

This is Lena

A Compendium of ‘Recreation’ & ‘Payback’

Two short prequels to the ‘Lena’s Friends ’series of crime novels

by

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Contents

Recreation:

- 1 - Coming Home to a Call
- 2 - The Punter
- 3 - Afterwards
- 4 - Away from it
- 5 - Morning
- 6 - The Girl in the Road

Payback:

- 1 - Roxy
 - 2 - Punters and Gamblers
 - 3 - The Small Hours
 - 4 - Sadly Missed?
 - 5 - Getting away
 - 6 - Questions, then Answers
- Epilogue

And now

Recreation

“Yes, you do look a little familiar...”

1 - Coming Home to a Call

The young man in the hot hatch lifted his foot off the throttle and backed off, letting his car drop in behind the motorcycle. He'd intended to show its rider who was boss, and carve it up as he headed for the turn off, but the fit of the rider's leather jacket and faded jeans suggested that this wasn't some overweight mid life crisis biker on his flashy custom bike, it looked more like a woman. A well formed woman at that. Carving a woman up in the traffic wasn't the best way to impress her, should she be worth impressing.

At the bottom of the slip road where it joined the roundabout, he pulled his car alongside the bike as it waited for the heavy traffic to be stopped and for his lights to change to green.

Glancing to his left, he could see that it was definitely a girl in the red open faced crash helmet. He could see her striking copper coloured hair hanging out from under her headgear to fall over the collar of her traditional black leather jacket. He couldn't help thinking that the colours of the hair and of her helmet should have clashed terribly, but somehow she managed to get away with it.

The girl glanced across at him, her expression carrying more of a 'don't even think about it' vibe than one of any kind of flirtation. He assumed it referred to him not cutting her up, rather than him not thinking about 'it'.

He certainly was thinking about 'it'. She was undoubtedly gorgeous looking, sitting astride that low slung shiny machine as its exhausts burbled away to themselves and the afternoon sunshine glistened off the chrome and the bright metallic paintwork. The bike wasn't too bad looking either, even if it wasn't really his cup of tea. He'd ridden dirt bikes as a kid, but had never bothered to gain a motorcycle licence.

She glanced back and smiled briefly at him as the lights changed, before accelerating smartly away to tuck in behind the last of the red light

jumpers on the roundabout. He followed behind her, lowering his window a little to allow him to savour the sharp and slightly staccato sound from the bike's short exhausts as they echoed off the sides of the underpass. It didn't sound the same as most of these cut down chopper style bikes, even to his inexperienced ear. He didn't know that most of them were Harley-Davidson V twins which gave a particular note to the exhaust. If he'd looked more closely at the bike, rather than its rider, he'd have seen the protruding heads of an old BMW twin cylinder engine sticking out into the breeze, though it may not have meant anything to him.

As they left the roundabout, he let himself drift over to the outside lane and began to accelerate hard but was surprised that the girl on the bike was pulling away rapidly from him. He dropped a gear, but she was still quicker than him so, resignedly, he pulled back into the nearside as the road became a single carriageway.

As he caught up with her at the next roundabout, she peeled off to take the first exit. He carried on to take the next one, then went straight on up the bypass.

* * *

As Lena Fox pulled into her driveway, she switched off the engine, and in what was almost one fluid movement she kicked down her bike's side stand, laid the machine's weight onto it, and dismounted.

She removed her helmet, and very carefully placed it on the ground. It was a very expensive French made 'Ruby', hand fitted in the company's small factory in Paris's fashion quarter to her measurements by craftsmen who believed that even protective clothing should be beautifully styled and made with care.

As she fumbled in her jeans for her garage key, she could hear her phone ringing in her jacket pocket. She answered it. It was a friend, who she'd worked for some while ago. Her friend was calling to ask her for a big favour.

Lena Fox was what is politely known as an 'escort'. A prostitute by any other name, and she was quite OK with that. To those of her friends that were in the know, she cheerfully referred to herself as a tart, though she would draw the line at using the word 'whore'. Somehow that didn't reflect the higher echelons of the business that Lena now worked in.

Clients who could afford Lena's rates certainly didn't use 'whores'. 'Courtesan' may have been more acceptable to them, if indeed they even thought about putting a name to it.

The friend who'd called her, ran what was euphemistically referred to as a massage parlour. Though still a little on the sleazy side, it was one of the better ones in Bristol. The girls who worked there were all exceptionally good looking, were clean, well turned out, and actually wanted to be working in the sex industry, rather than being forced into it by poverty, drug dependency, or the lack of the necessary documentation to work legally or to claim benefits.

The girls were well paid, keeping most of their own takings after paying a reasonable commission to the 'house' for the room and for laundry and service charges. The parlour's rates reflected this. It catered to a clientèle from a more 'white collar' demographic, rather than the boozed up lads who fancied a shag after a night in the pub watching the big match on a large screen TV. In fact this establishment closed its doors well before the pubs chucked out. There were plenty of cheaper massage parlours around that were more than happy to cater to a less discerning customer base. They were open for business until well into the small hours of the morning and they would all employ 'security' to deal with any drunks who got a little too out of hand.

Annabelle, the parlour's manageress, had called Lena because she was temporarily short staffed due to several of her girls having gone down with a flu bug. She was particularly hot on girls not coming in to work if they had colds or flu, or any other contagious ailment. In her business, any bodily secretions needed carefully controlling.

Lena had worked the odd shift for Annabelle in the past, as a favour to her old friend, though it wasn't really worth it as far as the earnings were concerned. She did, however, quite enjoy returning to her roots, as she thought of it, where she'd once worked alongside Annabelle to support herself while working towards her degree at the university. Now Lena had moved upmarket, and Annabelle ran the old place.

With her phone held to her ear, she abandoned putting the bike away till later and after picking up her helmet, she let herself into the cottage so she could consult her diary.

She already had a booking that clashed with one of the shifts that Annabelle needed covering, but she agreed to help with a couple of the others. It didn't bother her at all that in a couple of shifts at the parlour she would probably earn only a very small percentage of what she would be paid by her own pre-booked client, even though, with her stunning looks, she'd probably be chosen by up to half a dozen punters during a shift rather than just the one gentleman at his luxury apartment in one of nearby Bath's glorious Regency buildings.

Working there for the odd shift might even be a lot of fun. There was often a real sense of camaraderie between the girls working the same shift in a well run parlour, provided there were enough punters to keep them all busy and that no one lost out on business.

Fortunately, the standard of the girls Annabelle took on was particularly high, and their individual looks were nicely varied so it was rare that any one girl would be less likely to be chosen over the others.

Each punter has his own idea of perfection, with some of them preferring a curvy blonde, while others liked a tall slim long legged girl, the fresh faced 'girl next door' look, or maybe a slightly severe Goth or even dominatrix style.

Annabelle tried to cater for all tastes, but even amongst some of the undoubtedly beautiful girls who worked in her parlour, Lena's striking red hair, and the elegant look that she would adopt when working, would always make her stand out from the crowd.

* * *

2 - The Punter

The man stepped out of the wind into the half shrouded entrance and pressed the doorbell. He glanced up towards the small camera in the corner. A buzzer sounded. He pushed the door open and entered the building to find himself in a small reception area decorated predominantly in red and

black. There was a desk in front of him, where a well dressed middle aged woman sat. On the desk were a telephone, a desk diary, and a small TV monitor for the camera in the vestibule. The man wondered how she could tell from merely looking at the screen, what kind of man had rung the bell.

There were sofas against two walls at right angles to each other, with a table in the corner between them. In the diagonally opposite corner to the entrance was another doorway, with a beaded curtain, which led elsewhere. Sat around on the sofas were four barely dressed women who all looked up as he entered.

“Good afternoon, sir...” the woman at the desk smiled at him, “Would you like a cup of coffee?” There was no attempt to ask him what he was here for. That was taken for granted, only the details needed to be decided with his chosen girl, once they were in the room. To all intents and purposes, the woman on the desk was only there to open the door, greet the visitor, and introduce him to whichever girls were available.

As far as anyone else was concerned, anything that took place between a customer and a girl, other than the time allowed for the massage, was strictly between the two of them. Any ‘extra’ services that a girl might offer a client were entirely a matter between the two of them, but she wouldn’t be working there long if customers weren’t completely satisfied by the time they walked out of the door. In reality, negotiations rarely took place unless a punter required something different to the usual ‘full personal service’.

The woman continued, “Or perhaps you’d prefer tea?”

The man shook his head, “No thanks... I’m fine”. The receptionist nodded, then stood up, smoothed her skirt, and walked out from behind the desk.

“Today we have Alison, Skye, Scarlett, and Lena...” She gestured to each of the women in turn, “...or if you would like to wait a little while, then Coral will be available shortly”.

By coming here at the time he had, he’d arrived while two shifts overlapped, giving him more choice. Soon the two afternoon girls would be finishing, leaving only three girls for the busy evening shift.

The man thought to himself that the name Scarlett would be more suited to the red headed woman than to the dark eyed brunette that had been pointed out to him. He thought he’d been with the redhead once before, but

had forgotten her name. He didn't realise that, unlike so many of these girls, Lena was in fact her real name rather than one that she only used when working.

Normally this man would choose a girl he'd not seen before, as he firmly believed in the old adage of variety being the spice of life, but attractive as they undoubtedly were, none of the other girls held a candle to this amazing looking woman so he chose to go with Lena. She smiled warmly as she stood up and took his hand.

"If you'd like to follow me please, I'll show you to the room".

The man muttered, "Thanks," to her as she took his hand and led him through the beaded curtain into a dimly lit corridor.

She turned to him again. "What's your name then, my love?" She thought she'd seen him somewhere.

"It's Tony", he replied, "Actually, I think we've met here once before... a while ago".

"Oh... Really?..." She smiled at him, "Yes, you do look a little familiar." She opened a door, "In here please, Tony... and I'm sure we'll be getting even more familiar in no time at all." She smiled again as she showed him into a small room with mirrors along one wall, and a divan with a large white towel spread along it taking up most of the space along the other. There was also a small chair with more, folded, towels on it, alongside a corner table bearing a box of tissues, and a bowl full of condoms.

Tony reached into his back pocket for his wallet and took out a small folded wad of banknotes,

"Here... We'll get this bit out of the way first, shall we?" he held out the cash, "It's the right money". Lena took it from him, glancing briefly at it, satisfied that it looked correct.

"Thanks." She indicated the small shower cubicle in the far corner, "If you'd like to take a shower..." then pointing to the chair, "there's towels for you there. I'll be back with you in just a moment". She flashed him another devastating smile as she left the room, closing the door behind her.

He undressed and stepped into the shower. At least the water was hot here. He'd been in places like this before, where it had been barely lukewarm.

Once he was certain that he was fresh and clean, he stepped out of the cubicle just as the girl re-entered the room. She picked up one of the towels and began to dry his back,

“Thank you, Lena.” he said, remembering her name, “I don’t usually get this kind of service.”

She laughed, “That’s OK, I won’t charge you any extra for it”.

He took the towel from her and finished the job, then sitting on the divan, he watched as she casually removed the short salmon pink satin dress she was wearing to reveal matching silk French knickers, a suspender belt, and a bra in the same colour. She raised her leg, resting her foot gently on his bare thigh.

“Would you give me a hand, please?” She grinned at him, “Could you help to take my stockings off for me, Tony?”

He reached forward, to unclip the suspender fastenings, then carefully rolled the first stocking slowly down her long and very shapely leg, taking great pains not to ladder it. As he reached her ankle, she lifted her foot slightly to allow him to slip the wispy garment over it. She dropped her foot to the floor and between them they repeated the operation with the other leg. For some reason, Tony suddenly began to feel underdressed as he sat naked on the divan.

Lena stood there in her underwear and asked him to lay down on his front. He did as he was asked. He was in no position to argue.

She asked him if he preferred oil or talc.

“Oh... Talc, please”. Most men chose talc. Baby oil was messier, unless the girl spent more time massaging it into the skin. That time could be far more interestingly employed. These ‘appointments ’were on a paid for time basis, after all.

She bent over him, sprinkled on talc, then began to gently massage his back and shoulders before working her way down his body. When she’d finished, she turned him over to begin on his front. As he watched her, she paused to remove the rest of her underwear, before joining him on the divan, kneeling astride him as she massaged his chest. He reached up to gently caress her breasts.

She smiled down at him, then sat herself upright, took a condom that Tony hadn’t noticed her placing on the bed beforehand, and after turning

herself around, she rolled it onto him before bending to administer to his now evident needs with her soft wet mouth.

Tony reached forward and slipped his hand between her legs from behind to gently stroke her. He felt himself smile on hearing her barely audible murmured appreciation, as she moved her head slowly up and down, her flame red hair tickling him as she did so.

Whether those appreciative noises were genuine, or merely her playing a part to make him feel good, hadn't even entered his head. He was already completely lost in the moment.

* * *

3 - Afterwards

Tony Birdham felt nicely relaxed as he made his way back round to the tyre fitters. Fitting tyres was one of the few jobs he preferred to delegate to others, though he was quite prepared to remove and refit the wheel himself as tyre shops only like to fit motorcycle tyres to a loose wheel.

His new tyre had been fitted, so using borrowed tools, he busied himself with replacing the wheel on his bike while his friend Bob, who owned the business, went off to put the kettle on.

Fortunately Tony's late fifties BSA had what were known at the time as QD, or quickly detachable wheels, so refitting his rear wheel actually took less time than it would have on a more modern bike. So much for progress, he thought to himself, as he finished tightening the spindle to the sound of Bob calling out to him.

"Tea's up, Tony!"

Tony put the tools back in Bob's toolbox. He'd have a quick cup of tea, followed by a nice ride home in the sunshine to scrub in the new tyre on perfectly dry roads, after having already had an hour of nicely meaningless

recreational sex with an exquisitely beautiful woman in the nearby massage parlour.

Once back home, he'd have a long soak in a hot bath, followed by dinner: the venison casserole that was already in his slow cooker.

Later on, he would be meeting an old mate for a pint or two in his local. Sometimes life could be just a little too good, but he wasn't complaining.

* * *

Lena arrived home that evening and prepared herself a quick meal from the remaining half of a small cooked lobster from the fridge, with a little left over potato salad, some sliced beef tomatoes, drizzled with a garlic and chilli vinaigrette, and a large dill pickle. She opened a chilled bottle of a decent Sancerre to wash it down with, then settled herself and her tray in front of the TV to watch the late evening movie.

Tomorrow was to be a day off, before a chauffeur driven car picked her up in the early evening. She had a working weekend away booked, with a wealthy client who wanted a no strings attached glamorous partner to accompany him to a country house party.

It would be fun, and it would pay well, certainly many times more than she'd earned from helping Annabelle out of a jam, but that had been fun too. They were a nice bunch of girls, and the punters had been no trouble. Just the usual selection of nice lonely business men in need of a little TLC, and well mannered middle aged single guys with urges to satisfy and a taste for younger prettier women than they could normally attract.

All of them had treated her with respect and in return she'd made sure they went away with the feeling that they were just a little bit special. It's what she was good at.

It may not be a vocation that would suit everyone, but it suited her fine. She enjoyed her work a lot, and had done rather well out of it, as this old stone country cottage and her working apartment in Bath city centre clearly demonstrated.

She had a few advanced bookings over the next couple of weeks, arranged by the agency that provided a lot of her work and vetted any new

clients, followed by a long weekend off when she would be heading away to a motorcycle rally with her tent and bedroll strapped to the sissybar of her bobbed BMW.

A weekend of ride outs, live music, junk food, and partying the nights away with like minded enthusiasts would be a complete and welcome contrast to this weekend's private house party at a minor stately home in the Midlands.

She was looking forward to it. She could meet up with friends old and new who knew nothing of her lifestyle and judged it even less.

* * *

Sitting in a comfortable village pub with a pint of good ale in front of him, Terry Peters looked at his old friend in exasperation.

