

An antidote to gritty dramas, the second part of the diaries of Ewan Walker is a coming-of-age and redemption narrative that celebrates resilience, acceptance, and the creation of a chosen family.

More than Meets the Eye

From my Father's Diaries Part 2

Peter Walker

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Author's Note

Although these stories are written in the context of real-world events, the places and areas described in this narrative are entirely fictitious, as are the events that make up this story.

All characters in this book are completely fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

This story contains strong and emotive language in certain places, as it reflects the kinds of language used by young people of at the beginning of the Twenty-First Century.

I see no good reason to be prudish about this sort of thing, but if such language offends, I apologise.

One of the characters is openly gay, and there is reference to his boyfriend, but there is no sexual content. However, if this is likely to offend you, please DO NOT read this book.

Chapter 1

July – August 2014

In Scotland, the Summer Term ends at the beginning of July. Therefore, Scottish students have three weeks of more or less glorious weather while their counterparts in most of England still have to sweat it out in stuffy classrooms. July 2014 in Scotland was warmer than average, by 1.2 °C. There were some showers and thunderstorms but generally it was fine and dry. Unusually the Walkers did not go on holiday that year. This was no surprise; the one who did most of the organising in the Walker family, Mary, had passed away. Although the boys were getting over the death of their mother, they felt that a holiday without Mum would be missing something that was precious. As far as organising something major like a holiday, Dad could hardly organise binge-drinking in a brewery.

This was at first sight rather strange, as Dad was the Dunalastair Professor of Electrical and Electronic Engineering at the University of Edinburgh. Professor Joseph Walker was a first-rate departmental leader, as well as being a distinguished researcher and teacher. He could turn his hand from managing his staff to producing a range of programmes of undergraduate and postgraduate study. His management of a multi-million-pound budget was cited as an exemplar of good practice by the university accountants. He had given support and advice to many of his colleagues whose accountancy skills were somewhat less than their flair for academia.

However, that skill set was left behind in the top drawer of his desk in his office at the King's Buildings each time he went home to Corscadden. His incompetence at household budgeting was a source of considerable amusement to his parents and sisters. Their little kid brother, Joby, was thirty-nine going on about fifteen. However, a white knight in shining armour had ridden to the rescue in the slight form of Christian Dominic Hayward Salway, a young man of the same age as his eldest son, Aidan. This youth had turned up at the boys' school, Strathcadden Academy, in November. Both his sons had befriended him. After Mary

had died so unexpectedly in January, Christian (Chris) had not only supported him and both his sons, but also taken over the running of Brewster House, their large and elegant family home in the most desirable part of Corscadden. Brewster House was difficult to heat.

Many people had commented on the similarity of Christian to his oldest son, Aidan, who was, by entire coincidence, almost exactly the same age. Clearly any genetic likeness was impossible, until by another coincidence, he had caught Christian's mother, Laura Salway, on the rebound not long after Mary had died. Joby knew that Christian had been born in rather disadvantaged circumstances and that the first seventeen years of his life had been rather more challenging than his own sheltered teenage years with his protective parents and sisters in Laurieston Villa. He had a secret that he had hidden from Mary. Her tom-boy's toy-boy had been a naughty boy while off the leash. He had been to a party which had a hidden extra, one which he would have happily done without. The whole thing was rather distasteful. He was so hopeless at the process of mammalian reproduction that it had been nothing short of a miracle that Aidan had been conceived. When he and Mary tried for Ewan, the process was done medically. His role was to go into a darkened room at the Strathcadden General Infirmary (The Strathie) with a specimen pot.

Even so, in May, he had learned that not only had he been a naughty boy, but he had also succeeded in doing what seemed impossible. He had succeeded in spreading wild oats due to a defective rubber product of a type that he detested. It had been proved scientifically that he, Joseph Oliver Baxter Walker, was the biological father of Christian Dominic Hayward Salway. He was very much younger than Mary, a very young twenty-year-old with the street wisdom of one ten years younger.

Having started 2014 being the father of two sons, Joby had acquired a third along the way. All three boys were very close to each other, both emotionally and physically. They adored their father. He considered himself very lucky. Many a gritty drama could be made by the TV channels based on a story like his. They tended to involve high emotion with a lot of arguing and swearing, developing into violence.

During breaks from the high drama, the speech was mumbled to the extent that it was barely intelligible. Some dramas were even enlivened with a murder. Joby hated that. He was one of nature's cowards and didn't mind admitting it.

The Walker family made very boring television. There were a few anxious moments when Chris went away to talk it over with Aidy and Eejay. Christian had accepted it with incredible maturity and grace, far beyond his seventeen years, considering the fairly lousy start he had had in life. Now Joby would have to make it up to Chris. And the first thing to do was to marry Christian's mother.

On a Monday morning in early July, both Laura and Joby had gone with their son to see the Reverend Matheson, the Minister of St Columba's Church in the town centre. It was going to be done properly. They told Mr Matheson all the detail.

"I have heard far worse," said Mr Matheson. "But I am pleased that you have been able to tell me everything truthfully. Remember that the Lord won't be shocked by what you have told me. He knows all about it anyway. He will forgive any sin that has been confessed and repented. Christian, how do you feel about it?"

"It was a shock when I first heard about it, but Aidy and Eejay were there and helped me. Although I didn't know who my dad was, Dad became a real dad to me. And now he is my dad. I have a mum and a dad now. I want them to be married, to make Mum happy and Dad happy as well."

"Well, there isn't anything against church law to prevent a widower marrying his new wife in church. Even if there was, I would find a way around it. Joby, I know how much it will mean to your mum and dad. Laura, what about your mum and dad?"

"I have a feeling they won't come. I know they will be keen enough, but they go to the Fatheringham Evangelical Church. They have

a very dominant pastor who would not approve. He's a control freak. They wanted to divorce, but the Pastor at the time wouldn't let them. He didn't approve at all of what Joby and I did all those years ago. The elders of the church fasted and prayed that Chris wouldn't survive to term. The current pastor is even worse. It's all about fear, condemnation, hell, fire and brimstone. Mum and Dad have been brainwashed and are terrified what the church will do to them."

"Jesus of Nazareth doesn't get a look in," added Chris.

Rob Matheson went ashen. "Good Lord!" he said. "Why was that?"

"Chris was born out of wedlock, so it was all very sinful. Their church had a service that expelled me from the church, cursed me, and committed me to Satan."

Christian was looking horrified. "Mum, why didn't you tell me? Why did they..." Christian didn't know what to say but cuddled up to his mother.

"I have heard about that church, if you could call it that," said Mr Matheson, "and it's shocking. Thank God that God doesn't answer every prayer. Chris has started to come to our church and wants to be confirmed. I don't need to tell you what a lovely young man he is. He has told me his story, and horrific it is too."

"They speak to me from time to time, but we don't always get on. They try to persuade us to give all our spare money to African charities. They are terrified of the Pastor."

"Aidy says the goats will end up as cat food," Christian added. "When I was fifteen, they told me they were going to buy me a mountain bike. I looked forward to it. On my birthday a letter arrived from the missionary organisation saying that one of their roving pastors had a nice new mountain bike donated by me. There was a begging letter wanting me to pay £30 a month to support him. I am constantly getting begging

letters from these charities. I throw them in the bin. I sometimes feel guilty that I am not being very godly.”

“And that’s the place for them,” Mr Matheson replied. “What they have done to you is not godly either. It’s child abuse.”

“When I was in hospital, I heard lots of things. The doctors called me a bed-blocker. They persuaded Mum to turn off the life-support machine. They said I would be a cabbage requiring 24-hour care and would be a drain on resources. Some church elders came and said horrible things about me. I felt I was destined for the Hot Place. Mum was horrified and they got kicked out of the hospital. I hate religion!”

“I agree,” said Mr Matheson. “If that is religion, it stinks. It is certainly not Christianity as I understand it or preach about. Christian, I give thanks that you are here with us. I am speechless; I cannot think what to say, other than this is not of God. No wonder you didn’t want anything to do with the church. I wouldn’t.”

Joby was looking shocked as the enormity of what he heard was starting to sink in. Whatever course of action he had taken would have been wrong. His action had started off the life of a child who had had to put up with an awful lot of trouble from the chavs of Sowerland. Horrible people they were too. Chris had also had to bear the rejection of people who should have been there to support him and Laura.

Joby was a kid at the time. What he knew about procreation came in Mrs MacFarlane’s biology lesson. He had got 8/20 when he answered the Ordinary Grade question on it. He had got 0/10 all those years ago. Even in May, he was awarded 1/10. That was an improvement on his previous score.

On the other hand, if he had stayed to listen to boring old farts rabbiting on about Type 4 and 5 diesels or Stanier Black Fives and BR 5MTs, he would not have the truly beautiful young man sitting next to him and Laura. Chris was about to do his shift at Walker Bros. He was looking immaculate in his kilt, grey jacket, black jumper, shirt, tie, socks and black

shoes. And Christian was not just beautiful in looks, with his fresh face and long blond hair; he was beautiful in temperament as well. Joby looked at his son and burst into tears.

“Chris,” Joby said as he pulled himself together, “I don’t know how to start. You have had a ghastly time, and I was responsible. I don’t know how to make it up to you. I can only do my best.”

“You don’t have to, Dad. I have looked for you and found you and that’s important. You, Aidy, and Eejay have given me and Mum something to live for. If you had stayed with the boring old farts, I wouldn’t be here. This wouldn’t be happening. Dad, you don’t have to make it up. All you have to do is be my dad. I am so grateful I have got you, Aidy, and Eejay.”

The Reverend Matheson was sitting there with his mouth open. He decided he ought to do something with it. He poured some coffee into it before saying, “That is a modern parable, if ever there was one. And I can tell you this, there is one big party going on in heaven. I believe in life before death as well as after. Laura and Joby, I want your wedding to be a party as well. Your marriage will be one of life. You have been truly blessed with Chris. I have never heard so much grace coming from one so young.”

They did not mention what had happened in the master bedroom in Brewster House at the end of May. The performance had been every bit as pitiful as in the bedroom in the flat in York. Laura had laughed. As far as procreation was concerned, Joby was thirty-nine and Laura was thirty-eight. Much longer, there would be the risk of something being wrong with the child. This child would have a proper start in life and be brought up by Mummy and Daddy. It was not that they didn’t want Rob Matheson to know, for they knew that he wasn’t the old-fashioned prudish church minister. His own brood of grown-up children was testimony to that. No, they wanted it kept secret from the Walker family, who could be nosy, and this could leave the coast quite clear for them to put all feet in it, another Walker family trait.

If this didn't work, and it wasn't guaranteed from Joby's performance, it would be the specimen pot in the darkened room. In June, the missed period had indicated that the process had actually worked against all expectations; they both had form on that.

The wedding was going to be arranged for Saturday 27th September 2014. Joby's parents were thrilled. From Laura's parents the silence was deafening.

On Wednesday 30th July 2014 they celebrated Joby's fortieth birthday. It was not to be the boozy occasion that is so characteristic of many a fortieth. Instead, Joby was hauled out of bed by his three sons to do a 5 k before breakfast. Chris, already in his running kit, brought Mum a cup of tea while Joby got into his kit. No running tights this time.

After their stretching routine, they went out up onto Corr Hill, which gave them panoramic views over the town. Chris scampered off setting a blistering pace, but both his half-brothers and Dad were determined to keep up. Joby was getting fit again. He was racing with the Edinburgh University Hare and Hounds, the university cross-country running club. As a staff member he was an Auld Harie, but he could certainly give the youngsters a run for their money. Although he had been a veteran for five years now, he still competed as a senior. Now he was forty, he could, in theory, run in the Scottish Masters M40 class. Whether anyone would believe he was forty was a different matter; he looked very much younger. He had never been tempted to have his legs waxed for charity. There wasn't much hair to wax. Other than his shadow around his face, he didn't look much different to Aidy. At sixty-eight kilograms, he carried just a bit more body bulk than his son. Whatever, he was certainly pushing them.

The trig point on Corr Hill was three-hundred and fifty metres above the town. The path to the top led through Corr Wood which started at the top of Priestfield Avenue. Even Christian had worked up a sweat. Although it was a bright morning, there was a definite nip in the air and

all four of them were grateful to have their sweatshirts on, and the boys sat on the rocks huddled round their dad. They didn't say anything but listened to the gentle sigh of the wind. Black Grouse were still performing in a lek on a patch of grass some hundred metres off. There were a lot of wheezing hisses that were meant to turn the females on. But the girls were distinctly unimpressed.

Joby felt decidedly more content. He did not have to compete for girls. He had been courted by Mary. Their pair-bonding had been somewhat back to front. Now he had been caught on the rebound by Laura: not just caught, but well and truly harpooned. As far as his three sons were concerned, none of them would be high in the lekking stakes. Were black grouse ever gay? He had his arms round Aidy and Chris, while Eejay lay back between his legs. Joby felt a warm glow flow through his body. Joby was AC-DC, an appropriate term for one who had made his living with the engineering of electric railways.

Once back and showered, Joby was ordered to keep out of the kitchen while the boys did breakfast. As always it was a light breakfast, cereal and toast, with lots of black coffee. Ewan made the toast.

Joby and Laura had the day out in the car, the highlight of which was to have an intimate luncheon at the prestigious Glenclawe Hotel outside Buchanan. Back at Brewster House, the real celebrations were going to revolve around a sumptuous buffet organised by Christian and his half-brothers, ably assisted by Ewan's boyfriend, Jordan, and their Grandma. Granddad was sent out to get the garden straight. He was in his scruffy clothes, again looking more like Worzel Gummidge than a master tailor and the proprietor of an upmarket clothing and department store with a turnover of several million pounds a year. The focal point of the dinner was a large salmon which was sourced from Robertson's Fishery and Smokehouse on the other side of Maunder. Chris and Aidy went off in the Fiesta. It was quite a trek to Maunder – not far in terms of kilometres, but because of the traffic on the A825, and two sets of temporary traffic lights. Their father called them "jokes", because "it was someone's idea of a joke to put them there".

Meanwhile Eejay and Jordan (naturally) had gone off with Grandma to get the vegetables and delicatessen from the Kelside Organic Farm Shop at Bracklennen. Now it was back to the Food Hall at Walker Bros for lots of other bits and bobs. The Honda Jazz was pretty chock-full by the time they got back. There was a trip to Cardean for the wine and beer. It wasn't the booze, or the...ae...bevvy of course; this was the Walker family. And Christian had been somewhat put off the booze by a dose of ketamine and that other shit whose name he could not remember.

The stop-start traffic between Corscadden and Maunder was so slow that Aidy and Chris got back at the same time as Grandma, Eejay and Jordan after their second journey. Unlike his father, who could get quite het up in traffic jams, Aidy just let it happen with a gentle, "We'll get there in the end". And Granddad had just finished the mowing. He shunned the garden tractor for two reasons. Firstly, the walking behind the normal mower was better for him. Secondly, he had once lost control of the infernal machine and mowed across the vegetable patch.

They had only just finished coffee when the first of the guests arrived, James Belson who worked with Joby at The Engineering Department. There was no standing on ceremony; James was roped in to peeling and chopping vegetables. He was going to sing for his supper. Chris had everything well planned. The Proudlock family landed. While Sam was left to look after the children, Jess was up to her arms in potatoes, tomatoes, chillies, and peppers. Chris was now setting up the table in the dining room. It was going to be done properly; the Walker family were elegant, and nothing less than elegance would do. Aidy and Eejay were given a refresher in silver service.

Soon after that, Mary's parents landed with Uncle Alex. Ewan and Aidan were delighted to see Grandma and Granddad. Richard and Bethan Fairbairn knew about their son-in-law's playing away, and they had raised their eyebrows, but were not over surprised. They had commented in the car on the way home after Christmas how similar Christian looked to Aidan and commented that their feisty daughter would have torn Joby limb from limb if she had found out that something had happened. They

also knew that Mary was no angel; she had played away from home with her girlfriend, the boys' Aunt Sarah. Besides, Joby had not been married when it happened. In addition, Joby and Mary had clearly conceived Aidan before they were engaged. In their view, both had been naughty. Anyway, they had taken to Christian immediately they had met him. Whatever the rights and wrongs, these things had happened. They had lost a well-loved daughter and had been heart-broken like the rest of the family. Life had to go on, however, and sleeping dogs should be allowed to lie.

They too were put to work in the kitchen. Uncle Alex was put to work in the dining room. At thirty-five going on seventeen, Alex was that phenomenon of the second decade of the Twenty-First Century, a typical boomerang kid.

It was hot in the kitchen and the shorts and T-shirts seemed not quite the right kind of clobber for silver service waiters. The family would dress-up later. If you didn't dress up for your father's fortieth, what would you dress up for? Besides, Aidan, Ewan and Jordan (who were very handsome young men) had a lifetime's experience in modelling beautiful clothing, and their half-brother designed it as well. So, the boys loved dressing up in beautiful clothes for nice occasions. It would be kilts, jackets, ties, shirts, and nice shoes. Mum and Dad would dress up as well.

Brewster House was going to be full tonight. Grandma checked that the guest rooms were ready.

The boys and Grandma found themselves tidying their room and the games room. Ewan was a dab hand with the Hoover. He enjoyed seeing all the bits whizzing round inside. When the designer had perfected his cyclonic vacuum cleaner, it was clear that he had intended men to use it as well as women, so he ensured that the contents of the drum could be seen clearly going round and round, caught up in the cyclone.

By the time that Joby and Laura were back, the house was ship-shape and Bristol fashion.

As afternoon turned into evening, the other guests started to arrive. Granddad no longer looked like Worzel Gummidge but was in full Highland Regalia, exquisitely tailored by himself, and he looked a picture, as one would expect from a master tailor and the proprietor of a business selling the finest clothing.

Grandma was elegant even when dressed informally. When all dressed up, she looked a stunner. Aunts Jenny and Sarah were both every bit as elegant as Grandma. Similarly, Richard and Bethan Fairbairn were dolled up to the nines. They were sure that their daughter would have wanted them to have a good knees-up rather than moping about at home. Uncles Simon and Jon had dolled up as well. Samuel Proudlock had a suit and tie; he did not have a kilt as he was from Derbyshire. Jess had an elegant dress of a pattern that had sold well at Walker Bros. Sophie and Olivia had little party frocks which they loved. Baby Kieran had a little bowtie. Like all one-year-old infants he had little idea of what this was about, but enjoyed being the centre of attention, and pushing his buggy around the garden.

Joby's sons were serving the guests with wine and nibbles. Christian was feeling particularly pleased with himself. He had put this together, with many willing hands. This time last year he had just about recovered from having his drink spiked with ketamine and that other shit whose name he had forgotten. Here he was now with Mum and Dad on the tennis court outside his home, a posh house the like of which he had only ever seen in period dramas on the telly.

In Beckton, it would be barbeques (or even worse, BBQ's) with badly cooked chicken and leathery beefburgers, greasy sausages, and litres of poor-quality beer, accompanied by raucous music.

Not here. Chris might have a glass of wine, but he and his half-brothers would be far too busy with looking after the guests. If any of the guests did get shit... No! This was the Walker family. They would get tiddly or even inebriated. Aidy, Eejay and Jordan certainly wouldn't. Aidy remembered the last time he had got into that state and was left in no

doubt that his late mother deplored his actions. Afterwards, he had told Eejay, “Another one like that, and I am going on the wagon.” Additionally, he didn’t want to upset Chris. As far as Eejay was concerned, one glass of wine and he was anybody’s. Jordan might get jealous. There were more practical reasons as well. Aidan had to get up early in the morning to go to Stirling to take his Grade VIII practical examination for the piano. Ewan and Jordan were to model clothes at Walker Bros, for both were very handsome young men. Christian had a photography session, and a shift in the restaurant.

It was getting late in the evening. Although it was pleasant and bright, it was a little on the cool side as Corscadden was so high up, and Aidy, Chris, and Eejay were glad to have jumpers on that were made from soft lambs-wool as well as their tweed jackets. Now they were shepherding the guests through to the dining room where Chris’s efforts were on display to be admired by all, until Joby and Laura came through.

And Joby stepped forward to make a little speech, “Thank you all for coming tonight. It is lovely to welcome you all, on my behalf and Laura’s behalf. Before we go any further, I want to thank Laura who has done much to support me after Mary was so suddenly taken from us. I also want to thank Richard and Bethan for coming. They lost a much-loved daughter and Alex a much-loved sister. But they still are very much loved by us. I would like us to pause for a minute to remember Mary who was the pillar of our family, a loving wife to me, and devoted mother to Aidy and Eejay.”

And there was a pause. On the telly, someone would have made a crass interjection to raise a cheap laugh. Not with the real-world family that was the Walkers.

“I must not forget the support also from Aidy, Eejay and Jordan. They helped me no end during the dark days of January. They also brought Chris into our lives, who has done so much to put on this wonderful event. Chris arrived as a friend of Aidy and Eejay and became a brother to them, and another son to me. For those of you who don’t

know, Chris and Aidy have birthdays that are very close together. They were both born in the last week of August 1996. They have agreed to have their birthdays on the same day, halfway between the true dates. In effect they are twins.

“As most of you know, I discovered a closer relationship between me and Chris. Not to put too fine a point on it, I am his biological father. I won’t go into what happened either. But I want you to know that Laura and I fell in love soon after we first met. And we are going to get married, on Saturday 27th September 2014 at St Columba’s Church in the town centre.”

