he was tall; about six feet I would say, certainly taller than me, and heavily built. He hit me with some force!’

‘Did you see anyone else that evening?’

‘Yes, there was a woman walking her dog. Oh yes, and a chap jogging.’

‘Do you think either of them would have seen the man who ran into you?’

‘I don’t think the woman would. She passed me and had turned off before then, but the jogger might.’

‘Would you recognise the man if you saw again?’

‘I don’t know. I only had a brief glimpse before he knocked me over, but...I don’t know, he seemed to vaguely look like someone I served with during the war. John Ingold and I were both in the Navy, on the same ship. This man reminded me of a young junior officer on the ship.’

‘Were there any incidents between Ingold and this man?’

‘It was more than thirty years ago and most of us saw things which we would rather forget.’

‘Can you recall his name?’

‘No, I’m sorry. It was too long ago and anyway, I did say it was only a vague resemblance.’

‘What rank did Ingold hold?’

‘He was the Captain of a light cruiser.’

‘Can you remember the ship’s name?’

‘Yes, it was Warlord.’

‘Thank you, Mr Wenford. You’ve been very helpful, but we’ll leave it at that for now.’

When Wenford had left the station, Sally asked, ‘What do you reckon, Sir; was he telling the truth?’

‘I was watching him closely and he didn’t come across to me as someone who was worried by what you were asking. A bit embarrassed about being knocked over, but that was all. Either he’s a damn good actor, which I doubt, or he was telling the truth. If we assume that he was telling the truth, we’d better see whether our jogger witness can add anything, if he saw the man. For now, given what Wenford said, it is a long shot, but we’d better see what we can find out about HMS Warlord under Ingold’s command; crew list and any unusual incidents. First of all, we need to check where those records are held.’

It turned out that they were held by the Royal Navy Disclosure Cell of the Ministry of Defence, based at Whale Island, Portsmouth.

‘Well Sally, you had a fairly successful trip to London. How do you fancy a trip to Portsmouth? Disclosure is only open to families usually, but if you turn up in person and explain that this is a murder enquiry, I’m sure they will be willing to help, in confidence.’

‘It’s a bit of a trek, but I’m happy to go. If it’s ok with you, I’ll renew my acquaintance with Mrs Wentworth, then go down to Portsmouth the next day, to give me as much time as possible there; it could be a needle in a haystack job! Before then though, I’ll get one of the DCs to speak to the jogger again.’

Chapter Eight

It was 10pm on October 24th, 1942. HMS Warlord, a 'C' class cruiser, was employed on minelaying duties off the coast of Sicily. It was hazardous work at the best of times, and these were not the best of times.

The vessel, under the command of Captain John Ingold, was operating in enemy controlled waters, under cover of darkness. There was heavy cloud cover, through which there were occasional glimpses of the moon.

There was a strong swell running, but they were making good progress in a westerly direction, despite battling a head wind. Ingold was on the bridge and Sub-Lieutenant Arthur Wenford was also on duty.

Suddenly, without any warning, the wind swung through 180° and a freak wave threatened to drive the last mine which they had laid, back towards the stern of the ship, on the starboard side.

With no time to think, Ingold ordered the ship to go hard to port, to avoid the imminent, probably fatal, collision. She had a powerful engine and was capable of making a rapid change of course.

Warrant Officer Jenkins had gone below to try to get some sleep before his next watch when it happened. As the ship turned sharply, the heavy seas caused her to heel over and Jenkins was knocked off balance.

He fell and struck his head against a bulkhead. The danger was averted and the ship resumed its original course. Jenkins got to his feet, steadied himself and, other than a nasty bruise, seemed to be fine.

However, a couple of days later, he complained of severe headaches and was dead within a matter of hours. He was buried at sea.

A fellow Warrant Office was a great friend of Jenkins, having been through training with him and they had been drinking companions when on shore leave. He felt that Ingold had panicked and caused the unnecessary death of Jenkins. As a junior officer, he was in no position to do anything about it, but bore Ingold a grudge as a result.

When the ship returned to port, the WO was transferred to another vessel and never served under Ingold again. After the war, he lost track of Ingold.

Chapter Nine

The following Monday saw Sally on the train to London, having ‘phoned Mrs Wentworth to arrange a night’s accommodation at the hotel. She caught a taxi there and settled in, then put through a call to the MoD at Portsmouth.

