

DRIVE WAY MURDER

By Philip Rainford

A figure, obscured by the dark, dragged a body up the drive and dumped it close to the pavement head-first. A second body was dragged and dumped beside the first, both were covered in blood. Nearby, on the front lawn lay a third body.

Sandra Richards regained consciousness when woken by a police officer. It was the middle of the night, she'd been lying on her back on the front lawn of a suburban home. She had no idea where she was, or how she got there, and she had a tremendous headache that clouded her vision and her thoughts.

“Are you okay?” asked the officer.

“I think so,” she replied uncertainly.

“I only ask because you're covered in blood. Can you explain that?”

Sandra's awareness of her surroundings expanded to the scene of police, flashing lights, ambulances and forensic personnel wandering about. In the same instant she sat up to examine herself and saw the blood; she checked herself for injuries but could not feel or find any source of the blood. “What happened? How did I get here?”

“We were hoping you would tell *us* that. What's your name?”

Sandra thought for a moment, she didn't know who she was. In fact, her memory was blank except for the last few minutes. The officer saw her confusion and called for the ambulance attendee who checked her over and ordered a gurney.

“I think we should take her to hospital and have her checked over more thoroughly. If she has no memory there could be head trauma. She does have a nasty gash on the back of the head.” The officer agreed and she was loaded on to the gurney and placed in the

ambulance. The officer summoned a forensic officer to mark the pistol lying nearby with a number.

Detective Inspector Ali Sutradhar was a young man in his late thirties of Indian descent. He watched the woman being carted away and approached the officer. “What’s her story?”

“She has no memory; they’re taking her to hospital for examination.”

“Go with her, don’t let her out of your sight,” ordered the Detective.

Sandra arrived in the ER where she waited with the officer for over an hour. Finally, a male doctor in his twenties entered their cubicle; he quickly examined Sandra visually, noting her bloodied clothes and making an initial judgement about her proceeded with a closer examination. “What happened to you?” There was no caring manner to his enquiry; no reassuring smile or soft tone to his voice, it was purely a clinical question. The officer decided this man lacked bedside manner and was quite arrogant.

The officer responded. “She was found at the scene of a crime, she has no memory and no apparent wounds to account for the blood.”

“Did I ask you?” snapped the doctor. “I would prefer the patient answered.” He turned back to Sandra who took an instant dislike to the man.

“What he said,” replied Sandra as it dawned on her she’d been at a crime scene, despite the blood possibly giving her a hint, but she didn’t feel her head was working correctly. The officer had also been short on conversation during their wait.

The doctor started pressing her body around the ribs, the arms, the legs but got no reaction. He checked her eyes and examined her head. “No indications of injury or trauma other than a head wound that has scabbed over. We’ll do some scans to verify no internal injuries. What kind of accident was she involved in?” This time he directed his question at the officer.

“A double murder.”

“Victim or perpetrator?” asked the doctor without thought, ignoring Sandra’s horrified reaction to the word ‘murder’.

“Yet to be determined, we’re going to need her clothes and your medical report, and she’ll need to undergo a forensic examination,” instructed the officer.

“Firstly, she will have those tests. Get your team in here!” instructed the doctor and departed. A half hour later a gurney arrived to take her for X-Rays and MRI scans. The officer tagged along and witnessed the tests. When they returned to the ER, the forensic team were waiting. The officer stepped outside while a female doctor from the forensic team removed Sandra’s clothes, dressed her in a gown and took other samples such as DNA, hair, and pictures of her head injury. They departed, leaving her alone with the officer. Again, they were left to wait.

“Looks like we’re going to be spending a lot of time together, can you tell me your name?” asked Sandra.

“Sergeant Hector Grey, ma’am.”

“And are you here to protect me or am I under arrest?”

“I’m keeping watch as you are a material witness to the murder we just attended. Do you remember anything since we last spoke?”

Sandra shook her head. “Who was murdered?” she asked suddenly interested.

“They’ve not been identified when we left the scene.”

“They! You mean more than one?” she replied shocked.

Detective Sutradhar watched as the bodies were loaded into the coroner’s van. He approached the coroner as she supervised the task. She was an older woman of fifty, quick witted but a no-nonsense person with thirty years experience as a pathologist. She was of medium height but her years of dealing with death had aged her beyond her years.

“Anything you can tell me at this point?”

“They’re dead!” Sutradhar was not impressed with her sweet smile. “We found no ID and their faces are smashed in enough to prevent identification. I’ll have more after lunch, say 1pm?”

He watched as the van drove off before heading inside to see what had been found there. He was met by Detective Sergeant Walter Briggs, a heavy-set man in his early thirties with a face that would make any criminal think twice before confronting him.

“Anything of interest inside?”

“No sign of any struggle, very little sign of anything, no personal items, no clothes in the wardrobe, no food in the kitchen other than coffee, tea and milk. Beds are unused and we have takeaway wrappers in the bin indicating someone was using the place, but no one was actually living here. DNA samples were taken by forensics from anything we found, and they also fingerprinted the place. It would seem they were killed in the driveway, but no one heard anything.”

“So we have very little. When will forensics get back?”

“They say 5pm today for their prelim findings.”

“Alright, Walter, I’m calling it a night. I’ll see you at the coroners around 1pm.”

The doctor returned to the ER and announced that Sandra would be taken to a private room where she could shower; then she’d be admitted for observation. It was an announcement not an option and he left without waiting for any response or supplying any results from her tests.

The officer was getting very annoyed at the delays between visits and the slow workings of the hospital. He’d also noted the Ambulance people had been kept in ER for over an hour, going through paperwork and waiting on doctors before being released back on to the road. Very inefficient in his view, but police were also bogged down in paperwork that prevented them doing their main job.

Detectives Sutradhar and Briggs fronted at the coroner’s office after lunch to examine the body. The coroner waited in her sterile examination room surrounded by white walls and metal benches. She uncovered the female body as she spoke. “They were

both healthy young adults in their thirties. I've sent blood and DNA samples over to forensics."

The female had been cleaned up, but her wounds and the damage to her face were more obvious. "She was stabbed sixteen times by someone who really didn't like her. They're strong, deep wounds done without hesitation. The face has been smashed in by some solid object that caused the face to cave in on itself."

"Someone really did a job on her," remarked Briggs.

The coroner moved on to the second body. "He was shot once then had his face caved in, probably by the same solid object as the woman."

"We found no knife or any bloody solid object at the scene," commented Briggs.

"Nothing more I can tell you at this stage."

"Thanks," replied Sutradhar and left deep in thought. The coroner watched them leave before she covered up the bodies.

The Detectives returned to Police Headquarters. Their office was nothing fancy, they both shared a view of the car park and a neighbouring high rise. Outside their fishbowl office other staff were working on computers, Briggs shut the door. "What do you think?" asked Sutradhar.

"Domestic dispute? The girl on the lawn catches her husband cheating on her, shoots him then stabs her to death. Sixteen stab wounds implies a lot of anger and hatred."

"Agreed, how is our prime suspect?"

"Still in hospital, we have an officer with her who probably needs relief."

"Let's go relieve him and get a medical report."

The doctor stormed into the patient's room quite angry. "Who do you think you are demanding I attend immediately? I have other patients who need my attention more than your investigation!"

“I don’t care, doctor. I need your report now! I’m not waiting around for you to get back to me on your timetable. Now what did you find?”

“You will need a warrant to release medical information on my patient. I have an obligation to patient confidentiality!”

“You’re trying my patience, doctor,” replied Sutradhar having another thought as he turned to Sandra. “Do you consent to us being present while he announces his findings?” Sandra nodded. “Now you have patient consent – talk! Or I’ll have you charged with obstructing a murder investigation!”

Unused to be spoken to in that manner, the doctor hesitated; he needed a moment to calm himself. “She has no physical injuries to her body either internally or externally except for a head wound. That may have caused her amnesia especially if associated with a traumatic event such as witnessing or committing a murder.”

“Can she be released from hospital?” The doctor nodded in the affirmative. “Then discharge her. Officer I want her detained on suspicion of murder!”

“Murder! Who did I murder?” exploded Sandra, confused.

“That we have yet to ascertain.”

The forensic officer doing the briefing was Doctor Alan Boone, a sixty-year-old, bearded man with a slight stoop from decades of bending over microscopes. They sat down around a conference table as the Doctor activated a large screen.

“Interesting case, quite a challenge really, but no surprises. The man was shot but the gun you found does not match the ballistics of the bullet that killed him. No murder weapon has been found to match the females stab wounds, but it was probably a non-serrated kitchen knife. The blood on all three victims belongs to the two bodies, so our amnesia victim was definitely involved.”

“Did fingerprints or DNA reveal anything?” asked Briggs.

“Negative. The fingerprints of all three were found in the house along with others, but none are in the system. DNA also matched items found in the house. Without names we can’t search for dental records. We’re at an impasse.”

“Thank you, doctor that will be our first priority.” Sutradhar left without further comment followed by Briggs. Dr Boone had dealt with the Detective Inspector before and knew his abrupt manner.

In the car park, the Inspector turned to his Sergeant. “We need to check the house again, first thing tomorrow, this time we want mail, bank statements, household bills, any documents that may assist in identifying the victims given they must have had wallets, bags or ID on them somewhere.”.

Ray was a perfectionist, a frustrated artist with an eye for detail forced to work as a handyman at the age of seventy. In his past, lay the memory of having to flee his native country in the Middle East to escape the fanatic religious uprisings that tore his country apart.

Today, after twenty years, he still worked but his passion was carpentry. From his home garage he repaired and made furniture. As a perfectionist every job took as long as it took, to have it just right, so as a businessman he was not charging by the hour.

Once when asked to paint a front door, most painters would simply have slapped on another coat but not Ray, he observed that several layers of paint had already been applied and any more would have caused the layers to contract and crack. The thickness was also obscuring the shape of the mouldings. So he carefully scraped off the layers until he got back to raw wood, skillfully bringing out the features of the door previously hidden.

After several rests, due to his age and diabetes, he took three times as long as previously estimated but charged no more. He’d never survive as an employee, he took too long but his pride in his work was worth more than money and what else did he have to do with his time but bring beauty into the world.

DI Sutradhar and DS Briggs found him in his garage restoring an antique dressing table. It was around lunch time and Ray was considering stopping to eat and rest before commencing the afternoon. The interruption irritated him. "What do you want?"

"I'm Inspector Sutradhar and DS Briggs, we wondered if we could ask you a few questions?" The Inspector held out his ID.

"Cops! Is that about the commotion next door last night?"

"It is! Can you tell me if you saw anything?"

"Nothing. I heard sirens and a lot of people gathering next door but nothing else. I turned up the TV to block it out."

"Did you hear any noises prior to that, a fight, screams, shouting?"

Ray shook his head. "What happened?"

"The couple next door were killed. Did you know them?"

"Killed, you say. What about the boy is he alright?"

