

CHAPTER 1

Monday 1st September 2014

Sandy Moloney stared through the glazed front window of the Docklands Light Railway EMU. The Electrical Multiple Units had become a familiar sight both above and below ground over the past two decades. He glanced at the increasing cloud cover drifting across the sky. Its aim was to obscure the sun. Rain showers would not be far away. What a great way to celebrate the first day of his final working week.

The annual medical did for him. Retirement was possible between sixty and sixty-five, and several colleagues had already taken advantage of that. When he met up with them, between trips abroad, or after golfing days near London, they badgered him to quit.

Sandy was sixty-four and divorced. Although he saw his daughter on high days and holidays, they weren't as close as thirty-five years ago when he bounced her on his knee. Cora, his wife, took a fourteen-year-old Amy with her when she walked out.

Living in London wasn't everything it was made out to be; not if you lived alone. So, thoughts of retirement were put on hold. Sandy knew of others in their seventies still putting in a shift on the railways. You could continue to drive a train or fulfil the role of a train attendant on the DLR if you kept passing the medical. With the prospect of four walls in his flat to stare at every day, Sandy determined to keep working for as long as possible.

Then, he attended that medical. The doctor sighed as he looked at the paperwork before him. Sandy steeled himself for the news.

"How long have I got?" he asked.

"If you reduce the drinking, give up the cigarettes, take regular exercise and switch to a healthy diet, you might have another fifteen to twenty years, Mr Moloney."

"Oh," Sandy said, "I thought I was a goner when you sighed."

"Something showed up on your scans we can control with medication. We can delay the condition from radically influencing your everyday life, for a while. Those things I suggested you do will be essential in supporting that treatment. However, I couldn't pass you fit to drive either a car or a train. Nor can I let you be responsible for the lives of hundreds of passengers on those driverless units you run on the DLR."

"It's not cancer then, doctor?"

"Do you remember the initial cognitive and psychomotor skills tests you took before you came for the scans?"

"Oh, those," said Sandy, "I remember. What of them?"

"Your results showed a marked difference from earlier tests. That's why we carried out the scans; to discover what might have caused it. A degree of deterioration in those skills is a natural result of ageing, but it can be an early indicator of dementia, or Alzheimer's. The comments from your line manager suggest you live alone, is that correct? Do you have family members living close? Do you have an active social life?"

Sandy Moloney shrugged. He had little to offer in reply. The doctor nodded.

“Another factor affecting performance on these tests is depression. We’ll get you on a more even keel, Mr Moloney, and check any changes, as we go forward. If the more serious conditions I mentioned manifest themselves, we’ll manage those issues as and when they happen,”

Sandy collected his prescription, driven home, and poured himself a large glass of red wine. Of course, he was depressed. Who wouldn’t be? The wrong side of sixty, with no wife or partner. A daughter with no kids living out in the suburbs. A handful of friends across London in his social circle, with wives, children, and grandkids; but with each year, the company newsletters informed him of another death. That handful of friends grew less and less.

What of his immediate future? The doctor recommended he gave up his car and advised his only safe choice was to take the retirement package on offer. He could no longer ‘captain’ passengers on the DLR. One by one, the things he held precious had been taken from him. He dragged his eyes away from the last few bright moments of sunshine ahead and considered his fellow travellers.

They looked a disparate bunch. Nothing new there. London was a cosmopolitan city when he moved from Southampton as a young man. The bustling port on the south coast had suited him. There was a terrific nightlife for a teenager, plenty of job opportunities and living at home had never been a problem.

His grandparents arrived in Southampton from the south-west coast of Ireland towards the end of the nineteenth century. Many relatives emigrated to the United States, and when he reached twenty-one Sandy Moloney was tempted to search for long-lost cousins in Boston and New York. The bright lights of London in the mid-Seventies won him over, and the train that carried him from Southampton to Waterloo pitched him into a colourful, noisy mass of humanity that never hushed or stopped.

Working for London Transport, above and below ground on various jobs kept Sandy next to the throbbing heart of the metropolis. It had been intoxicating. Everything and everyone constantly on the move. Nothing stayed the same for long. The skyline altered with new buildings shooting skywards, jarring with the centuries-old solid structures the millions of tourists flocked to visit.