"I jus 'don't get it, Tony... I know you likes doin 'it, but what's it all for, eh? Why not get yourself a proper bird, 'stead o 'goin 'down all these knockin 'shops. You never know what you might pick up". He chuckled to himself, as he saw the grin appear on his friend's face, "P'raps I put that a bit badly, but you know what I mean. How d'you know they ain't riddled with the clap or somethin 'even worse?"

Tony interrupted his friend's distinct 'Brizzle Burr 'accented diatribe. They'd been discussing their day, and to his closest friends Tony had very few secrets.

"Aw c'mon now, Terry, you've seen some of them birds falling out of the pubs and clubs. They're not exactly discerning, staggering down the street clinging onto some trendy clubber type they've only just met. Looking for some alleyway where they can consummate their new 'relationship 'with a knee trembler against a graffiti covered wall. It isn't even likely to be something classy like a 'Banksy'! That's if they haven't been at it already in the club's bogs. No..." He chuckled, "Leave it out, mate. How many of them are sober enough to even remember what a condom looks like? let alone actually put one on". He took a mouthful of his cider then continued, "I mean to say, there's housing estates that's full of silly little scrubbers pushing prams 'cos they let some randy no mark into their knickers on a night out. How many of them are on repeat prescriptions

for antibiotics, eh? An 'the buggers who gave 'em the nippers or the dose of whatever STD is currently top of the charts, are nowhere to be seen, while you and I are supporting them out of our taxes."

Terry shrugged, "Yeah, mate. I hear what you're sayin', but I ain't on about that sort of thing. Not just one night stands... I mean... don't you want to have a proper girlfriend?" He sipped at his beer, "Y'know, like, someone who you can spend some time with, not just for a bit of nookie".

Tony shook his head. He knew Terry's preferences in these kind of matters, though the man was currently between girlfriends.

"No, my old friend. Not yet, at least. It's too much hassle, it's almost as bad as havin 'a dog... which brings us back to those clubber birds." He grinned, "But seriously, you've got to consider them when you want to sod off somewhere on the bike at short notice. Y'know, like when a mate calls you about a rally or a party somewhere... like this Dorset do we're goin' down to in a few weeks time. You can just up, and go, without being told that you promised to go out furniture shopping for your girlfriend's flat. You know what I mean?... You don't end up letting anyone down."

Terry nodded, "OK, I get that... You can't go without a shag, so you have to go to a knockin 'shop. Is that it?"

Tony laughed, as he put his glass back on the table, "No Terry, it's not quite as simple as that, not at all. I like going to these places, it's fun. I like the variety of the girls. Sometimes I fancy a nice cuddly little Goth chick, other times a skinny waif like blonde, or an athletically built black girl. Variety, mate, it's the spice of life. It's like finding a new piece of road with a nice set of bends to ride, every one is different, understand? But I don't want to own that road an 'I don't need to. There's no strings, and I'm not just picking up some poor disillusioned girl who thinks it's going to be forever, then letting her down after getting my wicked way with her". He took out his tobacco tin and began to roll a cigarette, "No, mate, this way, it's a dead cert that I'll get laid and the girls are willing, skilled, and are getting what they want too... the cash. It's a no brainer." He paused to lick the gummed strip on his roll up, "And they're careful too, and therefore safe..." He paused, tapping his cigarette on the table to settle the tobacco, "After all, I don't go out shagging those crackhead street tarts down Fishponds road, do I? No way! Only decent parlours for me... If anything looks in the least bit dodgy, then I'm out of there." He slid the tin across the

table to his friend. “You comin ’out for a smoke?” Terry nodded and took a paper and a generous pinch of tobacco, then began to roll up a smoke, “Cheers...” He licked the paper and closed the rollup, then stood up. Tony followed suit. Still talking animatedly, the two friends went outside into the fresh night air.

* * *

4 - Away from it

One Friday afternoon, just a few weeks later, Lena was turning off a B road into a tiny winding rural lane that led to a freshly mown farmer’s field which overlooked the not too far distant English Channel.

The Sun was shining, the air was perfumed with the delicate smell of freshly cut grass, and her bike’s crisp and resonant exhaust notes bounced off the banks and stone walls like sweet music to her ears.

Turning into the gateway, she could see a scattering of bikes leaning on their sidestands while people were busily erecting tents and setting up camp for the weekend. Others were still setting up trade stands, portable toilets and showers, and other facilities.

Lena finished putting up her small tent, slipping the remaining spare pegs back into their nylon pouch which she then put back into the tent’s own bag, before tossing it inside the open flap. She unstrapped her sleeping bag, and a PVC stuffer bag containing changes of clothes and necessary toiletries from the back of her bike, then threw them all, along with her leather jacket, unceremoniously into the tent.

Taking a look around her, she could see, parked beside tents, a few bikes that she recognised from this or other similar events. More machines were still arriving and probably would be for some while to come, especially if they’d come from some distance.

In her case the rally was reasonably close to home, just down near the Dorset coast, so her journey had only taken a couple of pleasant hours on

nice winding country roads in the sunshine. It had given her time to watch the countryside go by and muse on the things that mattered to her.

At least she hadn't had to endure the boredom and discomfort of a long motorway stretch. On her kind of bike, they became quite literally a pain in the neck with the constant wind pressure from sustained high speed cruising.

She picked up her helmet from the grass and put it carefully into a protective bag before placing it gently inside the tent. She zipped up the tent flap, and after another look around her, she headed across the field towards the food van.

It was parked to one side of an open area in front of the makeshift stage, in reality an old flatbed trailer with screens around it and a gantry for the stage lighting.

In front of the stage, in the middle of the open area, a couple of men were rigging up the mixing desk, making it ready for the bands. They had laid boards over the cables that linked it to the stage so they would be protected from the expected onslaught of motorcycle boots, Doc Martens and the various forms of army surplus and industrial footwear favoured by many bikers.

Both men looked up as she passed them, a look of sheer admiration on their faces. She was wearing old jeans and a loosely fitting T shirt bearing the very faded logo from a now defunct Bristol bike shop. Despite the fact that she had no makeup and her glorious red hair was plastered flat from wearing her crash helmet, she could still turn heads..

Lena wasn't there to pull, she was there to relax. She was there to have a good time with other bikers, and to bathe in that weird kind of solitude that could sometimes be found in the midst of a crowd of like minded strangers. But she still managed to turn heads.

The catering van's operator had provided a selection of plastic garden chairs and tables for his customers, so Lena sat down with her bacon roll and her plastic cup of stewed tea from the huge pot on top of the urn. Somehow, in the open air, she thought it tasted it better that way.

Chewing on her roll, her mind on nothing in particular, she looked out across the field to the rapidly filling camping area as she waited for her tea to cool to a low enough temperature to drink. All seemed well with the world. The Sun was shining still, low down in the western sky, and

somehow the ever present rumbling background noise of arriving motorcycles seemed soothing, at least until it was interrupted by one of the roadies checking the microphones for the evening's entertainment.

A large tattooed girl, wearing a tie dyed men's vest, cut short jeans, and yellow boots, walked past carrying a tray full of steaming plastic cups. She nodded across to Lena in recognition, then called out,

"Hi ya, Lena... I'll see yer tonight... Should be good, the band have been going down well in local pubs, or so I'm told... Catch ya later... Gotta get these back to the lads". Lena nodded,

"Yeah... Sure..." The woman continued across the field. Lena searched the recesses of her memory for her name. The face and figure rang a bell, as did the tattoo of a large Chinese dragon climbing up the girl's arm. It suddenly came to her, 'Grizz', that was her name. She'd said it was short for Griselda, but that could have been a nickname as well. Lena thought she might have changed her hair colour too, from last year's blue to the mauve she wore now. Still, it had been a year since she'd seen her and her crowd. This wasn't really their stamping ground. They came from somewhere up north, and as far as Lena was aware, this was the only rally this far south that they bothered with.

She screwed up the paper serviette that had accompanied her bacon roll, drank down her tea then walked across to the waste bin to drop the cup and tissue into it before heading back to her tent. The band weren't scheduled to come on for a couple of hours yet, so she decided to take a nap before the night's partying started.

Sleep was a rare luxury at motorcycle rallies. You'd get into your sleeping bag late, but any chances of a morning lie in were scuppered by the early dawn sunshine making its way through the fabric of your tent at some unearthly hour, usually followed shortly by the movement of campers heading for the toilets. If you slept through these, then there would soon be the sound of bikes leaving and returning to the site, as their owners headed to the nearest village shop, or to the local garage to top up their tanks ready for the rideout later on. Even for those who were suffering with a hangover after the excesses of the night before, opportunities for sleeping late into the morning would be extremely unlikely.

Later that evening, Lena was standing to one side of the stage listening to the local five piece band as they played one of her favourite songs. She was familiar with Little Feat's version of Lowell George's 'Willin'', but these young lads had given the song their own stamp, and she liked it. She liked it a lot.

She made a mental note to find out, during the band's half time break, if they had recorded it. There was always a chance they'd have CDs for sale. Many relatively unknown gigging bands did produce these to sell at gigs, often nothing more than home produced discs burned on somebody's computer. These days, it was even easier to produce them than the cassettes which had been frequently sold to fans at pub and club gigs in the past. Added to that, the digital sound quality was infinitely superior to the tapes, even if the recordings had been taken direct from the mixing desk at a live show. In fact, often these live recordings had more spirit and character than the more technically and musically perfect, but sometimes cold sounding, studio recordings.

Out of the corner of her eye, she became aware of somebody waving furiously at her. Turning to look, she saw Grizz, the girl from earlier, with her friends as they made their way from the bar tent to the area in front of the stage. Lena acknowledged her and made her way over to where they were headed to join them.

* * *

Tony was standing, tankard of cider in hand, watching and listening as five young lads were giving creditable renderings of some of his favourite rock and blues numbers.

A very beautiful girl caught his eye, she was standing next to the makeshift stage. Something about her looked familiar, very familiar, but he wasn't quite sure what it was. A friend spoke to him and he turned to answer, when he turned back the girl had moved and he couldn't see where she'd gone.

He placed his tankard carefully on the ground and took out his tobacco tin to roll a cigarette while looking around to see if he could see his friend Terry. He'd ridden off earlier to the nearest coastal village in search of some good fish and chips.

Tony had decided to patronise the food stall that was on site as he figured they weren't going to make much of a fortune for themselves out of the visitors to a small bike rally. They were almost certainly either friends or relatives of the organisers attending with their snack van as a favour.

He put the tin back into his pocket, then lit his cigarette. As he did so, two young lads wandered up and asked him for a light. He didn't recognise them, they didn't look like bikers' offspring attending with their parents. They were dressed differently to the way those youngsters usually did at these kinds of events. More 'urban', rather than adopting the biker look, or even the rock fan style often seen at live gigs.

Tony guessed they were probably a couple of local village kids checking out the show, despite their 'urban' style clothing in the heart of the countryside.

Tickets were made available on the gate for the evening gig, though it wasn't uncommon for local teenagers to slip onto the site from the adjacent fields. No one worried too much as long as they behaved themselves.

Tony put his lighter back into his pocket and picked up his drink. Taking a swig, he turned to listen to two of his friends as they regaled the tale of a recent close shave with a police car. It had seen them riding a little too quickly for the posted speed limit, but had failed to turn round in time to give pursuit.

As more drink was consumed, the banter became more ribald and the anecdotes less believable, but no one seemed to care anymore. They were relaxing with their own kind and having fun.

* * *

5 - Morning

Lying awake as the early morning sunlight streamed in through the open flap of her tent, Lena finally decided that she could delay no longer. It

was no good, she was going to have to leave the warm cocoon of her sleeping bag and venture across the field to the mobile toilet block.

She unzipped the bag, then wriggled into her jeans before emerging blinking into the daylight. Looking around she could see that there were only a few people outside their tents, either smoking, or putting kettles onto camping stoves.

Across the field she could see the catering van. Its flap was still closed but there was a stream of vapour coming out from the stainless steel vent pipe into the cold air where it condensed into a white plume worthy of some kind of industrial facility. Patches of mist hung just above the dewy grass. They seemed to have an almost ethereal look about them as they seemed to softly glow in the low, early morning, sun.

She walked over to the mobile toilet, wishing she'd pulled on her boots, rather than simply slipping her feet into the canvas espadrilles which had already become sodden after only a few steps across the wet grass.

Fortunately the hire company's cleaners had already been to service the block so it smelled cleanly of disinfectant rather than of stale urine and vomit. She wondered at what unearthly hour these poor souls must have to start work. These facilities were something that in the past she'd tended to take for granted, simply accepting that they were there.

Feeling greatly relieved, Lena stepped out once more into the sunshine. Then Froze. But it wasn't the early morning chill that brought forth her next utterance.

"Oh, Jesus!... No!". Neither had it been the 'Second Coming'. In Lena's world, those two words meant something very different.

She had a pretty good memory for faces, and was certain the one that was walking towards her had been one of her punters when she'd been helping Annabelle out of a staff shortage situation only a little while back.

"Hi... It's Lena, isn't it?... Or is that just a working name?" The man drew on his roll up, then smiled, as he slowly exhaled smoke.

Lena wasn't ashamed of how she earned her living, but she didn't want to broadcast it to the people in her own private life who might judge her unfairly. She hoped her recent punter felt the same way.

“Er... Yes, it is Lena... and yes... it’s my real name...” She paused, unsure whether she should admit to remembering his name. It might seem as though he’d made an impression on her, though in fact he’d been OK. He’d been considerate and undemanding. That was all that really mattered apart from him leaving completely satisfied with her service. “You’re Tony... That’s right, isn’t it?” He nodded as she continued, “Listen... I’d appreciate it if we kept our recent encounter to ourselves, OK?”

He smiled, nodding again, “Of course... no problem... some people can be funny about that sort of thing, can’t they?... D’you fancy a coffee?”

She looked across at the still closed food van.

“They’re not open yet...”

He interrupted, with an indignant snort, “No... Not that instant muck...” He shook his head in disgust, “I’ve got a percolator on the stove back at my tent... By the time I’ve had a leak, it should be nicely bubbling away to itself... Decent coffee... I can’t live without it... Well, what do you say?”

Against what she thought was probably her better judgement, she found herself agreeing,

“OK... You’re on”. She smiled at him. He smiled back,

“Right then... I shan’t be a moment... Just gotta make room for it”.

She looked puzzled, till he added, “Make room for the coffee... I’m still full of used cider from last night...” He grinned, then turned towards the gents ’end of the toilet trailer, casually calling over his shoulder, “Won’t be two shakes... I’ll be back soon”.

For a brief moment, Lena considered making a run for it, but it wasn’t really her style. She waited. He wasn’t gone for long.

As they walked across the wet grass, she stopped.

“Hang on a moment... I want to change into my boots... My feet feel like ice in these, they’re soaking wet”. She pointed to the rope soled canvas shoes she was wearing.

He laughed, “Not really the best choice of footwear, Lena... are they?”

She shook her head sheepishly, “No... I wasn’t really thinking when I put them on... I wasn’t properly awake”. She walked across to her tiny tent.

He followed, his eyes caught sight of the neatly ‘bobbed ’BMW twin parked alongside. He could see the tent was only big enough for one and

nodded towards the bike.

“Yours?”

She nodded, “Yeah... All mine”.

He smiled approvingly, “Nice... Very nice”. He walked around it, bending occasionally to take in the little details, “You don’t see too many of these being bobbed, or even chopped... that’s really tidy, I like it... Did you build it yourself?” He wasn’t a chauvinist. If a woman rode a bike like this, then why shouldn’t she be capable of building one.

“No, Tony... Unfortunately I have neither the skills, nor the facilities... It was built for me, but to my design... I gave him some sketches of how I wanted it to look, and he turned it into reality...” Tony began to open his mouth to speak, but she anticipated his question, “I had it done a couple of years ago by a little custom shop over Bridgwater way...” she turned to her tent, “I won’t be long”. She opened the zip and ducked inside. He could hear her thrashing around as she moved her discarded bedding aside to rummage for her boots, and for a towel to dry her feet with before putting them on.