"What boy?" asked the Inspector looking to Briggs to confirm he knew nothing of a boy. Briggs shrugged. First he'd heard of it.

"The boy, Adam, he was about eight. He used to come over and watch me work when he was lonely, started to teach him a bit of carpentry. Need to pass on the skill before I depart this world. Not many craftsmen left I'm afraid."

"Did you know the family?" Ray shook his head. "Do you know their name?"

"No, they were only there a few weeks, making a film or something. Adam felt bored, so he often came over here."

"Did you ever get the impression they were up to anything strange or illegal?"

"Nothing like that, they were just unfriendly."

"Do you know this woman?" asked Briggs showing Ray a photo of Sandra.

"That's his mother."

Returning to the house where their car was parked, both cops were in deep thought. Sutradhar summed up what they'd found. "There are no identifying papers on the premises for any of the victims. No bills, bank statements, no mail of any kind nor any documentation that might help to identify them."

"Who has no personal documents in their house? Unless it wasn't their real place of residence?" asked Briggs.

"We found no kids room, no luggage, no food in the pantry, the place is decked out with bare minimum of crockery and linen. This cannot be their primary residence." Sutadhar stopped for a second and stared at the house thoughtfully. "I want to know who owns this place!"

Later that day, back in their fishbowl office at Police HQ, an officer walked in to make a report. Briggs took it. "The girl's gun is unregistered."

"Of course it's not! Any leads on who owns the house?"

"It's owned by an overseas company that's owned by a series of other overseas companies. I contacted the conveyancing agent who said he'd had no dealings with anyone in person; an international transfer from an unidentified bank was paid into his trust account on settlement. He dealt with a local solicitor but when I followed him up but guess what? He doesn't exist."

"I'm beginning to wonder if this is a safe house. Our victims might have been in protective custody and the girl was an agent charged with protecting them."

"I'll check around but that could prove impossible to confirm, these kinds of undercover activities are always hard to get a lead on," stated Briggs.

"And then we have the question of where is the kid? Was he kidnapped or is he still in their primary residence? Do a search of missing kids in the last few days and have an officer check with Ray and get a sketch artist over there to build a picture of the kid. If we identify the kid, we might identify the mother."

Briggs departed leaving Sutradhar deep in thought. This was a strange one. What had happened in that house? None of this made any sense.

Sandra found herself running through a forest calling out, “Adam! Adam! Where are you! Adam!” Something or someone was chasing her, and they were closing in, she felt desperate. She woke with a start not knowing where she was. As she settled, she remembered she’d lost her memory. But who was Adam?

Alan Campbell liked his home office. He could look out his window and see his neighbour’s fence and a collection of old roof tiles stacked as if by a madman down the side of the house. Last Spring this view had been obscured by green leaves and pink flowers. Unfortunately, that tree had been held responsible for undermining the foundations.

In winter, the grey/green curtain with a faintly mathematical pattern of cubes and circles prevented this view but helped retain the warmth in the room. The walls a soft pale green; adjacent to the window a painting of Chichester’s yacht battling through rough seas on its historical journey hung, a gift from his grandmother in the 60’s. The remaining walls were lined with floor to ceiling bookcases in polished wood, bursting with books.

As a young man he’d been refused a job with a leading food manufacturer, he’d resented that rejection as he’d had his heart set on working there. Now he was the CEO of their competitor and he’d just taken them over. He now planned to crush them and wipe their brand out of existence and that sweet revenge made him feel good.

He picked up the paper; his wife had deposited on his desk earlier and read the headlines. He immediately got on the phone. “You read today’s paper? The murders at ‘Yarmsley Lodge’, I want a full report!” He hung up and continued to read the article where he saw the photo of the woman and a sketch of a boy.

Sutradhar and Briggs were seated in their office staring at the wall. “How did they all get there? There is no car registered to the house, there are no vehicles in the street or neighbouring streets that shouldn’t be there. No taxi has a record of a fare to that address. And no CCTV shows them arriving,” repeated the Inspector.

“Given the CCTV does not extend to the street in which the murder occurred it doesn't help because we don't know what we're looking for!” added Briggs.

An officer entered. “You have a visitor, sir.”

“Who is it?” demanded Sutradhar irritably.

“He says he can identify the people in the newspaper photos,” replied the officer who was used to being snapped at by the Inspector, an indication his boss was frustrated by a case.

“Escort him in,” replied the Inspector.

The man, in his early thirties, was well dressed in a suit and tie, clean shaven and short hair. His whole manner said – businessman. “Take a seat, Mr...”

“Richards, that's my wife and kid, you have on the front page of the paper,” he replied placing the newspaper on the Inspectors desk. “Where are they?”

The surprise announcement woke both detectives up from their lethargy. “And your wife's name?”

“Sandra and my son is Adam.”

“Do you know ‘Yarmsley Lodge’?” asked Sutradhar showing him a picture of the premises.

“Never seen the place before and I'm not sure why my wife would be there. What about my son, it says he's missing?”

“We don't know and your wife is suffering from amnesia, she can't remember anything. Can you tell us what her movements were on Friday?”

“She and Adam left last Wednesday for our holiday home; I was going to join them today for a week's holiday.”

“And you haven't heard from her since Wednesday?”

“No, I left them both after breakfast. I had expected a call that night but reception is bad down there so I dismissed it. Can I see my wife?” he asked anxiously.

Sandra had been transferred to a secure medical facility where she could be observed and treated. They found her sitting and staring out the window at the garden outside. She stared into the distance in the lounge where other patients of various ages were either watching television, playing cards or reading. Her husband approached her. "Sandra?"

She turned sensing she was being spoken to but didn't recognise the face. "Do I know you?"

"I'm your husband, Andrew. What happened to you? What happened to Adam?"

Sandra was confused. She remembered the name from her dream. "Who is Adam?"

Andrew taken aback replied. "Our son! You lost our son!"

"I don't remember, I don't remember anything! I don't remember having a son! What's happening to me?" she cried looking to the Inspector for assistance becoming distressed. A male nurse approached to check on the situation. Briggs took Andrew aside.

A while later, they all arrived at the Richards house. Sandra had gone with the Detectives, Andrew had followed. Briggs stayed with Andrew while the Inspector took her inside. She remembered nothing.

The holiday home was an hour and a half down the road on the coast. When they arrived the first thing they noticed was a car in the drive. "That's my wife's car!" declared Andrew as he checked inside then ran towards the house calling his son's name.

Sandra and the Detectives followed. On entering the house they found Sandra's bag and mobile on the hall table. Andrew joined them after searching the house. "He's not here! I'm going to check with the neighbours! He departed in near panic as Sandra took in the property.

The house was large for a holiday home, modern with glass doors opening up on to a balcony overlooking the ocean. Steps led down to the beach. Inside the kitchen overlooked a large family room with couches and large wall television. The place was painted white, even the furniture was white not very practical for children. She wandered around, visited the bedroom to the rear of the kitchen but nothing was familiar.

“Do you work, Mrs Richards?” asked the Inspector.

She thought for a minute but nothing came. Her husband returned empty handed with no news from neighbours. “She’s a film producer, does documentaries.”

The two detectives remembered Ray had said they’d been making a film at the house.

“Do you have an office?” asked Briggs.

Andrew waited for her to respond then answered for her when he saw she was struggling to recall. “A home office, she hires the spaces she needs when required. She also has an office here.” Andrew led them to a small, carpeted room with a small wooden desk. A comfortable red upholstered chair sat behind the desk. Sandra automatically went to sit in it. The ceiling was white, the walls a pale green in stark contrast to the rest of the house. In front of the desk was a reasonably sized empty space, large enough to lie down on, an activity obviously engaged in as a pillow lay on the floor. Sandra sat staring at the ceiling.

“Is your wife engaged in any projects at the moment?” asked Briggs.

“No, I’m in between projects,” replied Sandra without thinking. They all turned to her, but she remained staring at the ceiling.

“How do you know that?” asked the Inspector suspicious of her amnesia.

Sandra then realised what she’d said, her attention redirected to those around her. “I just knew. I think I painted that ceiling, got a crick in the neck from doing it.”

“That’s right you did. We also had an argument over the clash of colours in this room.”

“Did we? I don’t remember,” she replied her mind going blank again.

The Inspector addressed Briggs. “We need to get a forensic team down here and to their residence as potential crime scenes. As for you two, you cannot return home until our team has finished. I’ll arrange for you, Mr Richards, to stay with your wife in the facility overnight.”

Campbell hung up the phone as his Chief Executive walked in. “What did you find out?”

“There’s no record of anyone officially using ‘Yarmsley Lodge’. Police Reports include photos of a woman and a missing boy.” The Chief handed Campbell the paper.

“And who are they?”

“They haven’t identified the dead couple. They have identified the woman found nearby as Sandra Richards, she’s a documentary maker; her husband is a talent agent for actors.” Again, he was handed photos.

“Do we know them?”

“No record of them having anything to do with the Lodge. I’m having their backgrounds thoroughly checked.”

“Keep me apprised of the situation,” instructed Campbell dismissing his Chief.

Inspector Craig Danyells found himself tied up in the corner of a room. It was dark, he was not gagged but he could hear someone else nearby. He struggled with the tape binding his hands behind his back. ‘What happened to the old days when ropes were used and you could struggle to loosen the bonds?’ he said out loud to the empty room.

Despite the darkness he could feel the room; he was lying on a cold hard concrete floor and the room echoed as if devoid of any furnishings to dull the sound. He guessed he was underground. “Is anyone there?” he asked of the dark. He heard a whimpering. “I’m a policeman, don’t be afraid. Can you talk?”

“Yes.” The voice was female but weak and afraid, perhaps a child.

“Can you come over to me?” He heard some shuffling then felt her nearby. Her movements did not sound restricted. “Are you free?”

“Yes.” The same meek reply.

“Can you untie me?” He felt her feeling around until she found his bindings and ripped them off. He heard a door open; a light came on to reveal they were in a cellar.

Craig dived out of sight as two men came down the stairs. They saw the girl, a child of maybe twelve but no sign of the Inspector. He came out from behind, both were holding guns. He grabbed one man swung him aside and grabbed the gun. The other man acting swiftly grabbed the girl and used her as a shield.

“I’ll kill her! Drop the gun!” ordered the man as the other got to his feet.

Craig had his gun aimed at the man with the gun - and fired. The man holding the girl collapsed, the other man surrendered as the gun was turned on him. The girl sank to the ground and whimpered.

“Cut!” The Director rose from his chair and entered the set. “That was great! All of you! We’ll call it day, everyone back here at 7am tomorrow!” The Director returned to his crew as the cast picked themselves up, shook hands and moved off.

The man he’d killed approached Craig. “Did you hear about Andrew’s wife?” Craig hadn’t. “She’s a suspect in a double murder.”

“You don’t mean the murder in the papers yesterday?”

“That’s the one. She’s the girl found with no memory and holding the murder weapon.”

“Thanks for the heads up. I hope that head wound heals quickly,” he quipped. The dead villain actor smiled and walked off.

