

Chapter 1

Words and Deeds

Saturday 6th July 2013

Manchester

England

Dan was beginning to feel the effects of his overnight stay. His eyes stung, his body trembled with fatigue, and his belly sent out noisy messages. He had his backpack strapped on, and his camera was hanging around his neck. Dan had all the evidence he needed, and he was ready to go.

The rising sun eased over the inner city roofs behind the club, and the natural light shone through the top of the shielded windows to illuminate the upstairs rooms. Dan remained motionless, seated among the crates and cartons in the large stockroom. It had been a long night.

Dan was aware of the passive infrared sensors, so had stayed still, but alert for hours. He had learned it was better sometimes to sit it out in the dark; his flashlight switched off. He breathed a sigh of relief when he felt the alarm vibrate on his watch. He had set it for 05:25. He'd be gone in five more minutes, he thought; job done.

Discovery in one of the Starlight Club stockrooms would not be good right now, he thought. When he considered it, there would never be a good time to be caught snooping in any part of the Starlight Club. Mickey Flynn, one of Manchester's most ruthless underworld characters, owned the place. He had a reputation for not taking prisoners. If you crossed Mr. Flynn, you disappeared; and you stayed disappeared.

Flynn had started out as a teenage gang member, and fought his way up the chain of command. He experimented with a variety of criminal activities, doing his fair share of time behind bars. As opposed to the bars where drinks were served, the bars in question were the metal ones with large locks.

The crooked club owner was 25, by the time he'd worked out how to use other people, and remain in the clear himself. By the age of 30, he had taken over the Starlight Club. Nobody ever questioned how it came about. The only person in Manchester more crooked than Flynn was his accountant, but the gangster also had members of the local constabulary in his pocket.

Mysteries like Flynn's remarkable good fortune captured Dan Galloway's imagination. As a freelancer, it was up to Dan if he had a good reputation with editors. It bordered on outstanding.

Since leaving a regular job with a newspaper in Glasgow some years before, Dan had proved himself on many occasions as an investigative reporter. Some men in his trade had mental scars from getting down and dirty to follow a particular story. Others had physical scars. Dan Galloway had both.

Dan's watch vibrated again. He knew it was 05:29, which meant the cleaners would shortly be allowed into the building. A member of the club security staff would disarm the system at 05:30 precisely. The cleaners would have three minutes to get indoors before the entrance and stockroom alarms were reset. Individual sectors could be disarmed on the security system, but Dan had done his homework. It seemed laziness ruled, and it was an easier working practise to trip-out everything.

Dan pulled his leather gloves from his jacket pocket and slipped them on, flexing his fingers to get the gloves on tight. He closed his eyes and took steady, deep breaths. His heart was pounding, and the earlier chill had gone, to be replaced by all-consuming warmth. It was approaching the sort of warmth which ran down the legs, as Dan prepared for the hard part of the job.

There was a single high-pitched bleep. Dan slipped his digital camera inside the open top of his jacket, pulled up the zip, and used both hands to raise the window frame. He had dealt with the lock during the early hours of the morning, when the alarms were off, and the place was rocking with music, dancing, and the consumption of both legal and illegal substances.

The window slid up easily. Dan glanced up and down the alleyway, before climbing out onto the window ledge. He estimated it to be five metres to the narrow, cobblestone back alley below him.

"Hey ... you!" a gruff male voice shouted.

"Shit," Dan murmured, as he looked along the lane towards the main road. He saw who'd shouted at him, and prepared to lift his toecaps clear of the wall.

The man was about 80 metres away. He was the archetypal nightclub doorman: heavily built, with a shaved head, dressed in leather jacket, white shirt, dark trousers, and shiny black shoes.

Dan decided to keep his black balaclava down over his head. He abandoned his plan to close the window, and gripped the drainpipe in an attempt to control his rapid descent. He lifted his feet to the sides of the pipe, and dropped like a stone, the toecaps of his trainers scuffing the wall, grasping the pipe. One of his leather gloves ripped apart on a metal bracket, which also sliced into Dan's left thumb. He gritted his teeth to stop himself crying out.

He hit the ground with the balls of his feet, and stumbled backwards two paces. Dan ran towards the furthest end of the alley. He felt confident he could outrun the big man. Fear of capture

would help when it felt painful to run. Dan squeezed the fingers of his left hand around the thumb injury, and the torn leather.

“Bring the car, Darren!” the security man shouted.

A lone security guard was bad news, but two? The thought of it gave Dan wings.

