

CHAPTER 1

‘Good luck in your new venture’, the card read.

It was one of a handful of cards from well-wishers that had arrived at the Hounsell house in the past few days. Phil Hounsell was making a fresh start.

The Divisional Commander had been a man of his word. Phil had walked out of his job with his head held high and a full pension. He had cleared his desk on Friday afternoon, then spent the best part of August in the garden at home or on holiday with Erica and the children.

The ACC was able to save his career by the skin of his teeth. A gullible public swallowed his story that ‘heads had rolled’ at Portishead after the debacle of the hunt for the Bulgarian killers; in truth, the shrinking numbers were more to do with austerity cuts or fellow officers giving up the pointless struggle and quitting the service.

The identities of the murdered men had emerged as the new month had progressed. Dimitar Marinov and his cronies were exposed as a collection of career criminals and ruthless enforcers. The media questioned how these murderers just waltzed through immigration control without anyone wondering whether they were the calibre of person the UK really needed.

As for the gang’s killers, there had been little progress on that front. A few local residents had contacted the police to ask if they knew about the film crew in the area that weekend. Confusion reigned over the name of the company involved.

Memories were hazy; it seemed so innocent at the time. A trifle inconvenient to have gunfire in the background while serving breakfast or driving out to fetch the Sunday papers. Not important enough to remember every detail on an apparently official sign. The Met police were passed the information by the local police and when added to the sum of everything they gathered at Eton Wick, it amounted to very little.

The media’s attention switched to new matters; the killings had stopped and the Met were following up dozens of leads gained from the Bulgarian’s homes. Dimitar Marinov was proven to have been involved in the trafficking of drugs and young women. Dozens of properties were raided and the smiles on the Met senior officers were getting broader by the day.

For the time being, the possible existence of a second ruthless gang of killers was pushed to one side. There were five hundred gangs from which to choose. They could only tackle one thing at a time. As for the involvement of third parties, such as the one stationed at Larcombe Manor, for instance, it never crossed anyone’s mind. Giles, Artemis and the team could keep their misinformation tactics in reserve for another occasion.

At the end of the third week in August, as Phil Hounsell and family were stepping off the plane from Marbella, news broke the Met had discovered the bodies of the ram-raid gang. At long last, their families learnt what had happened to them.

The press portrayed them as ‘victims’ which their criminal shenanigans suggested they certainly were not. But they were British rogues, slaughtered by foreign killers that should never have been allowed to enter the UK. The headlines caught the mood of the country.

Phil had read the newspapers the next morning and wondered at the mentality of people these days. His leaving-do and the finalising of his exit from Portishead took place on Friday, August 30th. The DC was there both in the office and in the pub later. The ACC and others

were otherwise engaged. Phil arrived home in a taxi, at about two in the morning three sheets in the wind; Erica saw that he was tucked up in bed safely but also made sure he got up by eight o'clock so he could get used to going shopping with her.

Phil had given hours of thought to what he might do now that his police career had ended. What were his strengths? Detecting was his expertise, but he didn't fancy starting up as a private investigator. He thought he would try his hand as a security consultant. Erica came up with the name; she suggested Hounsell Security Services or HSS for short.

"What nature of security work do you think you might get offered?" she asked.

"I'll circulate my details around the companies in the region and offer my services to help them avoid being robbed or defrauded for a start. We'll see what that generates."

It's odd how the supermarket run can sometimes find one bumping into old faces. Erica had Phil on trolley duty and piled stuff into the basket while he coped with his hangover. He knew better than to expect any sympathy from his wife, so he looked at the other poor souls passing him.

"Morning Sir," said a voice "don't see you in here very often."

It was Wayne Sangster, his companion from the Glastonbury weekend.

"Not 'Sir' any longer Wayne, I'm retired," he replied.

"Got out at last then? Good for you. What are you doing with yourself?"

"I'm starting a security consultancy, offering advice to firms, that sort of thing," said Phil.

"You don't want to be pissing around with that caper mate," laughed Wayne "the big money is in personal security. Looking after celebrities and Russian and Arab oligarchs."

"How do you know so much about it Wayne," asked Phil. Erica looked eager to move into the next aisle. Wayne manoeuvred his small trolley around to follow the couple.