“Saves sending out the invites,” interjected Charles.

“Charles!” Muriel reproached him.

“Thanks for that, Dad. Chris didn’t know who his dad was for the first seventeen years of his life. He managed the news very graciously, even though it was a bit of a shock. Now he has a mum and a dad, and he will have us for the rest of our lives. I went into 2014 with two wonderful sons; now halfway through, I have three wonderful sons and Jordan. And I want to thank them all for all their hard work in putting this party together, along with Mum and Dad. It has been a wonderful gift for me and Laura.”

In a drama on the telly, Joby would have succeeded in putting his foot in it. Richard and Bethan would have had a whole scene to themselves in tearing Joby limb-from-limb for two-timing their daughter. Just a few months after Mary had died and all! Chris would have gone into orbit with embarrassment. There would have been a huge scene with lots of swearing and high emotion. The Walker family were experts at putting their feet in it. Instead, Richard and Bethan Fairbairn held each other and looked over at Alex. Mary would never have wanted Joby to be a lonely widower. He needed looking after. Chris smiled gently and looked lovingly at his parents. And he hugged Aidy, Eejay and Jordan who were standing either side of him.

“And this is not the last do this year. Aidy and Eejay are having their eighteenth birthdays on Saturday 30th August. We would love you to come. So put that date in your organisers. Now, Dad, will you give thanks?”

Charles offered thanks for the lovely meal to come and the good company that had come. And the noisy conviviality that was such a feature of Walker family events carried on unabated. Joby and Laura were lovebirds, snuggled up to each other. When Aidan had first seen Laura back in November, he had fleetingly thought how lovely she was. Laura was just over a year younger than Joby. And like Joby she looked quite a bit younger than her age. Like Joby she was very slim, and her blonde hair was quite short for a woman. With a kilt and jacket and knee-length socks, she could have well been seen as a teen boy. Joby was in his kilt and from a distance could well have been confused for Aidy, for both were so similar in looks, hairstyles, and mannerisms.

Yes, Laura had harpooned him, and he was pleased. He had not relished life alone as a widower. Mary had done the organising. At home Joby could not organise a binge-drinking session in a brewery. At work it was a different matter. But that was the appeal that Joby had for both Mary and Laura. He looked like and was just a gentle and sensitive teenage boy. He was completely worldly-unwise – very intelligent, but in many ways so impractical. He was forty, going on sixteen. Aidy would be the same. Laura had the common sense, which she had passed to Chris. She had had to, given her circumstances of the last eighteen years, and it had served her well, for she was rapidly climbing the promotion ladder in the Radiography Department. Indeed, she had heard that in about eighteen months or so, the post of Senior Radiographer would come available at Strathcadden General Infirmary, just right for when she came back from maternity leave, provided, of course, that baby-brain didn’t make her forget everything she had learned.

For Joby, Laura was as loving as Mary, but much less feisty. She had started to do some of the sporting activities he had enjoyed with Mary. Once Little One had arrived, she no doubt would get her fitness back.

Before they had met, Christian had often got her out running. He would never let his mum get away with being a couch potato. Joby always conceded that Chris was the man about the house. Dad had this instinct about Chris that had suggested that he would be the man to take over Walker Bros when Jenny and Sarah retired.

It was getting on. The dishwasher was busy with the first of several loads. Grandmas and Granddads on both sides would look after it, and the four boys went to the boys' den, the games room at the back of the house, where they curled up together like four exhausted young retrievers. Mary had brought up her sons in what she felt that Nature had intended. There was no sibling competition. Aidan and Ewan had never had a true fight; the only one occasion had been when Aidan had fallen (was pushed?) into *The Colossus*, and Ewan had emptied the entire contents of *The Cloudburst* over him. On this occasion they were out for the count, and the roar as *The Cloudburst* emptied into *The Colossus* for the rest of the evening did not disturb them at all. Nor did Kieran Proudlock who needed a change at three o'clock in the morning.

For Joby and Laura, the rest of the evening was bliss, listening to music and the chatter of their friends and it was into the early hours of the next morning when the lovebirds finally fluttered up to their nest, leaving Uncles Alex, Jon and Simon in the drawing room. Each was found fast asleep the next morning with his kilt revealing his badly kept secret. After a stagger to *The Venerable*, each announced that another session like that and he would go on the wagon. The boys were out by the time Joby and Laura got up and went down to the kitchen to do breakfast for all their guests. Uncles Simon, Jon and Alex had cleared their hangovers enough to do something useful.

Chapter 2

Wednesday 13th August 2014

August arrived on a Friday. On Tuesday 5th August came the results for Highers and Advanced Highers. Lots of Caddies flooded into Greatorrex House, and there were the usual screams of delight as envelopes were torn open. Christian Salway had performed beyond his teachers' highest expectations by his achievement of Grades A in all his Highers, with all his marks above 80 %. Ewan Walker had scored even higher marks with his Grades A, averaging 91 %. Jordan Melhuish scored Grades A and B in all his subjects, doing particularly well in Mathematics. Aidan Walker had excelled in his Advanced Highers, scoring 98 % in German, 95 % in French, 89 % in Classical Studies, and 90 % in English. He had also done Latin and Ancient Greek as a Higher, scoring 84 %. Edinburgh University were delighted to have him for Modern Languages and invited him down to meet his new tutor on Friday 8th. He would get his pre-course assignment.

August was a dreich month, with a lot of wind and rain. The hilly nature of Buchananshire tended to make the atmosphere more unstable than elsewhere, which resulted in showers being more intense, and sparking off thunderstorms. For Ewan, it was the downside of life in Strathcadden. He hated thunder and lightning. He could tolerate storms when indoors, but to be caught out in one was his recurrent nightmare. It happened to him on the afternoon of Thursday 7th August. He and Aidy were running up on Ben Lufen when a storm came on quite rapidly. They were off the hill as quickly as they could, although at one point, they had to crouch low as several bolts hit the ground within fifty metres. When they got back to Brewster House, Ewan was in a state, trembling and terrified, as well as soaked to the skin. A good, sweet cup of tea and a long bath helped Ewan get back onto an even keel. Afterwards, he felt a complete prat and wished he wouldn't be freaked out by things like that. After all, he wasn't scared by spiders and had even handled a snake.

Despite his unpromising start in life, Christian Salway was described by his tutor at Strathcadden Academy, Mrs Foxton, as a gentle young man who was a gentleman, serious and thoughtful. His attitude to his previous life was gracious and pragmatic. Although he had arrived late in the academic year in 2013, Christian had impressed all his teachers not only with his work ethic, but also with his positive attitude and aspirations. He had shown himself to be a role model for his peers and to younger students. This had been helped by his befriending by the Walker brothers, who had an established circle of friends. They had taken this “waif and stray”, as late arriving pupils were affectionately referred to, under their wing. Christian had blossomed. So, it was an easy choice for the staff to appoint him as Head Boy. Head Girl was Gemma Hammond who had made her name as an accomplished badminton player and was captain of the women’s senior football squad.

Now, at the start of the Autumn Term the new Head Boy was considering his duties for the day. A couple of days into the term, there was the inaugural chapel service and ceremony to celebrate the arrival of the new academic year. Both Christian and Gemma were to be master and mistress of ceremonies. They had rehearsed thoroughly and carefully. They would be meeting important people like the High Marischal of Buchananshire, Sir Hugh Clayden, and the Provost of Corscadden, Councillor Mrs McCrum. It was what was known at Strathcadden Academy as a high day. On high days, boys from Secondary Five and Six would wear sporrans. Many girls would as well, even though to the purist it really was not the done thing. Christian and Gemma would also wear the Oswald Boss and Sash, as had all their predecessors at Strathcadden Academy.

One privilege of being Head Boy (or Head Girl) was that the students had a large room in their house, regardless of whether they boarded or not. Since Christian’s parents worked away from home, he boarded between Monday and Thursday. Gemma Hammond was a

“Distant Caddie”, a weekly boarder from the village of Merton o’ Kenniebrig, up towards the Highlands proper.

Christian Salway was sitting cross-legged on his bed thinking about the day ahead. It had become a habit in his teenage years. He wanted the day to go well, as it was his second major duty. The first had been at the end of last term.

Near the headmaster’s office, there was a gallery of head boys and head girls. Many of these were confident young men and women. The Head Boys had that self-assured cockiness of the budding alpha male. Most of them looked older than their seventeen years. Christian’s portrait showed something different. He looked so young. Last year’s Head Boy was Samuel Fulton, a tall powerfully built youth who was a wing three-quarter in the First Fifteen. He looked like a Viking, with long hair done in a ponytail. Christian Salway could not have been more different. Age-wise, Christian was the oldest of all the Head Boys at Strathcadden Academy. However, at eighteen, Christian looked no more than fifteen or sixteen. He was not that tall and, according to his BMI, he was decidedly underweight. His kilt, still loose on him, was for a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old. Some of the boys clearly shaved every day; Christian had never used a razor.

But hey! Aidan was similarly fresh faced. It was in the genes (or was it the jeans?). Dad looked considerably younger than his forty years. In his twenties, he still looked like a gawky and geeky teenager. But half of Christian’s genes had come from his mother. She was a blonde, and Christian had inherited some of her features. Therefore, he had a slightly feminine appearance. It was just that he was very skinny, had passed through puberty later than most, and had very sparse secondary hair. As he was so skinny, some Caddies called him “Skeleton” and would say, “If you hear the rattling of bones, don’t call the minister. It’s Salway doing his rounds.”

One thing Christian could do was run. His skinny body and low weight gave him an ideal power-to-weight ratio. He could scamper up

hills and had the technique to move like greased lightning. Aidy had taught him, and now he was in a position to pass it on to others. He was captain of the Strathcadden Academy running squad, and a junior champion cross country runner. He and Eejay would soon start coaching and selecting the various squads for Under 13, Under 15, Under 17, and Juniors (Under 20). Mr Drummond, the Head of Boys' PE, described him as "The Cheetah".

That Christian Salway existed at all was something of an improbability. His conception had certainly been far from immaculate - the product of a party in extremely poor taste. Had Christian's father, at that time a shy twenty-year-old, who looked about seventeen, realised the kind of party that was in store for him, he would have run in the opposite direction, and spent the evening with the other delegates at a railway engineers' conference at York University. It would have been infinitely preferable to listen to the boring old farts going on about Type 4 and Type 5 diesels, or the relative merits of the Stanier Black 5 or the BR Standard 5 MT steam locomotives.

When Christian's mother had found out that she was pregnant, she immediately sought a termination. However there had been a certain amount of delay, primarily because the doctor did not approve of abortion as a way out of wild party behaviour. And at Christmas she could not hide the signs of pregnancy from her parents. Her parents, once easy-going and fun-loving people, had become embroiled at an independent fundamentalist church, whose pastor was an irascible Ulsterman of extremely conservative views. The Fatheringham Evangelical Church was mortified by their daughter's licentious fornication. She was in it either way. If she had a termination, the church would disown her. If the baby went to term, she was a woman of loose morals. She had embarrassed the church and that was unforgiveable in the eyes of the Pastor.

After she had been expelled from the church, it was hardly surprising that the relationship between Laura Salway and her parents was strained.

The birth was easy, and on Sunday, August 25th, 1996, Christian Dominic Hayward Salway was born a healthy boy, slightly under average weight for a new-born male infant. And that set the trend for his life. Christian was not the smallest but was never large. As a child he was always slightly lower than the average height and his BMI suggested that he was slightly underweight.

Laura Salway got a lot of support from her sister, Imogen, who was outraged by the church's attitude to her nephew. Also, her maternal grandparents, Mr and Mrs Hayward, gave her a lot of financial assistance. The support was vital, as Laura was able to finish her radiography training. Money was tight, as was finding a job that would enable her to share the rent with her sister. Fortunately, tax credits helped to support her. Imogen lived in the small town of Alverston in the Middle Riding of Yorkshire. A training spell for Laura at The Dominican Hospital there led on to her first post at Carlsborough General. And that's where she ended up on her own, for Imogen moved south for her work. Laura rented in Beckton-on-Sower, an historic but very run-down and dismal town on the edge of the unlovely Sowerland conurbation.

During those years, Christian Salway's continued existence on the planet was rendered more improbable, not only by a serious car accident when he was small, but also by the fact that when he went to secondary school, he was the youngest and smallest of his year. Bullying in Sowerland was not just verbal; it was maliciously physical. He had been the subject of a "happy slapping", a serious assault that was filmed on a mobile phone and put up on the internet. Despite the wealth of evidence, the Sowerland Police handled the case so badly that charges were dismissed in court.

Christian had had the responsibility of helping his mother financially by doing part-time jobs. Despite that, he scored the highest

GCSE grades at The Grange School and went on to Beckton Sixth Form College. Christian did have friends, but his hold on life was nearly extinguished by a friend of a friend spiking his drink with veterinary grade ketamine (a powerful horse anaesthetic) and some other psychoactive substance (which he called “that shit” and who could blame him?) whose name he had forgotten. It had put him in a coma in intensive care. Under pressure from the hospital, Laura Salway was persuaded to allow the life-support machine to be turned off. Although he was in a coma, he had heard everything that had been said. It did not please him one little bit. Just to annoy everyone, Christian was an awkward bugger and did not die, and a few weeks later he had made a full recovery.

Christian Salway had had enough trouble in the first seventeen years of his life to last a lifetime.

By an equal improbability, Christian was now a student at a unique school, Strathcadden Academy, a Scottish state high school that served the Corscadden area. It also had boarding provision for Higher and Advanced Higher students from the Region of Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil. It also accepted students from not just Scotland, but south of the Border. It also had a distinctive uniform based on the kilt for both boys and girls. It was weird at first and he was terrified, but he had been befriended by two posh boys. The two boys were brothers from the family that owned the large department store in the centre of Corscadden. Both were very elegant in looks and dress, with impeccable manners – a contrast to the boorish louts of Sowerland. Both were very musical, Aidan being a first-rate artist on keyboard instruments such as the piano, organ, and electronic keyboard. While Ewan could play the piano well, he was more accomplished on electric and acoustic guitars. Ewan had a love for the English language and enjoyed poetry. He would set poems to his brother’s music, and they had performed at the Corscadden Festival at the end of June. Both were excellent linguists and were fluent in French and German. Both boys were exceptional runners and could play different racquet sports, including tennis, badminton, and squash.

The brothers had had their own calamity when their mother, one of the local doctors, died unexpectedly as the result of leukaemia in early 2014. Christian had helped and supported them and their father, who was a brainy doctor, and Dunalastair Professor of Electrical and Electronic Engineering at Edinburgh University, but absolutely hopeless in the realm of a domestic goddess.

Christian was the artistic one of the trio. He had always appreciated good design, and liked fashionable clothes, an interest that put him at odds with the other boys in Sowerland. As he recovered from the attempted murder inflicted on him, he discovered that his artistic talents had become even more developed than before. He could draw with considerable accuracy, with deep and subtle tones of shading. He had many original designs and started to design a range of different kinds of clothing for different occasions. His talent had been spotted by Aidan and Ewan's grandfather, who owned the Walker Bros department store.

Mr Walker had set Christian a challenge to design and organise a fashion show. This helped Aidan and Ewan to overcome the loss of their mother. It had been a colossal task, but it showed Christian and others that he had management skills that were beyond his seventeen years. But he never got big-headed about them. He still worked as a Saturday boy in the restaurant at Walker Bros, carrying out his job and wearing his staff uniform with pride.

The Fashion Show, held at Strathcadden Academy at the end of the Summer Term, was a stunning success, taking the local fashion world by storm. Now Walker Bros, who had their own workrooms, and many reliable contractors, were doing a steady trade selling his designs. Particularly popular was Christian's range of lightweight sport and casual wear. As a runner, Christian knew what he wanted from his running kit, and it informed his design. Very popular it proved too.

Christian was a handy photographer and was responsible for the fashion pictures for the Walker Bros on-line catalogue. Another achievement was that he had taken driving lessons and had passed his test.

This would make him a guru amongst the Advanced Higher students who were taking their driving lessons.

Like most children, Christian was curious about the circumstances of his birth, which his mother was happy to tell him. A stork had not delivered him behind a gooseberry bush. However, the circumstances of his conception were more of a mystery. He had no father, and he knew that his mother was very young at the time and had a one-night stand with a student at York University. While his mother was an intelligent woman, Christian was one of the brightest pupils at his school, so the boy responsible was clearly a very bright lad.

The mystery had lasted until this year. When he first heard the details of the party, he found the whole thing rather repulsive, although later he could partially see the funny side of it. He now knew why he felt so close to Aidy and Eejay: he was their half-brother. From the description of Joseph Walker's prowess at mammalian reproduction, it was equally improbable that Aidan and Ewan Walker could possibly have been conceived, even if the circumstances were more orthodox. Even so he found some of the expressions used sordid. The processes of sex gave the English language some of its most revolting words.

Aidan was five days younger than Christian, having been born on Friday, 30th August 1996. So, it was natural that Chris and Aidy would have a joint eighteenth birthday on 28th August. In the family, they were now *The Twins*. Ewan was eighteen months younger, with his birthday, 27th February 1998 being one day before the cut-off date for the new school year. At sixteen, Ewan was the youngest student doing Advanced Highers at Strathcadden Academy. When he had started in Secondary 1, Ewan had been the youngest in the school.

Ewan was the only one of the trio who was born in wedlock; Mary was five months pregnant with Aidan when she and Joby married.

Like his brothers, Christian felt much more at ease with other young men. Aidy had rapidly become his closest friend. And so was Eejay. Aidy was very gentle but rather shy. Eejay, although younger, was protective of his older brother, and was the same to his other friends. Eejay was openly gay and was known widely as “Gay Ewan”. Not that he minded. He could be quite feisty like his mother and could give as good as he got. However, to most people he was gentle and friendly. If you couldn’t get on with Ewan, you wouldn’t get on with anyone. He was very caring to the Wee Caddies. The deep emotional attraction that Christian had felt towards Aidan and Ewan could now be explained: they had the same father, and all had inherited his intelligence. Aidy was almost a clone of Dad, down to his mannerisms and telephone manner. And many people had commented on how like Aidy Chris was.

Like their father, the boys found discussion of sex processes distasteful and hated sexual innuendo. They were asexual. Ewan, despite being openly gay, had strict limits. Ewan had a boyfriend, Jordan Melhuish, an Advanced Highers student and fellow prefect who was just over a year older than he. Jordan shared the limits that Ewan had. All the boys had a wide circle of female friends, who felt very safe with them. The new Head Girl, Gemma Hammond, was one of them. Something seemed to be happening between Christian and Gemma. Gemma was a boyish girl, and Christian was a girlish boy. Christian was not far off a year older than her, but that didn’t matter one jot. Gemma thought he was so cute and pretty. There could be some elements of romance between the two gentle and sensitive young people. They would be discreet about it. However, such feelings were put on the back burner as Gemma told Christian about her boyfriend back home.

Christian Salway and Gemma Hammond had quite detailed responsibilities in their role. They had a team of prefects to manage, and there was a rota for them to be on duty, assisting the teachers. The prefects were responsible young men and women, selected for being good role models. A duty that had stemmed from the old independent school was that if the Head Boy or Head Girl were boarding, he or she had to

make an early morning patrol of the school at seven o'clock in the morning. This had been started decades before when some Saint Oswald's boys were in the habit of going AWOL off the school premises during the night and getting up to nefarious activities like distilling illicit hooch. It did not happen at Strathcadden Academy. If the Head Boy and the Head Girl were not boarders, it fell to a prefect who was. It was Christian's week on.

There was one gap in Christian's life at the moment. While Eejay was in the room opposite, Aidy wasn't. Aidy had gone to Dringhausen to stay with the Fischer Family before his Modern Languages course at Edinburgh University. He was going to study Literature and Culture in Medieval Europe as one of the extra courses. Near Dringhausen were two important towns, Mühlhausen and Ekelsalle, which had a large quantity of mediaeval buildings. Although Christian was good at German, he wasn't as fluent as Aidan or Ewan. However, he could speak Spanish. Matti and Andi had come over from Germany for the Corscadden Festival, and Chris had got on really well with them. Both Andi and Matti could speak English like natives. When Eejay contacted them on *Skype*, he would chat away in German. When Chris chatted to them, he would practise his German, but if he got stuck, they would help him out in English. The important thing was that all five of the friends knew no linguistic or cultural barriers and chattered away joyfully.

In the room opposite, curled up under the duvet, was the sixty-three kilograms of sixteen-year-old youth that answered to the name Eejay. When Chris gently touched it, there were small squeaky noises, a bit like a squirrel, and it buried itself deeper. Chris put on the radio. *Cadden FM* came on with its noisy between-the-eyes diet of music that its young audience liked. There was further stirring, and a head with tousled light sandy brown hair emerged, followed by arms and upper torso in a light jumper and T-shirt, followed by a midriff in shorts. Flowing after this were two colt-like and slightly hairy legs, with two feet in long ravelled sports socks bringing up the rear. The whole performance was like a snake 1.8 metres long emerging from its burrow. It gently flopped onto the floor

and lay stretched out on its back. It could, and often did, emerge in the reverse order.

“Hi Chris,” it mumbled. “Is it time already?”

“I’ve been awake the last half hour.”

