

A wide-angle landscape photograph of a vibrant turquoise lake, likely a reservoir or dammed river, surrounded by dense evergreen forests. In the background, a large, rugged mountain peak with some snow patches rises against a clear blue sky. The water is exceptionally clear and bright, contrasting sharply with the dark green of the surrounding woods.

# See No Evil

Peter Thwaites

**See No Evil**  
**by**  
**Peter Thwaites**

*This book is a work of fiction. Places, events, and situations in this story are purely fictional and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead is coincidental*

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## *Preface*

'See no Evil' is the second in a series of mystery stories based on the diaries of Rick Shore. Rick is alive and well and lives in his much-loved bungalow in Worthing, West Sussex, on the South Coast of England. As well as enjoying the quiet solitude of his garden, Rick still enjoys the adventure of fishing from the local pier, but has yet to land anything heavier than a one hundred gram Bullhead which somehow became entwined on his line when reeling in one wet Sunday morning.

Rick began his working life as a Police Cadet, easing his way gently up through the ranks to Detective Inspector, when he was selected for a transfer to the Flying Squad. Here he remained for several years before taking early retirement and settling down for a quiet life and some good fishing.

He now spends his retirement as a Private Detective working on mysteries that confound the local police force, more as a hobby than a job.

Rick was married for almost thirteen years, when regrettably he was divorced, leaving him to bring up three sons single-handed. The youngest of whom has only recently left home.

Rick is a deep thinking, quiet man with simple tastes and an easy manner, and loves to spend a quiet evening philosophising over some of life's adventures.

This story is dedicated to my three great sons, Jez, Jon, and Tom who will, no doubt, recognise their dad.

## *Chapter 1*

“What we don’t see, we don’t worry about”

We spend our waking and sleeping hours worrying about events that may never happen or if they did would cause no harm at all. The early morning anxieties are the result of the pressures of everyday life that we put ourselves through. Searching for that perfect existence is an endless task and the more persistent the search, the greater the anxieties in the early dawn. We need to feel that we have control over our destiny, the work that we do, and the way that we live our life. Without this control we are continually swimming upstream and against the tide. The more conscious we are of our failure to offer the best that we can is an added burden to carry whilst on our daily swim.

The events and happenings that are not visible to us will inevitably cause us the greater pain, yet we

do not strive to explore the unknown. Perhaps it is the fear of the knowledge that we might discover.

It had been a good day. The weather had been very kind with a gentle South Westerly wind blowing small tufts of soft white cloud around a pale blue sky. It was even warmer than of late which, after the past few days of cold biting North Easterly winds and the occasional burst of heavy rain that seemed to want to drown everything in sight, was a very welcome change. The visit to the firm's latest construction project site on the South Coast had gone extraordinarily well. Armitage Jones and Partners, the clients, had expressed a real concern that the project should be commenced on time and at the moment this seemed very possible.

There had been some earlier difficulties in the location of a suitable site, with an extensive and detailed specification having been presented to the

Architects at their first conference, but following widespread enquiries and copious site visits this particular brown field development site had actually been suggested by the developers themselves. Tucked away behind a now derelict farm complex, it was of the requisite size, and with a location some three miles from the main highway, planning permission was unlikely to be an issue. The Local Authority were very keen, within their sustainable development policy, that disused brown field sites should be effectively re-developed.

The site was currently somewhat a mystery as the only surviving owner of the land was an elderly spinster who had taken possession shortly after her brother had died following a serious heart attack many years ago. There were one or two rather ramshackle old buildings scattered about the area but these had long seen better days

and were in imminent danger of collapse.

James was the Architect appointed to oversee the new project and this was to be his first visit to the site. He was a newly qualified Architect in his late twenties, had already established a reputation for his designs of similar type developments and was very keen to establish himself locally. He was an enthusiastic squash player and often enjoyed a round of golf with some of his colleagues over the weekend. James was a handsome young man with well-groomed blond hair and a physique to match. He was fastidious in the way that he dressed and always kept a spare pair of shoes and trousers in the car ready for that particularly muddy site.

Walking over the site that afternoon, James perceived that a large majority of these buildings appeared to have basements with access by the way of heavy steel doors bolted up a long while ago,



and refusing any attempt to re-open.

The ground itself was made up of a mishmash of now crumbling tarmacadam and reinforced concrete paving designed for some reason, to carry substantial loads. There were few other remaining structures, with only a very basic chainlink fence bordering the property, and sparse vegetation, save for the grass and weeds desperately forcing themselves through the ancient road and pathways in search of the life giving rays of sunshine.

The buildings themselves were more often than not built of concrete blocks with corrugated iron roof panels; although some of them had been faced with a simple white wash rendering to make them slightly more attractive to the eye.

Inside the few buildings missing a door, where access could be gained without having to climb over piles of discarded boxes of evil smelling

packets of some sort, there were some remnants of wooded furniture, such as a few tables and a chair or two, but no signs of habitation. In fact the whole site appeared to have been thoroughly cleared of any signs of life. None of the buildings had any windows intact, although this was probably mindless vandalism over the last few years. There was certainly a great deal of broken glass around.

In fact it seemed to cover the entire site.

It won't take much to clear this area, thought James, as he crossed the site to where he had parked his car. A couple of scrapers and heavy bulldozers would remove most of what was left standing. As for the basements, they would require further investigation. Removing his boots and replacing them with a pair of light brown brogues, he made his way to the front of the car and went to open his door. A small Terrier dog had wandered on to the

site, probably from the nearby farm and was sniffing around one of the buildings. James felt a slight brushing against the sleeve of his jacket, as if he had touched a wall or door, and he suddenly felt cold, with a shiver running down his spine.

"Someone walking over my grave" he said to himself out loud and spun round.

There was nothing there, only the distant solitary buildings, and a light warm breeze playing with scattered leaves and the smallest of twigs.

The dog had crouched down low with his stomach scraping along the ground as if in defence, and was softly growling with his teeth barred and lips curled back. His tail was absolutely flat against the ground. James had the strangest feeling that he was not alone. He couldn't explain it, but there was something close to him. He was certain. Without warning the dog suddenly sprang to its feet and

sprinted back to where it had come, ears flat against his head, tail between his legs, and occasionally glancing back towards the buildings. James felt that shiver again, and the atmosphere around him became suddenly icy cold. He cautiously turned back to his car and once again tried the lock. His hand was shaking and felt cold and yet sticky and it took him a while to unlock the door and sit down. The door closed to behind him on its own accord, and he managed to start the engine.

As he drove the car slowly away from the site, a feeling or maybe fear, made him glance in to his rear view mirror and although he could see nothing, he felt certain that he was being watched. He could feel eyes watching him as he left the compound, and headed for the road.

Back on the main road James was beginning to slowly recover. His hands had stopped shaking and

he felt warm and safe in the close comfort of his car. By the time that he had reached his home he had almost forgotten the whole incident and as he drove into the driveway, with his wife waving from the lounge window, the thoughts of the afternoon disappeared completely.

Today was Wednesday and regularly as clockwork every Wednesday evening whilst his wife invited a few girl friends home for a gossip and drinks, James enjoyed a game of squash with one of his younger colleagues from the firm, Josh. Josh was much younger than James, but the games always ended very close with either one or the other winning on alternate nights. This evening was no different and with the events of the previous few hours long gone from his mind, James succeeded in taking the match. Both players showered at the courts, and after exchanging ideas and designs for their latest

project over a light meal, each left to go their separate ways home.

James collected his car and switching on the headlights turned into the lane that would take him home. He felt tired, nothing really unusual here, it had been a long day, the game had been fierce, and he wasn't getting any younger. At least he would be home in under a quarter of an hour. He rubbed his eyes, which were feeling tired and sore and concentrated hard on the winding road ahead. He actually enjoyed driving at night with the dark shadows and many twinkling lights. He felt safe and comfortable in his car. Looking upwards he could make out the moon, and many stars, and towards the Southeast a dull orange glow was sure to be Mars. He greatly appreciated the wonders of the world, and although not particularly a religious man, it was a good feeling.

Ahead, about two miles, he guessed, he could make out the headlights of a car flashing on and off between the many trees and bushes that lined this road, travelling towards him. Not going particularly fast, but just in case they were to meet on a narrow section of the lane, James kept into the left-hand side. The car disappeared behind several trees and then re-appeared; bright headlights casting long beams of sharp white light into the countryside lighting up the trees and hedgerows like giant searchlights burning through the night-time darkness. As it suddenly materialized directly in front of him, James felt himself completely blinded by the piercing brightness of the lights.

“For Gods sake, dip them, dip them” he screamed as intuitively he pulled into the left side of the road.

The nearside front wing of his car caught the

trunk of a wizened old oak tree, no doubt planted by a young farm hand many years ago, and as the car spun around it forced him against the steering wheel where his seat belt tightened across his chest. The force of the spin caused the offside wheels to lift and as it shuddered to a halt against the low steel barrier, the car began to roll. The windscreen shattered into a thousand minute pieces, and the bonnet lid twisted by the collision sprung free from the safety catch bouncing up towards the broken windscreen. James released his seat belt as the car completed the first roll and he was thrown like a wet towel in a washing machine against the roof. He felt his chest explode with pain and blood began seeping from his forehead as he made contact with the cracked roof light.

The car began a second roll, this time gathering momentum as it entered a slight downhill gradient



running alongside the lane. With the wheels spinning in shrill torment, the roof collapsed trapping both of James' legs and he felt his lifeblood draining away. At the end of the second roll, the car bounced to a halt settling disturbingly on all four wheels. The engine had by now stalled, and great gasps of steam were coming from the engine compartment. The world was unnaturally still and with a quiet groan, the car stopped moving.

James' lifeless body hung limply from the rear of the car and even as the sounds of the rescue services could be heard below in the valley, his spirit entered into Peace.

George Perkiss replaced his mobile phone in its holder and pulling onto the soft grass verge to the side of the lane; stared unbelievably at the wreckage that was spread before him. He had never been this close to a vehicle accident ever before

and would certainly never want to be so again. The speed at which the car had spun round, and then rolled into the field the other side of the fence was incomprehensible.

Still trying to come to terms with what he had seen, he climbed out of his car and was making his rather unsteady way across the lane when the first of the rescue vehicles arrived. Inspector Joseph Lucas was on his way home after a particularly tiring day in court when he had received the radio message reporting a vehicle accident on Tommacks Lane and had headed straight here. The position of the vehicle, and location of the body, indicated a fatal accident and all that could be done before the Scenes of Crime officers arrived was to interview any witnesses before they left the scene.

Walking slowly towards the car drawn up on the side of the lane, he was met by George Perkiss. A

tall, brown haired gentleman, wearing a rough pair of Levi jeans, a dark blue roll neck sweater and a pair of dark green wellington boots.

“Excuse me Sir, was it you who placed the emergency call?” enquired the Inspector as he approached the driver.

“Yes, that be correct. I called the police as soon as I saw the other car hit that tree” pointing to the old Oak tree standing frm against the impact of the overturned car.

“Will you tell me exactly what happened here?” asked the Inspector as he took his notebook from the inside pocket of his worn grey jacket and licking his pencil, selected a fresh page.

“Well, I’m not really sure. But it is really strange. I came around that corner back there” pointing to a sharp left hand bend about fve hundred yards back up the lane “and this car suddenly swung

left, hit the tree and then rolled into the field”

“Did you have your headlights on?”

“No, they were on dipped. The main beam is not working at the moment. I had meant to get the switch fixed, but have never got round to it”

As he spoke a further police car arrived on the scene accompanied by a paramedic ambulance. The Inspector thanked George for his assistance and turned to the other police vehicle that by now had pulled up behind his own.

The traffic officers left their vehicle and were approaching the Inspector.

“Evening guys. I don't think there is much that we can do here. It seems that the driver of the other car over reacted, and ended up in that field” pointing to the still steaming car.

“If you would take a formal statement from the other driver, we'll wait for the post mortem report

on the deceased. I'll see you back in the office tomorrow"

The Inspector walked slowly back to his car and watched as the paramedics carefully carried the body back to the waiting ambulance. Someone will have to tell his next of kin. Not me this time, he thought to himself, thank God.

## *Chapter 2*

The wind had again changed direction and was blowing from the North. It had gathered force and was blowing a bitterly force four or five as John Hammond, and his partner, Peter Welling turned their survey vehicle into the derelict courtyard.

This wasn't going to be a particularly difficult survey to carry out. There were very few buildings on the site, and as for natural objects, these were conspicuous by their absence.

The site to be surveyed was of approximately ten

hectares and ran mainly to concrete and tarmac paving with the very occasional area of extremely sparse grassland. A broken wire mesh fence that skirted the site held up only by a few remaining reinforced concrete posts, although clearly marked, physically defined the boundary.