"I did a bit of security before I joined; I told you I'd done quite a few jobs didn't I?"

"You did Wayne. Are you still enjoying life?"

"There haven't been many laughs since the weekend we worked together it has to be said. I thought of looking around for something else. I've got a couple of mates in the security business that I might give a call."

Phil decided to make an executive decision; Erica was shelf-surfing a few yards in front, hunting for a specific brand of whatever that they had probably withdrawn from production. This could take a while.

"How do you fancy coming to work for me Wayne?" he asked.

"Do you have a uniform?"

Phil thought quickly.

"Of course; it will be a navy-blue shirt with epaulettes, and the HSS logo on the sleeve, black trousers, and boots. That sound okay?"

"You can count me in," said Wayne.

Erica returned from a fruitless conversation with a spotty member of staff to find her husband and a strange man shaking hands vigorously.

"Good to have you on board Wayne," said Phil "would these mates of yours be interested in joining us, what do you reckon?"

Wayne agreed to check and start the ball rolling on getting himself out of the police service. Phil breathed a sigh of relief; the shopping run was finally completed. Erica still seemed miffed about the item she could no longer find. For his part, Phil was staggered that two adults and

two children could demolish the loaded trolley he struggled to push towards the car in one week.

Monday, September 9th, 2013

Phil had rented office space above a dry-cleaning firm, far enough away from Bath city centre that the amount didn't make his eyes water. Wayne arrived at two o'clock on the dot as he had agreed when he rang Phil earlier in the day. He was off-duty until Wednesday and counting the days. With holiday entitlement, he would be changing uniform for the umpteenth time after Friday. His two mates Dusty and Leggo had definitely been interested. The newcomers just wanted to know when Phil secured a decent-paying contract that made it worthwhile packing in their current jobs.

"Do we have the uniforms yet boss?" asked Wayne, always eager to start dressing up.

"All in good time. Let's find work first," said Phil.

"I might have an idea boss," said Wayne "while we worked together at Glastonbury I picked up loads of contacts. Dozens of people handed out cards and fliers and that. You never know when one of them might come in handy, so whenever someone stuck a hand out with an offer, I grabbed it. You've heard of that Honey B, the singer?"

Phil shook his head.

"She's older than you, boss, she's been around ages; upset a lot of people too. A bit of a diva. She's starting a UK tour next Monday. I've just read in the Sun that she's fired her security people. A car never turned up where and when it should have. Honey B got left standing on the pavement in Chelsea for ten minutes with the grubby public. She got recognised and people started grabbing hold of her and wanting photographs with her and all that stuff. Now advising *her* on security would be a nice little earner."

"We don't have the experience for that Wayne," said Phil "she'd hardly employ a brand new outfit like us."

"Her first concert is in Bristol boss. She doesn't have much time to get something in place, does she? I'll get hold of her management people and tell her we'll sort Monday night out and if she's happy, we'll take it from there. What have we got to lose?"

"What, just the two of us?" said Phil.

"I'll get Dusty and Leggo to phone in sick if they're working. We'll be fine. It's personal security boss, it's only her we have to look after; the venue will have their own guys. We just need to liaise with them, collect her from the hotel, get her to the gig and away again afterwards, without her breaking a nail."

Wayne's confidence started to grow on Phil. He asked him for the number of this Honey B's management company and made the call himself.

"Good afternoon, I am ex-Detective Superintendent Hounsell; we have staff available with decades of experience in personal security. I understand you have a pressing problem regarding the security of your client at next Monday night's concert in Bristol. We are based in Bath and are prepared to step into the breach. We will waive our fee for the night. If your client is happy with our work, we can negotiate a figure for the other dates on her UK tour. What do you say?"

Wayne looked impressed. Not with the waiving the fee bit. But how Phil covered all the bases and didn't give the bloke on the other end a chance to breathe. Let alone pass comment.

Phil was listening to a voice on the other end of the line and making notes. Wayne watched intently. Phil ended the conversation.

“Well boss?” asked Wayne.

“HSS have their first client; Honey B’s people will be in touch later in the week with the arrangements we need to make on Monday,” said Phil with a smile.

“What’s next then boss?” asked Wayne.

“What size collar are you? What waist and leg measurement? What logo should we have? Big boots at a guess?”