It would be tempting to say, “Bully for you,” but that was not Ewan’s style. Instead, both boys went to the bathroom just down the corridor. There was an advantage of being up first. Nobody would be in the bathroom, and they spent time in pleasant surroundings before having their morning ablutions and preening themselves in the mirror. It was not as congenial as the family bathroom in Brewster house, but it was more pleasant than when they had camped with the Fischer boys.

Refreshed, the boys went back to their rooms and got dressed. They would hug before Christian had to start his morning patrol, and Ewan would go downstairs and make an almighty row by clanging on an old ship’s bell that hung in the main corridor of Asher House.

As he left Asher house, Christian looked at himself in the full-length mirror at the end of the corridor and gave himself a final preen. He had his outside coat on over his jacket. Although it was mid-August, it was quite chilly at this time as the summer of 2014 had become decidedly indifferent and Corscadden was nearly three hundred metres above sea level. Under his jacket he had his sweater, shirt, and a T-shirt. He needed the layers as he was so skinny. He felt the freedom of his kilt, and he liked it. Being proud of his appearance, even at that time of the morning, his long blond hair was neatly combed, his tie was done up properly, and socks were pulled up and his shoes were well-polished. “Chris, you look a picture,” he allowed himself to say as he unlocked the main door.

Christian walked towards College House. The din behind him told him that Ewan was rousing the boarders. Another ten minutes, he would be clanging the bell again, to make sure that everyone was roused, including Mr McEwan and Miss Fraser, the house tutor. Fortunately, he

did not have to ensure the latter was up, as she could be quite grumpy in the mornings. He could hear the clanging of other ship's bells to wake up the Distant Caddies in other houses, in exactly the same way as it was done in the old days of Saint Oswald's.

Of course, Christian was not by any means the first up. John the Jannie would be busy unlocking the classroom blocks. He would be in his...ae...vannie (appropriately a *Volkswagen Caddy*) to pick up materials for the hundred and one odd jobs he and the maintenance team would have to do around the school that day. The cleaners would be busy Hoovering. There was loud clattering from the kitchen for the canteen. Soon bleary-eyed Distant Caddies would be coming down for breakfast. The prefects had the privilege of having their breakfast first, but afterwards they were on duty to make sure that breakfast went smoothly for all.

The early birds would start flocking in from the town, before the gaggles would arrive on the buses. Large gaggles would pour up Dennistoun Avenue ten minutes after their trains had arrived at Coruscadden Station. And the canteen would continue to be busy before registration and assemblies at eight thirty. Quite a number would have had breakfast at home, but they would have a second one when they got into school.

But at this moment, at seven o'clock, Christian had the place to himself. A shy "Good morning, sir" to John the Jannie, followed by the reply, "Good morning, Mr Salway." There were just the distant sounds of Strathcadden Academy coming to life.

Christian looked at College House. It was an imposing Victorian High Gothic edifice with Scotch Baronial turrets at each corner. It had been initially built for Walter Pollard, the First Earl of Buchananshire in 1856. In those days it was the focal point of the Dennistoun Park Estate. The Second Earl of Buchananshire, Michael Pollard never married. With him died the Earldom, and the Dennistoun Park Estate was broken up. Dr Henry Cowan and the Saint Oswald College Trust bought Dennistoun

Park and the adjacent 40 hectares of land to build a school to educate the future leaders of the British Empire. The classrooms were converted from stables and ancillary buildings behind the big house, and five identical boarding houses were built to the design of John Motson, the architect commissioned by The Great Central Railway. Hence buildings such as The Wests echoed the design of Corscadden Station. All of Motson's buildings were heavily over-engineered and designed to last more than a lifetime. During the Second World War, the only German bomb ever to have been dropped in Buchananshire hit the tarmac parade ground outside The Wests.

The irony was that the bomb was dropped by a young crew who had got thoroughly fed up with the long flight over hostile territory with gunners taking pot-shots at them. They were now in cloud so that they couldn't be seen. This resulted in a problem in that the pilot hadn't the least idea of where he was going or where he was. Eventually he got fed up and told the bomb-aimer to get rid of the bombs. If he had waited another four seconds, he would have scored a direct hit on the Great Central Line. Fuel was getting low. A landing at Cardean Aerodrome and a request for fuel to get back to their base near Bremen would not have gone down that well. Instead, the crew made the landing at Cardean without asking for fuel and joined their mates in a PoW camp.

Although a third of the back wall was blown out, such was the quality of the installation inside that none of the fittings was damaged, and every apparatus continued to work perfectly. The crater was filled in rapidly and the damage to the block was repaired in time for the start of the Michaelmas Term 1942.

Behind Dennistoun Park was the chapel where the future leaders of men did their militant devotions, and were made to learn that God was white, British, and had to be addressed in the ancient and poetic language of the King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. If they weren't convinced by the chaplain's sermons on matters of maintaining the highest

standards of morality and purity, further tuition was provided by Dr Cowan's cane. This was not a comfortable experience, as Dr Cowan was a big man and an expert tennis player.

The six boarding houses each housed about a hundred boys in dormitories. College House was the only one whose name was relatively tame. The other five houses were named after heroic empire battles: Inkerman, Khartoum, Blenheim, Ladysmith, and Omdurman. The names were designed to remind the boys of the heroism of the empire soldier, and bloody-well to put some backbone into them, what? There was an oppressive barracks atmosphere in the place. Or was it a prison? There was the sour reek of over-cooked cabbage that pervaded each house. This would combine with the miasmas from the changing rooms and the main lavatories.

The boarding houses of the old Saint Oswald College, apart from College House, were built to the same design. A substantial residence had been built for the housemaster, behind which was the accommodation block for the boys. In those days the accommodation blocks were Spartan. Each block consisted of three floors. On the ground floor there were the study rooms. The study rooms were furnished with pitch-pine desks and small wall cupboards. None had plaster; the bricks were painted. On the first and second floors were dormitories. A two-floor extension at right-angles to the accommodation block housed the changing rooms and lavatories on the ground-floor. On the first floor there was a large bathroom with washbasins around three walls, except for where there were three baths and a couple of showers. These afforded the users precisely no privacy. But they were designed to make Old Oswaldians leaders of men ready to take on any mission required by the British Empire. The lavatories downstairs were to exactly the same design as The Wests, and just as unpleasant to use.

Any (very) Old Oswaldian would tell you that for a junior boy, the first entrance into any of the houses was a scary business. Bullying was rife. There was fagging, in the sense that junior boys were made to do menial tasks for the older boys. There were other kinds of fagging too,

which could lead to one-to-ones with Dr Cowan, each being reinforced with his cane. Either one joined in with the bullies or one got trampled on. Also, there was the rugger and cross-country runs. It was all good manly stuff, making men of boys. And they would obey orders without question, whatever the result may have been. About twenty years after the school's foundation, Old Oswaldians led the men over the top at Ypres and The Somme...

And the Saint Oswald College continued to make men of boys undisturbed until the late nineteen sixties when boys nationally decided that they did not want to be made men of. To be truthful, one concession was made to the Twentieth Century in the early nineteen fifties. Partitions were erected to improve marginally the privacy of users of The Wests, although no doors were fitted. The same applied to the facilities in the houses. In the early nineteen seventies, a programme of work was undertaken to refurbish the accommodation which had remained almost untouched for the previous eighty years. This included adding doors to the facilities. Like the partitions erected twenty years before, the doors, which were like saloon bar doors in old Westerns, did little more than conceal the middle part of the users. There were no locks.

The dormitories remained for the junior boys but were made somewhat less Spartan by the addition of curtains. However, the senior boys were provided with bed-sitting rooms. These were in the portion of the block closest to the housemasters' apartments.

Some of the hang 'em and flog 'em brigade maintained that Saint Oswald College had gone soft. However, that was not the reason that the career of Saint Oswald's came to a sudden end in 1988. The Trust, having spent so much money in refurbishing the place to bring it up to the standards expected of the time, struggled with debt. The isolation of Corscadden at that time stunted its growth, and the Trustees threw in the towel at the end of April that year.

By a total coincidence, the local high school, Corscadden Grammar School, had its own crisis; a major structural fault caused the

collapse of part of the gymnasium, and the brutalist and troublesome building was condemned as dangerous. The recently abandoned Dennistoun Park was an ideal place to which to decamp, especially as the Saint Oswald's School Trust owed the Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council money that was equivalent to the value of the site. The size of the site was such that a larger school serving a wide region could be established. However, that threw up a problem. The Great Central Line had been closed, and the project to re-open it had only recently got underway. The A 825 road was so inadequate that buses would have to leave at six o'clock to get pupils in for eight. But the boarding houses would be ideal for them. They could stay at the school over the week and go home at weekends. This practice was not new; it was standard for pupils in the Islands.

A major refurbishment saw the boarding houses reduced to half their boarding capacity. Boarders would all have study-bedrooms. The younger would share, and the older students would have their own. The other half of each house was turned into classrooms. (The English Department was in Asher House.) The walls were plastered and painted with gentle and pleasing pastel colours. The houses were re-named after benefactors of Coruscadden Grammar School, Saint Oswald College, and dignitaries of Coruscadden. There were Asher, Baxter, Dibben, Edwards, and Fenton Houses. College House remained as it was. Over the years, the motley collection of dilapidated classroom blocks from Saint Oswald's College were demolished to make way for large, spacious, and well-designed classroom blocks. Greatorrex House was not a boarding house but housed the area for Secondary 5 and Secondary 6. South of the Border it would have been referred to as the Sixth Form Centre. Harrison House was where the Science and Modern Language Departments were housed. Inman House housed technology and home economics. Kinmond House housed the drama department and the theatre. Strathcadden Academy was the pride of its community. And with the re-opening of the Great Central Line, Buchananshire and Kyle of Tonsil started to prosper again. Parents outside the Region could get a first-class education for their children at a fraction of the cost of an independent school. The

opportunity to buy into the excellence of the Scottish System did not go unnoticed south of the Border.

Christian had learned from Ewan about the intriguing history of this unique school into which he had most improbably landed. Ewan had done a comprehensive study on the Saint Oswald College in a Secondary Three History project. Christian would have hated it at Saint Oswald's during Dr Cowan's time. At least at the Grange School, assaults by teachers on pupils were not a first line teaching strategy. In Beckton Sixth Form College the students had tried to kill him; at Saint Oswald's they would have succeeded. And they would not have used ketamine and that other shit whose name he had forgotten. A pint-sized, skinny, and effeminate youth like him would have been toast. At Saint Oswald's he would have been a "squirt". Dr Cowan would have caned him until he stopped having girlish looks. Dr Cowan hated squirts. Dr Cowan was a bastard.

Now he was walking past the old parade ground. There were no such parades now, just Caddies playing footy against the walls of The Wests. A slight change in the shade of the tarmac showed where the bomb had landed seventy-two years before, and the repair to the wall was also just visible. Opposite The Wests stood The Easts, a mirror image, but modern and pleasant. How the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association had managed to get a preservation order to prevent the modernisation of The Wests was beyond him. It irked him that the boys were denied the same standard of facilities as the girls. He would be on duty with his fellow prefects at times on the hard games area. But he would, like most Caddie Laddies, do his best to resist having to use The Wests, and go elsewhere.

It was a pleasant walk around the school grounds, to the end of the sports pitches and the athletics track. Christian walked past the Strathcadden Sports Centre. About a hundred metres further on was the cricket pavilion, which had been converted to the athletics pavilion, for

cricket was not played at Strathcadden Academy. Some Old Oswaldians had had a fit when they heard that the regional council were going to put an athletics track on the First Eleven Square. Theirs was a vain battle. A track and other athletics facilities were built to the highest standard, a regional-level facility for the town and the school, complete with state-of-the-art floodlighting. Chris passed Dibben, Edwards, and Fenton Houses. In each, the house bell was being beaten with vigour by the Distant Caddy who was a House Prefect.

He walked on the path that passed on a bank above the lower playing fields. These ran down to the River Cadden. On the other side of the river a heavy freight train rumbled northwards on the Great Central Main Line. Christian had used this path many times. Less than a year ago, he had first run along the path with Aidy who had gently encouraged him, and within weeks he was a fast and effective runner. Now he was the captain of the Strathcadden running team and a junior champion distance runner. He had also taken up badminton under Aidy's gentle tutelage. Somehow badminton seemed to suit them both. He rapidly got into the Senior Badminton Squad. Gemma was captain last year and was this year. Gemma was also a good footballer and was part of the Women's First Eleven who could give a good game to any women's football team, and not a few male teams as well.

Beyond the railway was Dunlivven. This was the area adopted by the Tartan Hippies who arrived in Corscadden in the early nineteen seventies. Although their free love and alternative lifestyle was initially looked at askance by some of the townspeople, gradually they won their way into the hearts of the population through their stomachs. They set up a cooperative store that sold everything for a wholesome alternative lifestyle, providing tasty organic produce. They also supplied the restaurant at Walker Bros. The cooperative went from strength to strength. The original caravans and shacks had now long been replaced by substantial eco-houses in neat gardens that made excellent family homes. Outside were parked 4×4 cars, not too big, of course.

Now he could see The Wests again. There was nothing wrong with the building itself. It echoed the design at the station, which had been refurbished after twenty-five years of dereliction. It was what had gone on in there. Things had happened in there that had never been intended: way beyond what was the correct or decent use of the facility. But that was all part of toughening up boys to be the leaders of The Empire. Now there was no empire, and Christian did not want any further toughening up.

Dr Cowan would have had a fit if he had seen that the Parade Ground was used for boys and girls to stand about and chat idly at break-times: even worse to play informal games of soccer. Nor would he have approved of girls in a boys' school, especially as they all wore a kilt. To see Christian as Head Boy would make him spin in his grave. All the head boys of Dr Cowan's time were eighteen-year-olds who looked about thirty. Each had a military style haircut. Many of them would soon be dead.

Yes, Christian was glad that he was born into the Twenty-First Century. He spotted Ewan with his boyfriend Jordan Melhuish. And Gemma was with them. And they went into the canteen for their breakfast with the other school prefects.

It was now time for inducting this year's crop of Wee Caddies. For Christian Salway and Ewan Walker, the morning on the ground at Strathcadden Academy was to be less eventful than that of Aidy and Andi Fischer in the skies above East Saxony. The biggest thing that Ewan was to manage was the newly restored organ which he was to play in the opening assembly for Secondary Three to Secondary Six. Tamsin Heady from Secondary Four would play for Secondary One and Two.

Although Ewan was a good keyboard player, he was not as talented as his brother. As long as he didn't try to be a clever arse and bite off more than he could chew, he would be able to pass it off. And he had practised the previous evening. Another thing that was in his favour was that the instrument was no longer the cantankerous old devil that it had

been. Last night he had also got a few tips from Aidy while they were chatting on Skype.

Like some other features of life at Strathcadden Academy, the start of year assemblies harked back to the days of the Saint Oswald College. It was a more gentle and cuddly affair with simple songs and a talk that showed that Strathcadden Academy was a caring community underpinned by progressive Christianity. Even so, the portrait of Dr Cowan, complete with the little rip at the end of his hooter, was enough to unsettle some of the younger Caddies.

No more was there Hymn No 333 A, *Lord behold us with thy blessing/ Once again assembled here...*¹ Nor was the cold basilisk stare from Dr Cowan, nor the long litany of infringements that could result in a caning, one of which was “not being a man”. Cowan would have beaten Christian Salway until he had hairs on his chest. Since his genetic make-up precluded that, he would not have sat down for his entire time. As for Ewan Walker, Cowan was strongly and violently homophobic, and there were persistent rumours that Cowan had killed a “queer” boy, although the death on the school premises was recorded as a tragic accident. Ewan and his boyfriend Jordan Melhuish would certainly have been dead meat. To kill one boy could be covered up relatively easily. If he had killed two, Henry Cowan would have needed all the friends in high places that he could muster. Even so there would have been every possibility that Henry Cowan would have an appointment with a hangman on a gallows.

Ewan was now writing up an account of another independent school where both staff and boys had been mistreated. There had a lot of shenanigans with people in high places. While Saint Oswald College had gone belly up because of dwindling students, Tanswold School had

¹ This hymn was written by Henry Buckoll (1803 – 1871) who was a teacher at Rugby Public School and frequently used on the first day of many a school until the early Nineteen Seventies. It was number 333 A in *Songs of Praise*, a hymnbook with a strongly Anglican theme used widely in schools. 333 B was *Lord Dismiss us with thy blessing*, written by the same poet, but used at the end of term. The book was used by Saint Oswald College until the day it closed in April 1988. At the time of writing (2015), there was still a cupboard full of the things.

suffered a massive own goal as its bursar had had his fingers in the till. He had heard about a horrible man called John Gonall who would have fitted in well with Henry Cowan.

And each time Ewan saw the portrait, he would quietly utter a sentiment shared by all Caddies, “Henry Cowan, you are a bastard.”

Although it was always called The Old Chapel, it was actually a multi-purpose building, being the school assembly hall as well as a theatre, a concert hall, an art gallery, and examination hall. Although its use for religious observation was a daily occurrence during the days of Saint Oswald’s, nowadays its use as a large church was only occasional on high days and holy days. The removal of the pews had not only made it a very flexible space but also got rid of that constant source of irritation for preachers and embarrassment for the headmaster, the pew-creaking that demonstrated that Oswaldians had had enough.

A small chapel behind the building was used for a short and simple service on a Sunday morning for Distant Caddies who wanted it. During Sunday evenings the Distant Caddies would go to the St Columba’s Church in the town centre, if they wished.

Unlike Saint Oswald’s, where it was about drawing attention to the chaplain and the headmaster, the services at Strathcadden Academy were about the students. Peter Struther had rehearsed with the newly formed choir and got several pieces together since Monday, the first day at school. Ewan was going to read some poetry. Mr McEwan would give a short talk. There was also going to be a slide show to celebrate some of the achievements of the school in the previous year. The Headmaster, Mr Mitchell, was going to do nothing except bask in the satisfying glow of it all.

Christian liked the chapel because it had been the setting for one of his life’s greatest achievements, the Fashion Parade at the end of June. It had been highly successful and had spurred him on to design more. It would form one aspect of the portfolio for his Advanced Higher in Art.

Since it had excellent acoustics, he had also enjoyed listening to Ecjay's keyboard performances.

For Christian, the main thing was to tell the Wee Caddies about their new school and to reassure them that it was not such a terrible place as they might have imagined. Many of them had come from small primary schools in villages across Buchananshire and from further afield. Now they were dressed in jumpers of house colours, and kilts (Douglas Grey Modern). And the teachers called them by their surnames. And they were in a place that had more than a passing resemblance to Hogwarts, the school made immortal by J K Rowling's *Harry Potter*, all the volumes of which Christian had read as a child. He was going to tell them about his arrival as a waif and stray, and how he had thrived there.

At nine o'clock that morning, Christian Salway, Gemma Hammond and thirty other prefects were seated on a low stage alongside Miss Fraser, the new Head of Year for Secondary 1, and Mr Hall, the Head of Year for Secondary 2. Tamsin Heady was seated at the organ and was playing peaceful and gentle music to set the atmosphere. Christian and Gemma were both wearing the Oswald Boss and Sash.

The prefects were nothing unusual, just a typical cross-section of students from Secondary 6 who had been chosen because they were good role models for the younger students. To Mr McEwan, they all looked so young. And the boys mostly had long hair. The fashion for short, cropped hair had never really caught on in Corscadden, probably because of the hippy influences in the town.

Mr McEwan started off the ritual. It was Christian Salway who was to make the first talk, "As Head Boy, I would like to welcome you to our school. I do this on behalf of my fellow prefects, and all the teachers. I hope that you are as happy here as I have been, and take all the many opportunities..."

At this point he lost his place in his notes. He had done this before, and it was starting to become a habit. And it was obvious, and a couple of Wee Caddies were starting to titter. Mr Farjeon was pointing at

them and glaring. Christian went bright red. He had to do something, so he made it up as he went along from what he could remember. “This time last year I had never heard of Corscadden, let alone Strathcadden Academy. I lived in the North East of England. This time last year, I had failed my AS levels in a Sixth-Form college. AS levels are the equivalent of Scottish Highers. This year, because the good teaching I got here, I not only passed, but all my grades were As and Bs. Nine months ago, I arrived as what we Caddies call a ‘waif and stray’. Now you can all see that I have the body of a waif. I was terrified. I had said at the age of sixteen that I would never be in a school uniform again. And one with a kilt as well! I had never worn a kilt! But I was taken in by my friends who made me feel immediately a part of them. And I love wearing the kilt now. Wear your uniform with pride. It’s unique. This is a unique school.

“Last year I didn’t have a sport. In Sowerland there was no other sport than football. I’m no good at footy; the last time I played, I let nine goals through. The headmistress of the college was furious. Here I learned to play badminton, and I am in the badminton team. And I learned to run. It’s a bit more than putting one foot in front of the other! I am the captain of cross-country running. Here’s a plug. Come and join us - this afternoon outside the Sports Department.

“In five years, a good many of you too will be up here with Mr McEwan and Mr Mitchell.

“And I know that some of you came to Open Days in June and saw all the things that the kids do here. Mr Mitchell, the Headmaster and Mr McEwan here, encouraged me to organise a fashion parade, which got into the papers. There are lots of things that you can do. You will work hard and play hard. You will have a great time here. Now I will pass you to Gemma Hammond, our Head Girl who will show you some of what Caddies get up to.”