As they sat drinking the coffee he’d brewed, they talked. It seemed that apart from motorcycles, they shared a lot of opinions and ideals. They liked the same kinds of music, the same kinds of foods and both despised the artificial over hyped, but infinitely inferior, versions of age old drinks that were being marketed so heavily. Both of them liked real ales and ciders, but disliked the pasteurised fizzy ones being promoted everywhere, and both detested the rash of brightly coloured disgustingly sweet alcopops that were so obviously aimed at young, even underaged, drinkers.

Neither of them were fooled by the manufacturers claims to the contrary, or by the appearances of trendy ‘twentysomething ’professional types having immense fun in some of their advertisements.

Their conversation was interrupted by a shout of horror from beside one of the other tents, followed by a man running over towards them. Another was running along the line of tents in the opposite direction. As the biker came closer, they could see a concerned look on his face,

“Did either of you two see or hear a little dirt bike leaving here last night... or maybe early this morning?” They both shook their heads. The

man went on to explain that his son Sean's bike had been stolen under the cover of that almost total darkness that could only be found deep in the countryside.

It was the boy's first time at a rally under his own steam. He'd been to several in the past on his dad's pillion but having now reached seventeen he'd travelled on his own machine. His father, and their friends had even tailored their route to avoid using motorways in deference to the lad's bike being slower, and him being still a learner and therefore not allowed on them.

The kid was distraught at the theft of his pride and joy. He'd been saving up for it for several years, and had bought it as a cheap unloved wreck long before he was old enough to ride it on the road. It was an old Yamaha DT 125. He'd resisted the temptation to buy a moped or 'twist and go' scooter at sixteen, instead continuing to use his mountain bike for transport until, at seventeen, he could ride the little trail bike on the road. He spent all his spare cash from his Saturday job and the money he made from selling his no longer required possessions on Ebay, to restore it to something approaching its former self.

The mountain bike had even been sold, to be replaced by an old, no longer used, bicycle of his mother's from the shed, despite it bringing ridicule from his more style conscious school mates.

The finished DT wasn't perfect, and certainly not completely to its manufacturers original specification, but it was tidy, roadworthy, and most importantly it was Sean's own bike. But now it was gone.

His father and their friends were incandescent with rage. By this time several others were running from tent to tent asking everyone if they'd seen, or more likely heard, anything untoward during the hours of darkness. It might be a field full of bikes, but few of them made the distinctive sound of a small single cylinder two stroke trail bike.

Others were going off on their bikes to look around the lanes. There was a slim chance that the thieves had pushed the bike away, to avoid being heard, then had failed to successfully hot wire the ignition to get it running, and had dumped it in the hedgerow.

It was unlikely, as they'd been able enough to break the padlock and to force the bike's steering lock before taking it away, though they may have left the lock and chain around the back wheel and simply carried the

locked bike off between two of them. The little Yamaha didn't weigh too much and there was no sign of the discarded chain. Once away from the site, it could have been loaded into a van, or even wheeled away by youngsters in a hand cart or wheelbarrow.

Although the field was a temporary home to some far more valuable machines, they were far harder to steal, and more importantly they were less suitable for teenaged tearaways to use for thrashing about in the woods, or round a farmer's empty field.

A Harley-Davidson or a big Japanese superbike - even one of the large so called 'adventure bikes' which were supposedly capable of off road use - were all much too heavy and unsuitably configured to be used by kids as a field bike.

This bike almost certainly hadn't been stolen to sell on. It wasn't worth enough on paper, even broken up as parts as it was too easy these days to be caught out selling stolen used spares.

To its heartbroken young owner though, it was everything that he'd worked so long and hard towards and was priceless. He just wanted the little bike back in one piece. He just wanted to be able to ride it.

* * *

Lena finished her third cup of Tony's excellent coffee. She now felt fully awake and ready to face the day. The patches of mist over the open grass had almost all burned off as the morning sun rose higher into the sky.

She excused herself from her new friend. She wanted to take her bike to the filling station so it was tanked up ready for the later ride out.

She was pretty sure though, that she'd be seeing more of this man, but not in any romantic way, and probably not as a client either, now they'd become friends socially.

The fact that they'd had sex together only a few weeks beforehand was completely immaterial. It had been a purely business arrangement. Lena had been providing a service as a part of her job. Tony had been nothing more than an extremely satisfied client. Besides, she'd only been working at the parlour as a temporary favour to Annabelle, and she didn't see Tony as being the type to pay the high price for her usual, exclusive, high end type of service.

Nevertheless, it felt to her as if they'd been good friends for years. There had been no undercurrents of sexual tension between them, just simple friendship and camaraderie. They just seemed to be able to communicate, and to understand each other perfectly. It was nothing more, and certainly nothing less, than that.

* * *

6 - The Girl in the Road

Lena turned out of the gateway and headed off down the lane towards the main road. The bike was running sweetly. She thought it felt as if it was revelling in the clean morning air, but she realised it was more likely to be simply that the longer journey had given it a chance to clear any stale fuel from the tank.

Shorter runs during the week would only use a smaller proportion of the bike's tank capacity. She'd still put in the odd gallon to keep it topped up, but it meant there was always a proportion of the fuel that was stale.

Unfortunately, modern unleaded fuel went stale in a vented tank a lot quicker than the old stuff. It had new additives, to replace the benzine which used to be in the mix before benzine was found to be carcinogenic. However, the new additives seemed to evaporate out allowing the fuel to become stale. This isn't so much of a problem with a modern bike's or car's one way vented tanks which have little air in the space over the fuel, only petrol vapour. Fuel in those vehicles stays fresh a little longer.

Rounding a bend in the narrow lane, Lena found her way blocked by a tractor and trailer. A wheel had come off the trailer and the driver was waiting for assistance. Lena turned the bike around, rather than wait. She was pretty sure she could find an alternative route out to the main road by following her own in built sense of direction.

At a fork in the lane, she turned left, then left again at the next turn. Around the next bend she saw a bike, stopped, in the middle of the road. She assumed it to be someone else from the rally, who was also trying to find another way out.

As she got closer, she could see the bike had a passenger on the back, a young girl, but she didn't appear to be wearing a helmet. Lena pulled up behind the bike and immediately saw its rider look back, but she wasn't prepared for what happened next.

The rider turned and pushed his passenger sharply off the back of the bike, leaving her sprawling in the roadway, as he sped off down the lane in a haze of two stroke smoke.

As the passenger staggered to her feet, Lena pulled up alongside the girl. Lena looked at her, realising she was only a kid.

"Are you OK, love?" The girl nodded. Lena kicked down the BMW's stand and dismounted. The young girl began to swear viciously, screaming out loudly to no one in particular,

"The fucking bastard... I'll so fucking kill the little sod if I get my fucking hands on him... The fucking shit... I'll... I'll... I'll..." She kicked out at the grass bank in anger. Her obviously fake branded trainers looking ridiculously big against her skinny ankles.

Lena tried to calm the girl down. Even with the things that she'd seen and heard, she was shocked by such language from one so very young.

"OK... OK... Calm down, love... What's up?... Boy trouble?... They're not worth it y'know... Honest". The girl calmed down a little, as she stood there rubbing her thigh and her backside through her short denim skirt. Lena looked concerned, "Are you hurt?" She shook her head. Her pride seemed more hurt than her body,

"No... But thanks... I'll be OK... Thanks for stopping". Lena smiled,

"I didn't have much of a choice, did I?... You were on your arse in the middle of the road". The girl laughed, as Lena continued. "So... what was that all about, eh?" The faint smell of two stroke smoke lingered in the air. It triggered something in Lena's mind. The boy from the rally's little DT 125. "Well?... Why was he in such a hurry to do a runner then?... Eh?... Was the bike nicked?... Didn't he have a licence?"

The girl nodded, "Yeah... Nicked... Well I think so, anyway... He was riding it in the field... He ain't old enough for a licence... There was

two of them, but his mate went off earlier 'cos he was on his pushbike... I was just... like... watching them... Y'know... Ridin 'around... They wouldn't let me have a go". She only looked about thirteen at the oldest. She'd probably thought the lads with the bike were really cool, exciting even.

Lena persisted with her interrogation.

"Listen... D'you know what kind of bike it was, love?... I mean, what make?" She saw that the girl was thinking about the question.

"Er... Suzuki... I think... Yeah, it was a Suzuki... I remember 'cos my dad had a Suzuki when I was a kid... A big one though". Lena felt deflated. For a moment she thought that she'd stumbled across the lad's missing bike,

"You're sure... I mean it wasn't a Yamaha... was it?" She watched the girl's reaction.

"No... Deffo a Suzuki, though his mate who he was riding with said something about some Yamaha what they'd just got hold of". Lena's interest was rekindled.

"Really?... OK... So... You want to get him back for dumping you in the road then, do you?"

The girl nodded enthusiastically, "Do I?...". She grinned. "Like... I so, so, want to get him for it... Of course I do... No one does that to me... No one".

Lena smiled, "Do you know where they live?... or where they keep their bikes?"

The youngster nodded, "Oh yeah' ...course I do... It's an old shed... We all go there to smoke and get wrecked... Snog a bit... a little bit of messin 'about... y'know..." she grinned, blushing, "Anyway... I think it belongs to one of them's uncle". Lena made a decision. She turned her bike around in the narrow space and got on it.

"OK then... Hop on the back".

The girl didn't question. She just climbed on, as Lena started the engine.

Aware that her passenger was wearing a skirt, and wasn't even wearing a helmet, Lena kept the speed down as she made her way back to the rally site.

On arrival, she rode over to where the father and the boy were stood talking. Switching off, she called over to them.

“Any news?”

They both shook their heads, “Nah... We’ve phoned the police... Given ‘em the reg number an ’a description... They’re gonna send someone down later, but they don’t hold much hope”, he shrugged, “They’ve just given us a crime number for the insurance, for what good that’s worth”. Lena smiled as she saw her new friend, Tony, walking over.

She continued, “Well, I might just have a lead... thanks to this young lady here... Has anyone got a spare helmet she can borrow?”

“She might as well take mine,” The boy, Sean, quipped, “It’s no fucking good to me now”.

Lena shook her head, “No, Sean... You hang on to it... You might be needing it sooner than you think”. She told the girl to get off, then kicked the stand down and got off herself as Tony arrived.

She went on to tell them all she knew. Out of the corner of her eye she could see the girl looking interestedly at young Sean. She was flirting outrageously with her body language. Lena thought that she might be just a little too precocious for her own good. Fortunately, Sean showed absolutely no interest whatsoever. He could see that, pretty or not, she was obviously much too young for him.

Tony went back to his tent to get his spare helmet, along with a woollen knitted hat. He thought his helmet might be a little big for the girl, but the hat would help fill it out.

Within five minutes, a small group of bikes were leaving the site and turning out into the lane. They all followed Lena’s BMW as her passenger guided her to an abandoned cluster of farm buildings just outside a nearby village.

A large shed stood with its doors open. Loud pop music boomed out from a portable music system, drowning out the popping sound of a small generator. There was a bicycle leant against the open door.

Inside were two lads working on a dirt bike, a yellow Suzuki TS 100. They both looked up, a frightened look on their faces, as the small posse of bikes pulled up in the doorway, seeming to blot out the sky. Some of the pillion passengers were dismounting almost before the bikes came to a standstill, followed immediately by the riders.

Lena had held back, stopping her bike out in the lane so that her passenger's identity wasn't seen by the two teenagers. She thought it better if they weren't made aware of how they'd been rumbled, if it was in any way possible.

One of the boys tried to make a run for it, but was stopped by the immovable object that was known to all across the rally going fraternity as 'Bull'. He was in fact a gentle giant, but surprisingly nimble on his feet, and somewhat like a wall of solid flesh to run into.

Bull grinned broadly as he grabbed the boy and held him fast with hands which closely resembled an American baseball catcher's gloves.

"You, my son... ain't goin' nowhere... OK?" The kid looked up at the huge looking bearded face that seemed to tower above him.

He gulped nervously, "Yes... Nowhere?... OK... Fine". Bull held him firmly but gently. The boy was quite right. He was going nowhere. Not for a while anyway.

Tony smiled as he witnessed the encounter. He knew Bull wouldn't harm the kid, but thought the terrified face of the teenager looked vaguely familiar.

Then it came to him. He'd been one of the two lads who'd asked him for a light last night. They'd probably spotted the little trail bike then, and had returned later once the lights had been turned out and people were sleeping.

Of more interest than the two lads, at least to one of the new arrivals, was a splash of red and white that could be seen in the shadows of the darkest depths of the building.

Sean ran forward, pushing past the Suzuki, then gave out a whoop of delight as he gazed upon his missing pride and joy as it leant against the bench at the back of the shed.

Apart from a forced steering lock, and the two wires pulled from the ignition switch, the bike was in the same condition as it had been when it had been parked up for the night. It was certainly in a good enough state for Sean to ride back to the rally site.

If they were quick, by cutting across country, they'd all be able to catch up with those on the ride out at the lunchtime pub stop.

The two lads were stripped down to their underwear. The word 'thief' was written across their chests with a marker pen. Then they were

photographed, with the threat of those pictures being made public, before being set free.

While this was going on, Lena had taken the girl home. She promised to send her copies of the photos that she knew were being taken at that very moment.

The thieves' names and addresses, courtesy of the girl, were anonymously phoned through to the police, along with the location of the shed that still contained the Suzuki as well as a couple of battered mopeds that had also, almost certainly, been stolen.

* * *

That Saturday evening found Lena yielding to the effects of alcohol to a far greater extent than she was accustomed to. She didn't normally have a problem with holding her drink. At many of the upmarket functions she'd attended, on the arms of some of her wealthier clients, the best Champagne and the finest cognac would be flowing like water.

However, on this particular Saturday night, she was partying very hard under the stars with a large crowd of boisterous, and extremely happy, bikers. To many of them, she was the star guest.

As the music played, some of the best ales and ciders, served direct from the barrel, were being dispensed in copious quantities, and a relatively small percentage of the total amount, but still a lot by volume, was being bought for Lena by members of one of the clubs who were present that evening.

As far as one young reveller was concerned, Lena Fox could do no wrong. In his mind, the Sun shone directly out of Lena's extremely attractive backside. She had saved the day, and between himself and his friends, she wasn't going to have to buy a single drink for herself all evening.

Without her, he would no longer have a bike. She had found his stolen motorcycle, and now he, his father, and their friends wanted her to know just how grateful they were.

* * *

The following morning, after the indignity of being helped back to her tent and put into her sleeping bag by Tony with the assistance of a total stranger, Lena decided never to get herself involved with anyone's problems ever again.

She vowed to avoid doing good deeds till the day she died. A day that, with the way that her head felt at that moment, couldn't arrive too quickly.

However, after several large mugs of Tony's strong but exceptionally good coffee had made their way past her lips, along with a couple of first class bacon rolls from the food van, her mood had begun to improve somewhat. The additional assistance of two soluble co-codamols in a mug of water, the painkillers appropriately provided by young Sean, helped speed up the process.

By the middle of the day she was almost back to her normal self again. By then, the field had almost emptied of tents.

She took down her own tiny tent and quickly and efficiently loaded up the bike. Then, joined by Tony on his old 1959 BSA 650, and his friend Terry on his brand new Harley-Davidson, she rode out of the gateway onto the lane that led to the main road.

In no more than a couple of hours of pleasant motorcycling, they'd part company and all three would be shortly back in their own homes in three different villages.

All of the villages were fairly close together, nestling in rural countryside between Bristol and the ancient city of Bath.

Telephone numbers had been swapped. Promises to keep in touch had been made: promises that all of them had every intention of keeping. Though none of them were aware of it, their lives would never be quite the same again.

Nonetheless, the three of them unanimously agreed that over that eventful weekend in Dorset, they had each found themselves some new, lasting, and very real, friends.