“Seventeen. Forty-two, thirty-three. A white horse. Size twelve boss.”

“Forty-two?” asked Phil.

“At a push boss, honest,” replied Wayne “shall I ring Dusty and Leggo to get their measurements too?”

Uniforms for the three lads were sorted out and Phil agreed to a logo that looked remarkably like the Ferrari prancing horse, but in white with HSS below it. He decided to stick to a suit and tie.

The instructions for the Bristol concert arrived from the London office of the management company. Miss Honey B wanted plenty for her money, which in this case was literally something for nothing. Phil sat in the office and went through the items and set out a timetabled procedure. If Wayne and the others followed this to the minute, they should be fine.

It was like planning a raid and getting the resources to arrive on cue at exactly the right time. Phil found he enjoyed the exercise; this time, they had an end result. Even if raids he organised went off without a hitch, someone screwed up further along the line and the criminals only received a caution or got off altogether.

He sent the schedule he’d prepared off to London. He got back a reply within minutes, saying his plan had been accepted. Honey B had given HSS the task of keeping her safe on Monday night.

Phil asked Wayne on Thursday evening if he could track down a good limousine firm. Naturally, Wayne had half a dozen cards in his possession. A car was secured. The flowers and champagne ordered. The exact blend of aromas on standby to be introduced via the air-conditioning to the interior of the vehicle while Honey B was on board.

Wayne was the designated driver for the evening. Dusty Miller and Jake Legg stationed themselves on the pavement outside the stage door of the venue.

The limousine arrived on the dot, Honey B swept from her Clifton hotel and into the back of her sweet-smelling stretch limousine. The door closed quietly behind her. The drive to the venue was smooth. It left not a smidgen to complain over; even for a diva. Wayne eased to a halt by Dusty and Leggo. Phil tapped on the stage door.

Honey B waited until Dusty opened the door and then she emerged to screams and flashing cameras and phones. Dusty and Leggo closed the gap to surround their charge and she was inside the sanctuary of the theatre in seconds. The stage door slammed shut behind her. Honey B gave Phil Hounsell a head to toe appraisal.

“Mr. Hounsell?” she asked.

“Yes, ma’am, Chief executive of HSS at your service. Your dressing room is this way.”

“I’ve been here a dozen times before,” she hissed “I know the way.”

The room had also been given the diva treatment. Phil was glad he wasn’t paying for that

lot too; this venue must be charging a fortune for tickets, he thought.

The concert got underway within ten minutes; a warm-up act played a brief set and then it was time for Honey B to take to the stage. The manager was praying nothing would go wrong.

“The audience will expect a two-hour show, but she can be fickle. If she gets it into her head she’s not ‘feeling the love’ then she’ll walk off after an hour. Another night she’ll do an extra fifteen minutes.”

“What will she do at the end, assuming she does the straight two hours?” asked Phil.

“Your guess is as good as mine. She might run off the stage and collect her things from the dressing-room. She’ll expect you to be ready to whisk her straight back to Clifton. Last time she played here she was hanging around in the room, cooling down and finishing off her champagne, chatting to staff. Quite often she’ll have one glass before she takes to the stage and the rest is wasted.”

Phil raised an eyebrow.

“Well, it would be wasted if the staff didn’t look after it,” the manager replied.

It was time for Honey B to sing to her adoring public, Phil stood in the wings and watched. He had to admit she sounded good. He recognised one or two of the tunes; his mother had several of Honey B’s earliest hits on vinyl. He decided against mentioning it if she deigned to talk to him later.

Almost two hours had passed; Phil texted Wayne and told him to bring the car round to the stage door. Dusty and Leggo lingered backstage, primed for action. Truth be told they were having a coffee and nipping outside now and then for a cigarette. Honey B finished her set with one of her greatest hits. She left the stage to rapturous applause. She smiled.

Phil noticed that the smile didn’t reach her eyes. As she made her way to the dressing room her beady eyes appeared to be darting left and right. As if she was searching to find something to justify a tantrum. A strange woman and no mistake. He needed to tread carefully.

Honey B entered the room and went to close the door. She paused and turned back towards him.

“Will you drink a glass of champagne with me before we leave Mr. Hounsell? I hate to drink alone.”

“I’ll keep you company ma’am,” he said and took the proffered glass.