Mr McEwan smiled to himself. He knew full well that Christian had lost his place, because when he did, he started to speak with authority rather than just from a script. As for the bit about the Wee Caddies being

there as prefects in front of him, he doubted it. He was sixty-two, and a grandfather. He had three years missing service on his pension as a result of the Bursar at Tanswold having had his fingers in the till and not paying staff pension contributions. He and Joan were getting no younger and they wanted a bit of fun out of life before either got too old and knackered to do so. Another three years would do... Mr McEwan smiled at Christian as he sat down.

As Christian spoke, Gemma Hammond gazed at him. She fancied him, even though she had a boyfriend. Christian was so cute, with his long blond hair and baby-face. He was built like a cheetah, skinny but designed for running. She had often seen him in his running shorts – oh that tight little bum of his. She wanted him for herself, and God help anyone who got in her way. But since he was in a group where the boys were decidedly girlish, she could bide her time.

Gemma came to the rostrum and made her pitch, accompanied by an impressive presentation of the hundred and one activities that Caddies could get up to.

As she spoke Christian gazed at her, as if there were no-one else in the room. There seemed to be something about her. He could not say what. There were plenty of other girls in their group of friends.

For Gemma Hammond and Christian Salway, the meeting with so many dignitaries was a bit scary at first. But they were all very kind and did their best to make the two young people at ease. Mrs McCrum had been delighted by the Fashion Show in June. She wished that she could have fitted into Christian's designs. She was fascinated by Gemma's success as a footballer and badminton player. Sir Hugh Clayden remembered Christian as a junior champion runner and was delighted how he was now captain of the running squad. Sir Hugh had been a rower in his youth; now he was rather tubby after too many corporate luncheons.

In the second service, a more formal occasion for the visiting dignitaries, both Gemma and Christian read a passage from the Bible. There was music from the student orchestra, prayers read by staff and

students, and a talk from Mr McEwan. Finally, Ewan Walker completed the service with *Trumpet Voluntary* by John Bennett, a piece that he had found in some of the music books that resided in a cupboard next to the organ.

It was a bit of a surprise to all of the prefects that Mr Farjeon had read one of the prayers. He had read it as if he meant it as well. Craigie-Boy had been famous for his outspoken atheism and would never have darkened the doors of the Old Chapel if there was going to be anything remotely Christian. But Caddies are nothing if not nosy; he had been spotted talking to Mr McEwan in what was clearly a very private and personal capacity. Craigie-Boy had caught religion.

The rest of the day was a normal Wednesday. For Christian it was Art and Economics before lunch, for Ewan it was French and History, while for Gemma, it was Biology and Physics.

After lunch it was the sports session. There were a good number of runners in for the cross-country running squad. Ewan would take the older students through Dunlivven up onto Linnen Brae, a good 150 metre climb that would get the lungs going. Christian would take the Wee Caddies for a 3 k around the school on the level, before peeling off and catching up with the older students. He was fast and fit enough to manage what, to many, would seem an impossible task. Mr Drummond would follow up the rear for the runners on the flat. Now in his forties, he had been on some good pastures.

As Christian took his squad past the football pitches, he saw Gemma doing her footy practice. She was coaching the Secondary 4 boys' squad and getting them into shape. Initially he thought 'whipping' but that wasn't an appropriate verb for Gemma. A girl with a gentle personality would not be into that kind of thing. He couldn't get her image out of his mind as he herded his charges along the three-kilometre route he had worked out. To Dr Cuthbert who passed them next to the sports centre, Christian's performance was a bit like a sheepdog. He was waiting for the whistles and command of "Come bye!" from Mr Drummond who

was leading up the rear, puffing away like an old steam engine. Christian Salway had not even broken sweat.

Like Christian, Ewan had herded his charges like a sheepdog, giving gentle words of encouragement. After reaching the top, he had gone back down almost to the bottom to help the stragglers. He was half way up on his second round when Christian joined him. And when they were down, the two of them did an extra 3 k. Gemma was now training with her own footy team.

When a *Skype* conversation happened that evening, it was clear that Aidy and Andi had the more exciting day, although it was an adventure that neither of them would have chosen. They had gone flying, and there was a majorly scary incident in which the engine of their Cessna152 failed drastically. Andi had showed incredible skill and expert airmanship to make a safe landing at Dringhausen Aerodrome.

They both tried repeating their escapade on the *X-plane* simulator. Aidy stalled going from base to final, putting the plane into a spin which would have killed them both heavily. Andi landed in the middle of his parents' factory, which would not have pleased his dad. Another landing spot was the Lutheran church in the middle of Dringhausen, which would have annoyed the pastor. The least scary landing turned out to be on the Fischer family's lawn, which was not long enough for a proper landing. They went straight through the house and ended up in the Böhler family's back garden. There would have been a fearful mess to clear up.

Andreas had certainly learned about flying from that.

Chapter 3

Thursday 14th August 2014

Friday evening always saw the Walker family coming back to Brewster House for the weekend. Actually, Joseph Walker would come back on a Thursday evening from Edinburgh to do a day's work at the Dunalastair Engineering Company, the organisation that sponsored his professorship at Edinburgh University. If Laura was not at work, she would come too. On Friday Christian would come back to stay with Mum and Dad, still a somewhat new concept for him. For Ewan, it was just Dad. Although he was getting over the loss of his mother, there were times that it still hurt. Jordan Melhuish would often come and join them. Jordan was a Distant Caddie whose family had lived south of the Border. His parents had separated, and his father had taken the lease on a small house in the Borders. The one positive was that Jordan would have the excellence of a Scottish education. Like Ewan he was a sensitive, dreamy, and gentle young man who loved what was beautiful. Although he was just over a year older than Ewan, there was a very deep emotional as well as physical bond between the two. And it helped Ewan cope with what had been a particularly grievous blow to him.

Despite the loss Brewster House had retained its atmosphere as a much-loved family home full of fun and laughter. Theirs was a close-knit family at total ease with itself. Joseph (Joby) was forty going on fifteen and he and his three sons would chatter noisily. Joby would play his music slightly louder than before. The boys would play their music in the noisy room above the garage. Joby would also use his big boys' toys in the workshop which made a lot of noise and mess and used a large amount of electricity.

Over the summer, Joby had regained his fitness, and he could keep up with his sons when they went running, a considerable feat for a man in his early forties. And he was now entering races as a veteran. Christian continued his work with Walker Bros but kept it a closely guarded secret

that he was the grandson of the owner, and that he was being groomed to take over the business at some date in the future.

Christian and Aidan were born, totally by chance, five days apart at the end of August 1996. They were therefore known in the family as “The Twins”, and they had their eighteenth birthday celebrations on Saturday 30th August 2014. Although they had agreed on having the 27th as their joint birthday, that would have been on Wednesday and Chris would have been staying at the school.

Aidy was staying with Laura and Dad at Dad’s Edinburgh flat. He was getting the lie of the land as far as student life at Edinburgh University was concerned. The first place to visit was Chancellor’s Court at the Pollock Halls of Residence. This was a modern complex that had replaced two previous halls, Brewster House (sounds familiar?) and Cowan House. Brewster House had been a nineteen sixties edifice of system-built monstrosity. Aidy preferred to think of Brewster House as the elegant family home he knew and loved. Cowan House was built in the early nineteen seventies and was never popular with its residents. It was built on the cheap and it showed. Nobody mourned its passing. Now the site was occupied by the new hall, a substantial building in a somewhat Germanic style. Although the architects had a name that could have been thought of German or Austrian, they were actually a young and dynamic Edinburgh-based practice. Aidy had been allocated a top-floor room with a marvellous view of Arthur’s Seat.

Further exploration took Aidy to George Square to familiarise himself with The Department of European Languages and Culture. The department was situated on the East Side of George Square, next to the David Hume Tower and the University Library, a massive nineteen-sixties edifice that had been built with no expense spared. The parapets that were a feature of each floor were adorned with white Portland Stone. Unfortunately, they had weathered over the years to give the effect of rough-cast concrete. Behind the library lay The Meadows, the park that

Aidy had run around on a number of occasions, the last being in January just after Mum had died.

Aidy felt quite overwhelmed by the size of everything. Strathcadden Academy was a big school in generous grounds. But College House would have fitted into the Library many times over. As far as the Student Union was concerned, the student common room in Greatorex House would have been swallowed up without trace. At 1.78 metres and 59 kilograms, Aidy was not a very tall young man, and skinny to boot. He felt 1.78 centimetres, and 59 grams...

Chapter 4

Saturday 30th August 2014

As usual everyone was back in Brewster House on the Friday. On Saturday morning a 10-k training run up into the hills and back was enjoyed by all. Aidan would not be running with Strathcadden Academy, for the simple reason that he was no longer a student there. He had joined Cadden Harriers as an under-19, while Dad had joined as a 40 M. All of them went home on a high, which was to last until they got back to Brewster House.

The post had not arrived when they had left. Laura was having a quiet day in and put all the letters on the kitchen table. One was addressed to Chris. The address was typed, and the postmark was indecipherable, so she would not have guessed whom it was from. The forwarding address was in strange handwriting, presumably that of the current tenant in her old flat in Sciennes.

When Chris opened it, what he found was like having a bucket of cold water over him. The address was that of his grandparents. It involved a trust that he, his mother and aunt had paid into for a good number of years to help him with university. All were confident that he would make the grade. Aunt Imogen had got her parents to look after it. They would match the money pound for pound. They had promised that to their daughters. They were Christians and Christians would be honest with the money, wouldn't they?

Dear Christian

We are write about the Salway Family Fund. We were praying in church during August. We had the vision of a starving African in Mali. We have fast and prayed about it. Several words of knowledge came from the congregation that suggested what we should do with the money, and we sort the advise of Pasta Elsheimer. Several verses from the bible confirmed it in our minds and we are doing God's will.

We have donated the en-tyre money, £25343 to Africa Evangelical Support International. We know that you would agree to this and that your sacrifice will be blesst as all your other donations have.

Please do not contact us about this, as its Gods will and we do not want to hand Satan any excuse to undermine the work of the chruch.

Have a look at the artical on page 4.

Grandma and Granddad.

There was another envelope from Africa Evangelical Support International with a letter of sycophantic thanks for the donation of £15347. There was also a newsletter with articles written by very pious sounding missionaries, most of whom were supported by the Fotheringham Evangelical Church. Page 4 contained an article written by an American evangelical that condemned gay men, effeminate men, those men with long hair, and the wearing of kilts. The final sheet was a direct debit mandate filled in with a minimum monthly payment of £75.

Christian went ashen, burst into tears, passing the letters round. Aidan, Ewan, and Jordan surrounded him and took him into the games room and all four of them sat on the old, battered settee. It took him several minutes to compose himself. None of them had said anything, until Chris spoke, "They have done it again! They build me up and kick me down again and I am too stupid to realise it. Could you get Mum and Dad?"

Joby and Laura were speechless when they saw the letter. The first coherent thought through Laura's mind was that her mum and dad had no right whatever to have helped themselves to a fund that she, Imogen, Grandma and Granddad Hayward, and Chris had been paying into for the last ten years. Chris had put in pocket money and little bits that he had earned. Imogen and her grandparents had put in most, but Laura had put in a couple of thousand. Imogen would go ballistic when she heard, and she was going to hear right now. And Laura pulled out her mobile.

Joby's concern was for Chris. What a bloody awful present for his eighteenth. This was religious abuse, not Christianity, but Mr and Mrs Salway's church had form on this.

Ewan's first observation was that the letter had basic spelling errors that a spell-checker should have picked up. They were clearly unable to spell basic words. How could they have produced such an intelligent daughter as Laura, whom he now called Mum?

Aidan noticed the discrepancy between the £25000 and the £15000. No, it must of bin a miss steak, a type-O. "Look at this, Mum," he said.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Laura replied. Imogen answered the phone. Laura was right; her sister went ballistic.

"They have done what?" she shouted.

"They have passed Chris's legacy to a charity, £25000, to Africa Evangelical Support International."

"25 grand? That's what we put in. I'm at the computer. I'll check it out."

Laura could hear the furious tapping of a keyboard over the phone. She could hear Imogen swearing as she mistyped her password. After a couple of minutes or so, she was into the account. It was true; 25 grand had been withdrawn and paid to the Fotheringham Evangelical Church. The account had been closed.

"How has Chris taken this?" Imogen asked. She too was speechless and blurted out the first thing that crossed her mind.

"Pretty hard, as you would imagine. Mum and Dad have form on this. They have always done this on Chris's birthdays. I thought they had agreed to match what we had put in, but they clearly haven't. They have ruined Chris's and Aidy's eighteenth. We are still going to take them out."

“Laura, I’m coming up. We’re in this together. I will leave now and should be in Corscadden about midnight. What are you doing for the Twins’ birthday?”

“We’re taking them, Eejay, and a couple of close friends to the Glenclawe Hotel in Buchanan. Joby’s mum and dad are coming, and Mary’s mum and dad are staying there. You don’t have to come up. It’s a long way.”

“Well, I am coming. I am shocked and I bet you are too. You need me and I need you right now. And Chris needs me as well. The phone is not good enough. If you’re not back, don’t worry. I’ll listen to some music in the car. Pass me over to Chris.”

“Hi, Aunt Imm,” said Chris who had used this abbreviation from the time that he was a very small boy. It had taken him a while to get his tongue round “Imogen”, so it had stuck.

“Chris,” replied Imogen, “don’t let this spoil your birthday. And don’t spoil it for Aidy. Promise? We’ll sort this out. I’ll give Grandma and Granddad a piece of my mind. Promise.”

“Imm, I haven’t put in much,” said Chris. “You and Mum have though. Why do Grandma and Granddad do this?”

“It’s that loony church they go to. They used to be fun people until they started going there. They used to be open-minded. They were in the Labour Party. As soon as they joined that church, they became racist and right-wing. The pastor scared them witless. The Ulsterman who was their pastor was replaced by an American who’s even worse. Your mum and I used to have terrible arguments with them. They have been brain-washed and have to pay one quarter of their income to the church. We didn’t want to go, either. Superficially it was fun, but some of the things the Pastor used to say were outrageous. He wanted us to believe that the Earth was made in 4004 BC. He went mad with us when we said that he should preach that the Earth was flat and made of blue cheese.

“When Laura came pregnant with you, they forced her to beg forgiveness on her knees. She was only twenty. They refused to give her forgiveness and expelled us both from the church and handed us over to the Devil.”

“Mum has never told me about it until recently.”

“No, she didn’t want to upset you.”

“It’s upsetting me now. Imm, can I put you back to Mum?”

Jordan had not heard much about Chris’s story, so Ewan took him out of the room to explain everything. Jordan, who had not had an easy time himself, was shocked. “If this is what religion is about, I don’t want anything to do with it.”

Joby had decided that he should do something useful; he rang Mum and Dad and told them what had happened. Within ten minutes they were up at Brewster House. Sensing that this miserable turn of events could kill the seedling that was Christian’s faith, Charles Walker rang the Reverend Matheson. Robert Matheson was, quite by chance, having a walk in Corr Wood with his close friend and one-time flatmate Andrew McEwan. Within another five minutes they too were there. Chris was sitting in a foetal position on a beanbag staring into space. He would need a lot of convincing that God, if indeed there were such a thing, was not a complete and supreme cosmic bastard. Jordan didn’t know what to say. He had always thought of religion as a kind of cosy comfort blanket that you grew out of. Aidan and Ewan also didn’t know what to say either. Each thanked God that their church, for all its faults, never treated people like this. Aidan was feeling slightly sick and would have happily brought this eighteenth birthday to a hard stop.

Christian said, “Mum, why didn’t you tell me this? I know that Grandma and Granddad’s church didn’t approve of me, but this is unbelievable. I hate that loony church. When I was in hospital last year, those people prayed I should die so they would be rid of me and the embarrassment. I bet Pastor Elsheimer put them up to it. They rang the

church elders in Carlsborough and asked them to pray that I should be handed over to Satan. I heard them say that ‘God hates fags.’ That would have meant that I would have gone to the hot place.”

“Chris, how do you know this stuff? You were completely out. The doctors said you were brain-dead.”

“Yes, I know. They said I was a bed-blocker, and they should turn off the machine. I heard every word they said to you, including that I would be a cabbage needing 24-hour care. They said you would never be able to afford the nursing, and that Sowerland would take at least fifteen months before they would even consider the case. It was their way of saving money. You agonised a lot before you said yes.”

“Of course I did!”

“They turned the thing off, and I didn’t go. Later they said, ‘He’s an awkward little sod. He’s not dying’.”

“Chris, you’re making this up!”

“No, Mum, I am simply saying exactly what I heard. I can remember everything. The words came through loud and clear. I can remember the music that was being played on the radio, for example, *Luigi Boccherini’s String Quartet in C-major*. It was tuned to Classic FM. I had never heard of the stuff. Dr Wilson liked it, as did Debbie Gibson, the charge nurse.”

Laura was looking decidedly unsettled. Of course, she knew how some deeply unconscious people could hear everything that was said. But how on Earth could Chris remember details when he had been diagnosed as brain-dead? He was very much brain-alive, and still was, even more than he had ever been before. Laura would make damned sure that none of her radiography staff would make such crass comments in front of any unconscious patients. The karma could well come back to bite their bums. And she was going to damned well make sure that bad karma would sink its teeth into her parents’ fat bottoms. As for that bloody pastor, she longed for him to get his come-uppance. The mood she was in, she would

have gladly led him onto a gallows and hanged him on it with her bare hands.

Charles Walker came over to his grandson. “Christian, look at me in the eye and read my lips.”

The tone of Charles Walker’s voice suggested that if Christian knew what was good for him, he would look straight into his grandfather’s eyes, read his lips, and be all ears. So, he did.

“Christian, I have heard all about this. You have told me a lot, but not in so much detail. I am shocked at what Mum’s parents’ church have done to you. I have seen the letters. It’s not God’s will, I can assure you. I will ensure that the legacy that they squandered is made up to you. Aunt Imogen is coming up and she and your mum are ready to do murder on their parents. They’ll do it tomorrow. Your granddad always has his mobile on, even in church. They will ring him up and that will really piss off the elders.”

“Charles! Language!” Muriel chided.

The front doorbell went, and Joby answered it. Without standing on ceremony, Jake trotted through the hall and straight into the games room, making a beeline for Christian. He pushed his nose into all the bits that had interesting smells. All the boys were still in their running kit and had not yet showered. Chris fondled Jake’s ears and rubbed his flanks and started to cry again. It felt stupid, but it seemed that God was ministering to Christian’s distress through a large black flat-coat retriever. Jake knew nothing about God or Christianity, of course. There were lots of cuddles which he loved, and he had always had that instinct for the distressed teenager. He would be the centre of attention. He had poked his nose up Christian’s kilt before, and there were lots of familiar pheromones. Now that Christian was in running shorts, there were even more delicious smells to delight his doggy brain, as well as the smell from Christian’s running socks and trainers.

There arrived the two ambassadors for Christ, although diplomacy was not high on the priority list as far as their views on the Fatheringham Evangelical Church were concerned. A desire by the Reverend Matheson to show off the Church Militant by pouring five litres of petrol through the front door was rejected on the grounds that it would be good for ten years inside for arson. It amused his young audience. Andrew McEwan would have happily turned Pastor Elsheimer into pasta.

Joby had brought coffee through. Robert Matheson and Andrew McEwan were still practically speechless as they read the material, and their mouths hung open. In case anyone thought they were looking gormless, each decided that he had to do something. And each poured some coffee down his mouth. Robert Matheson was the first to say something, “Christian, this is not the action that I would have expected of church people. As you know, church people can be pretty petty and vindictive at times. But this is cruelty. It is a kind of abuse. I have heard rather a lot about the Fatheringham Evangelical Church. What do you know about it, Christian?”

“Not much. I know they were really nasty to Mum and Aunt Imogen. I would not want to go anywhere near the place. I don’t ever want to go near Fatheringham either. It’s not nearly as bad as Beckton, but that’s not saying much.”

“There is a Fotheringham near Forfar,” said Ewan. “I didn’t know that there was one south of the border.”

“It’s not a nice place,” Chris replied. “It has hit on some bad times. All the industry has gone.”

“And that’s how the Fatheringham Evangelical Church makes its way,” Mr Matheson continued. “There was an Anglican congregation, but it struggled. Some people set up a house church in an old garage. They too struggled before they were taken over, firstly by a free church from Belfast, then by International Evangelical Church Ministries Inc., IECM, an American company for the want of a better word. They sell a kind of wacky fascist religion for want of a better word, as a kind of drug. It’s not

about the love of Jesus Christ. It's all about fear, judgement, condemnation, power, money and the pastor's dominance."

"I saw two of them when I lived in Sowerland," Chris said. "I didn't realise that they were churches. They were on industrial estates. I used to think, 'Why are the staff in on a Sunday?' They were like fortresses, with barbed wire around the carparks. I thought that there should be watch towers and machine guns. In Sowerland you needed that kind of security to stop the scallies from nicking everything. Even if it was bolted down, they would still nick it."

"I can tell you that the Fotheringham branch is just like that," said Laura. "You have to have a pass to get through the doors. So much for a church being accessible to anyone."

"TECM are a very strange company," said Mr Matheson. "I would hesitate at calling their branches churches. I would be even more dubious at calling them Christian. These meetings are more like a gathering of the Ku-Klux-Klan. They are white supremacists. They have political views of the extreme right and are funding the English Patriotic Party."

"I've heard of them," said Aidan. "They make UKIP look like a European socialist movement."

