

# The Flying Man: a love story.

A Paranormals novella by  
Ian Williams

(c.30,000 words, plus a few explanatory notes at the end)



## Siddhartha 3:5.

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1.

He had, he thought, always wanted to die. Now it seemed, as the world fell away, he was about to get his wish.

He woke with a woman's name on his lips, compressed into an agonised cry of fear and, perhaps, betrayal. A kaleidoscope of images: snow, men caging him, shock and recognition on her face. He remembered the soft sound of a silenced gun going off like snow falling from a branch and then...

...and then he woke.

Woke to the sound of bird songs outside the window, to sunlight streaming in between half closed cream velvet curtains, to the hum of a milkman's electric cart, and to the very strange feeling of being completely refreshed. He hadn't felt like that in months, not since the nightmare began. Pulling back the bedclothes he realised he was naked; not surprising, perhaps, as he always slept unclothed. He could see no new scars or signs of injury. Shaking his head, which caused him no problems as it might had he been suffering from the after effects of drugs, he stepped to the window and looked outside.

Looked onto a garden, an ordinary and utterly conventional garden, a lawn bordered with shrubs and unopened beds of flowers. On either side stood a waist high wooden fence and at the top of the garden, about thirty metres away, a higher fence with a gate but not one so high that he couldn't see the oak wood which lay beyond it.

He nodded for no particular reason, turned and saw some clothes draped over a chair next to the mirrored fitted wardrobe that occupied the entire wall which faced the double bed he'd woken up in. Staring at himself in the glass, all he could see was the completely familiar. He saw a man in his mid-thirties, tall and well built, a hairy chest, muscular arms and legs, a square shaped rugged unshaven face that, he had been told, was extremely handsome. Only the lined blue eyes and the prematurely greying brown hair suggested a man with more problems than he should have had to bear.

He pulled on the clothes –jockey shorts, navy socks, jeans, a pale blue shirt- slipped his feet into laceless black shoes and opened the bedroom door onto a living room. Now he felt impatient and he strode through the house mentally cataloguing everything: a single bedroom; a spacious cream-tiled bathroom with bath and shower; square shaped fitted kitchen with fridge-freezer, dishwasher, washing machine, microwave, toaster, ceramic hob, window looking onto the garden; the living room with all the modern electronic conveniences, two armchairs, table, window looking out onto the street where he saw facing, he then and rightly assumed, country-style cottages that were the mirror image of his own. Everything was here that he would need if this was his own home, even his own clothes, books, DVDs, and CDs which he'd abandoned in panic all those months ago.

*What have they done to me?*

Returning to the kitchen he filled the electric kettle, found some, fresh of course, sliced bread and minutes later sat at the pine (did they shop at Ikea?) kitchen table with hot buttered toast and strong black coffee. Only then did he

2

notice the piece of paper stuck to the tabletop. He read typed words: 'Almost all you need is here, daily papers are available from the shop at the bottom of the lane.'

Yes, he liked to read the morning paper –usually The Independent, sometimes The Guardian or The Times, with his breakfast. Perhaps they knew that. Leaving the coffee unfinished, he stepped out of his front door. The air smelled clean, the temperature was early morning cool –the watch (his own) he'd strapped on moments ago read 6.37 –but not unpleasant. He saw no one, neither could he detect any movement behind closed curtains as he walked down the lane. A black cat, tail confidently erect, sauntered past him but made no attempt at contact.

It took him only a couple of minutes to reach the shop which appeared to be two converted cottages and stood on one corner of what appeared to be a village green. Appeared, appeared? Yes. He could take nothing for granted; not in this place. Inside he found a man sorting out a pile of newspapers. The shop itself was large with several aisles containing a wide variety of goods like a micro-supermarket -minimart did they call them? The man looked up and smiled.

"Morning," he said. "I'm Jimshed, proprietor of this establishment and you, sir, if I'm not mistaken, have just moved in up the street."

The man was Asian and in his early forties, stocky and balding with a northern accent, not Geordie but similar. Maybe from Middlesborough. He remembered their football team had made a bad start to the season.

"I've come for a paper but I don't have any money."

"Of course you don't," Jimshed said. "Just pick whatever you want while I set up an account for you. Won't take long."

"What's the date?"

Jimshed didn't seem surprised by the question. "April fourth, Tuesday," he answered.

"Last night... it seems only about an hour ago to me, it was the tenth of February, I was in Grasmere, the place was snowbound, and somebody had just shot me in the stomach."

Unbelievably, the shopkeeper barely reacted. He responded immediately, but casually as if it was of no great importance. "These things happen to people like us," Jimshed said, "but we have to get on with our lives." He offered no explanation for his statement –people like us?- but continued sorting a pile of newspapers.

"I don't mean to be rude, but are you mad?"

"No he isn't," said a female voice. "He simply knows more than you."

He turned and found himself staring at a woman in a wheelchair framed in a doorway that led to the rear of the shop. He guessed her to be younger than Jimshed by maybe ten years, putting her nearer his age. She was plump with a round face framed by long mousy brown hair. A long shawl hid her legs.

She stared back at him and said, "Well, well, well, this really is a surprise. Nick Shannon, you've finally come home." Then she laughed as if she'd said something funny.

Until the moment she spoke, he'd been confused and apprehensive but now he felt afraid.

He said heatedly, "I've never seen you before in my life. I don't know you. I don't know where I am, and my name isn't Nick Shannon, it's Daniel Morgan. Daniel Morgan!"

The woman held his gaze for a moment then frowned, averted her eyes, shook her head, and didn't speak for several seconds. Then she said quietly, "I'm sorry, of course you're right. I thought you were someone once I knew. You aren't, I can see that now. Do forgive me."

Her evident sincerity was as confusing to him as her laughter had been moments earlier.

"The wife's not been well lately," Jimshed said. "Have you, Trish, love? And she gets it worse being as you can see. M.S.," he explained. "Besides, everyone knows that Nick Shannon's been dead for twenty years or more."

"Where am I?" Daniel asked.

Jimshed turned to his wife. "I don't think that's for me to say. Is it, Trish?"

"Best not," she answered. "You'll find out soon enough... Daniel."

"Why are you here?"

Trish smiled then, "For the same reason, I assume, you are, Daniel. You're a paranormal whom they either they don't trust or can't survive in the outside world. Now take your paper, take whatever you want, and go. Please, just get out."

"Nick Shannon meant something to you," Daniel said. "You cared for him."

Trish laughed harshly. "He meant the same to me as he did to everyone else. A warning. And he was an arrogant son of a bitch. Some thought he got what he deserved."

Back in his cottage he found another note.

Write your story, it said. Tell yourself how you came here.

Nothing more.

There was a packet of cigarettes, lighter, and ashtray next to the pc in the corner. He went and made another cup of coffee. Perhaps, he thought, I do need to understand what happened to me. Standing over the pc, he switched it on, brought up Word, created a document, sat down, opened the packet of cigarettes, lit one, and began to type-

THE FLYING MAN

2.

Below him, waves clashed like angry horses against the base of the black coal dust cliffs. Above, dark heavy clouds scudded across the sky like racing fat women. Wind roared in his ears. It would take only a moment to step forward and be dead in less than three seconds.

He thought, perhaps, that he had always subconsciously wanted to die, even when he'd been happy. There was something about high places that made him want to throw himself off them. On his honeymoon trip to Paris he had clung to the Eifel Tower rail until his hands bled. Mel had thought he suffered from vertigo. He'd never told her the truth and now it was too late. Now she didn't give a shit and might never even know.

Two months ago he had come home from school to find a note. She hadn't loved him for years. She'd been having an affair with someone from work. They were going away together. Don't try to find her.

She took nothing from him. No jointly bought possessions, no money, not even from a joint account. Took nothing but his heart and his reason for living. And the cat, the damned fucking cat.

He'd rang her parents. The line was disconnected. He wrote to them and the letter came back marked "unknown, not at this address". Her employers, a nebulous corporation, had shut down their local office and a secretary at their head office in London informed him it was not company policy to give out personal details, especially to abandoned husbands.

They'd been together for twelve years. Met on their first day at university and had hardly been apart since. Mel opted for a career in management (she never talked about work), while he went in for teaching Humanities at a comprehensive. Mel was well paid so she must have been good at her job. She often went away on courses. Daniel loved teaching, liking the kids and his subject. Some of the older girls developed crushes on him but his superficially disarming manner meant it never caused any trouble. He knew that women found him attractive but deep down he could never understand why.

Daniel knew he had two sides to his personality. He was well mannered, cheerful and charming but it was just surface. Underneath lay a tangled web of self-doubt and worry. Despite his and Mel's good life –no children, enough money, good holidays, lots of friends, a range of interests- Daniel was convinced that it wouldn't last, that something dark and horrific would happen to destroy it all. Because he deserved it. He didn't know why and never could understand it, though he supposed it to be suppressed guilt.

Perhaps it had something to do with his missing past. He had woken, aged eighteen, in hospital. He had been unconscious for months, the only survivor of car crash which had killed his entire family. He could barely remember who he was and so little of his past. Oddly he had no trouble with academic knowledge, but his identity seemed a mystery. A hefty insurance policy and being sole heir meant he didn't need to work for a long time and had more than enough to see himself through college.

The mostly hidden melancholy streak first surfaced while at university when he discovered the Blues, a form of music then out of fashion but with a hard core of fans. Like many before him, he found himself attracted to the

haunted enigma of Robert Johnson and his music which in turned inspired him to take up the guitar. Contrary to general belief, the Blues is a good time cathartic form of music but it does have its dark side and it was that to which Daniel was most attracted. He could rock and boogie well enough in company, but alone he used his guitar to explore the darkness chartered by Johnson and others like him –Charley Patton and his sometime friend Son House drinking, singing, and screwing their way across the racist Deep South, and the evangelical fundamentalist hellfire and damnation of Blind Willie Johnson’s gospel-blues.

Now it didn’t matter. He was alone on a cliff top with no one to stop him doing what he wanted. He imagined Robert Johnson staring up from his place in hell and laughing at him, Blind Willie sitting on the right hand of his vengeful god screaming he was damned. Daniel didn’t care. He’d been on his own for two months. He’d stopped taking the tranquillisers. It was his choice. His final choice.

He wondered if he’d hit the sea or the rocks. It wouldn’t make any difference but it would be a matter of pride if, for a split second, he could jump far enough –to fly for a brief moment- that he’d land in the water.

He backed up several paces, took a deep breath, braced himself, and started to run, launching himself off the cliff, arms outstretched, urging himself forward.

He fell outwards, accelerating rapidly. Air pulled at his face as his arms swung back behind him. His mind reached out ahead of him as if dragging him onwards into the black.

Then his body began to arc.

His head came up. His body followed.

And he rose into the air.

Daniel Morgan flew, soaring upwards into the dark heavens.

Without understanding what he was doing or how, he rolled over, looping the loop, and dropped down to the cliff top like an acrobat doing a dismount from parallel bars.

Daniel Morgan opened his mouth and screamed just as thunder cracked and lightning ripped bright wounds in the sky. The deluge began then and he ran to his car parked in a lane a hundred yards away. The doors weren’t locked, the keys left in the ignition. He hadn’t cared what happened to it.

With trembling hands, he pulled out a cigarette and lit it. His lungs raked in smoke, the hit of nicotine giving a calming illusion. He gulped down more, stubbed it out, lit another then another as he tried to focus, to think clearly, to understand what had happened.

Now everything had changed. Now he understood why he kept wanting to throw himself off high places. Not a subconscious urge to die. Not to die, but fly.

The car crash had eradicated more than his family and his memory. To do this thing now meant he had to have done it before. And he could do it again.

He returned to the home he never expected to see again. It wasn’t far away, just a couple of miles along the coast road in a pleasant old established suburb. For

a while he just sat, thinking, letting R.L. Burnside's hypnotic repetitive Hill country sonic assaults wash over him as he wondered what to do next.

There was no food other than scraps in the house. Of late he'd been eating fitfully but drinking in considerable quantities. After six, he rang for a pizza, a meat feast twelve-inch deep pan. His appetite had returned with a vengeance. While waiting for the delivery, he shed his wet clothes and had a shower, something else he'd been neglecting in recent weeks. He tried to levitate the soap from its dish and failed miserably which made him laugh. He hadn't shaved for three days so he attended to that too. Miraculously there were some clothes he hadn't yet managed to soil.

He forced himself to eat the pizza slowly so as not to get indigestion, interspersing slices with sips of a cheap but tasty Chilean merlot, one of two remaining bottles he'd left behind intended for whoever had to clear out his house. He smiled, for the first time in months, as he ate.

Everything had changed. He had a purpose now. He had a life, a new wonderful life overflowing with as yet undiscovered possibilities. True, it was also one scary as hell. Flying men weren't exactly common in the early years of the new millennium except in the comic books he'd never managed to outgrow. They would hardly provide a viable blueprint for what he should do next.

Which was to finish the bottle of wine and then, over the course of the evening, drink the other while watching television and mulling over his plans for tomorrow.

What a day that was going to be!

He just never expected how it would end.

After a large carbohydrate-packed breakfast, he made some sandwiches and filled a flask with coffee and put them in a backpack. He took a taxi to a shop which specialised in biker accessories. Here he was after clothes, a thick padded leather jacket, leather trousers, thick gloves, and a shiny black helmet. Daniel already had a good pair of boots. Then he went and bought a bike, a Kawasaki 500cc. He'd always wanted a bike but Mel had simply hated them. Now everything had changed. He had a new life.

He'd had some regular practice at riding bikes, thanks to a colleague who was an avid fan, and it was a skill that came naturally to him. He eased along the dual carriageway, heading inland and away from the windswept coast, at a steady fifty for a while, tucking in when convenient behind cars as he got used to the feel of his new machine. It felt good.

Just me and my machine, he thought smugly, and the open road. Then: what a strange world this is. I never knew, I never suspected that wonders were possible. I thought it was all so mundane. But if I can fly then what else might be true? What else might exist that I don't know about? I've found the mystery I didn't think existed. If I can fly then perhaps there is a god and a Loch Ness Monster and flying saucers and ghosts; a world not bound by cause and effect or a universe limited by Einsteinian theory and maybe Robert Johnson did meet a man at the crossroads. Man, I wanna play some fucking blues. Yes!

The lake –reservoir- was exactly, give or take a hundred yards or so, approximately one mile long. His bike parked underneath a bush, Daniel stood

on the pebble dashed lake shore and checked his watch. Then he concentrated and summoned up his power.

His power!

It was there. It came easily as if it had been waiting for a long long time. He felt it suffuse him, wrapping him in energy, as he slowly rose vertically several feet into the air. He moved forward gradually bringing himself into a horizontal position, arms flat by his side.

Now let's see what I can really do, he thought. Go!

He shot forward three feet above the surface of the lake. Wind-whipped spray splattered and streaked across his visor but he didn't notice as he concentrated on surging forward. High above him, dark clouds hid the sun. He sped across the lake some thirty yards from the southern shore. No fool, our Daniel. If his strength gave out he could, even with the heavy clothing, swim that short distance.

He didn't need to. He reached the far eastern end of the lake and rolled over on a grassy bank. Checking his stopwatch, he found he had flown that mile in a little over seven minutes, about the same speed it would have taken at a fast jog. Interesting. It had taken about the same amount of energy out of him. He pulled a bar of chocolate from a pocket and crammed it into his mouth.

After a leisurely cigarette, he decided to fly back as well, but taking it slowly this time. He'd established, for the time being, his maximum speed, though he wondered if that would improve with practise. Now he glided at little more than walking pace back the way he'd come, this time paying more attention to his surroundings. On his right, on the other side of the lake, the ground rose steeply, a road snaking upwards. Only then did he see a car parked half way up. Probably somebody taking a leak, he thought.

But the car was still there ten minutes later when he got back to his bike. As he pushed the bike over the stones to the road a few yards away he glanced back to where he'd seen the car. The sun broke briefly through the heavy clouds at that moment bringing the world into such a sharp focus that Daniel could see the man standing beside the car.

Holding binoculars to his eyes. Pointed at Daniel.

The man put them down and climbed inside the car and it moved off, downwards towards the lake, towards him.

Daniel Morgan had just discovered that other people knew about the mystery.



3.

Someone knocked at the door.

It was the postman. A needle thin five-foot tall bald black man in an official postperson's uniform.

"Daniel Morgan?" he asked as if he didn't know.

"I'm thinking of changing it to Patrick McGoohan," Daniel said blandly.

This puzzled the postman. "Why," he asked, "change a perfectly good Welsh name for an Irish one most people will spell wrong anyway?"

He didn't get it, Daniel thought incredulously. He actually doesn't get it. "Maybe I won't then."

"Fine. I'm Pat."

"Postman Pat?"

The postman grinned exposing even white teeth. "Gotcha!"

I'm going mad, Daniel thought. I really am going mad.

"Nah, I don't think so. My name really is Patrick and no-one calls me Pat unless they're pissed."

"Are you reading my mind?"

"Heaven above, no! Just your reactions which are par for the course for someone in your position. I've got a package for you," he said handing it over. "You started writing your story yet then?"