Their instructions had been to carry out a full topographical survey of the site, indicate the existence of any known services, and plot the location of the remaining buildings. They had been given three days to complete the survey and had to report back to the Architects by Friday next.

John pulled the vehicle up alongside one of the more complete structures so as to avoid the cold wind that was whistling its way across the site, picking up fallen debris as it went through.

Raising their coat collars up around their necks, both men left the vehicle and made their way

towards one corner of the site marked by a red and black striped ranging rod that had been placed in that week. Turning their backs to the wind Peter gingerly opened up a plan of the area, pulling it tight at opposite ends to avoid the wind tearing it from his fingers. Orientating themselves with the information that they had they began a 'walk-over' survey making brief notes as they continued, referencing areas of concern, remains of building structures, and any visible signs of drainage or service connections, etc.

One of the buildings appeared to slightly differ from the others because although it too had no windows or door intact, it did give off the feeling that it had been recently used by someone. The purpose of which remained unclear. It was noted that a more comprehensive survey of this particular area of the site should be carried out at some

stage. With the exception of one or two unusual objects that neither men could readily explain, the remainder of the site 'walk-over' produced no further surprises and walking back to the car, Peter had already begun to plan the methodology of the actual survey.

Unloading the survey equipment from the car, John commented that the air had become much colder and that, in fact, he was beginning to feel several shivers going down his spine. Even his fingers were going numb. Peter on the other hand noticed no such change and put John's sensation down to an impending cold, or maybe a bout of influenza.

Establishing the first station point on the site, they selected the corner where they had begun their 'walk-over' survey, and quickly hammered a wooden stake far into the ground. It had to remain, maybe, for the life of the development project,



so after satisfying themselves of its permanence they sprayed it with a survey marking paint, and indicating the position on their approximate plan, gave it the reference 'TBMA'. The next station point was to be approximately one hundred and thirty metres away running parallel with the site boundary, and so after establishing the North bearing using an in-built compass, Peter made his way to mark the next station point. To calculate the distance and bearing to station 'B' they were using an 'EDM' theodolite. The instrument set at station 'TBMA' projects an infrared beam towards a target held on station 'B'. By using several calculations, including the speed of light, the onboard computer can calculate the distance and bearing to the target, and so establish a set of co-ordinates. Repeating this as they traverse the site, the surveyors would have the location of a

set of stations established around the site. From each station an accurate topographical survey would be performed which when stitched together with all of the other station surveys would produce a very accurate and detailed site survey.

Reaching the second station point, Peter held the target directly above the peg set into the ground to mark the point and rotated it so that it was directly in line with the instrument set on 'TBMA' operated by John. John selected the activate switch and waited for the response. Within a few seconds, the computer returned the message "Sighting OFF".

This would normally signify that the instrument was not able to locate the target directly, but looking through the eyepiece John could see the target

directly. So directly that he could actually see the instrument reflected back in the target mirror.

"Obviously an instrument error" muttered John and

repeated the operation. Still the same response, "Sighting OFF", although he was sure that the instrument and target were in direct line.

It was then that John had the strangest sensation. He would have sworn on his life that someone was standing in front of him, directly in line with the target. He couldn't see anyone, but he felt it as solidly as if it was really happening. He shivered uncontrollably and beads of sweat began forming on his forehead. His clothes felt clammy and for some weird reason he was absolutely terrified. He dropped his hands to his side and stared at the unseen person. A pain not unlike a very severe cramp began working its way up his left arm, his chest began to pound and he felt that he was about to vomit. The world began rotating in a series of spasmodic iso-circles and for a brief moment he was certain that he could make out the shape of something of human

form standing not more than four metres from him. The earth on which he was standing began to shake and as his legs eventually gave way under him, he slumped to the ground.

Peter saw his colleague fall to the ground, and dropping the target ran to his aid. John was lying slumped on the ground crouched into the foetus position. His knees held tightly against his chest, his face buried in his hands as if scared to look. Gently opening his hands to speak to him, Peter was aghast at what he saw. John's eyes were blankly staring ahead. All life had been drained from them.

His pupils were wide-open showing large black holes through which his spirit had been destroyed. His fingers had been clamped so tightly together that they were knotted in such a way as to be impossible to separate and pools of scarlet congealing blood

were beginning to form on each palm of his hand.

Whatever had caused the death of John, it had been so terrifying that he had literally frozen on the spot where he had fallen. Peter felt completely devastated and knelt reverently by the body of his friend. He too now began to feel a shiver, and brushing the back of his hand across his face, he reached inside his coat for his mobile 'phone.

### *Chapter 3*

The hassles of everyday living, the stress and strains of maintaining equilibrium within a world of secrecy, dominance, and impending violence takes a toll on everyone and Rick was no exception. His regular angling excursions were a way of bringing the balance back into focus and the natural beauty that always seems to be prominent either on the sun bathed river bank, the serene lake side or the wind swept coastline was an added bonus.

Rick enjoyed fishing with his son who was a keen fly fisher, but as age creeps on, the power to drift the fly across the other side of the lake to descend on an unsuspecting trout hiding in the shadows diminishes. Boat fishing had been one of Rick's favourite pastimes when in fact a few years ago he owned an eighteen foot glass-fibre angler and a day spent about three or four miles off the coast deep sea fishing for bigger prey remains for ever in his memories.

When his sons had been much younger they would all spend an exciting week or two in the school summer holidays caravanning in the West Country where the regular deep sea fishing trip was a real adventure.

On one particular trip fishing for the 'big' stuff, they were caught in a tremendous storm. The boat was tossed around on ferocious white foamed swells three or four times higher than the boat. Great

rolling, filthy grey waves would thrash on to the deck drenching all in icy cold salt laden water. Yet the fishing still continued. What an adventure that was!

Today, returning from a short but refreshing fishing trip, Rick was about to turn into the road in which he lived, when his 'phone went off. Pulling in to the side of the road, he took the call to hear his old friend, Jon Blake.

"Rick, old mate. We need to have a chat. Can I call round to see you in, say, half an hour?"

"Yes, of course you can Jon, but why so urgent?"

"I'll explain all when we meet. See you soon" and the line went dead.

Re-joining the stream of traffic, Rick soon turned into the road and within minutes was reversing his car into the driveway.

Not bothering to remove any of the fishing equipment from his car, Rick entered his bungalow and switching on the kettle prepared two mugs of tea.

Jon arrived shortly afterwards and after exchanging the usual pleasantries they both retired to the lounge each with their mug of freshly brewed tea. Jon was keen to begin and explained that he had been asked to assist on two recent incidents that would seem to be in some way linked. The first involved the accidental death of an Architect a few nights back, and the second, the very peculiar death of a young surveyor not more than twenty-four hours later.

The link had not been apparent until it was discovered that both men were involved in the same development project and that both men had visited



the project site the day that they died. One further twist was that both men, following a post mortem examination showed traces of a chemical used to enlarge the pupils of patients undergoing an eye examination, although neither man had any reason to undergo such an examination at all. The whole thing just didn't seem to add up and Jon wondered if Rick would be prepared to help with the details of the two cases.

Rick is not one to refuse a challenge and this did seem to present a real poser. It had been a while since the Swiss adventure and other than the occasional 'missing person' case; he hadn't been involved in any real detective work for some time. Okay, he would be glad to help and suggested that, perhaps, the initial step was to visit the project site for himself. Following that he would contact Jon for more details on the two individual deaths.

The following morning began with a short, sharp rainstorm that did nothing to aid the parched state of the gardens around where he lived, but instead formed deep grey puddles at the side of the road. Spraying the many pedestrians with filthy cold water when passed through by the rushing commuter traffic. Rick gathered up his wet weather gear just in case the storms returned and driving out of his driveway headed for the project site.

The police had cordoned off the entrance to the site and marked it as a 'Police Only' area pending further forensic investigations, but Rick was recognised by the Constable on duty and he was waved through without fuss. The area certainly had a depressing, heavy atmosphere about it, not helped by the recent downpour that had produced large pools of murky water. The roofs were still dripping, and where the guttering had collapsed, the water was

forming ditches along the sides of the buildings exposing the top of crumbling foundations and what would appear to be basement formations.

There seemed to be almost as much water inside the buildings as was outside, but surprisingly, much of it seemed to be draining through cracks in the flooring. The movement of water had obviously disturbed something, as the smell that seemed to permeate up through the floor was appalling and Rick had great difficulty in keeping his eyes open as they consistently filled with tears. The smell almost seemed to be acidic and it was impossible to stay within the buildings for more than a few minutes at a time.

Each building that he visited had the same characteristics and he was about to return to his car when he suddenly recalled something that he had noticed earlier and yet had seemed to be

insignificant at the time. One of more intact windows installed in the smaller structure, furthest away from the road entrance, had been fogged over. At the time, his brain had registered the fact, but only now it sprang back into his mind. How could this be? As the Constable and he were the only two people on the site, and there was certainly no form of artificial heat apparent anywhere, it was worth a second look.

This particular building was, indeed, the smallest on the site, and looked as though at one point it had been used as an office of some kind. Approaching it from the road entrance, it appeared to have a good view of anyone entering or leaving the site, probably better than any other structure that he had looked at that morning. The door was wide open, which in itself was not unusual, except that the entire inside was remarkably dry considering the

amount of rain that had fallen just recently. There were no signs of footprints on the floor, although to whom they would have belonged to if there had been, Rick felt, would have been an interesting question.

Moving further into the 'office' there was a small, low, wooden table pushed up against one of the walls, the long grain twisted and warped in the damp air. A pair of ramshackle wooden stools that had long seen better days and what appeared to be a damp and rusty steel filing cabinet with three drawers. All of which were securely locked.

As he walked across the wooden floor, Rick could feel the weathered joists giving under his feet and there were unmistakable sounds of falling debris, except towards the centre of the end section which did seem to be much more solid. Getting down on to his hands and knees he passed a small pen knife

blade between the wooded slats lining the floor and twisted it slightly to widen the gap. The timber was so rotten that his blade turned a complete revolution forming a hole about 10mm across and for an instant he thought he saw a flash of light force a way through the aperture and into the building, but it vanished just as quickly.

Rick jumped to his feet startled. He felt fear seize him like the cold grip of a vicious vice. His body went rigid and cold all over, gooseflesh covering every inch of his skin, a chill causing the hairs on the nape of his neck to rise. He felt profoundly anxious because he had a positive feeling that something (or someone?) was watching him. There's someone behind you, his mind spoke up, turn around now, turn around, turn around NOW! Rick didn't turn around even though he wanted to; at the same time that was the last thing in the world

he wanted to do but now he felt it there, someone standing watching. Without turning he ran for the open door and stood panting in the damp cold air.

The constable was still where he had left him, guarding the taped entrance and seemed relieved to see Rick approaching him. He raised his hand in salute, and enquired if Rick would fancy a cup of tea.

"I most certainly would" replied Rick, and they both slowly headed towards the police van parked just inside of the entrance.

The van was equipped with most of the essential of tools and equipment, and included a small portable gas stove for the brewing of the traditional mug of tea. Clearing space on one of the van's benches, they sat and relished in the warmth and sweetness of their tea until it was time to return to the work at hand.

Relieving himself behind one of the few fuel drums that remained on the site, Rick noticed a small dog sitting watching him from just outside of the boundary fence. The dog, a small, smart looking Terrier, was eyeing him up and down, not certain if he was a friend or foe. As Rick began walking slowly towards him, the dog rose to its feet and tentatively wagged his tail. Reaching the little dog, Rick presented his hand and attempted to look at his collar. This, the dog would have nothing of, and started to back off away from where Rick was standing. No amount of friendly persuasion would convince the dog to cross the boundary so that Rick could stroke him or look at his collar, and eventually he decided to give it a miss and returned, defeated, to his car.

This was indeed a strange affair. Nothing that he had seen or uncovered threw any light at all on



what had happened here only a short while ago, and yet, there must be a sound explanation to be found somewhere. Although the site certainly emitted an atmosphere of being somewhere odd, not exactly frightening, but not real, or of this world. It was absurd of course, but with the weather beaten buildings, the broken fences, and the almost barren landscape that seemed to attract the coldest of winds, it would seem that anything was possible.

There was, after all, that incident in the small building when Rick would have sworn to have seen a light through the gap that he had made with his penknife. But that could have been caused by sunlight glinting on the blade, if it hadn't been quite so cloudy, of course. A return visit there with a few more tools was definitely called for, and a visit to the local record office might also help.