"Pastor Waldron Brain Elsheimer is the chief executive officer for the UK," said Mr Matheson.

"Shit-brain, more like," Andrew McEwan interjected. "You didn't hear me say that did you? You know what Caddies are like."

"Agreed," said Mr Matheson. "He's not a very nice man. He doesn't minister to his congregations. He harangues them. He manages them like the owner of a Victorian mill. He expects them to pay at least twenty-five percent of their earnings to be church members. If they can't pay, their few membership privileges are withdrawn. If they leave the church, they are still chased up for subscriptions. He gets the bailiffs in too."

“Do they have any branches in Scotland?” Joby asked.

“Mercifully not, although it’s not the first time I have had to help people undo the damage that IECM have done, not just with the subscriptions, but also with the brainwashing. In effect I have had to de-program them. IECM expects them to act as robots to make them money. They are owned by a TV evangelist called Logan B Trommelkopf III, who maintains a prayer tower, and manipulates his audiences to give lots of money.”

“Trommelkopf means drumhead,” said Aidan, submitting his thesis to the University of the Truly Obvious.

“Sums him up,” continued Mr Matheson, “but he’s sure good at manipulating money from people. And his minions are as well. The elders of his branches are organised on corporate lines. In effect they have the responsibility of directors, but none of the power. The ‘pastor’ is actually the branch executive. There are about twenty branches, and each pastor is answerable to Waldron Elsheimer. Each pastor is personally vetted by Head Office, and they are always American men. Trommelkopf is decidedly misogynistic and justifies it on Paul’s teachings. All pastors have to submit accounts on a monthly basis, and if the profits aren’t high enough, it’s a “strike”. Three strikes and they are out. In a nutshell, they are in it for the money.

“Trommelkopf gives very large donations to right-wing groups in America. He makes most of his money from his TV channel, IECM TV, by charging a subscription and by advertising. He preaches from his prayer tower, which looks more like a penthouse suite. The charity Africa Evangelical Support International belongs to IECM. Only about a third of what is donated actually gets to Africa. The rest goes on administration. None of the leaders, including our friend Elsheimer, are short of a few quid.”

“It sounds like total fraud to me,” Mr McEwan added.

“It is. Elsheimer has friends in high places among the English establishment.”

“What about Police Scotland?” Charles Walker asked.

“It’s never affected anyone north of the Border, so they have never investigated. They would probably say it’s not a police matter.”

“Well, it has become one now – my grandson and my daughter-in-law to be are victims of fraud and I am not having it,” replied Charles. “Other than this stuff, do you have the other things sent by your grandparents, Chris?”

“No. I threw them away.”

“If we can get a sufficiently good sleuth onto it, Elsheimer will get his come-uppance. They will trawl through the evidence. I am seeing Derek at Gordon Morton on Monday. Chris and Laura, we’re going to put this right one way or the other.”

Christian had found a lot that was comforting in the presence of Jake. And the Reverend Matheson and Mr McEwan had a lot of words to reassure him that God was not a mean and callous bastard. The big challenge would be to forgive his grandparents when they were ready to receive it. It would not be easy, given the depth of rejection that they had showed to him and Laura. In Mr McEwan’s words, they would need a complete brain-detox to get rid of the twenty years of filth with which they had been brainwashed. He was sure that Granddad would do his best to screw Pastor Elsheimer for every penny that he had. The sooner that the church was filled with lathes, circular saws, and other industrial machinery, the better. The important thing was now to shower and do himself up to look a picture for his eighteenth. Aidy, Eejay, and Jordan would as well.

Charles Walker went through to the study where Laura and Joby had retreated. He wanted to assure them that although the attention had been on Chris, he hadn’t forgotten them. And in doing so, he got a very useful piece of information. Laura had made computer copies of much of the stuff that her parents had sent to Chris. “Laura,” he concluded,

“you’re a much-loved member of our family. You are making Joby happy, and you have added so much. I am looking forward to meeting Imogen. I hope we can bang some sense into your mum and dad before it’s too late.”

The rest of the ‘Twins’ birthday went to plan, after the earlier trip-up. As Mum and Dad took them over to the Glenclawe Hotel, Christian thought back to eighteen months before. At that time, he had just left the hospital in Durham having been treated for the results of an attempted murder. He had made a remarkable recovery: miraculous as the specialist had put it.

Although he didn’t know it at the time, a whistle blower had told the specialist about some of the comings and goings at Carlsborough General. The specialist went apoplectic and ordered that Christian should continue his treatment at Durham. When he found out about the attitude of the Fatheringham Evangelical Church, he immediately reported them to the social services in Fatheringham. This was taken up by the Fatheringham Evangelical Church as an attack by Satan to undermine the work of God. That Dr McLeod was himself a stalwart of the Catholic Church was neither here nor there. The Anglican Church was not a proper church. The Roman Catholics were a papist sect and beyond the pale. So was Christian who had committed the heinous sin of reading all the Harry Potter books.

One year ago, Christian’s wardrobe was limited to two pairs of skin-tight jeans, some T-shirts, a hoodie, and a suit, rarely used. While the jeans were nominally skin-tight, he was so skinny that they were loose on him. Now he was dressed up to the nines (for him) in a tweed jacket, fashionable shirt, a tie, a soft lambs-wool jumper, an informal kilt, long socks and highly polished shoes, as were his half-brothers, and Jordan. This time last year, he was about to stand up in court to give evidence about ketamine and that other shit whose name he had forgotten. He had

never felt so alone and unwanted, just he and Mum. His grandparents had rejected him under pressure from that damned pastor, and it still hurt.

But now he had gained a family. It was so improbable. He not only had Mum, but Dad – not a pretend Dad, but his real Dad. And he had inherited Dad's brain as well, not that Mum was lacking upstairs. Where she and Aunt Imm got their brains from was anyone's guess. Certainly not from Brian and Brenda Salway, so it seemed. Perhaps that loony church had actually succeeded in wiping out their brains in the intended way of the ketamine and that other shit whose name he had forgotten. If they still had brains, it was clear that they were not using them. Mum and Aunt Imm had told him about what fun-loving people they were, until they caught religion.

Mr McEwan had said to him that religion was about controlling people, none more so than fundamentalist Christians whose views not only taught that the world was created in 4004 BC (because a bishop had worked it out), but also that young men like he, Eejay, Aidy, and Jordan were an abomination, a favourite term of theirs. Believing in evolution was on a par with reading Harry Potter. Since Christian had done all of those things, it was proof to the Fatheringham Evangelical Church that Christian was Satan personified. But Satan had horns, a thick beard, hairy goatlike legs, and a rat-tail with a barb at the end. Satan was malicious. Christian Salway was a long-haired skinny boy who was in many ways rather girlish. He was gentle in nature and had taken a whole lifetime of rejection and bullying with a graceful attitude that was almost saint-like.

Christian had not caught religion. He had a faith that had landed as a seed that was growing bit by bit, one that revelled in his youth, was playful, and loved life to the full. In the car, he thanked God. He didn't utter a long prayer in seventeenth century English. In fact, to everyone else in the car, he just seemed to be rather quiet and was gazing out of the window at the glorious Scottish countryside between Bracklinnen and Buchanan. He turned to Aidy next to him and smiled gently and held Aidy's hand. A deep sense of peace flowed over him, and some words that he had never heard before came, unbidden, into his mind: *The LORD*

says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you."

The Glenclawe is a luxurious hotel, universally recognised for its excellent service. It occupies a hill-side site just outside the town of Buchanan. Visitors to Buchanan can see it from the train as it slows down for the terminus. There is a long driveway from the B 8161 road from Corscadden, with impressive gates and lodges at the bottom. Glenclawe House was built in the centre of a shooting estate in the Nineteenth Century for William MacPherson. During the Great War, most of the male workers on the estate went overseas to fight; very few returned. In the mid nineteen twenties MacPherson died, and the estate struggled on in the family who really did not have the money to keep it going. During the Second World War the house was requisitioned by the War Ministry. When it was handed back to the MacPherson family, it was in a poor state of repair. It was sold at a fraction of what it was truly worth. Although it had been intended to demolish the house, it was instead rented out to an independent boarding school, the owner of which paid a peppercorn rent on condition that he did the repairs. The school lasted from the late forties to the early eighties. Like Saint Oswald College, Glenclawe School suffered badly from its enforced isolation when the trains were taken off and never recovered. It survived its last ten years on a hand-to-mouth existence, supported by a number of benefactors. Eventually the house was sold in the mid nineteen eighties to Jamie and Lorna Campbell who spent more doing the place up than it cost to buy it.

Mr and Mrs Campbell made a tremendous success of their venture, helped no end by the easier access for tourists when the Great Central Line reopened. They were helped further by the fact that the branch line to Buchanan was not only reopened, but also electrified, so Buchanan enjoyed frequent electric trains that linked the town to Edinburgh. If guests were coming up by train, they would be met by minibus. Such was the success of Glenclawe Hotel that in 2001 Mr and Mrs Campbell bought The Hermitage in Tanswold, a large Georgian

house that had been previously occupied by another independent school. The Hermitage Country House Hotel too had gained an enviable reputation for its excellence.

Aidan and Ewan had been to Glenclawe before. The Walker family used it for any event for which they had really wanted to push the boat out. The last time was in 2013 when Granddad had had his seventieth birthday. Well, if you couldn't celebrate your seventieth in that kind of style, what could you? From his time at the Hermitage Country House Hotel, Christian vaguely knew that the owners, Mr and Mrs Campbell, had a place in Scotland, but he had never given it much thought. There were times that he would have infinitely preferred to be there than in Tanswold.

For Jordan, a dinner in a nice pub was a right posh do.

As they got out of the car, Mr and Mrs Campbell came out themselves to welcome Joby, Laura, and the boys. Mrs Campbell knew that this was a special party for twins, one of which was Aidan, and the other one was Christian. She had in her mind's eye two identical eighteen-year-old boys, but as soon as she saw them, it was clear that these two were not identical. The one with long blond hair seemed somehow familiar. Anyway, the Walkers were to be welcomed and were to be pampered and fussed in a way that would make the 'Twins' eighteenth birthday a truly memorable event.

There were many people to meet. Both Aidy and Chris were young men of impeccable manners, making small talk with lots of people. They found Mary's parents, who had taken Chris to their hearts. They had heard what had happened with the Fatheringham Evangelical Church, and they too had promised to help in making it up to Chris and Laura. Ewan and Jordan were with Uncle Alex.

Aidy and Chris found their Caddy friends and felt comfortable. The Fischer family were staying at the hotel and Aidy brought Andreas and Matti over to join them. Andreas' English was not just fluent but was spoken with a Buchananshire accent. Matti's English was impeccable as well but had traces of the Germanic. The significance of *The Twins*

moniker was explained in that the two boys were such close friends that they were like brothers, and that their birthdays were so close together. If the secret got out to a nosy Caddie, it would have been all over the town by Monday. As always there was that warm feeling of comfort and conviviality of people of all ages at total ease with each other.

Andreas told Aidy all about the flight over from Dringhausen. Kirsten had flown them on the first leg to Abbeville in France. She thought that the air traffic controller at Abbeville was rather rude. But she had resisted the temptation to call him a patronising chauvinist pig, because she didn't know the French equivalent. She had muttered the phrase in English, but it was lost on him. Andi had picked his way round London. It was difficult and he only just managed to keep clear of controlled airspace. Aidy and he laughed as they thought of Jurgen Andorfer (the grumpy *Flugplatzmeister* at Dringhausen aerodrome) cursing and swearing at the difficult path and straying into the controlled airspace around Heathrow. (Surely not – Herr Andorfer was a first-class aviator.)

A TV producer would have based the party at Brewster House. News would have got out on social media. Friends of friends of friends would have turned up. There would have been a rave, and Brewster House would have been razed to the ground. And the riot police would have been called. And both Aidy and Chris would have their drinks spiked with ketamine and some other shit that would destroy their brains for good.

Instead, the family enjoyed an evening in a luxurious hotel with exquisite dining and the highest standards of silver service, which more than passed muster with Christian Salway.

Behind the scenes, Lorna Campbell was feeling confused. She had welcomed the Walker Family before and had met Aidan and Ewan. She had never realised that there was Christian Walker as well. She had obviously missed him. She met thousands of guests every year; she couldn't possibly remember them all. Well, she had seen him tonight. No,

he was not an identical twin; he was easily distinguishable. He was slightly shorter than Aidan and even skinnier. Perhaps they had found that particular bun in a corner of the oven. Aidan looked so much younger than eighteen, while Christian looked even younger. Both would need their proof-of-age cards for a good many more years! They seemed to have many of the same mannerisms, and they spoke in the same way. Perhaps it was just coincidence. It was all part of natural variation.

There was something that made Lorna feel unsettled. She was convinced she had seen Christian Walker somewhere before. But where? She would sometimes go to Walker Bros on her day off and enjoyed the restaurant there. She had been served by Christian Walker definitely. The name badge with Chris on it was a give-away. She enjoyed being served by him and thought how professional he was for a Saturday and holiday boy. No, it was somewhere else, and it was bugging her. Clearly to go out and ask the boy was simply not on. And it bugged her for most of the evening.

“Jamie,” she said to her husband, “I recognise Christian Walker. He works in Walker Bros, but I have seen him from somewhere else. Do you recognise him at all?”

“I see what you mean. There was a very similar lad who worked with us at The Hermitage. He learned silver service and was very good. But he disappeared. We were up here at the time, but we found out later some of his so-called friends took him to a pub, even though he was under-age. There they spiked his drink and put him in hospital in intensive care.”

“What happened?”

“I guess he died. They said he was brain-dead. It was murder.”

“I could swear that Christian Walker is him.”

Mrs Campbell was not so crass to ask, but was saved the embarrassment, for after the dinner Chris was coming back from the Gents and immediately recognised Mr and Mrs Campbell who, as always,

were paying their full attention to the guests. “Mr and Mrs Campbell,” said Chris, “do you remember me?”

“You must be Christian Salway,” said Mrs Campbell, who was wondering whether she was losing it or had seen a ghost. “I thought you were Aidan’s twin.”

“It’s a long story, but I will give you the edited version,” Christian replied. “Is there somewhere we can sit down in private? It’s not something I want everyone to know.”

“Of course. Come into the office.”

And Christian spent the next ten minutes explaining not only about how his drink had been spiked with ketamine and some other muck whose name he had forgotten, but also about his less than immaculate conception as the result of a very young university student from Scotland taking part in a party with a less than tasteful theme. He also described how he had, totally by chance, landed at Strathcadden Academy and had been taken in by the Walker Family. For Lorna and Jamie Campbell, it all made sense, and it was a massive relief that a highly valued young employee had survived a despicable attempt at murder.

“You were a while,” said Jordan when Chris got back.

“Yeah, I needed to go for a dump,” Chris replied quite untruthfully, but saved himself the trouble of a true explanation. Dad was on his hind feet addressing the gathering, “Thank you all for coming and I would also like to thank Jamie and Lorna Campbell and their staff for making us so welcome and looking after us so well. I am sure you will have enjoyed dinner as much as Laura and I did. Our purpose is to celebrate Aidy’s and Chris’s eighteenth birthday. As you all know, Chris came into our lives a few months ago, the result of which his mum, Laura, and I came together after Mary so sadly passed away. Both were so kind and supportive along with so many others, too numerous to mention...”

“Dad, you are about to put your foot in it,” Aidy muttered. “Watch what you are saying. There are Caddies about.”

“...and Chris has become as another son to me. As most of you know, Laura and I are getting married in four weeks today in St Columba’s Church. We are looking forward to seeing you all. There is one other announcement that I will be making to you. Laura is expecting. The critical twelve-week mark has passed, and he or she will be arriving in late February. All the tests are fine...”

“Well, knock me down with a feather,” said Aidan. “Dad, you really are a dark horse.”

The rest of the evening continued as it had started, in the joy that is the result of loving and harmonious conviviality. The Germans call it *gemütlichkeit*. Aidy had experienced it a few weeks ago in the clubhouse at Dringhausen Aerodrome. Aidy entertained his friends with pieces on the piano. Eejay and Jordan had disappeared behind the scenes briefly to re-emerge on the stage with Iain and Cameron, their close friends and band mates in their teen boy-band, *Kilted Spice Boys*. And Aidy was soon up there playing the keyboard part. Cameron’s father had brought all the kit up in his van earlier in the evening and was enjoying his son’s performance with his friends. The youngsters and those young at heart danced to the music. It was a live performance with the bubbly spontaneity from excitable teen boys.

Joby and Laura sat contentedly on a sofa, snuggled up as lovebirds. Laura was not drinking for obvious reasons and would drive home. Aidy had had a token pint of Heavy which for the first time in his life he had legally bought. Chris had a glass of wine. The memory of ketamine and that other shit was still too raw in his mind. Besides he couldn’t stand drunks; they reminded him too much of Beckton. And Aidy didn’t like to drink too much because not only would it upset Chris, but also it would give him a rotten hangover.

The two grandmas and granddads were talking about the errant third set of grandparents and about how poisonous loony churches could be. Aunts Jenny and Sarah had their group of friends, chatting about the

Edinburgh Festival. Uncles Alex, Simon and Jon were propping up the bar. They had lost their inhibitions and made public that well known secret of the kilted Scotsman. It was not worth speculating what Mary would have said to her little brother.

It was over too quickly and at midnight all were back on their way to Corscadden. The four boys were exhausted and dozed while Laura drove them back. Dad had one or two inside and was happily talking drivel as was usual in the circumstances. And when they turned into the drive at Brewster House, a red Mazda sports car was parked there. Although he was tired, Chris was excited to see his Aunt Imogen. If he was a golden retriever, his tail would have been wagging furiously. He did not leap up at her and stick a wet nose in her face. Instead, he ran up and hugged her. She had been what had kept him and Mum sane in some of the darkest times.

Aidy and Eejay thought about how their uncles would be waking up to a horrible hangover the next morning and swearing that another session like that and they would be going on the wagon. It was a phrase often used in the extended Walker family, and the promise lasted a day longer than the hangover.

Chapter 5

Sunday 31st August 2014

Although Imogen Salway had met Joseph Walker before, she had never been to Brewster House, but her satnav had brought her up from Clinton Muncey to Corscadden with little difficulty. She had heard about the A 825 road, but it had been late on a Saturday evening, so the traffic was not too bad. While the others went to bed, Chris stayed up with his mother to talk to his aunt. He was exhausted and after Mum had knocked up a light meal for Imogen, he was finding it hard to keep his eyes open and went up to join Aidy upstairs.

“Imm, I have a little news for you,” Laura started. “If you were at the party, you would have heard about it.”

“I wish I had come, now that I am here. So, what is it? I’m all ears.”

“I am expecting again. I had my first scan on Tuesday. It’s going to be twins.”

There was a whoop of delight from Imogen, who said, “With Joby? I thought he couldn’t get it up. Was he any more of a stud than last time?”

“Marginally - I scored him at one out of ten rather than zero. We didn’t expect anything and were ready to do AI. Mary had to have AI when they went in for Eejay.”

“Eejay?”

“Ewan. He’s the tall one. He looks just like his mother.”

“Who’s the one who looks like Joby?”

“That’s Aidan, or Aidy. Chris is very like Aidy, so much so that people think they are brothers. They’re referred to as the Twins. Aidy’s birthday is five days after Chris’s; in fact it was today. Other than my colouring, Chris takes after Joby. There is one big difference. Joby is forty

going on about fifteen and a half, while Chris is eighteen, going on thirty. He's the one with common sense in this house."

"So, how's Chris getting on at school?"

"Very well. They are really pleased with him. He's doing his Advanced Highers this year. He did really well with his Highers last year, all Grades A. He's the captain of running, and he's Head Boy."

"Didn't he fail all his AS exams the year before last?"

"He did. He wasn't at all happy at Beckton Sixth Form: - what with his friends spiking his drink. Don't tell me, he was underage."

"What's that school called?"

"Strathcadden Academy. It's a state school but is just like a posh one. You've seen the pictures of Chris in his uniform?"

"I can't imagine our Chris in anything other than jeans and a T-shirt. How did he take to it?"

"He felt weird at first. He was quite scared at the idea of boarding, but Aidy and Eejay took him under their wing. The Head of Highers, Dr Cuthbert, chose Aidy because he knew how gentle Aidy was. Chris took to him immediately, and Eejay. He's now quite used to it."

"Who was that other boy with Eejay, the one with the long brown hair?"

"That's Jordan, Eejay's boyfriend. Eejay is openly gay. Chris and Aidy are very close as well. Chris has been attracted to boys as well as girls for most of his teen years. That's one of the reasons he got bullied at school."

"Does he get bullied at school here?"

"No. The headmaster is really on top of it. Also, it's much more main stream up here. The kids at the school really look out for each other."

They are also very nosy, so if you tell a Caddie a secret, it will be across the town in a day.”

“So, what’s this about boarding? I didn’t think they did that in state schools.”

“There are several in England, and in this country kids from the outer isles stop over on the mainland. This one takes older kids in on a Monday, and they stop over and go home on a Friday. They come from outlying villages and the Kyle of Tonsil, and it saves a really long journey each morning and evening. The main road is terrible in the morning. Some come in from Edinburgh or even south of the border. Others stay over the weekend when parents are working away.”

“Does Chris still board?”

“Yes. He and Eejay go on a Monday and are back on a Friday.”