Craig Danyells, whose real name was Bradley Abbott, a young man in his thirties, kept himself fit with daily visits to the gym and runs in the park. He prided himself on his fitness and his ability to do his own stunts in the roles he played. Today, he was the lead TV cop in a very successful TV crime series that had been running for nearly four years. He had high hopes that a fifth season would be given the green light.

He arrived at the Richard’s home and found Andrew and Sandra standing outside with the two detectives. He approached and was recognised by Andrew. “Bradley! What are you doing here?”

“Heard of your little problem, thought I could help.”

“What as a detective? You realise this is real life not a scene,” queried Andrew, a bit condescending as if the actor couldn’t tell the difference, though Brad did get heavily into his role.

“I meant, as a friend.”

Andrew relaxed; he felt jumpy. “Sorry Brad, I’m just stressed.” Then he remembered Sandra standing next to him. “This is Bradley Abbott, one of my clients and a friend to us both.”

“Hallo Brad, I’m sorry but I don’t remember you.”

“That OK, I understand, I heard. What are they doing here?” said Brad becoming interested in what was happening, indicating the police and a crew of people in white coveralls.

“They’re doing a forensic study. We came, hoping to pack a bag but they won’t let us in. We can’t even use our cars.”

“Can I drive you somewhere? To my place if you’ve got nowhere to stay,” he offered.

“Sandra is booked into a medical facility, if you could take us there that would be appreciated.”

Brad led them to his car and they drove off after telling Sutradhar and Briggs what they were doing.

Next morning Sutradhar and Briggs arrived at the Medical Facility to report their findings to the Richards. They were told at Reception that they had not returned last night.

“Could they be on the run?” asked Briggs.

“Check on that actor before we make any decisions,” instructed the Inspector.

Bradley Abbott found himself tied up in the corner of a room, it was dark, he was not gagged but he could hear someone else in the room. He struggled with the plastic tie

binding his hands behind his back. His lines came back to him ‘What happened to the old days when ropes were used and you could struggle to loosen the bonds?’ Then it struck him. “We’ve already done this scene!”

“This is not a scene, Brad, its reality,” replied Andrew from out of the dark.

Brad realised he had no memory of coming to this place. Without warning the lights came on to reveal they were in a cellar; he was lying on a cold hard concrete floor and the room echoed as if devoid of any furnishings to dull the sound. Two men wearing balaclavas came down the wooden stairs, it so reminded him of the scene he’d acted out only yesterday. However, he didn’t have the same confidence in overpowering these men as he did in the scene.

“Who are you? What do you want?” demanded Andrew.

They ignored him and spoke to Sandra. “Why were you at that house?”

“I don’t know!” replied Sandra. “I can’t remember!”

“Who were the couple you murdered?” demanded balaclava man.

“Murdered! I didn’t murder anyone!”

“Then how come you were found at the scene with the murder weapon?”

“I don’t know! I can’t remember anything before waking up on that lawn. All my memories are gone!”

“Maybe some more time down here might help you remember!” stated the man who left with his silent partner, turning off the light as they closed the cellar door behind them.

The three of them sat in silence and waited.

Briggs showed the CCTV footage they’d found. It showed Bradley’s sports car travelling along the road with a police car following. It pulled them over and threw a gas grenade into the car. A van pulled up and unloaded the bodies before driving off. The police car and Brad’s car were abandoned at the point of interception.

“Any trace on the van?” asked Sutradhar.

“It was stolen, and we lost it.”

“So our prime suspect is kidnapped by unknown parties and we have no idea about anything that’s going.”

“That about sums it up, sir.”

Alan Campbell took the coffee handed to him by the girl manning the coffee stand outside his office. Another man, heavy built, unshaven, and wearing a T-Shirt approached him in the street. “Couldn’t you have chosen something less conspicuous?” commented Campbell.

“What do you mean?”

“Why would I be meeting someone who looks like a construction worker in the street outside my office?”

“Do you want me to leave?”

“No, give me your report!” he replied irritably.

“The two guys know nothing; the woman I believe has truly lost her memory. None have had food or water for 24 hours they’ve been threatened with torture and haven’t changed their story.”

“Release them; we’d be better getting the information via the police. But do it discretely I don’t want anything traced back to us!”

The tough guy walked away, and Campbell walked back inside his office building.

Sandra, Andrew and Brad were dumped in an alley that night, unconscious. They were found by a couple going for a walk and taken by ambulance to a hospital. The two detectives visited them next morning. “Did you recognise any of the kidnappers?” asked Briggs.

None of them did, explaining everyone wore balaclavas, no names were used and they were all unconscious during transport. They’d been held in a dark room, possibly a

cellar with no sounds from outside, no windows and they were constantly asked why Sandra was at 'Yarmsley Lodge'.

Sutradhar and Briggs leaving them to recover, stepped outside. "So who else might be interested in obtaining the same answers we're seeking?" asked the Inspector.

"One person who might be interested is the owner of 'Yarmsley Lodge'. We drilled down through the various owners and discovered a local company, the director is an Alan Campbell," replied Briggs/

"You think a corporate executive would get involved in a kidnapping? Interesting if he did, indicating something deeper is going on here."

"Shall we visit him, sir?"

"I think that would be an excellent idea."

Alan Campbell felt a little unnerved to discover police on his doorstep. His immediate concern was his heavies had slipped up. His Chief Executive was in the room and also looked concerned. "Let them in," instructed Campbell to his secretary.

Sutradhar and Briggs walked in and introduced themselves. "Can I offer you coffee, gentlemen?" asked Campbell as he sat down. The two detectives declined, the secretary dismissed. Everyone sat on armchairs but Campbell remained behind his desk. "So, what can I do for the police?"

"I understand you own a property known as 'Yarmsley Lodge'," began the Inspector.

"Me personally, I think not. Maybe a company asset?" replied Campbell looking to his Chief who got up and reached for the phone.

"Tanya from Asset Management will be right up," he replied hanging up the phone.

"So, what's your interest in that property?" queried Campbell.

"A murder was committed there, two nights ago," replied Briggs.

“You’re not referring to the one on the news? On a property of ours?” replied Campbell shocked as he checked with his Chief who shared his reaction.

“So we’re hoping you could tell us what actually takes place there?”

“Wouldn’t know, hopefully Tanya can do that.” As if on cue there was a knock at the door. “Enter!” replied Campbell. A tall dark haired girl in her thirties wearing a black business like outfit entered. “Tanya! These gentlemen are from the police. Do we have a property known as ‘Yarmsley Lodge’?”

She looked around nervously then answered. “Yes, we have that property. What do you need to know?”

“Who is occupying the property at present?” asked Sutradhar.

“No one, it’s vacant awaiting demolition, we’ve had some delays in getting council approvals and we were hoping to buy the property next door.”

“You mean the one owned by Ray, I forget his last name?” asked Briggs.

“No, the other side, he’s reluctant to sell.”

“Would you be surprised to learn that a couple were living there recently and were murdered on the property?” asked the Inspector.

Tanya who was still standing took a step back. “Who was living there?”

“We had hoped you could tell us. When was the last time you visited the property?”

Tanya had to think for a minute. “Probably a year or more for myself. We do have maintenance crews check it for damage every so often; I’d have to check with them on when they last visited.”

“Can you give us their contact details and we’ll check it out for you,” replied the Inspector. “My Sergeant will accompany you.” Briggs got up to escort her out. Tanya looked to her boss for instructions and got the nod of approval.

“We are shocked to discover what you’ve told us! If there’s anything we can do to assist?” stated Campbell rising to his feet as a sign of dismissal. The Inspector took the signal and was led to the door by the Chief.

Once the door was closed the Chief stared at his boss with a concerned expression. “How did they get to us?”

“As they stated, through tracing the owner of the address, but they know no more than we do about what was going on at that house and whether someone is working to undermine our operation.”

“So what do we do?”

“Lie low, watch and wait!”

Adam’s father believed in corporal punishment for his son. Adam, when he knew he was in trouble, would lie in bed waiting as fear engulfed him. When his father had inflicted his first round of punishment, usually inflicted with his belt across the boys bum, he would walk out and leave him lying in terror waiting for round two. There was always a round two. His father would go away, fume and then return to share some choice words designed to be words of warning and wisdom. There would be no second beating unless you gave the wrong answer or no answer at all, but the shouting was nearly as bad. These third and often fourth visits would not be so violent, only scathing, belittling while warning one not to upset his mother who was often screaming and crying in the background pleading for the father to be more lenient. Yet it was her who had instigated the punishment by reporting on the boys misbehaving to his father.

Although this was mental torture, there was never any real physical harm done, the belt stung but it was the violent yelling that scared Adam the most. Where he was now was different. He was locked in a nice room with a computer and a television; a woman fed him with food on a tray. She was nice, telling him he was there for his own protection. He was not sure who was on the other side and he’d not seen his parents for several days. Where was he? What he would give to be in his room receiving a beating from his Dad. It was part of his life, the beatings; it was home it was where he felt safe and loved. He knew they only did it because he was bad, he’d never be bad again...if only he could go home.

He lay on the bed, staring at the ceiling; he was concerned for his mother. It was a strange place; it didn’t feel like a house.

Andrew, Sandra and Brad returned to their home in a taxi. Brad paid the fare and they walked inside unaware of a man seated in a car down the street watching them. He was a sleazy looking man, unshaven, untidy hair, smoking and dressed in a short sleeve shirt. He carried a smirk on his face that was probably permanent.

They were greeted by a neighbour watering her front garden. "Haven't seen you around for a few days, Sandra, Andrew? I saw the newspapers, what happened to you Sandra? They say you have no memory?" she queried as they walked up the front footpath.

"Long story, Mrs Waterson. How have you been?" replied Andrew.

"I'm good, where's Adam? Hope you didn't forget him," she remarked jokingly.

Andrew hesitated before replying, he could see Sandra was affected by the enquiry. "No, he's with friends for a few days. Good day Mrs Waterson" They continued

towards the front door and entered, shutting it hard behind them.

"I think I'll go and lie down," said Sandra and went to her room.

She dreamt of driving at night, arriving at the holiday home and pulling up outside. She checked on Adam asleep on the back seat. She got out of the car and was jumped by two men dressed entirely in black including black face masks. She struggled but one had his hand over her mouth as he injected her with something. She felt herself go limp worried about what they might do to Adam. She woke screaming out to Adam.

Andrew and Brad rushed in and found her weeping. When she calmed down she told them what she'd remembered.

Special Agent Norman Macquarie burst into Inspector Sutradhar's office with a team of agents. As he entered he announced, "Everyone cease what you're doing and step away from your desks!"

The Inspector only had a small staff of two constables who did the hack work of searching for answers. They looked to the Inspector for guidance before anyone moved. Sutradhar approached Macquarie. “What’s the meaning of this? Who are you?”

“We have a warrant to seize all material relevant to your investigation into the driveway murders.” He flashed a piece of paper at Sutradhar who examined it.