Having left the site, Rick decided to pay a

visit to the spot where James Watson, the Project Architect, had so tragically met his death following the car accident. As he approached this particular stretch of the lane he noticed that the fence was still down, but all other signs of the crash had been removed. Pulling his car into a grassed lay-by a few metres from the spot, Rick slowly walked his way towards the large Oak tree that the car had first made contact with. He had been puzzled by the fact that the car had rolled over. Usually a near side front impact would have only forced the vehicle to a sudden halt with, possibly, a slight skew to one side, and certainly not flipped it over. On closer inspection of the road surface, he discovered that this particular spot was particularly slippery with a great deal of mulch and weed growth, probably as a result of falling leaves and consistent shade from any sunlight. This could have caused the car

to slew more than normal and with sudden contact with a fairly substantial steel barrier, maybe it just rolled over. Rick was not totally convinced but it was obvious that nothing more could be discovered here, so returning to his car he headed back home to type up his findings and review what he had uncovered so far.

#### *Chapter 4*

Dawn broke as predicted, heralding a dry, cloud free day full of hope, joy, and compassion. The pale blue sky seemed to encompass all that it sheltered and within this, our world, there were the many sights, sounds and perfumes of life.

Rick prepared himself for the new day and after a light breakfast of a soft-boiled egg and toasted soldiers loaded his car with a selection of handy tools, a powerful torch, and a sound packed lunch.

This could be a long day.

The same Constable was on duty once again as Rick drove on to the site and was waved through the small temporary barrier. Even on this beautiful morning the atmosphere was unchanged. The sun was desperately trying to bring life and colour to the area but the resistance was immense, and as if in despair, it slid peacefully behind a range of high fine weather clouds. What little of the sun had succeeded in penetrating the gloom, had dried up a good deal of the water that had been lying around the site, and some of the galvanised roofs were beginning to release fine clouds of white steam.

Collecting the tools from the boot of his car, Rick trundled his way across the dreary paving and reached the building that he had entered yesterday.

The door was still open, and since his last visit the floor had become wet with some overnight rain. Kneeling, he found the gap that he had made earlier,

and removing a large wrench from an old brown leather tool-bag began to raise the floorboards each side of the hole. At first they refused to budge, but applying more leverage, the first board sprung free and could be easily removed from where it had laid for several decades. Clouds of dust, assorted insects and a fine collection of cobwebs came with the board that had obviously been home to a number of creatures for some time.

The second and subsequent boards surrendered without much of a struggle and Rick had soon cleared enough of the flooring to permit access into the area that had been revealed below. Directing the beam of his torch through the hole he saw, with amazement, that he was looking into a tunnel that ran parallel to the building and possibly five metres below the ground level. He would have to return with a rope or ladder to get into the tunnel, and from what he

could make out, this was not going to be the only problem. The smell that was now escaping skywards was appalling; a mixture of death, disease, and rotting vegetation was the only way Rick could describe it. Even in this short time, Rick's eyes were beginning to sting and tears were forming along the side of his nose.

The floor of the tunnel itself was littered with debris of all kinds. Many of the shapes he couldn't make out, but in one area it looked disgustingly like body parts or the remains of something human and once alive. A large grey rat suddenly appeared from inside one of the discarded packages and a pair of bright red eyes stared straight at Rick, the long wet nose twitching with curiosity. This was enough, and pulling himself to his feet with the aid of the nearby table, he stood in the doorway, looked up at the sun trying yet again to overcome the resistance,

and took a long deep breath. Even the smell out here smelt sweet after that tunnel. Footsteps from behind made him freeze to the spot, until he heard the friendly voice of the Constable.

“Fancy a cuppa, Sir?”

Over a hot sweet mug of tea, Rick described what he had seen and suggested that some ropes and ladders be delivered to the site, together with additional manpower, so that a detailed search could be made of the tunnel. The clouds had begun to develop whilst they were in the van and it soon became too dim to be able to read his notes without a light. Easing his way along the bench like seating, masterly balancing the hot mug in one hand, Rick reached forward and pushed open the side door. The unexpected burst of light that hit his eyes burnt through his eyeball and into the back of his skull like a blowtorch. The pain was

excruciating; his mouth filled with a foul tasting liquid and he felt violently sick. He staggered back into the dim light of the van with some relief and sunk back into the seat throwing the hot tea across him and his companion who winced as the scalding liquid travelled its way down his sleeve and onto the palm of his hand. Rick could see very little. Any exposures to even the faintest of light caused his eyes to sting and tighten in pain. It was as if the brightest torch was being held directly into his eyes at very close range.

The constable disturbed by what had occurred grabbed for the first aid kit secured to the side of the van, and removed a couple of eye pads and some bandage and carefully applied these to Rick's eyes. This seemed to ease the distress and Rick began to relax a little.

"Sit tight, Sir" the constable advised, as he



climbed into the driver's seat, "I'll get you to the hospital in no time at all"

Rick heard the engine start, and as they entered the lane, the siren began howling from the roof of the van. Being thrown about blindfolded in the back of a van was not an experience to be endured for too long and Rick prayed that the journey would be short.

There was the normal two-hour wait in the casualty

area where injured and upset patients were waiting to be seen by too small a band of hard working dedicated staff. However, with the sound of the horn and the constable's shouts for help, Rick was seen almost immediately upon arrival.

He was wheeled by trolley into the first available cubicle and guiding him to the bed, was told to wait a short while until the doctor was free.

Whilst the bandage and eye pads were being carefully removed Rick could feel the pain returning to his eyes, but once they were totally exposed, the dimly lit cubicle area offered some relief and he did not re-experience the blinding light as before. The doctor spent some time examining Rick's eyes and could only come to the conclusion that although there did not appear to be any permanent damage, for some reason both of Rick's pupils were fully open and did not respond to any change in the ambient light.

He asked Rick if he had attended an optician recently, or had received an eye test within a hospital earlier that day. Upon hearing the negative, Rick was advised to remain in the cubicle for a couple of hours so that his eyes could be re-examined. At that stage the doctor would then make his decision as to any treatment that may be

required.

Rick spent the next couple of hours gazing thoughtfully at the sterile white panelled ceiling above his head, listening to the quiet buzz of a busy casualty unit, whilst at the same time trying to come to terms with what had recently transpired.

This was indeed a peculiar case, not the sort of work that Rick had ever experienced before and it was extremely difficult to apprehend if anything illegal was in fact going on. All of the events could just as well lead to a natural explanation concerning the project site. Rick's senses were, however, saying something different and as soon as he was fit to leave the hospital he would start to dig a little deeper.

The doctor returned as promised and the pupils in Rick's eyes had improved dramatically, almost down to their normal size. As long as he kept out

of bright sunlight for another couple of hours, he should be fine. As for the cause, it was difficult to say, but it would appear that Rick had somehow come in contact with a chemical of some sort that enlarged the pupil of the eye making it painful when exposed to any form of light. The affect was usually only temporary, and as in this case, would fade in a few hours.

### *Chapter 5*

The County Records Office was based on the first and second floor of a very aesthetically pleasing Tudor style detached building in the centre of the city. Recently restored to a previously pristine condition the building seemed appropriately chosen to store the information on most of the properties in this area, some of which date back over many centuries. Rick entered through the fine glazed entrance doors and approached the information desk

manned very efficiently by a young attractive woman, with long dark brown hair cosseting a gently tanned face with eyes that seemed to invite.

Rick was momentarily lost for words, and only left his dream world when asked if he required any assistance.

“For God’s sake” thought Rick, “I’m old enough to be your granddad”

It was difficult to avoid looking straight into those inviting light blue pools of mystery, but taking a deep breath, he plunged in and explained that he was seeking as much information as he could discover on the site shown on the plan. He passed over the drawing and suggesting that he bare with her (“if only” he thought); she would look to see what they held on that particular property. She was gone for only a short while and returned with a loose-leaf fle containing some documentation,

which she handed to Rick.

“As you can see from our fle” she said as Rick the desk before them, “We don’t have that much information”

“No, so I see. What does this symbol mean?” pointing to a large red fish like symbol that had been stamped across one of the sheets.

“That would be an in-house comment indicating that the fle is not complete. Usually meaning that the owner was connected with a government office. We have several properties that were used during the nineteen eighties for scientific research and that.

This particular site, I believe was once used by a chemical company for some sort of research, which was discontinued towards the end of the last decade. You would probably find out more if you contacted the present owner”

She made a short note on a scrap of paper and

handed it to Rick who smiled his thanks, took one last longing look into those delicious eyes, and left the building.

Jayne Richards was registered as the last known owner of the property and therein lay the problem. Jayne had taken possession of the grounds and what was left of the buildings from her brother's estate as he had died without leaving a wife or children.

The address given her at the Records Office, was located on the other side of the town, so striking while the iron was hot, Rick studied his street map and headed off.

Jayne lived in an expensive area of the town, but in a rather run down old detached house that looked as though it had seen better days many years ago. The large sweeping front garden with the mandatory curved driveway was completely overgrown and in several areas of the granite-chipping driveway

large clumps of weed and thistle had managed to make their way towards the sunlight. Red Boston Ivy had spent the past thirty years or so developing a very firm hold on most of the elevations and had begun blocking out many of the timber framed sash windows.

Rick felt very uneasy about driving up the driveway, so parking his car in the street outside he crunched his way towards the front door. In the past, this must have been a magnificent example of joinery work with solid oak panels and rails, an antique brass letter box and small leaded light vision panel now completely clouded over with dust and mould.

Remarkably the doorbell (a short ivory plunger) rang out through the house and Rick waited patiently for a response. A second attempt failed dismally as whatever power had been available for the first



ring had now been exhausted. Instead Rick resorted to knocking on the letterbox flap, again without any response, but as he released his grip on the brass flap the door, almost imperceptibly edged open. Calling out through the now partly open door Rick could hear nothing, save the ticking from an old mahogany grand father clock standing upright against one of the oak panelled walls. The building seemed empty except that there was a warm smelling odour that was permeating the atmosphere within the hallway. As though someone had been here recently.

It was difficult to explain but Rick was certain  
that he was not alone.

Easing the door further open he could make out the fine sweeping staircase winding a way towards the first four bedrooms, the various doors leading off from the hallway, presumably opening into the reception rooms and kitchen. The foliage covering

the many windows threw the inside of the house into a sort of gloomy basement feel. Switching on the lights he could see that although the décor was old and in disrepair at one time it must have been very salubrious. Fruitlessly calling once again, Rick stepped slowly towards where he assumed the kitchen must be, and gently pushing the door ajar, the sunlight streamed through and into the hallway illuminating the entire surroundings as with a giant searchlight.

The sunlit kitchen, after the dimly lit hallway, was brightness itself. The cupboards, worktops and various appliances were as old as the remainder of the house but had been kept in good condition.

The utensils, pans, etc. were neatly stacked away and there was a slight fowery smell, much as a soft perfume of spray. Leading from the kitchen was a short passageway which led to a similarly

cared for dining area furnished with many antique items dressed neatly with some fresh flowers, a fine white Spanish lace tablecloth and settings for one person, laid out ready for lunch.

The contrast between these rooms and the hallway was uncanny. Rick could only assume that Jayne would only live in this particular part of the house and the rest had been left to deteriorate. There was a shrill scream from the kitchen and Rick dashed through to discover that the electric kettle had boiled. But where was Jayne? Someone had intended to make a hot drink only minutes before Rick had arrived, but there was certainly no sign of him or her now. Returning to the dining area, a further doorway led off towards what appeared to be a study area and with the curtains firmly drawn across the large bay windows it was difficult to make anything out too clearly. Rick reached for the light switch,

and swinging back towards the centre of the room it suddenly became very obvious why nobody had answered the door, and why the kettle had almost boiled itself dry.

Jayne's frail body lay twisted and bent across the side of one of the soft blue velvet lined easy chairs. She had been struck viciously from behind and still fresh blood was running down the side of her head and onto the upholstery. Her hands had tried to grasp one of the arms of the chair to prevent herself falling but to no avail, and it appeared from the desperate look in her eyes that she had died almost immediately. Rick looked into her sad staring grey eyes and deep into the still darkness he could see hell.

Gently closing the windows of life forever with the first and second fingers of both hands, Rick reached inside his jacket and telephoned his

colleague for help.

Rick had seen death before, far too many times for any one person. Life is a precious commodity given so that we can all experience the world around us. It should never be taken away by another and certainly not in such a brutal way as this. Still trying to comprehend the madness of man, he could hear the police and ambulance services arriving so leaving the body where it lay, he crossed to the doorway and signalled to the officer standing in the entrance way. As they began their gruesome tasks, Rick edged away back into the bright sunlight and stood on the damp unkempt lawn gazing into space. His hands clasped tightly behind his back and his feet way apart.

"Penny for your thoughts old mate" he was accompanied by Jon Blake, his colleague.

"They're not worth that much" mused Rick turning

his gaze towards the other man.