"The beginning," Daniel answered.

"Very good place to start, mon."

"I've been known to beat the crap out of fans of Julie Andrews. They don't deserve to live."

"Yeah, hard man. You a white boy who likes down and dirty blues."

The postman's voice was changing every time he spoke. He'd begun as a fairly neutral working class Essex, moved into Rasta and had now turned African-American.

"How did you know?"

"Just guessing. You don't look like you like trance dance drum'n'bass techno hip-hop an' all dat shit. Course you could be into singer-songwriters. You going to read your mail?"

"In front of you?"

"No, man, I'm out of here. Jus' there aint no point if you don't read it. Means I've wasted my time and that's not a good t'ing -thing!"

"I'll read it now, okay. I've been writing for a couple of hours and it's time for coffee and a fag."

"You want to quit that stuff, man. Caffeine rips your nerves to shit and the cigarettes just plain kill you."

"Are you a postman or a doctor?"

Patrick frowned. "See you around, Mr McGoohan. You know this is number six, don't you?" And he was off.

Daniel stared at the package. It was addressed to him at 'Chicago', 19 Ender Lane, Hampton Parva.

He laughed and opened the package.

4.

Riding a bike before had been fun, a rarely indulged pleasure. He could ride safely at sensible speeds but he wasn't a biker in any real sense of the word. So he couldn't outrun his pursuers, not without seriously risking his life. The only good thing was in that they weren't pushing him. If he did fifty, they did fifty. If he accelerated, so did they. Slow down, they slowed. All the time maintaining a two hundred yard gap.

This had been going on for half an hour as he sped along country lanes and roads. The only advantage he had, he hoped, was that he knew these roads. He and Mel were walkers. They loved getting into the country and out up onto fells and moors and he knew this area very well. Had he been a more experienced biker he could almost certainly have lost them. And if wishes were horses, beggars would eat horse steak.

He couldn't lose them. They probably had satellite guidance. He'd seen in a wing mirror, when they once got too close, two faces. One of them would be the navigator spitting out possibilities.

He didn't really know. He couldn't think. All his mental energies were concentrated on riding the damned fucking bike. A world full of possibilities. Everything to live for. My fucking arse! From despair to elation with no sense of proportion in between. In love with outlaw biker image. A bloody wank, that's all it was.

He'd never made a decision on his own in his entire life until now. He had no past and almost from waking up he'd shared his life with Mel who (and screw it if it was sexist) had worn the fucking pants, not him. Since she'd left him he'd done nothing but totally fuck up. He couldn't even live. He could, however, swear a lot.

He'd zigged and he'd zagged and those bastards had stayed on top of him. Now he was really going to hit the highway! The country lane abruptly turned into a motorway slip road. Believing he had a feel for the bike he gunned the engine and accelerated away from them as he moved into the outside lane. Traffic was relatively light and he focused on staying on the dividing line between the middle and overtaking lane. So long as no one pulled out unexpectedly he could really pile on the speed.

For a time it seemed to work. He was cruising at ninety, when possible shifting up to the ton. He'd beaten them. Now all he had to do was to decide which exit to take.

Even as he pondered that he saw them in his mirror.

Bastards.

Then again, maybe he'd been doing it the wrong way.

He slowed down, shifting into the left-hand lane, cruising at a comfortable sixty em pee aitch. So, they were super drivers and he wasn't. In that case, whose petrol tank would last the longest? If it was theirs, he was truly screwed but alive. (If they'd wanted him dead all they had to do was nudge his bike.) He'd either win or lose but whatever happened he'd be alive, which had to be a result.

He never even thought that twenty-four hours earlier when he'd tried to kill himself.

Daniel never discovered until much later but the reason he won this particular duel was because his pursuers were simply too arrogant to believe that a civilian could beat them. They hadn't called for backup. They hadn't asked the motorway police to stop him. They thought it was an easy catch.

They didn't enjoy the next two years very much.

He watched them slow down and turn off.

Then he did something that would have featured on TV programmes for years to come had a video camera caught him. He stopped on the central reservation, manhandled his bike over the barrier, and headed back north in the left-hand lane. He filled his tank at the service station his pursuers had left just minutes earlier, used the cash point, taking out the maximum, left the motorway for the nearest small town where he used another cash point, bought a top of the range compact sleeping bag for cash, moved on to stay that night at an isolated youth hostel in the Pennines.

The next day he headed south into Yorkshire. In Barnsley he managed, after some effort, to withdraw two thousand pounds from his account. He never imagined that, in order to simplify affairs before he killed himself by transferring everything into his current account, it would prove so useful. There he sold the bike and bought a cheap car

The day after that he arrived in the north-west Lancashire town of Nelson where he tried to withdraw even more cash only to find that someone had frozen his account. Annoying but not a disaster. He sold the car and bought another. Then he moved on.

He stayed at cheap bed and breakfast places, at Salvation Army hostels (after leaving his car somewhere else and his money buried under a suitable hedge).

After a week he sold the car for less cash than it was worth and from then on took a train or a bus instead. On occasion he walked, having bought a lightweight tent.

He became a ghost haunting the north of England high country. He roamed from as far north as Jedburgh just inside the Scottish lowlands to Sheffield in south Yorkshire, from Morecambe in the west to Whitby in the east, though he preferred less well-known places.

Once he was mugged by two drug addicts and escaped by flying away. Once he was mugged by a greedy little bastard and he kicked the shit out of him.

He went everywhere and nowhere, running from enemies he didn't know and couldn't identify. He grew tired and depressed. He lost interest in personal hygiene and there came a point that he would only be welcomed in hostels for the dispossessed. Money didn't always talk and sometimes it was best to whisper.

Eventually his luck ran out and he was robbed and beaten and had everything taken from him. A nice policeman found him and took him to the local casualty department where he was stitched up and given a bed for the night.

Two days later he robbed a shop. When the alarm went off and the police arrived more quickly than he'd expected, he escaped by flying away.

As he still didn't have enough money he did it again. Successfully this time.

Now he abandoned cars and bikes and buses and trains, flying from one place to another by night. He burgled shops and post offices and slept in places with the brain-damaged and the desperate and eventually he realised that there was no difference between them and him. They had become his brothers. Only fear prevented him from taking their final step and finding complete solace in a bottle.

In order to retain what sanity he still possessed, he went to ground. He went to a place to which he'd never been before -though Mel had and hated it for reasons she never explained- but had only read about and seen pictures of.

He went to the Lake District, to Grasmere, in January. Cleaning himself up first, he found a hotel which would accept cash and no questions asked.

And there he met...

5.

Dear Daniel,

Welcome to Hampton Parva. Please read this letter first before browsing through the enclosed brochure.

You have, of course, many questions and some of them will be answered immediately on this page, others the brochure will explain. Those which are answered by neither will be given to you in person after you've finished writing your story. We always ask new residents to tell us the story of how they came here –it is, as you may have guessed, automatically downloaded from your pc- as it helps them understand their situation a little better.

Hampton Parva is a real community with shops, cultural and sporting amenities, thriving farms, a school and an unparalleled health centre and hospital. All your needs will be taken care of here.

Also, all basic needs are provided free of charge. However, should you wish more than the basic (what this basic consists of is explained fully in the brochure), then after a discussion with our vocational guidance officer a job will be provided for you. In your case it may come as no surprise if we suggested teaching.

For the moment, read the brochure, complete writing your story, and then have a chat with one of our induction personnel who'll be calling on you shortly.

Hampton Parva is your new home for the foreseeable future and we hope you'll be happy here. We can tell you this: almost everyone is.

I'm in hell, Daniel thought.

6.

After three days in the hotel, Daniel had begun to relax for the first time in months. Settled in his role of a walker on holiday, he'd taken on the persona of someone perhaps a little eccentric, not a social person but polite enough who might join in a bar conversation so long as it wasn't personal, or take part in a pub quiz. It was just enough that he'd be left alone without being considered sufficiently odd to warrant close scrutiny. Grasmere had plenty of visitors even in the winter and hotel staff were used to strange people so that they'd hardly pay much attention to someone who, as a guest, was no bother at all. He didn't seem like a criminal on the run or an escaped mental patient. He didn't ogle the female staff (or male), though some of them wouldn't have minded if he had (female and male). He tipped just enough, kept his room reasonably tidy, no stains in the bed or mess in the bathroom, no inflatable rubber women (or men) sticking out of the cupboard. Didn't get unpleasantly drunk or blatantly pick his nose in public. In fact, a few more guests like him and their lives would be a lot easier.

It didn't take him long to explore the village itself as there wasn't much to explore though what there was was extremely attractive even in winter. The weather so far had been cold but, unusual for the area at any time of year and not just the winter, dry so Daniel took the opportunity to start wandering the lower fells. He began with a trip up Dow Crag, a short but steep ascent to a rocky ridge. Halfway up he heard a rumbling then a terrifying crack sounded as four jet planes shot overhead so low as to seem barely above the crag itself. Unexpected and abrupt, it shocked and scared him so much that he almost fled back down the steep track. A couple of cigarettes later and he'd calmed himself down.

He had the full walker's gear of snug backpack containing a variety of emergency essentials, thermal underwear, two loose t-shirts, and a woollen jumper underneath a blue anorak, jeans and a pair of Nokia boots a cross between conventional boots and cut-down wellingtons. And he felt pretty good. He liked hill walking, preferably in company, but now he was used to being on his own and he still had his Ipod. This would do. He checked the map, more out of habit than necessity as the day was bright and clear, and decided to do what he'd originally planned, to walk the length of the crag until it began to drop down to the head of a narrow valley. He could have kept on, going uphill again, to take in a couple of more summits and still ended up roughly in the same place, completing a loop, but opted for the shorter walk. He had enough money to last for several weeks, there was no hurry.

He got back to the hotel shortly before one. A quick shower and change of clothes and down to the public bar for lunch and a couple of pints. Passing through Reception he saw a new arrival checking in. Normally he wouldn't have paid more than a cursory glance but this one was slightly unusual –an Asian woman, possibly mixed-race Indian, on her own. A little younger than him, he guessed, but not by much. Not dressed for hill walking, she was wearing an expensive coat that dropped to her knees, trousers underneath that. She couldn't have seen him looking at her, not from that angle but she turned then and looked at him for several seconds with a coolly appraising stare. The hint of a smile began to play on her thin red lips, then she turned away and continued with the business of checking in.

Curious, he thought.

Being mid-week, the bar was only half full giving him a choice of seat. Out of recent habit, he opted for an alcove where his back was against the wall and he could pretty much see the rest of the room. He ordered chicken pie, chips, and peas, good basic food after a morning's hike, to be washed down by a reasonable pint of Jennings best bitter.

He'd drunk half the pint by the time the food had arrived and he tucked into it with relish. Daniel had always liked his food but had never put on weight –fat, rather- because he'd always led an active life, walking, swimming, and playing squash regularly. When he next looked up he saw the Asian woman sitting several feet away in a facing alcove. She had a plate of sandwiches in front of her and was sipping on what looked like a pint of Jennings. She put down the glass and, picking up a sandwich, smiled as if to herself.

She ate daintily, small bites, putting the sandwich down in between them to take a drink of beer. She was smartly dressed in a black trouser suit, the jacket open revealed a buttoned up white satin blouse. Her face was thin, mouth a bright lipstick red, hair long straight and black dropping to her shoulders. She wasn't attractive in the conventional sense, the planes of her angular face jarring rather than flowing, but undoubtedly she was a very striking woman that once seen would never be forgotten.

Daniel had picked up a paper, left by someone else, which he read at an angle while covertly looking at the Asian woman. He didn't want to stare, and no-one else in the bar was paying her any real attention other than a curious but cursory glance, but she seemed to draw his eyes as if he couldn't focus on anything else in the room.

After finishing the sandwich, she drained her beer and went to the bar. Daniel tore his eyes away and forced himself to read the paper.

"I believe this is what you were drinking."

His eyes shot open. The woman stood next to him holding two full pint glasses. For a moment he wondered if she was going to throw one in his face for daring to stare at her.

"Jennings best bitter," she said.

"Yes, thank you," he replied taking the glass from her. He clumsily stood up. "Would you like to sit down?"

"Thank you, yes." She lowered herself gracefully onto the padded chair and faced him from across the table.

"You are a very handsome man. I would imagine you are used to women who are hitherto unknown to you approaching you with a drink in an attempt to engage you in conversation."

"It's never happened before," Dan said with an embarrassed laugh.

"You do surprise me." She stared him in the eye as she spoke and he felt that he'd been trapped.

He said, "I've been with someone since I was eighteen up until recently. I've never been in the situation where it could happen."

"What a pity. My name is Munyeen Ohrmuz."

"Daniel Morgan."

"I don't mind if you smoke, Daniel."

"What? Oh, I suppose, yes." He fumbled with the packet on the table in front of him. "Do you...?"

"Not usually, but on occasion. On this occasion I believe I shall."

She took a cigarette and put it to her lips, waiting for Daniel to light it. For some reason he thought it was the most arousing erotic thing he'd seen in months. She was so cool she gave off waves of sensuality despite not looking in the least conventionally sexy. Who was she, he wondered, and what was she doing here?

She inhaled and blew smoke away from him. "You're on your own," she said, making a statement rather than a question. "I'm very observant," she added before he could ask how she knew. "You don't look at your watch so you aren't waiting for anyone. You sit in a corner that could be said to deter anyone from joining you. So, you are on your own, Daniel Morgan. The question is: is it from choice or circumstance and do you want it to change?"

"I'm not sure how to answer the first part of the question which is rather personal. As for the second, your company is welcome."

"For the moment at least," she said smiling. "You smoke too much, you know."

"How can you say that?"

Munyeen gestured with a finger, reaching across the table and tapping one of his fingers with a red nail. "Nicotine stained fingers. But I suspect you've only been smoking very heavily of late."

"You smoke."

"I'm in the fortunate position of being able to stop whenever I want. Besides, I don't inhale much and smoke as an active choice rather than from habit or nerves. Your partner left you."

"My wife."

"Yes, I'm sorry."

"Are you a social worker?" he asked.

She said, "Meaning: who are you?"

"I suppose," he said. This was a very strange conversation. She probed but seemed to know the answers. For a moment he wondered if she was one of those chasing him. No, no, she couldn't be. That didn't make sense. If she was she'd have contacted them already.

She said, "Who do you think I am? After all, we've established who you are so it has to be my turn."

"Who am I, then?" Daniel asked her.

"A man with a broken heart who wants to be on his own or, if not on his own exactly, who wanted to get away from that which is familiar to contemplate his future and what decisions he should next make. You are intelligent man, probably in business or one of the professions. The latter I suspect. There, now it's your turn."

She wanted to play games. Was she just amusing herself or was she genuinely interested in him? Well, there was no harm in playing it out. Who was she indeed?

"You are expensively dressed and have good taste in clothes. University education. You don't have a northern accent. From London, senior management, lavish expense account, fast track to the top, but something's happened. No wedding ring, no rings at all, so you probably aren't married. This is unusual for a woman of your background. Perhaps there has been pressure on you by your family to get married... To someone you find unacceptable." That had to be it.



She smiled, a hint of smugness. "That would not be an unreasonable guess, Daniel. A shame it is almost completely wrong. I see we've finished our drinks. Another would dull our brains. Perhaps a walk in the fresh air. Show me around, Daniel."

That seemed a very reasonable idea.

They went out into the open. The hotel was only a minute's stroll from the village green and Daniel pointed out various shops on the perimeter, guiding her around it to pause at the Perfumery, thinking she'd be interested but she wasn't. They walked on and Munyeen linked arms with him.

A high class prostitute killing time until her assignation?

Meeting her married lover who wouldn't arrive until the evening?

A writer doing some research?

A woman who simply liked to have a holiday by herself? Sometimes the most obvious answers were the right ones.

They paused on the small bridge next to the closed tea room, looking over at the local church. Munyeen saw a bench in the grounds and nudged him. Daniel took her round and they sat down.

"I like to play the enigmatic woman," Munyeen said, "but I'm quite a simple person really."

"Now that, I'm sure, is a lie," Daniel replied.

"Perhaps it is." Munyeen smiled. Her face seemed innocent, less sophisticated when she smiled and he found that appealing.

"You've caught me out," she said. "I'm thirty-one years old, my mother is German, my father high caste Indian and we moved to England from Delhi when I was seven. Urdu is my first language, German my second, and English only my third, albeit a close third. This is why my speech patterns sound strange to you, though my speech itself is grammatically correct. I see my parents occasionally and I love and respect them. I am not running away from an arranged marriage, Daniel, sorry."

"So you're not a damsel in distress," he said. "Pity."

"May I have a cigarette, please?" Daniel took two from the packet, lighting hers first. "Thank you. You fancy yourself the hero."

He shook his head. "Not really, just a fantasy. I don't believe in heroes."

"What a shame. They do exist, Daniel, but not in the form Hollywood would have us believe. I have known true heroes one of whom refused to harm his own worst enemy even though he could have done so, justifiably and with no chance of any recrimination. That is a hero to me."

"A boyfriend?"