“What interest has the National Security Department got in my murder case?”

“Classified!” was the quick official response. “You will now hand over all evidence, all files and notes. Don’t worry about accessing data on your computers I have people that can do that. Now step aside!”

The Inspector turned to Briggs as everyone else stood up and stepped aside. “You supervise. I’m going to the boss!” he ordered as he noticed the NSD staff begin dismantling his timeline board after photographing it. Staff were pushed aside, their desks searched, their computers accessed.

The Inspector was admitted immediately by his superior who sat him down and closed the door. “So what is going on?”

His superior was a big man who’d spent too much time behind the desk losing the fitness of his younger days. He was at the political level in the police force answerable to politicians more than the police force hierarchy. “It’s out of my hands, I don’t know why this case has become so important or why we’re being ordered to back off.”

“I don’t like having cases pulled from under me!”

“Neither do I so I’m unofficially telling you follow it up, but your emphasis has changed. You’re no longer looking to solve a murder. I want to know why it is a national security issue!”

“Understood.”

When Sutradhar returned to his office he found his staff standing around stunned. Briggs approached. “They took all the evidence, backed up the electronic data to hard

files and deleted all our copies. The coroner tells me they took the bodies, all samples and deleted her autopsy results presumedly after taking copies.”

“I suggest we step out for coffee as we have no work to do.” They all followed the Inspector to a café across the street. “I suggested we meet here because I wouldn’t be surprised if our office has been bugged. I’m not giving up on this case so we need to reconstruct our files from memory. We have unofficial permission from the boss, but we must operate low key.”

“I’ll have the tech guys sweep our office,” suggested Briggs.

“Good idea but they may put them back and if we keep searching they’ll suspect we’re up to something. So no discussion of the case in the office, I’ll arrange a neutral base off the grid, meanwhile I want you all to rack your memories for every detail you can recall and write it down. No electronic record, find a quiet place individually and jot down everything. I’ll be in touch about when and where to meet and we’ll collate the data. In the meantime, we’ll complain to our mates on how unfair it is for NSD to step in and get the guys talking.”

“Looking to stir up trouble, sir?” queried one of the constables. Sutradhar just smiled.

Alan Campbell had had a long day. It worried him that police had linked him to that house but he hadn’t done anything illegal, in fact he had no knowledge of the events that had taken place at ‘Yarmsley Lodge’. He was more concerned about the spotlight that could spread to his other activities. He got out of his car and commenced walking towards his house. His mind was pre-occupied and he didn’t notice anyone in the street until a woman’s voice caught his ear. “Alan!” He turned and saw his elderly neighbour sitting on her front porch.

“How are you, Mrs Waterson?” he queried as he walked up the path to join her.

“You look troubled,” she observed.

“I do have a few things on my mind, troubles at work.” He’d known this woman since he’d been a young boy. She’d always been the nice old lady down the street and

when he'd been rejected in his first job, it was her that had put him back on his feet and made him determined to get a job and show those idiots they should have hired him. It was a kind of passive revenge. She'd also taught him to go for the job he liked rather than the job he could get. "It was important to enjoy your work," she'd said. "Or it was just a chore, and that chore took up a lot of your life living in misery." Now he was successful, and he owed a lot of that to her.

She popped inside, put the kettle on leaving him to reflect on his troubles. She returned shortly. "You know those murders a few days ago? I bet you were not aware that the woman found at the scene is our neighbour. I ran into them today!"

Campbell had not realised they lived so close. They talked together for over an hour before he wandered down the street back to his house four houses away.

Briggs and two Constables knocked on the Inspectors door, a modest one-bedroom house where he lived alone. Its main advantage was he had a large lounge room where he'd set up a white board. The group took a seat.

"Everything we do here from this point on is off the books. According to the rest of the force we're on a special assignment. So nothing we discover leaves this room. Is that clear to everyone?" They all nodded their agreement. "Good so now let's reconstruct the evidence we have from memory and personal notes as we've had all our files confiscated."

As they had no files or photos to place on the board, the white board map was a mass of arrows and names trying to visually establish links.

"So what do we have starting at the beginning?" asked the Inspector.

"We have two unidentified bodies at 'Yarmsley Lodge', their faces bashed in beyond recognition," started Briggs.

"The male was shot, the woman stabbed multiple times implying a crime of passion, possibly the unconscious woman was having an affair with the man and he found out he'd cheated on her," suggested one blonde haired Constable.

“That’s one theory,” replied the Inspector. “But the gun found was not the murder weapon, and what happened to the woman, Sandra Richards, for her to lose her memory?”

“We can also assume her son was abducted from the Richards’ beach house as her car was found there,” stated the second Constable, an older man with dark hair.

“So how does Sandra fit in? She’s a film maker and her husband a talent scout. Not exactly professions that lead to murder,” suggested Briggs.

“Unless crime of passion,” put in the blonde Constable.

“Also remember the neighbour thought they were making a film which would explain why she was there and the couple could be part of her film crew,” stated the Inspector.

“But we found no film equipment, so there must have been others on site and what were they filming that was so controversial?” stated Briggs.

“Then we have the issue of why would this become an NSD matter? How does any of this affect National Security? That takes us back to who were the dead couple, that’s the key to this. How Sandra got there is not our main focus!” summed up Sutradhar.

“What about this Campbell guy? The company he works for owns the house and it carries all the characteristics of a safe house, possibly for NSD. Maybe they were hiding witnesses?” offered the dark-haired Constable.

“Again, that takes us back to identifying the victims. We’ve got nowhere to go until we know who they were,” stated Briggs.

Andrew decided to take Sandra for a walk as Brad had gone home. They often used to walk in the evening, chat about their day and visit the local shopping strip. Once, it had thrived and they’d stop for a coffee but now it was dying. It was worth a try, the doctor said familiar surroundings, and following old routines, all could help jog her memory. Neither of them noticed the man in the car get out and follow on foot.

“If you can recall arriving at the beach house with Adam, surely you can remember what happened next?” pressed Andrew.

“It comes in flashes not complete scenes,” she replied.

“So you’re telling me you lost our son then your memory. Very careless if you ask me!” he stated cruelly as his frustration started to rise to the surface.

“You blame me?”

“Who else? He was in your care and now he’s gone! I didn’t lose him!”

“That’s unfair,” she replied. “I was attacked! Someone hit me over the head, and I could have been injured defending our son, for all you know!”

“You don’t know that!”

“Neither do you! It’s more likely than me killing two people and losing my memory from the resulting trauma!” She walked off angrily, away from the shops.

Andrew stood there watching her retreating back as a dog came up eager to say hallo, He glared at the dog and kicked it causing it to whimper and run away. Sandra turned at the sound. “Did you have to do that?”

“I hate dogs!” he snapped back.

The man who’d been following them stood outside a vacant shop, the windows plastered with newspapers. Andrew saw him watching. “What are you looking at?”

“Just reading the newspaper, mate. Not interested in you!” replied the man retreating, his cover blown. He returned to his car and reported in as Sandra and Andrew made their separate ways back to their house.

Campbell loved to entertain and tonight he was at his best, it was his wife’s birthday and he was giving her a party. It was a clear night and the party had moved outside. His wife was also enjoying herself but had one eye on her husband as he worked the floor with other people’s wives.

“I believe your business is opening up another food processing plant in the third world?” asked a blonde woman, well jewelled up.

“Yes, it’s our sixth plant doing our bit as a corporate world citizen helping those in the world who are starving.”

“But aren’t you exploiting them for your company’s profit?” she queried with no concern at the possibility of upsetting him.

“Not at all. Sure we have cheap labour, processing cheap food at prices that the locals can afford. Any surplus we sell to the world at higher prices where we make plenty of profit.”

“What about the farmers?”

“They make a good living, better than some of *our* farmers. Everyone wins!”

“Until the infrastructure starts to cost and then the locals pay. Eventually they’ll suffer. They always do when dealing with the west.”

“We hope we can change that,” replied Campbell as he was approached by his Chief Executive who took him aside, rescuing him from the interrogation. “We have a problem,” announced the Chief and walked off.

Campbell proceeded as if nothing had happened then quietly slipped away to his study. He sat back in his chair after pouring a whisky and waited. There was a knock at the door and without waiting to be given permission, the Chief entered with a bearded Middle Eastern man and a woman.

“You betrayed us!” shouted the man waving a gun at Campbell. The Chief stood back not expecting the meeting to turn violent.

“How? Who are you?” asked Campbell nervously.

“We represent your partners who you betrayed. Now you pay!”

“Wait! How did I betray you? At least tell us that before you kill us!”

“You sold information to the media. You have set back our plans by years!”

“I sold them nothing! In fact, I doubt I know enough to cause that much damage anyway but I can find out who did!”

The man hesitated, the woman intervened. “You told me not to kill before we had answers. Now I tell you!”

The bearded man hesitated, seeing the sense in his warning. “Talk!”

Campbell thought quickly. Were recent events linked to what this man was saying? “Did you kill those people at ‘Yarmsley Lodge’?”

“Yes, they were interviewing experts and obtaining data on our projects, but someone was supplying them with the questions, they were just verifying its authenticity.”

“And the NSD was acting on the results,” said Campbell thinking aloud.

“You believe NSD got that information on their own?” pressed the man angrily, not believing their scenario and thinking Campbell still guilty.

“No, there’s another person who could tell us but she has unfortunately lost her memory due to you nearly killing her with a blow to the head!”

The bearded man glared briefly at the woman, she looked away. Campbell decided she was responsible. That didn’t help him, he thought quickly about what he did know. “Did you take the boy?”

“No, he escaped with two others out the rear of the house; they hailed a taxi before we could catch them.”

“I think I know where to find them, I already have a team on it. Meet me at the coffee shop opposite my office tomorrow at 2 pm. I’ll tell you what I’ve found.”

They both hesitated. “You ask us to just trust you?”

“You can always find me and kill me later. For now you need us to track down the source of the intel. I’ve got the network you don’t!” Both hesitated, the man still waving around his pistol and making Campbell nervous. “What choice do you have?”

JoJo entered the room. It was bare except for a bed, a computer on a table and a TV. Lying on the bed was Adam. He sat up, he was getting used to JoJo visiting, she was nice but he didn't like it here. "Has my Mum come for me yet?"

"No, she hasn't. Remember she was injured by those men and she's not well. They asked us to look after you so no one can harm you."

"Can I come up and watch you use the main computer?"

"Of course you can, you know you're free to go anywhere." She escorted him outside the room into the main complex, a huge warehouse lined with computer servers, row after row of them. She led him to the control centre where Ashley was working.

"Hello, Adam. How are you today?" asked Ashley in a friendly manner.

Adam smiled, he liked these two people but he was getting bored being locked away here despite his access to any computer game he wanted. But even gaming heaven got boring when you're homesick.

"Would you like some dinner?" asked JoJo "We're about to eat." Adam nodded and went off towards the dining table in the next room, beyond which lay the kitchen.