“By God, you come up with some strange jobs”  
snapped Rick looking back towards the house “Why  
the bloody hell do you keep getting me involved in  
your flthy work?”

Jon didn't answer but took Rick's arm and guided  
him towards his car parked just behind his own.  
His young driver impatiently tapping the steering  
wheel.

“Get in” and Jon gestured to Rick to take one of  
the rear seats.

“Take us away from here Constable. Drive around  
the block a couple of times”

Quietly and deliberately Rick recalled the  
events so far, ending with the death of Jayne  
Richards, whilst Jon sat back and listened without  
interruption. After he had spoken, Rick felt a  
little better and had begun to pull himself back

together as Jon spoke and he to described the events leading up to the point when he had first approached Rick for assistance. This was indeed a strange affair. Nothing seemed to tie together except for the damage to the eyes, which seemed to be a common thread.

“Jon, would you ask that the Post Mortem checks for any sign of chemical around Jayne’s eyes, please. If you drop me back to my car, I have a couple of theories that I need to test out”

“Of course, and we’ll keep in touch. I am on your side Rick” and instructing his driver, the car shortly returned to the old house where Rick collected his car.

The following morning started well with a bright sunny dawn preparing the way for a glorious spring like day. There was a soft light breeze fidgeting around the leaves and small branches and some of

the local bird life had decided to make a special effort. The local newspaper was announcing the funeral today of a young aspiring Architect, James Southall, who had died so tragically in a road accident a few days ago. The funeral was to be held at the local parish church with the service beginning at ten-thirty.

Rick usually avoided funerals and even swore that he wouldn't even attend his own, but on this particular occasion he felt that he may find a couple of answers to some questions that had been bothering him lately. He arrived at the church with a few minutes to spare and parking his car away from the relatives and friends, he walked slowly into the well-kept and rather pleasant graveyard. Surrounded by large majestic oak trees and a variety of beautifully trimmed shrubs and bushes the area produced a sense of quietness, a reuniting with God,



perhaps a homecoming. It was difficult to explain, but in spite of the obvious sorrow that abounded here on many occasions, today it felt good.

The grave had been prepared and was surrounded by a pale green sheet of textured turf covering the excavation works and several bouquets of sweet smelling flowers. The funeral party arrived and through the thick church walls Rick could hear the hymns being sung by the choir and those of the congregation that were not too overcome with grief.

The burial party edged slowly and quietly from the church and made their way towards the grave pausing only to let the elderly of the family keep pace with the coffin being carried and escorted, Rick presumed, by close members of the family. As they reached the graveside, the coffin was gently lowered into the ground on pure white satin ribbons

and there laid to rest. A short service of burial took place and after the Parish Priest had completed the ceremony, many of the party began mingling with and talking softly to other, perhaps, seldom seen family members.

Jame's Architectural firm was well represented and Rick approached a tall-distinguished looking gentleman standing to one side of the rest of the party.

"I am sorry to intrude at such a time" apologised Rick as he approached the man "Let me introduce myself"

He explained what he had been asked to do and wondered if the gentleman could throw any light on the site or from whom it was purchased. He seemed pleased that Rick was investigating the whole series of events, but could not actually help with his enquiries. He did, however, suggest that Rick

called at his office first thing next morning when his

Personal Assistant may be able to assist further.

Rick, thanking him for his help, and not wishing to

encroach any further into the grieving party left

the churchyard and returned to his car.

The Architect Practice had established itself in

a relatively new conversion of an old Sussex Barn,

presumably one of their own designs, with wide,

open eaves, original oak beams and a good example

of a king truss roof. Each Architect or technician

working within the practice had their own allocated

space with a full drawing board and equipment, a

large monitor PC and various shelves stacked full

of manufactures' information and regulations,

etc. Many of the Architects were using computer-

aided design (CAD) software with several three-

dimensional models on display. The reception area

had an airy relaxed feel about it and was manned

very competently by a young lad obviously training to work within this particular field.

Rick introduced himself and spoke about the meeting that he had had the previous day. Peter, the young lad, had already been primed on what they could do to help with the enquiries and had produced a short list of interested parties, headed by the family's solicitors who had handled the sale of this particular parcel of land.

Rick left the practice feeling as though, perhaps, he was beginning to make some progress and as the solicitor was based in London, he would travel up by train the following morning. He drove back home passing near to the development site and was almost tempted to pay another visit but thought better of it, deciding that a chat with the solicitor first may be more prudent.

The station was reasonably quiet when Rick walked

on to the appropriate platform and waited for his train. There were a couple of elderly women who looked as though they were preparing for a day of shopping in London, several business looking gents with the requisite briefcase and umbrella, and a solitary looking guy who didn't appear to be happy standing on the platform who quickly turned away when he noticed Rick glance across at him. He was wearing a black zip up jacket, light brown trousers and a pair of brown suede shoes. And although the day wasn't particularly sunny he was wearing a pair of dark sunglasses, but it was his manner that intrigued Rick. He was certainly uncomfortable, and looked as though he wished he could disappear into a puff of smoke.

The South Central train to London left the station promptly at ten thirty-nine and was soon bumping and knocking its way along the Southeast

Network. Every section of track permeated its way into the carriages above, which vibrated and shook every bone in his body. The times may have moved on, technology had made enormous advances, but somehow the Railway seemed to have been locked in a dark and dingy cupboard and completely missed the revolution. When considering the extent that which each of the four carriages were thrown about as they rattled along it was surprising that they remained in contact with both rails at all. Unfortunately a sobering fact was that recently some of these trains have not managed to do so at a cost of many lives.

Travelling for almost an hour, the train suddenly rolled to a halt, and sat motionless and in complete silence for several minutes until this was disturbed by an announcement that for some reason power had been lost to the first carriage and the drive was

being transferred to the second. Sitting in silence in a crowded carriage, not being able to look in any particular direction in case of being accused of staring, Rick could image the fast express train bearing down on them from behind. The sudden tremendous jolt as the two trains made contact and the terrific destruction that was unfolding before him. His thoughts were shattered as the train began moving once again and the rattles thankfully continued.

There was a points failure a few miles up the line and the train will be delayed for a further few minutes whilst an inspection is made. Please be patient and we apologise for the delay. Considerate words that fell on deaf and very disgruntle ears. The train was already running over thirty minutes late and with connections dependant on critical arrival times, many passengers were facing even

longer delays once London was reached. The points were cleared, the express train once more failed to make contact with the rear of Rick's, and shortly the train pulled into London station. Pulled was probably the wrong term to use as it was actually both pulled and pushed, depending on which carriage you had been sitting in.

Oxford Street was the destination and with the Northern Line closed following a recent derailment, it meant using the Victoria and Central lines instead. Joining the steady river of passengers who all seemed to be heading towards Oxford Street Rick boarded the appropriate train and within minutes entered the bright sunshine beaming down on to an extremely busy Oxford Street.

According to his 'A to Z' the offices were about one hundred yards up on the left and tucking the guide into his inner pocket Rick began walking



forward with his eye on the street numbers. The offices were as Rick had imagined. A large glass fronted shop opening directly on to the pavement, through which one could see a selection of tasteful, yet comfortable easy chairs, the standard pile of irrelevant magazines stacked neatly on a small low well polished mahogany coffee table, and at one end of the shop, a smart expensive looking reception area with a smart expensive looking receptionist.

Entering the office, Rick could feel the fee beginning to build and he was keen not to stay too long.

“Can I be of assistance Sir” the receptionist spoke.

“I wonder what that has cost me” thought Rick, and followed with “I have an appointment with George Shuman”

Looking through the diary, she confirmed the date

and offered Rick one of the nearby seats. Speaking into the ivory coloured telephone, she announced Rick's arrival and confirmed that Mr Shuman would be down shortly.

Mr Shuman arrived as promised and leading the way, led Rick upstairs and into his consulting room. George Shuman was an elderly man, not much taller than Rick, although a little stouter, probably due to an expensive lifestyle, with clear blue eyes that seemed to penetrate into your own. He was neatly dressed, but appeared to be a little on edge and kept fiddling with a small gold ring on the index finger of his left hand.

"Please sit down Mr Shore" and indicated an upright leather chair positioned just in front of his desk, as he made his way to his own chair, a typical full backed office chair.

"I understand from one of my colleagues that

you are enquiring into the sale and purchase of Smalldean Farm?" George queried.

"Yes, that's correct. I am trying to discover the identities of the previous owners, and more importantly the previous use of the land. There doesn't appear to be much detail publicly available"

George rose from his chair and with his hands clasped behind him walked slowly towards the window.

"Well, there really isn't much to tell. The property had been owned by Mr Graham Richards and his partner David Tomas for many years, almost thirty or so, I believe. The partnership was dissolved a few years ago after a disagreement or something, and shortly following this My Richards had a fatal heart attack"

"What exactly were they doing on the site"

enquired Rick feeling that he wasn't being told  
everything

"Both partners were chemists, and I believe,  
although I can't confirm this, that they were  
working on an experimental drug of some sort or  
other. That's about all I know"

"Where is this David Tomas now?"

"Now, that's a little strange. Mr Tomas  
completely disappeared almost immediately after  
the partnership had been dissolved and I haven't  
seen or heard of him since. He had no relatives and  
was a bit of a loner even when he and Mr Richards  
worked together"

George had returned to his seat and was noticeably  
calmer "I hope this has helped"

Rick rose to his feet, thanked Mr Shuman for the  
information and left the offices with a bit more  
information but a greater feeling of unease. As he

entered the brightly-lit street once again, Rick noticed a familiar figure standing looking into a large well-dressed shop window just across from the solicitor's office. It was a while until he recognised the man as the same guy he had noticed on the platform earlier that day. Strange, he didn't seem the sort of person who would window-shop. The return journey was completely uneventful and although he had kept a good look at whoever got onto the train, Rick had not spotted any sign of the same guy again and felt confident that his reappearance had been nothing more than a coincidence. On his arrival back home there was a message from Jon on his answer-phone and returning the call he was told that the local police were arranging for a thorough investigation to be made of Smalldean Farm and the underground passage ways. Would Rick like to

accompany them?

Not wishing to miss the opportunity to maybe discover more about what may have happened on the site, Rick gratefully accepted and the following morning met up with Jon and four members of an elite search team. They had come fully prepared and equipped for an extensive search of the site and Rick was also provided with a complete set of equipment including breathing apparatus, and emergency lights. Jon was to stay above ground and would monitor the communications link and power supplies.

Rick had never had to wear breathing apparatus before and it took some time for him to become accustomed to using it, but after a while he felt confident enough for the exploration to begin. The team moved forward to the building where Rick had first broken through into the tunnel and began their

descent. As Rick, to his horror and disgust earlier had seen the human remains below on the tunnel floor, now they seemed even more disgusting in the light of the powerful torches, but little was said.

Save for the occasional shaft of sunlight spitting through open cracks in the timber floors of the various buildings as they made their slow way along the tunnel network, it was pitch dark. Every now and again they would walk into piles of unknown material that would give to the pressure and a cloud of evil smelling dust would erupt or an angry rat scurry angrily away.

Their torches casting sharp beams of white light into the darkness picking out numerous piles of rotting packages. The tunnel structure was well designed with very adequate supports; timber panelled sides and a floor of what seemed to be concrete flagstones. At one time, lighting would

have been provided along each side of the tunnel as they could make out the remains of cabling and various light fittings.

There was a cold damp sensation all around them and even through the facemasks they could smell a distinctly acid odour that permeated through everything that they saw or touched. It was absolutely silent down there and Rick felt that they were somehow intruding. They had no right to be here and the quicker that he could get out the better he would feel. They had managed to travel along the tunnel network for about one hundred metres when they were suddenly confronted by a heavy steel door that completely closed this section of the tunnel.

The five men stopped and laid down their equipment.

Speaking through a face radio, the leader passed a message up to Jon on the surface and asked for further instructions.



They had to go forward, and without causing any damage to the tunnel or themselves the instructions were to blow open the door using a low-grade explosive device. One of the team produced a slim aluminium tube containing a strip of plastic looking material that was pushed gently into the lock escutcheon and connected to a small power pack held by another member of the team. The entire door was then covered with an expanding foil mat fastened along all four edges by tape. Retreating back up the tunnel and away from the door, the men were told to protect their ears and breathe slowly and gently, and on a count of five the explosive device was activated.

The explosion was muffled, but Rick could feel the reverberations making their way towards them and along the tunnel behind them. As they passed huge clouds of dust and smoke few pass them and several

pieces of rotten debris fell from the ceiling.

Gradually the tunnel cleared and through the swirling mists illuminated by the torches, Rick could see that the door had swung open and the team was preparing to go forward. The door was one of a pair of air sealed doors that opened into a sealed air chamber and as the door swung forward the chamber was immediately filled with a bright fluorescent light and a sound of escaping air could be clearly heard. The chamber was about three metres square with a door at either end, and on one side, a small switch panel with a range of LED lights and switches.