Honey B threw a wrap around her shoulders and sat in a comfortable chair. She studied Phil over the top of her glass as she sipped her drink. Phil didn’t enjoy the way she looked at him; not a pleasant inspection, more like a surgical dissection. He looked at the photos and cards that festooned the table in front of them. The room was full of roses; dozens of them, all splashes of red and yellow.

Near her handbag lay a photo that didn’t fit. The rest looked like signed pictures of Honey B alone or unsigned shots with a fan at an exotic location somewhere around the world. This one was a hastily framed shot of a man and a woman. They had been snapped leaving a building. Phil’s heart almost jumped out of his chest. It looked like the two people he had met at Glastonbury at the end of June. He was convinced of it. Why on earth did Honey B have a photograph of them?

Behind the public mask of Honey B, Demeter spotted the security consultant’s sudden reaction; her mind raced. How could this ex-policeman know Athena and Phoenix? Her colleague had taken these pictures in Curzon Street as they left the Olympus meeting. Shortly

before he travelled to Ibiza to carry out a small task for her and her friends. She hoped to unmask the true identity of her male opponent. Could this man hold the key?

Honey B soon switched back to her day-to-day persona. She drained her glass and told Phil she was ready to leave. As he moved to the door to summon Dusty and Leggo, Honey B caught hold of his sleeve.

“Thank you for tonight. Call my office tomorrow; name your price and you can be my personal security people for the rest of the tour.”

Phil Hounsell thanked Honey B, trying not to sound too grateful. He didn't want to overdo it. She could be fickle and the chill that ran through his arm as she touched his wrist unsettled him.

As she swept away from the stage door in Wayne's stretch limousine he thought they must be doing something right. HSS was up and running.

In the back of the car, Demeter was purring gently. What a stroke of luck to stumble across someone who clearly recognised Phoenix.

“I believe we are both hunting the same man, Mr. Hounsell,” she muttered “I shall have to keep you close by my side. What fun we might have!”

CHAPTER 2

Monday, August 5th, 2013

While Phil Hounsell wrapped up his police career on one side of the county, matters in August had started on a more sombre note at Larcombe Manor.

Athena and a handful of mourners attended the funeral of William Horatio Hunt. Erebus was laid to rest between the graves of his beloved wife Elizabeth and their daughter Helen. The family vault could now be sealed. The generations of the Hunt family that had occupied Larcombe for five hundred years would see no further coffins arriving to join them.

Athena shed tears for Erebus, her mentor, as she stood in the vault beside Minos. Her cheeks already dampened by the showers that had greeted the small congregation as they followed the coffin onto the hillside cemetery that overlooked the Hunt family estate.

The gods expressed their displeasure at the manner of Erebus's death; as the mourners left the dark recesses of the vault they emerged to violent claps of thunder. Seconds later sheet lightning illuminated the hillside on the opposite side of the valley.

"I understand," said Athena quietly "but you can rely on me. I will discover who was responsible for his death and take our revenge."

Minos placed a hand on her shoulder to comfort her.

"We owe Erebus a tremendous debt of gratitude. Olympus could never have existed without his vision and drive. This nation has no idea how many lives the missions our agents have carried out saved over the past six years. A simple ceremony such as that was scant reward for his true significance."

Athena nodded. "We will each of us remember him in our own way, Minos. But, the integrity of the Project had to be maintained. As much as we might wish to proclaim his name from the rooftops and demand the headlines he deserves, that was never going to be possible."

The party of mourners from the Olympus Project HQ gathered in the car park at the entrance to the cemetery. Athena stood for a moment and gazed across the hillside to the mausoleum. No one spoke.

Athena turned and walked to the cars from the transport section. Time to return to Larcombe. There was to be no wake; no maudlin recollections of a life well lived. It had to be back to business; battles needed to be fought and debts must be paid.

In the orangery, Phoenix sifted through the reports Rusty prepared following his recce into the 'beds in sheds' situation in Outer London. Phoenix had been denied the opportunity to attend his saviour's funeral along with many others who worked here at headquarters.

His true identity had been closely guarded since his arrival at the beginning of July, three years ago. The day Colin Bailey ceased to exist and the Phoenix was born. The struggle to keep that knowledge hidden had been made doubly difficult now Artemis worked in the ice-house. Zara Wheeler and Colin Bailey had history.