"What are we going to do with him?" asked JoJo.

"I'm not sure. Sandra still has no memory, and she was our only contact. I never liked Andrew and from what Adam tells us he's a tough father to live with. If we go to the police they'll want to know who we are and we can't have that."

"So we wait for Sandra to make contact. What about Sam?"

"Again, we only have contact through Sandra and even our system can't locate him on such simple parameters as *Sam with secret high tech van.*"

"Let's go eat!" suggested Ashley as they went to join Adam at the table.

Campbell entered his office and summoned his property manager. She entered a little concerned at the urgency of the call. "Were you aware that 'Yarmsley Lodge' was being used by a film crew?"

“No, sir.”

“Is there anyone else in your department that may have done so?”

“There’s only one other person in my ‘department’, sir,” she replied taken aback by being referred to as a whole department. She was just a small division of Property Acquisitions and Maintenance.

“Send him up here!”

Ten minutes later a young man in shirt sleeves entered loosening his tie nervously. “You asked for me, sir?” he asked timidly.

“‘Yarmsley Lodge’! Has anyone asked you to give access to anyone off the books?”

He hesitated. “Yes, sir. The Security Manager, Mr Swan.” He waited while Campbell took in that information. “Did I do wrong, sir?”

“No, you can go.” As the young man left, Campbell summoned Albert Swan. On the tail end of that instruction his Chief Executive entered.

“What’s going on?”

“I’m not sure but I suspect a lot.”

Albert Swan was ex-military police. He was of solid build and carried himself like a Sergeant Major about to drill his troops. He entered the office and found his two bosses waiting. “You wanted to see me?”

“Yes, Albert. ‘Yarmsley Lodge’, why did you give access to a film crew recently?”

“Security matter, sir. I heard they were doing an expose on global capitalism conspiracies and needed a place to film interviews. I offered them the Lodge so we could keep an eye on what was said, given our involvement in that region.”

“What did you discover?” asked Campbell as the Chief sat back and listened.

“Nothing. They were verifying information with experts and interviewing them. I gathered if the experts were just verifying the information, it could not be that vital.”

“Not that vital! That intel has successfully jeopardised our global operation. It also resulted in two murders on site, apparently by our operatives who identified it as the source of the intel!” shouted Campbell.

“I didn’t realise. Are our ‘friends’ angry?”

“Angry! They came to my house last night to kill me thinking I’m the traitor. I persuaded them I’d get to the source of the intel. The film crew are only the means of the leak but I need to know where they got the information. How do I contact them?”

“Andrew Richards, he’s a talent agent who was hawking the concept. He arranged the booking; he’d know who was involved.”

Campbell knocked on the door of the Richards’ house. He’d waited until Sandra had left and approached the door with two heavies. “Mr Richards, I believe you organised the use of a premises where a murder later took place. I need to know the name of the person who organised the film crew.”

“That would be the director, but he was one of those murdered,” replied Andrew nervously watching the two thugs standing in his doorway.

“Who else?”

“His producer but she was the other person murdered.”

“You’re not being very helpful, Mr Richards. We need to know the source of the intelligence, or I might be forced to hurt you. Hurt you badly.”

“Who are you people? I was instructed by NSD not to tell anyone anything about the film crew or what went on in that house.”

“I’m countermanding that order. Who else was in that house?” demanded Campbell.

“A cameraman, sound engineer and interviewer, occasionally we were joined by a couple who did the research.”

“Names! Mr Richards! Names!”

“I don’t know their names, they have a research complex that NSD were watching but only my wife knew that address and she’s lost her memory.”

Campbell thought for a moment, remembering a couple had fled out the back with a boy and caught a taxi. He walked away leaving Richards on his doorstep...shaking.

Special Agent Macquarie scratched his head. Where was he going to take this case next? He needed to re-establish contact with the Hathaways but without Sandra he had no way in. The intelligence they’d gathered had given his division international kudos but now they wanted more. He’d placed a gag order on the surviving film crew on the basis of national security. They weren’t happy but they complied, they had nothing to gain from talking to anyone and everything to lose if they did. Local police were chasing their tail with no answers so the matter was locked down. Maybe he could use Sam? They knew him but what was his excuse for contacting them again?

Detective Briggs entered his boss’s office excited. “Got something!”

“Okay spill it!”

“You’ve heard the recent news of a major international conspiracy among global corporations. They’ve had a number of breaking news items that have been followed up by NSD.” Sutradhar nodded unsure where this was leading. “Richards was the one hawking that documentary and the interviews were conducted at ‘Yarmsley Lodge’. Our unidentified victims were part of that film crew.”

Sutradhar smiled, he felt a warm feeling replace his heavy mood. At last they were getting somewhere. “Do we have a contact, other than Richards?” Briggs shook his head. “Why not go to Richards?”

“Because he’s concealed that from us from the beginning, I want to know more before we confront him with this. Do we have contacts in the industry?”

“Yes, but there’s more. Our Mr Campbell, whose business owns ‘Yarmsley Lodge’ is one of the food manufacturers caught in the conspiracy. They’ve been setting up food plants in third world countries as a cover for the transporting of other questionable items

around the world. They are also accused of conspiring with Big Pharma to produce non healthy foods to cause illness that they can provide drugs to alleviate. Illnesses like diabetes, obesity, heart disease and cancer!”

“So he’s mixed up in this up to his eyeballs! Let’s talk to your film crew contact and then pay a visit to Mr Campbell.

Briggs found the contact and they visited him on set. He was the newsman who had received the footage for his broadcast. “Yes, I know the team you’re referring to but I’ve been sworn to secrecy by the NSD,” he stated as he sat with the two detectives in his dressing room.

“We have two dead bodies we can’t identify and you’re telling us you can’t reveal their names to us. Think about their families seeking answers on their disappearance,” pressed Sutradhar.

The newsman hesitated, he on one hand hated NSD secrets it was part of his job to uncover such deception. On the other he’d been threatened. “You didn’t hear this from me!”

Campbell and his two thugs sat in a car outside the Hathaway Complex watching. There was no activity, no sign that anyone was inside, no comings or goings. They decided on the direct approach but were delayed by an arrival.

Sam drove up in his high-tech van and parked outside the Complex. He knocked on the door. It was JoJo who greeted him. ‘Sam! Is it safe?’ she asked, relieved to see him but still alarmed by recent events.

“Why what’s happened?” asked Sam.

“Sandra was injured and we were shot at! We had to flee with the boy!”

“You have Adam?” he asked, she nodded anxiously. “You were at the house?” he asked as he realised what had taken place.

“Sandra is fine, worried about Adam. Can I see him?”

“Of course, come in.” JoJo ushered him inside. It was then he saw the banks of computers lined up for the full length of the warehouse.

“You sure have some computer power here! What do you do?”

“We process data,” she replied closing the door. “Is it safe for us to go outside?”

Sam looked up and saw a raised platform where Ashley and Adam were standing watching him. It was this platform that housed their living quarters. Sam was so absorbed by what he saw that he didn't hear her last question. It became irrelevant as they started up the stairs.

An explosion ripped open the outer door and part of the surrounding wall. Instantly a clear 'glass like' wall descended cutting off the entrance area from the rest of the complex. Campbell and his thugs entered. “Well! Well! What do we have here?” Campbell surveyed the complex, noted where the Hathaways were located and was amazed by the size of the data processing equipment. “We now control your complex!” he announced smugly.

“You think you have control,” replied Ashley. “Just try and get further. These barriers may look fragile but are ten times stronger than the window in a spaceship. A meteor travelling at 10,000 mph couldn't penetrate.”

“We'll see about that!” shouted Campbell but his threats were cut short by a shower of boiling hot water from the ceiling forcing them to flee.

Sam reached the housing platform with JoJo and approached Adam. “Hi, my name is Sam. I'm a friend of your mothers. If you'd like, I'll take you home to her.”

“Will those bad men try to hurt us?” asked the boy.

“Yes they will, but we're safe here until they leave, then I'll take you home.” The boy liked that plan and went back to the dining table to finish his meal.

Sam pulled out his phone but found he had no signal. “That won't work in here, the building is shielded from any outside interference,” advised Ashley.

“So, how do we call for help?”

“Who would help us?” queried Ashley.

“I know people.”

“We can defend this place, just relax. Join us in a meal,” suggested Ashley walking over to where Adam was seated. Sam decided he had no choice he might as well wait out the events taking place.\

Macquarie received a message that an explosion had been heard in the vicinity of the Hathaway Complex. He gathered together a team and headed out there. Sutradhar and Briggs also got the report.

A monitor switched on, Ashley rose from the table and was joined by Sam and JoJo. They saw Campbell and his men were drilling into the side of the building. They also had a big bag with them. Sam watched anxiously. “What are they up to? I hope you have a few more deterrents up your sleeve?”

“Watch and wait,” replied Ashley confident in his defences.

Without any warning, the thug drilling was violently thrown back, his drill sparkling with electrical impulses. The second thug ran over to his buddy and checked him over. “He’s dead!” They heard the thug announce.

“We have an electrified plate in the wall. The moment the drill hit it he grounded the circuit and killed himself,” explained Ashley.

Sam was impressed. “That’s quite an effective deterrent.”

“We anticipated we’d have to defend this place one day, given the amount of data stored here and information is power.”

Campbell glared at the CCTV watching him. “Pile the dynamite up against the wall and detonate!” The thug obeyed, wired it up and they stepped back.

Although Ashley remained relaxed Sam felt anxious.

The explosion shook the building but all it did was blow away a layer of concrete from the external wall. The sound of the explosion echoing across the open fields surrounding the complex faded to be replaced by the sound of approaching sirens.

Campbell and the surviving thug decided it was time to get away. They climbed aboard their car and drove off at speed. One police car took off in pursuit while the remaining three pulled up outside the complex. They were not in fact police cars but NSD cars. They had the same flashing blue lights and sirens but were black with the NSD logo on the side doors.

The pursuit continued down the road for some distance until a car came out on their left hitting the Campbell car. It spun around out of control, crashing through a level crossing boom gate before it stopped on the track only to be wiped out by an oncoming train.

Macquarie entered the complex through the exploded door and faced the same 'glass like' barrier that stopped Campbell. He was accompanied by three heavily armed officers ready for action. "I'm Special Agent Nathan Macquarie. I hereby seize this complex on behalf of the government for breaches under the National Security Act."

"What breaches?" demanded Ashley defiantly.

"You have illegally accessed classified material and suspected of selling that information to foreign powers. You will be charged with espionage and possibly treason."

"Where is your proof that we've accessed any classified data? Can you link a breach of any firewall to this complex? Have you even had a breach? Without that proof you have no business here!"

"Our proof lies in the quality and detail of the data supplied to the film crew. It could only have come from classified records."

"We have access to many sources of data. Our system can process data and make links that you cannot make. You cannot prove that data came from any illegal source. So I repeat, you have no business here!"