"No, just a friend who shamed me for my own lack of heroism. If you don't mind I'd rather not go down that road, not just yet. Tell me of yourself, Daniel. I would like to hear your story if you would like to tell it to me."

He sensed then that her request was not a casual one, that it meant something to her other than the superficial curiosity of a stranger.

He told her -there was no reason why not- up to the point he was about to kill himself, and there he stopped. He'd been talking non-stop for nearly twenty minutes and Munyeen had listened without interjecting.

Munyeen waved away the offered cigarette and while Daniel lit his, said, "No memory of your past at all?"

He blew smoke. "None."

“And you never tried to find other relatives or find out about your parents?”

“I didn’t want to. I suppose I felt guilty enough. There is one thing I haven’t mentioned. Just occurred to me. When I met Mel, within a couple of hours I felt as if I’d known her for ages, I felt really comfortable with her.”

“That’s nice and do you feel the same with me?”

“I...”

Munyeen giggled and put a hand over her face. “I’m sorry, I’m teasing you.”

Now Daniel laughed. He laughed long and loud, needing the release. She’d really caught him there.

“Do you read much?” she asked. “You’ve told me about your other interests but not about books.”

He shrugged. “I do read but nothing heavy since college. Science fiction and fantasy.”

“Who in particular?”

“Um, there’s John Claremont. He recently finished a trilogy called The Three Thrones. Very strange. Not surreal but a long way from Tolkein. I don’t suppose you’ve heard of him.”

“I have heard of John Claremont. I believe his books have an intellectual respectability which transcend the bounds of genre. Anything else?”

Daniel twisted his face. He didn’t want to admit this to a super intelligent sophisticated woman. “I still read comics and graphic novels. It’s an art-form best known by its most lurid examples.”

“You don’t need to justify yourself to me. I am not one who makes judgments about people. If you had said you read lesbian S&M I might have raised an eyebrow, made my excuses and departed quickly; but reading comics to relax is hardly a sin. On the other hand, should you believe that superheroes exist...”

Daniel laughed again. “Oh no,” he said, “one thing I am sure of is that they definitely don’t.”

“I feel as if my mind has been put at rest. Now, Daniel, I have enjoyed our conversation but I did come a long way today and I do feel rather tired. Would you mind if we returned to the hotel?”

“Not at all.” He’d begun to feel a little cold and the day had started to turn decidedly chilly.

“I would like to continue our conversation,” Munyeen said, “but I may not be up to it this evening. This is a possibility, not an excuse for avoiding you, Daniel. Of course, I am immodestly assuming that you wish to resume our acquaintance later. I am not the sort of woman that men necessarily find it easy to be with.”

“Then that is their loss, Munyeen,” he said. “If you want to get in touch, my room number is twenty-seven. If I’m not there then I’ll either be in the lounge or the public bar.”

“Do you think it will snow?”

7.

Munyeen.

He'd last seen her hours ago. Only fucking hours and then he'd been shot and re-awoken two months later in hell.

What had happened to her? Was she safe? Had they killed her? Was she here? Had she been with them all along? Had she just kept him sweet until they got to Grasmere?

And would they –the mysterious they who ran this place- even tell him?

Hampton Parva. He'd read the brochure and it told him everything and nothing. It told him nothing more than the letter had done, merely amplifying by providing specific detail and photographs. It even supplied a map of sorts.

If the map was to be believed, the village was surrounded by woods with nothing beyond them, as if Hampton Parva was the world. Contained within the encircling woods was an inner circle of farmland which girded the village and its facilities. He'd skimmed through the brochure then thrown it on the floor in disgust. He'd find his way around when he needed to or was shown. The first stage of his induction would happen later that day.

It didn't matter. He knew what Hampton Parva was and it didn't matter how they glossed over it. Hampton Parva was a prison for people sentenced to life.

It was lunchtime and he had a kitchen well-stocked with food if he wanted to cook or make a sandwich. Or he could go to the pub –there were three- or the chippy. Or...

Hell, he wasn't hungry. He hadn't finished writing his story. He hadn't got to the important part.

Oh Munyeen, where the hell are you?

8.

Daniel sat in his room drinking black coffee and watching tv. He tried not to smoke too much. Munyeen was right about that. He'd been getting up to thirty or forty a day of late and his lungs felt like the inside of an oven that someone had put a turkey in and left on high for two days.

Would she call him?

She was very slender, underweight, not very strong. She could be exhausted and sleep right through the evening and night. If that was what she needed, then fine, though it would mean a long night for him.

He'd never met anyone like her in his life. She was so intelligent and sharply witty, very dry and deadpan. Vulnerable, he thought. She'd been hurt somehow and, he believed, was feeling very vulnerable. He'd relived their long conversation, remembering everything she said, her own curious individual way of phrasing things. She never used one word when ten would do but at the same time said precisely what she meant. She enjoyed using language as a tool and perhaps a weapon. She could be...

He didn't know. He didn't know enough about her to make any kind of judgment other than that she fascinated him and that he wanted to see her again.

He glanced at the bedside clock. Seven fifty-nine. He watched the seconds turn over to eight.

The phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Daniel. How are you feeling?"

"Fine, Munyeen. And you?"

"Very refreshed. I've had three hours sleep followed by a leisurely bath and some black coffee."

"A meal."

"That might be nice, but nothing heavy. With perhaps a decent bottle of wine."

"I believe we are of one accord in that matter, Ms Ohrmuz," he said.

Her laughter echoed in his ear. "The dining room, then. Five minutes."

Wearing a casual suit and tie, he just made it having frantically changed out of his jeans. Munyeen appeared a moment later in cream slacks and a sleeveless loose silk top. She wore pearls around her neck and gold bands on her forearms. Daniel thought she was stunning.

"I made sure we had a table an hour ago," she said.

Daniel, who knew most of the staff by face if not name, noticed that those on duty in the restaurant had checked out the couple and were swapping surprised glances.

Munyeen seemed to see even more as she whispered, "The young lady behind the bar is very upset as if her intentions have just gone for nought."

Daniel looked over. He'd talked to the girl a few times, attractive and pleasant enough, it had never occurred to him that she might be interested. She looked back, forced a smile and turned to a customer.

They ordered quickly. Both chose a seafood salad with a bottle of Hardy's Chardonnay, a nice light wine. He'd suggested it and Munyeen had agreed instantly. They talked inconsequentially, about movies and music, discovering mutual likes and dislikes and areas of disagreement. They laughed

and made eye-contact, finding conversation easy on neutral subjects, without pretense or evasion, neither trying too hard nor filling in spaces of silence.

They finished their food and the wine at the same time. Ice cream and coffee seemed the next natural step.

“Would you like to know why I’m here?” Munyeen asked.

“That is definitely a redundant question,” Daniel replied and thinking, I don’t believe this but I’m falling in love with her. This is insane but wonderful. She’s wonderful.

Munyeen smiled demurely. “You don’t know me, Daniel,” she said. “My life has been less easy than you can imagine.” She took a deep breath and snatched the cigarette he had just begun to offer her. She sucked in the smoke, exhaled and took another deep drag. “Shit,” she said, “I knew this was going to be fucking hard.” The crude language sounded strange coming from her, oddly discordant with her usually refined circumlocutive manner of speech.

“On my thirteenth birthday I was selected for a very special school. One could call it a public school of sorts but far more selective than Eton and considerably less well known. Pupils there were trained by the state for very special functions within government. They all possessed special talents. On graduation they were seconded to a very special and very secret unit. And I should, and would be within my rights, to kill you after I finish telling you this.”

Daniel laughed, puzzled.

“I became director of this unit at a relatively young age. It was never intended that I should ascend to this role –that had been destined for another who rejected his fate- but fall to me it did. I did my best and those who had authority over us told me that they were pleased with my work. While lucrative it was, however, very stressful and I became and remain an alcoholic.”

Daniel’s eyebrows shot up so abruptly that she laughed.

“It’s under control,” she said. “It can be done. But for a time it wasn’t. Because of my exalted and quite unique position I had minders who protected me from the worst problems my behaviour caused though they couldn’t prevent me from doing things of which I am now ashamed. I never hurt anyone, that’s not my in nature, just myself.

“Finally a situation arose with which I could not cope. Then he came back. I don’t know what deal they did with him but he came back. The one who was once my friend but who had become the object of my hate. Because, you see, Daniel, when he originally walked away, others went with him. Including the only person I have ever loved.”

Now he could see the real Munyeen. Someone who was just as haunted as him.

Munyeen continued, “I couldn’t leave and my lover wouldn’t stay.” She waved a hand dismissively. “He’s dead now. His heart wasn’t big enough for his large body. But he had a good life I’ve been told.

“So, my old friend whom I now hated came back and took over from me. He took over superbly, taking control as if born to it. He sorted out the problem I had had so much difficulty with like Alexander cleaving the Gordian knot. He was kind to me. I hadn’t expected anything else. His compassion had always been boundless. I wanted to kill him, to spit on his nobility, his superhuman consideration, his unthinking unselfishness.

“It became too much for me and I needed to get away. No, Daniel, this did not happen yesterday. I went to stay with my family, my parents and then my older brother and his family who live in Chester. It wasn’t enough. I needed to get away from everything I’d known to a place where no one knew me, where I could think and reassess myself and my life.

“And then I met you. Someone else as desolate and bereft as me, someone who has his own dark dangerous secrets. I’m fascinated by you, Daniel. Just as you are by me. Isn’t that the truth?”

“Yes,” he said. “Totally.”

“Then let’s get our coats and go for a walk and you can tell me your true secret.”

She had hypnotised him and he couldn’t disobey her.

It had begun to snow. They walked up a country lane as snow flurries swirled around them creating light in darkness reflected from the beam of his torch. There was no-one around.

“This will do,” Munyeen said. “Now Daniel, tell me your secret.”

“How do you know you’re safe with me?” he asked. “I could be a serial killer.”

“Believe me, Daniel, I know you are not that. Show me what you are.”

“Who are you, Munyeen? Who are you really?”

“Show me,” she hissed. “Show me now.”

He gave her the torch. “Watch me. You aren’t going to believe this.”

“You’ll be surprised at what I am prepared to believe, Daniel.”

He summoned his power and slowly rose into the air until he hovered at a height of six feet.

“So,” she breathed.

“I’m not an alien,” he said.

Munyeen erupted in laughter. “Of course you’re not,” she spluttered. “You’re the same as me. You’re a paranormal and you aren’t unique. Come here, you fool.”

Daniel dropped down and Munyeen ran to him. Unexpectedly, she jumped up and kissed him on the mouth. His arms went around her and then they were kissing passionately, tongues thrusting into each other’s mouths.

When they broke for air, he picked her up, her legs going around his waist as she kissed him again. But that hadn’t been his intention. He went up.

Munyeen screamed as she realised what was happening, not in fear but delight. Daniel climbed vertically, reaching about fifty feet before realising he couldn’t go any higher and slowly started dropping down. Munyeen clung to him.

When they landed, she said, “I knew you were special like me, I just didn’t realise what form it would take. Do you love me?”

“Yes, yes I love you,” he said. “But I think I’m insane.”

“Nobody’s perfect. Everything I told you about my job, Daniel, you just have to insert the word ‘paranormal’ to know it all.”

“Munyeen, people have been hunting me.”

“We’ll sort it out tomorrow.”

“Why tomorrow?”

“Don’t you want to make love to me?”

“More than anything.”

“Then what are we doing standing freezing to death in a fucking snowstorm for?”

In her room they just stood for a moment, eyes looking with wonderment into eyes. Yes, he thought, the world does have mystery and magic.

Slowly they undressed. He removed her coat, letting it drop to the floor. Her gloves followed. Munyeen unbuttoned his shirt and slowly planted gentle kisses across his hairy chest. In turn, he stroked and caressed her long hair.

Her hands went to his belt which she nimbly unfastened, then his fly and she slid a hand inside, touching him. “You are a big boy,” she whispered and laughed.

Daniel gently pulled her hair back and kissed her mouth. Her tongue snaked into his.

Munyeen pulled away from him and removed her blouse. She wasn't wearing a bra and he saw her small pointed breasts for the first time.

“I'm frightened of hurting you,” he said and he ran a finger over her black nipples.

“Believe me, Daniel,” Munyeen said as she pulled his trousers and pants down, “I'm stronger than I look. God, you're big.” She slid down and, clutching his muscular buttocks, kissed then only for a moment lightly sucked at his penis.

He pulled her up and they kissed again, mouth burning mouth with a fierce passionate urgency. His right arm slid under her legs as he picked her up and laid her gently down on the bed. He pulled down her tights and then, more slowly, her panties. His kissed her pubic hair and slid a tongue between her legs, seeking then finding then licking.

Munyeen moaned and stroked his head. “Don't stop,” she said.

He didn't and she moaned some more, thrusting herself against him.

She cried, “Oh god! Oh God! That's... Fuck me, please, fuck me!”

He moved up her body, pausing to kiss and suck her nipples.

“Shit, get inside me you stupid man.”

“Condom.”

“Fuck the condom!”

“That's the point.”

“I don't want jokes, I want... Oh yes, that's just what I want.”

Daniel entered her, his cock sliding easily inside her. She held him, gripped him as he moved on and in her. He kissed her face, her mouth. Her tongue slid into his mouth again. His forced it back.

“Christ, yes,” she moaned, digging her nails into his back. Her legs went around his waist. “Oh, yes.”

“I...” Daniel gasped then thrust harder and faster inside her.

“Ah Jesus fucking Christ!” she squealed.

“I love you,” he said, now thrusting frantically as he finally came bursting inside her.

For over a minute they lay in silence, Daniel on top and still inside her. Munyeen planted tiny kisses on the corners of his mouth.

Eventually she said, “Well, that really was special.”

“Uh huh. Phew.”

Daniel raised himself up, slipping out of her, and rolled over onto his back. Munyeen turned on her side, facing him. She took hold of his softening

penis, bent over and took the tip in her mouth, squeezing the end to lick off and swallow a small blob of semen. She moved again, rolling on top of him.

“You’re worried about not using a condom,” she said.

“Well...”

“I was tested several months ago and was clear of any and all infections and haven’t been with anyone since until you.”

“I haven’t been with anyone since Mel. Apart from you now, I’ve never been with anyone *except* Mel.”

“Was I different?”

“Very.”

“Better.”

“In every way, and don’t tell me you didn’t already know that.”

Munyeen’s head went down to his chest and she sniggered into his hairs.

“How long,” she said brightly, “before we can do it again? Have we got time for a cigarette?”

“Just.”

Ten minutes later she fondled his penis erect and mounted him. Daniel’s hands came up and touched her breasts. Munyeen smiled and began moving on him.

They took a break after that, smoked, chatted, drank wine from a bottle Munyeen had brought with her. Then they made love again and finally fell asleep with her nestled in his arms.

Daniel woke early, just a little after six, to the sound of her gentle breathing. He held her for a while, unable to believe how happy he was. She was very sexually experienced and liked sex a lot, she’d admitted as much to him. He didn’t care how many lovers she’d had as long as she loved him now and he believed her when she said she did. Christ he was so happy.

Not wanting to disturb her, she slid out of bed and quietly made a cup of black coffee for himself. Then he sat in a chair and just watched her in the dim light.

“What time is it?” she asked abruptly, surprising him, speaking before she’d even moved.

“Half six. Coffee?”

“Please. What’s the weather like?”

Daniel hadn’t thought to look. All he could think about was her. He opened the curtains. “Snow, thick thick snow. A lot of it. We could be snowbound.”

“What a shame,” she said, “Oh well, in that case I suppose we’ll just have to spend all day in bed having sex. Is that all right with you?”

“I think I’m up to it”

“How about now?”

“What about the coffee?”

“What would you rather have between your lips, coffee or my clitoris, darling?”

An hour later, Munyeen said, “Breakfast?”

They went down to breakfast. Daniel wanted a fryup but Munyeen insisted that several large bowls of cereal –plenty of carbohydrate- would be much better for what she had in mind later. The staff told them that Grasmere was indeed snowbound and that guests weren’t advised to venture far from the



hotel. Munyeen and Daniel smiled at that. They had little intention of venturing much further than the end of the bed.

By midday, and at least three positions more than he and Mel had ever thought about doing, Munyeen sank back on the bed and said, "I'm sorry but I'm sore."

"You want to stop for a while."

"I've got some lanolin to put on, Daniel. Perhaps by this evening."

"Okay. We've still got some serious talking to do."

"Yes, I suppose we have, Daniel. The things you never told me and that which I have yet to tell you. It might seem perverse, but I would like to attempt a walk. I did come prepared with boots and anorak."

"Okay. Lunch but no alcohol."

"I agree."

It had stopped snowing hours ago and ploughs had got through on the main roads but the snow was still piled high and walking was slow. Hand in hand they followed the main road out of the village and walked until they came to the lake Grasmere itself. They made their way down to the narrow shoreline and lit cigarettes.

"Now, Daniel, the remainder of your story."

He told her, about being reborn by flight, the elation, the testing, and then the discovery and his panicked flight followed by the lonely months of wandering.

"You did well to survive," she said. "But I am not surprised because I could see the determination on your face. That and so much more."