The young ex-policewoman lived at Larcombe with Rusty Scott, his closest friend.

Disillusioned with the modern role of policing she joined forces with Olympus. Phoenix had no idea what she might do with the knowledge of his past life should it ever be uncovered. Until Artemis could be trusted one hundred percent, Phoenix had to resort to creeping around the estate. He moved between the rooms he shared with Athena and the orangery which became his sanctuary. Trips to the ice-house and the other facilities were strictly controlled. Phoenix felt like a caged animal. Not a feeling he relished.

“Concentrate man,” he chided himself, as he leafed through the reams of intelligence that Rusty had gathered.

The background to the rents crisis in London was clear for anyone to see. The city had built new homes at around half the pace needed to satisfy the intensifying demand. Its population set to surge past nine million before the end of the decade. Average rents had risen by over fifteen percent in the past two years. The poor devils forced to rent the roof over their heads to live in the vast, sprawling metropolis parted with an average of over twelve hundred pounds per month.

Phoenix looked at his surroundings. The elegant, refined orangery he and Erebus used for their private meetings for over two years. He knew just how much he owed the old gentleman. How different his life might have been if Erebus hadn't marked him out as a potential recruit for Olympus.

After Sue Owens died Phoenix had been left a wealthy man, but money was no substitute for family. Larcombe was now his family home. Erebus had been the father figure he never knew as a child. Athena was his partner for life, and she carried their child. Phoenix felt at one with his surroundings for the first time in his life.

Phoenix knew the direct actions he planned were challenging. The capital held many thousands of families and individuals who wanted nothing more than to experience the sense of calm and ‘belonging’ he experienced. Whenever an opportunity arose to make a profit out of ambitions such as those, unscrupulous people always stood waiting to take advantage.

Rusty identified two targets as meriting special attention.

Hounslow, a West London Borough had its share of rogue landlords. Oscar Friedman, a grocery shop owner, started to expand his property portfolio twenty years ago. To the customers that visited his shop every day Oscar was a quiet, attentive grocer in his mid-sixties who charged over the odds for his fresh produce.

As far as anyone knew, Friedman merely rented out the rooms above the shop. Oscar and his wife lived in the more sophisticated climes just over the borders of the Borough in Richmond. Retirement beckoned and they were certain to have put enough by to see them live out their days in moderate comfort.

The truth behind the public face of Oscar Friedman proved to be far more sinister. He employed an agent to look after the properties that provided his main income. Sylvester Read, a former estate agent, was single and in his late thirties. He spent his leisure time watching or participating in his favourite sport. Sylvester was a cage fighter. Violence his answer to most problems. If the problem needed extra muscle, he called Frank DeAngelo.

DeAngelo was a thug for hire. He had spent more than half his adult life in prison. Frank wasn't the brightest senior citizen on the planet, but he came from an Italian family that arrived in London in the 1920's. There had been a DeAngelo family member filling the role of ‘enforcer’ in nearly every organised crime gang in the capital since that time.

Rusty had gathered evidence on the Borough and the impact of uncontrolled immigration. He identified the long list of properties Friedman owned and the methods Read employed to constantly improve the returns on his employer's investments.

Hounslow had been a rural area in the not too distant past. Now, many areas resemble shanty towns. There were twenty thousand gardens with ramshackle sheds or outbuildings of different sizes. Many rented out illegally. Two years ago the census showed the official population at a quarter of a million. That number, only two years later, stood closer to three hundred thousand.

Shed-renting had reached crisis point. The council set up a special squad to tackle the problem. The squad now carries out dawn raids; properties that break planning rules are sometimes destroyed. Too often though the landlord only receives a warning.

The knock-on effects of the housing crisis are easy to see. Local schools have to accommodate hundreds of extra pupils. Many are the children of newly-arrived migrants; while others are from families moved out of Central London to cut housing benefit costs. Doctors' surgeries, dental practices, rubbish collection and the sanitation system are stretched beyond capacity.

Criminal landlords, such as Oscar Friedman, made huge profits from the most vulnerable people in society. Families trapped into living in squalor in little more than shacks, yet paying hundreds of pounds a month in rent.