"Then we will have to enter by force!" threatened Macquarie.

“You’re welcome to try but should you succeed, you should know two things. Firstly, this equipment will not operate without us. It will shut down. Secondly, should you attempt to breach this building, we will release information that could be embarrassing to both your government and your allies.”

“So you do have classified information!” stated Macquarie.

“We have information, our sources are protected. And that information is not something you want made public. We have been expecting this move and are prepared for it!” replied Ashley.

“We shall test that!” retorted Macquarie before retreating to his car.

Sam turned to Ashley. “Let me talk to them and return the boy.”

“If you think it will help. It would be safer for Adam if you got him away from here.”

Moments later Sam exited with Adam and approached Macquarie. “What are you planning here?”

Avoiding the question he asked, “Is that Sandra’s boy?”

“Yes it is, they rescued him from ‘Yarmsley Lodge’ during the murders.”

“So we can add kidnapping to the charges.”

“No, sir. You can’t! They rescued the boy and kept him from harm. What you’re doing here is wrong. You have no proof of any wrongdoing. They are good people...”

“...with a powerful weapon, knowledge!” replied Macquarie, turning away. “Call the mother! Get her out here to take him away.” An officer stepped forward to take the boy.

Sam resisted. “He can stay with me. I promised to return him to his mother, not hand him over to you.”

“As you wish.” Macquarie moved to depart, Sam grabbed him and spun him around.

“I have been hired to protect the Hathaways. I wasn’t told but I knew it was your people who were threatening them - you still are. Before you act hastily at least gather your facts. I doubt you have any real evidence of a hacking trail linked to them. They’re too clever.”

“Doesn’t matter.”

“It will in court, the assumption will be that any hack leaves a trail no matter how sophisticated. If you can’t prove a hack then they are protected like any journalist from revealing their source. It could be a whistle blower. It could be a conclusion drawn from piecing together information from the internet and other sources. You can’t prove anything beyond that unless you have access to their servers. I don’t even see a warrant here!”

“I don’t need one in cases of a National Security threat! Now leave us to do our job!” Macquarie walked off to communicate with superiors.

Sutradhar, Briggs and his team arrived at the scene. Sutradhar marched angrily up to Macquarie. “What’s going on here?”

“Not your jurisdiction! I’m ordering you to leave and take your people.”

“Not doing that, as I see it, the cat’s already out of the bag. Campbell and his conspirators are in big trouble globally because of these people. You should be recruiting them - not persecuting them.”

“Campbell is dead!”

“When? How?” replied the Inspector taken aback. Macquarie ignored him and walked off. Sam observed the conversation and was about to approach the Inspector when Sandra and Andrew arrived at the scene and were greeted by Sam and Adam.

Sandra felt strange, she knew it was her son but she had no memory of him. Adam saw his father first. “Dad!” he said uncertainly as if afraid to approach him. Then he saw Sandra and ran to her. “Mum! Are you alright?”

Sandra hugged him but Adam could feel the difference in her hug. He said nothing but stared at her strangely when she let him go. He looked to his father for re-assurance but there was no response.

A screaming sound filled the air and they felt something fly overhead at speed. Whatever it was there were three of them. They impacted on the complex which exploded into a ball of flame deafening everyone around, the blast wave knocked them all to the ground. Macquarie's people had kept everyone well back from the complex, as if he'd known this was going to happen. The complex was now a smouldering structure of debris.

"You killed them!" shouted Sandra getting to her feet after realising what had happened. She was joined by Sam and the Inspector who both confronted Macquarie.

"It had to be done. They had control of too much data to be allowed to operate."

"They helped you bring down a major conspiratorial network, freely offering their research and you do this!" shouted Sandra. "A film crew is murdered and they are threatened. They saved the life of my boy! They could have been a great asset to us if you'd tried to recruit them! They had probably the most sophisticated data collection platform in the world! And you short sightedly destroyed it out of fear!"

"You seem to be remembering quite a bit for someone suffering amnesia?" queried Macquarie. It was then Sandra realised the shock of the explosion had restored her memory.

"Yes, I remember everything," she said in a threatening tone walking off. Sam joined her and her family as they left the scene.

"I'm going to need a full briefing!" shouted Macquarie as she walked off ignoring him.

The next day Sandra wrote her report based on everything she had pieced together. The Hathaway's were both computer nerds of the highest order. They were geniuses. From years of undetected crime, they'd amassed some very sophisticated computer equipment which now resided in the cellar of their home. The rest of the house was almost

irrelevant to their requirements as they spent 24/7 in that cellar hacking and developing new ways to defeat security systems.

“I did it!” announced JoJo raising her arms above her head in triumph.

“Try another one to verify?” pressed Ashley excitedly.

Moments later, “It worked and it only took a few minutes! You try one!”

Ashley complied and within minutes his face lit up. “I’m in! Let me try another!” A few minutes later he also raised his arms in excitement. “Do you know what this means?”

JoJo gave him a devilish grin. “We can control the world!”

“Who wants that? Think of it, this algorithm can get passed any security system in minutes, no password, no firewall, no anti-virus, any encryption, nothing can stop us getting in and it doesn’t sound any alarms because we don’t go through the security we actually use it to gain entry!”

JoJo gave him a big hug. “So what do you want to use it for?”

“Data gathering! Information is power and power gives us money. I want to build a super computer. Hack the key data bases around the world, spy organizations, politics, and big business. Expose the corruption while selling our data. We could save the planet!”

They hugged again enthusiastically, excited by their hopes and dreams of the future. They had the ultimate weapon, they could access any computer-based system, copy their data and with a super computer they could analyse and cross reference data in ways not previously possible.

Special Agent Norman Macquarie entered the briefing room where a dozen agents were waiting. “We have a mystery and I need it solved! We have noticed over the last year or so a massive increase in the purchase of super-computer infrastructure. That in itself isn’t the main cause for alarm because we could usually identify the purchaser and uncover their purpose. In this case it’s being done in small packages by a multitude of

businesses all with no visible existence. By that I mean, there is no central address. Judging by the amount of equipment being purchased this super-computer has massive storage and massive processing capability.”

“Do we know what they’re processing?” asked one agent.

“No, and that’s our concern. If they were purchasing for legitimate businesses they would have an address, a contact person. The fact that they are trying to build this in secret, means they want to collect data that we probably don’t want them to have, or to use that data for their own purposes.”

“Do we have any idea who we’re dealing with?”

“No. That’s your task to identify the prime source of all these purchases and track down where the equipment ended up. There are hundreds of companies linked to a network of other companies overseas. It will be a massive undertaking to track every piece but it has to be done. Any questions?” No one responded. “Then get to it, you all have access to every piece of data we have. Distribute the work load and start tracking!”

He didn’t need to formally dismiss the team; his walking out of the briefing was enough.

JoJo and Ashley stared in wonder at their creation; rows and rows of computer banks. The room had no lighting other than a blue glow emanating from the equipment itself, enabled the extent of the complex to be visible in the dark. “We did this!” stated Ashley proudly.

“But we have a long way to go before this data is useful. I’m having troubles with the analysis algorithm. Collating the volume of data coming in, is a huge task.”

“There’s no hurry. We have all the time in the world to build this, no one knows it exists and no one knows the extent of the data we have collected. We could do a world census and come up with more accurate data than any one government can because they can’t hide anything. We could sell the data on population demographics, deaths, religion, health, habits etc for a fortune.”

“I thought we were going to take over the world?”

“Who wants that headache; we could make a legitimate fortune by selling this data to the right people. We could raise alarms on where the world is going wrong. This will be exciting!”

“Then what, lie back in our mansion on a Pacific Island and...”

“Get bored! No, we’d just keep building this thing until we... I don’t know...”

“Get bored?” They both laughed enjoying their success and looking forward to the challenges ahead.

Agent Sandra Richards reported to her boss Special Agent Macquarie on her team’s discoveries. “I think we’ve found something.”

“Okay, spill it!”

“We tracked every suspect purchase to a number of holding warehouses. Each package was picked up by a private carrier who paid cash for the holding costs and was paid cash by someone who booked them by phone or internet link. Each time it was a different carrier who took it to a second holding warehouse. All the packages were addressed to fictitious companies or individuals.”

“What happened to them then?”

“They were all taken to a third holding warehouse which had all its records wiped in a hack. The warehouse manager remembered a few of the carriers who picked up the deliveries. We tracked them down and found they all delivered to one address.” Sandra placed a photo of a warehouse on his desk.

“That building is owned by ‘OK Pepea Ltd’ it’s registered as a data analysis company but we can find neither source for its data nor any customers for that data. It has a healthy bank account, but the source of funds has been untraceable so far. Directors are JoJo and Ashley Hathaway who lodge legitimate tax returns based on their salary from the company. On the surface it operates legit.”

“Except that they purchase their equipment in secret, obtain and sell data in secret and hide behind a shield of companies’ world-wide.”

“Which means we have no legitimate reason to get warrants or to interview them.”

“Then we’ll do it another way,” stated Macquarie.

JoJo exited the supermarket pushing a trolley of supplies and heading for her car. As she crossed between cars, a car roared into life and sped towards her recklessly. For a moment she froze, a woman dived out and pulled her out of the path of the vehicle as it sped off without slowing down. They were both lying on the ground, her shopping trolley knocked over. Concerned people approached to see if they could help.

“Are you alright?” asked Sandra helping JoJo back on her feet.

She was shaken, staring off in the direction the car had taken while she got back on her feet. “What was he doing?” she asked not expecting anyone to answer.

“I got the licence plate,” offered a young man handing her a piece of paper. Sandra took it and thanked him as she held JoJo by the arm, still feeling unsteady on her feet.

Witnesses gathered - some had called the police; others were praising Sandra for her heroism as a few helped pick up her groceries and return them to the trolley. “Can I take you for a coffee while you calm down?” suggested Sandra. JoJo nodded still dazed and overwhelmed by the attention. Sandra addressed the gathers. “Thank you all, I think she needs some space.”

“If you give me your keys, I’ll put your groceries in your car?” offered the young man. JoJo handed over the keys and pointed to her car. Sandra led her away to a restaurant next to the supermarket and ordered coffee. The young man returned shortly after with her keys. JoJo thanked him and Sandra winked to her team member.

The police arrived and interviewed her while she sipped the coffee; Sandra handed over the licence number. “Is there anyone who might want to run you down?” asked the officer.

JoJo felt shocked by the question. “You think it was deliberate?”

“The witnesses seemed to think he waited for you to cross and drove directly at you. You were lucky to escape regardless. If he was just a reckless driver, he made no attempt to brake when he saw you.”

“I think I need something stronger than coffee,” she replied. Sandra ordered a whisky as the police left her to recover.

“So, what do you do with your time,” asked Sandra drawing her attention away from the incident.

“I’m a data analyst,” she replied. “And you?”

“I was in security but I’m now a wife and mother. My husband is a talent agent, finds actors for films, stage and modelling events.”

“And you don’t work anymore?”