--- The End ---

Payback

“Does that make me a bad person?”

1 - Roxy

Roxy swung her legs off the bed, her white knee sock clad feet sinking into the deep pile of the carpet as she stood up. She pulled the school tie from her neck and, reaching across, dropped it into the open bag that rested on the chair.

Her companion slid off the other side of the bed, then standing, he reached for a silk dressing gown of the kind once popular with the likes of the late Noël Coward. It had the letters ‘P D ’embroidered in gold thread on the breast in scrolled script. He’d introduced himself as ‘Peter’, but hadn’t revealed his surname. Not that this was unusual. Many clients gave false names, but it seemed that ‘Peter’, at least, was real. Even the butler had referred to him as ‘Mister Peter’.

As he put the garment on, the woman busied herself gathering up a pair of trainers, and other items of clothing from the floor around the bed before taking them to the bag.

After taking a pair of jeans and a tee shirt from the bag, she placed the grey school style skirt and the white cotton blouse, that she’d retrieved from the floor, into the bag with the school tie.

The simple white bra and pants that she’d also collected up were retained, to be put back on.

“If you’d like to use the shower, my dear...” the man’s voice had a slightly stilted, old fashioned timbre about it, “... it’s just off the dressing room...” He pointed to the door that they’d entered the bedroom through. “In there, where we came in through... The shower’s through the door on the right”.

Roxy nodded, “Thanks... I will... We did manage to work up a bit of a sweat, didn’t we?” She felt sure that she detected the merest hint of a blush on his face as he smiled at her.

She already knew about the dressing room. It was where she’d been asked to wait for her client by his butler. It was where she’d changed into her stereotypical school uniform, ready for her punter to escort her into his plushly furnished mirrored bedroom.

Looking at her reflection, despite being naked apart from the socks, she thought to herself that even though she was in her mid twenties, once her hair was in pigtails, she was still able to carry off the classic St. Trinian’s sixth former look reasonably well.

This room had obviously been designed to be used for entertaining women, with its huge circular bed, dressed in burgundy silk sheets to match the predominantly red décor, and the full length mirrors on the ceiling and along the wall.

She felt acutely aware that her satchel style bag, sitting on the maroon velvet upholstered chair, looked a little out of place next to the Champagne bottle in the ice bucket on the bedside table. He’d commented on how the bag had looked the part but she’d really only brought it through to the room with her as it contained her mobile phone.

Despite the man being a regular client of the agency, and therefore having been vetted carefully, Roxy hadn’t been here before so she wanted her mobile phone within easy reach. It had already been prepared so that one press of a button would dial the agency’s emergency number.

That number would always be answered immediately, day or night, and a recorder would be automatically switched on in case evidence was required by the police, should something really nasty occur. She’d never had to use the number herself, but knew that it had helped a couple of other girls in the past. Even at the expensive end of the business that her agency catered for, you couldn’t afford to be complacent.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sudden realisation that her client had started to speak to her again.

“When we’ve both showered and dressed, my dear... Cronin, my driver, can take you home... There’s no need to call for a cab”. He picked up the phone handset from the bedside. “Unless you’d like something to eat before you go... I can call Jenkins and ask him to arrange some food from

the kitchen... Mrs. Wyndham can rustle you up something, I'm sure... She usually manages it".

He smiled. The girl may have been here to provide a paid for service, but once she'd accompanied him to this more private part of the house, he considered her to be a guest and would treat her as such.

She'd, in fact, been one of the better 'schoolgirls' of the many who had passed through this way. She was still able to maintain the illusion once the school skirt and blouse had been removed. Many of them simply became naked pretty girls once undressed. Perfectly good 'naked pretty girls', but no longer looking anything like the schoolgirl fantasy that he shared with so many men. Apparently, it was one of the most popular fetishes of all.

The agency that had provided her was expensive, but you had to pay for the best and it was certainly a cut above the other suppliers of similar services that he was occasionally forced to use. This one at least, would tell him if there wasn't a suitable girl available for his particular tastes, rather than send over a girl who couldn't really carry off the look convincingly. He admired them for their honesty.

Another provider, an occasional business colleague who also owned several massage parlours, private sauna clubs, and a nightclub, had on several occasions sent women who had been barely any younger than his own forty years.

He'd always thought the man to be a particularly odious individual, but sometimes in business, you couldn't afford to be too choosy when it came to your associates' personalities.

When profits were at stake, sometimes you just had to grub around in the dirt, often an awful lot of it, to get to the most flawless diamonds or to those elusive nuggets of gold.

* * *

The girl picked up her cup and drank the rest of her tea, before returning to her roast beef sandwich. The meat was pink and had been sliced fairly thickly but was so tender that it required no conscious effort to bite through. She couldn't remember ever having had beef that was as

tender as this. She'd always thought it to be something of a cliché, but this beef really did melt in the mouth.

She began to wish that she'd accepted the offer of something a little more substantial, rather than the snack that she'd asked for. It would, almost certainly, have been something quite special, if this simple sandwich was anything to go by. A woman turned from the work surface where she was preparing vegetables,

"Another cup of tea, Miss?" The older woman, who had been introduced to her as Mrs. Wyndham, reached for the empty cup.

Roxy shook her head, "Er... No thanks, Mrs. Wyndham... It's very kind of you, but I'd better get a move on I suppose". The big man, wearing a grey suit, sitting at the other end of the table, picked up his mug and swallowed the rest of his tea.

"When you're ready then, Miss... The boss has asked me to drive you home... or to wherever you need to go... There's no hurry though... You can take your time, he won't be wanting the car again this evening".

Her client had excused himself earlier, apologising, saying that he had to make a few phone calls and needed to deal with some business. He'd used the bedside phone to summon the butler, Jenkins, to show the girl down to the kitchen while he went in the other direction along the corridor to his private office.

Jenkins had introduced her to Cronin, the chauffeur, who would be taking her home later, after she'd finished her tea and sandwich.

It all seemed to her, to be like a modern day version of one of those period dramas with their butlers and the 'downstairs' staff, that her mother had always loved watching on TV.

* * *

As she relaxed in the soft leather of the Mercedes 'rear seat, the girl heard the muffled sound of 'Roxanne', the song by 'The Police'. She took her mobile phone from her bag, silencing its, so appropriate, ringtone and glancing at the caller ID. She expected it to be either Janet, the woman who ran the agency, or one of her own regular clients calling to make an appointment. It was neither.

“Hi, Lena... How’s it going?” The caller was her friend, another girl from the same escort agency.

“Yeah... Pretty good, Rox... Listen, are you doing this club opening gig tonight?... A casino, or something, isn’t it?” Roxy smiled to herself, thinking that there was no peace for the wicked and that she could certainly be pretty wicked if it was asked of her.

“I sure am, Lena... though I wish I hadn’t agreed to it. I’m bloody knackered now”. She sighed. “When Janet asked me about it, I had sod all booked so I took it... Then this job that I’ve just come from came up... It was at a big old house in Clifton with a guy that epitomises the smooth urbane kind of image... Peter something, his name is... wears smoking jackets and a silk dressing gown, an ’has a butler and all the staff”. She chuckled softly, “I’m being driven home at the moment by his driver, complete with chauffeur’s cap an ’all the works, in a big black Merc... It’s well cool”, she dropped her voice slightly, almost to a whisper, “he’s pretty tasty too, the chauffeur that is... Tall, with bulges filling out his suit in all the right places”.

Lena had just taken a sip of her coffee. She spluttered.

“You’re incorrigible, girl... Absolutely incorrigible”.

Roxy giggled, “I’m sure I must be... If I knew what it meant... Anyway... have you ever done a job over there?... The Clifton place?”

Lena shook her head, then realised the stupidity of it. Roxy couldn’t see her over the phone.

“No... not yet anyway. But Amber’s been there, she said it was a good gig...” Lena used her colleague’s working name, as she wasn’t sure how well Roxy knew the girl, or if she knew Amber’s real name. She went on, “...actually, from what she was sayin’, I’m probably unlikely to be sent there ‘cos I’m much too tall... She said he likes the petite types, in school uniform... Shortarses, like you... I look bloody daft in a school uniform, unless it’s supposed to be a caricature, I’m certainly no good for the real schoolgirl fantasy fan”.

Roxy laughed, “Yeah, you’re probably right, with them long legs of yours... I’ve been doin ’my best sixth former impression for him, an ’he seemed happy with it... He certainly treated me well, with Champagne an ’strawberries in the bedroom, an ’his cook would’ve done me a full meal afterwards if I’d wanted it... I wish I had, now, but I only asked for a cuppa

an 'a sarnie". She smiled at the thought of it, "It was the best sarnie I've ever had... by a mile."

It was Lena's turn to laugh, "You and your food, Roxy. I don't know how you keep that tiny figure of yours. I've seen you putting it away, yet you never seem to put on an ounce... I'll bet that tonight, there'll be tables groaning with canapés an 'stuff... and you'll be getting stuck in to it... Right?... I know what you're like".

"I'm sayin 'nothing at all, Lena. On the grounds that it might leave me wide open to more piss taking from you. But if there's smoked salmon, an 'any of that caviar stuff... 'specially with those little blini things... Well... say no more, eh?" She grinned to herself, licking her lips, her mouth beginning to water as she was thinking about it. "Anyway, Babe, you didn't call me just to talk about my dietary habits, did you?"

"No Rox... I just thought that we could share a taxi, that's all. I'll be passing your flat on my way, so I may as well pick you up... Sound good?"

Roxy didn't need to think about it, "Yeah... Sounds good to me. What time?... Around seven thirty OK?" Lena agreed. They both said their goodbyes and hung up the call as Cronin, the chauffeur, turned to speak over his shoulder.

"Which end of the street is your place, Miss?"

She sat up in the seat and peered out through the windscreen.

"Oh... Er... Just over there, after the blue van. That'll be fine, thanks. It's about as close as you'll get".

Cronin glanced in his mirror, then indicated and pulled in as Roxy gathered up her bag. It fell open, scattering her hairbrush, makeup, and a can of deodorant onto the car's plushly carpeted floor.

By the time she'd retrieved them, Cronin was standing, almost to attention, holding the door open for her. She got out, shooting the kind of smile at him that could be read in several different ways, all of them with distinct erotic possibilities.

"Thank you... Er... Cronin... Sorry... I don't know your first name". She stretched up, almost standing on tip toes, then kissed him lightly on the cheek. He began to blush,

"My pleasure, Miss... and it's Mick, by the way... Mick Cronin". He paused, smiling at her. "Oh... And there's a Mrs. Cronin too... Sorry".

Roxy shrugged, then smiled, “Oh well... Never mind... You can’t blame a girl for trying, can you?” With that, she turned away, glancing back over her shoulder, and wagging her fingers at him. “Bye bye, Mick... an’ thanks very much for the lift”.

Mick Cronin was shaking his head and smiling as, without taking his eyes off the shapely backside that filled her jeans so well, he walked around to the driver’s side and got back into the car.

He started the engine, checked his mirror, then with a glance over his shoulder he pulled smoothly out into the light traffic.

As he passed Roxy, she turned to watch and blew him another kiss. He laughed quietly to himself as he headed off home to have tea with his wife Sandra and their young daughter Victoria.

The girl might have been extremely cute, but she wasn’t his type anyway.

* * *

2 - Punters and Gamblers

Lena Fox closed the door of her cottage behind her, then went through the gate to the waiting taxi. The driver was standing beside the car, lounging against it smoking a cigarette. He pinched out the glowing end, and put the remaining half back into the pack.

“Taxi for Redland, love?”

Lena nodded, “Yeah... via Longwell Green, OK?” She opened the car door, “We’ve got to pick up someone else too”.

He nodded, as she got into the back, “No probs love... You’re the boss... On the agency’s account, is it?” He walked round to the driver’s door to get in. As they pulled away from the cottage, Lena took out her mobile phone to call Roxy. She wanted her to be ready. The driver wouldn’t want to wait around, especially if he had to double park.

“Rox?... Hi, it’s Lena... Yeah, We’re on our way to yours. You ready?” She listened for a moment, “Great, meet us outside, OK?... Yeah,

'bout ten or fifteen, I'll see you then... Yeah, bye then". She put her phone away and relaxed back in the seat. They had a busy night ahead of them.

* * *

As the man got out of his taxi, he was struck by the strange way that the light seemed to be moving around. Glancing up, he realised that it was just the light breeze swaying the branches a little. The lamp posts were protruding through the foliage in this quiet leafy residential suburb of Bristol: their light taking on an almost eerie cast from the lush green leaves.

He paid the cabbie. While the driver was talking on his radio, the passenger carefully checked his appearance, reflected in the cab window. Satisfied that his longish, if dated, silver grey hair was in place, his full beard had no wispy strands to spoil its line, and as far as he could tell, there were no stray hairs or crumbs on his coat lapels, he turned and walked up the drive of the large Victorian house.

Looking straight ahead, aware that there might well be some that would recognise him, and bear ill feelings toward him, he passed a selection of large parked cars, their chauffeurs standing around them smoking and exchanging tales. He tried hard not to notice if some of these men were actually following him with their eyes, though he felt sure that some of them had been. Perhaps he was being paranoid, but despite their elegant uniforms most of them gave the impression that they were somewhat harder edged than the usually subservient characters that one would expect.

He wondered if, perhaps, it might be time for him to employ some muscle of his own on a more permanent basis, rather than just using someone on far more casual terms as required, from his wide circle of acquaintances.

Reaching the house, he rang the bell. The door was opened almost immediately by a large man with cropped hair, wearing an evening suit that looked quite out of place on him. The buttons of his jacket strained around the chest area, and the jacket hung slightly lop sided, as if he had a heavy weight in his right side pocket. This reassured the visitor that at least the security seemed adequate. He idly wondered if it was just a blackjack, or as he suspected from the appearance of weight, a handgun. Had he been

braver, he might have suggested to the man that he had his suits tailored to accommodate both his muscular chest and a shoulder holster. But as he only moved on the very edge of those circles that he aspired to, it hadn't occurred to him that if you had to ditch a firearm in a hurry, then still wearing a shoulder holster would be a dead give away to any inquisitive police officer.

The big man took his coat, then ushered him politely but firmly through to the inside of the house where he was greeted cordially by a short, slightly portly, balding man who nonetheless gave off an aura of both stature and sophistication. His clearly more expensive and undoubtedly tailor made evening wear fitted him perfectly.

* * *

“Oh well, ladies, it's time to circulate again, I suppose... Got to keep 'em happy, haven't we?” Lena smiled at the other two girls. Roxy was chuckling,

“Yeah... I've never come across fellas like some of these. Normally at gigs like this, I end up black and blue from being mauled and havin' 'me bum pinched by randy drunks”. Lena nodded. She knew exactly what her friend meant. Roxy grabbed a delicate looking morsel from a passing tray, then popped it into her mouth as Lena enlightened her.

“I think it's the stakes that make the difference here, Rox... and the fact that I don't reckon that this place is strictly above board, so if they can't pay their table debts, they have someone a bit heavier than a local bankruptcy court to slap their wrists... It's an incentive to keep some of their wits about them... Y'know, stay at least a little bit sober and in some sort of control”. Roxy looked at Lena, with a puzzled look on her face.

“I'm not with you, Lena... What d'you mean?”

“Look... this place is probably unlicensed, unregulated, and shouldn't really be operating as a gambling club... especially in what is really a residential area, too... but the punters here don't care about that, 'cos there's no limits, no taxes, and the money that they're throwing down on the table isn't always legitimately acquired... besides, have you been into the back room?”

Roxy grinned, “Not yet, but I’m sure it’s only a matter of time...”