"What is it about me for you, Munyeen?" he asked. "I'm a wreck. I'm scared and I don't understand what's going on. I'm a miserable bastard."

"You really do suffer from low self-esteem," she said. "Which I find extremely curious and strange. You aren't miserable, rather you have a streak of melancholy about you. Actually I find that to be rather attractive in moderation. I stress moderation, as a dominant trait it would be unbearable. What it does do is tone down your natural charm and gives you a depth of character. One trait complements the other, dark enhancing the light. Without it you'd be a charming handsome bore, though one imagines there are worse things to be. You have no ego about your looks either which is also strange, perhaps the effect of your wife. Daniel, when you first saw me in the hotel, if you'd come up to me then and suggested a quick shag I would have been very tempted. I am also glad that you didn't. But believe me, you are so good-looking I couldn't wait to get you into bed. And, for what it's worth, you are very accomplished."

"I just love you and wanted to make you happy."

Munyeen reached up and touched his face with a gloved hand. "You have and you do. You've given me a happiness I had once before and never thought I would have again. Thank you."

Daniel pulled her against him and they clung to each other like limpet to rock though which was which neither could say.

Munyeen said, "You have a strange past, Daniel, much of which is, I suspect, hidden. I'm going to make a phone call now. There's someone I haven't spoken to for years."

She pulled a notepad computer from a pocket and checked out a number which she then tapped into her mobile.

“Ah, Ellen,” she said, “I’m glad to find you at home. This is Munyeen Ohrmuz and I have a few questions. Answer them and I’ll never bother you again.” She briefly described Daniel, without naming him, mentioned flying. “No, his name isn’t Nick and he’s nothing like that. Very well, enjoy your life.” She turned to Daniel. “That was a waste of time. You don’t need to know the details. Someone I thought possibly might have known you but she didn’t. Let’s walk. I think better in motion.”

“You must have been an Einstein these last few hours then.”

She laughed.

Wind blew small waves against the shore as they walked around the small lake. After a while, she said, “Security –it couldn’t be anyone else- must know about you. They must suspect you of being paranormal for some strange reason. How I don’t know if you’ve never demonstrated any such abilities in the past. Except we don’t know your past. You can’t have been at the B... the school, we’d have been contemporaries. Yet you must have been a low possibility. It might have been a formality for them to observe you after your wife left you. They must have had some reason for thinking it would act as a trigger but assigned it a relatively low priority. Hence the one car, no backup, and probably inexperienced agents otherwise you would not have been able to evade them. Perhaps their own overconfidence let them down. They didn’t call for backup when they should and lost you. You were very lucky.”

“And you know an awful lot about spies,” Daniel said.

“Yes, I do,” she said. “That’s my job.”

“You what?”

“I’m paranormal like you,” she said. “My ability is Intuitive.” He heard her capitalise the word but didn’t understand why. “I read body-language. We all do it, consciously and subconsciously, but I possess the ability to a very high degree. It’s almost like the difference in sensitivity between a dog’s nose and ours. I know what people are thinking by the way they move, by the expressions on their faces. I knew you were paranormal within minutes of us talking. Don’t ask me how I knew, as I said, it’s intuitive. I do it, I don’t profess to understand how it works. There is so much I can tell you.”

She stopped abruptly in her tracks, calf deep in snow.

“You can’t run forever,” she said, “and even if you came home with me, they’d know you instantly.”

“You’re saying I’m going to have to give myself up.”

Munyeen held her hands up in supplication. “Not surrender. We can do a deal. It’s the only way if you want us to be together.”

Unspoken was the question: do you want us to be together?

Somewhere out of sight the silence was broken by a fluttering sound of a helicopter. Neither of them paid it any attention.

“Let’s walk,” Daniel said.

Linking arms they continued around the shoreline. In fine weather they could have walked the whole circumference in not much more than an hour. The snow slowed their progress considerably. They walked through a white landscape. Snow covered the trees and the fellsides and mountain tops.

They walked along, trees to their right, the lake on their left. Neither had really spoken for nearly half an hour, muttered half sentences, smoked cigarettes. Their white world was silent. Whatever birds there were sat hidden motionless in nests. Only the breeze sighed in the branches.

Daniel didn't know what choice he had other than to trust Munyeen. He couldn't run forever.

Then all choices were taken from him as the trees came alive. Snow exploded in their faces. Arms gripped him from behind. Men clad in white came from under the trees.

Munyeen shouted at one, "Carson, you shit, this isn't necessary."

The man she spoke to carried a gun. As he raised it, he said, "Muny, don't you know who you've been fucking?"

Then he shot Daniel in the chest.

*"I met Munyeen Ohrmuz in Grasmere. We talked for some time. I told her about myself. We made love. I don't know where she is. I don't know what's happened to her. I love her."*

Daniel stared at the words on the monitor's screen. That's all he could write about Munyeen. He couldn't stand to write any more.

Now he didn't know what to do

For a brief moment he had hope. Now he had been cast down into a living hell.

The phone rang and he picked it up.

"Good afternoon Daniel. My name is Sally Hargreaves and the first part of your induction process will begin when I call in a few minutes time. Why don't you put the kettle on and we'll have a nice cup of tea."

"Fuck you, bitch!" he snapped.

"I've heard worse replies for less justification. Milk, no sugar."

Ten minutes later there was a knock at the door and his life began.

## Part 2

1.

Four people gathered together in a room. They are the secret masters of Hampton Parva. They move among residents as residents and not staff but their loyalties lie elsewhere. The staff of Hampton Parva facilitate but do not control. Real power, real decisions lie in the hands of these four and their loyalty is to the government. They alone can leave of their own free will.

For this reason they will not be identified here. Suffice to say that there are two men and two women. None are young or old. Perhaps one might be considered to be shading very early middle age and another may look as if they are only in their twenties when they are older than that.

They do not decide by vote but by consensus. While they may argue strongly against each other, they share a commonality of purpose and idea. They also play games so what they say may not always be the truth.

So, how to identify them? Well, they won't be, it's as simple as that.

"He's a mediocrity," said A.

"An underachiever," said B.

"He had a good life until his wife left him," said C.

D continued, "A successful career as a teacher, heading for promotion to department head. A competent guitar player and with a strong voice. A wide circle of acquaintances. A range of interests. Charm and good looks."

"He's got rocks in his head," said A. "He's screwed up."

"Though that's hardly his fault," said B more mildly now.

"He should be more," said C.

D said, "If he was more he wouldn't be Daniel Morgan and do we really want that? But don't underestimate him. He managed to make Munyeen Ohrmuz fall in love with him in a matter of hours."

"She'd drop her knickers for any tight arse and big dick from what I've heard," said A.

"Don't be crude," said C.

B said, "I do know she's kicking up all kinds of hell to get him out of here."

"And it's not working," said D. "The trouble is she has no leverage any more."

"She could go public," suggested A.

"She won't do that," said D. "She made her choice years ago when she stayed behind. In the end, she's a coward."

"And I gather the new director is being neutral on the matter," said B. "Now that's a surprise."

"Our old friend has learned diplomacy in his years away," said C.

"Your old friend," said A, "never mine."

"It doesn't matter," said C a touch wearily.

"So," said D, "what about Morgan?"

"He poses no threat to the status quo," said A. "Leave him to fit in any way he wants. It won't make any difference."

"It seems such a waste," said D.

"He has to be here," said B. "For sixteen years he had no paranormal ability. It was completely gone. It was only due to bureaucratic inertia that he

was still under surveillance. Even then, another couple of days and we'd have missed him. But the point is that if his power came back, there are absolutely no guarantees that something else won't come back as well. No-one knows for certain exactly what was done to his mind by that psychopath."

"I still think he should have a friend," said C.

"Any volunteers?" asked B.

"Why not pick a card?" suggested D.

"That reminds me," said A. "I bid two hearts."

"Pass."

"Three hearts," said D.

"Pass."

"Four hearts then."

2.

This is what Daniel Morgan was told:

Yes, this is a prison and very few people ever leave. That's the bottom line. It is also the most comfortable prison in the entire world where you can have just about everything you want except the freedom to leave.

If you want to be a parasite, you can. You won't go hungry. You won't be bored, unless that's in your nature. Your food allowance will be fairly basic but edible –haddock rather than halibut. You keep your own possessions but you won't be able to buy new CD's. Your access to sporting and entertainment facilities is limited. Your alcohol allowance is restricted to five units a week.

If you choose to contribute to the village, you will be paid in Euros. The more skilled or essential your work, the more you will be paid and the more luxuries you can afford. Because the basics are provided free, prices are much higher than outside Hampton Parva. One full price CD is worth an average day's pay.

If you commit anti-social acts you will be placed in solitary confinement. If you become a habitual offender, we will drug you into submission.

You have access to the Internet and can communicate via e-mail and chat rooms. Every message is monitored. Any attempt to communicate your situation or to identify yourself and your access will be withdrawn, permanently. There are no second chances.

Hampton Parva is secure. Defences are automated. Anything larger than a bird is shot down. Anything larger than a badger approaching the perimeter is killed. We would rather you were dead than escaped.

Children are born here. The school has excellent facilities and adheres to the national curriculum. It is hoped that they may leave at the appropriate time though none have yet done so.

Adult education is available. There are a variety of computer based courses as well as more practical courses, usually taught by residents. Residents can also take Open University degrees.

The population is approximately fifteen hundred residents and a number of staff. We do not monitor you in your own home or inside most other buildings. We do have cameras everywhere else. This is no different from most towns these days.

You are free to do as you wish subject to economic and social limitations. There is no curfew, no restrictions on gatherings. The only stimulants available are nicotine and alcohol. Drugs do not enter Hampton Parva. The staff cannot be corrupted or seduced. They are too well paid to be bribed and too frightened to succumb because anyone who attempts to assist a resident to leave will be killed. This is, of course, against the laws of the country but then so is the illegal imprisonment of fifteen hundred of its citizens. When it comes to maintaining the secrecy surrounding the existence of paranormals, the government will do anything it deems necessary.

There will be times when scientists will use you for research into paranormalcy. You will not be harmed by this and will be paid for your time at twice your normal rate.

You have two weeks to acquaint yourself with Hampton Parva. During this time you will be paid at what would be your normal teacher's salary should

you elect to teach in the school. There is no cash as such. Every individual has their own smartcard which they use to pay for goods or services. Everyone is paid on a weekly basis. Each place of work has a point where the card can be slotted to receive its euros. Payment is in advance. Sickness is not debited. Your card will have your first two weeks credit already allocated. If you use it before starting employment you will have to make do.

There are no cars here. There are electric carts which are communal and can be driven by anyone. In practice, and by convention, most people walk almost everywhere and the carts are generally left for the disabled of whom there are many in the general population. Do not offer to help any disabled person, wait for a request for assistance.

Other than the physically disabled, there are also many mentally disabled or ill residents among the general population. As you will discover, you personally are above the norm both physically and mentally for Hampton Parva. Do not make this a cause for resentment.

There are other social conventions. Some you will have to discover for yourself. Some you must know now. Do not volunteer any information about your ability. Do not initiate conversation about the world outside Hampton Parva. The people who live here are not fools and will make allowances for newcomers but their patience is finite and they will ostracise those who offend the group's mores.

You will have other meetings with other members of staff outside your home over the next two weeks. The first is in two days time. Be at Administration Reception at ten a.m. Until then you're on your own.

And you'll be watching me to see what I do, thought Daniel as he sat smoking in the living room. In his lap he held *The Chronicle*, Hampton Parva's weekly newspaper. It was so introspective and narrow focussed as to be almost a parody. The names of people making the news (a broken leg, a swimming trophy, a baby –hold the front page!) meant nothing to him. The list of social activities caught his attention as it included a roots music night at one of the pubs. He put it to the back of his mind for the moment as he pondered other things.

The shock of being here had worn off now and he had a good idea of what he was in for. What he had to decide was how to react to it. He suspected they probably believed he would mope around the house for several days, smoking and drinking too much, not shaving, all the usual things he did after Mel had left him. Well, screw them, he'd been done over once too often. They expected Hampton Parva to make him over in the image they desired, to be one of their complacent sheep. After all, what choice did he have?

Apart from attempting to mould rather than be moulded.

They'd taken everything away from him and he had nothing to lose. A man in that position is frightened of nothing.

He picked up his guitar and strummed a few chords. Then he sat down to practise for tonight.

The evening was chilly and clear threatening a frost and he was unable to suppress a nervous shiver as he walked down the lane, guitar case across his back, small amplifier in his right hand. He had no idea of dress codes so he wore what he'd normally wear at an amateur night –denim jeans and shirt and a

leather jacket. The pub wasn't far away, just down the lane and across the green, perhaps three hundred yards to the oddly named Drunken Octopus – somebody here had a sense of humour.

The pub was two storeys high and had a thatched roof. The downstairs bar seemed to consist of one large room with the circular bar in the centre. Daniel saw about ten people in the room in small groups of two and three. The woman behind the bar took one look at him and said, "You'll want to be upstairs. On your right."

He murmured his thanks and followed her directions. He could already hear singing from upstairs, slide and acoustic guitars, a female voice singing a traditional country song. She carried it well. At the top of the narrow staircase was a door. He pushed it open onto a square room little smaller than the downstairs bar. About fifty people sat at tables grouped in a semi-circle around the stage. The small bar stood to his right.

Daniel put down the amplifier and got out his new smartcard.

The barman said, "If you're singing tonight you get a free pint or glass of wine for every song. Maximum of four even if you sing like Elvis. You can't carry it over."

"Sounds good to me," Daniel said. "When do I take my turn?"

"First-timers go when they want. Nobody'll mind. My guess is you sing Blues."

Daniel nodded.

"Good. Some of these buggers are a bit too much finger in the ear or my ma mahn done done me wrong. Any good?"

"You'll have to judge for yourself. After them okay?"

The barman made a brief gesture then poured Daniel a pint.

The trio sang two more songs, finishing to enthusiastic applause. They were good, Daniel admitted, if you liked that sort of thing. The woman thanked the audience then said, "We've someone new on next and I don't think any of us expected that. Let's make him welcome."

The audience applauded, though whether as a welcome or acknowledging her graciousness he wasn't sure. He made his way to the slightly raised stage, plugged the amplifier in then slid the lead into his guitar. He didn't speak as he approached the microphone. Instead he looked at the audience, recognising he had dressed appropriately. Apart from an unusual number of wheelchairs and walking sticks it could have been any normal pub.

Taking a deep breath, he said, "There was a man who made a deal. I haven't made any deals."

Then he bashed out the riff to Robert Johnson's immortal song 'Crossroads' but playing it at the power driven chord-dominated pace of Cream's electric version. He played using the plectrum slamming it across the strings then he opened his mouth and shouted/sang, "I went down to the crossroads/ fell down on my knees/ I went down to the crossroads, fe-eeelll down on mah knees." He ripped into the lyrics, imagining he was riding the atom-powered motorcycle that a music critic had once compared Cream's version to. He didn't bother with Claptonesque solos but kept the song to its power-chord basics as he drove the song headlong down its narrow repetitive powerful track, maintaining the momentum for three and a half minutes.

For a moment after his abrupt finish there was silence before the room burst into what seemed to him genuinely enthusiastic applause.



“Thank you,” he said. “That’s what you call getting people’s attention. Problem is that afterwards they either want to buy you a drink or throw one in your face.” That got a few laughs. “In case you don’t know, and I don’t know what the grapevine is like here, my name is Daniel Morgan and I play the Blues. This next one is either Catfish or Two Trains but it’s based on the Muddy Waters version and not, you’ll probably be relieved to hear, the Jimi Hendrix one.” Another laugh and he launched into a finger-picked slow blues about lust and betrayal. He used his strong voice to drag out syllables, keeping the pace slow, emphasising deep dark emotion rather than raw power.

Deliberately not overstaying his welcome, Daniel finished with a traditional song ‘Gallows Pole’, following an arrangement taken pretty much intact from a version by the young black bluesman Alvin Youngblood Hart. It was uptempo and rhythmic, a foot-tapper of a song.

Finishing, he said, “There’s more where they came from but not tonight. Thank you.”

The audience clapped and whistled. There were even a few calls of ‘more more’. Daniel smiled and shook his head. He unplugged his amp, finished off his beer, and left the stage for the bar.

“That was worth the maximum,” said the barman, pulling a pint for him.

“Cheers,” said Daniel. “Thanks. I haven’t played for an audience for a while. What’s coming up?”

“Mostly folk and country, maybe a couple of others playing some blues. Frankly, Dan, you’re as good as the best here.”

“It’s just a bit of fun,” Daniel said. “I play for my own pleasure. If others like it that’s good but not the be-all and end. What’s your name?”

“Joe McKenrick, pub manager, epileptic and telekinetic. The latter two don’t mix well.”

“I’ll take your word for it. I know bugger all about this paranormal stuff.”

A woman had got onto the stage and had begun singing a song by the late Sandy Denny.

“Word’s got round that you know Munyeen Ohrmuz and I think that was the wrong thing to say.”