Sandy watched it all as he worked on the overground and underground trains that crisscrossed the capital’s network. He met Cora Flynn on a late-night tube as she returned home to Dagenham from a gig. Fashions in clothes and music altered quickly too, and he cringed when he thought of their wedding photographs, now consigned to a suitcase at the bottom of a wardrobe.

The attraction between them had been immediate. Cora always said she knew the second she spotted Sandy walking through the compartment towards her he was Irish, and ‘the one’. For Sandy, her wild, curly hair and dark brown eyes captivated him. The punk clothes, with slashed jeans, safety-pins and chains didn’t deter him.

He grabbed the closest hanging strap and stood, swaying to the rhythm of the train next to her. He knew his uniform and her outfit signalled an ‘odd couple’ to the rest of those late-night travellers. But they melted away so Cora and Sandy became the only two people in the world.

“Do you want to see my ticket?” she had asked.

“I want your phone number,” he replied.

“Is this a new London Transport policy?”

“I prefer to think of it as an initiative. Do you think it will work?”

Their wedding at St Peter’s Roman Catholic Church took place nine months later. Sandy’s uniform and Cora’s slashed jeans replaced by a modern suit and wedding dress for the occasion. The 70s fashions dated faster than any decade before or since. Even the photos at the christening of their daughter, Amy the following year were hidden away before the decade ended. Then, by 1990 both the women in his life left him.

The sights and sounds still flashed and crashed around Sandy as he threw himself into work to ease the pain. He nodded his assent every time a colleague asked him to pick up an overtime shift. The money was little compensation. He had nobody on whom to spend it. Before he knew it, Sandy allowed twenty years to drift by, and when the doctor gave him the ultimatum, it suddenly made him realise that life had all but passed him by.

He had spent every day since arriving on that train from Southampton serving the public. He doubted any of the people travelling with him this late morning even cared. His last week at work he would be moving from Bank to Lewisham and back again. Colleagues told him there were regulars if you took the trouble to look at their faces. Sandy had to admit he stopped noticing. The different shapes and sizes, colours and creeds, of the men, women and children had become wallpaper.

Had he seen that elderly couple before, two rows back? Could he remember where they boarded? What of the students? What did they study? There were tourists, for sure, you could spot them, even without the cameras. He gazed at another elderly lady for a while. He remembered her get on at Greenwich. She had been out of breath when she took her seat. The same as Sandy, she carried more weight than good for her.

It was no good. He couldn’t recognise anyone. Nobody nodded or uttered a friendly word. That was common when he began to work in London all those years ago. Millions travelled on the Tube, crushed together hurtling from station to station in artificial light, or occasionally, total darkness. A conversation still out of the question then, even in the days before wi-fi. The deterioration speeded up the day Sony Walkmans arrived. It was so much easier to stick headphones in their ears and shut out the world.

The EMU slowed. They were pulling into Crossharbour, on the Isle of Dogs. Sandy kept an eye on the passengers. People got ready to leave the train. Others shifted in their seats and watched people waiting on the platform. They were interested enough to look, but not to talk when they found a spare seat next to them. The doors closed. Another stop successfully negotiated. Nobody tripped making their way to the door or had to dash back for a forgotten item. More got on than left, so there were more strap-hangers.

Could he remember having seen any of the new arrivals? He saw nothing extraordinary about any of them, old or young. Several carried umbrellas or wore light rain jackets. Sandy checked the glazed window ahead. The sun had disappeared, and a smattering of showery rain now dappled the glass.

South Quay came next, and then Heron’s Quay. Sandy walked towards the front of the cab. He wished he could get back in the driver’s cab, but progress had all but eliminated that job. In an emergency, the ‘captain’ operated the train manually, but the occasion never arose since the DLR started.

Sandy and his driver colleagues weren’t the only ones to find their posts being eliminated

or transformed. The automated light metro system used minimal staffing on both train and major interchange stations. The underground stations on the DLR were staffed to comply with Fire and Safety requirements but there was little to spare.

Young Moloney had arrived in London when the IRA wreaked havoc. He spent many nights underground wondering whether a bomb sat waiting around the next corner. Different brands of terror drifted in and out of London over the decades. Attacks on London Transport personnel had followed a steady upward trend. Everyone had to be vigilant. There were many who wanted to harm their fellow man, for one cause or another. The Dockland bombings in 1996 had been the final atrocity from the Provisionals. Al Qaeda soon became the major threat and the events of July 2005 were shocking and brutal.