The irrepressible reporter glanced back over his shoulder, and saw the security man had stopped. He was speaking on a mobile phone, possibly giving the intruder’s description to his colleague, Darren. In all the groundwork, Dan had completed over many weeks he had never seen a pair of guards at the club at this time.

So much for a detailed reconnaissance, he thought.

It was time to create a diversion, so Dan unzipped his jacket, and detached his camera from the sling. He dropped the camera, and stopped for a moment as if to pick it up. Once he was sure the pursuing man saw him, he abandoned the camera and ran out into the city streets.

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Normally Dan could have disappeared among the crowds, but there was a distinct lack of pedestrian traffic, because it was a British city street at 05:30 on a Saturday morning. It was 15 minutes later, when he sat at a table in the early morning cafe, minus his balaclava face-mask. He ran his right hand through his short brown hair so it wasn’t clamped to his head with sweat.

“Full English breakfast, and a mug of tea, please,” Dan said. His breathing was under control, and he was in the process of taking off his jacket. It was proving difficult because the fingers of his left hand were maintaining pressure on the bloodstained hanky wrapped around his throbbing thumb.

The teenage waitress smiled, and walked off to give the order to the cook.

Dan used the moment of solitude to turn his jacket inside out, so the bright green lining was the outer colour, and the navy colour was innermost. He hung the jacket over the back of his hard-backed chair. The black balaclava was stuffed in beside the black backpack, in a large plastic carrier bag.

A white Audi screeched to a halt outside, and a big, bald security man in a leather jacket entered the cafe. He looked at the only customer; and the waitress.

The bald man said, “Have you seen a guy in a black hat and navy jacket?”

Dan had already lifted a discarded magazine and opened it at random, so he hid his injured thumb. He glanced up at the visitor with furrowed brow, and looked back to the advertisements for pregnancy testing kits.

“Well?” the big man said in his deep voice. “Have you seen him or not?”

The girl said, “This guy, was he carrying a black bag?”

“Yeah, has he been in here?”

“Well, he ran up to our door, and leapt into a blue VW van. It had pulled up right out there. It was about two minutes ago.”

“Thanks,” the big man said; opened the door to leave, and stopped. He looked back towards Dan. “Did you see him?”

Dan lowered the magazine from his face and screwed his eyes up as if in thought.

He said, “I’m not sure about the man, but I do remember the blue van.” He glanced at the girl. “It had ‘Colin’s Carpets’ painted on the side, didn’t it?”

“Yes, you’re right,” the girl said. “There were carpets sticking out of the back door.”

The big man squinted as he looked at Dan again, and left. He jumped into the Audi, and it raced away as he struggled with his seatbelt.

The girl placed the breakfast, and a mug of tea in front of Dan.

“Have you been up to some mischief Mr. Galloway?” she said, and grinned down at her customer.

“You could say,” Dan said, smiling as he looked at the memory card he’d removed from the camera. “How did you know who I was?”

“My mum is a big fan of your daring escapades,” she said. “Now I’ve seen how cool you are, I can see where she’s coming from.” She held out her right hand. “Nicola.”

“Dan,” he said putting the memory card back into his pocket. “It’s Dan, if we’re going to be on first-name terms.” He smiled up at her as he shook her hand, feeling flattered he had a fan-base which extended across two generations.

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Sunday 7th July 2013

The Manchester Sunday Tribune carried a story by investigative journalist Dan Galloway, which exposed the stockrooms full of contraband cigarettes and alcohol, in the Starlight Club. The pictures accompanying the story left no doubt about the illegal goods. There was a massive cache of stock at a Merseyside dockyard, apart from the stock in the Manchester nightclub.

The police had already been tipped off on the Saturday, which had resulted in two early morning raids of premises, and numerous arrests. Dan had used his usual codeword to establish credibility.

At the end of the newspaper feature, the reporter had signed off:

'I'd like to thank my able young assistant for her help. She knows who she is, and I send best wishes to her mother.'

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Monday 8th July 2013

New York

United States of America

Crystal van de Velde stood at the window, looking out across New York Harbour. As a regular visitor to the city, Crystal had often seen the Statue of Liberty, and recognised it as a symbol of freedom. She found herself gazing at it, and wondered how her mother must have felt all those years ago when she arrived from Europe.

"Crystal," the lawyer said, in a whisper. "Are you okay?" He wanted to comfort her, to embrace her. His thoughts were crossing the line of professionalism, but each time he'd met this woman he'd had the same desires.

"I'm fine Roderick, thank you," she said, turning briefly from the panoramic view.