Daniel had intended to keep very tight control of himself but at the mention of Munyeen’s name and his face fell. He said calmly, “Yes. Is that a big deal?”

“You might say that. A lot of us think Munyeen’s very special. She’s a good person.”

“I know that.”

“We do hear things, about our world, whispers, rumours. I’ve heard she loves you.”

What was he doing, Daniel wondered. Goaded him, trying to psychologically torture him, or being genuinely friendly?

Joe the barman said, “If that’s true then it predisposes more than a few people here to like you.”

“I’ve been told I’m a likeable person,” Daniel said.

“So was Nick Shannon.”

“That’s the second time I’ve heard that name today. What’s he to do with me?”

“You look a lot like him,” Joe answered.

“I think you think I am him,” Daniel said.

“I don’t have an opinion. I never knew him. He died twenty years ago. At least that’s the official story. But if a member of staff tells us the sun is shining then we get out our umbrellas. You’re Daniel Morgan. Fine by me. If you’re interested in doing a set by yourself –I’m talking about an hour here– you’d be paid and I’d charge on the door.”

“Maybe in a few weeks. I’m very out of practise.”

“How about joining a band then? There’s a few halfway decent musos here who wouldn’t mind forming one. I play harp.”

“You didn’t strike me as a drummer,” Daniel said and they both laughed. “I wouldn’t rule it out. What lineup have you got in mind?”

“Okay, you seem okay for vocals and lead guitar. I do sing as well. I know a woman who plays a Fender Stratocaster who could double up on bass, and there’s a kid who’s a fairly high grade down’s syndrome who can keep good rhythm on drums. No hurry to make a decision, I’m just suggesting a possibility, you’ve a lot of settling in to do and one hell of a lot to learn.”

Daniel drained the pint, lit a cigarette and blew smoke. His third pint was in front of him before he flicked ash. “Like what?” he asked.

“They’ll hit you with a lot of shit, is my guess. Just remember one thing: they say they tell the truth, that they have no reason to lie, but they don’t and they do.” He turned away to serve several people as there seemed to be an intermission.

While serving a middle aged man in a wheelchair, he turned his head and said, “There’s a lift.”

“Thought so.”

Daniel stayed at the bar, listening to other singers and swapping sporadic remarks about the Blues with Joe the landlord. When he finished his fourth and last free pint, he picked up his guitar and amp and went to his cottage. A frost had set but the four pints in ninety minutes kept him from getting too cold. The cottage was warm and he slid into bed and went straight to sleep.

3.

The morning of his third day dawned, mild, pleasant, dry, bland and innocuous. For the first time he wondered just where in England Hampton Parva might be. Not being an expert in plant life, there would be no point in him wandering the woods looking for any species indigenous to a particular area. Besides, he strongly suspected he was in the south of England somewhere, probably Sussex or Hampshire. You didn't get thatched cottages north of Watford. Not that it mattered anyway. For all he knew, he could be living in a drug-induced dream world, or in an underground complex with a simulated sky.

He set off an hour early giving himself ample time to arrive at the admin buildings. Turning left at the village square, he made his way down to the lakeside. The village itself clustered round the squarish lake's southern and western edges. Heading around on the wide tarmac path in a northerly direction, he came first to the leisure centre. He'd been there yesterday for a swimming session and met a pleasant if rather strange boy called Toby. Bypassing the centre, he went away from the lake and came to the administration block. There was a more direct route on the main road but he had wanted time to think.

Daniel had a feeling that today they were going to start telling him things he wouldn't like. Not that that was unusual these days. But he was going to play them at their own game. They'd want him to react to see how he was going to jump, to discover which stimuli would work best.

The admin block, unlike the village, was a modern, single storied affair that still managed to fit into the environment, using curves, plants and bricks in subtle ways.

The double glass doors slid open as he approached. The woman behind the semi-circular reception desk looked up, smiled and said, "Mr Morgan, if you go through the door on your left please and then the second on the right along the corridor, Tim is waiting for you."

Daniel nodded and followed directions. Not being instructed to knock, he didn't and went straight in. Tim was sitting on a padded chair staring out the window, sucking on the arm of a pair of spectacles. He swivelled round, stood and held out a hand. "Pleased to meet you, I'm Tim Groves."

Daniel took it firmly but briefly. The room was pleasant, slightly curved with a floor to ceiling window looking out onto a flower border. Trees lined a path. Inside the room and like his home, technology was built into the frame and fabric of the office. How post-modern, he thought. A coffee maker stood on a table next to a box of chocolate biscuits. How cliched, he thought.

Not waiting for an invitation, Daniel sat down in the armchair in front of the desk.

"Coffee? Biscuit?" Tim asked. "You can smoke if you want."

"Coffee's fine for the moment... is that Doctor or Colonel Groves?"

Groves, a bespectacled man in his thirties with fine retreating sandy hair and an intellectual mien, laughed at that. He said, "Sometimes I'm not sure either, Daniel. In this place the roles of the staff seem many and varied. It is doctor, but I hardly ever think of that. Tim will do."

Daniel took the coffee.

"How are you feeling?" Tim asked.

Daniel shrugged. "As well as can be imagined," came the noncommittal answer.

“I know you’ve undergone considerable stress during the last few months that I’m almost surprised you aren’t catatonic. I wish I could say that the worst is over but it isn’t. You’re going to learn a number of things this morning which will shock you greatly. It’s my decision that I tell you them now because I don’t believe holding back would do you any favours. It’s important you understand the realities of Hampton Parva as quickly as possible and the reality of your position.”

“I’m a paranormal in prison,” Daniel said.

“Not quite true. This isn’t a prison, it’s a refuge. There are fifteen hundred people here. If they all decided to march to freedom, do you think we could stop them?”

Daniel decided to be brutally honest with his answer. “Well, actually, yes,” he said. “You could keep shooting them until the only ones that were left preferred not to die. I can’t imagine it would take many.”

“I understand your cynicism but it’s misplaced. They stay because they prefer it here to living on the outside. Here they live just as productive purposeful lives as they would outside but without the fear.”

Daniel said, “If they didn’t they’d go mad. They’re adapting to their situation in order to stay sane. That’s what you expect me to do as well. It’s the only rational response to an otherwise intolerable situation.”

“I understand where you’re coming from,” Tim said, “and from your point of view at the moment, it’s a valid interpretation. But it isn’t the only one. Why do you think you are here?”

“I’ve been wondering that myself. I’ve been told that sane healthy adult paranormals work for the government. Why haven’t I been given that choice? I am sane and I am healthy. Perhaps a mild personality disorder but otherwise I’m perfectly functional and rational.”

“A very good question, Daniel. If you are sane and healthy, why indeed have you not been given that choice? Well now I’m going to show you exactly. Have you heard of Nick Shannon?”

Daniel lit a cigarette, unease creeping over him like clammy hands on the back of his neck. He said, “I’m aware that I bear a resemblance to him, whoever he is, and that more than one person thinks I am him. I’ve also been told he died twenty years ago.”

Tim nodded, “Yes, all true, up to a point, but only up to a point.” He got up and turned the nineteen inch monitor round to face Daniel. Holding a cordless mouse in his right hand, he clicked a button. “Some of what you’re about to see was copied from video tapes recorded twenty to fifteen years ago, edited, and transferred onto DVD. I’m showing you edited extracts which are solely relevant to your situation. The full thing concerns the dangers of the abuse of paranormal abilities. It’s an educational aid.”

An image of a teenage boy appeared on the screen. He stood in front of a large old long red brick building that might have been a public school. The resemblance was striking, he could indeed have been a young Daniel Morgan.

“Hi there,” said the boy. “My name is Nick Shannon and I’m what you could call the head boy of-“ he paused then said, “-the Britannia School for the Gifted. It’s where the government educates and indoctrinates us teenage paranormals. Hey, don’t be shocked, I don’t mind saying it. In fact I’m having the time of my life. I just love it here. Come and let me show you round. Don’t worry, you must have top rated security clearance to be seeing this.”

The scene cut to a variety of shots of the school –a well equipped bedroom/study, students studying in groups, eating in a refectory, chatting in a common room, playing soccer and netball (mixed teams), and a final shot of a girl swimming backstroke in a pool.

The scene cut to a close-up of Nick Shannon again. “Did you check out the blonde with big boobs in the pool? That’s Trish, she’s only fourteen but we’ve been doing it for the last three months and she loves it. The staff know and don’t care. If she got pregnant they’d take care of it. As long as we’re happy that’s all that matters. Actually she’s getting a bit clingy and I think it’s time to move. There’s someone else I’ve got my eye on. He’s only thirteen.” Nick burst out laughing. “Just kidding! It’s a she and she’s fifteen. This isn’t Eton you know, nothing queer here. Well, maybe there is but that’s not my scene.”

The screen went blank for a moment.

Tim said, “The next scene was filmed six months later. Prepare yourself.”

Nick Shannon lay naked on a bed, curled into a foetal ball, screaming and crying like a baby. The camera stayed focused on him for a very long two minutes before cutting to him being spoon fed.

“His mind was stripped down to what you saw,” Tim said. “All his personality was erased as if it had never been and by another student. The school where this happened was full of hidden cameras but this occurred out of their sight. We still don’t know what exactly was done, other than it took over half an hour to accomplish, and the person who did it refused to tell the staff.”

“What happened to him?” Daniel asked. “The one who did it?”

“A couple of years later the vicious little sod met someone who was bigger and stronger than him and he’s been here ever since. I’ll tell you about Alex later, if you’re still interested. What happens next is that they tried to recover Nick’s personality. Watch.”

After a shot establishing that Nick Shannon was now within the confines of Hampton Parva hospital, the scene cut to him in shorts playing outside on the grass with a puppy.

A voice said, “Hello there.”

“Hello, doctoroctor,” giggled Nick.

“What’s your name?”

“Can’t remember.”

“Yes you can. Go on, say it.”

“Won’t.”

“I’ve got some chocolate for you if you do. Go on, say it, say ‘Nick Shannon’.”

Nick screamed in terror and projectile vomited, splattering the camera lens in a moment that blended gross comedy with utter pathos. Daniel didn’t know whether to laugh or shed a tear for the boy.

Tim clicked off the image. “Any attempt to get him to say his name resulted in what you’ve just seen. But he did age mentally and quite rapidly. After a year he was the equivalent of nine years old and, after a little encouragement, had the knowledge of a bright nine year old. Here.”

He was in a school room writing in a book and looked up at the approaching camera. “What are you filming me for?” He sounded annoyed by the intrusion.

“We like to have a permanent record so we can show you how well you did when you grow up,” explained the voice. Another figure stood out of focus behind him.

“Just for the record, tell us your name and your girlfriend’s name.”

The boy-man sighed and said, “My name is Danny Morgan and that’s not my girlfriend that’s—” and the camera brought her into focus.

“-Mel,” said Daniel and Danny simultaneously.

But Daniel was the one to erupt.

“You fucking bastard!” he screamed as he lunged for Tim, arms outstretched. His power coming on him unconsciously, his feet left the ground as he propelled himself at the other man.

Anticipated and rehearsed, two security officers charged in even before Daniel had started to move, grabbing his arms a microsecond before his fingers reached Tim’s throat, holding him firmly but without hurting him.

“My life, my whole life has been a fucking lie.” Anguish rode in his voice. “You’ve left me nothing now. Sodding fucking nothing.”

“Not quite, a lot more than nothing” said Tim. “Now you can either be sedated and taken home or have a cigarette and a whiskey and listen to the rest of it. I think, I hope, you’re ready for it now.”

“Yeah, yeah, sure,” Daniel said, all good intentions of self-control gone. The adrenaline surge dissipated leaving him drained of energy.

“You aren’t going to try and hit me, are you?”

Daniel shook his head. “What would be the point? It wouldn’t do either of us any good.”

“That’s a very rational answer. Thank you.” Tim –Dr. Groves- gestured and the security men lowered him gently into the chair, one of them patting his shoulder.

Daniel fumbled for a cigarette and had to have Groves light it for him his hands were shaking so much. He put the cigarette down, swallowed a large whiskey clutching the glass with two hands, then sucking again on the cigarette. He’d started on his second before he could begin to listen to the rest of the story.

“I’m Nick Shannon.”

“Only genetically,” said Groves. “To all intents and purposes, Nick Shannon is dead. You are a new person living in his body. You weren’t created, Daniel. You are the personality who evolved rapidly to take Nick’s place. You grew up here and it took you four years to develop from a baby to an eighteen year old –at least that’s what age we decided. You’re actually two years older than you think.

“And you grew up without any paranormal powers at all. There are tests, brain scans, and you were completely negative. Nick Shannon was paranormal, Daniel Morgan wasn’t. So it seemed only fair that you be given a life. There was no reason for you to stay here.

“Drugs erased your memory of your time here. Mel volunteered to stay with you in the outside world because she had fallen in love with you. That part is, at least, true. She didn’t stay with you to spy on you. While her emotional motivations might be psychologically suspect, she did love you and wanted to care for you.”

“Is that so?” Daniel asked warily.

“Oh yes. Unfortunately we can’t engineer happy endings. After you both finished college and married, she went to work for Security helping track down paranormals in the northern region. And eventually she fell in love with a colleague and left you. Shit happens, Daniel. Not a very clinical description, I admit, but I can’t think of a better one.

“You’d had your chance and you were on your own. The government had cut you loose. Another few days and you wouldn’t have even been under light surveillance.

“The problem is that the powers that be, having seen your paranormal ability resurface, can’t take the chance that your personality won’t change as well.”

“You mean I’ll become Nick Shannon.”

Grove shook his head. “No-one can say anything for certain when it involves the mind, especially when we don’t know if Alex planted any mental time-bombs inside your head, though I think it unlikely. I personally do not believe that Nick Shannon will come back but I don’t know for certain and no-one can. Another possibility is that you have a personality breakdown. It’s what you could **possibly** do which is the reason why you are here. If we could say for certain that you would remain as you are now –which I believe you will– there would be no reason for you to stay here, not permanently. But, I repeat, we can never know. When it comes to the mind, there are no certainties.

“For your own sanity, you must assume that you are here permanently. And equally, never doubt that you **are** Daniel Morgan. You are a better person than Nick Shannon ever was. He was deeply self-centred and manipulative. Charming by all accounts, ingratiating, a high libido. He’d even, before he was discovered, attempted some experimentation with his younger sister. His parents –who are both dead now, in a car crash ironically– were glad to see the back of him. His sister also believes him to be dead as well.

“You aren’t self centred, at least no more than most of us. You have a pleasant way with people because you like people, not for what you can get out of them. You have a private, usually hidden, morose streak that sometimes shades into depression. Unlike Shannon, and for no obvious reason, you suffer from low self-esteem. Nevertheless, you fit into the category that most people would describe as ‘a good person’.

Tim finished with, “So now you know it all.”

Daniel asked, “How’s Munyeen?”

“She’s physically well and living in London. I can’t tell you more than that. I’m sorry.”

“One last question before I go and get pissed. What happened to me during the two months between being shot and waking up in the cottage?”

“There’s no reason why you shouldn’t know. You were in the hospital here. Most of the time you were deeply sedated. When you weren’t, you were given a rohypnol-type of drug to bring you to consciousness but make you forget what then happened. The decision to place you in Hampton Parva was not made lightly but after great discussion at the highest levels and with the greatest regret. No-one wants you here but the great secret must be kept and it’s simply impossible to predict what changes might happen to your personality. I really am sorry. I’d like to offer you hope that you might one day leave here but that wouldn’t be fair.

“If you do go on a bender, please don’t hurt anyone. One way or another, they’re all in the same position as you.”

“Yeah, of course.”

Shoulders slumped, Daniel Morgan left the building and walked slowly down the main road to the village.

Halfway there, a youth in a wheelchair approached.

“Dan my man, how’s it going?” shouted the broad shouldered blonde boy. He held up a hand palm face outwards.

Daniel slapped it, turned his palm upwards for a slap, gripped and twisted fingers. “Pretty good, Toby, considering.”

“Considering what, Dan?”

“My life’s a lie, I’m not who I thought I was, I’ve aged two years in about ten seconds, and my wife was a spy.”

“Sounds good, Dan. Story like that will be worth a few beers. Let me get you the first.”

“Are you old enough?”

“You haven’t heard my story yet, Dan. I’m twenty.”

He looked five years younger, not a hair on his chin, not a line under either eye. From the waist up he was an Adonis. From the waist down...

Daniel remembered meeting him at the pool the previous day.

The smartcard got him through the doors. There was only one large changing room. Cubicles were wide with low seats, arm rests, and no doors. The whole place was designed for disabled access with the abled expected to fit in. Seems reasonable, Daniel had thought.

The pool was large, not Olympic size but big enough with a smaller offshoot, like a club foot, for beginners and young children. Just after ten in the morning, a dozen people were swimming up and down.

“This place discriminates against the disabled,” said a boy sitting in wheelchair by the poolside.

“How do you work that one out?” Daniel asked. The kid was parked by the ramp which would allow him to slide into the water.

“They don’t have a hoist that will get you to the top of the diving board,” Toby said and introduced himself.

“Why would you want to get up there in the first place?”