Sandy had been working nights that week. He was just getting home and climbing into bed after an uneventful shift when Amy called. She wanted to check he was safe. It took something dramatic to stir her interest in her father. The next call came in late December.

The minimal staffing levels concerned Sandy. How could you stop someone walking onto a station platform carrying a bomb if there was nobody watching? A determined soul could wait until the coast was clear, and then plant a device on the platform. Who would challenge them? Simple enough to buy a hi-viz jacket these days. What if they wandered up the tracks a hundred yards in either direction between trains and buried an IED? Who thought it worth checking they were supposed to be there?

They had arrived at South Quay.

Sandy scanned the platform for bombers, or hi-viz jackets, but saw none. Only suited and booted office-workers and business types from Canary Wharf. A group of middle-aged women, who Sandy imagined were 'ladies who lunch' followed the men onto the train. So many things had altered over the years.

The doors closed. Next stop Heron's Quay.

The medication prescribed for him was working. It soon became routine to take it every day. The doctor said he needed to get him more stable. He now suffered fewer bouts of depression. Sandy felt he had mellowed. He stayed alert the entire time the train stopped at the station. Although he hadn't admitted it to the doctor at either of their meetings, his concentration drifted over the past five years, especially on a warm afternoon.

It was time to move to the rear of the train. There were checks to carry out before they reached Canary Wharf, and finding a new vantage point for a change of scenery eased the boredom.

He took one last look at the front glazed window.

The rain had stopped. Sandy Moloney turned and headed up the aisle.

As he passed the elderly couple, something that barely registered at first made sense. There had been a dark shape across the track two hundred yards ahead. The EMU was travelling at 40mph. Sandy Moloney's ten seconds were up before he could react.

The IED was detonated from a remote location high in an apartment in Canary Wharf. The glazed front window of the EMU disintegrated. The sudden jolt caught every passenger unawares. Glasses flew off faces, phones were knocked out of hands. Shouts and screams of alarm followed as the derailment nightmare unfolded. Everything shook as the train rapidly decelerated. People's belongings flew everywhere.

Sandy was hurled back into the standing passengers he passed. Seated passengers were

tossed around like rag dolls as the cab twisted and turned. The elderly couple now lay under the seats on the opposite side from where they had been sitting. The lady's right leg clearly had been broken. Her husband had suffered a significant head wound.

The screams Sandy heard as he drifted in and out of consciousness came from the middle-aged ladies who got on at South Quay. The older woman, on her own, and who joined at Greenwich slumped in her seat. Apart from a large swelling above her right eye, she looked calm. She was the last person Sandy saw.

The stresses and strains on the three-car EMU as it ground to a halt played out against a cacophony of tortured metal and human suffering.

For a few seconds, there was silence.

The front car was totally mangled. The second and third cars had tilted precariously for endless seconds, then toppled onto their side, their bodywork remarkably intact. Those passengers still mobile, attempted to escape through the rear of the third car. Heads appeared from windows and doors of the rear cars. Help was arriving from members of the public who had been at the station. Rescue services had been summoned, but access was restricted. Those inside the EMU requiring urgent medical help lost valuable minutes from their golden hour.

The automated system controls did their work. Traffic halted on the Lewisham-Bank DLR network. The bomb squad was alerted. The first explosion witnesses reported both inside and outside Heron's Quay had to be confirmed. Then the search would begin for additional devices. The DLR would be disrupted for a considerable time.

The terrorists in the apartment surveyed the scene from a safe distance. No words needed to be spoken. The two men turned away from the devastation they had caused and removed every trace of their presence in the room. Thirty minutes later, they walked to the lift in the corridor, descended the twelve floors to the street, and went their separate ways. Busy pavements swallowed them in seconds.

Conversations they overheard as they passed by concerned their handiwork. The sense of panic they picked up in the voices was music to their ears. They both smiled on the inside. This was only the beginning.

Half a mile away, the streets next to Heron's Quay were congested with ambulances, police vehicles, and fire appliances. Barriers had been erected, and the immediate area cleared. The capital's media swarmed like ants across every inch of ground, as close to the action as it could get. Overhead, helicopters circled. The police, security services, and Air Medical Services (HEMS) out of Whitechapel performed an unchoreographed dance routine.