"When will you be flying back to Chicago?" Roderick asked with a hint of hope in his tone. Perhaps a dinner date was possible.

"I have a flight booked for this afternoon."

"If there's anything I can do for you in the meantime ... anything at—"

"There is one thing," Crystal interrupted.

"Yes," Roderick said, too eagerly.

"Could I have a few minutes alone, please?"

"Of course," the disappointed lawyer said. "I have a few errands to run. I'll be out of here for at least half an hour." He lifted his jacket from the coat stand and made his way across the plush carpet to the door. He paused, and looked back as he gripped the handle.

Roderick said, "Please help yourself to coffee, and take as long as you like. If you're not here when I get back, I'll be available anytime. Just call." He'd already decided his errands would now include a short break in a nearby bar.

"Thank you," Crystal said. "Thank you for everything; especially today."

The lawyer nodded and left his client in the office.

Roderick Hamilton Jr. Would be a fine catch for any woman, Crystal thought. He was handsome, well-mannered, respected by his peers, and financially stable. Apart from anything else, he was available, and his admiration of the Chicago client with the Dutch surname was obvious.

Although Crystal appreciated what Roderick had to offer, she didn't see him as anything more than a lawyer and family friend. Of major importance was the fact Crystal was not looking for a partner. It would take a special man to repair the wrong done to her in a previous relationship.

Crystal resumed her gaze across the bay, and for a moment smiled at the thought of her lawyer running a few errands. He had an office suite with 18 staff, on the 50th floor of the New York skyscraper. He only had to press a button on his intercom to have any task done by somebody else, but it was a kind gesture to allow his client some privacy.

As Crystal lifted her mother's letter again, tears threatened. Two letters had been given to her; one from her mother, and one from her father. As expressed in her father's Will, she was obliged to read his letter first, and in the presence of a lawyer.

It was a pre-requisite, because there may have been questions arising from the content. There were questions, and Mr. Hamilton Jr. had dealt with them without fuss or hesitation. After reading, Crystal had put the letter in her handbag.

Crystal wanted to read her mother's single page alone, and though she was eager, she felt apprehensive. She'd seen photographs of her mother, and she'd been a beautiful young woman. From what Crystal's father told her, her mother had also been brave, just like her forefathers. Crystal unfolded the sheet, and it fluttered in her trembling hands as she read:

'My darling daughter Crystal,

I would not have chosen to speak to my child through a letter, but it is God's will. I have limited time, so I will say what I must. Your father will by now have told you of my past, and a little of our ancestry. You come from a long line of fine people.

You will receive this letter when you reach your 30th birthday, or because of your father's death. I pray it is because of the former occasion. My wish would have been to take you to see Amsterdam, the place of my birth, but it is not to be. I would ask you to go, and think of me when you are there. Try to find Maarten. You have a heritage of which you can be proud.'

The handwriting had started controlled, in a flowing script, but there were stains on the paper. Were they tear-stains? Whatever they were, they were joined by Crystal's tears. She focused on the writing which had become a scrawl, and then towards the end, a scribble.

'I talked to you every day as you grew within me. I had an important decision to make today, and I tried to explain it to you. I will bring you into the world in a demonstration of my unconditional love for you. Have a wonderful life my daughter,

Krystallina van de Velde - Ross. xxx 10th July 1983'

Attached to the letter was a copy of a statement by the surgeon who'd delivered the baby. In two simple paragraphs, he explained how he had been compelled to give the mother a choice to make. Krystallina's condition was, only she or the child would survive.

The distraught woman had been given less than 15 minutes to make a decision. She would condemn herself or her unborn child. Krystallina had asked for a pen and paper, and her husband remained by her side in silent support. Immediately following the birth, the team had fought to save the courageous mother; but to no avail.

All those years before, Harry Ross had watched his wife die, giving life to their only child, Crystal. He had stood holding the freshly written letter as he watched the drama unfold, all the time wishing he would be able to destroy the letter.

As Krystallina's eyes closed, Harry folded the letter, unread, and placed it in his pocket to take to the offices of Roderick Hamilton, the family lawyer. Earlier in the day, Mr. Hamilton's wife had delivered their first child; Roderick Jnr.

Harry held his baby daughter for the first time, and his tears flowed, formed of pride, sorrow, and gratitude. He decided at the time he would have the newborn carry his courageous wife's maiden name. He too would write a letter of explanation for their daughter, and it would be given to the lawyer along with Krystallina's letter, and specific instructions.