“I’m disabled,” Toby said, “not handicapped. Carry me up there and I’ll show you.”

Daniel looked at the boy, wrongly guessing his age and overestimating his weight but not by much. He had the shoulders of a weight lifter and correspondingly massive arms. While no ninety pound weakling himself, no way could he carry Toby up there.

“Sorry, kid,” he said.

“Looks like I’ll have to do it myself then,” said Toby. “Bugger.”

He put his hands on the wheels and pushed himself along the wide path around the pool until he came to the back of the diving board. Curious and concerned, Daniel followed. To his amazement, Toby reached up to a metal strut and hauled himself up the back, hand over hand, muscles on his bare shoulders rippling with the effort.



Even more startling was the fact that Toby was naked but for a cup over his genitals. He didn't have any legs as such. He did have two upper thighs but they fused at the single knee and ended in a flipper like foot. Daniel felt faintly queasy looking at him and then guilty over his own unease.

Toby paused in his ascent to glance back down at Daniel. "Two things," he said. "They call me Toby the Fish and, yes, crapping can be bloody messy especially when I have the runs."

When he reached the top, he nimbly swung his leg over and onto the board. There he shuffled along until he was sitting on the edge a good ten metres above his head. Toby pushed himself off and managed one somersault before he cleanly hit the water.

Then Toby provided Daniel with an even greater surprise. Daniel watched him swing the entire length of the fifty metre pool under the surface, walking quickly along the pool side to keep up with him. Watching him, he saw something unusual. Uncertain at first, he realised that he wasn't imagining it. Toby was swimming with a bubble of air plastered over his face so that he could breathe under water.

"It's a form of telekinesis," Toby explained as clung to the side looking up at him. "I can mentally attract oxygen atoms. No other kind, just oxygen. If I'm not careful I can get high as a kite. You swimming, man? I'll race you."

When Daniel beat him over the first length, Toby was a little annoyed.

"Not many can do that," he said. "I'm Toby the fish and I swim like one."

Daniel didn't say anything. Toby didn't swim like a fish. His lower limb was effectively useless. Toby's speed all came from his powerful arms and shoulders. Had the lower half of his body matched his upper he could well have kicked the crap out of most WWF wrestlers.

"Okay," Toby said, "I suppose I need a bit competition. Want to swim with me, not race?"

"Okay," Daniel said, liking the kid.

"There's a big thing here about telling your story," Daniel said as they sat in a corner of the pub, both just about having come to the end of their first pint.

Toby said, "Yes. It's telling the truth about yourself. Most of us have never been able to do that before we came here. We were frightened of being found out for what we were. A lot of people, once the government took them in, were pretty much abandoned by their parents. They were frightened of us. So it's become a kind of ... a .. what's the word?"

"Ritual," shouted over Joe the landlord from behind the bar.

"Yeah, right, ritual. We don't tell the group, usually only one person at a time, maybe two at most, and they never repeat it. Telling and receiving are signs of trust. Also a really good story well told is worth buying a drink for. You could probably drink for free for a year as long as you weren't shitting me and you told it well."

"I don't know," Daniel said. "I don't know if I want to repeat it, not right now. I've had quite a shock."

"Write it down. Polish it."

"It's something new," said Joe loudly, listening in to their conversation.

"Why don't you join us?" suggested Daniel.

"Thought you'd never ask. You buying?"

Daniel flicked his smartcard over.

“How about lunch? You’ll need something on your stomach if you’re planning on a long session. I’d recommend a large plate of shepherd’s pie. Goes down easy and fills you up. All ingredients grown and reared locally and organically. Can’t say the same of the curry though we’re working on it. It’s about twenty minutes to the start of the lunch time rush, so I’d get it now.”

They had the shepherd’s pie.

Daniel lit a cigarette ignoring Toby’s blatantly disapproving screwed up face. “I think I might be the unluckiest person alive,” he said.

“Right,” said Toby. “Totally tragic. Must be awful to be six foot two, good looking, muscles in all the right places, that work, brains, the ability to play guitar and sing reasonably well so I’ve been told.”

“Well apart from that,” Daniel said and laughed.

Toby said seriously, “Dan, by our standards, you’re fucking Superman. You’ve even got a serious talent. You’ve actually got a power, man, not just a party trick. You think you’ve got problems? My girlfriend lives in a basket and can’t even talk. Don’t tell me, or anyone else here, about bad luck or they’ll chin you, man. Tell us your story but if you’re going to wallow in self-pity, then fuck you. We’ve all been there, we don’t need more of it.”

“I’d listen to him,” said Joe. “He’s normally an airhead and it takes a lot to get him to be serious.”

Daniel remembered a story by H.G. Wells with a line that went: In the country of the blind, the one eyed man is king. He also remembered that in the story, the blind brought the sighted man down.

“There was a man,” he said, “who had it all, lost it, found something else and a new meaning in his life, lost that, and went to hell before finding another reason to live, and lost it again but he’s going to get it back. It’s a story of love and loss, of discovery and adventure, of finding love, and of leaving the security services with egg all over their faces.”

“Now that sounds like a good story,” said Joe.

10.

Two weeks later.

“Sir, what does ‘freedom’ mean?” asked the twelve year old girl.

The question was strange for several reasons. Firstly, teachers and pupils were all on first name terms no matter what their age difference. Secondly, this was supposed to be a history lesson about the Norman Invasion. And thirdly the question itself was so multi-levelled that Daniel had no idea how to answer it.

“Have you suddenly forgotten my name, Tonya?”

“No, sir,” she said and smiled sweetly.

That settled it. She was winding him up.

“Rather than answer it for you, why don’t you and the rest of the group take that as your history homework for the week. Minimum two hundred and fifty words. Everybody happy?”

The rest of the class, a mixed –in every sense of the word- group of sixteen eleven to thirteen year olds all turned to glare at Tonya.

“Whoops,” she said, grinning. “Do I get a head start at the end of the lesson, Daniel?”

“I don’t see why you should, Tonya, but-“ he glanced at his watch, “ – you might like to start moving towards the door.”

The bell rang then and Tonya legged it, arms clutching crutches, stretching forward, swinging her stunted legs after her arms. It was ungainly but quite efficient and she moved quickly. The other kids didn’t chase her, though one bounced a ball of crumpled paper off her head. The paper ball had shot from the full waste bin like a cannonball.

“See you all tomorrow,” he said. “And I wasn’t joking about the essay.”

He leaned against the desk as he watched them go. Most walked unaided though two were in wheelchairs and a third, not the now long-gone Tonya, used crutches. They were a nice bunch of children, friendly and keen on learning, even the slower ones in the mixed ability group. Mixed ability, he thought, also mixed sex, mixed races and religions, mixed paranormal and normal. And they mixed better than any group of children he’d ever taught. Sure there was the class clown, the class flirt, the class smartypants, and the class swot. But they shared a certain attitude, a way of seeing things that he’d never encountered before. He assumed, rightly as it turned out, that it was due to living here in the strange environment of Hampton Parva.

Since the shocking revelations of his own story, he’d made the effort to settle down and get to know the place and the people. He hadn’t pushed it, forcing himself on anyone, just set about living. He walked around the village, discovering some streets empty of inhabitants, the houses sealed. He’d begun to explore the woods when he went on reflective walks. He’d gone canoeing on the lake. He swam regularly and began using the gym, using the weights. His muscles had slackened off during his two comatose months. Everywhere he went he would meet people, speak politely to them but not push his company on them, a polite greeting, a brief introduction, and then be on his way. Most evenings he would call in the pub, late, usually after nine, for a couple of pints and to talk. He called in regularly at the corner shop where he apologised to Trish for anything that Nick Shannon had done to her and he realised that she’d never outgrown the crush, the adolescent love, she had for him, and that her

marriage was a compromise, and he pitied her. He called in at the school where he met staff and pupils and discussed how he would fit in and what he would do. He liked it even before he started. The place was spacious, well equipped, clean and airy. The atmosphere was informal but keen.

After a week he understood. Hampton Parva was a dream, a shared dream of quiet lives lived in comfort and security free of worries and freedom and those who lived there wanted nothing that would disturb their dream of paradise.

It would be so easy, he thought.

Ten days in and he received a jarring phone call. It was early evening and he'd only just finished his dinner of pan-fried salmon steak with boiled potatoes, peas and glazed carrots, and was sipping a cup of lapsang souchon tea. Curious, as phone calls were infrequent, he picked it up, said, "Yes."

"Daniel, oh God, Daniel."

"Munyeen!"

"I don't have long," she said. "Tell me one thing. Do you hate me?"

"I love you, Munyeen," he gasped. "I never stop thinking of you. Where are you? What's happened?"

"I can't... I... There is too much to explain. I'm sorry. Tell me again, please tell me again."

"I love you, I..."

The phone went dead.

Daniel picked his jacket up from the staff room, patted a pocket for cigarettes, found them, put the jacket on, picked up his briefcase and made his way to the main entrance –as with every public building- a pair of electronically controlled glass doors. He lit up just before they slid open and stepped outside into the cool late afternoon air. He'd cut down drastically on the cigarettes. His first of the day was now, during the week at least, lunchtime. His second, now he had started work, when he finished. After that maybe five to ten more depending on the circumstances.

He was about to set off down the path through the village when a security man approached him.

"Mr Morgan, there's been a change of plan. A bit sudden and we apologise, but you've been moved."

"Moved? You mean out of my house?"

"Yes, exactly that."

"But why? I'd just got settled in."

"I couldn't say."

"Can't or won't?" Daniel asked, hostility beginning to surface. What the hell were they up to now? Were they starting to play mind-games?

"I'm to show you to your new home. Hopefully this will be permanent. It's not so far."

Daniel shrugged. There was no arguing. Whatever they said, this place was a prison and any freedoms he had were an illusion to be dispelled at their commands.

The street they went to was down nearer the lake.

Daniel stared when they stopped. "What do I need an upstairs for?" he asked looking up at two large windows.

"I couldn't say. Everything you have has been moved."

He didn't give Daniel the keys to the front door. On the inside there may be a bolt but in Hampton Parva there were no locks.

Somewhat irritated Daniel opened the door and found himself in a short hall. To his right were stairs, ahead a door to the kitchen and to his left the living room.

He entered the living room. Someone was sitting in a chair, hands folded neatly in her lap. She looked up.

He said, "Munyeen? Oh my God, Munyeen!"

"Daniel. Daniel, there has been a change in circumstances."

Then she was in his arms, kissing him, him kissing her.

## 11. MUNYEEEN'S STORY.

It was a whim on Munyeeen's part, nothing more. She wanted to do something out of character, to act on impulse rather than as a result of meticulous consideration. Pouring over her brother's road atlas of Great Britain, she found her eyes drawn to the Lake District and a line of that, she considered, mawkish Wordsworth poem came to mind. He lived in, or near, Grasmere, she remembered. She would go and visit his cottage, assuming it was open in February. Visiting the home of a dead poet she disliked, what a perverse thing to do. How amusing. How out of character.

Five minutes on the internet found her a suitable hotel and within another five had booked a room for a week. Little more than the same amount of time produced a route for her brother, who had offered her a lift, to follow. Munyeeen had always been a great and meticulous planner. Her brother smiled, said, "M6, turn left when the sign says Kendal. Follow the signs to Grasmere. Sometimes you don't need a map, Muny."

"One always needs a map, brother dear," she replied. A pity, she mused, that we were not supplied with detailed maps of life.

The decision made, the planning completed, the packing performed, they set off for Grasmere arriving in less than two hours and only three after first considering the idea. How impulsive! Her brother brought her bags in then left immediately as the weather was worsening and he didn't want to get stuck.

As she bent over the desk to sign the register, Munyeeen felt something, perhaps caught something subliminal out of the corner of an eye, either that or there was a disturbance in the Force. Completing her signature, she stood upright and turned slightly to find a man staring at her.

In the five seconds before he turned away in embarrassment at being caught in such a gauche display, Munyeeen registered a number of things. He was tall, well built, dark, in a European rather than African or Asian way, and handsome. He stared out of curiosity, wondering about her, and also with a degree, only as yet a hint, of finding her sexually attractive. Not the same as being considered beautiful, which Munyeeen knew she was not, or pretty, for she was not that either. But striking, her angular features and Eurasian skin held, for some men at least, a certain allure and this man was one of them. Good, for she was certainly attracted to him. He was just her type.

Now she registered the next layer. He was haunted, he had secrets which made him a driven and, possibly, scared man. Even better. For her this made him completely irresistible. She wanted to walk over to him and say, "Hello, can I have your baby?" Instead, she smiled demurely and turned away.

There, that would get him really wondering. She had a feeling that after she'd unpacked he wouldn't be far away. Eating lunch in the bar possibly. That wasn't without its own attraction for her, irrespective of tall dark handsome men with secrets. Not impossible that he might be a criminal or a psychopath but she would find that out easily and safely within a few minutes of conversation and if he proved a threat then she would, reluctantly, make a phone call and have him dealt with.

Before unpacking, she turned to the porter and said, "In the lobby, I saw someone, someone I possibly might know, I'm not sure. Tall, dark, thirties, male, good looking I suppose. Would you know if he's a resident here?"

"I believe so, madam," the porter said politely.

Without enquiring further, Munyeen slipped him a note. That should ensure good service. She unpacked quickly but didn't change from her warm clothing; she might decide to go out later. For the moment, food took priority.

The bar was pleasant and old fashioned, genuinely so she assumed, with a roaring log fire in one corner and hiding in an alcove her mysterious starrer. She ordered a pint of Jennings and received a raised eyebrow from the barmaid as well as the sandwich. I may look petite, Munyeen thought, but I have large appetites.

Mystery man didn't notice her as she sat down opposite being too busy with a paper. Well, he'd see her soon enough and she got down to the serious business of eating and drinking.

It wasn't long before he realised who was sitting opposite and had begun to stare covertly in her direction. Munyeen found this amusing. He was wondering why she was here, a youngish Asian woman apparently on her own in the small Lakeland village of Grasmere. Dear me, but he is so gorgeous, she thought and wondered what he'd be like in bed. She hadn't had sex for nearly a year and hadn't wanted to have sex. Now the old appetite was stirring.

He had manners, she could tell that, which was a pity as she suspected he'd be too polite and probably politically correct to intrude. Which meant that she would have to do it. She finished off her sandwich, went to the bar, got two pints and made her move.

Christ, he was lonely she quickly realised. He also wasn't mentally ill, pretty disturbed about something, but not a, to use a technical phrase, loony. In fact he was enchanting and fascinating and, most oddly, quite shy. He was in desperate need of someone to trust and quite fascinated in turn by her. They went for a walk and talked a lot more. Lots of hints from both of them but nothing explicit. And the more they talked the more Munyeen realised that they were both totally absorbed in each other. Munyeen also felt so horny that she could have fucked him on the cold church bench in the open air. She also realised that he was a rogue paranormal. She could fill in some of the missing gaps in his story. He'd been seen using his power and some group were after him. Most likely it was Security but it could also a foreign cadre.

What an interesting day this was proving to be.

Rather than push matters too much and to give herself some breathing space, she feigned a weariness she didn't feel and suggested they might wish to return to the hotel. He was so nice, like a puppy, he agreed immediately. Back in her room, Munyeen masturbated for the first time in months as she imagined what it would be like being fucked by him.

She couldn't believe this was happening. She hadn't felt like this since... It wasn't just the physical attraction. He wasn't just tall dark and handsome, he was tall, dark, and handsome, and melancholy with a gentle humour.

Since Jim. Since her first and only real love half her life away.

Dinner was wonderful, being with him was wonderful, she hoped sex – and that definitely was going to happen if she was reading him correctly – wouldn't be disappointing. But first she needed to know his real secret. He had to trust her with that.

And there in the lane in the dark and the snow, he showed her and, impressed, she laughed.

And the sex was even better than she'd hoped. In love, each wanted to please the other, and they did. All of it was wonderful but best with her arms around him as his penis penetrated her, thrusting deep inside her, fucking her fucking her fucking her, loving her.

It was madness. It was joy. It was the great mystery that happens so rarely. For once Munyeen delighted in her paranormal talent for it had allowed her to see Daniel for what he was and to know that she could trust him absolutely, that he would never betray her.

In the morning, with Grasmere cut off, they had no other option but to spend it in bed. How awful, how delightful, how, eventually, quite sore.

In the afternoon they went for a walk and she began to consider how best to deal with the situation. Daniel had to be brought in and under her protection. But there were strange circumstances involving his background that she didn't understand. She made a call to someone outside the magic circle but it was a waste of time.

They walked along by the cold lake shore and then the trees came alive as four Security agents clad in white erupted around them.

Daniel had no chance whatsoever. Two of them grabbed him, wrenching arms behind his back, another put a pistol against his temple.

Munyeen recognised their leader immediately and had time to scream, "Carson, you shit, this isn't necessary!"

"Munyeen," he said, "don't you know who you've been fucking?" and he shot Daniel in the chest.

Munyeen went berserk and somehow managed to fling off a glove and rake nails down the side of Carson's face. "You fuck!" she screamed, "you fucking fuck shit bastard. I should have ripped your cock off that time."