Sylvester Read's response to questions from inspectors from the council squad was as flimsy as the fabrications that Friedman's tenants occupied. Yet it was tough to prove that many of the buildings were definitely places where people lived. The council squad needed to give the landlord notice of an inspection visit.

Oscar merely phoned Read and when the inspectors arrived the next day the families were at work; the children at school. If a wife stayed at home with an infant, she moved up the street to another house. The grocer owned more than a dozen properties on one street alone. The council might have their suspicions, but obtaining the proof turned out to be as elusive as a winning lottery ticket.

Phoenix read page after page of escalating harassment and intimidation. Sylvester Read and Frank DeAngelo dished out racist and homophobic abuse on a regular basis. The pair made frequent late night visits to properties with no prior warning. Tenants complained locks were being changed while they worked. Services such as hot water and heating often got disconnected.

Repairs and maintenance on properties were withdrawn to the level where they became uninhabitable. This happened most often with single-occupancy apartments. Once the tenant had been forced to move out Friedman had a ready supply of families prepared to pay more rent. Overcrowding wasn't a word in his dictionary.

Rusty talked to a disabled lady in her fifties, who had lived in one of Friedman's flats for eight years. She kept herself to herself, and always paid her rent on time. Despite her physical limitations, she kept the place clean and tidy. Read paid her a visit.

He forced her to sign an agreement that reduced her rights. Two Somali men moved into the attic space above her flat. They tried to break into her flat to rob her on several occasions. The poor woman was terrified they might do far worse than rob her. She quit the flat and within a week a family of seven migrants occupied the place she had called home.

Phoenix spotted another familiar story in the file. A young bank worker in her twenties moved into Hounslow from Brighton. Read told her initially he had nothing available for someone wishing to live alone. He suggested she shared accommodation with a group of fellow professionals. The young girl was away from home for the first time. He persuaded her to at least meet her potential housemates.

Read picked her up after work and drove her to the property; a five bedroomed Victorian house converted into flats. When they pulled up in the driveway outside he explained to her that each flat already contained three tenants. As they climbed the stairs to the top floor, Sylvester Read pointed to a newly installed set of stairs leading to the loft.

“We’re installing an apartment up there. Will you feel more comfortable being on your own? If so, this could be just what you need. You can still enjoy the company of the others in the communal areas.”

The young girl was ecstatic; even though the rent was high she grabbed at the chance and arranged to move in as soon as the flat became ready. Within six weeks, Oscar Friedman had decided rents needed to be increased across his property portfolio. The young bank worker was distraught. The true costs of living away from home had started to hit home. She called Sylvester Read to ask if he knew of anywhere cheaper on his employer’s books? Was it possible for her to move into one of the other flats in the house to help her new friends with the extra burden they had to stand?

Read called around in person. Well, of course, he did, thought Phoenix. The slimy agent turned up at the loft apartment, late at night. The young girl told Rusty ‘his breath reeked of alcohol. He apologised, of course, he said he appreciated the financial impact of a rent rise was unfortunate. It was difficult to see a way forward. The landlord insisted on three occupants as a maximum, and a minimum. He believed it resulted in less unwanted interference between the sexes with that arrangement.’

Read then suggested a solution to her problem. What if he waived the rent increase in exchange for sex? The young girl had been horrified and ordered the agent out of her flat. Read merely shrugged his shoulders.

“I’ll pop round tomorrow night sweetheart, to see if you’ve seen sense. If not, the extra money will be due in full, for this month and next. If you can’t pay, then you’ll be in breach of our agreement. I will tell my boss you’re a ‘flight risk’ and might disappear without paying what you owe. He’ll want you out of here in days. It’s up to you.”

Rusty had detailed the sorry tale. The girl had opened the door to Read the following night. For the next eight months, while she hunted high and low for a flat outside the Borough, Sylvester Read visited her on a regular basis. The violence that typified his lifestyle continued in the bedroom. She was depressed and withdrawn. Her haunted look when being interviewed shocked even Rusty, a hardened soldier. She was still battling to mend her broken life in a woman’s shelter in Chiswick.

“This direct action is going to be a pleasure,” said Phoenix as he moved deeper into the file. Friedman bought property after property in the same style as the semi-detached Victorian house he had just studied. Most had been converted for multi-occupancy letting and the tenants were white, middle-aged to elderly business people. As the years passed, Read and DeAngelo carried out Friedman’s orders. They were ordered to move these people out so that large migrant families could be moved in to replace them.