Lena laughed, as she interrupted her, “Not that kind of back room, Roxy my dear... I’m sure you’ll be invited into one of those later on, to help some lucky high roller celebrate his winning streak by getting down and dirty... or more likely, to help him forget his losses... Though usually they’d be too pissed to be any good to anyone by that time”. She smiled, as the third girl, Amber, walked off towards a bearded, but well groomed silver haired man who had been looking at her and smiling. Lena explained to Roxy, “No... I mean the room where the very special card games are being played... The cash only tables where they lure the unsuspecting, and of course extremely wealthy, thrill seeking specially invited guest to part with even more of his money... lots and lots more of his money... in a no holds barred, no limits, game”.

Roxy looked intrigued, “No limits?... What?... None?... None at all?”

Lena shook her head, “Nope... None whatsoever... it’s all about the buzz... The adrenalin... then once they’ve reached the point of no return, and the only way out is to hope for that elusive win to recover some of their losses, they’ll throw down the keys to the Bentley or the Roller as their stake. Or occasionally, they’ll even write and sign an IOU for a house, or other property... An IOU that they wouldn’t dare welch on. Not if they want to keep all of their fingers and toes”, she paused, to allow it to sink in, before hammering home her point, “or even their wife’s or daughter’s fingers and toes”.

Roxy gasped with surprise, “You’re winding me up, Lena... Pullin’ my chain...” she stopped, mid sentence, halted by the look on Lena’s face and the slow shaking of the other girl’s head.

“Uh uh, Rox... I’m deadly serious... These guys play for keeps, believe me. Did you notice anything about how the cashier was handing out the chips?”

Roxy shook her head, “No... Why?” Her look said that she really hadn’t got a clue.

Lena explained, “All the money paid over at the desk is put into one or other of two drawers, depending on either a signal from the guy handing over the cash, or because of who he is. Occasionally the cashier glances over at the croupier on whichever table he’s been playing... for a signal”.

Roxy looked intrigued, as her friend revealed more. “But whenever anyone cashes in any chips... or uses their card to draw cash to flash around to one of us hostesses”, she grinned, “or for the cab ride home for him and his now unemployed chauffeur, it will only come from one particular drawer... It’s dodgy money... most of it”. She nodded to another girl that she recognised from somewhere, “Anyway... the cashiers know which of the punters is handing over cash that needs to be spread about to lose it, and which ones are straight, and are handing over clean money... Of course, it’s the straight guys who usually walk out of here with the dodgy money”.

“Dodgy?... You mean fake? Counterfeit?... That kind of dodgy?” Roxy looked worried, but Lena shook her head. The two girls had begun to wander around the room, smiling at the players. Few of them took any notice of them, as she continued to explain.

“No, not fake... but some of the serial numbers are almost certainly on a list somewhere in some police station, and if they turn up at a bank counter, questions might be asked... unless the depositor is someone whose credentials are cast iron, like some of these ‘more money than sense’ idiots...” Roxy laughed as Lena continued, “...or more likely some well known expensive Michelin starred restaurateur, exclusive jewellers, or other top drawer retail business where he’s been chucking around his petty cash like confetti”. She smiled, “To some of these guys, a new girlfriend only has to complain that her watch has stopped, and he’ll buy her a brand new Cartier with pocket money... paying cash, of course, ’cos it looks more impressive to the sweet young thing hanging onto his arm”.

As they passed the roulette table, a man reached over and grabbed Lena’s hand.

“Here... My lovely lucky charm with the flame red hair”. He grinned at her. “Kiss my chips, my darling, and I’ll bet on the red that matches it”.

She bent forward and kissed the stack of plastic tokens he held in his hand. He kissed her on the cheek. She stood to one side of his chair and draped her arm around his shoulders, making sure that he could feel her firm breast pressing warmly against him.

The spin went his way. As the croupier pushed the stacks of chips towards him, he took a twenty pound note from his wallet and turning, tucked it into Lena’s cleavage.

“There you go, sweetheart... I said you were my lucky charm... Thanks”, Lena ruffled the man’s hair playfully, but he appeared not to notice. All of his attention was back on the table once again. The gorgeous redhead might as well have not existed.

As the two women moved away, to continue mingling as they were being paid to do, Roxy turned to her friend.

“Easy money, that... eh Lena?”

The redhead merely shrugged, “I thought he was a bit of a tight wad, actually... Only a twenty?... Pah!... I’ve seen ’em lighting cigars from twenties before now”. She smiled, “But I suppose I shouldn’t complain too much”.

There was an archway at the rear of the room, leading to a small dance floor surrounded by tables. As the gamblers seemed, in the main, to be oblivious to their presence, the two girls went through. They could see Amber disappearing through a side door, holding hands with a well dressed man who could have easily been her grandfather. She glanced back at them. Her thin smile had a slightly uncertain look about it that Lena thought strange. There was a coldness in the girl’s eyes. It wasn’t the kind of expression that she was used to seeing on the face of her normally carefree and somewhat happy go lucky friend.

Some of the other girls were scattered around the place, either cuddling up against their male companions as they shared sofas, or sitting at the tables pretending to be totally engrossed in whatever the men were saying.

It was only the tips from the punter’s winnings that they were really interested in, along with any little ‘gifts ’they could earn themselves later on.

It was quite a useful kind of place to meet potential future clients though. Phone numbers would get exchanged with any men who asked. Some might even be given the girl’s real number, if they were deemed to be OK, and of course well heeled enough to be able to afford their services.

In one corner of the room through the archway, there was a small raised stage where a quartet played easy jazz for those who wanted to dance. A couple of the hostesses were on the floor, dancing with guests, one of whom seemed to be having problems with a partner who appeared to be somewhat unsure of the steps.

Few, if any, of the members and their specially invited guests had brought women with them. They all knew that girls who asked no questions, and who always said ‘yes’, would be available for their entertainment, and not just as a floor show, though a singer had been performing with the band earlier, and was sure to be doing so again.

Roxy suddenly turned to Lena, grabbing her arm,

“That’s what it is... Of course... I knew something was different, it’s the smoke, isn’t it?... There’s normally no smoking in a club nowadays, but they don’t seem to worry about it here”. Lena burst out laughing, and had to stifle it behind her hand,

“I think there’d be far more interesting things going on here for the owners to get done for, than allowing smoking on the premises... Christ almighty, Rox... there’s probably shed loads of coke getting consumed here, for a start... an ‘I’m not talkin ’about the kind that comes in red ring pull tins”.

As if to prove Lena’s point, a man summoned Roxy over to his table to ask if she had a mirror in her handbag. He was waving around a small ziploc plastic bag containing a tiny quantity of white powder.

“Charlie?” He held out the bag, “You want to share a few lines, darling?”

Roxy shook her head, “No thanks, but you can borrow my mirror”. She fished it out, from amongst the makeup, her cigarettes, and the foil wrapped condoms.

As he took the mirror from her hand, one of his companions took the hand in his own as he stood up smiling broadly, “Dance?”

She nodded. “Sure... Why not?” She could tell by the look in his eyes that he had more than just a jig about on the dance floor in mind, but that was why she was here, after all.

She knew, from the briefing that all the girls had attended, that there were quiet rooms around the place with soft furnishings, sofas, and ice buckets containing bottles of halfway decent Champagne. Waitresses would be watching the rooms, and would carry a tray of canapés to a room as they saw it become occupied, then take any orders for drinks or even for fresh oysters, should they be required.

Roxy waggled the fingers of her free hand at Lena, in a ‘goodbye’ gesture as she was led by the other hand onto the dance floor. The other

man sniffed up the last remaining cocaine from the mirror, unrolled the twenty pound note, licked it, then replaced it into his wallet. The empty plastic bag lay discarded in the ashtray. He picked up a brandy balloon and drained it in one, then refilled it from the bottle of Armagnac on the table.

Lena began to turn away. The man stood up, then after wiping a trace of white powder from his top lip and licking it off his finger he grabbed her hand and nodded towards the dance floor. She smiled, unsure of how well he'd manage the steps after the cocaine and the alcohol but was pleasantly surprised as he led her around the floor with ease and consummate skill.

No mean dancer herself, Lena was impressed by his light touch and his delicate footwork, but when the band changed to a tango rhythm for the next number it was his turn to be impressed, along with the others on the floor who one by one stopped moving, then along with those at the tables, stood to watch them dance.

The tango was Lena's favourite dance. She loved its theatricality, its passion, its drama and style, and she was very good at it. With her elegant long legs and her striking red hair, she looked the part as they glided and swooped, stopping and holding poses for maybe only a single beat, as the dance required. Making those dramatic moves of the head, one moment gazing into her partner's eyes, then turning sharply to stare into the distance, all in perfect time to the relentless 'four four' rhythm.

The band's music was the only sound in the room, all chatter and clinking of glasses had stopped. Only the very faintest murmur of play from the gamblers next door could be heard, as they continued their gaming, oblivious to the performance being witnessed by those around the dance floor. Till at last the music stopped and the room burst into spontaneous applause. It was only then that the couple realised that they'd been playing to such a captivated and appreciative audience.

Looking around them, in surprise and with a slight measure of embarrassment, the couple left the floor for a well earned glass of chilled Champagne.

* * *

3 - The Small Hours

As the cab drivers, and the last of the chauffeurs, disappeared into what was left of the night carrying away the punters and hired hostesses, staff busied themselves around the house gathering glasses and emptying ashtrays.

A big thick set man, wearing an evening suit that looked completely out of place on him, came running down the staircase two steps at a time calling out anxiously.

“Mr. Silverman?... You gotta key for bedroom four, Mr. Silverman?” A shorter man, whose diminutive form still managed to exude authority, looked up from the cash he was counting.

“What’s up, Jacobs?... It isn’t locked, is it?... It shouldn’t be. Everyone should have gone by now, have you tried knocking?” Jacobs nodded,

“Course I ’ave, Mr. Silverman... But I reckon it’s bin locked from the outside, ’cos I looked through the keyhole an ’there ain’t no key in the inside... there ain’t no one in there either, unless they’s stone deaf”.

Silverman reached into his jacket pocket and drew out a bunch of keys.

“Here you go, Jacobs... They’re numbered... You’ll probably find a pissed whore and her equally comatose punter sleeping it off, but you’d better check... They’ll need throwing out, anyway”. He tossed the big man the keys.

“Cheers, Boss”. He turned and ran back upstairs, dodging a woman carrying a tray of dirty glasses. Within seconds there was an anxious shout, “Mr. Silverman!... Boss!... You’d better come up here, I think you need to see this”.

Silverman sighed, shook his head resignedly, and made a note of where he’d got to with the cash.

“OK... OK... Keep your hair on... I’m coming”. Silverman closed the cashbox, locked it, then put it into the safe. After spinning the dial, and checking the safe had locked, he headed up the staircase following the sound of Benny Jacobs ’excited voice.

* * *

The three women were still buzzing by the time their cab arrived at Amber's flat to drop her off. Despite the hint of light that had begun to appear in the eastern sky, even competing against the city's light pollution, none of the girls felt in the least bit sleepy. Tired, maybe. But not ready for bed yet. As she got out of the taxi, Amber turned to the other two,

"D'you two want to come in for a drink or somethin'?... I've got a couple of good bottles up there that a client gave me... You can always crash here, an 'go home later".

Lena and Roxy looked at each other, nodded, and began to move.

"Yeah... Why not?" Roxy turned to Lena, "We can share a cab later, can't we? We're both heading in the same direction".

As Roxy thanked the cabbie with a tip, any fare being on the club's account, Amber went up to the door and turned the key in the lock.

The other two girls followed her inside, giggling to each other about some of the punters they'd entertained over the long night's work.

Conversation in the taxi had been a little subdued. The cab had been provided by the club so they, probably correctly, reasoned that the driver may have been in the club's employ. It didn't do to be laughing about the antics of the kinds of people who were likely to have been guests at an event like that. By the end of the evening, each of the girls had realised that there had been some pretty dodgy characters around the place, as well as the inevitable 'hangers on' who enjoyed the perceived notoriety that they believed mixing with those kinds of people gave them.

The two guests collapsed into the pair of sofas that dominated Amber's living room. Their host disappeared into the kitchen of her ground floor flat in the converted Victorian semi to get glasses. She called through from the kitchen, seemingly oblivious to the time of the morning, and that her upstairs neighbour would most probably still be sleeping.

"Are we having wine, ladies?... Or do you prefer coffee and brandy?" She reappeared in the doorway to hear their answers. The consensus was for wine first, then coffee and brandy later. This was looking like it was turning into a hen party.

* * *

In the chill pre-dawn air, the exhaled smoke from old Mr. Dodgson's pipe seemed to be magnified as it combined with the condensed breath.

He looked out over his garden to beyond, across the Avon. The moon was reflected in the wet mudbanks on the opposite shore giving them a silvery sheen that he thought looked quite beautiful. He liked this time of the morning. Back when he'd still been working, before his retirement, he'd sometimes sit out here with his cup of tea after a late shift with overtime, before grabbing a few hours sleep.

This morning though, he was on a mission. One that unfortunately had proved fruitless in this instance. Still, in this case, no news was good news he supposed.

He'd been sitting watching out for a neighbour's dog. He suspected that the owner had been letting the animal out in the morning, before going off to an early shift at the nearby docks, and had been encouraging it to relieve itself in the old man's vegetable patch, to save himself from having to clear the dog shit from his own lawn. It was a large dog, perfectly capable of leaping over the three foot fence. Bert didn't want to install a taller fence as it would cut out the light to his vegetables, but he needed to see for himself if his suspicions were grounded. To this purpose, he'd been sitting here, shielded from view by his back porch, with a night vision scope borrowed from his son, whose nocturnal excursions occasionally provided him with the odd piece of illicit game for the larder.

He was just about to go back inside, having heard his neighbour's car pull away as he left for work, when he noticed something strange across the water. A small van was driving along the cycle path beside the river. His first thought was that it was a municipal worker on an early start heading out to do some maintenance, but he realised that the van was showing no lights. He turned on the night vision scope and peered through it at the van, following it as it stopped and reversed to the edge of the bank. The amplified brightness of the reversing lights made him wince as he watched through the image intensifier.

He watched as two men got out and rolled a large bundle out of the rear doors, then across the grass, to let it drop over the edge into the soft

mud that would be soon be covered by the rising tide.

He mused to himself that it might be a body, but thought that they were more likely simply fly tipping. He was particularly annoyed about that sort of thing, so he went indoors to phone the police. Realising that the tide was rising, and that fly tipping was probably a little way down the police's priorities, he decided to suggest that it had looked like a body.

He hoped that they might then get there in time to recover evidence which would identify the fly tippers before it floated away down to the Severn estuary and out into the Bristol Channel to end up as detritus washed up on a beach somewhere further along. There was also the worry that it might contain chemicals, or other pollutants harmful to fish or even to kids playing on the beaches or bathing in the sea.

* * *

As the morning wore on, the three women became gradually more relaxed as tiredness and alcohol overcame the caffeine. Amber's large cafetière sat cooling with only the dregs left in it as the girls swapped stories about their private lives, their work in the sex industry, and how they became involved in it in the first place.

Lena had explained how she'd originally started working, at first on the streets, then after a very short while in the safer massage parlours. How she'd wanted to earn enough money to pay her way through university as she had no intentions of leaving uni with a large debt to accompany her degree. She'd been unlucky that the introduction of student loans rather than grants started just as she started her higher education. She found that she was extremely good at the work, and really enjoyed it.

Roxy laughed when she said this, "Yeah... You mean that you enjoyed the power it gave you over the men, right?" Lena grinned as her friend continued, "I know I did... Watching their faces then easing back, controlling them till they're almost begging you to let them finish... Ahh, the power... I love it... Always have done".

Amber laughed. She took another large swig of her brandy, then gasped as the strong spirit hit the back of her throat. Swaying slightly, she

carefully placed the glass back onto the coffee table before speaking in a slurred voice.

“Well I shtarted ’cos I wash shkint... Absolutely flat fuckin ’broke after the bashtard I wash workin ’for simply bugged off... He even owed me wages... It wash a market stall, an ’one morning...” She sighed loudly, “I jusht turned up for work an ’there wash fuck all there... No stall holder, no stuff to sell, and no fucking stall either... Nothing... Sod all”. The drink had obviously got to her, but she was determined to tell her story as she continued, “I’d bin givin ’it away at home for fuckin ’years, so I fort I might as well get paid for it, now I was old enough”.