"I didn't enjoy it very much either, Munyeen," Carson said casually as he wiped blood off his face. "I thought we'd agreed never to mention it. And do that again and I'll break every one of your fingers. What the hell has gotten into you? You don't usually get worked up about your sleeping partners."

"Fuck yourself, Carson. His dick's twice as long as yours."

"I know. I have pictures."

"He can keep it up a hell of a lot longer as well."

"Well," Carson glanced over to his men strapping an unconscious Daniel onto a stretcher, "he's not going to be keeping anything up for a while. The bastard's led us a right merry dance these last few months. You've really no idea, have you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, you motherfucking prick."

"You either talk like some unbearable intellectual savant or like someone from the gutter."

"You can't understand the first and the second reminds you of your family," she sneered.

Carson blew on his fingers as if they'd been burned. "Good one, Munyeen."

"Why don't you go suck a diseased cock. I'm sure any of your three goons would oblige."

"You are going to have to be debriefed and interrogated about this, you know."

"Why, Carson? Sure he's paranormal with a strong talent. So what? What's special about Daniel Morgan?"

"Because," he replied, "he was christened Nick Shannon."



“You’re lying, you motherfucker.” And knew he wasn’t.

“Poor Muny. You’re actually in love with him. Daniel Morgan the ghost of Nick Shannon.” Then he laughed and walked away from her.

Two days later she sat in a room with a man she hated. A man who was her superior in every way but for, perhaps, intellectual rigour. Physically, well that could be taken for granted. Shorter, more slender than Daniel, not in the least as handsome, but still a fit and strong man. She hated him because he was her moral superior. He had courage she lacked. He made the world accept him on his terms. He would only have taken this job, her job, on his terms. He would compromise of course, but only from strength, after consideration not through pressure. He was also the most dangerous paranormal on earth and probably the most sane. Sometimes she thought he might be the only truly sane paranormal. His sanity and his absolute sense of morality had kept him alive and free, though she wouldn’t have been surprised if he had a few safeguards up his sleeve to make sure he stayed that way.

How could she not hate him when his very existence held up a mirror to her weakness? He stayed true to himself while she became exactly what her masters wanted of her. And it cost Munyeen her self respect. She had always been inclined to drink and as the years wore on and the pressures increased and some friends died she began to drink more and the drink affected her libido so, when not at work, she became lost in a haze of alcohol and lust.

Then came a crisis and she couldn’t cope. The Institute had been penetrated. Not literally, but someone –a woman- knew who the paranormals were and had begun preying on them. She lured them with sex and then robbed them, leaving them without any memories of the incident. Six had been targetted –including two women- before Munyeen was requested to stand down as director and her enemy was brought in.

“Does Barbara suck your cock?” she asked.

“Give me your assessment of Daniel Morgan and what happened between you both, please Munyeen,” he said.

“You’ve got my report.”

“Carson could have written that. I want your feelings.”

“Get Daniel back for me.”

“I can’t. I don’t know enough to ask and I don’t know even if I could if I wanted. But I certainly can’t if you don’t give me a reason to try.”

“I love him. I don’t care what he’s been. I do know that Daniel Morgan is one of the most gentle loving souls I have ever met. He was put under a vast amount of stress and he didn’t break.”

“I know about stress, Munyeen.” Yes, he did. He had lived alone for ten years, isolated from all paranormal contact, and still made a success of his life. Even if it had been dominated by his dreams of what had been.

“He’s not a ghost. I know false personas.”

“Tell me about him. Tell me what he told you. Give me your observations.”

“Am I doing this because you’re making me?”

“I’d never do that to you. If you think that then you’re free to go.”

She said, “I’d never know really, would I? That’s how it worked with Alex. Our own minds build rationalisations. But, I suppose, if I don’t talk to you then it would have to be Shit Carson or someone else.”

“Yes. They consider Morgan to be potentially dangerous and they need to know everything they can before they can make a decision. But knowing the way they think it would be unkind of me to raise your hopes, Muny.”

“Don’t call me ‘Muny’, John. You forfeited that right long ago.”

“Poor Munyeen, so much guilt.”

“And damn you to hell, Director. Damn you to fucking hell. This is what he told me.”

So much for her holiday. Back where she started, and in love with someone forbidden to her. Munyeen retreated to her Mayfair flat where she stayed for a week to read and watch tv and feel sorry for herself, emerging only to go shopping or the women’s club she had joined years ago to go swimming. Believing, wanting to believe, that somehow she would see Daniel again, she cut back on the drinking and smoking but overindulged in self-pity and tears as she constantly wondered what was happening to him and constantly reliving the twenty four hours they had had together. Sometimes she couldn’t believe that was all it had been, feeling like weeks compressed into hours packed with tiny moments like crystalline jewels each one so precious. She wrote it all down, for herself, on paper not trusting her pc. She didn’t even have a photograph of him, though she might be able to obtain one if she called in a favour or two.

After a week she called a girlfriend, not a close friend. She had no close friends just old friends or dead friends. They went to a pub. Down a narrow alley, with only a tiny sign above the door. Inside it looked no different from countless others in the city. Mostly young affluent things working in the financial heart of London. Except that none were bankers, stockbrokers, or accountants. Here gathered those associated with the hidden worlds of Security and the paranormals. This was a safe place, staffed by retired Security officers. Any mundanes wandering in accidentally would find the place cold and unwelcoming, not one to be recommended to their friends. Once a gang of yardies tried to start selling drugs there. They were never seen again. It was a safe place. The hidden world. You wouldn’t want to go there, would you?

Munyeen had a good time. She kept the drinking under control. People were polite, quietly friendly. But keeping their distance. Unsure. Few knew the truth, only that Munyeen had been involved in a deep operation and come away burned. Some heard that she’d clawed open Carson’s face though fewer believed it. He was too tough a bastard and she’d never been known to be remotely violent. Munyeen was a drunk but not a vicious one. And she was out of favour. They didn’t know, they didn’t dare ask, they didn’t want to be tainted with her failure, with her problems. And they couldn’t hide it from her.

She made her excuses and left early to return to her very comfortable cage.

She made her full report to the new director. He said he’d try to help. He said he’d failed. He said he’d try and keep her up to date if he heard any news. One day he said that Daniel Morgan was to be integrated into Hampton Parva.

By this time Munyeen was deep in depression and taking tranquillisers. She did some work intermittently for Security but was, on her own admission, unreliable. Eventually they left her alone. She didn’t care.

The Director told her that Daniel Morgan appeared to be adapting well to life in Hampton Parva and was starting to teach at the village school.

Then she said, "Let me join him. Please."

"You'd give up your freedom to be with him?" said the Director sounding, for once, astonished.

"Was that meant as a joke?" she asked. "What freedom do I have? What freedom do any of us have?"

He scribbled down a number. "Call him. Now. There's not much I can't access from here. But make it quick, they might be monitoring and cut you off."

She tapped in the number and Daniel answered. For a moment she didn't know what to say, then she gabbled out words and then she heard him say he loved her.

"Please," she said, "let me be with him. If you would do one thing for me, John. If you feel you owe me anything, then do that for me."

"If that's what you truly want, Munyeen," he said, "then I'll do everything I can. Everything."

She closed her eyes and said. "Thank you."

And began to cry.

Two weeks later they came for her.

They took her to the last place she expected and offered her a job.

12.

She lay dozing next to him. She'd put on weight, he thought. Her breasts seemed heavier and she'd started to develop a small pot belly. Perhaps she'd been drinking more than she'd admitted, or eating more to compensate for not drinking. Whatever the reason, she looked healthier for it.

After she'd finished telling him her story, they'd kissed and had gone to bed, making love slowly and unhurriedly until both were satisfied. Lying next to her now he felt so happy, that they were together again and that she was willing to make such a commitment to him that she would give up her very freedom for him to come and live in this velvet-coated prison. She had chosen him above her life.

Munyeen grunted and rolled over, an arm slipping round his waist, her mouth pressing against his hairy chest.

"What time is it?" she mumbled.

"Just after seven. If you're hungry I could cook something or we could go out."

"Not out. I couldn't face seeing anyone else today."

"A takeaway, then?"

"Mmm. Pizza?"

"Fine. I'll call them. Topping?"

"Seafood. Ten inch, thin crust. Got any wine?"

"Californian chardonnay in the fridge. Hardy's shiraz-cabernet in the cupboard."

"The chardonnay. I think I'm going to like living with you."

"That's a relief. By the way, are you on the pill?"

Munyeen sat up, long black hair dangling over her breasts. "No," she said.

"Then I'd better get some condoms."

"I'm glad you didn't have any already. I'm teasing. Anyway, it's too late."

"Yes, but there's the morning after pill and there will be other times. I hope."

Munyeen leaned into him and his arms went around her. She said, "I mean it's really too late. There's something I missed out of my story because I selfishly wanted to make love first without putting you off your stroke –and yes, I meant that exactly the way it sounded." She paused then said, "I'm three months pregnant."

"This is certainly a day for surprises," Daniel said.

She glanced at his face and saw that he didn't doubt for a moment that the child was his. He trusts me so much, she thought, and I could so easily destroy him by betraying that trust.

"Will you marry me?" he asked.

"Does getting married matter here?" she asked. "Besides, we've only known each other, in real terms, about thirty hours. We could be making a terrible mistake."

"Then you've already made it. There are no guarantees in life, Muny, I just know I want to spend all of mine with you."

“Oh very well, if it will make you happy,” she said. “What about the baby?”

“What about it? It’s ours, we love each other, we’ll love him or her or whatever.”

“Was life always this simple for you?” she asked.

“No, but here it is. I do know this is turning into the happiest day of my life, the second happiest being the day I met you.”

“And the third?”

“Is irrelevant now. Munny, don’t you know that I want to walk naked into the street and utter a loud and inarticulate scream because I can’t think of any other way to express how happy I am?”

He kissed her gently on the mouth.

“I’d have to join you then,” she said. “Perhaps you should ring for a pizza. How long do they usually take?”

“Half an hour. They’ll also bring wine if requested but we’re okay on that score.”

“Yes.” She would have at most two glasses of the white wine. Her baby must be healthy. For the same reason she would have to insist that if he wanted to smoke, it would have to be outside. She had recently stopped completely and didn’t want even any second-hand smoke getting into her lungs. She knew he wouldn’t mind. Perhaps he’d even manage to quit, but she would not nag him about that. She knew from experience that it would only prove counter-productive.

They ate the pizza, which she found acceptable, drank the wine, reasonable, talked about how he had adapted to life here, who he had met, and what he’d been doing. Then they went to bed early, made love again, and fell asleep, his arms around her, her body nestled against his.

Her fading thought as sleep took her was this: This was meant to be.

13.

“Fuck! Fuck, fuck fuck!”

“Spare me the old movie parodies.”

“Fuck, shit, bastard, cunt!”

“Now you’re just being coarse.”

“This has put the cat among the pigeons.”

“Cliché.”

“Munyeen Ohrmuz is here.”

“Oh fuck, fuck, fuckity fuck.”

“Stop taking the piss.”

“You think it’s a problem?”

“Munyeen, ex-director of the Institute, Ohrmuz. Munyeen, best bloody Intuitive in the country, Ohrmuz. Munyeen, who knows more secrets than us, Ohrmuz.”

“Munyeen, alcoholic, Ohrmuz. Munyeen, I’ve had a nervous breakdown, Ohrmuz. Munyeen, drops her knickers for any male in tight pants, Ohrmuz. Munyeen, pregnant and insanely in love, Ohrmuz. What makes you think she’s a threat to us? She never wanted to be Director of the Institute. It was forced on her.”

“Because she was the best candidate. She ran it very well for six years. She’s also very subtle, unbelievably intelligent, and is very good at getting other people to do exactly what she wants. The only thing worse than her would be having you know who come here.”

“Lord Voldemort?”

“Don’t be sarky. She’s a threat and I’m going to make damned sure that my other self stays well out of her way. I suggest the three of you do likewise.”

Alone, the other person said, “What a strange conversation that was.”

Munyeen spent a pleasant day familiarising herself with her new home. It had been tastefully decorated in furnishings that were modern yet possessed a certain timeless quality and saw no reason to want to change anything. She could live with Daniel's ornaments. As she'd told him, possessions had never meant all that much to her, except for perhaps her large wardrobe of clothes. She had always liked to be well-dressed. There was a study which contained most of Daniel's items –his books, comics, graphic novels, CD's –mostly Blues- and dvd's- and a pc which consisted of a keyboard and a flat screen tv with a rewritable dvd drive. Most software for word processing and the like was downloaded from the local intranet which also stored all documents. Very convenient for their masters to monitor, she thought, though they probably wouldn't bother much. Why waste time checking the ramblings of prisoners who didn't want to leave anyway?

She spent some time studying Daniel's wall to wall of books, picking up specific titles and deliberately perusing them before making a cup of decaf coffee and taking it out into the garden along with a couple of chocolate digestives. Typical suburban garden, she thought, a nice wide lawn with a handful of trees and borders of flowers. Large enough to keep one or two people busy in their spare time but not so large as to dominate it. She sat down on a wooden bench beside a young lilac tree and let the early summer sun fall on her face.

Welcome to the dream that is Hampton Parva, she thought. Not a prison, of course not, but a refuge. Just that its inhabitants can't leave. Well, except for me, that is, if I ever want to. She hadn't told Daniel that and never would, though he might guess. However, and unless she truly had made a terrible decision which she seriously doubted, so long as he remained here then she would remain with him.

Later on she picked up the phone and said, "I'll start work on Monday but you can download any files you think I should read before then. I like to be prepared."

Daniel came home at lunchtime -everyone at the school did, every resident of Hampton Parva went home for lunch, or to the pub, unless the nature of their work prevented them- and there was just enough time to make love and have a light lunch before he had to go back. Munyeen suspected lunchtime sex would be a regular thing for a while, along with evening sex and morning sex. How nice, for at least another couple of months until, she suspected, the effects of pregnancy would start to dull her enthusiasm.

She supposed that seeing as he was at work and she wasn't then she should prepare the evening meal. She hoped he liked prawns fried in olive with oil with garlic, mushrooms, and onions on a bed of pasta with green pesto because she wasn't much good at anything else. As long as it involved stir fry somewhere along the way with pasta, rice or jacket potato (the latter two done in the microwave), or didn't involve cooking at all (Munyeen ate a lot of salads) then she could manage. Baking was a complete mystery to her, as were other so-called womanly skills such as sewing and knitting. She could iron, reluctantly, but avoided it whenever she could. In London she ate out a lot, had a cleaner for her flat, and paid a seamstress to alter or repair her clothes. She

could see already that Hampton Parva was going to pose some mundane problems.

After dinner, which Daniel praised to the skies and she didn't have the heart to tell him that she could tell he'd only quite liked it and thought he could do better which was probably true, she decided to tell him a few more things he ought to know.

"Daniel, we need to talk," she said.

He raised an eyebrow. "Does this mean the honeymoon's over?"

She said tersely, "It was over the moment that prick Carson shot you."

Daniel stared at her a moment before saying, "He meant something to you, didn't he?"

Munyeen face briefly displayed a disgusted expression. "I had sex with him once, if that's what you mean. And it wasn't very good for either of us. I don't think he's ever gotten over fucking fourteen year old boys up the arse at public school. People like him are never very good with women." She sighed, "He's dangerous, I suppose that was the attraction. That and that I found him repulsive." She shivered. "It was a long time ago. I want to talk about us and things."

"Okay. Can I cuddle you while we do?"

"I'd rather not, Daniel. Later, if you still want to. Let's go outside." She reasoned the house might be bugged. But then again so might the wooden bench in the garden or any one or all of the trees.

They sat on the seat anyway and despite what she'd said, let him put his arm around her and cuddle her.

"I've had sex with lots of men, Daniel," she said, "but I've only been in love once before you. Like you he was physically strong and like you he was remarkably gentle and vulnerable. It's such a rare combination. In almost every other way you're completely dissimilar. I didn't fall in love with you because you remind me of him, except perhaps for an echo, emotional resonances.

"I'm experienced in sex but I've never lived with anyone before. All my adult life I've lived alone, in so far as any adult paranormal is alone or allowed to be. But I've never shared my life with anyone, my space. I don't know what to do and I'm scared as hell. What about the housework, the cooking, all that kind of thing? Do we have written rotas, clearly defined duties? How do we live together?"

Daniel kissed her. "I don't know either," he said. "I'm not going to duplicate the way Mel and I lived because you aren't Mel. We find out together. It's an ongoing process of discovery. We don't work things out in advance, we sort them out as we go along and hope we don't annoy each other too much in the process. If that's all you wanted to talk about then let's go to bed."

"It isn't," she said flatly.

"Ah."

"There are things you don't know. While you were out I looked through your books and records. I noticed that John Claremont's Houses trilogy was deliberately out of place and put at the very beginning of the alphabetical sequence. Why is that?"

"You haven't read them?"

"No."