‘Good afternoon. I’m from the Midshire Police, stationed at Milechester and we’re investigating a murder which took place on our patch. The victim was a solicitor, but we believe that during the war he was in the navy, in command of a light cruiser, and that something may have happened under his command which might give us a clue to his murderer. I’d like to come down tomorrow and look at the records for the ship, in strictest confidence, of course. Would that be possible?’

‘Access to such records is normally restricted to members of family of men who served, but in the circumstances, we’ll do what we can to help.

‘Thank you. That’s very kind.’ As an afterthought, she added, ‘I have signed the Official Secrets Act, of course!’

* * * * *

On the Tuesday morning Sally caught an early train to Portsmouth and then a ferry to Whale Island, in Portsmouth Harbour, where she presented herself to the Guard Room, produced her warrant card, and was introduced to the Records Clerk who had been assigned to help her.

The task proved to be less daunting than she, and Granley, had imagined. The ship had had a complement of 358, and even allowing for the fact that most of them would have been ratings, that left quite a few junior officers to consider. However, the

It seemed that the trail had gone cold, so Sally once again thanked Tim for his help and headed back to Milechester.

There were other problems for Milechester CID to handle, so the Ingold murder investigation was put on indefinite hold until such time as information on Brademan came to light, as it seemed that he was now the most likely suspect, though the reason was less certain.

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Chapter Ten

Eighteen months later; a Saturday night in Milechester. The town's pubs and discos were busy and the bobbies on the beat had the usual set of mostly good-natured drunks to deal with, 'Come on lads, you've had a good night out. While spoil it by getting yourself a night in the cells? Get yourselves off home and sleep it off.'

In the less respectable part of town, the Rat and Ferret pub was equally busy, with a crowd of mostly locals enjoying the footie on the newly installed TV. Suddenly a fight broke out; one of the local idiots had made a remark about sailors being cissies and a tall, strongly built man in his 50s had taken exception to it in the traditional manner; by punching the speaker.

In minutes, all hell had broken out, punches were being thrown and tables overturned, sending bottles and glasses flying. Anyone not involved headed for the exit and the landlord called for the police.

Hearing the sound of the sirens approaching, the man who had thrown the first punch hit the man next to him, then slipped away, first towards the toilets, then out through the back door and out into the night, just before the officers arrived.

The sight of half a dozen bobbies soon restored some semblance of order and questions were asked as to how the fight had started.

'I were only 'aving a bit of a laugh like.' This comment from the man who had made the offending suggestion, and who was now nursing a very sore jaw.

'Can you describe the man who hit you?'

‘What have we got here then lads? It was Bill Jones who answered. He glanced round the office, saw there was a woman sitting on a bench, waiting to be seen, and said, ‘I found this charmer using a shop doorway as a toilet, and when I challenged him, he tried to plant one on me. It’s taken all of us to bring him in.’

‘Alright lads, let’s find him a bed for the night in one of the cells. Hopefully we’ll get a bit more sense out of him tomorrow.’

As they were wrestling him towards the cells, Sally Maiden came through and at once saw a resemblance to the photograph of the Warrant Officer from the Warlord. He was older, naturally, and going grey, but the likeness was still there.

Once the group had left the front office, she said to Fred Lomas, 'Fred, what's the name of that man?'

‘Search me, Sally. He’s fighting drunk and we haven’t been able to get any sense out of him. They’re going to leave him to cool his heels in a cell overnight and we’ll charge him with D&D (drunk and disorderly) tomorrow morning.’

‘Do me a favour Fred. Don’t let him out until the DCI and I have had a chance to have a talk with him.’

‘A D&D? Isn’t that slumming it a bit for CID?’

‘We have our reasons. Just do it please, Fred.’

‘OK – “ours not to reason why!” We’ll keep him here for you.’

‘Thanks Fred. Much appreciated.’

Sunday morning. The unknown man was considerably more sober, but no more in the mood to co-operate than the previous night. Sally had 'phoned Granley at home to give him the news

that she thought they may possibly have found their man, and arranged to meet at the police station.

He was less aggressive, but surly, when he was taken to an interview room and found himself being questioned by Granley and Maiden, who took turns at asking the questions.

‘Name?’

‘Mickey Mouse.’

‘OK. We can wait; after all, we’re being paid for our time, so take your time. We’ll still be here when you realise you’ve nothing to gain by being awkward, apart from another night in our hotel.’

‘Oh ha bloody ha. Very funny.’

‘I’ll ask you again. What’s your name?’