One of the switches was flashing orange and a low whaling sound could be heard coming from the other side of the second door. Cautiously they all entered the chamber and as the door closed automatically behind them the orange switch ceased flashing. The instruments the men were carrying were

now indicating that the air was pure and they could remove their facemasks. Rick willingly complied. A decision now had to be made. There was no way of knowing what lay beyond the second door and judging by this elaborate air chamber it was unlikely to be similar to the tunnels that they had just left.

## *Chapter 6*

There was little need of talking or discussion as they were all thinking the same thoughts, when the same orange switch began blinking again. With a loud hiss and a sudden rush of air the second door opened and as they began to move forward the darkness ahead was shattered by a flash of fluorescent light and they were staring straight into what could only be described as a laboratory. The clinical atmosphere, the bright polished worktops, rows of glass containers of every size, shape and colour, and the range of expensive looking equipment took

them all totally off guard and they could only stare amazed into the room in front of them. With a loud hiss, the door swung closed behind them and they were alone and in absolute silence.

The laboratory was of about one hundred and fifty square metres in area with spotlessly clean white floor and wall tiling, and a white translucent ceiling concealing a range of bright fluorescent lights. It didn't look as though the room had been used for sometime, but had been prepared and was ready for use at any time. Carefully the men entered the main area and began to look around. Some of the wall cabinets were locked and contained glass phials of coloured liquids, others seemed to have various samples labelled and stored in specific orders. The atmosphere smelt clean and fresh and there were signs of an air conditioning system, although this was currently not functioning.

One of the men took several samples from the benches, and forcing the locks managed to obtain placed in a protective container for investigation later.

Upon entering the laboratory Rick had noticed that an indicator light over another door leading out of the room had been blinking green but this had now turned to orange. The atmosphere had already begun to take on a new feel and one or two of the men had complained that they were feeling warm.

It soon became very stuffy with Rick first noticing that he was beginning to have some difficulty in catching his breath whilst searching within the room. They were ordered to replace their facemasks and breathing apparatus and made their way back towards the way that they had come in.

As one of the men moved across the room to rejoin the group, a small black box that had been bolted

to the underside of one of the benches caught his eye. As he bent to take a further more detailed look, a green indicator light flashed twice, before turning red and remained continuously lit.

He had no doubts at all as to what it was and removing his facemask he screamed "Bomb" and ordered everyone to stop where they were. Rick had reached the doorway and was trying to operate the locking mechanism.

"Can we make it safe, Paul?" the leader questioned, instinctively glancing at his watch.

"I'm not sure Sir. I don't know what time we have" and went back down on to his knees and began tentatively feeling around the small steel box.

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"There doesn't appear to be a way in. It's probably hidden behind the fxings. What do you suggest we do Sir?"

“Have you managed to sort the door out, Shore?”

Rick was asked, and when he replied in the negative,

the leader turned back to Paul

“Well over to you. Do your best. We’ll keep

working on the door”

Paul removed a small leather bound toolkit from one of his large pockets and began very slowly removing the bolts that held the device to the bench. Meanwhile the others had begun wiring up the door as they had previously done before entering this room.

It was the third bolt that Paul turned that had been the trip switch and the blast was so extreme that both doors of the air chamber were blown completely away. Together with the majority of the contents of the laboratory they were forced through and deposited like twisted rag dolls across the tunnel floor. The sound of rushing air and flying

glass and debris was absolutely deafening and a tremendous fireball and dense black smoke followed them as they desperately tried to run from the explosion. Paul was killed instantly and his body so destroyed that he was never ever recovered. Miraculously the four remaining men managed to reach the tunnel entrance, but it was only when they broke surface into the old building did Rick realise what had also happened. Rick being closest to the chamber door had escaped some of the effects of the explosion and was assisting the other three up through the hole in the tunnel and into the building. As the first man appeared above ground and stepped out to be warmly greeted by Jon, he screamed in pain and terror and with his hands squeezed tightly against his eyes threw himself back into the building. Without hesitation he jumped blindly into the tunnel and ran screaming



towards the burning laboratory. Without a second thought Rick left the tunnel entrance and sped after him to last see him spontaneously burst into flames as the heat of the explosion caused his clothing to combust. As Rick stood helpless he could see a feeling of relief cross the dying mans face and he slipped peacefully away.

Rick was devastated and returned to the entrance to see the other two men behaving in exactly the same way, although this time the two were cowering with fear in the far corner of the building. Jon was completely dumbfounded and stood aghast at what he had just witnessed.

“Why has it not affected you Rick?” he asked as

Rick emerged from the doorway.

“I’m not sure, but I do have some ideas” He gestured to the two men crouching low in the corner

“Get these two to hospital as quickly as possible

and keep them in the dark, literally, at least for a few hours. I have a feeling that the blindness will ease. Trust me, Jon”

Rick took Jon’s right hand “I have some ideas to follow up. I will get back to you soon. Take care my friend” and he made his way to his car.

Rick was not sure why he too had not been affected by the blast and could only assume that the earlier experience with his eyes had somehow made him immune from further attacks.

There were several facts that didn’t seem to make sense; with the most obvious being why were the developers so keen to re-develop the site knowing that it had once been used for chemical experiments. It should have been obvious that the ground would have been contaminated and that any sort of development would most likely never be granted Local Authority Approval. Secondly was there any

connection with the murder of Jayne Richardson. Rick did not normally accept coincidences and this one certainly warranted a more detailed investigation.

George Shuman was a worried man. He had been told that he had nothing to fear and that the sale of the land and subsequent development would go through without a hitch. Too many people were involved, and too much money was at stake to permit any deviation from the original plan and yet here was a private detective asking him all sorts of awkward questions. He had telephoned a friend shortly after Rick had left his office and although his concerns were dismissed he was not reassured. It was, perhaps, time to have a meeting so that any of these concerns could be sorted through and the plan put back on line.

The Coach and Horses country inn was a splendid example of the concept of sustainable development

having originally been a stable block used during the late twentieth century. The fine building had fallen into disrepair and was about to be demolished when it was bought by a local brewery and restored and converted into a fine country inn. Frequented by many of the village locals and more recently attracting visitors from further afield it was the arranged meeting place for the solicitor and his colleagues.

The car park was reasonably well lit with a selection of antique street lights although the tall mature trees bordering the boundary cast many dark shadows across the car parking area during a particularly dark and star-less evening. George arrived in plenty of time and parked his pale green BMW estate alongside a small timber outhouse on the edge of the car park. He switched off the engine and sat quietly waiting for his colleagues

to arrive, listening to the light evening breeze whistle in and out of the trees. Golden leaves were dancing in the shadows and a cocky grey eared rabbit hopped across in front of him. The trees bowed to the pressure of the stiffening breeze and as the shadows played games on the surface of the car park, the bullet passed through the windscreen of the BMW and penetrated well into the forehead. A small spurt from a burnt hole, followed by a gentle trickle of warm scarlet blood down on to his nose was the only sign that George had died that evening, even whilst the small grey rabbit scampered on his way and disappeared into the thick hedgerow beyond. The shadows played on and the golden leaves danced as the blue saloon car drove quietly away.

The local planning office was situated on the second floor of the Civic Centre and had panoramic view of the South side of the town centre. The Civic

Centre building had been built only three years ago and meant that many previously divorced departments within the local council were now housed together under one roof. The building was of modern design under a low-pitched and welsh slated roof. The façade was of modern brickwork and uPVC windows and doors and gave off a feeling of space and professionalism. Entrance to the building was via a pair of automatic fully glazed doors opening on to a wide reception area bustling with visitors to the many different departments. The lift took Rick to the second floor and upon exiting he followed the signs to planning reception. At the desk was a severe looking middle aged woman whose bark was hopefully far worse than her bite, and Rick was immediately reminded of the receptionist who so steadfastly manned the access to his local General Practitioner. She was a fairly

tall and well-  
built woman with a matronly bust and  
a forties style wardrobe.

She (whose word was final) spoke first and suggested  
that maybe Rick needed some assistance.

"Yes indeed" taken slightly aback by this 'attack  
first' method of dealing with strangers that hovered  
before her "May I have a quick word or two with  
the planning officer dealing with properties in  
the Smalldean Farm area, please", and Rick edged  
forward cautiously.

"Yes, certainly you may Sir" Rick was surprised  
how quickly she had mellowed "That would be our  
Clive Clarke. I shall see if he is available. Would  
you mind taking a seat, I shan't keep you long" and  
disappeared through a side door.

True to her word she was soon back, "Mr Clarke  
has a few moments to spare. Would you walk this  
way, please"

Not wishing to make a pig's ear out of a silk  
purse

purse, Rick ignored the comment that would usually  
follow that remark and followed diligently behind.

Clive Clarke had a neat and modest office and  
arose to his feet as Rick was shown in. The silk  
purse pulled the door to and left. Clive was a

good-looking sort of guy, in his late fifties and  
most certainly keen on outdoor sports displaying a  
deep brown sun tan. He had a helpful smile and as  
he spoke, his dark brown eye sparkled with the love  
of life.

"I understand that you are enquiring about a  
property in the Smalldean farm area?" and spread  
out a local site plan on the desk between them.

Rick orientated himself with the map and placed a  
finger over the farm itself.

"Well, actually it



that a developer is planning to redevelop the site and I wondered if you could help me on a few points” Rick sat down on the small green plastic chair just behind him.

“There’s not a lot that I can tell you at the moment” he got up and gazed towards the open window that overlooked a tidy garden area “You see we haven’t received any details from the developer or Architect as yet”.

Rick made to join him at the window “I appreciate that, but I understood that the site contains a network of underground tunnels which would make any development very expensive and somewhat difficult” Rick sensed that he had trod on a sore corn as Clive coughed slightly before “I’m not sure where you got that information from, but in any event the proposals would have to include whatever work was deemed to be necessary by the clients Engineer.”

In for a penny, in for a pound, Rick continued “I understand that the previous use included chemical experimentation. Has the ground been examined for any toxic content?”

There was that cough again “I understand that a series of soil tests were carried out by the Engineer and they proved negative. That’s really the limit of my knowledge of the site. I am sorry that I am unable to help any further” and stepping past Rick, Clive opened the door.

The meeting was obviously at an end, but as a parting shot Rick asked, “Would you have the name of this Engineer?”

Clive seemed at a loss as to quite what to say at this point and finally went for “I don’t believe so” and gently ushering Rick through the door, closed it and returned to his desk.

Returning to his car, Rick noticed that he had

received a call on his mobile 'phone from Jon, and returned the call. Evidently there had been a murder at one of the nearby Country Inns, and although he felt that it was in all probability of no real interest to Rick, he wondered, as a local guy, if he might recognise the name. Rick was not taking in much of the conversation, but was quick to respond when Jon mentioned the name 'George Shuman', a London solicitor.

"How did it happen?" cut in Rick even whilst Jon was still recalling the details.

"Why, did you know him?" Jon replied with a question.

"No, not really, but his was one of the names that came up while I have been investigating the various events at Smalldean Farm. I met him in his London office only yesterday. Where did you say it happened?"

“Well I’m damned. I’ll meet you out there, in  
say, half an hour?”

“Okay Jon, but I need to know where. I’m not  
telepathic”

“Oh of course, sorry. It is just that these little  
coincidences keep cropping up and I don’t like it.  
The Coach and Horses Country Inn at Satcham. See  
you there”

The call ended and Rick replaced his ‘phone.

He was thinking about the strange character that  
he had seen on the platform and again outside the  
London office. Did he have anything to do with this  
and ... A sharp rap on his near side window made Rick  
jump, and he turned to see a smiling traffic warden  
taking out his notepad and pencil.

“Hold on a sec.” Rick slid across to the passenger  
seat and got out on to the pavement alongside the  
warden. “I’m just about to go”.

“Sorry sir” replied the warden, almost sympathetically, “You’ve exceeded the waiting limit by almost five minutes” and continued to complete the ticket.

“I was on the ‘phone and didn’t want to move whilst using it” It was worth a try.

Unfortunately this particular warden had probably heard that one before “Very public spirited and law abiding sir, but you still over stayed your parking” handing Rick the completed ticket.

“Just continue being law abiding and pay promptly, and that will be the end of it” He had already begun to inspect the windscreen of the car behind Rick’s.

“Oh what the hell”, thought Rick as he walked back round to the driver’s door “I’ll put it down as expenses”

It took Rick just short of half an hour to reach

the Coach and Horses Country Inn and pulling into the car park he could see Jon had already arrived and was standing by the BMW. Rick pulled up alongside and parking the car, walked round to greet him. The smart fairly new BMW Estate displayed little signs of what had occurred here save for a neat round hole in the centre of the driver's side of the windscreen. The body had already been removed and taken to the mortuary, and although there was a small amount of broken glass on the dashboard, the seat and surrounding upholstery was completely untouched.