Not everyone wanted to leave. DeAngelo called around late at night and used his fists to mete out a mild beating. If the message hadn't been received loud and clear by one visit Read and DeAngelo called back together. The beatings became more severe.

The violence continued to escalate as the numbers of migrants flowing into the country picked up pace. Many of these new arrivals arrived here illegally; others had overstayed student visas and evaded deportation orders. It's not difficult to find a hiding place in a city of over eight million souls. As soon as there was any sign of trouble from one of these tenant families Friedman reacted. Complaints on the state of the ramshackle properties they were housed in resulted in Friedman getting his lackeys pay a visit.

Warnings were given that their illegal status could be made known to the authorities if they didn't pay up and keep quiet. If the message wasn't heeded, then Read forced himself on the wives while DeAngelo subdued the husbands and made them watch.

Fewer and fewer of Friedman's properties still remained in the hands of the tenants living there at the outset. Indeed, the turnover was rapid. There was evidence in Rusty's file of dozens of tenants living in fear; too frightened to seek protection from the police. The thugs targeted anyone that didn't fit their twisted idea of normality.

Two men in a civil partnership were terrorised by Read and DeAngelo. They suffered verbal abuse for months. When the thugs wanted to persuade them to leave the flat they shared, they arrived on a Sunday afternoon and tried to force the pair to agree to leave. The older man tried to argue with Read. He insisted they had rights. He had arranged to see a lawyer in the morning to put an end to this harassment.

DeAngelo grabbed the younger man by the wrist and forced the palm of his right hand flat on the table top in front of his partner.

"Rights?" he bellowed "you ain't got no rights!"

With that, he pulled out a knife and stabbed it into the man's hand. It pinned his hand to the table. The screams echoed around their apartment and the other flats in the house for days. There was no visit to the lawyer. The whole property became available for new tenants within days.

Phoenix looked at his watch. Athena should have returned from the funeral. He was sick to his stomach with what he had read so far. The first targets had been identified and confirmed. Time to read stories of the Irish mafia in Ealing later. He needed to get a breath of fresh air.

Phoenix checked there was nobody in the vicinity of the orangery, and the pathways were empty. With a glance over his shoulder towards the old stable block and the ice-house for any signs of Rusty or Artemis, he headed over to the main house.

He found Athena sat by the window looking out over the manicured lawns. She held the silver-framed photograph of Erebus and his wife Elizabeth against her bosom. Phoenix could see her tear-stained cheeks. He wrapped her in his arms and kissed the top of her head.

"Hard saying goodbye to those you love isn't it?" he said.

"Even harder when you know that they were taken from you before their time," said Athena.

"We'll find out who was responsible and avenge him soon enough Athena."

"Have you kept busy while I was gone?" she asked.

"I feel dirty." he growled, "After reading Rusty's reports into the vermin that live in the big city; I need a shower."

“I think I might join you,” Athena smiled and took his hand “I have a favour I need to ask.”

“Lead on,” said Phoenix trying not to appear too eager.

“Mummy and Daddy are home soon from the south of France; we need to pay them a visit. I want a united front when we break the news to them they will be grandparents in the New Year.”

“Ah,” said a deflated Phoenix.

“You’re going to be there, so that’s final,” said Athena,

The thought of an interrogation by her father inside the Fox family home in Vincent Gardens, Belgravia was terrifying to a simple West Country lad.

“How do you think they’ll react to having a vigilante killer as a prospective son-in-law?”

“One step at a time,” replied Athena “we’ll tell them our news of the baby first. Then we can let them get used to the idea we’re a permanent item before we mention the ‘M’ word.”

“Oh, they know we’re a permanent item then?” asked Phoenix, surprised.

Athena blushed. “They know we work closely together for the charity; I always catch them looking at one another whenever I mention your name. With them being abroad most of the year, and Mummy’s heart problem always needing to be taken into account, I haven’t confirmed their suspicions in so many words.”

“Awkward,” said Phoenix as they reached the shower in their en-suite bathroom.

“Maybe we should discuss what we’re going to say to them?” said Athena, slipping out of her clothes.

“Later,” said Phoenix.