“An eight year old boy keeps me busy and... I make the odd documentary to break the monotony.” She replied pleasantly.

“That’s an odd switch from security to documentaries?”

“I was more in monitoring CCTV and analysing the images, so viewing and cutting footage came naturally for me. When I saw that car I just knew you were in danger, seen it too many times before on hit and run viewings.”

“So you think it was deliberate as well?” asked JoJo.

Sandra nodded solemnly. “I think so.” She replied leaving JoJo to think about her position. “If I can help let me know I’ll give you my number. Will you be alright if I leave you now?”

JoJo nodded. “I think so, thanks for the coffee and the drink.” JoJo found herself feeling very alone and vulnerable. “Sandra! Can you escort me home?”

Sandra agreed, besides that was what she had hoped would happen. Though she felt guilty for putting her through this stress she had to make friends and get inside that complex.

They drove up in separate cars to the warehouse. Sandra helped JoJo with her groceries and knocked on the door. “Who’s with you?” asked Ashley

“A friend, she helped me. I think we might have a problem.”

“She can’t come in, it’s a security breach!” replied Ashley.

JoJo turned to Sandra. “I’m sorry; we have a lot of sensitive top-secret equipment in here.”

“I understand I’ll be on my way.” Sandra, disappointed, placed the groceries on the ground and walked off. JoJo waited until she was gone before opening the door. Ashley was there and helped her inside.

After she briefed Ashley on the events in the car park he felt very worried. They both sat in the kitchen talking. “Why would anyone target you? Who even knows about this place? Who could feel threatened?”

“I’m scared, Ashley. Maybe we’re playing with something too powerful for us to handle. We might need protection?”

“What did you have in mind?”

“The woman who helped me was in security, CCTV monitoring. She might know someone who could act as our bodyguards when outside the complex.”

“Maybe,” said Ashley thoughtfully. “Firstly, we need to check her out and that car. We have the most sophisticated search engine in the world, we can uncover anything,” he said excitedly jumping to his feet and rushing over to the computer console.

He fed the licence number into the computer and found no information. It was a fake, it had never existed. He tapped into the CCTV footage in the car park and viewed the incident, but the driver wore a balaclava. He traced the vehicle as it left the car park until it had been abandoned under an overpass. The driver disappeared probably getting into another car passing by. He tracked the vehicle back the other way; it had been stolen by balaclava man who had also appeared from a CCTV blind spot, his origin unknown.

“He’s a professional. He knows where all the CCTV cameras are located and cleverly avoided them. This was definitely an attempt on your life!” declared Ashley which didn’t give JoJo any comfort.

Ashley dug into Sandra’s background, confirmed her past history and her family status. He discovered she didn’t live locally but was doing a documentary in the area explaining her presence. He felt convinced she was not a threat, based on the initial search.

“If she’s doing a documentary, she may not have the time to help,” stated Ashley.

“She only has to recommend someone, though I would like her to be involved. I liked her; it was nice to have a friend. I get a little lonely with it just being us.”

“I understand, maybe we can meet up with her tomorrow and have a chat.” That pleased JoJo and helped her concentrate on her work for the rest of the day.

Sandra had had a sleepless night thinking of JoJo. She appeared to be a nice girl but if she was dealing in international espionage, she’d have to take them down. But what evidence did they have other than they were working in secret, that in itself was not a crime. Her thoughts persisted as she prepared breakfast for the family, the following morning. Adam was already seated at the table eating his cereal and talking but Sandra wasn’t listening.

When Andrew entered she didn’t even notice him arrive. He’d picked up on the conversation with Adam as Sandra cooked bacon and eggs. When they were ready she was about to call her husband when she noticed he was already there. “When did you sneak in?” she asked as she placed his breakfast in front of him.

“Not long, I picked up on the conversation you were not having with your son.”

“What do you mean?” she asked sitting down to her own meal.

“I was asking you about getting my day trip permission slip signed but you weren’t listening,” replied Adam. Andrew held it up for her to see he’d signed it.

At that point the phone rang. She picked it up. “Sandra? This is JoJo from yesterday.”

“How did you get this number?” asked Sandra, surprised at anyone getting her private unlisted mobile number.

“I run a data bank, Sandra. It’s easy to find an unlisted number.”

“What can I do for you? Have you had another incident?” JoJo simply stated she had and wanted to meet over lunch. Could Sandra make it? She agreed and hung up.

“NSD problem?” asked Andrew. Sandra nodded and continued her breakfast.

They met in the same restaurant as before. Sandra joined both Ashley and JoJo and found they’d already ordered coffee for her. They had taken seats outside observing the car park as if wary of another attack. “So, what happened?”

“We were being watched last night! They followed us into town, waited while we went to a movie then followed us home,” reported Ashley, matter of factly, but JoJo was spooked. “In fact, if you look at the red car parked over there, it followed us here today.”

Sandra noted the car being indicated, got up and walked towards the car in question. It immediately started its engine and drove off with screeching tyres. She returned to the table. “Definitely suspicious. What are you thinking?”

“You said you’d been working in surveillance. Do you know someone who can look out for us?” asked JoJo. Her eyes showing she was terrified but Ashley was surprisingly calm.

“I can recommend a bodyguard if that’s what you’re after. He can be with you day and night inside and outside the facility.”

“No, not inside,” stressed Ashley. Our building is very secure; no one is getting in there. It’s when we are outside getting supplies, visiting the theatre, that sort of thing.”

“So you want someone outside at all times or someone on call?”

“On call,” replied Ashley without hesitation.

“You’d have to arrange with him every outing you were engaged in,” warned Sandra.

“We can do that,” replied Ashley. “We don’t go out much.”

“I’ll organise it. Can I bring him around to your facility later today? I’ll have to confirm the time, based on his availability,” suggested Sandra.

Sam Bullock was a stocky man in his forties. He’d once been an Olympic weightlifter and still bore the muscles which he maintained on a daily basis. He pulled up in his van outside the complex followed by Sandra. They rang the bell and the couple emerged gingerly. Sandra introduced Sam and they sat down outside on a table and chairs obviously set up for doing work in the sunshine.

They discussed the situation. “From what you’re telling me these people are professionals working for a large organization. Probably someone you’ve upset, a customer or a supplier perhaps. Amateurs and small players don’t go creating false plates, they use stolen plates. Any ideas on who that might be?”

Ashley and JoJo both looked surprised, they both knew no one had any idea what they were doing; they had no customers, and their suppliers didn’t know they were stealing data. Had someone caught on?” The thought, echoed through their heads but they said nothing.

Sam noted the hesitation. “I suggest I set up camp out of sight of the complex and watch who comes and goes. I have equipment that can detect anything approaching your complex. If I could get a look at your security I could synchronise the results.”

“Our system is quite impenetrable. Anything that touches our perimeter fence raises an alarm Any scanning of the building is blocked and we have CCTV cameras covering the entire complex including the roof. It’s outside the perimeter we are vulnerable,” replied Ashley quite firmly, making it clear no one got inside.

“Are you happy for me to just watch the complex for a few weeks, it might tell us who is hunting you,” suggested Sam. “You’re welcome to have a tour of my van if you like.”

They entered his surveillance van lined with monitoring equipment for tapping phone lines, infra-red scans, visual surveillance and heat signature detection. “Quite a set up Sam, how do you afford all this?” asked Ashley.

“I’m quite successful at my job, my fees are not cheap, but my service is better than anyone else, got a lot of corporate clients who need their bosses protected at times.”

Ashley became suspicious. “So how come you’re not busy now?”

“There are busy times and quiet times. Not all jobs require the van and I have other operatives. The van is currently not in use for the next two weeks. Shall we talk price?”

Two weeks later, Sandra visited Sam in the van on the perimeter of the complex. The area was undeveloped, so he’d taken cover in the trees nearby giving him the high ground and concealment against other observers, not that they expected any as NSD were the ones doing the scare tactics.

“Nothing! I’ve got absolutely nothing! There have been no visitors; I can find no phone signal so I suspect they have no mobiles. The building is impenetrable to infrared imaging, X-Ray or any other visual penetration. The IT nerds cannot get past their firewall and are sure they’ve been detected. There’s a lot of computer activity and the complex draws a lot of power. Whatever they’re doing in there its big, they’re processing massive amounts of data, but we have no idea where it’s coming from.”

“Is it worth continuing the surveillance?” asked Sandra.

“No, I doubt it, two weeks out here and I’ve no clue. As far as I can tell they’re not doing anything illegal, it’s just they’re doing it all in secret which makes it suspicious but no grounds for a warrant even with the extended powers of the NSD.”

“Our research indicates the same, the Hathaways earn a modest income, own a modest company that runs a project funded by a network of off-shore corporations, none linked to hostile governments but somehow they’re spending tens of millions doing it.”

“What’s our next move?”

JoJo appears to be very lonely, her whole life being spent working on algorithms to analyse data. I think I need to become her friend. She's had me come over for coffee a few times during the last few weeks. I might instigate another meeting."

"What does she talk about?" asked Sam.

"The problems of the world, global warming, violence, poverty, corruption, she's a bit of a campaigner but she's one of those frustrated believers who feels impotent."

"Makes her ripe for radicalisation," warned Sam.

"True, but who's going to radicalise her; she never meets anyone."

"Maybe that's your job! Join her campaign. Maybe what they're doing in there is planning some big hit back. With the computer power they have they could hack into something critical and bring it down."

"That definitely gives me something to talk to her about," replied Sandra.

JoJo was taken aback. "You want me to do research on global warming!" She wasn't sure whether to be pleased or afraid; afraid of anyone getting under their radar or pleased to be able to use their data for something useful.

"We'll pay but we need someone who can draw out the rare data and then we can focus a hard-hitting documentary around the real undisputable facts. Can you do that?"

"Yes, I can, and I'd be happy to do it free if the message can get out there."

"Well, there's no guarantee once I have the data and put together a proposal we need to get the backers. That can take a while," warned Sandra.

"That's okay. Meet me back here tomorrow night and I'll give you an update," she replied excitedly and rushed off so quickly it left Sandra surprised.

Special Agent Macquarie examined the data presented, he flicked through a document some six inches thick as Sandra entered. Macquarie was with a University Professor Anton Smithers. "This report is more thorough than anything I've ever seen on

any topic. They've drawn data from just about every published study on the environment. They've delved into modern and ancient weather patterns, studied ocean currents and cross linked the data to produce predictive models that outperform anything I've ever seen. This must have taken years!"

"She did it between morning tea and dinner the following day," replied Sandra.

"That's impossible!" exploded the Professor. "Can't be done!"

"I'm afraid Professor, that's exactly what happened," confirmed Macquarie.

"But how? Can I get a copy? Are they going to publish?" blurted out Smithers excitedly.

"I will talk to her; she wants to make a documentary based on the data. I'm going to talk to my husband on finding a backer," replied Sandra then added. "My husband is in the industry."