‘John.’

‘I presume you have a surname?’

‘Brademan.’

‘Would that by any chance be John Brademan, ex-WOII, Royal Navy, formerly of the cruiser HMS Warlord.’

‘It might be. Why?’

His mood changed from one of defiance to one of a more guarded nature.

‘Well, Mr Brademan, we’ve been hoping to have a word with you, but you’re an elusive customer.’

‘Since when did CID take an interest in drunks?’

‘Oh, we’re interested in much more than the fact that you were drunk last night; much, much more. Your Captain on Warlord was a man called John Ingold.’

‘So what?’

‘There was an incident while you were serving on board

Warlord; an incident in which your mate died.’

‘Yeah, and?’

Finding him determined to be as obstructive as possible, they tried a different line of approach.

‘What do you do for a living, Mr Brademan?’

‘I’m a lab assistant.’

‘And your employer is?’

‘Easy enough for you to find out, so I’ll tell you. It’s Drug Research UK. They’ve got a place over in Broadgate.’

‘What sort of research would that be?’

‘I’m not allowed to say. It’s all very hush-hush; Government sponsored.’

‘We can ask them. We’ve signed the Official Secrets Act, so I’m sure they’ll be willing to tell us.’

‘So go ask them.’

‘Do you live in Broadgate?’

‘No, I rent a flat here in Milechester. It’s cheaper.’

‘Where were you between 6pm and 9pm on Friday, 9th July, 1976?’

‘I’d have been at home.’

‘You seem very sure, for something that happened a while ago, and it’s strange, because someone saw you in Broadgate Road then and that’s where Mr Ingold lived.’

‘Isn’t he that solicitor chap who was killed?’

‘Yes, and the man you held responsible for the death of your mate.’

‘If you’re going to try to pin that one on me, I want a lawyer before I say anything more.’

‘We can arrange that for you and we’ll continue this interview when we’ve got one, but in the meantime, if you are so innocent,

I'm sure you won't mind taking part in an ID parade?'

'Yeah, why not. I've nothing to hide.'

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Granley and Maiden left the interview room, leaving Brademan to return to the cell while they arranged for the necessary number of men to be recruited to take part in the line-up.

An hour later, they had nine men, all of a vaguely similar appearance to Brademan and a local solicitor had agreed to act for him, so the men were lined up in the yard behind the police station, with Brademan third from the right.

The man who had been jogging on the night of the murder was standing with Granley and Maiden, being given his instructions.

'All we should like you to do, Mr Williams, is walk slowly up and down the line and see whether you can recognise the man whom you saw on the night that Mr Ingold was killed. There's no rush; take your time and if you're not sure, you must say so, because we shall ask you to give evidence if you do manage to identify the man. Is that clear?'

'Yes, quite clear.'

He began to walk past the line of men, pausing briefly to look at each one in turn, then turned and walked back, paused a little longer in front of Brademan, nodded to Granley and walked quickly away.

Granley led Williams away while Maiden said to the other men,

'Thank you gentlemen. We're grateful for your help. You're free to go now,' then to Brademan, 'We have a solicitor here for you, so we'll go back to the interview room and continue our conversation there.'

Before they entered the room, Granley had a brief conversation

with Maiden, 'It's very sad that Arthur Wenford died last year, but at least he was spared being charged with theft, and we did get his written statement, about the incident on the ship and the fact that he was able to identify the man who knocked him over as John Brademan. We also have the statement of the jogger, Mr Williams, that he saw Brademan leaning against a wall on Broadgate Road, out of breath, on the night of the murder, so even if Brademan refuses to admit his guilt, I think we have sufficient evidence to charge him with the murder.

I managed to get hold of Brademan's line manager on the 'phone while we were arranging the line-up. The company he works for is engaged in research into antidotes for chemical and biological weapons and one of the substances with which they are working is Atropine.'

'Yes, but it would certainly help if we could get a confession out of him.'

'Well, we can only put the facts to him and see what he says.' They went in and Granley said to Brademan, 'Now you have a solicitor present and you know the outcome of the identity parade, I must caution you that you are not obliged to say anything unless you wish to do so, but what you say may be put into writing and given in evidence.

'We have written statements from two witnesses that they saw you in Broadgate Road, Milechester, on the night of Friday, 9th July, 1976. One of those statements also details an incident which happened on board the cruiser HMSD Warlord during the time you were serving on her.