"Hi Rick" said Jon as Rick lifted his head from the interior of the car and pushed to the driver's door.

"Any clues as to what happened here?" asked Rick as they walked slowly together towards the main entrance of the recently opened bar.

“No, none at all. Mr Shuman was a well-respected solicitor with an office in London. As you know” turning to Rick “He had no enemies that we know of, and robbery was not a motive, as he still had his wallet containing a large amount of cash, and his credit cards”

They had entered the salon bar and Jon offered Rick a drink.

“I’ll have a scotch and ginger ale, no ice, please Jon” as Rick sat at a small table close to the window.

The sun was beaming through the small leaded light windowpanes casting hazy patterns on the tabletop. Outside the trees were swaying casually in the soft breeze and clusters of golden autumnal leaves skipped skittishly across the car park. One or two other cars had begun arriving and the Inn seemed to progressively awake from the night-time

slumbers.

Jon brought the drinks over to the table and took a seat next to Rick.

“Cheers” toasted Rick as he raised his glass.

“To you” responded Jon as he too raised his glass and took a long slow sip.

Both men were deep in thought but Rick broke the silence.

“Jon, there has to be a connection between this death and that of Jayne Richards and I will stake my reputation, for what it’s worth, on a link with the incidences at Smalldean Farm”, he took a further sip, “How did your men get on at the hospital?”

“Okay, it was as you said. After a few hours the pain and sensations eased. Once the bruises and cuts they experienced during the explosion, and by the way you were bloody lucky, have improved, they will be returning to duty. We have sealed the



tunnel and are arranging for the entire network to  
be filled with concrete”

“What about the laboratory. Didn’t your guys  
report at what we had uncovered? Surely Jon, this  
has to be examined in much greater detail. There is  
something very odd about that place.”

Jon shook his head “That was the original plan,  
but the explosion completely destroyed the complex  
and everything within it. There is nothing left to  
examine. What wasn’t blown apart was burnt”.

“Jon” quipped Rick, “I have to find out all I can  
about the partner, David Tomas. Any ideas?”

“No, I’m afraid not. The last that we heard was  
that he had died some time ago”

“Died?” cut in Rick “You heard that he had died.  
From whom?”

“Well to be honest, we had heard that he had  
disappeared, and since he has not been seen or heard

of since, I assumed that he must have died. There was talk of an accident in the Laboratories when they were above ground, but this was well before I became involved”

“I’m not convinced. I have a feeling that David’s disappearance may have something to do with the recent events. I’ll get back in touch once I’ve made a few enquiries”

They soon parted company and each made their way back from whence they had come. Rick decided to call in home on the way through and take a shower and change of clothes. Standing in the shower feeling the warm soapy water run over his head and encompass his whole body in a stream of perfumed softness relieved the stress and anxieties of life’s occasional hurdles. It was as though he was back in the comfort and protection of his mother’s womb where only serenity and caring prevailed.

Reality kicked in with the piercing ring of his telephone and clutching his towel protectively about him, Rick left the shower room to answer it. Although he suspected that he had heard the voice before he couldn't quite place it.

"Rick Shore?" queried the caller, sounding almost threatening

"I hope so" followed Rick trying to ease the tone a little

It fell completely on deaf ears "I have some information about the case you are working on that you will find useful. Can we meet?"

"What case is this?" Rick had that feeling again, and wanted a bit more detail before committing himself to a meeting.

"Don't frig me about. Smalldean Farm. You knew very well what I meant. Do you want to meet, or not?"

This guy was getting sore "Okay, okay. Where do you suggest?"

"There's an area of land on the sea shore known as The Plantation"

"Yes, I know it" A good place for barbeques remembered Rick

"Fine. Be at the South end near the shelter at seven thirty tonight"

The telephone went dead and Rick replaced the receiver. Water had been dripping on to the carpet and as he moved he stepped into a cold damp pool. "O'll for goodness sake" Rick muttered, and went to dry off and dress.

Seven ffteen. Rick pulled his car into a small parking bay at the Northern end of The Plantation and switched off his lights. This was as close as he could get by car. The Southern end would have to be reached by foot. It wasn't a particularly dark

night; the sky was reasonably clear with several clusters of distant stars twinkling high above with the occasional cloud formation drifting silently across in front of them. It was going to be a frosty morning. It was certainly cold and as he walked slowly along the well overgrown track his breathing was heralded by large clouds of white mist.

The Plantation was a ribbon of mainly derelict woodland that stretched the one hundred and fifty metres between the main road and the sea shore and was about sixty or so metres in width. Much of the woodland comprised some good examples of English Oak, and some Ash and Beech trees, but the ground between these was full of overgrown bushes, shrubs and a range of formidable thistles and weed.

Unfortunately, whilst picnicking on the well kept greens that bordered both sides of this ribbon, the tourists, and locals, would allow their dogs free

run of the area with the resultant unpleasant and unhealthy excrement that was abundant throughout the entire area.

As Rick followed the track, one eye on the ground to avoid an unwanted gift, and another searching for signs of life, he felt that perhaps this was not a sensible thing to be doing, certainly not on his own.

He was about halfway into The Plantation when just ahead and to one side he thought that he spotted a shape move quickly across and in front of him, to disappear once again into the undergrowth. Rick halted and held his breath. Nothing was to be heard. He turned to look back down towards his car and was quietly reassured to see that it was still there.

There was a sudden spark of light just ahead followed by a sharp snap as something hit a branch

just to the right of him sending a small cloud of wood dust into the night air. Then another, this time whispering up a cloud of mulch and dried bracken from the track just three metres from where he was standing. Rick dived for cover behind a rotten stump just off the track and watched the area in front of him. There was a slight movement and then silence. Rick had brought a torch, but using it now would give away his position, so using the stars above, he very slowly began to ease his way through the weeds and thistles to the right of where he had last seen a movement. He caught his left leg on a protruding limb of a fallen tree which tore through his trousers and pierced his skin so that a warm trickle of blood began heading for his shoe. His hands were scratched and blooded and he was about to head back to his car when he spotted the gunman to his left about twenty metres away. Just for a

split second, the man was silhouetted against the black velvet sky, but Rick was sure that he did not recognise him.

Without warning the gunman began to retrace his steps back towards the beach and Rick turned to see an elderly gentleman strolling casually along the track accompanied by an excited Labrador dog. Its tail going sixteen to the dozen, sensing some sport ahead. Rick gave chase after the gunman and was soon being assisted by the now highly enthusiastic dog. Not quite certain what the chase was for, but dying to have a go anyway. His elderly master struggling in vain to keep up. For what it mattered, the dog's name was apparently 'Biscuit'

The gunman was now completely silhouetted against the horizon as he had climbed the shingle barrier fronting the beach and appeared to be making a dash for something over the ridge. As Rick entered



the clearing the gunman had disappeared followed closely behind by Biscuit who was going for the capture. There followed the sound of an outboard engine, several explicit curses, and as Rick reached the top of the shingle bank, the gunman had left the shore on a lightweight rubber dinghy forcing a way through the incoming tide. Not to be defeated, Biscuit made a last minute effort to grab a trailing rope, but failed to get a firm grip and with a final lurch forward, a piercing whine from the outboard as it cleared the water on a particularly large wave and a deafening thud as the bow made contact one more, the dinghy sped away.

Looking completely disgruntled and shaking himself ferociously Biscuit slouched back past Rick and joined his master who by now had also reached the beach, exhausted and completely out of breath.

“What the bloody hell was that all about?”

gasped the gent grabbing his dog's collar more for stability than for anything else.

"I think we disturbed some nutcase shooting in the woods, perhaps after a pheasant or rabbit, maybe. Are you alright?" reaching forward to touch the gents shoulder.

"I'm fine. Just a bit shaken. Bit more exercise than I had planned." He turned and started back towards the road "See you again, perhaps" and obviously recovered disappeared back over the bank.

Rick's leg was throbbing from the cuts and bruises inflicted during the chase and there was no way that he would be able to trace the gunman at this time of night, so the only thing to do was to retire gracefully for a clean up, some first aid, and a stiff drink. Not necessarily in that order. Bright and early the following morning Rick was back at The Plantation. If, as he suspected,

he had been shot at the previous evening, it may be possible for him to locate one of the bullets so a match could be made with the one removed from George Shuman's brain. He began to retrace the steps he took on the last visit and tried to picture where he had been at the time he had heard the first crack into the branch near him. The track looked very different in daylight and he wasn't having a great deal of luck when he was approached by a Policeman who had parked his patrol car just in behind Rick's

"Excuse

me

sir"

the

standard

police

introduction

“Yes Officer, what can I do for you?” turning to  
face his enquirer.

“Would you be good enough to explain what you are  
doing, sir?”

“For God’s sake, Officer, Haven’t you got more  
important things to do?” quirked Rick, continuing  
his search.

“I’m sorry sir, but I must have an answer. We have  
reports of strangers wandering about in these woods  
and some of the local residents are concerned” He  
had placed his hand on Rick’s sleeve.

Rick reached inside his coat and produced his  
old warrant card and one of his business cards, and  
pointed them towards the officer.

He didn’t seem to see them, and instead stretched  
his arm past Rick’s face to remove a small bullet  
that he had noticed embedded in a nearby branch.

“You weren’t looking for this, sir, I suppose?”

showing Rick the find.

It was no good. Rick had to explain why he was there, and ran through the events of the previous evening, including the escape by dinghy. He hadn't reported the incident as he was not sure anything criminal had occurred, although personally he had a good idea of what was going on.

The Policeman seemingly satisfied with Rick's explanation took his leave and strolled back to his patrol car, no doubt to report the incident closed.

Well at least Rick had the bullet that had been fired at him last evening. All he needed to do now was to compare it with the one that had dispatched George Shuman and he would have a direct link.

Jon was extremely helpful and promised to let Rick have the results of the tests on the two bullets as soon as they were available. Meanwhile Rick would have another chat with Clive Clarke, the

planning officer, after first paying another visit to the site.

The developers had been busy since Rick had last visited the site. All of the buildings had been completely demolished and cleared from the site.

There was a large open crater where the laboratory had once stood and a fleet of ready-mix concrete lorries were discharging tonnes of concrete into the gaping hole and extensive tunnel network.

Two men seemed to be supervising the work, one a tall, heavy built man with a finely polished bald head glinting in the sunlight. He was not the usual site worker as he was wearing an expensive grey and blue suit and a particularly smart pair of shoes.

The other man appeared to be more at home and was a little smaller in build, with a fine grey beard and suitably dressed in a dark blue boiler suit and safety boots. Both men were wearing red safety hats

and high visibility jackets.

As Rick strolled towards them, the taller man turned to face Rick and held out his hand. Rick did the same and introduced himself.

“Ah”, rather unconvincingly “good to meet you Mr Shore. Let me introduce my colleague, Tony Bradley, our Site Engineer, and myself, Peter Armitage. For my sins I am the developer”

“Good to meet you both” responded Rick and shook hands with Tony Bradley, who appeared to be anxious about something.

“Tony”, Rick decided he had to go for the jugular while he had the two of them together, “Was it you who organised the soil samples on this site. Only I understood that there could well be a risk from chemical pollution?”

Rick had definitely trod on something hot, as Tony’s face greyed over “I carried out the test

myself. The results were negative and indicated no threat to anybody”

Peter Armitage was not going to help Tony here, and began moving away from the group.

“Sorry, Peter. Before you go” called Rick, “Were you aware of the test results?”

“I’m sorry Mr Shore, but I leave the specialist work to the specialists. I pay them well and don’t expect to get involved” so saying Peter turned away and headed off towards his car, a dark green Rover, parked on the far side of the site.

Tony

Bradley

was

looking

particularly

uncomfortable and wasn’t prepared to answer any more questions.



Rick wanted to know just one more thing. "Sorry Tony, but have you heard of the killing of a solicitor just a few miles from here. You might have known him?"

"Killing, why should I know of anyone being killed" Tony had almost lost his grip "Who was it anyway?"

"I understand it was George Shuman. Have you heard of him?"

Tony didn't have to answer, in fact he couldn't, he had collapsed to the ground, gasping for air and clutching his chest. Rick got down to him and eased him gently to his feet. He seemed to slowly recover from the collapse and asked that Rick help him to his car.

Leaving the site a few minutes later, Rick had begun to put some of the jigsaw together.