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Crystal stared down at the letter, wiped the tears from her face, and folded the precious documents, before placing them back in the envelope. She gazed out once again towards the Statue of Liberty and held the envelope to her chest. For 15 minutes she stood motionless, trying to come to terms with the sacrifice her mother had made to give her unborn baby the opportunity of life.

The grim reality of her birth hit Crystal with impact, and she burst into uncontrollable floods of tears. She leaned against a large window with one hand as her body was wracked with sobbing. For five minutes, she cried, and allowed herself to grieve.

When she felt she had regained control, Crystal placed the envelope on Roderick's desk, and went to the en-suite facilities to freshen up as best she could. She returned to the sumptuous office, and fixed herself a strong black coffee, before sitting to look out across the harbour.

Crystal had established herself on the fashion scene, and was only two days away from her 30th birthday. There had been many offers for her services, but following a brief period of work-experience after graduating from university, she had struck out on her own. It took a couple of years of sacrifice and a lot of hard work, but she'd made it.

As she focused on the distant statue once again, a reflection caught her eye. The sun was shining on the gleaming bodywork of a passing airliner. A faint smile passed over Crystal's lips. She pulled out her phone, dialled, and waited for a response.

"Hi Mary, it's Crystal. I'm fine thank you. Yes, there is something. Could you arrange a flight for me, please?" She heard Mary speak to somebody in the background before getting back to her. Crystal heard a door being closed at the other end of the call.

She continued, "Thank you ... from Chicago to Amsterdam. For tomorrow afternoon please," and she listened for a moment. "I'd like to be returning on Saturday 20th. Yes, I'll have to be back for the promotional video," she said. "Yes, arrange a meeting, and I'll explain the situation to the others. Ciao."

She put her phone back into her handbag, picked up the envelope containing her mother's letter, and placed it too in her handbag. "Amsterdam is calling," she said aloud, as she gazed across the harbour.

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Tuesday 9th July 2013

Acciaroli

Italy

Callum McGregor had a short frame, but it was muscular. He took care of his body; all 5ft 7ins of it. His tan accentuated his thinning blonde hair, and a thin scar which ran from his left eye to his left ear. He was wearing a white cotton T-shirt, khaki cargo pants, and white trainers.

McGregor was standing in a parking bay on the coast road. Parked beside him, was a black, Porsche 911 convertible. He leaned forward onto the driver's door, and to any passing motorist, it looked like he was in conversation with a man at the wheel. McGregor glanced over his shoulder to make sure there was nobody in view. He reached in, switched on the ignition, and smiled at the driver's face.

Cesar Giovanni remained upright in the seat, his unseeing eyes staring out into the Tyrrhenian Sea from the parking area on the dramatic, picturesque west coast.

"Like I said, it wasn't personal," McGregor said to the dead man. He reached across, unclipped the seatbelt, and released the handbrake. Following a glance in both directions along the coastal road, McGregor pushed, and steered the car against the low wooden parapet fence. He smiled with satisfaction as the vehicle crunched through the damaged wood. The car bounced several times off the rocky outcrops on the way to the sea. There was still no approaching traffic on the road.

In preparation, half an hour before, McGregor had parked his large rented van to conceal his actions. On arrival, he'd smashed through a section of the parapet fence with an axe, and a sledgehammer. When content with the damage, he draped his jacket over the fractured wood, and smoked a cigarette while waiting for his target.

Anyone passing the scene would be concentrating on the road. Most Italians enjoyed the fast drive along the route to, or from Rome. The drive was too good to be spoiled by taking interest in a parked vehicle.

When Giovanni had arrived, and parked between the van and the sheer drop, he'd been expecting to pick up details of a drug deal. The conversation with the casually dressed British man lasted less than two minutes before the Italian's neck was broken.

A few minutes after dealing with the body, and the car, McGregor got into the rented van, and drove north on the SS267. After 10km, he turned off the road among some trees at a spot he'd prepared the previous day.

McGregor climbed into the back of the van, stripped, and dressed in a smart, but casual outfit. His fresh clothes were more upmarket than what he'd been wearing previously. He placed the discarded clothes, shoes, and latex gloves into a large paper bag. He dropped the bundle into a shallow hole in the sand, poured fuel over it, and set it on fire. Only when there was nothing left but ashes, he covered it with sand, and drove on.

It would be easy to head towards Salerno and join the A3 north towards Napoli, but McGregor was in no hurry. He took a long and scenic route along the coast; but not because he enjoyed the view. The killer knew from his rehearsals there would be no traffic monitoring cameras until he arrived on the outskirts of Rome; over 300km away.