“Why’s that? The school is just down the road.”

“You know that I work in Edinburgh, and Joby does as well. He’s a professor.”

“Oh Laura! You’re going to marry a professor! The Scottish twink you kept on talking about is a professor. He doesn’t look like one. He’s far too young. Professors are really old. Are you chasing him as your toy-boy?”

“Imm, he was twenty-one when he brought Chris about. He’s now the youngest professor at the university. He’s very good at work, very brainy. But he’s a typical professor at home: can’t organise a piss-up in a brewery. He’s only nine months older than me. Mary, his previous wife was nine years older. He was her tom-boy’s toy-boy. That’s what Mary’s mum and dad said to me tonight. She was forty-nine when she collapsed and died in January.”

“What happened?”

“She was a doctor. She was a GP in the town. She was also a haematologist. But she got leukaemia and didn’t realise until too late. She was giving a talk in Bern when she was taken ill; she had a heart attack and a stroke at the same time.”

“Poor thing! Poor Joby!”

“Yes, he was in Lausanne doing a conference at the time. It was a shock to him and the boys.”

“Of course it would have been. How did they cope?”

“They all took it hard, as you would expect. But Chris was incredibly supportive to all of them. He acted as a kind of father figure to not just Aidy and Eejay, but also to Joby. Chris did all my accounts, and he started to help Joby as well. Also, Joby’s mum and dad live just down the road. It wasn’t long after that I met Joby. He’s just a slightly older version of the Scottish twink I met in 1995. He’s very sweet and gentle, just like Chris. Aidy is like him as well, and quite shy. Eejay is more confident.”

“Laura, you should be dead proud of our Chris.”

“Oh, I am! He’s become quite an artist on top of everything else. He works for Walker Bros in the town and does silver service in their restaurant. He’s teaching the others to do it.”

“Are Walker Bros anything to do with these Walkers?”

“Yes. Joby’s dad owns the business and runs it with Joby’s sisters.”

“How come Joby doesn’t work there?”

“His dad says he would be useless. Joby is very bright but has not a shred of business about him. He’s good at electric trains, but he couldn’t run the business. Same is true of Aidy and Eejay. However, with Chris it’s a different story. Somehow the business gene seems to have got through to Chris. His granddad set him a challenge to do a fashion show at the end of the summer term. It was really successful, and Chris’s designs

have sold well. Granddad is grooming Chris to take over when Jenny and Sarah retire.”

“They’re keeping it in the family?”

“Yes. Charles Walker is in his early seventies and wants to retire. Jenny and Sarah will take over. When they go, Chris will be ready to take it on.”

“Well, well, you have landed on your feet, and Chris as well. No thanks to our Mum and Dad.”

“Yes, they are the grandparents we are meant to be talking about. Chris was really cut up about that. You put money in, and I did. So did Grandma and Grandad. Chris put little bits in as well. Joby’s mum and dad have offered to make it up to all three of us, as have Mary’s parents. They all have been very sweet about it.”

“It’s not the point,” said Imogen. She was building up pressure to give her parents a good earful in a few hours’ time. “They promised they would look after it. I trusted them. After all they go on all the time about how they are Christians and could be trusted to the end of the Earth.”

“Which at that rate will be sometime on Monday,” Laura replied acidly.

“Without a word to us, they go and give it to that church of theirs. It wasn’t theirs to give. Also, they have not paid a penny into the account.”

“And it’s abusive to Chris as well. They have always done this to him. Whatever they would have spent on him as grandparents would, they have made a big show of giving it away to that bloody charity that church supports.”

“I’ve heard you go on about it.”

“The charity constantly sends begging letters to Chris. They are always going on about some worthy project in the poorest parts of Africa. On top of that, there are the articles from missionaries. These people say

they live a hand-to-mouth existence in prayer but actually look like they live in big houses with mains electricity and running water. They do their missions in Toyota 4-by-4s. The plebs are empowered with goats which end up as cat food for any passing leopard.”

“What does Chris do with them?”

“He swears and throws them in the bin. And Chris hardly ever swears, so it must get to him. But I decided a few years ago to keep them and push them down Dad’s throat when I got the chance, and what’s left, push up Pastor Elsheimer’s fat arse. I rescue them when Chris is not looking. I’ll go and get them.”

A couple of minutes later, Laura returned with a wallet-folder full of the letters. Imogen looked through the things with increasing disgust. She asked, “Why do they do it?”

“They told me. They are embarrassed by what happened at that party and the result. The church elders have given them a lot of stick about it.”

“They need to get over it. That was nearly nineteen years ago. It’s no excuse to behave like that to Chris. He didn’t ask for it. And that performance in expelling us from the church and handing us over to Satan.”

“Shows how loony Devine was. That man was unhinged. Do you remember when he told us to believe that the world was made six thousand years ago?”

Imogen smiled as she remembered Fatso as he quivered with rage. His belly had wobbled like a cartoon jelly. “He cursed us in the name of the Lord before he had us thrown out. He was expecting two she-bears to come round the corner and tear us to pieces. Instead, two tomcats had a fight across the road.”

“And the girl cat they were fighting over came over and purred. Elsheimer’s even worse. If Devine was fatso, Elsheimer is jelly belly.”

“That church is a fraud. They stole our mum and dad. They were fun-loving people. Now they are miserable puritan fundamentalists. Laura, I want our Mum and Dad back.”

“I do as well, Imm. I want Chris to have a grandma and granddad.”

“Well, I am going to get them back, Laura, if it’s the last thing I ever do.”

“You’ve got help from me. More importantly we have Charles Walker on our side. He’s not owner of Walker Bros for nothing. He’s not a typical selfish businessman at all. He is very generous to people in need. But he can be a real bugger to those who treat others badly. At the moment, he’s not got Mum and Dad in his sights; he’s got Elsheimer.”

The two sisters talked fondly of the fun-loving young people that were their parents, who had been changed by religious brainwashing into bitter white English nationalists. Theirs was not a faith inspired by the teachings of Jesus Christ, but a religion inspired by a fundamentalist sect that picked out some of the nastiest verses of the Bible. Its God was an angry and vengeful tyrant, and the preaching concentrated on hell, fire, brimstone and damnation. IECM had its own teaching that was based on Calvinism and narrow nationalistic interests. It taught the virtues of the American way of life combined with a strongly defined pecking order that depended on how many good works were done by church members. The latter was devised on a very literal interpretation of the Parable of the Talents. Each good work counted for Talent Points. Good works included standing on street corners preaching Hell, Fire, and Damnation. Where there were LGBT marches, placards would be held up with the slogan, “God hates fags”. They picketed a hospital when a rape victim sought a termination. They prayed for Christian’s death when he was lying in a coma and picketed his room before they were ejected by the hospital security. They evangelised the streets with leaflets. More points could be awarded if another spiritual scalp could be brought into the church. The greatest number of points could be awarded if large sums of money were

brought in on gift days (of which there were many). In short, it was made to be hard and competitive. There were privileges for those who scored the highest numbers. But they could be lost if future targets were not met. For those at the bottom of the league table, interviews were held with the Pastor and the elders, and targets to improve were set. Failure to meet the targets would lead to expulsion.

The last thing for Laura to do was to show her sister to the front guest room. Laura warned Imogen that the family bathroom had a Jack-and-Jill arrangement with the back guest room. Not that that was a problem, but that there was a third door onto the landing.

“That’s a giant loo there, Laura,” Imogen commented as she saw *The Colossus* for the first time. The apparatus certainly lived up to its name. “I like the cistern as well, *The Cloudburst*.”

“You’ll hear it when it goes,” Laura said, simultaneously activating *The Cloudburst*.

“Thunderclap more like,” replied Imogen as the pipes rang like a quarter-peal.

“The boys are going for a run before breakfast. If you get there first, have a little singsong, or they might burst in on you. If not, they go in there together and they call it bonding. Wait until you hear the fourth flush.”

Laura went into the master bedroom to find Joby sprawled out on top of the bed in his birthday suit.

Imogen managed to get into the bathroom the next morning before the boys got up. But she did hear the bonding process going on through the door, and it lasted twenty minutes or so. After the fourth flush there was a scampering of trainers down the front stairs and the front door closed heavily, reverberating through the house.

When Imogen woke up again, there was the excited chatter of young voices coming from the kitchen and the smell of coffee. The boys

had been for a 5 k and had hardly broken sweat; all still had their tops on. Joby came downstairs, no longer in his birthday suit, but in jeans and a T-shirt. “Another one like that and I’m going on the wagon,” he grumbled as he sat down looking gormless.

“You know what Mum would say,” said Aidy.

“Yes, I know. ‘Eyes like piss-holes in the snow’. She had all the medical expressions.”

“Dad, do something useful like getting that coffee down your neck,” said Aidy. He smiled as he looked at his father’s generally vacant expression that accompanied his hangovers.

After breakfast Joby had the best part of a litre of strong black coffee in him and seemed slightly more in contact with the real world. Mum and Dad were coming up straight after morning service, but he couldn’t remember why, until Imogen and Laura came down. It came back to him about his eldest son being ripped off by some church that sounded completely off the wall.

“You back in the world of the living, Dad?” said Eejay.

“Just. How come you lot are so perky?”

“We didn’t get rat-arsed last night,” said Aidy. “Last time I got rat-arsed, Mum went mad with me.”

“I didn’t get rat-arsed last night, Aidy. I got shit-faced, if you really want to know.”

“Yes, and Mum found you on the bed in your birthday suit.”

“Very good suit it is too. I’ve had it for forty years. It has grown with me and doesn’t shrink or wear out.”

“Well, Dad, you are still a dark horse,” said Aidy.

“Being gay is much easier,” added Eejay as he snuggled up to Jordan.

Chris smiled as he thought of the reaction of the Fatheringham Evangelical Church if they saw Ewan and Jordan. They would have come out with their usual “God hates fags”, a mindless American mantra of homophobic vitriol, which would be funny if it weren’t so nasty. Actually, Ewan and Jordan had a deep friendship that was emotional as well as physical. It was as gentle and deeply affectionate a love as that between a man and a woman. What was wrong with a seventeen-year-old boy and a sixteen-year-old boy pair-bonding like that? Both were incredibly innocent and needed each other to make sense of a lot that was going on. Ewan had a sharp eye for what was truly beautiful and was getting more and more into the spiritual side of Celtic Christianity. And Jordan was following him. If Elsheimer told any of them that they were the Devils’ work, Rob Matheson would wipe the floor with him. And Aunt Imm was going to wipe the floor with Grandma and Granddad.

Imogen waited for Charles and Muriel Walker to come up to Brewster House, and when they were settled, she got out her mobile. Charles and Muriel were looking at the letters that Laura had hoarded. Although they would normally have kept their noses out of what was, after all, none of their business, they could not sit and watch their grandson being manipulated and abused in this way. These people who should have been there for Christian when he needed them had turned their backs on him. If they had left it at that, it would have been a pretty poor show. But they had pretended that they would offer the things that most grandparents would, but they would snatch them away. It was the pits, nothing short of cruel. To justify it in terms of bible verses was a blasphemous abuse of everything that true Christians stood for. Muriel was more down to Earth; she considered it to be fraud.

Imogen pressed her father’s mobile number. It was quarter past eleven and Waldron B Elsheimer would be well into his hour-long sermon, although sermon was a misnomer. It was a tirade of abuse padded out with quotations from the King James Bible, to which the congregation were expected to interject with “alleluia” and “praise the lord” with well-choreographed spontaneity. The whole exercise was more for the purpose

of massaging the ego of the Almighty Lard-pile than a service of worship to the Lord Almighty. For a mobile telephone to ring in these sacred moments would be greeted as the ultimate *faux pas*.

Unfortunately, Brian Salway tended to leave his mobile on in case someone's lavatory or fuse-box needed instant attention.

"Hello, Dad," said Imogen. "I didn't interrupt anything important, did I?"

"What do you think?" grumbled her father. "I have just been put out of the Main Mission. I have just lost ten Talent Points. So, what do you want?"

"An explanation from you now as to why you have helped yourself to the money that Laura, Christian, Mum's folks, and I have put in for his university."

"I didn't think he was bright enough to go to university. He failed his AS levels."

"Shows how much interest you take in your grandson, Dad. Do you know what he's doing this year?"

"He went to some poncy school in Scotland. How long did he last there?"

"He lasted the year and got some of the best results in the school."

"Doesn't say much about the other kids there."

"What do you mean? It's one of the top schools in Scotland. The exams are tougher than AS levels. And he got Grades A across the board, all over 80 %. So don't you dare call our Christian thick. He is doing Advanced Highers this year. What's more, he's head boy. He is going to university next year."

"They must be poncy!"

“Dad, you are trying to get away from the subject. You have not given me an explanation as to why you decided to give Christian’s legacy away. I want to hear it now...”

Brian Salway was not the sharpest knife in the drawer. He had a small business as a self-employed plumber and electrician which just about kept him afloat. He could have made a fortune if he had a more dynamic business model that included trivial things like turning up to his customers’ premises at the appointed time, rather than two hours late, if at all. But Brian had been assured by the church that God would provide for all circumstances as long as he and Brenda kept their Talent Score above the annual target set. So, his attempts to explain about visions of Africans and bible verses were lame to say the least. It was also interrupted by “uh-hu”, “I see” said in a tone of voice that suggested that Imogen did not see, and “yes, carry on”.

“Now Dad, you still haven’t really answered the question,” said Imogen when her father dried up, “but I am going on to the next question. You and Mum promised that you would match what we put in. Why has that not happened?”

The excuses were lame, varying from his van playing up, to a big job for which the customer had not paid. The former was quite untrue; how his decrepit van kept going was a mystery, but it did, held together with wire. There was some truth in the latter. There was total truth when he had been fined for using his mobile while driving. Also, the church had been helping itself to his money, which had increased his overdraft.

“Like the first question, Dad, you have not really answered it, but I don’t think I am going to get much sense out of you on this one. You have always gone on about how God has made your business successful. He seems to have been somewhat off the job recently, hasn’t he? Now how could you transfer the money without telling me and Laura? We have to sign documents. You haven’t forged our signatures, have you?”

“No.”

“How were the bank authorised to do the transfer?”

“I got the church elders to be signatories as well.” Brian Salway could not have made this up; he wasn’t bright enough. “So, they were willing to sign it off on the gift day.”

“You did what?” yelled Imogen. “Do you mean to tell me that you opened up a legacy kept in trust for your grandson to be plundered by elders of that loony church of yours? Do you realise that they have helped themselves to ten grand of it?”

“They can’t have. They are Christians. They wouldn’t do a thing like that, would they?”

“Dad, of course they would. Don’t you realise that Waldron B Elsheimer is running that sect for himself. His main interest is to feather his own nest. You haven’t done that with your other accounts? What about your pension?”

“They know what they are doing. My pension grew by twenty percent in the last five years. God has really blessed them because of all the good works we do at church.”

Imogen was feeling decidedly alarmed. She knew that her dad was a washer short of a full pack, and clearly was the kind of gullible person that sects like that preyed upon. Where she and Laura got their brains from, she never knew. That wasn’t important. The important thing was that the growth of the pension was not due to the beneficence of the Lord Almighty but instead carried all the hallmarks of a Ponzi scheme.

“Dad, now you listen to me!” Imogen shouted. “You get your pension and accounts out of that church now! You are going to be ripped off! You must get it done tomorrow. I am serious about this one. You are prey to Elsheimer and his vultures.”

“We did pray in the church about it, me and the elders.”

“I bet you did. If you go down the pan, we are all in trouble. I wouldn’t be able to support you on my salary.”

“Laura and Christian would have to help.”

“I don’t believe I am hearing this. Do you mean to tell me that if you go down the pan, you expect Laura and Chris to help? You have a bloody cheek. You turned your backs on them so that you could curry favour with Elsheimer and his cronies. You allowed your daughter to be humiliated when they found out she was pregnant. You have abused Chris almost his entire life.”

“They sinned grievously before the Lord and the church.”

“How did Chris sin? He didn’t ask to be born?”

“He was born out of wedlock.”

“Get with it, Dad. So was I. I was born in 1973 and you were married in 1975. I was a bridesmaid. Loads of people are born to unmarried mothers, so get with it, Dad.”

“That kind of sin is an abomination to the Lord.”

“So is not paying your VAT or ripping off your customers by using cheap bits and charging a fortune. You might end up on *Rogue Traders* at this rate. And what about your little bit on the side? Mum knows about it. There’s an old-fashioned word for it, adultery. Remember the commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery?”

“Christian is a poncy fag,” retorted Imogen’s father. “God hates fags. He has ideas above himself.”

“How dare you say that about your grandson? I wish to God you would have more respect. I am going to put you over to Christian’s other granddad. He has one or two things to say to you.”

“Good morning, Mr Salway,” said Charles, “I don’t believe I have had the pleasure of meeting you...”

There were a good number of things that Charles Walker had to say to Brian Salway. Credit must be given where it is due. Brian Salway did not put down the phone. Often, he did not reply to messages left by

exasperated customers or potential customers. However there seemed to be an authority to this rather refined but irate Scotsman. It was more immediate and clear than “the words of knowledge” that formed a well-rehearsed part of the Main Mission. It certainly would not have been worth his while to have even considered terminating the call. The conversation was rather one way. His treatment of his daughter and grandson was an abusive parody of biblical teaching. There was nothing godly in withholding birthday and Christmas gifts to a child and donating them to charity instead. Ponce was not an appropriate word to describe his grandson who had shown incredible grace given the circumstances, and that as for maturity, Christian was showing rather more than his maternal grandfather.

“I am doing this to challenge you, Mr Salway,” continued Mr Walker.

“Why is it any of your business?” asked Mr Salway petulantly.

“Good question. Because it involves my grandson as well as yours.”

“What do you mean, your grandson?”

“Christian is my grandson. My son is his father. My son is also marrying your daughter. You have been invited to the wedding, although I do wonder if it would be wise for you to attend given the deep rancour you feel towards your daughter and her son.”

“I need to talk to the elders. They decided that my daughter was a fallen woman and should be expelled from the church. You are Satan and are trying to attack our church.”

“You can do better than that. I have been called many things, but Satan is not one of them. If you really want to know, both my wife and I go to church every Sunday. We are Christians and do not want to attack a church. What we are standing against is cruel bigotry that is causing a teenager, his mother, and his aunt, great distress. They are your daughters.

As for those letters you sent to Christian, and the charity begging letters, they are to stop.”

“What do you mean? I want him to give money to those who are less fortunate than him.”

“Do you know how much the recipients get from Africa Evangelical Support International?”

“How should I know? I do the giving through the church.”

“Well, let me tell you. About 10 % actually arrives for those whom the charity claims to support. A lot, 25 %, goes to provide the missionaries with all their perks. The locals are starving, but the missionaries are certainly not. Some are positively obese. And how much goes on those Toyota four-by-fours? A lot, 20 %, goes on admin. And the rest, 45 %, goes to IECM.”

“Who are IECM when they are at home?”

“International Evangelical Church Ministries Inc. They are an American private company. They own your church and Waldron B Elsheimer, your pastor, is the UK director.”

“You’re making this up, Mr Walker.”

“No, Mr Salway, I am not. I have the figures in front of me. Africa Evangelical Support International is on a blacklist provided by the Scottish Episcopalian Church. Besides I am not bright enough to make up these figures myself. I am passing the begging letters to my solicitors tomorrow to have an injunction placed on Africa Evangelical Support International to restrain them from contacting my grandson. I shall also be discussing about your unauthorised handover of Christian’s legacy to the Fotheringham Evangelical Church. To me as a businessman, it is fraud.”

“You can’t do that. I’ll tell the Pastor and the elders. The church has got very good solicitors, you know.”

“So, do I. I have a business with a turnover of ten million pounds a year. Your company asset is a mobile phone and a knackered old van, with a shrinking customer base. My solicitors do all my legal work. They charge a fortune but are very good.”

“Bully for you. Our church will fast and pray.”

“Just like your church did for the Lord to kill Christian as an unborn baby, or when he was lying in intensive care last year. Thank God that God did not even listen to their prayers. They were to get rid of an embarrassment to you and your church. What you all need to do is to get down on your knees and pray for forgiveness and repent of all these evil thoughts. Christian is a real blessing to my family, and he could be to yours, if you let him.”

“God hates fags!”

“So, you keep on saying. Hitler hated Jews, and we saw what happened there.”

“It was all exaggerated,” retorted Mr Salway. It was a firm tenet of IECM that the Holocaust was exaggerated by communists with an agenda. It had formed the principal part of a sermon preached by Pastor Elsheimer about four weeks before. “Why are you persecuting me like this, Mr Walker?”

“I do not want to persecute you. I want to challenge you for your sake to turn away from the misguided bigotry that has pulled you down these last eighteen years. I want you to start thinking about how you can be reconciled to your daughter and your grandson. You have war in your heart and it’s destroying you. You wanted to destroy Laura and Christian. If you want to be reconciled, we want to be reconciled too. If you don’t, you will have no further contact with Laura or Christian. My family went through a devastating time when my daughter-in-law died. My son and my other two grandsons went through a terrible time. Laura and Christian have been a great support to us all. They are my family, and I will not

tolerate anything that will cause upset to any of my family. Do I make myself clear?”

“I’ll have to talk to the elders.”

“No, Mr Salway. Use your brain instead. And by the way, to help you get over it, my youngest grandson is sixteen. He is openly gay and has a boyfriend who is seventeen. I love them both anyway, as I love the rest of my family.”