Officers ran into every side street, shouting at every human being they spotted to move as far away from the blast site as possible. General traffic was at a standstill. Every parked car scrutinised, in case it posed a threat.

On the rail track, the bomb squad personnel edged their way forwards, checking for any evidence that more explosions were imminent. Colleagues swept the platforms and approach roads, allowing ambulance crews to be waved forwards.

Twenty-seven minutes after the explosion the first paramedics reached the front car. The scene was one of overwhelming devastation.

Behind them, members of the public who had risked life and limb to scramble along the track helped the walking-wounded thread their way through emergency services personnel. Those fortunate enough to walk unaided were reaching the platform.

There were still passengers trapped inside the rear two cars crying out for help. Everyone standing near the stricken EMU was aware the poor devils in the front car had suffered the most. Those crying out as the paramedics dashed past were still breathing, their airways clear. They were not their priority as harsh as that might sound.

The quiet ones demanded their urgent attention.

The paramedics entered the rear of the first car. Ahead of them, a shapeless mound of people. The blast and sudden deceleration of the train threw dozens of passengers helplessly forwards. People lay trapped by bodies and debris. Here and there voices were shouting to get out. Elsewhere they made only moans and groans. Rapid assessments were made as they drew closer. An elderly woman they passed was beyond help. A man pinned to his seat by a metal bar was unconscious but breathing. On the floor, trapped under the seats lay an elderly couple. The woman's leg was badly broken, and she had suffered a collapsed lung. A man, perhaps her husband, lay next to her. He wasn't breathing. This would be a long day.

Minute by minute, the situation moved from chaotic to controlled. The critical and seriously injured were extricated with the help from the fire services where necessary and transferred to waiting ambulances. Local accident and emergency departments had already received dozens of casualties needing various degrees of treatment. Doctors were primed for worse injuries to arrive later, knowing life-saving operations would be necessary, routine operations scheduled needed to be deferred yet again.

Hours passed. The only passengers who remained on the EMU were beyond help. Paramedics continued to work on their standard procedures after a bombing. The scene should be as undisturbed as possible. Dressings, clothing, and belongings of the casualties must be preserved for forensic evidence. Pieces of shrapnel from the device itself which they found inside the front car must be kept for examination.

Many lessons had been learned over the past twenty years. Every scrap they encountered could be the key to determining responsibility. Knowledge added to the vast data security services had amassed increased the odds of preventing the next attack.

The bodies of the eighteen people who perished on the EMU were removed to the nearest morgue. The first bodies arrived at a few minutes before four o'clock. A final body arrived at half-past five. Six hours had elapsed since Sandy Moloney started what turned out to be his final journey. There was a certain irony that the EMU's 'captain' was the last man to leave.

News bulletins on TV and radio had carried reports of the original incident. As the drama unfolded throughout the afternoon, the scale of the attack became clearer. Derailments are not an uncommon event, Often, they don't result in any injuries. It was a while before the explosion witnesses reported hearing was confirmed as an IED. Thoughts of minor disruption to the network and those passengers involved were soon forgotten. The tone of the bulletins grew more sombre as the afternoon progressed.

Across the capital, in many households, family members waited for news. The DLR carried one hundred million passenger journeys each year. Many Londoners rode the EMUs daily, either to and from work or to school or college. The cars ferried people to business meetings, shopping trips, and social outings. Until they heard from their loved one, nobody could be sure they hadn't been on the Lewisham-Bank train that left the terminus before noon.

In Vincent Gardens, Belgravia, Geoffrey Fox awaited the return of his wife, Grace.

Geoffrey had been in their small, rear garden after lunch. Grace travelled by bus and train

to meet a school friend in Greenwich. This was not an unusual occurrence, on a Monday. The mode of transport might have changed in recent months, but Grace kept in contact with as many old friends as possible. There were fewer and fewer each year. Time was short and precious.

He potted in the flower borders and trimmed a few overhanging bushes. He was careful not to do too much damage. Then he planned to sit on the seat they often shared and study his efforts. The late morning showers had scudded through, and now a warm sun peeped through the clouds. Their sheltered spot was a sun-trap. Geoffrey rested his eyes and fell asleep.