Clive Clarke, the planning officer, was, according

to his personal administrator, at lunch with a colleague and wouldn't be returning to his office for a couple of hours or so. His PA wasn't very forthcoming with the location of this lunch date, but one of the receptionists remembered making a booking for Clive at the nearby 'Wheatsheaf', a small, but tasteful Public House only two hundred metres from the Civic Centre.

Rick's car was on a 'Pay and Display' parking bay with over an hour to go, so he decided to have

a mid-day snack and perhaps a word or two. The

'Wheatsheaf' was a traditional Tudor building, recently restored and tastefully converted into a town centre eating and drinking house. There was a small half-moon shaped bar where several business men and women were standing in friendly conversation over a drink or two and a selection of bar snacks.

The vast majority of the building was set out with a number of individual tables and chairs, laid with white laced tablecloths and posies of small wild flowers.

Rick went up to the bar and ordered a scotch and ice, and from the menu of bar snacks, a toasted cheese sandwich. As his order was being prepared he took the opportunity to look around the seating area, but could find no sign of Clive Clarke. His attention was drawn to the door leading to the toilets as it swung open, and Clive entered the room and made his way through the seated diners to a small table tucked behind a large 'Weeping Oak'. The other seated diner was not known to Rick, but they both seemed to be deep in conversation. Rick was about to approach the table, when the front door was opened and to his surprise, Tony Bradley, entered looking extremely disturbed. He

was looking around the seated area when he caught Clive's eye who seemed to want to ignore him. It was certainly not Tony's day, for as he caught sight of Clive, his gaze also fell on to Rick. Tony paused, uncertainly, in the entrance, before retracing his steps, he left.

Rick left his glass on the bar and winding his way through the seats approached Clive's table. Clive had noticed Rick's approach and stood up as he arrived.

"Mr. Shore. How are you?" holding out his hand.

"Fine, thanks. I had called at your office to have a chat, but I'll get back in touch at another time. I can see that you are busy" looking down at his colleague.

"Oh, Excuse my manners" following Rick's gaze"

Let me introduce Tim Sharpe. Tim is one of our local architects"

Tim rose to shake hands with Rick "Pleased to meet you, er." Waiting for an introduction.

"Sorry. Rick Shore. I'm a local private detective"

Tim was obviously taken aback. "You'll not by any chance working on the Smalldean Farm project are you?" In for a penny, in for a pound.

Tim sat down "Yes I am. How did you know?" his eyes burning into Clive's face.

"Oh, just a wild guess. Sorry to have disturbed your meal" Turning to Clive, "I'll call your office"

With a dismissive wave of his arm Rick turned away and walked slowly away with both pairs of eyes burning laser like into the back of his head.

Outside, in the bright sunlight, Rick could see and smell the sea air as it was carried Northwards

on a gentle South-easterly sea breeze. He was drawn

to the local pier with thoughts of his fishing

exploits as a young lad, with his dad. Even today in these times of electronic games, computers, and remote control almost anything, angling from the local pier was still much enjoyed by folk of all ages whatever the weather, come rain or come shine. As he approached the pier entrance, in his mind's eye he could still see the damp newspaper bundle of lug worm, the small container of rag worm (it would give you a nasty nip if you weren't careful), mind you, having a hook shoved up your behind would upset anybody, and the green plastic tackle box with a myriad of hooks, swivels and all sorts of tackle.

Rick was a fairly accomplished angler and could cast out the line as far as anyone, except, maybe his dad who would stand steadfastly waiting for the elusive bite, rain running down his tanned and weathered face, into the back of his coat and

diluting his fask of hot tea. They were good times, times that had gone and would never return, but times that had formed deep memories that would never be forgotten.

As Rick ambled along the wooden pier deck he could see the sea through the gaps in the planking, twists of nylon fshing line caught on the barnacled and rusting steel pier supports, the occasional hook embedded in a section of the timber decking (oh to have seen the fsherman's face as the hook became entangled and the line snapped), and debris from passing shipping.

At the end of the pier was a lower deck area, once used as a landing stage for the regular steam ship link to Brighton or the Isle of Wight, and passing through the open gateway, Rick made his way down a short fight of steel steps and stood gazing far out to sea. On the horizon he could see the outlines of

many ships. Some were passenger ferries, some cargo vessels, and a few fishing boats scattered about the ocean, each plying a different trade but all using the same sea as their main provider.

He continued his walk around the end of the pier and was about to climb the opposite flight of steps to get back onto the main deck way once again, when he was approached by Tony Bradley, the Site Engineer.

Tony was obviously very agitated about something and as he met Rick he signalled that they should both return down the steps and back behind the end of the pier from whence Rick had just appeared.

"Mr. Shore, I'm glad I caught up with you. I watched you come down this way after you had left the 'Wheatsheaf'. I need to talk to someone" Tony kept glancing around him as he spoke. "Is it true about George Shuman?"



Rick assured him that it was, and that he had been shot in his car as he had waited in a local pub car-park. Rick had no idea who he had been waiting for.

"How did you know Mr. Shuman?" Rick asked "He was the Solicitor who had dealt with the sale and purchase of Smalldean Farm" Tony replied, again glancing around in all directions.

"I'm not sure that it is safe for me to be seen talking to you here" he continued "Could we meet somewhere a little less conspicuous?"

"Yes, of course. Where would you suggest?" asked Rick, gently guiding Tony along the lower decking.

"I lecture at the local college on a Thursday evening. Could we meet at say nine o'clock, as the lecture finishes?" They had reached the steel steps once more.

"That'll be fine with me. Do you have a room number?"

"Yes, of course, sorry. A135. I'll see you there nine o'clock this Thursday" and with that Tony took his leave and left Rick looking out to sea.

The telephone was ringing when Rick entered his front door. It was Jon with the results of the tests on the two bullets. Both bullets had been fired from the same gun, and even stranger, the gun that had fired the bullets was of a very old vintage, probably around the late nineteen sixties. That was odd, and yet it made a strange sort of logic as all of the people that Rick had spoken to and who seemed to be linked by the Smalldean Farm project were all of that sort of era themselves. It could, of course, be completely coincidental, but Rick had an aversion to coincidences and anyway, it didn't smell right.

“Jon, have you had any success tracing the person involved with the deaths of either George Shuman or Jane Richards?”

“No, Rick. We’ve drawn a blank on both. I would put my money on the fact that each was killed by a different person. The MO was so different. Are you getting anywhere?”

“I’m obviously upsetting someone, hence the attempt the other evening, but am not really much further. Would you see if there is any connection between George Shuman, Peter Armitage, Clive Clarke, and Tony Bradley? Anything at all, and as quickly as you can”

“Yes, sure will, Rick, and take care of yourself.

“Don’t worry. I intend to” and replaced the receiver.

Almost immediately the telephone rung again, and

with a look of surprise, Rick lifted the receiver  
to his ear.

"My God, Jon, that was quick" Rick spoke first.

The voice was desperate and sounded in immense  
pain "Listen. I must talk to you. Now"

Rick was completely taken aback "Who is this?"

"You won't know me. But I must talk to someone.  
Please"

"How do I know this is not a stupid prank, or  
worse? I must know who you are. Trust me"

There was a long pause "Alright. David Tomas." He  
spat it out, "Now will you meet me?"

David was dead. He died several years ago during  
an accident at the laboratories where he and his  
partner Graham Richards both worked. That was back  
in the last decade, almost ten years ago.

Rick was silent for a while

"Well Mr. Shore. Will you meet me?"

“Okay. Although if this is a set up. We’ll see.

Where?”

“In half an hour. In the Agent’s hut on the  
Smalldean Farm site”

*Chapter 7*

Rick drove his car through the site gates and on to the deserted plot. The site staff had gone for the night and the only sign of life was a single security light that flickered a meagre beam of light on to the Site Agent’s hut. Much of the concreting had been completed, and already there were indications of the work to come, with site boards, profiles, etc., having been erected at the far end of the site.

Rick was certain that he shouldn’t have come. This was definitely not a good idea, but for once his curiosity had taken over. The evening had begun to draw in and the shadows caused by the search light

danced eerie patterns on the shed sides. A slight breeze had picked up, probably on the incoming tide, and this was making the site hoarding rattle and sigh with each sudden gust. Rick left his car and walked slowly towards the shed. As he approached it, the door swung open and feeling almost drawn he stepped up and inside, closing the door behind him.

A light switch to the left of the door illuminated the hut enough to see that save for a long wooden table, several wooden folding chairs and a couple of well beaten fling cabinets, he was alone.

The window was not clean enough to see into the nearby materials compound, but occasionally the light would illuminate the forescent paint on a site dumper and several small wheelbarrows standing on end along one side of the compound fence.

Within the shadows Rick suddenly saw a small dog squeeze his way under a section of the boundary

fence and almost on his stomach edge his way towards the shed where he stood. To one side of the dog, Rick thought that he saw the figure of a man walking slowly towards the shed. He appeared to be in some difficulty and kept calling to the dog. Eventually they both reached the shed and the door was quietly pulled open. Rick immediately recognised the dog from his earlier visits but the man took him totally by surprise. As he entered the shed, his dog forced himself past and made a dash for Rick, his tail wagging furiously. The door closed shut and the visitor introduced himself as David Tomas. Before talking he gently switched off the light throwing the shed into relative darkness. The only light was from the dim security light which occasionally cast an orange glow across the window.

David was an elderly man, dressed mainly in a worn blue suit and dirty brown leather boots. His

appearance was that of someone who had fallen on particularly hard times and yet was struggling to retain some difficulty. His face was worn and weather beaten and he wore the darkest glasses that Rick had ever seen. They seemed to obliterate his eyes completely and gave him a sinister looking exterior. He offered his gloved hand to Rick, which was taken and shaken.

“Please sit down Mr. Shore” David’s voice was calm, sad, and despairing and cried out for comfort. “I would like to tell you a short story, after which I will leave you to make up your own mind about what to do next. I have no more spirit. I am dying and wish to leave this world in peace”

Rick pulled out a chair from under the table and sat down. Here was a man who knew that he was about to die, and he at least deserved someone to listen to his story before it was too late.



“Graham and I were partners. We were both industrial chemists and our final contract was to try and develop a chemical weapon to be used during any large public disturbances that became out of control. At first we were unsuccessful, until towards the end of our research we discovered a chemical that produced a hallucinative reaction within any one who inhaled even a very small amount of the gas. The reaction only lasted a few hours and the victim was then unaware of any long term effects.

Unfortunately we didn't realise at the time that the drug also produced a similar effect to the drops used by an ophthalmic surgeon when observing the iris of patients”

This was obviously draining David and he sat down on a nearby seat. His dog curled himself affectingly at his feet, sighing softly. His large brown eyes staring unblinkingly at Rick.

“Unknown to me at the time, Graham had formed a new partnership with a small local syndicate who planned to take over the rights to the product and presumably sell the idea to the highest bidder. I discovered what was going on and tried to put a stop to it. The gas that we had produced was far more dangerous than we had thought and the wisest thing was to destroy it before it got out of control. I tried to explain this to Graham but he wouldn't listen. He unfortunately died of a heart attack a few days later, and I became sole owner. I managed to convince our solicitor, a George Shuman, to ensure that the deeds to the property included a covenant that the site would never be developed”

“This certainly explains a few things” thought Rick, allowing David time to regain some breath.

David continued “A few days later whilst I was working in the laboratory there was a terrific

explosion that almost destroyed the entire laboratory. I wish that it had done so now, but..." he was wringing his hands and shaking his head from side to side," I unfortunately took the blast and was exposed to the gas for a while. I managed to escape from the tunnel and have lived in the farmhouse ever since "

"David" cut in Rick "Why were you so determined that the site would never be developed?"

"You have seen some of the results for yourself. The ground is totally polluted. It must be left alone."

"But you are assumed dead. Why have you not come forward before now?"

David unhurriedly raised his hands to his tired face and delicately removed his glasses. It evidently caused him considerable pain to do so and he winced as he turned to face Rick. Rick could not

but sharply draw in his breath as in the orange glow he looked into those eyes. They were totally black. The irises were completely enlarged and as he stared into the blackness, Rick suddenly felt nothing but pity.

David replaced his dark glasses and turned slightly away. "I can only go out in the darkest of nights and even then have to wear these blackened glasses. I tried writing to the local council and my solicitor, but have never received a reply from either. When I was declared dead the deeds were passed to Graham's sister, and I thought that that would be it"

"But she has sold them on" acknowledged Rick "to a developer." "Do you know why the solicitor removed or chose to ignore the restriction?"

David shrugged "No. I suspect that he was one part of the syndicate formed with Graham, but surely

they realise the full potential of what they might  
be doing?"

"When there is money concerned, all thoughts of  
morality or ethics go straight out of the window,  
I'm afraid."