'I have spoken with your line manager at Drug Research UK. He told me that you work in a laboratory which is specifically looking into the possible uses of Atropine, the poison used to kill

John Ingold.

I strongly advise you to take a few minutes to confer with your solicitor, Mr Allen, before I speak with you further. DS Maiden and I will leave the room now, to allow time for that conversation to take place between you in confidence, so that you can be given advice on what to say, if anything.'

They left the room and, outside the door, could hear a heated discussion between Brademan and the solicitor, though without being able to hear the actual words. After 10 minutes, the solicitor opened the door and said, 'Thank you, Chief Inspector. We have finished our discussion and you may come back in.' When Granley and Maiden were seated, Allen asked, 'Before my client says anything, may I ask you to explain to him the likely difference in sentencing, if he should be found guilty, between having entered a guilty plea or a not guilty plea.'

'I can see no objection to that. If you plead not guilty and there is the need for a full trial, the judge will be duty bound to take that fact into consideration when deciding what punishment would be appropriate.

If you have entered a plea of guilty, that would indicate a degree of willingness to co-operate, which might incline him towards a more lenient sentence.'

'Thank you, Chief Inspector. This is what I had informed my client, but I felt that it would probably carry more weight if you were to confirm it. Mr Brademan, you now have all the facts. As you have been told, the police have evidence which places you very near, if not actually at, the scene of the crime, and further evidence which indicates a motive which may have led you to commit the crime.

There is a further point for you to consider; if you were to be found guilty and sentenced to a term of imprisonment, you would be eligible to apply for release on parole. In that case, it is likely that the members of the parole board would view such an application in a more favourable light.

It is now for you to decide whether it would be wiser to make a full statement in writing.'

'Looks like I don't have a lot of choice then, doesn't it? If I do, I'm going down for a long time, but the parole board might decide to release me. If don't, but I'm tried and found guilty, I'm going to have to serve the full term.'

'I could not have summed it up better myself, Mr Brademan.'

'Get your pen and start writing. John Ingold's cowardly panic as Captain of HMS Warlord caused the death of a very good friend; a fact for which I have never forgiven him. After the war, the job I found in a lab put me in a place to learn about poisons. I first worked for the company in London, but then they opened a branch here in Broadgate and offered me the chance to move. I took the offer and moved here, renting a flat in Milechester. That was just over two years ago.

I had no idea that Ingold lived here, but one day when I nipped out to get some lunch, I literally bumped into him in the town centre. At that time I was amazed that fate had brought us face to face again after so many years, but realised that here was the chance I had been waiting for, to repay him for what he had done. I pretended to be delighted to see him, 'It's Captain Ingold, isn't it? I'm delighted to see you again. What are you doing now?' He fell for it and we talked for a few minutes, then I asked if we could get together for a couple of drinks to have a longer chat about old times in the Navy.

He said that he was on his own since his wife had died, and asked me to his house. I said I would bring a bottle of gin and some tonic, as he was providing the house and he agreed.

On the night, I arrived about 6:30pm and we had a couple of glasses and talked, then I asked to use his bathroom, in the hope that would put the idea into his head. Sure enough, a short while later, he needed to go. While he was out of the room, I laced his drink with some Atropine which I had managed to sneak out of the lab, topped up both our glasses so he wouldn't get suspicious, then put some more into the bottle of tonic.

When he came back, we finished those, then I said I would have to be going, but why not have one more before I left. I put both gin and tonic in his glass, but only gin in mine – I pretended to put tonic in mine, but only put a drop in.

After that glass, he started feeling ill; short of breath and confused. That was my moment. I told him what I had done and why. He tried to get up, maybe to get to the phone, but I carry a lot more weight, so I was easily able to push him back into the chair and keep him there. Let's face it, he wasn't in any state to put up a fight.

He became more and more agitated, gasping for breath, and then suddenly, he stopped and slumped back into the chair. I checked that he was really dead, then tipped the remainder of his drink and the bottle of tonic back into the bottle I had used to bring the Atropine, wiped the bottle and glasses and left the house.

I had been running on adrenaline until then, but when I got outside, it hit me that I'd really done it and I panicked and started running. I remember I ran into an older man, knocking him over, and it was just my bad luck that the man was Arthur Wenford, a Sub-Lieutenant from Warlord.'

‘John Brademan, you have been told that you need not say anything, but that anything you say may be put into writing and given in evidence. You are charged with the murder of John Ingold on Friday, 9th July, 1976.’