Three o'clock had come and gone when he awoke. He checked his watch again. Grace should have been home by now. He returned indoors, and called upstairs, in case she had only just come indoors. There was no reply. He stood at the bottom of the stairs. Perhaps, he should call Daphne? To check whether they chatted longer than usual, and Grace caught a later train.

When he replaced the phone, Geoffrey was worried. Daphne had told him she dropped Grace at the DLR station in Greenwich at the same time as always. She begged Geoffrey to ring back with news.

It was rare for Athena's parents to watch TV during the day. Geoffrey couldn't stand the drivel between the music on the radio, so he was happy to do without entertainment, apart from his Times newspaper. That kept him abreast of everything he needed to know. It often occupied several hours of his day as he made his way through one thoughtful article after another. He switched on the television.

Geoffrey Fox perched on the arm of a leather settee as he watched the rolling news report from Heron's Quay. Grace would have been on that train. She could be injured, or even worse. It was time to call their daughter, Annabelle Grace Fox-Bailey. He hoped she was at Larcombe Manor with her husband, Phoenix. Whatever needed doing, those two would want to be involved. He returned to the hallway, picked up the phone, and dialled.

"Daddy?" asked Athena, surprised to hear from her father.

"I'm afraid your mother travelled on that train today, darling," said Geoffrey "I haven't heard from her."

"Sorry, Daddy," said Athena, "we returned from the North of England in the last hour. Phoenix and I have been travelling for hours. What train? Where did this happen? Why did Mummy go on a train without you?"

"She visits Daphne, her old friend from Greenwich most Mondays. They have coffee somewhere together, and then your mother comes home. Taxis in London cost the earth these days, and now we're eligible we've picked up Freedom Passes, and Sixty Plus Oyster ID Cards. That provides us with free bus travel and concessions with the Senior Railcard on off-peak Oyster fares."

Athena was incredulous. This didn't sound like Daddy. He always travelled first-class everywhere. She couldn't have helped the Olympus Project without her share of the family fortune she inherited when reaching twenty-five.

"I don't know why you two are scrimping and saving, Daddy. Forget that for the time being. Tell me what's happened."

"Mummy takes the bus to Tower Gateway, and then travels to Greenwich, with one change of line. The whole trip takes her fifty minutes. On her return trip, she was due to change at Westferry from the Lewisham-Bank line. When she reached Tower Gateway, it was only a fifteen-minute walk home. The walking has been part of her exercise regime these past weeks.

The consultant still reckons she's overweight and putting too much strain on her heart."

"So, where did this accident happen?" Athena asked.

"The train derailed at Heron's Quay just before noon. It wasn't an accident, darling. On the news, they said there was a bomb. An IED had been laid on the tracks. I'm watching the latest news now. There are emergency service people scrambling over the train and the tracks. It's a mess. It had to be a terrorist attack, but nobody has claimed responsibility yet. If Mummy was in the first car..."

"Phoenix and I will be there by six o'clock. if we can get hold of our helicopter pilot at such short notice. You stay by the phone. We'll find out where the survivors are being transferred. As soon as we know something, either Phoenix or I will call. I love you, Daddy. Try not to worry. Mummy will be fine."

Geoffrey replaced the phone and walked into the lounge. On the screen, there were wide-angle shots of the three-carriage EMU. Three stretchers were being hustled along the track carrying casualties. Those poor beggars must at least be alive, though Geoffrey thought, or they would move much slower.

It was fast approaching four o'clock. The live feed ended, and in the studio, the newsreader updated the confirmed number of casualties.

"Seventy-three passengers are continuing to receive treatment at the A&E departments. A further one-hundred and three have been released with minor lacerations and bruising. Those that remain in the hospital include twenty-eight with serious, life-altering injuries. Eight of those twenty-eight are critical. At this time, the death toll is estimated at eighteen. Screens are being erected on the side of the track, to allow the bodies of the deceased to be removed. That operation will start in a few minutes."

The programme switched to one of the hospitals where a senior doctor was being interviewed. He confirmed the number of fatalities and sent his condolences to the families. The main causes of death were due to severe trauma associated with crush injuries. As for those on the critical list, the next twenty-four hours were vital. When pushed on whether the number of deaths might rise, he said it unlikely that the eight would all make it through the night.

Geoffrey sank into a chair and waited for the call he hoped never came.