The other two turned and looked at her. It was Lena who spoke first, “What do you mean, ‘giving it away ’Liz?’” Liz was Amber’s real name. Like so many working girls, whether in parlours or operating as escorts, she used a different name when working.

Roxy, or Roxanne, like Lena, used her real name. Her mother had been a fan of the rock band, ‘The Police’, but hadn’t realised just what their iconic song had really been about when she’d named her daughter in their honour. Now though, it seemed appropriate.

Lena waited for Liz to answer, checking that she hadn’t nodded off, but the girl appeared to be thinking. She looked at Roxy and Lena in turn, as if she was deciding whether to tell them or not. She appeared to be sobering up a little.

Lena asked her again, “Well Liz?... What did you mean?... Eh?”

Liz shrugged, “Zackly what I said... Giving it away... Shaggin ’guys for free, so’s my old feller could party with his mates... or because he needed a favour... or sometimes I reckon it was so he didn’t get his head stove in ’cos he owed them money... or just because they had some kind of power over him... Oh I dunno... Fucking hell, I was only young”.

Lena latched onto this immediately, “How young?... Eh Liz... How young were you?... Underage?”

Liz’s look said it all, “Of course I was fuckin ’underaged... Jesus Christ!... If they’d wanted a grown up girl, they would’ve simply gone down to the nearest knockin ’shop... or picked up some tart off the street... No... I was about eleven an ’just getting into fashion ’n ’things... an ’goin’ all excitable and doe eyed over boy bands an ’guys off the soaps”. She lit herself a cigarette, then offered the pack to the other two. Both of them

declined as she continued, “Anyway... One of my dad’s younger mates commented on my ‘sexy mini skirt, crop top, and tights ’and how good I looked when I was dancing to the CD player in my bedroom... I’d got the door wide open and he’d come upstairs to use the loo... Anyway, it made me feel all grown up, like my friend’s big sister who was a proper teenager an ’had a boyfriend”. She laughed, “She was about thirteen or fourteen... something like that... Anyway, he must have said something to my father, ’cos then he came back up with some sparkling wine stuff and asked if he could dance with me... He said that he liked dancing an ’that Dad had said it was OK. He wasn’t a bad looking bloke, dressed kinda cool, like a rock star, in his twenties I guess, maybe early thirties, and I was flattered... I thought I was all grown up and had ‘pulled ’myself a bloke”. She drew on her cigarette, then blew smoke out in a stream before going on, “Yeah... anyway... when a slow song came on, we smooched, and he kissed me and you can guess the rest”.

Roxy was shaking her head in amazement, “Blimey, Liz... I thought I was a precocious little tart, losing my cherry at nearly fifteen...” She chuckled, “I can remember it well, It was two days before my birthday, and my boyfriend had been trying to wait until I was sixteen and legal... Trouble is, I’d lied about my age, so he thought I was already fifteen. He was going off on a geography field trip with his college... He was seventeen, and doing his ‘A ’levels...” She grinned as Liz began laughing, “No, not those sort of ‘A ’levels, Liz... Doesn’t sex ever leave your mind?... No?... Oh well... Anyway, they brought the trip forward by a week, which meant he would miss my birthday”. She smiled, “I simply suggested that we had an early birthday party... It didn’t take much to persuade him that two days wouldn’t make any difference. They weren’t going to nick him for that... Besides... I was getting fed up with waiting... My hormones were working overtime. I wanted some of the sort of action I’d seen in the porno videos one of my friends had nicked from her older brother”.

Lena interrupted her, “That sounds just like you, Rox... but what happened to Liz was different... Sounds like she was being groomed by that bloke”. She turned to Liz, “I’m guessing that he wasn’t the only one, Liz... Am I right?”

Liz nodded, “No... ’course he wasn’t... don’t be daft... Yeah, it started with him, but then others came along bringing me presents... Y’know, like the latest ‘Now ’CD with all the chart hits on it, or bits of jewellery, though after I looked at it when I got older, I realised that it was just cheap trashy tat... I even got given posh underwear”. She laughed, “Shit... I even had to pad out the little bras ’cos I hadn’t got no tits yet”, she took another puff on her cigarette, then stubbed it out in the ashtray. “They also brought along cider and the alcopops that were just becoming cool, and of course fags... If I was going to be a grown up teenager, then I had to have a cigarette between my fingers, didn’t I?... I didn’t really like the taste, but I thought it looked really cool”.

Roxy was astounded, “And your father knew what was happening?... I mean, he knew these blokes were shagging you in your room while he was downstairs?”

Liz nodded, “Oh yeah... Later on, we took my CD player down to the living room and had parties down there. The old man would be dancing with his latest girlfriend, or snogging on the sofa... Sometimes more than just snogging, along with the rest of us. He’d always got new girlfriends... that’s why my mum bugged off when I was little... Oh yeah... there was often a couple of other girls what used to come along too... Older than me, of course. I realise now that they were prolly just little tarts what they’d picked up from the streets. Nothing more than paid for playthings...” She chuckled. “Which, I suppose, is all we are, really”.

The others laughed at the irony, but there was an underlying serious mood developing. Roxy and Lena were happy working in the sex industry now, as adults, but Liz’s story of her abuse at such a tender age appalled them, even if she seemed blasé about it.

It was Roxy who stated the obvious, “So, your own father was sometimes in the same room where his cronies were having illegal sex with his seriously underage daughter?... Have I got that right?” She looked incredulous, “And he never got caught for it?... never got done?”

Liz smiled thinly, then leant forward and answered in a low conspiratorial stage whisper.

“Oh... on the contrary, Rox... He got done OK. He got his comeuppance good an ’proper”, She smiled. “Fate has its own way of dealing with arseholes like my dear father”. Her thin smile turned into a

cold looking grin, “Yeah... He’d just started pimping a couple of young street hookers... Crackheads, both of ’em”. She went to light another cigarette, then changed her mind and continued, “Anyway... He’d only been at it about a week when he was arrested during a police clean up... Wrong place, wrong time. You know the sort of thing... Anyway, he got banged up on remand in a cell with a particularly nasty bastard who was a little partial to a bit of bum banditry... There was some kind of emergency, so some remand prisoners got put in with the convicted men overnight... Well, this bloke took a fancy to my old fella, and there was nothing he could do about it ’cos this other bloke was a lot bigger than him... in more ways than one. Unfortunately, he liked it rough an ’my dad wasn’t used to using his ‘exit ’as an ‘entrance’, if you know what I mean...” She chuckled softly, but there was no mirth in it, “Yeah... he was a little bit tight... and I don’t mean drunk... that might have made it a bit easier for him”. She looked at the other two, noting the look on their faces. It was a mixture of horror, and amusement at her way of telling the story, “Anyway, to cut a long story short, he suffered some appalling internal injuries, which then became infected. He couldn’t shit properly either, so he was fed by a drip, an ’my old man hated needles, but in the end, a couple of weeks later, he died quite painfully from complications”. She smiled, noting the expressions on their faces, “And good fucking riddance to the old bastard... He got exactly what he deserved... He’d been a pain in the arse to me”.

The room fell silent, the only sound that could be heard was the faint murmur of early morning light traffic, until a bird began to sing outside. It broke the spell.

The three women decided that it was time to get their heads down for a few hours sleep. Liz went and dug out a couple of duvets for her two friends, then left them to the two sofas as she retired to her own bed.

* * *

[4 - Sadly Missed?](#)

Newly promoted Detective Inspector Nigel Ratcliffe put the phone down and turned to his partner, DS Nick Wilson,

“Well, Nick... It looks like we’ve got a suspicious death on our hands. Probably murder”. Wilson looked up expectantly,

“Guv?” He could hardly conceal the pleased look on his face. Hopefully it would take him away from this bloody paperchase. Searching through endless bank and credit card statements looking for a single particular company name was a thankless and extremely tedious task. “What do you mean by ‘suspicious’?... And why is it only ‘probably’ murder?”

Ratcliffe explained, “Yeah... actually, I don’t think that there’s much ‘probably’ about it. It’s a murder. Early this morning, like really early, an old bloke phoned in to say that he’d spotted two guys chucking a large bundle into the river mud. He said it looked like it might be a body...” He paused, turning to take a note from a policewoman who’d appeared at his side, “Cheers, Jean... Anyway... two uniforms went down to have a look, expecting it to be nothing more than a bit of fly tipping, but the seagulls had already started to pull away at the bin bags wrapping it and they could see that it was a body”. Ratcliffe glanced at the note he’d been given. “Hang on a mo, Nick... This might tell us more”. He picked up the phone and dialled, “Hello?... Dr. Raymond?... Oh sorry Dr. Rahman. My apologies, I was given your name wrongly, I’m DI Ratcliffe. You asked if I could call you about our dead body”. He chuckled, “Yes... I suppose you’re right. They’re all dead, aren’t they?” It would appear that the doctor had a sense of humour. “Anyway, Doctor... about our mystery body?” He listened, his eyebrows raised in interest, “Oh?... Hmmm... that’s interesting... very interesting indeed... Yes?... Oh, that’s good... Very good”. Wilson looked at his boss,

“What’s that, Guv?... C’mon, don’t keep it to yourself”. The inspector held a hand out to shut him up.

“Yeah, I’ve got one... OK... Fire away”. He scribbled on a pad, “Got that... great... Right then, OK, thanks a lot, Dr. Rahman. So you’ve already handed him over to the slicers and dicers then?... OK, I’ll look forward to their findings, thanks again for that, Bye”. He turned back to his sergeant, “Yeah, Nick. It’s the initial report from the duty doctor who checked over

the body... It looks like the death was from anaphylaxis... anaphylactic shock, or a severe allergic reaction, to the likes of you and me..."

Wilson interrupted him, "You mean like from peanuts, Guv... My nephew has a peanut allergy. Comes out in a terrible rash".

Nigel Ratcliffe nodded, "Something like that, Nick... apparently he had red marks, 'hives', the doctor called them, all over him and his tongue had swollen up and choked him... Nasty eh?"

"Yeah, Guv, but it's obviously still suspicious because he's been dumped into the Avon mud, wrapped up in bin bags... So it's highly unlikely to be totally natural causes, right?" Wilson grinned. "Besides..." He added, "It's not even bin day today".

Nigel's eyes lifted towards the ceiling in exasperation at his colleague's irreverent joke, but he knew that 'gallows humour' was endemic in policemen. It was sometimes needed to help handle some of the more distasteful aspects of police work.

"Anyway, Sergeant Wilson..." He used his subordinate's rank to make a point, "Putting your appalling joke to one side for the moment, there's a little more to it than that. This Dr. Rahman said that his mouth had bits of what was obviously seafood stuffed into it... even an unpeeled prawn with its head still on... Yet he had a serious seafood allergy..."

Nick Wilson interjected, "Maybe he didn't know... Maybe it was the first time he'd eaten it, Guv".

Ratcliffe shook his head, "Unpeeled prawns?... Who eats prawns with the shells still on, eh?... No, Nick. There's no chance of him not being aware of his allergy, that's what Rahman was saying. The guy had a 'Medic Alert' dog tag round his neck. The people who bagged him up and dumped him obviously missed it... there was no other identifying features, and no wallet or anything... but he had longish hair in a kind of 'David Dickenson' style, and a very full beard. The necklace must have been missed because it was hidden under it, but he thinks that someone actually removed a 'Medic Alert' bracelet, 'cos when he contacted them, their records had him down as having bought both a bracelet and the dog tag". Ratcliffe turned and nodded to another officer that was making 'drinking' movements with his hand. "Yeah, cheers Alan... White with two, OK?... Same for Nick... Anyway, Nick, our good Dr. Rahman went back and had a closer look. He found that there were signs of a bracelet having been worn, y'know, like paler skin, the

hairs worn away, that sort of thing, and there was damage to the skin's surface too, but he said it looked post mortem, as if a bracelet had been pulled off somewhat roughly..."

Wilson butted in, smiling. "So we've got a name, then?... Anyone we know?"

It was Ratcliffe's turn to smile now, "Oh yes, Nicholas, my friend... He certainly is... or rather, 'was' somebody we know". He held out the pad to Wilson.

"Well, well, well... If it's not our old friend Ricky Mollison... Loan shark, dealer, and senior pimp of this parish... If only his customers and his girls had given evidence against him, eh?" He smiled, "They're not going to need to now, are they?... It couldn't happen to a nicer bloke, eh, Guv".

"Yes... Not exactly a great loss to humanity, as I'm sure that even those debtors and tarts would agree. They wouldn't shop him, through fear, I suppose. But if they had done, he might be still alive now, even if he was in a cell".

Wilson nodded in agreement, "Yeah... It makes me wonder why we're bothering to investigate his death, really", he grinned, "unless it's to give his murderer some kind of a 'Clean up Bristol's Streets' award".

* * *

Benny Jacobs knocked on the door, and listened. He was summoned into the room by a simple two words. Their tone managing to convey to him the fact that it was an order rather than a request.

"Come in".

Jacobs entered quietly, closing the door behind him as he nervously, but silently, cleared his throat.

"Er... I've just had a call, Mr. Silverman... from Joey Roberts, who was with me in the van this morning..." He paused, working out in his head the best way to break the news to his boss, "Umm... like... We might have a slight problem..."

Silverman interrupted, "Problem, Jacobs?" He stood up and walked around to the front of his desk, "Well, spit it out, man... What kind of a problem?" His eyes bored into Benny Jacobs' own as Benny looked down and shivered despite the difference in stature. The shorter man looked up at

him, staring him straight in the face. “Well, Jacobs... I’ll ask you again. What kind of problem is it that brings you here to disturb me?” He drew on his cigar, “It must have seemed pretty important to your tiny collection of brain cells, or you wouldn’t have faced me with it”.

Jacobs took a sharp intake of breath. He was a big man, with a successful amateur boxing career behind him, but this short, slightly overweight, balding man could chill his blood with only the tone of his voice.

“It would seem, Mr. Silverman, that Mollison’s body has been found already... In fact only shortly after we dropped it into the river”. He omitted to mention that they’d actually dropped it into the deep soft mud because the tide was out. The wrapped bundle had almost disappeared into the slimy ooze that very nearly matched the colour of the body’s wrapping. It would almost certainly have been washed away with the rising tide. He continued, “Joey was driving along the Portway on his way home an ’he saw that the spot where we’d dumped it was infested with blue flashing lights an’ crawlin ’with coppers”.

“Bugger!” exclaimed Silverman, uncharacteristically. Swearing, or resorting to any kind of bad language just wasn’t his style. He preferred to convey his feelings with his erudition rather than by descending into profanity. “How did that happen?”

The question was rhetorical, rather than being directed at Jacobs, but Benny didn’t realise that, so he attempted to provide an answer.

“Joey wondered that too, Boss...” Benny was beginning to relax a little, now that he had a little of the power that greater knowledge gave him. “So he pulled over an ’phoned up his mate what lives nearby, y’know, over that side of the river, just to see if his mate had heard anything. Well, as it was, his mate was actually already in the crowd of rubbernecker what had gathered, and he’d already spoken to one of the coppers what was holdin’ people back behind the yellow tape... I mean, it was the most exciting thing to happen down there for years, wasn’t it?”

Silverman nodded, “And?... So what did he manage to find out then, eh?... I hope he didn’t say too much to his friend about his own interest in it”.

Jacobs shook his head, “No Mr. Silverman, even Joey Roberts ain’t that daft”. He smiled, “His mate said that the copper told him that some old

geezer had seen a motor stop there an 'drop it in, and he'd reported it as fly tipping..." He chuckled, "Hah... That stiff was far too fresh for flies... wasn't it, Mr. Silverman?" He paused, expecting an amused reaction from his boss, but none came.