“They’re fantasy, modern fantasy, very strange almost surreal. One reviewer called them ‘Gormenghast on acid,’ which isn’t really accurate but gives an idea. They’re about these three great Houses which rule a land and vie constantly against each other. They use groups of individuals, who move at various times between these Houses, manipulating them –the characters, that is. It’s more than that though. The books are packed with love stories, adventures, monsters, but the Houses always dominate. At the end of the final volume, the Houses are overthrown by the main characters and are reborn or rebuilt so that while everything has changed they’ve also stayed the same. It’s very weird and wonderful and I’ve got each book in a signed first edition.”

“So you’ve met the author?” Munyeen asked neutrally.

“Briefly, at signing sessions. He was very nice and friendly, about the same age as us. I asked him about the allegorical aspect of the books but he just smiled and wouldn’t say. It’s probably a very clever analogy to modern world society but there are also several other valid interpretations. I think that’s why the books are so popular, because they speak differently but personally to each reader. I’ve read them several times and I’m always finding something new.”

“And you will again,” Munyeen said. “I said I hadn’t read the books, and I never will, but I do know what they are about. The three Houses are the three paranormal houses –Hampton Parva, the Britannia School for the Gifted, and the Institute. John Claremont is paranormal. He defeated Alex who destroyed Nick Shannon. He is the one who walked out the Britannia and took my James with him. He survived alone for ten years in the real world. He took over as Director of the Institute from me. And I will probably go to my grave resenting that morally superior son of a bitch.”

“Oh,” said Daniel.

“Damn, get me a cigarette.”

“I thought you’d given up.”

“One won’t hurt and, unlike you, I’m not an addict.”

Daniel didn’t argue but hurried inside the house and came back out with two lit cigarettes. Munyeen took one and inhaled sharply.

“I was thinking of stopping,” he said.

“Stop tomorrow, not today.”

“Well, maybe not quite that soon. I’ve still got a couple of packets in the house. When they run out.”

“Whatever,” she said dismissively.

“Anything else to tell me?”

“This and that,” she said. “I’m starting a job on Monday. Counselling people with problems. Some who live in the village, some in the hospital, older residents, new arrivals. I’ve had to do a lot of that while I was Director and my ability helps me see the truth beneath the words. I’ll be good at it and I’ll earn more than you.”

“That’s nice.”

“Is that a problem?”

“No, of course not. So did Mel.”

“Right. I know a great deal about this place, though I had never been before. I’ve seen photographs, videos, read reports, talked to people who’ve been here. People do leave despite what you’ve been told. Sometimes paranormals come here for a respite before returning to the Institute or perhaps to teach at the Britannia. And I hear things that I’m not supposed to hear. There

is a secret group here in Hampton Parva called The Four. They appear to be inmates but actually govern the place and are supposed to be immune to discovery by people even with my talent. I consider that a challenge.” Munyeen laughed. “Everyone should have a hobby and finding out who they are is going to be mine. Now, what was that about making love?”

“You’ve left room for an awful lot of questions.”

“Then let’s take your mind off them.” She began unbuttoning her blouse.

“In the garden?”

“Certainly not, I was just getting a head start.”

So much more. So much more she hadn’t told him because she didn’t dare in case they were overheard. Munyeen Ohrmuz had finally arrived in Hampton Parva and she had her own agenda.

Monday and Munyeen strode through the doors of the great hospital of Hampton Parva. She wore a smart grey trouser suit, black shoes and black blouse. Her hair was tied back and she wore a little makeup, every image of the smart efficient professional woman.

A receptionist said, "Ms Ohrmuz, Dr Groves office is..."

"I know where it is, Avril," Munyeen said crisply to the receptionist. "I've studied a plan of this place." I know where everything is and who all the staff are, including you my dear. She walked past the stunned young woman, who wasn't a working inmate but a member of Security.

Munyeen walked into Groves' office without knocking. She didn't take him by surprise, Avril having had just enough time to warn him. She briefly took his outstretched hand then poured herself a coffee without waiting to be invited and sat down in his chair.

"Dr. Timothy Groves," she said slowly, savouring the name. You weaselly little man. How well you think you wear your mask of compassion. How fragile it is to me.

"Munyeen Ohrmuz," he replied, "this is a real pleasure."

Munyeen raised an eyebrow. "You think so?"

"You are quite a legend in our circles. Your accomplishments..."

"Are considerable for a promiscuous neurotic alcoholic, you weren't going to say aloud. Correct? Don't answer, I know I am."

"You are very forthright." Groves attempted to regain his composure and poured himself some coffee. "I'm sure that's a good thing, to be assertive, considering the disturbances in your life."

His continued attempt at gaining the upper hand she found quite amusing. He really knew so little about her. Time, she decided, to put him in his place and make him her creature. She said, "You have disturbances of your own, haven't you, Timothy?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," he said uneasily.

"I mean that it's a good thing we have Security to cover up for our misadventures. Being caught indulging in fellatio with a boy, barely fourteen years old, in a public toilet by the police could have got you banged up as a nonce and that wouldn't have been much fun."

"He told me he was eighteen!"

Munyeen stared at him coldly. "I'm sure he did," she said, "but you didn't believe him and you didn't care. You still don't. All you wanted was his young mouth on your cock. You might like them sexually mature, Timothy, but you still like them young. It is Thailand you go for your holidays, after all. I wonder what some of the residents would think if they found out about that. Not even our uber-tolerant community here likes borderline paedophiles, and I confess I'm uncertain about the qualification of borderline. I venture to suggest that they would lose a certain trust in one, wouldn't they?"

"I..."

"Be quiet!" she snapped, easily staring him down. He was already hers though he hadn't yet realised it. "I'm talking and you are listening. I can see you're thinking about my own chequered past and how to use it as a weapon. Don't waste your time. The only person who cares about me enough that it

might hurt him already knows the worst. You have no leverage, Timmy. I have all I need. Now, who's in charge here?"

"Looks like you are, bitch," he snarled, the last vestige of a bruised and beaten ego.

"That wasn't quite what I meant, but you are correct. Before I came here I used all my resources to check up on the key staff. Believe me, I have sources Security doesn't know about. I didn't come here unarmed, and you aren't the only one who'll be doing exactly as I tell them. Hampton Parva is going to play my game, not the other way around. Now that that's established, let's get my security clearances sorted out, shall we? Why don't you give me your introductory chat?"

"Whatever you say."

"Exactly, whatever I say. And you will support me unflinchingly because I can make your worst nightmare come true. Now, call me 'Mrs Morgan', I want to see if I like the sound of it."

"Yes, Mrs Morgan," he said and she was sure the words tasted like shit in his mouth. Enjoying herself greatly, Munyeen smiled. Mrs Ohrmuz-Morgan, perhaps? Ms Ohrmuz-Morgan? She'd have Timothy say them to her but at another time. Every girl should have a pet.

"I have your smartcard, Mrs Morgan," Groves said. "You will need it every time you come to work. To log in, to access certain areas, sometimes to communicate. Your clearance is level four."

"We'll see about that in a moment," Munyeen said. "Do carry on."

"You are aware of the layout of the hospital having seen a map. One resident once described it as a club footed octopus. The core is the central administration and key staff and resource areas. The club-footed legs are the wings of the hospital, each having a different function –general medical and casualty, physical residential, mental residential, psychiatric, long-term psychiatric residential. Not all the wings are currently in use. As you are aware, the government anticipated a rather larger capacity than has so far proven necessary.

"We have case meetings at the beginning of each week to review progress and to plan our work for the week, though this isn't to say we haven't already had that organised. Your brief is primarily to work with..."

"Whomsoever I choose to work with, Timmy. Now let's get my security status upgraded."

"That's impossible," he said. "I can't do it. I don't have the authority. That's an Internal Security matter and the cadre here at Hampton Parva decides on it. You are a resident and on probation."

"I venture to suggest that you have a lot to learn about me, Timmy. Let's go and see young Avril. I believe the terminal on her desk will access the security codes I require. Come along."

Dr. Timothy Groves followed after the small woman like a chastened puppy following his mistress and exactly as Munyeen had intended.

"Avril, dear, I need access to your terminal," Munyeen said.

"That's impossible, Ms Ohrmuz," the woman said, plump cheeks inflating in amazement at the impertinence of the resident. "You have absolutely no authority."

"Oh I think you'll find I have. Code Imperator."

"What? What's that?"

“You **are** a Security Officer. You **know** what Code Imperator means. Do it.”

"If you aren't entitled to use..."

Munyeen cut her off. "Do I sound as if I'm not entitled? I dislike having to ask twice." This was fun, she thought, playing the alpha bitch. She must do it more often.

Groves, watching, didn't understand what was going on but the very self-possessed Avril had turned pale and looked ready to faint even as she keyed in some numbers. Munyeen stepped past her as she scuttled to one side, slid the smartcard into the slot and typed in a number.

She said, "Voice activation." Groves didn't even know it could be voice activated.

"Accepted," said the computer. "Identity confirmed, Munyeen Ohrmuz." Words on the screen matched the voice as if one verified the other.

"Confirm status and upgrade Security clearance smartcard."

"Accepted. Munyeen Ohrmuz, paranormal. Status: active. Rank: Colonel, Internal Security. Current location: Hampton Parva. Currently on secondment to Hampton Parva. Duties: counselling residents, research, senior Internal Security duties as self-designated. Security status active. Grade: 9.5. Smartcard upgraded. Awaiting instructions, Colonel Ohrmuz."

"End input," said Munyeen.

"Fucking hell," breathed Avril, immediately following it with, "Sorry, ma'am." So far as she was aware, the highest ranking Security Officer at Hampton Parva only had a clearance of 9.2. Until now. A high security rating didn't automatically imply *de jure* authority but certainly *de facto*. She doubted if anyone would challenge it, not even the one Security officer, a major, who theoretically outranked Ohrmuz, Colonel Ohrmuz, she corrected herself. As far as security ratings were concerned, she herself was only a 5.9 with Groves a 6.2. She'd heard a rumour that the Prime Minister was only rated 9.4. Probably only a handful of people in the entire United Kingdom had a higher security rating than Colonel Ohrmuz. She'd been expecting a broken woman, not someone who acted as if they owned the place. Hell, for all intents and purposes, she did.

"I'm not here to give orders," Munyeen said. "Despite my rank, I regard my prime function here to be that specified –to wit, the counselling of those in need of my skills and experience. I do expect that this will be facilitated in every way."

"Yes, ma'am," said Avril.

"Mrs Morgan, please. Now I do have one order: don't go gabbling about this to all and sundry and, yes, I am also talking to you, Dr Groves. I will inform those who need to be informed as and when I deem appropriate. Hampton Parva is now my home and my work is here in the hospital. All I ask is for the co-operation of yourselves and other members of staff. Now, Timmy, let's go on the tour."

She paused, then turned to Avril and said, "Disable all surveillance devices in my home and garden and any that might happen to have found their way onto Daniel's person, internal and external." She smiled. "Please."

When she got home that afternoon, Daniel was already there chopping vegetables. Munyeen had something other than food on her mind. "Wash your hands," she said, "and come into the living room."

When he'd done as she asked, she made it clear with her body language that she wanted a kiss. Daniel was more than happy to oblige though he seemed surprised when her tongue darted into his mouth and her hands raised his shirt at the back and then began unbuttoning them at the front. She pressed her groin against his and as she expected he rose to the occasion.

He'd probably have taken her on the floor but that wasn't what she wanted and squirmed round in his grasp so that his erection pressed against her buttocks. His hands slid under her blouse, pushed up her bra and cupped her breasts. His fingers searched out her hard nipples, his mouth nuzzled the back of her neck. Impatient, she dropped her trousers.

Daniel got the idea and one hand slid down the front of her panties, sliding between her legs to the place where she was already wet.

"Jesus, Muny," he breathed and managed to drop his own pants. She excited him as much as he aroused her.

"Fuck me," she said, bending forward to place her hands on the back of the couch and spreading her legs. Daniel moved his hips and thrust upwards inside her. One hand rubbed her clitoris, the other her nipples. "Yes, that's just what I want," she said.

Daniel thrust inside her and clutched at her. Eventually he moved faster and his hands clamped on her hips steadying himself. He began to grunt, thrusting deeper, biting the back of her neck, faster and faster until he came, moaning loving words.

Munyeen hadn't climaxed though she'd enjoyed every moment of it. This was only the start. When he slipped out of her, she turned round, went down to her knees and took him in her mouth, licking away and swallowing semen, then sucking him for several minutes until he grew erect again. Now he pushed her down to the carpet and took her, thrusting with cock and tongue until she exploded, screaming his name and clawing at his back and arse.

Munyeen had always enjoyed sex, but with Daniel it seemed to go into another dimension, transcending the physical or making the very act of fucking a mystical experience.

She said, "Let's do it again."

"I need a rest this time," Daniel said, "Please. I need a cup of tea, or a cigarette. Did you have a nice day?"

Munyeen, lying underneath him, his cock still inside her, her bra lying across her throat, said, "Very productive, dear, very satisfying. And for some reason it made me quite horny."

"I noticed."

"Daniel," she said quietly, "if our baby wasn't normal, would you still want it?"

It hadn't been an idle question. Their foetus **was** normal, she'd had herself thoroughly checked out by the best doctors in London, but the next one might not be. She hadn't told him but a higher proportion of paranormals were either physically or mentally disabled compared to the general population. There were more paranormals held in Hampton Parva than at the Britannia and the

Institute combined. But until today, she hadn't really appreciated the implications of that fact.

In the few days she'd been here she had met socially a few of the disabled paranormals who lived in the village whom Daniel had befriended, including Toby and his very strange girlfriend, but that hadn't had any real impact. It took a tour of the hospital to do that.

The hospital, while not covering as large an area as the village, held more paranormals. Some were newcomers for whom the hospital was a halfway house for them to be assessed and to adjust before being moved into a house in the village. The majority, however, were permanent residents. Those whose handicap was so severe that they needed continuous supervision or whose disability combined with their special ability made them dangerous. Pyrokinesis and telekinesis could be lethal in those who either lacked the mental ability to control them –educationally subnormal, epileptics, spastics- or the self-discipline –the dangerously insane, fortunately a small minority.

There were no children in the hospital apart from those receiving conventional treatment in the medical wing. Paranormal abilities were hormone linked and didn't usually reveal themselves until adolescence, which was some form of blessing, Munyeen supposed. Yet at the same time it made it even more heartrending because young children would have no understanding of their condition, they simply endured their suffering; adolescents were all too aware of the nature of their problems which made it worse.

Munyeen liked the design of the hospital. Although having been on a virtual tour prior to her arrival, reality was never quite the same. Each wing, each ward or room was open plan with different customised décor and, she was informed, altered to suit the needs and demands of those who lived there. The hospital and its staff were flexible and responsive. Despite the nature of Hampton Parva –it could never be anything else than a prison- among its functions were to make life as positive and bearable for those who could not function without the help of others, to rehabilitate wherever possible, and ideally to heal.

Munyeen herself had a very ambivalent attitude towards her masters. On the very basic level, she and all other paranormals were disposable slaves. They did not have the basic rights of ordinary human beings. They were commodities to be used as the government saw fit. Above all, their existence was to be kept secret and the government, rather its agents, could be absolutely ruthless in protecting that secret. Yet at the same time, there was an acknowledged duty or responsibility towards the paranormals, a paternalistic duty perhaps, but no less real. The government said, you will serve us. It also said, we shall take care of you. And it did. Here in Hampton Parva more than anywhere. In the prison.

Munyeen walked the hospitals corridors and wings, introducing herself to staff and patients, albeit with more delicacy than she had shown to Avril and Timothy Grove. Only one place she avoided, the high secure area where the dangerously insane were kept safe. She was not quite yet ready to see Alex again.

For now, however, she would listen and learn and help. She would love Daniel and get big with their unborn child. And then, when the time was right, she would bring this place crashing down around Security's ears.





## Notes.

First off, this isn't a novella, it's an unfinished novel on which I ran out of steam because I'd run out of ideas. That was back in 2002 or thereabouts. But before that-

As just about, I imagine, any writer of fiction (well, me) will tell you, you can fall in love with your characters. Munyeen Ohrmuz was one of them from my published book **The Lies That Bind** I also wanted to tell a story about Hampton Parva, the Home, the third of the paranormal institutions. This wasn't my first attempt either. I'd completed a series of three linked novellas set there. Sadly that was back on my Amstrad word processor, the machine since scrapped, the disks discarded, any manuscripts thrown out.

Anyway, I got this idea about the flying man and it went well for a while. What there is of it, most of it I like, though if I was writing it now I'd probably cut out and/or rewrite the sex scenes. The big mistake, however, was introducing the secret Four who come over as being childishly silly to me now. I could never figure out who they were and what they really did. The only useful thing any of them did do in structural terms was to foreshadow the dynamic side of Munyeen's personality. If I'd ever worked out the plot for the second half of the novel I'd have probably rewritten them out.

Apart from minor editing, the text is pretty much as I wrote it several years ago. The only real rewriting other than the odd phrase comes in the last chapter where I added a couple of hundred words, in particular the final paragraph which creates a form of ending rather than just stopping.

It's also the last of my fiction that I want to show anyone. And, as I said, I mostly like it.

Ian Williams, 17th June 2009.