“God hates fags! They are both spawn of Satan!”

“Yes, you have said that several times over. Now you listen to me. Christian is exactly like his mother, gentle, affectionate, kind, and tender. These are not words I would associate with Satan. Christian is one of my employees as well as being my grandson. I didn’t know about his relationship to me when I took him on. I took him on because he was damned good at the job, and my customers tell me again and again how professional he is. He also took up a management challenge I set him to organise a fashion show. He is a first-rate designer of clothing. He is a good photographer and does the fashion-shoots for my website. He is interested in my company, and I can see him taking over when my daughters retire. I am proud that he is my grandson. So should you!”

“Clothes designer? He should get a proper job. They are all gay in the fashion industry. I bet he wears women’s clothing. It’s a sign of homosexuals to wear a kilt. That’s church teaching you know.”

“Mr Salway, you are, sir, crude and ignorant. You come up here and tell us that all those who wear kilts are gay. I wouldn’t guarantee that you would leave with a full set of teeth. By the way, I wear a kilt, and I am a father of three. My son wears a kilt, and he is a father of three, too. And all three of my grandsons wear kilts.”

“I want to talk to Imogen!”

“Of course, but before I go, this behaviour towards my future daughter in law and my grandson is to stop. It is defamatory, and if it does

not stop, I shall be issuing writs through my solicitor for slander. Do you understand? Now, shall I pass you back to your daughter?"

"Well, Dad, do you get the picture?"

"Who's that Jock? A real old Scots geezer, isn't he? Where are you?"

"I am in Corscadden, at Joby and Laura's house."

"Bloody hell! That's a drive."

"Yes, Dad. I was invited to Chris's eighteenth, but didn't go because it was so far. But as soon as I heard what you had done, I had to get in the car. By the way, Chris and Aidan have birthdays almost on the same day, so they share it. In the family, they are called 'The Twins' and they are very close, like brothers rather than just friends. Of course, they are half-brothers. You and Mum tried to ruin their day. I'll tell you now; you didn't succeed. This is one of the nicest families you will ever meet. What Mr Walker has said to you, he means. And I mean it too. Dad, you and Mum were such fun until you ended up going to that church. They have crucified you and I am not exaggerating. Start to use your brain a bit, for God's Sake! I'll give you a ring next week."

"Imogen, the church will forbid that wedding to happen. The elders will come up when the banns are read and say that Laura and Joby are living in sin and have given birth in sin. They should be stoned."

"Dad, you cannot do that. Banns are not read in Scotland."

"I will tell the elders. We will picket the wedding."

"I can't believe that I am hearing this!" Imogen yelled. "You do that, and I will have nothing more to do with you. I will be warning Mr Walker. Bye."

There was a brief angry squawk before it got cut off. Imogen plugged the handset in to recharge.

“Charles,” said Imogen, “Dad is threatening to picket the wedding.”

“I thought he might,” Charles sighed.

Charles Walker, who had been pacing around the room while on the phone, sat down on the sofa next to Muriel, and said, “Joby and Laura, he will come round. Muriel and I are both praying that this will happen. There is a brain there, but it has been addled by the poison that he has picked up since he has been at that church. However, it’s not going to be straight-forward. Brian and Brenda will not be getting into their van tonight and coming up here tomorrow. We need to give them time. But I must warn everyone that Elsheimer and his cronies may well try to disrupt the wedding. I will discuss it with Derek tomorrow. I have heard enough to say that there is enough evidence for an interdict. Imogen, when are you going home?”

“Tonight.”

“Could you stay until tomorrow, so that you can state what your father said? It will be a great help to us all.”

“Of course. I want my Mum and Dad back,” Imogen replied.

“Imogen, you will get them back. God will give them back to you and Laura with a considerable amount of accrued interest. You will have the fun with them that you did when you were little, plus more. But it will take time; they need a lot of deprogramming, a kind of religious detox. We are very lucky that Rob Matheson, the minister of our church, has considerable experience of it.”

The next morning Charles Walker took Imogen and Laura to see Derek at Gordon Morton Solicitors. Derek Yeoman was the senior partner and had known Charles Walker from when they were in the same form at Corscadden Grammar School. It was a routine monthly meeting to check out any legal issues that might arise in the running of a large

independent department store, a kind of legal check-up. The big boys had their own legal departments to oversee the legal needs. Walker Bros could never justify it, so they had a long-standing relationship with Gordon Morton Solicitors whose office was just across the road. After the introductions, Charles handed over all the letters that Laura had collected. Derek pored over them. He said, “At the risk of stating the obvious, there are three observations. The first is emotional abuse towards Christian. The second thing is that there is fraud going on. That church is helping itself to charitable donations. The third thing from what you tell me is that the church has a clear conflict of interests by acting as a signatory to an account from which it takes donations.”

“On top of that,” said Imogen, “my dad threatened that the church elders would picket Joby’s and Laura’s wedding. I don’t want the day ruined. On Saturday, Christian, my nephew, was having his eighteenth. That letter I showed you spoiled it for him.”

“That’s easily sorted out. I will issue an interdict through the Sheriff Court that neither any representative of the Fotheringham Evangelical Church, nor International Evangelical Church Ministries Inc. should come within fifteen kilometres of Corscadden on Saturday 27th September 2014. I will get that sorted this afternoon.”

“What about Christian’s legacy?”

“I will pass all this to the Lord Advocate this morning and I hope to have something together for the afternoon. If, as you suspect, your father’s pension has been put into a Ponzi scheme, it is clearly a police matter, which needs to be dealt with as a matter of urgency.”

Derek Yeoman was a practitioner who got things done. An interim interdict was obtained at Buchanan Sheriff Court to restrain all members of the International Evangelical Church Ministries from travelling within fifteen kilometres of Corscadden Town Centre on Saturday, 27th September 2014. Any breach of the interdict would be a

criminal offence that could lead on conviction, to unlimited fines or twelve months' imprisonment or both such penalties.

An indefinite interdict was obtained on Africa Evangelical Support International to restrain the said charity from communicating in any way with Christian Dominic Hayward Salway. Any attempt would be treated as a breach with penalties at Scottish Law.

The Lord Advocate's Office contacted Mr Yeoman in the afternoon to confirm that there was *prima facie* evidence of fraud. The case had been referred to a police expert on fraud, Assistant Chief Constable Richard John Smithells of the Middle Riding of Yorkshire Constabulary.

Chapter 6

Tuesday 2nd September 2014

When Pastor Elsheimer was in his office at the Fatheringham Evangelical Church, he only admitted the most trusted of his elders. He had meetings with them at times suitable for him, not them. Therefore, they had to take time out of work, which irritated their employers. Certainly, he didn't want anything to do with the flock, which he regarded as having little more brain than sheep. Additionally, he did not want them to know that his real lifestyle was much more complex than the simple puritanism that he preached.

On a Tuesday morning, it was unlikely he would be disturbed, so he would get down to work with the computer, shifting large amounts of the church's money to various worthy destinations. On this particular Tuesday the first transaction was to himself, while the second was to Africa Evangelical Support International. Both seemed to work as expected, but after a few minutes the accounts seemed to freeze. A message came up that all activity on the IECM accounts was suspended. Elsheimer rang the bank. It took him several attempts to get through to the right department. It took him further attempts to remember his password and the answers to his security questions. It was typical of these little people in the UK. Elsheimer was not particularly enamoured with the British Isles with its rotten weather, small cars, use of the metric system, and their insistence on paying taxes on money that he felt was rightly his. "Render unto Caesar" was for the simpletons in his flock.

In reality, Elsheimer paid very little tax. Most of his money was squirreled away in tax havens.

By the time he had finished with the bank, Elsheimer was in a thoroughly bad temper, which was not improved by the sound of the doorbell, and a heavy knocking on the pastor's door. Through the glass, Elsheimer saw two large men who looked if they meant business.

"Waldron Brain Elsheimer?" said the first one. "Are you the pastor of the Fatheringham Evangelical Church?"

“What if I am? Who are you?”

“We are asking the questions, sir. Are you the UK President of the International Evangelical Church Ministries?”

“What if I am? You’re foreign, not English, are you?” Elsheimer had never heard Scottish accents before.

“No more foreign than you are. We’re from Scotland.”

“I am originally from Scotland,” Elsheimer replied quite falsely. “My great granddad was McTaggart MacElsheimer from Nabo on the South Coast.”

“Nae such place, Mr Elsheimer...”

“Dr Elsheimer to you.”

“You are American. With a name like that, your family is from Hungary or somewhere like that. Besides we don’t have a South Coast. We have a border which we have crossed to give you this in person. We are from the Sheriff Court in Buchanan, and we are here to serve you with an interdict. You need to brush up on your geography.”

This stung Elsheimer whose knowledge of world geography was limited. He had never heard of Mumbai where all the call centres seemed to be. When he was told it was originally called Bombay, he thought that it was the business part of a B-52 bomber. Once, when he had seen an old Austin car, he thought that it was made in the eponymous city in Texas and was perplexed that an American car company was producing vehicles so small. All Americans had Scottish and Irish ancestry. The mention of the word ‘Hungary’ made him immediately think of food. And he told them, “Just wait there a minute. I guess I need to fix myself a steak and French fries.”

Leaving them at the pastor’s door, he rang his favourite fast-food outlet in Fotheringham. He wondered who Buchanan was. Was he into Dick? The banging on the door resumed, heavier than before. Elsheimer went back to the door and the big men did not look that pleased.

“We are waiting to serve this on you,” said the big man who had a large envelope.

“This is an abomination before the Lord. You have come to me with something about Buchanan being into Dick. It’s fornication and an abomination before the Lord. I refuse to take it.” With that, Elsheimer slammed and bolted the door in their faces. The two court officials had seen this before, so were not in the least bit fazed.

“Mr Elsheimer, you need to accept this. If you don’t, you are committing contempt of court. The maximum penalty is an unlimited fine and up to two years imprisonment. If you continue to refuse to accept this document, we will call for police back up. They will break down the door and hold you while the interdict is served.”

“I have an order for you!” shouted Elsheimer. “Get the fuck out of here!”

“That’s a mouthful from a man of the cloth. We will call the police.”

Ten minutes later, three policemen arrived at the church, and made a big show of getting out “the big red key”. They gave Elsheimer one last chance to open the door. The big red key did its job almost immediately and the three constables raced up the stairs to Elsheimer’s office, to which the red key immediately gained access.

“Who’s going to pay for the damage?” Elsheimer demanded angrily.

“You are,” replied the court official. “You chose to refuse to accept the document. You now have one last chance. If you refuse to accept the interdict, you will be in contempt of court. These constables will arrest you and hand you over to Police Scotland who will charge you. So, it’s your choice. The easiest choice will be to open and read the contents of the document.”

“But it has Buchanan into Dick. It sounds like an abomination before the Lord.”

“Are you stupid, Mr Elsheimer? Do you think it’s pornography? Do you have a dirty mind? For your information, this envelope contains an important legal document issued by the Sheriff Court, based in Buchanan, in the Region of Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil. It is an interdict, known as an injunction south of the Border. You must read it now and comply with the interdict.”

Reluctantly Elsheimer opened the envelope and took out two legal documents. The first read:

Interdiction taken out by Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service on behalf of Charles Edward Walker, Laurieston Villa, 12 Priestfield Place, Coruscadden, in the Region of Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil, CD2 5AL

This interdict was issued by Buchanan Sheriff Court, High Street, Buchanan, CD6 4EW today Monday 1st September 2014 against Dr Waldron Brain Elsheimer and all members and employees of International Evangelical Church Ministries Inc. at the UK office of the said organisation, Fatheringham Evangelical Church, The Tabernacle, Melton Lane Industrial Estate, Fatheringham FM1 3XP.

Take notice that:

Evidence has this day been submitted to this court that you intend to picket the wedding of Joseph Oliver Baxter Walker and Laura Mary Hayward Salway on Saturday 27th September 2014. The evidence has been considered to be credible, and this interdict has been issued to prevent distress to wedding guests, an obstruction to traffic in Coruscadden town centre and a breach of the peace.

1. *The named person and all associated in any way with the above-named person and organisation is required to refrain from such action.*
2. *The named person and all associated in any way with the above-named person and organisation are barred from entering an area of radius fifteen (15) kilometres from the town centre of*

Corscadden in the Region of Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil on Saturday 27th September 2014.

3. *The named persons and all associated in any way with the above-named person and organisation are barred from entering an area of radius fifteen (15) kilometres from the town centre of Buchanan in the Region of Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil on Saturday 27th September 2014.*
4. *This interdict shall apply from 00.00 to 23.59 on Saturday 27th September 2014.*

Be warned that failure to comply with this interdict is a criminal offence under the Protection of Abuse Act (Scotland) 2001 and the Contempt of Court Act 1981. Penalties on conviction are an unlimited fine and/or imprisonment not exceeding two years.

After that a second document was served on the Pastor. It had a different letterhead and writing style. It was from Gordon Morton Solicitors and read:

Dear Dr Elsheimer

We are representing our client, Christian Dominic Hayward Salway of Brenster House, 25 Priestfield Avenue, Corscadden, in the Region of Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil CD2 5AK. Our client is the intended beneficiary of a legacy fund set up by the Salway Family.

A sum of money £25343 (Twenty-Five Thousand Three Hundred and Forty-Three Pounds) was donated to your church by Mr B Salway. This represented the entire balance of the account. At least two of the authorised signatories are required to sign to authorise the transfer. Mr Salway is one of the signatories. Neither of the other signatories, Miss I J Salway nor Miss L M H Salway, ever signed for the transfer.

We are also particularly concerned that the Fatheringham Evangelical Church has pressed Mr Salway into allowing access to his private accounts. We understand that this is a practice that is strongly promoted by the church and that many other church members have been encouraged strongly to allow the same access.

We must state that as a beneficiary of charitable donations, the church has a clear conflict of interests and that this is not permissible under the laws that govern charitable giving.

We are in no doubt that you and your church elders have misunderstood the legal basis of this practice. We are warning you that it must cease forthwith, otherwise criminal charges could result.

We also demand immediate repayment of £25343 (Twenty-Five Thousand Three Hundred and Forty-Three Pounds). Our fee and disbursements amount to £3562, which will be added to the sum of money payable. Therefore, the total sum payable is £28905 (Twenty-eight thousand nine hundred and five pounds). This sum will be deposited by bank transfer at our office within fourteen days of receipt of this notice. Failure to deposit the whole amount will result in legal action being taken to recover the sum and our fees.

This letter is without prejudice to any other investigation that may occur into the donation practices carried out by the Fotheringham Evangelical Church.

We would be grateful to you if you would give this matter your immediate and urgent attention.

Yours sincerely

D Yeoman

Senior Partner

“Sign here please,” said the court official. And Elsheimer reluctantly signed there. At once he called his elders in for an emergency meeting.

Elsheimer was beside himself. Even a steak and chips didn’t calm him down. While stress puts many off their food, with Elsheimer it made him gobble his meal in double quick time, and it didn’t satisfy him. While most of the elders were retired men (there were no women as Elsheimer

used verses from St Paul's letters to justify his misogyny) others had to borrow time off work yet again. When they arrived at the pastor's office door, they immediately thought that there had been a break-in.

"No, it was the goddamn coppers," said Elsheimer grumpily.

"Coppers?" said the Treasurer. "The world's going mad. Did they nick anything?"

"Come on, into the vestry. Move it!" said Elsheimer. Good manners were not his strong point, and he tended to look down on these elderly British simpletons, all of whom did his leg-work and dirty work. "Sit down and listen to me. I had a visit from the Sheriff Court. A couple of Jocks have served me with this goddamn pile of trash. Read it."

Elsheimer threw the documents onto the table, before continuing, "Pastor Devine expelled a fallen woman eighteen years ago for fornication and her sister for abetting licentious behaviour. We committed these whores to Satan and prayed for the death of the son of the whore. The little bastard, the spawn of Satan survived. He's grandson of Member Salway. How dare the little whore name the son-of-a-bitch 'Christian'? Member Salway donated twenty-five k on our gift day for Africa. Now these Scots sons-of-bitches want the money back.

"And the Salway whore is marrying the fornicator who made her sin. In a church as well! That's what Member Salway told me. I told Member Salway that we would stop the wedding since Satan is using it to attack the church. Now we have got this goddamn thing from the Sheriff Court in Buchanan stopping us going within 15 kilometres of Corscadden and Buchanan on the wedding day. What's wrong with miles?"

Elsheimer went out and fixed himself a large coffee and a plate of cookies. It never occurred to him that it would be a kind gesture to offer his elders some.

Mr Garton, the Treasurer sighed. He did not like the pastor. He was so unnecessarily crude; more than crude, his mouth was like a sewer. He remembered the old days when Pastor Jack Thompson ran things.

There was Conall Devine, not a nice man, but preferable to this obnoxious oaf. After this American outfit took over, they commercialised everything. Unlike in other independent churches, where they could hire and fire a pastor almost at will, this oaf had been imposed on them. And this oaf revelled in his macho-management, spoken in a drawling Texan that made him almost unintelligible. Garton wondered why he did this job; that God wanted him to seemed to be wearing rather thin.

“Why have you called us in, Your Reverence?” Garton asked. Elsheimer expected that form of address from all his church members.

“Can’t you see, you dummies, that Satan is attacking our church. *Brethren, be sober, be vigilant. Your adversary the Devil roareth like a lion seeking whomsoever to devour. Be steadfast in the faith.* We must stand up to this. We go to Corscadden on the 27th, eh, and do this son-of-a-bitch over?”

“Are you asking us to breach a court order? I don’t want a criminal record.”

“Listen, bonehead, you are going to be a martyr, one of God’s elect. You will get life after death. Listen asshole, *And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.* If you refuse to come, you will be expelled as unbelievers. *So likewise, whosoever he of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.* We will stop that unholy union of the fornicators.

“Elder Lockley, you will organise a week of prayer and fasting. Elder Garton, you arrange a gift day to raise money for our crusade. Elder Crompton, you are to ensure that Members Salway are both expelled as unbelievers. That will happen at the Main Mission on 28th September. What are you sitting about for, you assholes? Get up and we will go and kick Satan’s ass. Pantywaist will not know what has hit him. *But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*

“Let us now pray against Corscadden in general and the fornicators in particular. O God who didst bring down fire and brimstone on the wicked of Sodom and Gomorrah, we thy humble servants do beseech thee that thou wouldst bring fire and brimstone on the wicked people of Corscadden, that nest of vipers, and thou wouldst strike dead with thine all-consuming fire that spawn of Satan, the grandson of Member Salway. Thou wouldst cut him off and hurl him into the lake of ever-burning fire...”

Four hundred and fifty kilometres to the north fire and brimstone did come to Corscadden in the form of a brief hail shower. Not that anyone realised that it was fire and brimstone. It was a shower typical of the kind that came in late summer, intensified by atmospheric turbulence and the high ground. Christian Salway and Ewan Walker had been on duty at lunchtime with other prefects of Strathcadden Academy. If the bolt of lightning had been intended for Christian Salway, the Lord God had fired a pretty lousy shot; it struck Barrock Hill some eight kilometres to the north. Christian and Ewan were sheltering under the awning of the athletics pavilion. The flash made Ewan jump a bit, but the peal of thunder was not in the least bit loud.

An unwelcome sense of anxiety intruded into Christian’s mind. He didn’t know where it had come from, or why. He was doing well so far. Mr Mitchell was very pleased with the seriousness with which he and Gemma undertook their duties. He was sitting next to Eejay and had become very close to him. Caddies did not know yet that actually Eejay was his half-brother. Ewan had kind words for everyone. Eejay made it cool to be spiritual, not in any religious sense, but to have a deep love of music, nature and poetry inspired by his interest in Celtic Christianity. It was rubbing off onto Chris and starting to influence his art. He mentioned his anxiety to Eejay.

“Eejay, that church Mum’s folks go to. They really hate me. What have I done?”

“Chris, you haven’t done anything. You didn’t ask for it. Dad was the naughty boy, if anyone. Our Mum and he were kids.”

“I wouldn’t know how to do that sort of thing.”

“Dad didn’t. Mum had to get it done medically when I was conceived.”

“Aunt Imm said that the church was threatening to picket Mum and Dad’s wedding.”

“Granddad was seeing his solicitor. They wouldn’t dare.”

“Why do they keep on about me being born in sin? I want to believe, but I don’t want anything to do with a church if it’s like that.”

“Chris, you know our church isn’t like that. Mr Matheson wouldn’t have it. You need to see Mr McEwan. He’s good at God, much better than me.” Eejay looked at him with his gentle smile and said, “You’re really loved here. This is your home. Look at it and be thankful.”

A thought came unbidden, *Leave all your worries with him, because he cares for you.*

As quickly as it came, the shower went, and Ewan and Christian carried on their walk. Some Secondary Three boys were now playing with a toy helicopter and flew it round the two prefects as they walked along. One of the boys rushed up like an excited puppy and showed the two older boys what stunts he could do with his tiny machine.

They certainly were not a brood of vipers, nor did the two gentle young men from Secondary Six seem to be the spawn of the Devil. Nor were there twenty thousand pillars of salt, just some small hailstones melting in the bright September sunshine. The A 825 road was as busy as normal. It was a very ordinary Tuesday lunchtime.