The Professor waited for any further responses hoping for an opportunity for himself. "You can have a copy and we'll talk to her about publishing with your assistance," replied Macquarie. With that Smithers left taking an electronic copy of the report with him. Macquarie asked Sandra to stay. "When you speak to her next, see if you can get a report on terrorism around the world. If she's as thorough on climate change maybe she can give us something useful."

"What do you think they're trying to do?"

"I wish I knew but this tells us they're drawing quite heavily and widely from sources from around the world and have the ability to analyse that data rapidly. This tool could be invaluable if they're not being funded by our enemies."

"I'll get back to you, sir."

Over lunch the next day, Sandra sat opposite the Hathaways. "We had Professor Smithers review your data and he was so excited he wants to help you publish the data formally in science journals and have your work officially recognised. My husband

believes he can get a backer, but he has someone now who's doing a project on terrorism. Would you like to be involved in that?"

JoJo and Ashley said nothing as they exchanged glances thinking together almost telepathically. Sandra felt concerned she'd pushed them too far, too fast. Ashley finally responded. "Tell the Professor he can publish under his own name, we don't want any credit. We want a low profile, happy to help save the planet but we don't want to have any kind of public face."

"Are you sure? This could make you world famous, pay you millions!"

"We aren't looking for riches, we enjoy what we do and make enough to live the way we are comfortable. As for terrorism, we're not interested in getting into the politics of that issue," replied Ashley.

"What would you be interested in?" asked Sandra.

"Pharmaceutical Companies and how they're conspiring with food manufactures to make people sick so they can sell more medicines," replied JoJo passionately.

"Give us a few days to do the report," suggested Ashley. Sandra agreed although disappointed. She didn't believe in conspiracies and had hoped the data on terrorism would have been more useful.

A week later, Macquarie met with Sandra out of the office in a pub. They shared a beer in the corner away from prying eyes and listening patrons. "These people must have access to numerous intelligence databases around the world to have obtained this data; including information that only we know about."

"Are you saying that such a conspiracy exists?" asked Sandra.

"Most certainly, but it's politically sensitive, involving big world stage players making a lot of money. Nothing we can do!"

"So, what do you plan to do now?" asked Sandra not pleased to discover she was powerless to act on this threat to everyone in the world. "How detailed is their data?"

"The data is incredible; they've uncovered the entire network worldwide, uncovered suspicious activities of people and linked them to others through transactions,

mobile phone tracking and post pandemic QR Code data. Cross linked corporations through secret agreements. International smuggling of ... you name it!"

"So what next?"

"For the moment, we finance their documentary, invite them on set. We'll find a safe house to interview people, one where we can keep an eye on everything that happens. We need to recruit them on to our side, to work with us! We need that tool!"

Ashley called JoJo over. "Look at this," he pointed to data scrolling up the screen showing reports of an international scandal around food. "Someone has acted on our data. I'd say NSD has got hold of it!"

"Has Sandra betrayed us?"

"I'm not sure, we need to ask her. It may be that since the data is out there, they've got wind of it and want to cash in. The only problem is they're going to go hunting for the source and Sandra could lead them to us."

When they confronted her Sandra was not surprised, she explained she'd been hawking the program around the industry and that sort of material attracted the attention of authorities. The good news was they'd got a backer and were going to commence interviews next week. They were currently lining up experts to interview about the data.

Ashley was wary but JoJo was excited. "Can we be present at the interviews?"

"That can be arranged."

Ten days later, Sandra arrived at the house where the interviews were being held. It was a weekend, so she'd brought Adam, Andrew had come out of curiosity. JoJo was already there but not Ashley. They entered quietly as an interview was underway. They listened for a while, not noticing Adam wander back outside.

He was bored and decided to explore, he found a gap in the fence and could hear an electric saw on the other side. He entered the neighbour's yard and followed the noise to a shed where he found Ray working on a piece of furniture.

“Hallo there, where did you come from?” asked Ray switching off the saw mounted into his bench.

“Next door, they’re doing boring stuff.”

“Well, let’s see if we can fix that. Ever done carpentry?” Adam shook his head. “Time you learnt. What your name? I’m Ray.”

They worked for nearly an hour before Andrew found him, having followed the noise from the carpentry shop. “Adam!” he yelled sternly from the door. The boy dropped what he was doing and stared in fear at his father. Ray noticed the reaction.

“Are you his father?” asked Ray.

“I am, I hope he hasn’t been causing you any trouble?”

“On the contrary, he’s been helping me out and learning a new skill. Do you need him to come with you? He’s welcome to stay here until you need him back.”

“You want to stay here, Adam?” The boy nodded shyly. “Alright but next time tell us where you’re going and don’t let us worry about where you’ve gone. Is that clear!” stated Andrew in his most authoritative voice. Ray noted the reaction in the boy and felt protective of his young apprentice. Andrew left.

“Is your father always like that?”

“Maybe,” replied Adam cautiously.

They returned on Sunday and Adam went straight to Ray, this time telling his parents where he’d be. Sandra went to visit them around lunch time. She knocked on the side of the shed which had no door and waited but they didn’t notice or hear above the noise of the equipment. When it stopped, Adam saw his mother. His face lit up and he raced to her. “Mum!”

“How’s it going buddy?” she asked wrapping her arms around him. Ray stood back observing the different reaction of the boy to his mother.

“Great! Ray is teaching me how to repair this chair. He’s making a new leg using the old broken leg as a guide. Look!” He dragged her over to the lathe where Ray had been cutting. “See it follows the pattern and makes a copy.”

Sandra, noting Ray was standing by, introduced herself. "I'm Sandra. He enjoys working with you. He couldn't stop talking about you all night and was so eager to come back today. I hope he's no bother."

"No bother. I enjoy having the company. Nice to have an apprentice and he's got potential. He listens, learns fast and is careful. He's got that artistic touch of a furniture craftsman rather than a furniture maker."

"I'm glad to hear it," she replied proudly. "I came to fetch him for lunch. Would you like to join us?"

Adam's face lit up at the suggestion. "Sure," replied Ray and followed them back to the front yard where a catering company had set up meals. Ray helped himself, entering into conversation with those around him. Andrew watched him warily. For some reason he didn't like that man.

It was school holidays so Adam kept coming all week and working with Ray. Sandra was watching from a security point of view. Leaks continued in the press as the story blew up rendering the documentary almost irrelevant. No one knew it was Sandra leaking the material and the media was seeking the footage of interviews. It was now a worldwide international scandal being played down by official spokespeople as just another conspiracy theory.

Ashley and JoJo were inside the house watching as the last of the equipment was loaded up and driven away. Out front the documentary director and a female assistant, Jane waved off the film crew. Night settled in and they were about to go home themselves. A car pulled up outside they didn't recognise. Sandra got out with Adam and two bearded men.

"I thought you were going away to your beach house for a break!" stated the director.

"We changed those plans," replied one of the bearded men.

"What do you mean?" asked the director beginning to notice the concern on Sandra's face.

“Adam, why don’t you go inside and wait for me there,” urged Sandra.

“Can I visit, Ray?” he asked eagerly.

“No, it’s too late. Just wait inside. I won’t be long.” Sandra looked to the men seeking permission. They didn’t stop him.

“What is this?” asked the Director stepping forward to confront these two men.

“We want to know the source of your intelligence and we want to know it now!”

“I’m afraid that’s not possible. Our sources are confidential. Now, I think you should go!” replied the director.

The bearded man drew out a pistol from inside his jacket. “I think not!” Without further comment he shot the director. The gun made no noise, but the director fell dead as Jane screamed. The other man grabbed her around the mouth to shut her up. Sandra took the opportunity to overpower the man holding her and grabbed his gun.

“Now both of you, on your knees and drop your gun!”

The man with the gun focused his gun on Jane. Jane had been released but was standing frozen to the spot staring at the gun while the unarmed man watched Sandra.

Sandra felt the blow to the back of her head as a blinding light turning the world upside down and filling it with pain. She thought she heard a gunshot but was uncertain as the world went black.

Sandra’s gun had gone off and a bullet had hit the second man. The woman who’d come from behind Sandra rushed to the injured man but saw instantly that he was dead. She glared at Jane, hatred in her eyes, drew a knife and attacked, stabbing Jane several times before the other man could stop her. Jane was dead but the woman continued to stab her until the man finally pulled her off the body. She turned to attack Sandra’s unconscious body with the same intent. The surviving man hit her to stop her continuing her murderous spree, she fell on Sandra, transferring the blood she was bathed in.

“Stop!” ordered the man. “You destroy everything with your impulsive behaviour! We needed answers! Now we must leave but first check the house!” He had her firmly by the shoulders, her anger still burning within her.

“He was my brother!” she cried.

“And now we must move on. Our mission is what’s important! Check the house!”

Ashley had been clipping his nails when they heard the commotion outside. They both witnessed the events and took Adam under their wing. The front door burst open! It hadn’t been locked and was, in fact, ajar. The attackers entered cautiously as Ashley led JoJo and Adam out the back door and out across the back yard.

They were spotted, several silent bullets pursued them across the yard as they climbed the fence and disappeared into the yard beyond. Rushing through the stranger’s property they arrived in the street beyond. It was a busy street; they hailed a taxi and it drove off.

“What about my Mum?” asked Adam, confused, and alarmed.

“We’ll call the police. They’ll protect your mum,” replied JoJo.

Ashley stared out the window considering the consequences of what had happened. As he did, he noticed he was still clenching the nail clippers tightly in his hand.

On returning to the scene, the woman picked up a rock and took out her frustrations by smashing in the heads of their victims. Once she had calmed down, the armed man dragged the two dead bodies up the drive and lay them side by side. He then went back and assisted by the woman picked up the body of their accomplice and put him into the females car before she drove off. The armed man got into his car and left. In the distance sirens could be heard approaching.

Sandra completed her report and added her resignation. She had decided she could not work with a man like Macquarie. They had never found any bodies in the remains of the Hathaway Complex, but the heat of the inferno created could have resulted in destroying all trace. No data was ever recovered either.

So she was quietly amused when breaking news reports kept leaking in to media outlets from an unknown source. The latest being revelations that western governments

had been in league with corporations in both the food and pharmaceutical industries to make people sick.

The food industry packed their foods with all sorts of chemicals that made people sick, while removing essential vitamins and minerals so they could sell these deficiencies in supplements and got kickbacks from the pharmaceutical companies for creating sick clientele.

What none of them knew was the Hathaways had a second complex hiding in plain sight in Silicon Valley among the super computers of the world. They had escaped through a secret tunnel after activating the data release to the media. To the world they were dead, and the 'threat' gone but they continued in secret collecting and collating data. Releasing media reports through the internet embarrassing big business and governments and no one knew the source.

Their aim was not to make money but to publicly reveal the evil in the world. To uncover the truth behind conspiracy theories if there was proof. To show governments were the puppets of global capitalism. They wanted to take the place vacated by traditional media as the watch dogs of democracy and not be the mouth pieces of government.