Silverman had already been contemplating having the van left somewhere and torched, then reporting it as stolen, but he'd figured that if the old busybody had got a registration number, then the police would have already been on the phone to here, it being the registered address. That was unless Jacobs or Roberts had been on the ball, and had fitted false plates. As the police hadn't been knocking noisily on the door already, and disturbing his breakfast, he could assume for now that he was in the clear. Torching the van might only draw suspicion in his direction, once the burnt out shell's VIN numbers had been ascertained, which would identify its registration. He could do without nosey policemen in the building.

"Were the van's plates changed, Benny?" Silverman asked.

"Yes, Mr. Silverman... and we took the false ones off again an' chucked 'em in the furnace in the basement".

Silverman nodded, "Good... Well done."

There was nothing else to point to any involvement, so he decided he'd garage it for a while, out of sight.

"Anyway", Benny continued, "Some bloke from the council arrived pretty smartish, hoping to find something in the dumped trash to say who'd chucked it, before it got carried away by the tide. When he got there, he could see where them bloody seagulls had been picking at the wrapping, an' there was an 'and showin', so he called in the police..." He shrugged, "Fuckin 'bad luck really... Oh... Sorry, for swearing, Mr. Silverman... Really".

Silverman let it go. He was already thinking ahead. "So, Jacobs... You're certain that there was nothing to connect the body to this place, then?"

Benny shook his head, "No... Nothing, Boss... We stripped the body, an' bunged all his clothes into a bag what's bin chucked into the furnace wiv the plates... Just in case there was forensics to link him to here. You never know, do you?... They're bloody clever, some of them police science blokes".

Silverman smiled thinly, nodding to himself, “Good... Now you understand why I resisted suggestions to update the heating system here from the old coal fired boilers, don’t you?”

“Yes, Boss... I realised that before, when we had to get rid of all those fake tenners pretty sharpish... Good thinking, Mr. Silverman”.

Ignoring the grovelling praise, Silverman thumbed through a leather bound address book. He stopped at a page, checked an entry, then smiled to himself.

“OK, Jacobs... Grab one of the boys and get all of the furniture out of that room... Bedroom four, wasn’t it?” Benny nodded, “Right, and the carpets too, just in case, then we’ll get the decorators in, tout de suite... I’ll call Eddie Welford now... He owes me a favour or two, and money, so he can drop everything and get over here”. He paused, thinking. “With luck, it’ll just be wasted money and the police won’t find any connection to this place... It looked to me like it was one of those allergic reactions that killed him. It’s a shame it happened here where we can’t afford to have policemen and ambulance men nosing around. Our disposal of the body will make it look suspicious”.

Benny Jacobs laughed, “Yeah, Mr. Silverman... Trust that old weasel Ricky Mollison to cause problems, even when he’s dyin ’of natural causes, eh?... P’raps you should impose an age limit here... Y’know...like... no old farts what might peg out with the excitement, eh Boss?”

Silverman could see the funny side, “Yes, Benjamin...” Benny smiled. Silverman rarely used first names when speaking to his underlings. He continued. “Unfortunately, a lot of those ‘old farts ’are the ones with all the money, and with a penchant for spending it on gambling, drinking, and whoring... and of course not wanting to pay taxes on it either”. He shrugged, “So, my friend, it seems like we’re stuck with them for the moment at least”. He turned back to his desk, “As I said... Go and get one of the lads from downstairs... Two if you feel that you need them... then get that room cleared”. Benny went to speak, but his boss had anticipated his question. “Use the big van to cart it away... far away... and don’t just fly tip it, OK?”

Jacobs grinned, “No Mr. Silverman... of course not, I wouldn’t want to get reported for illegal dumping, would I?”

Silverman smiled. He wasn't completely sure if the irony had been intentional or not.

"Right then... I'll call Welford now... If I can't get him, then there are others, I'm sure, OK?... Go to it".

Benny knew exactly what to do. He turned on his heel and left the room thinking that the encounter had gone a lot better than he'd dared expect.

He smiled to himself, thinking that he could make a little bit of extra money on the side. He knew a couple of second hand furniture dealers, way out of the local area, who would pay good money for quality stuff. He didn't know a lot about old furniture, but he knew that Silverman didn't buy rubbish, so even if they weren't genuine antiques, he'd make a bit for himself. Possibly quite a good bit for himself. Every cloud, as they say, has a silver lining. He didn't like old Ricky Mollison much anyway. He'd always been a mean bastard with a nasty streak.

* * *

5 - Getting away

A few days later, Lena Fox had almost completely recovered from the sleep she'd missed while working and partying with Roxy and Liz. A couple of nights alone in her own bed had worked wonders and she was looking forward to joining a few friends on a motorcycle ride to an event in Wales to meet up with other like minded folk.

She'd already rolled her pride and joy out of her garage, the BMW motorcycle that had been customised for her in what was known as the 'bobber' style.

After going over it with a sponge and a bucket of hot soapy water, then chamois leathering the paintwork and chrome, she'd retired to her kitchen to make the coffee.

Her friends Tony and Terry would be arriving soon, and for Tony at least, only properly made real coffee would do.

She cut a slice from a loaf of home baked bread and dropped it into the toaster to assuage her immediate hunger pangs. They would be stopping later at a café just over the Severn crossing, where they'd meet up with two more friends for a proper breakfast.

She turned on the radio to catch the morning news and weather report as she slathered locally made butter from the dairy of her neighbouring farm onto her toast. Their pedigree Jersey herd produced some of the very best milk, cream, and subsequently butter, so Lena was quite happy to pay a little more for a quality product that had been made with care only a few hundred yards from her own cottage.

Over the gentle bubbling of her percolator, she heard the unmistakable sound of two bikes turning into the lane. She looked up at the clock. They were almost on time, only a few minutes later than they'd said, which for Tony at least, was pretty good going. Perhaps he'd been taking lessons from Terry, whose timekeeping was infinitely better.

Terry was a cowman and he had to work to the inbuilt body clocks of the herd. They knew when it was time for milking, and would be waiting patiently at the field gate to be led along the lane to the milking parlour. A leisurely lie in, after a late night out drinking, was a luxury that Terry was rarely allowed.

Lena got up from the table to pour three mugs of coffee as the two men came in through the open kitchen door. As she did so, the radio newscaster was reporting on a murder case that police were asking for witnesses to.

A name, Richard, also known as Ricky, Mollison, caught her interest. She'd heard the name before, but hadn't to her knowledge ever met the man in person. He was notorious among some of the women in her profession as a low life pimp who ran street girls that he made sure were hooked on the crack cocaine and the heroin he dealt in.

He was also a loan shark. He charged extortionate rates of interest to those who needed to get hold of money quickly, usually for household emergencies. These people were often unable to raise it from the more usual sources, due to not having any credit rating. This was sometimes a problem to those who weren't in conventional employment. Some of his victims, or 'clients' as he preferred, were foreign 'illegals' who were frightened stiff of the authorities finding them. They believed they had no access to the

welfare system, a belief Mollison was only too keen to foster, in the knowledge that they'd then have to rely on despicable people like himself instead.

Naturally his punitive rates of interest were ruthlessly enforced by equally punitive measures, once the crippling penalty charges had finally become too much so bear. Fear would keep most of his debtors in line.

Listening to the report, Lena became aware that he was no longer going to be a burden on his now former clients. Her initial thought was that he wouldn't be missed. Then she laughed softly when she realised that of course he would be, but joyfully so with a sense of great relief for many of Bristol's underclass.

Only those who provided him with his evil merchandise would mourn his passing, but not for very long. Greedy small time dealers for smack and crack were always ready to take over a vacated opportunity on the streets, while the lucrative market in 'Charlie ' and 'E ' to the clubbers and the party set was easily serviced by their own kinds of entrepreneurs who knew exactly where to go for their supplies.

"Come on... Share the joke, Babe... What were you chuckling to yourself about?" Tony was grinning at her as he removed his crash helmet, "Don't let it stop you pouring that coffee, though... It smells good".

She smiled, then explained her amusement, feeling a little guilty at revealing that she'd actually been pleased to hear of a man's death. Did that make her a bad person? An answer to her unasked question was quickly forthcoming.

Tony nodded in agreement. "Good riddance!... If you ask me. Arseholes like that don't deserve any sympathy". It was almost as if he'd been able to read her thoughts. Not for the first time, she was aware that there was a particular empathy between them.

Terry agreed. "Yeah... Too bloody right". He put his helmet to one side, and began struggling to remove his heavy leather jacket.

Thoughts of the late and patently unlamented Ricky Mollison had reminded Lena of Liz's drunken revelations about her own father's demise after getting involved in similar activities, and of the fact that upon waking later, she'd not only remembered telling her friends about him, but had been adamant that her feelings about the man remained exactly the same.

All that had changed was that she'd shared her story with someone else, and had felt much better for it, afterwards.

An idea came into Lena's head, "Tony?... It's OK if we pick up another mate of mine too, isn't it?" He looked at her with a questioning expression. She continued, "I mean, we're not staying away overnight, are we?... It's only a daytime event, isn't it?" He wrinkled his brow, as he worked out exactly what it was that she was asking,

"No... I mean yes... Oh fuck it, you're confusing me, woman". He laughed, "I mean, 'no' we're not staying away, and 'yes', it's only a daytime show... There's no piss up and party tonight, if that's what you meant?" He grinned at her, "Why?... Who else were you thinkin' of bringing along?"

"Oh, only my mate Liz... or 'Amber' as you may remember her from when she was working at 'Crystal's' before she joined the agency and moved out of your price bracket". She grinned at him, then theatrically blew him a kiss.

Tony laughed. His own habit of using 'massage parlours' was well known to Lena, and to most of his close friends, in the same way that Lena's profession was no secret to hers.

"Yeah... Why not?" He said, "The more the merrier".

"OK, I'll give her a bell, then..." Lena got up from the table, "I'll see if she wants to come along for the ride. She's been badgering me for ages for a ride out on the back of the bike".

She went through to the phone in the living room, taking her coffee and slice of toast with her.

Tony and Terry sat at the table drinking their coffee and discussing the day's planned ride. They were looking forward to meeting up with their old friend Llew Preece again, and taking a look at his latest toy, a brand new Ducati.

He would be riding down, with his latest girlfriend on the pillion, from his home in the Brecon Beacons to meet them at a café near Newport for a late breakfast. For a 'foodie' like Tony, at least, the prospect of a 'Full Welsh Breakfast', complete with lavercakes and cockles was something else to look forward to.

They were interrupted by the return of Lena, as she breezed back into the kitchen with her leather jacket over her arm, and the soft bag that she

kept her best helmet in, held in her hand.

“Right, that’s that sorted then... We’ll pick her up at her place on our way from Roxy’s to the Severn Crossing. She’ll be ready by the time we get there... Are you two ready then? I’ve rung Rox as well, so she’ll be outside waiting”. She took down her spare helmet, for Liz to borrow, “Come on then... The Sun’s shining, I’ve already been out and washed my bike this morning... an Roxy say’s she’s polished her Virago, as if it isn’t blingy enough. I’ll bet neither of you two lazy buggers have bothered... So, C’mon... let’s get going, OK?”

The two men looked at each other, shrugged, swallowed the remains of their coffees, and stood to leave. There was no point arguing with Lena when she’d got the bit between her teeth. It was simpler to just go with the flow.

* * *

Liz busied herself with getting ready. She’d dug out a warm jacket, as she realised that despite it being summer, it could get cold on the back of a bike. It had been a while since she’d ridden on one, but she had fond memories of an old boyfriend who’d had a Yamaha. They’d get away from the city and tear around the lanes on it without a care in the world as they searched out nice country pubs for lunch or quiet shaded places to make love al fresco. He’d been nice, but she’d blown it all for herself when she’d lost the job on the market stall, or rather it had lost itself, and she had made the decision to work in a massage parlour.

It had been OK for a while, until one of his mates had seen her entering the premises and had tipped her boyfriend off. After a blazing row, with her screaming at him that it was her own body to use as she pleased, and that she was earning a damn sight more there than on the market stall, she stormed off.

The lad got back in touch again, asking if she’d give up working in the parlour, even if he had to give her money till she got a proper job. But she told him that was as bad as being beholden to a pimp, and if he couldn’t handle her working as a ‘masseur’, then perhaps it was better if they

parted as friends. She was pretty sure he was quite aware of what went on in massage parlours.

A telling nine months later, he'd sold the Yamaha and bought a second hand Fiesta. Liz was a guest at the christening of his new daughter, followed a month later by sitting in the register office watching him marry the child's young mother.

They'd lost contact after that, though she'd heard on the grapevine that he was happy and that the couple had moved away to a new starter home down near Dorchester, where his employers had another branch and had promoted him as a part of the move to Dorset.

She'd mused to herself then, that things could have been so very different if she'd swallowed her pride, but she was happy enough now. Particularly so at the moment.

She enjoyed the work she was doing, working mainly out of the agency, and earned herself a lot more than in somewhere like an office or supermarket, with the added bonus of often being paid to go to swish parties or getting to eat out in some of the best restaurants and hotels around, while being paid for the privilege. C'est la vie, as they say.

* * *

[6 - Questions, Then Answers](#)

"Guv?... Are you in there?" Wilson was calling through the open door to the gents. As he let it swing shut again, he thought he heard a voice from within. He opened it again, by just a crack.

"Jesus, Nick... Can't I even have a crap now, without being hassled?" Ratcliffe wasn't amused.

"Sorry Guv... I'll tell them to call back, shall I?" Wilson turned to walk back to the office as Nigel Ratcliffe appeared wiping water off his hands onto his trousers.

"Those fuckin' hand driers are about as much use as a wax kettle... Farting on my hands would dry them more efficiently. They're bloody

useless, I tell you!” he peered at his hands, then, satisfied that they were dry, he continued, “Now who was it, Nick?... on the blower, I mean”. He followed the Sergeant into the CID office.

“It’s the lab, Guv... about our dead friend, Mr. Ricky Mollison”.

DI Ratcliffe nodded. He reached for the phone and opened the line.

“Ratcliffe... Hello Mike...” He listened, nodding as he made notes on the desk pad, “Right... Cheers, my friend... Thanks for getting through to us so quickly... You’ll e-mail me the full report?... Great. Oh... Before you go. Was there anything on the body to indicate whereabouts he died? Y’know, like fibres or residues of some sort, only we still don’t know where he died yet... No?... OK, then... Thanks again, Mike, bye for now”. He turned to Nick Wilson, “Well... that settles that, Sergeant Wilson. It’s now very definitely a suspicious death. In fact I’d go as far as to say that it’s now undoubtedly a murder enquiry... No way was it an accidental death”.

Wilson’s eyebrows raised a little. He nodded, after considering for a moment.

“Yeah, well I guess that’s no surprise really... I mean we were pretty certain anyway, weren’t we? Especially once we knew his identity... Otherwise, why move the body away from the scene of death... Why try to lose it completely? So what was it that clinched it, Guv?”

His superior smiled, “Tox screen, Nick. It came back showing ‘Rohypnol ’in significant quantity...” He paused, to look at a note he’d been handed. Shaking his head, he handed it back to the constable and continued, “Yes... It was a good thing that the lab were on the ball, ’cos that particular nasty, doesn’t like hanging around in the body too long... Or at least, as far as I know, it doesn’t. Certainly, in a living person, it disappears quite sharpish. Though a stiff might behave differently”.

“Rohypnol, Guv? ‘...Roofies’?” Nick was thinking about it, “Isn’t Rohypnol a date rape drug?... Y’know, like the old joke goes, ‘The guaranteed aphrodisiac, for those times when charm alone just won’t work’.” Wilson saw Ratcliffe’s eyes roll in despair. “Sorry, Guv. I read it somewhere”. He grinned sheepishly.

Ratcliffe saw the funny side and laughed, “Yeah... That’s about the size of it, Nick. But it looks like our victim was doped, then had seafood stuffed into his mouth, triggering the anaphylaxis...”