"Mr. Shore, I've been watching you whilst  
you've been on site, and I've heard about your  
investigations. Please find out who is behind all of  
this and put a stop to it. Then at least I can die  
in peace"

David would say no more and still wincing from  
the pain to his eyes, left Rick and slowly made his  
way to the farm. Rick stepped down out of the shed  
and pushing the door to, returned to his car...

Flowchester College has expanded enormously over  
the last few years and is no longer recognisable  
as the original Technical College established in  
the late nineteen seventies. Some of the original

blocks still exist today and it was to one of these that Rick made his way in search of Room A135 and Tony Bradley. The lecture room was on the first floor, so taking the lift, he was confronted with hoards of students relieved that the lecture had finished and heading for the local hostelry. A135 was a large room laid out in traditional classroom fashion with rows of large drawing desks, drawing cupboards, filing cabinets, and the walls festooned with a range of construction related equipment and small tools. Tony had completed for the day and was carefully folding away his work sheets and notes, etc., when Rick entered the room. Tony gave the impression that he was pleased to see Rick and signalled him to take a seat at the front of the

as

they headed down the

room.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Shore" said Tony as he closed up his ancient leather briefcase and took a seat opposite Rick.

"Rick, please" offered Rick, and waited for Tony to begin.

He began by explaining that he had not been happy with his instructions to fabricate the results of his tests but had been threatened by someone who kept calling his house. He had been told that he would be well compensated for his contribution and that nobody would get hurt. When asked who was driving this scam. Tony wouldn't answer, only to say that there were five in the syndicate, although with George having been killed, it was down to four, and each had invested an equal amount.

Rick wasn't sure whether or not to mention his meeting with David Tomas, but felt better of it.

Leaving it as a hidden, and maybe, trump card seemed

to be a better idea at the moment.

David, having given all that he would, arose to extinguish the lights and together they left the classroom, pulling the door to corridor. Tony's car had been parked in a different area of the campus to Rick's so saying goodnight they went their separate way. Tony's explanation hadn't really given Rick much for information that he had not already managed to discover for himself, and he was certain that he could have discovered more. Maybe a further chat within a few days would encourage him to open up a bit more. Upon reaching his car, Rick called his friend, Jon, to see if anything further had developed.

There had been a connection between the four men. According to the grapevine, during the late seventies, the four men and one other, Tim Sharpe, were members of a financial syndicate that use to



invest heavily on the stock market. Rumour had it that they made a substantial fortune, but later lost most of it on a deal involving a new top secret product that was being developed by a London chemist, George Richards. Jon had no idea where any of the men could be found but would continue making enquiries.

Rick replaced his mobile telephone, and almost fell into his car. It had been an exhausting last few days, although the pieces did seem to be fitting together at last. He drove slowly out of the college car-park and turned right into the winding tree lined road that led away from the college and towards a small riverside pub that always served a good whiskey after a hard days work. As he turned down the volume on his car radio, he failed to notice a blue saloon car pull out of the college behind him and keeping a safe distance back was

following. Reaching the main road, Rick made a sharp left hand bend which took him towards a small village nestling between the South Downs and the coast. As the speed limit decreased approaching the outskirts of the village, so did Rick, which forced the following car to inadvertently catch up. At this stage, Rick caught sight of the car and continued to keep track of its movement as he turned into the pub car-park.

The following car pulled into the side of the road some one hundred metres ahead and the lights were extinguished. The pub was relatively quiet at this time of the evening and it was with some relief that Rick was able to order his drink and retire to a low upholstered bench seat against one of the many attractive leaded light windows. With fine low oak beamed ceilings, white painted rendered walls decorated with fine chintzy wall lamps, and a

long curved mahogany bar displaying a fine example of almost every available drink to suit every need, the atmosphere was one of peace and relaxation. Rick took a sip of his scotch, washed it around the inside of his mouth and with a long shallow sigh let it slip deliciously down the back of his throat, the single malt caressing every muscle as it went. He closed his eyes and gently leant back against the padded rest. Without being melodramatically philosophic it was a real puzzle trying to explain why there was so much violence and trouble infesting this glorious world of ours.

The warmth, comfort, and maybe the scotch, meant that Rick had to be shaken awake almost an hour later and told that it was time to go home. Easing himself from the cosy warmth of his surroundings, Rick ambled over to his car, opened the door and sat down. Through the windscreen he could see that the

blue saloon was still there, but assisted by the warm yellow glow of the street light he could see that the driver was missing. Maybe he was calling on a friend. Who knows?

Rick felt uncomfortable. Something was wrong. He had that unmistakable feeling. Winding down his window to gain some much needed fresh air, he drove out of the car park and slowly up to the parked car. He could make out the shadow of an object in the front of the car so he parked his own just in front, leaving his engine running and the lights on. He reached the car and even before he had opened the driver's door, he saw him.

Rick was too late. The snap reflection in the window was not enough to prevent his face being pinned against the glass. He felt his legs being kicked apart and his arm forced behind him. This man was bigger and stronger than he was and it was

pointless to try and resist.

“We are tolerating your irritating interference in our project no more. If you make one more move to disrupt us it will be the last move you make. Do

I make myself clear?”

Rick grunted in agreement

“You get back in your car, do not look behind.

Don't forget what I have told you”

Rick once again grunted in agreement but this time his agreement was met with a hefty open handed punch to the small of his back, forcing him to double up in pain and collapse on to the road. He was roughly kicked to one side and as the car disappeared into the darkness, Rick picked himself up and painfully scrambled his way back to the car.

Soaking in a hot perfumed bath, Rick was beginning to feel better. The pain in his back had subsided a little and peering into the bathroom mirror he could

see a large bruise forming to one side of his hip.

Gazing aimlessly towards the perspiring ceiling, Rick had to make a decision and having made it, had to stick to it. He could pass the whole thing over to the local police and drop out completely, but this would not guarantee that he was not targeted by whoever was in charge of this project. And, after all, he kept remembering what David had told him. No, he had to finish it, and finish it for good. This is what he was going to do. He had decided. It was time to turn up the heat on Tony Bradley.

He was the partner most likely to break first. If Rick could make him panic it might drive the others out into the opening where they would then be caught.

Tony was an easy man to track down. As an engineer with an office well established in the town, the address and telephone number was freely available

in the local directory. A quick call determined that he was available for a chat and as Rick drove into the car-park he had already formatted a plan. Tony was standing in the reception area as Rick entered. Bright and airy surroundings with background music and a plush well designed suite of furniture welcomed the unsuspecting client making them easy prey to the smooth talking receptionist. Tony took Rick's hand and together they walked down a long carpeted corridor to an office situated at the rear of the building. Filled with piles of drawings, folders of every description, and boxes of cylindrical soil samples this was a typical engineer's working place. Tony offered Rick a chair and they both sat. Rick began the conversation by saying that he had valued their chat earlier in the week and that he had now established the names of the syndicate members. He let Tony take this in and

then dropped the bombshell.

"I met with David Tomas the other evening. Did you know him? We had a very interesting discussion about Smalldean Farm"

Tony's eyes just glazed over. Rick thought that maybe he was about to have a heart attack, or at least a stroke. He eventually managed to regain some composure.

"I thought he was dead. An accident sometime back. Are you sure?"

"Certainly" confirmed Rick "and what he had to say gave some explanation to the recent events. Tony, I think it would be in your best interest to talk to someone officially. We are talking possible murder here, and you could well be implicated."

Tony suddenly stood up, looked at his watch and went to open the door.

"I'm afraid we'll have to discuss this at a



later date. I've just remembered that I have a pre-arranged appointment that I must tend to. Good to meet you again Mr. Shore" He showed Rick in to the corridor and pointed him in the direction of the front door. The meeting had been adjourned.

As soon as he was positive that Rick had left the building, Tony reached for his telephone and called a number. It rang unanswered for a while and then: "It's me, Tony. We have to meet" there was silence at the other end.

"I've just had Rick Shore in here making all sorts of accusations and he has just told me that David Tomas is still alive" This had the desired affect "Yes, you heard me. He's still alive. He spoke to Shore the other day" A long pause. "Okay, midday, today, at the site" and the call was over. When Rick had left the office, he had called his colleague, Jon, and they agreed to meet that

lunchtime at the 'Wheatsheaf' for a drink and to go through what was about to happen. Rick was adamant that the situation was about to boil and was determined that all those involved would be rounded up and put away for a long time.

As Tony drove onto the Smalldean Farm site he could see that three other cars were already parked alongside the Agent's hut. He recognised one of them as belonging to Clive Clarke but couldn't place the owners of the remaining two. He pulled up alongside Clive's and walked to where the others had already gathered. As he reached the shed door, it opened and the three stepped down and out and met Tony who immediately recognised the other two men as being Peter Armitage and Tim Sharpe, the other members of the syndicate.

"Aren't we rather conspicuous all meeting together like this?" queried Tony

“For God’s sake why?” Peter was obviously annoyed by the whole thing “Nothing unusual about the project team meeting on site. For pity’s sake get a grip”.

“Sorry, Peter, I’m just a bit shaken by what Rick Shore told me”

“He’s becoming a real menace. I’ll deal with him as soon as we finish here” Peter was walking slowly across the newly poured concrete as he spoke. The others were following behind like sheep “Everything is now buried under tonnes of concrete. Even if David is still alive, nobody would listen to him now. It has been too long. People have forgotten” Tony had come alongside Peter “What happened to George. Is it true that he was shot?”

Peter swung round and stared straight at only “We have all invested far too much to have it all thrown away by the snivelling likes of him. He was

about to go to the police. Actually Tony I'm a bit concerned about your behaviour just recently" Tony backed off and stood still.

"You know me Peter, I wouldn't do anything to jeopardise what we have already achieved"

Peter had reached into his inside jacket pocket "I'm sorry Tony, but we're not convinced" and without warning, pointed the small hand gun at Tony's forehead and fred.

Tony stood frozen for a moment; a look of complete disbelief crossed his face. His eyes slowly rolled and closed and he slumped motionless to the ground. Clive and Tim stood appalled at what they had just witnessed but chose to say nothing.

"Right, let me make this quite clear" Peter was addressing Clive and Tim, "If I catch either of you doing anything likely to threaten this work than let this be a warning"

Peter backed slowly away from where the two men were still stunned.

“Get the body into the back of my car. I’ll dispose of it later. Meet you back in the shed. And come on. Be quick about it”

As they struggled to lift the lifeless body and carry it to the boot of Peter’s car, Peter walked calmly to the shed, fung open the door and stood holding the padlock. He had no intention of leaving these two pathetic morons to threaten his plan. There was a lot of money riding on this development project and his share kept increasing by the minute. Clive and Tim had done as instructed and returned to the shed where they climbed up inside without noticing that Peter had already begun to push the door to. Almost shut, the telephone rang and Clive answered it. Clive paused for a moment. He’d forgotten the telephone. God, what a fool.

"Peter, you're wanted on the 'phone" called Clive unaware of the impending scenario about to unfold.

"Damn. Okay I'll take it" and peter stepped up into the shed.

David, standing out of sight, just behind the shed, his faithful little dog sitting patiently at his feet, replaced his mobile phone and slammed the door shut, locked it and walked quietly away.

Clive commented that he could smell burning. Small wisps of pale blue smoke could be seen penetrating the timber boarded floor and the men rushed to the door to find that it had been locked from the outside. The barred window prohibited any escape in that direction so the door had to be forced open, and quickly. Already the floor was beginning to burn.

Jon and Rick drove on to the site followed by several patrol cars to see the shed already well

ablaze. Rick could make out the shapes of three men desperately trying to force the door as without warning the entire shed exploded in a massive white ball of fire. The heat from the explosion and ensuing fire was intense and large billowing clouds of thick grey smoke plumed high into the sky completely obliterating the light from the sun. Large looming black shadows drifted ominously across the site and everything close by was covered in a fine grey ash. This was no ordinary explosion. The men inside the shed stood no chance at all and all that Rick and his men could do was to stand and watch.

As the smoke began to slowly subside and the countryside could be seen once again, Rick spotted a small terrier dog weaving its way contentedly across the nearby field, followed slowly behind by an elderly man walking uncomfortably with the aid of a stick. The man glanced across at Rick before

continuing into the woods at the end of the lane.  
Jon noticed this exchange “Do you know who that  
was, Rick?”

“Not really, I believe that he’s a local farmer.

Keeps himself to himself”

### *About the Author*

Peter Thwaites Is a Polio Survivor from the early  
1950’s and has reluctantly taken early retirement  
due to the steady degeneration of his physical  
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Peter is a qualified Building Surveyor and has  
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Just recently Peter published the first part of  
his autobiography, ‘Come Smile With Me’, which gave  
a personal and sometimes very amusing insight into



the trials and tribulations of a person determined  
to overcome personal difficulties.