Wilson interrupted him. “Which suggests that it was done by someone who was well aware of his allergy, right, Guv?... A family member, maybe?” He pondered for a brief moment, “Or a girlfriend... He wasn’t gay, was he?... It wasn’t a boyfriend, perhaps?... What about his doctor?”

Nigel began to laugh again, “Now you’re getting silly, Nick... Why the fuck would his doctor want to kill him... I can only think of stopping blackmail as a possible scenario, but a doctor could be far more creative than triggering an allergic reaction. I mean, it’s not exactly a guaranteed cert that he’d die of it, is it?”

“Hmm... No boss... But it might make him think twice about blackmailing his doctor again, mightn’t it?”

Ratcliffe stroked his chin, in what his colleagues sometimes referred to as his ‘Sherlock Holmes’ pose: something Nick Wilson had been told he did too, possibly in unconscious imitation of his boss.

The DI shook his head. “No Nick... I don’t reckon so. Mollison wouldn’t be thinking that deeply about it. He wasn’t the brightest bunny in the warren, after all... If it made him do anything, it would be to trigger some kind of revenge attack, probably by some thug or other who either owed him a favour, or desperately needed some of his rather nasty merchandise”.

Wilson agreed, “Yeah, Guv... I guess you’re right, which really just leaves us with his family...”

DI Ratcliffe interrupted his colleague, shaking his head, “Uh huh, Nick... That one’s not a goer either, mate. He isn’t married, and as far as I know, he hasn’t any living family... at least, not that he’s ever known about, anyway. I seem to remember that he was brought up in various kids’ homes. That’s when he wasn’t in juvenile detention for minor offences”. He shrugged, “No, Nicholas, my friend... I’m sorry if I’ve just pissed on your sparkler, an ’spoilt your bonfire night, but I reckon the family’s out of the picture”.

Wilson laughed, “Which leaves the bloody doctor again, Guv... Or as you suggested earlier, a lover of some kind or other...” He considered for a brief moment. “Or possibly a very close friend who he confided in...” He stopped, mid sentence, as if suddenly struck by something, “Or... What about his solicitor?... Eh, Guvnor?... He’d have a lot of his really personal stuff on file, wouldn’t he?”

“Good, thinking, Sergeant... Get onto it... But discreetly. We need to find out as much as we can about our Mr. Richard Mollison... All of the dirt, and all the clean stuff too, if there is anything that isn't dirty”. Ratcliffe smiled, “After all, he did trawl all the gutters and the sewers... remember... Shit sticks, even to shit”.

* * *

Sitting in the sunshine, outside a Welsh pub with pints of good ale in front of them, the seven friends were relaxing. Llew's latest girlfriend, Cerys, was getting on famously with the other three women, though it had been decided not to let on to her about their shared occupation, lest it should spoil things for their friend Llew.

If Cerys turned out to be a strict Welsh Presbyterian kind of girl, then discovering her new boyfriend had friends who were hookers, or another who frequented brothels for a hobby, might not do the couple's newly formed relationship's chances a whole lot of good.

Tony only knew Llew from various biker parties and rallies they'd both attended, so he didn't really know a lot about this big Welshman and his attitudes to life. They'd kept in touch, keeping each other apprised of any good rallies and events that were coming up in their respective areas. He felt, though, that a strong friendship was growing. The two of them got on really well together, even if they were on opposite sides of an argument.

Tony had always harboured the quaint misconception that most Welshmen were rugby playing, chapel attending, salt of the earth types who loved nothing more than to spend their time singing hymns with pitch perfect harmony in male voice choirs.

In fact, in Llew's case he was quite correct on one count, as Llew played a useful game with the oval ball in a local rugby team.

Llew didn't know of Tony's predilection for visiting massage parlours. Tony had never said anything about it, and the subject had never come up in conversation anyway. Nor did he know what Lena did for a living. Perhaps, when they'd got to know him better, then they might let him in on their secrets.

Most of Tony's close friends knew of his liking for prostitutes, and of how he'd first met Lena at a massage parlour before recognising her later at a bike rally. They had, since then, having found that they had so many beliefs, attitudes and likings in common, become the closest of friends. Likewise, most of Lena's friends knew how she earned a very good living and were comfortable with it, as she so clearly was.

Tony, Terry and Llew had been debating the pros and cons of their favourite players, with Llew obviously favouring the Welsh stars of the game while the two Englishmen who both supported Bath Rugby club had other ideas. There were obviously certain rugby players that all three men acknowledged as masters of the game. Unlike many followers of that other more popular form of football, they weren't going to let their differences spoil a good afternoon.

The two Englishmen got up from the table and headed inside to the gents, while Llew went to the bar. Cerys went with him to help carry the drinks.

As Roxy, Liz, and Lena sat talking, a little boy appeared beside them. He was fascinated by the crash helmets that were spread along the centre of the long wooden table. Roxy smiled at him as Lena picked him up and showed him the different types. His anxious parents were watching him closely, from another table over the other side of the beer garden, as he went exploring. Lena put him back down onto the ground.

He started to wander off towards his parents, before suddenly stopping next to another table. On the table was an open packet of peanuts, left by a previous customer. He reached over and took one, putting it up to his mouth. Immediately, his mother leapt to her feet screaming at him.

"No Kyle!... spit it out!... Right now, Kyle, there's a good boy... please". The child giggled and began running away. As he neared the three women, she called for them to grab him,

"Stop him, please... He's swallowed a nut... He's allergic to them". She was reaching into her bag, pulling out an Epi pen in case he had a reaction. Roxy stood up and stepped out in front of the child, catching him and sweeping him off the ground as he ran straight into her,

"Gotcha, you little monkey... You frightened the life out of your poor mummy, didn't you. Eh?" The lad found it all incredibly funny as he

giggled helplessly, wriggling in her arms. The mother came over to them, followed by her husband,

“Oh thank you, thank you, thank you... Did you see if he swallowed that peanut?... Did you?” She was still pretty agitated, panicking that her child might have a serious reaction to the nut. The three of them shook their heads in answer to her question. Roxy held the boy out to his mother as his father looked on, transfixed by these three beautiful leather clad women until Lena answered his wife.

“No... I’m sorry, love... I don’t know... I think he dropped it, but I’m not really sure”. The woman took her son, inspecting him intently for any signs of a developing rash or breathing difficulty as she walked off with her husband, still agitated and talking about taking the boy to be checked over. They headed for the bar to ask where the nearest hospital or surgery was.

Lena sat back down next to Liz, then noticed that her friend had turned very pale and was shaking.

“What is it, Liz?... What’s up?... Are you OK?” she put her hand on her friend’s arm as Liz began to sob helplessly. Rox finished lighting a cigarette, sheltering her lighter under her jacket, then turned to see what was up as Liz began to explain.

“I’m sorry, Lena... It was the kid... When his mother said he was allergic... I thought he was going to have an anaphylactic attack... I just couldn’t watch a kid go through that... I really couldn’t... I’ve seen someone have an attack like that”. She looked into Lena’s eyes, then began to break down. “I watched a man die like that... I killed him, Lena”, she sobbed, “I killed him...” Lena interrupted her, as Roxy listened open mouthed, her cigarette temporarily forgotten.

“Now, now, Liz... Calm down... You’re talking nonsense, girl, you’re making no sense at all... You’ve killed no one”.

Liz shook her head, “No, Lena, you’re wrong. I did it... he was that body the police fished out of the river mud... Though I don’t know how he got there”. Lena was puzzled, but she could tell that Liz was deadly serious. Whether she really had killed a man, or not, she was convinced in her own mind that she’d done it.

“Come on Liz... Tell me about it... What are you talking about, eh?... Who have you killed?” Lena squeezed Liz’s hand gently. Liz looked

around to make sure no one else was within earshot. The couple with the boy had gone off to seek medical advice.

Liz turned to Lena, “It was at that gambling club opening party... When he took me into the room, I knew it was him... It was his eyes... Older, yes, but they don’t change.”

“Who, Liz?... Who was it?... Whose eye’s don’t change?” Lena carried on holding her friend’s hand.

“Mollison, Lena... Ricky Mollison... I knew he was allergic to seafood, ’cos he had a reaction round our place when I was a kid, but he had his pen thing with him an ’stabbed it into his leg... it was really scary, but an ambulance was called and he was OK”. She took out a cigarette. Rox held hers over for Liz to take a light from it. They touched the ends together and Liz drew greedily on hers before continuing, “But the other night, despite his beard and his grey hair, I knew it was him... He didn’t recognise me, though, and took me off to one of the private rooms... We started to get comfortable, though he made my skin crawl, an ’when he went for a piss, I checked his jacket pockets too... just to make sure”. She rubbed her eyes. Lena handed her a tissue as she went on, “Anyway... his wallet had his name in it, but more worryingly he had a blister pack of Rohypnol in his pocket... along with, of course, his Epi pen”. She began sobbing again, “It all came flooding back to me... Oh sure, it had seemed like fun to me at the time, but he was abusing me all those years ago...” she took a drag on her cigarette, “an ’with that blister pack of roops in his pocket, I thought he might be up to his old tricks, again, abusing some other kids too, so I bunged some of them into his drink... I’d had a mad idea... I’d seen what was on the tray of canapés on the table”. She looked across at Lena, “He very nearly caught me fixing his drink, but it was OK... Anyway, we had a bit of a fumble around on the bed, by then he was getting a bit dopey from the rufies, and when he was almost out of it I went for the big platter of goodies that the waitress had brought into the room and grabbed a handful of as many kinds of the seafood things as I could an ’stuffed them into his gob...”

Lena interrupted her, in amazement. “You did what?... Didn’t he resist?... Didn’t he try to spit them out?”

Liz laughed bitterly, and shook her head. “No, Lena... That was the odd thing... He was so out of it that he even started chewing the stuff up

like a good little boy...”

Roxy interjected, “Good?... That bastard?... He wouldn’t have known the meaning...” Lena put a hand over her friend’s mouth to shut her up, as Liz carried on.

“And... then he passed out, so I stuffed a few more things into his mouth, then sat and watched for a bit. After a while, when nothing much had happened other than a load of red marks on his skin, I unlocked the door and let myself out, taking the key from the lock and locking the door behind me”. She looked Lena straight in the eyes, “So I did it, Lena... I murdered him... I’m not sure if I really meant him to die. After all, I left his Epi pen in his jacket, but I certainly wanted him to suffer a bit... like he had back at Dad’s house back then. I wasn’t thinking too clearly about it” She sniffed, then wiped her nose on the paper hankie, “I suppose, if he’d survived, he’d have come after me, or sent one of his junkies to get me for the price of a fix... I’m not sorry he’s dead though, ’cos it was payback for starting the whole thing off when I was eleven... and for all the other little girls that I’m sure he must have been fiddling with, and even fucking over the years... He deserved it, and if there is a hell, then I hope the dirty bastard spends eternity being toasted there... Perhaps he’ll be able to renew his acquaintance with my father while he’s there”. She stubbed out the cigarette that had been smouldering, unsmoked, between her fingers as she’d told her tale. “Does that make me a bad person?... Lena?... Rox?... Well?... Does it?” Roxy was shaking her head.

Lena simply shrugged, “I honestly don’t know, Liz... What do you reckon? Do you think it does?”

Liz smiled, looking her two friends straight in the eyes, from one to the other, then back again.

“D’you know what?...” She paused, looking up at the clear blue sky, before turning back to face them both. “No...” She took a breath. “I don’t think it does...” Her face brightened visibly. “Now where’s them two got to with those beers?” She wiped her eyes, tidied her makeup in a mirror from her bag using the corner of a wetted tissue, then grinned almost mischievously. “I want to raise a glass to the late, dear departed, Ricky Mollison... May the dirty bastard rot in hell!”

With the tension broken, Lena and Roxy began to spontaneously giggle at their friend’s reaction, stifling it nervously as they both thought it

in poor taste.

Laughter being contagious though, Liz found herself joining in, but the three women had to curtail their somewhat inappropriate mirth when they saw Tony and Terry appearing from the pub. They were followed closely by the Welsh couple. All four of them were carrying full foaming glasses.

Nothing more was ever said about the unfortunate matter of the late Ricky Mollison.

* * *

Epilogue

It's been two years since the death of Ricky Mollison, and the police are nowhere nearer to identifying his killer, or any definite motive, though many may have had one. They haven't even come close to ascertaining the actual location where the man had met his end.

Mollison's death was mourned by no one. Nobody lamented over the death of a paedophile, a pimp, a dealer, and a loan shark, when there were always plenty more of them waiting in the wings.

It was generally believed in the corridors of the Bristol police headquarters that he'd died somewhere where he shouldn't have been, by the hand of someone close to him, and had then been moved away by third parties to keep that location secret from the forces of law and order.

With no crime scene to examine, there were few forensics, so gradually the police let the case slip gently onto the back burner. His death was unlikely to be the start of a campaign of serial killings, some officers even secretly felt it to be fortuitous, so it became less of a priority. There were far more pressing crimes to solve. Ones where there was at least a chance of catching and convicting somebody.

* * *

Mollison's life had been lived in the shadows, and following his death, his memory gradually faded back into those same shadows. Nobody would miss him. His whores were already being run by someone else, at least those who weren't dead of the addictions that he'd worked so hard to foster. A few of them had managed to get away from the streets, even out of the sex industry completely, but that's for another story.

* * *

The woman who did Bristol's streets such a great favour by ridding them of Mollison was never to show up on the police's radar. No one other than herself and two particularly discreet friends knew the truth, but there

were many that had guessed, or even simply suspected, what kind of person it had been that had killed him, and why they'd done it. They just hadn't known their actual identity.

For those people, and for the countless young girls that he'd have continued to prey on, had he lived, she was their unknown heroine. They'd have thanked her if they could.

END

[And Now](#)

Other Lena's Friends Titles:

Transactions

“The gift wrapped, special selection box of assorted tarts”

Transactions is the first full length novel, in Chris Graham's, 'Lena's Friends' series.

* * *

Two middle class schoolgirls, working as prostitutes, provide the thread that ties together the lives of various characters around the city of Bristol, along with the crimes that some of them are involved in both at home and abroad. Forced off the streets, supposedly for their own good, they become the playthings of rich businessmen, each with their own differing agendas. When trafficked young women are discovered hidden in the back of a truck, one of these men becomes worried.

Meanwhile the police have a suspect who knows less than he thinks he knows, but he does have, in his possession, knowledge that puts himself in grave danger.

Unaware of all this, the two girls continue to ply their trade, as connections with Africa and with businesses in France are revealed. Diamonds and gold are being smuggled, and there is now a risk that the operation may be discovered.

This means that somebody must die.

To find out more about Transactions, click [here](#).

* * *

Souvenirs

The police are clearly satisfied they've got the right man. So why is Detective Inspector Nigel Ratcliffe going against his superiors' wishes, and continuing to investigate the suspect? Is Roger Dixon-Johnson guilty of other offences the police are unaware of?

To the surprise of the offender's lawyer, Selwyn Woodward, Ratcliffe has released the charged man on bail, but his every move is being watched.

Despite being aware of his arrest, high end escort, Lena Fox, has accepted a booking from Roger for dinner and what will inevitably follow. Why is she doing this, when Ratcliffe is watching him so closely?

A tip from Lena opens up other lines of investigation. It seems there's more than one way of selling young women for sex, and Roger appears to be involved.

Meanwhile, in the bloodiest parts of Africa, where warlords place a minimal value on human life, blood diamonds and conflict gold are being traded and sent on their illegal route to the UK... A route which, unknown

to him, or to the police, both Roger, and a client of one of Lena's friends, is closely connected.

Even the ever suspicious DI Ratcliffe is taken by surprise at what his investigations uncover.

Book 2 of the Lena's Friends series continues the investigations into Bristol's hidden underbelly.

To find out more about Souvenirs, click [here](#).

The rest of the Lena's Friends series of books are in the process of being re-issued and will appear through the course of 2022 and 2023.