As Ewan and Christian were walking towards the Sports Department, Mr Drummond, the Head of PE came up to them and said, “Salway, laddie, I have a favour to ask of you. The First Fifteen Squad are

so unfit. Can they join the running squad tomorrow? Just some short runs. I'll follow up, but you know what I am like, waddling like a fat rabbit."

"Of course, sir. We meet outside The Wests. I'll give them a couple of laps of the grounds which will give them a 2k."

"Good lad."

Ewan and Christian walked on meeting up with Jamie Mills, and Jade Talbot, two other prefects. Everything was in order, as it was on most days at Strathcadden Academy. Christian mused on the idea that, this year in Secondary Six, there were many more boys than girls. Ewan would like that, of course; there were lots of gorgeous boys. The same was true in Secondary Four. Dr Moore, the Head of Biology had a theory that the people of Corscadden were like alligators. If the weather was warm, more boy alligators than girl alligators would hatch. The summers of 1996 and 1998 had been warm, so more boys were born.

Chris said to Eejay, "I'm missing Aidy at the moment. I would love to be with him in Edinburgh at the Festival."

"He's got that assignment to do for when he starts," said Eejay. "Let's Skype him tonight. I worry about him too. I've got you to look out for, Chris. You are so like him."

Ewan had always looked out for his older brother. Although eighteen months older than Ewan, Aidan was a rather shy and serious boy and lacked confidence on his own. Aidan was a very talented musician, and highly intelligent, but easily scared. Much of that had also become apparent in Christian: with good reason. He had spent the first seventeen years of his life in a foul place where the people were ignorant and wallowed in their pig-ignorance like pigs in mud. They had bullied him, beaten him up, and even tried to kill him: all because Chris was a gentle and intelligent person. Ewan was attracted to Chris almost as much as he was to Jordan, with his long blond hair and slightly girlish face and manner. Given his past, it was not a surprise that Christian was quite a thoughtful

young man who took everything he did seriously and did his best to ensure he did a good job. Ewan had heard more and more about the Fatheringham Evangelical Church and had concluded that if that was what religion was about, it was little wonder that most young people in Scotland were declaring themselves as atheists. Chris was interested in the Celtic style of Christianity where the cathedrals were to be found in the woods, and the high altar was up on an outcrop of rock on Corr Hill. Chris needed the vitriol of a demented American Pastor like a bullet through the head.

Elder Garton had not been to The Tabernacle for quite a while. He had not been well. The result of this was that there were a good number of bills awaiting payment, some of which had reminders and final demands. The rent for The Tabernacle had not been paid for the June Quarter Day, and the September Quarter Day was coming up. It would be an understatement that the landlord was getting a bit niggly. Another couple of gift days and they would be able to buy the place for themselves, and the landlord could take a running jump. There was also the small matter of getting the doors mended before some hoodlums from the surrounding area reduced The Tabernacle to ash. Garton could hear the Pastor upstairs on the phone yelling and swearing. To try to take his mind off things, he got out the church cheque book. He was old-fashioned and did not do any banking online. Fortunately, all the cheques had been pre-signed by Elsheimer, so he would not have to go up to the bloody man's office and risk a tirade of abuse. If this man was God's ambassador, God was surely a cosmic tyrant of the nastiest kind. Doing God's will was becoming a bigger pain in the arse by the minute.

The joiners came to fix the doors. They would need to take the outside door away to the workshop and screw a piece of heavy-duty plywood over the gap. No, they could not say when the job would be finished. It was a bespoke door, and new pieces would need to be made. The door to the Pastor's office would need to come off. They did not like being called goddamn fartknockers, and they would have expected better from a pastor. If he continued to behave like that, they would go away,

leaving the outside door as it was, but would charge for the call-out. Eventually the outside door was taken off its hinges and the space was boarded over. The Pastor would have to use the main door as everyone else did.

Something was scratching away in what passed for Elder Garton's conscience. He felt quite pleased that the Pastor was going to have to use the Pleb door. How would he cope, being so far up his own fat arse as he was? Elsheimer had never been pleasant, but it seemed that he was getting ever more arrogant by the day. Somehow the IECM version of Christ's teachings didn't seem to tally with those that Garton remembered receiving as a child. The Jesus of IECM was almost as pharisaic as the priests and the teachers of the law. He certainly wasn't the Jesus that allowed the little children to come to him that Garton recollected from Sunday school. This Jesus was a fat-cat banker that was utterly obsessed with the bottom line.

Garton remembered that in March Elsheimer had got in a man to explain a new way of growing money, and that the entire congregation needed to be involved. Like Elsheimer, he was overweight and shaven headed. He couldn't recall his name: Scott perhaps? Anyway, this man was also insufferably rude and spent much of his presentation insulting his audience and using business buzz-terms that Garton had never heard of. Elsheimer seemed really enthusiastic. It was the only time that he had seen the Pastor happy. So, it must have been good. So Garton had joined the other elders in persuading almost all the congregation to allow the church access into their bank accounts. It certainly made gift days easier. But somehow it didn't seem right for the church to help itself to people's money at a whim. It occurred to him that if it all went tits up, he might have to do some explaining. It didn't bear thinking about. God favoured the church, didn't he? That's what the Pastor said, and he was a Doctor of Theo-whatever-it-was. Therefore, he was good at God. Getting back to the allotment was far more attractive.

By the end of the afternoon, Elder Garton had a fistful of envelopes, all of which needed a stamp for posting. Guess who was going to have to pay for the postage.

Imogen Salway was at home in her picture-postcard cottage in Clinton Muncey. She was checking her e-mails on her PC when the phone on her desk rang.

“Imm, it’s Dad. I need to chat to you.”

This was unusual. Normally Imogen rang her parents once a week. “What’s up, Dad?” she asked.

“I have been talking this over with Mum and I am scared. I couldn’t sleep last night. I mentioned the wedding to J-Eli Bellis and he’s going to do something. I feel so guilty. I didn’t mean to do this to Laura.”

It was the first time that Imogen had heard her father refer to Elsheimer with that pejorative moniker (derived from Jelly Belly) which was widely used in the community in Fatheringham. Dad had always referred to the pastor as Dr Elsheimer. “What’s going on?” she asked.

“Jim Crompton came to see me this afternoon. J-Eli is taking the Elders to picket Laura’s wedding. The following day, he’s going to throw Mum and me out of the church.”

“Well don’t go.”

“They will come to our house and picket us and hand us over to Satan. The last time they did that, they did it to Megan Foster; she was dead within the week. Imm, I’m scared.”

“Dad, Fatso did that to us after Chris was born. We’re still alive. Two she-bears were meant to come to tear us to pieces. Instead, two tom-cats had a fight, while the girl cat came over and allowed us to stroke her. J-Eli is all fart and no substance.”

“Imm, they will clean me out. They have already raided my bank account, and they will take my pension. You know I put it in when that man Scott came.”

“Dad, listen to me. Firstly, you close your bank account and open a new one. Yes, I know it’s a pain with all the direct debits and so on. The bank will sort it out though. Stop those vultures getting at your money anymore. Have they got hold of Mum’s savings?”

“No. They have been leaning on her to allow them access. Your grandma and granddad have told her not to give in.”

“Thank God someone has some sense. If Tom Garton comes round again to lean on you, tell him to take a running jump.”

“But I don’t want to be expelled from the church.”

“Look, Dad, it won’t be the end of the world if you are. Elsheimer is a fraud. Don’t you see that? He is helping himself to his congregation’s money.”

“How do you know?”

“When you and mum signed over Chris’ legacy to that charity, they acknowledged 15 grand. His legacy was 25 grand. That means that 10 grand has gone AWOL. Who do you think has had his grubby little paws on it? J-Eli of course.”

“He can’t have. He’s a pastor. That would be unchristian.”

“Of course it is. He is no more a Christian than Josef Stalin. He’s in it for himself. What do you know about IECM?”

“Who are IECM?”

“The outfit that owns your church.”

“I thought we did. We were always independent. When Devine left, we chose Elsheimer because he could get us new premises.”

“No, he chose you because it was an easy touch.”

“How do you know this?”

“I found it out. Look Dad, you and Mum should not darken the doors of that place again. You have been brainwashed, and you need a religious detox.”

“You sound like what those Jocks said.”

“Yes, because they’re right. Dad, they are on your side. If Elsheimer and his mates go up to Corscadden, they will be arrested. There is an injunction on them, and they will be arrested for contempt of court.”

“Imm, Mum and I want to come to the wedding.”

“Dad, it’s best you stay away. Chris won’t be that pleased to see you. Also, Elsheimer and his mates will see you as well and will give you all sorts of grief. We will film it and show you it afterwards.”

“We’ve messed up good and proper with Chris. He must hate us.”

“You’re right there, Dad. But Chris wants you back as his grandad and grandma. And we want you back as our dad and mum. The first thing you need to do is get away from Jelly Belly.”

“Imm, I’m scared. We were both terrified of Devine. It’s even worse with Elsheimer.”

“Dad, do you remember how you used to look out for me and Laura? You checked for monsters under the bed. You told me that Martyn was a loser when he dumped me. You were such fun until you caught religion. You were a good tradesman once, not a rogue trader. What happened? Why?”

“It happened when my Mum and Dad died. I was scared and I have been scared since. Jack Thompson helped. Conall Devine did, but he was quite scary, especially when Mum threatened to leave me. He put the fear of God up me and Mum. J-Eli is even worse. I know my work has gone down the pan, as I have been trying to get more for the church.”

With that Brian Salway started to cry.

“Dad,” said Imogen, “I have a lot of leave owing to me. I want you and Mum to come down here, to start to get a life again. There is life before death. You and Mum have only one life. It’s for living. Don’t come in that knackered old van of yours. Get the train to Stoke Porges. I am looking at the timetable now. The 11.00 train from Fotheringham gets into Stoke Porges at 15.30...”

At Strathcadden Academy, Christian Salway had had his evening meal in the canteen with other distant Caddies. He had enjoyed the conversations with his friends, but there were still things that were nagging at him. He wanted the wedding between Mum and Dad to go well without the disruption from those bigots from the south. Why did Mum’s folks (he wanted to call them Grandma and Granddad) hate him so much? Aunt Imm and Mum had told him that they weren’t very bright and had been brainwashed by that fundamentalist American Pastor who looked if he belonged in Sowerland with political views to match. If that was what God, whom they went on about all the time, was about, they could keep it. That god was no better than a cosmic version of Henry Cowan. That god was so different to the one that many young people talked about on a Sunday evening in St Columba’s Church. Corscadden had bucked the trend of much of Scotland in that there was a greater spiritual awareness among young people than in other places. There was a blend of Celtic Christianity with New Age and other alternative beliefs which had arrived when the Hippies came. On the whole it was very harmonious, so it seemed. And the blend gave Corscadden its very harmonious and tolerant atmosphere.

Christian needed help to make sense of it all. If the Christian God was really like the one that Aidy and Eejay talked about, Christian really wanted to be on side. But if God was a cosmic Henry Cowan, or the Fascist as preached by Pastor Else-whatever his-name-was, Chris would go back to being a humanist. It was something that he was, at least, comfortable with. He really needed to talk it over with Mr McEwan. After all, Eejay had said that Mr McEwan was good at God. And, by a stroke

of good fortune, Mr McEwan had no meetings or other duties, so could see Christian immediately. Mrs McEwan and Jake came through as well. For Jake, this meant lots of cuddles and attention and he rested his head on Christian's kilt.

Christian started off, "I am really worried, Mr McEwan, and I need your help and advice. There are two things. Both are related. Why do my grandparents hate me so much? You know I go to evening worship with Aidy and Eejay on a Sunday evening. Am I kidding myself? What is God really like? Is he the one we talk about in church, or is he a kind of Fascist dictator and none of us have any hope?"

Mr McEwan had come across this kind of question several times in his ministry, usually from middle-aged men. This was coming from a young man of eighteen who looked two years younger but acted twelve years older. The answers he would have to give would need to be convincing, if Christian Salway's seedling faith was not to rot off completely.

"Christian," said Mr McEwan after a minute or two, "I need to explore with you about your grandparents and what makes them tick. I do know a lot, but there may be other things that I have either forgotten or never knew."

"Where do you want me to start?"

"The beginning is the best place to start from."

Christian told him, from his earliest memories as a small child, including the way that Grandma and Granddad would only rarely pick him up. Whenever Mum had seen them, there had always been a row. He remembered when he was four, the Pastor (whom he thought was the Pasta) had been there and had used expressions like spawn of Satan. He wondered what the Sporn of Sayton was. He went through how he was bullied about having no daddy. He invited his friends in Beckton to birthday parties, but only a few came. He was never invited back. The last time he had seen his grandparents was when he was thirteen and they

had told him to get his hair cut short. Mum and they had a blazing row. They had never bought him presents as a kid and always sent stuff from the church about how his gift had enabled a family in Africa to have a goat and how they could sell the milk (until the goat became cat food). And there was the mountain bike that went to a pastor in Africa. They had prayed at that church to get rid of him, especially when his so-called friends had spiked his drink.

As he listened, Mr McEwan wondered how he would have coped if the first seventeen years of his life had been so hellish. His late father was a miner in Dalkeith who had totally backed his son to get educated so he didn't have to go down the Lady Victoria Colliery. (If he had, it would not have been for long as it closed in the early eighties.) Dad had been thrilled that "Our Andrew" had become a teacher of English and ended up as a Depute. Christian would need a lot of nurturing if he were not to conclude that God was the Tyrant of the Universe, and the immediate thought that was in his mind was *If anyone causes any of these little ones to lose his faith in me, it would be better for him to have a large millstone put round his neck and be thrown into the sea.* If he could lay his hands on Pastor Elsheimer, that is precisely what he would have done. And he would happily have spent the rest of his days in Barlinnie doing porridge for it. "Our Andrew" would almost certainly have gone off the rails and God only knew where he would have ended up. He had seen it happen to others plenty of times.

Instead, seated in front of him and petting Jake, was a serious and thoughtful young man, liked across the school by the pupils and staff alike. The last thing that Christian needed was pious platitudes.

"Christian," he said, "your past really hurts. I want you to know that if it had happened to me, I would have gone off the rails. You haven't. What do you think has kept you on the rails?"

"I used to think it was luck, sir," Christian replied. "Aidy and Eejay tell me it's God, their god. Granddad Walker said the same. They are a lovely family who took me under their wing."

“Yes, they are right. I know Charles Walker really well. You know that Rob Matheson and I are really close friends. We were at university together and shared a flat. Have a look at this.”

Mr McEwan took out a photo album, which had pictures of himself as a student. He hadn’t changed that much. True he was older, and his hair was much shorter. Christian could tell from the face that “Our Andrew’s” friend was the Reverend Matheson. However, in those days Rob was skinny and had very long hair, longer than Christian’s, and it was done in a ponytail. Now Mr Matheson had gone somewhat thin on top and tubby with it, the very caricature of a church minister.

“The point of this is that we have spoken a lot about this thing to your Granddad and been spending a lot of time in prayer. Do you want to be reconciled to your other grandparents?”

“Yes, of course. Mum and Aunt Imm want their mum and dad back. I want to have grandparents like everyone else.”

“Are you angry?”

“Yes, I am with them.”

“Are you angry with God?”

“He wouldn’t allow that. He would kill me if I started shouting at him.”

“No, he wouldn’t. You can be angry with God. There are plenty of incidences in the Bible of it. One prophet told God to get off his fat arse and do something. I get angry with God; he’s big enough to take it. My daughters could get angry with me; they could be scary, but I had to take it. Anyway, these stories about God striking people down in the Bible really could be explained by modern medicine, like heart-attacks and strokes. People in those days didn’t know about them.”

“Why does that church make God seem like such a bastard?”

“There is one reason and one reason only: the Pastor. We have done quite a bit of research about that church. Our friend Elsheimer is in it for himself. He runs the church as his own property. As a pastor, he is a fundamentalist and expects his membership to be puritanical. In life he is far from it. He has made the church into a cult, with him at the centre. Jesus doesn’t get a look in. Elsheimer brainwashes his congregation into doing ‘good works’ and donating lots of money. There have been many rumours that Elsheimer has his fingers in the till.”

“They’re threatening to do over Mum and Dad’s wedding. They hate me because they say I’m gay. They say I am girlish. Yes, I am girlish looking but prefer that to being a thug. I like wearing a kilt. I like dressing up. I design fashionable clothes.”

“You don’t need to tell me any of this. Things have moved on. They may say that the Bible says that homosexuality is an abomination. In those days adultery was punishable by stoning to death. They don’t do that nowadays, do they? A literal reading of the Bible is very dangerous, and you can see that Elsheimer has led a couple of hundred people into a very nasty cult. As far as your looks are concerned, nobody gives a damn. Everyone knows about Ewan Walker and Jordan Melhuish, but they are valued members of our community and your prefect team, as they are both good role models for younger students. There are many other same sex attracted couples in the school, both boys and girls. David and Jonathan in the Bible were very close as well. Nobody could deny how much of a hero David was. He wrote the Psalms. There has been a lot of hypocrisy, with a lot of priests looking down their noses, until they got caught doing things with altar boys and altar girls. As for the other things, that’s your talent. And your Granddad has recognised that in wanting to groom you to take over Walker Bros.”

“How do people see me, sir?”

“Why do you think you are Head Boy?”

“Mr Mitchell and you chose me for the job.”

“Yes, we did so because you are the best role model in the school. You came in as a waif and stray but got down to work immediately and did really well in your Highers. You took on a lot of responsibility in the running squad. You are a very thoughtful and caring young man. That’s what Mrs Foxton has said in your UCAS reference. You did the fashion show at the end of last term. You managed effectively a lot of our young people, one or two of whom can give us a hard time every now and again. Where do you think that it has come from?”

“I used to do a lot for Mum.”

“Yes, you did, and you brought the pair of you through. That’s part of what makes you what you are, a highly responsible young man. You are well respected by staff and pupils alike. I always hear lots of positive stuff about you, Christian.

“That church has tried to curse you. But I want you to know this. God is bigger than the foul-mouthed curses of an unhinged pastor. Your Granddad Walker has taken out an interdict in the Buchanan Sheriff Court that bans the Fatheringham Evangelical Church from coming up on the day. If they are so foolish as to do that, they are committing a contempt of court which is a criminal offence. Do you think that God is really behind that church?”

“No. They prayed for me to die to get rid of an embarrassment. I’m still here.”

“Precisely and I am thankful every day that God didn’t listen to their self-pious supplications. That church is not of God. If Jesus went there, he would go in with a whip.”

“They wouldn’t recognise him, anyway.”

“In our service I do for the boarders on a Sunday, there are the lines, *Playful God, Joyful God, Star-shaper God*. We worship a life-giver God, who is interested in young lives, not just the old as they near death. He wants to share in the fun. He also knows and understands when it hurts.

He's not made in the image of an unhinged American Pastor. Are you looking for him?"

"I am, sir."

"Christian, I want you to know that God wants to give you life now. He is a living God, and you see him through friends like Aidan and Ewan. He is going to give you your grandparents back. He is going to give your Mum and her sister their mum and dad. It will be a hard road, but they will regain the fun they once had. Are you ready to forgive them? Don't say yes because it's the right answer, just to please me; do it for yourself. It will be hard, and you will have to do it many times."

"Yes, I am. And I will try."

"Well said. Trust in God. It's an easy thing to say. If you don't feel it, pray for it: something simple like, 'help me trust you' and he will help you. Think it through."

Christian looked out of the window. The bird feeder outside had many birds on it and they were gorging, before flitting back to the bushes. There would be a commotion, and the little birds would fly out and gorge again. When the little birds weren't there, a red squirrel came up the feeder. Mr and Mrs McEwan asked Chris if they could pray for him, and they did. Jake had been resting his head on Christian's kilt, and he had dribbled in the excitement of having so much attention lavished on him. It looked as if Christian had not been able to contain himself and the first thing he did was to slip upstairs and put his other kilt on.

It was getting near to seven o'clock. It was time for Christian's evening patrol. Like the morning patrol, it was a duty for the Head Boy (and now Head Girl) that had been inherited from the Saint Oswald College. It was presumably to stop the boys of Saint Oswald's from sneaking out of the school grounds for illicit cigarettes, or other assignations and liaisons, or to distil hooch. That sort of thing didn't go on nowadays. As the evenings got darker, Christian would have a

powerful torch and be accompanied by another prefect in case he got bounced by the local hoodlums. It had never happened, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

Christian, who always liked dressing up, preened himself in front of the full-length mirror, and combed his shoulder-length hair. It still looked neat, as it always did. It was cut only twice a year. Despite the fact that people said he was eighteen going on thirty, he still looked about sixteen.

It was a fine evening after a number of heavy showers. The sun was getting lower in the late summer sky. The weather people said it was autumn, but Christian preferred the definition of Autumn starting on the equinox, some three weeks away. It hadn't been warm that day with the showers and the fact that Corscadden was over two hundred and fifty metres above sea level. He was glad to have a T-shirt under his school shirt, and a jumper above it. Above his jacket was his quilted anorak that he used when hill-walking. The walkie-talkie was there in his pocket, and he contacted John the Jannie before he set out.

Somehow, he felt a great sense of peace and beauty. He didn't know where it came from. He wanted to say God, but he would have struggled to explain it to a sceptic. It seemed as if the colour control had been turned up. The flowers in the borders around College House, the War Memorial, and the Old Chapel seemed particularly vivid. John the Jannie was a very keen gardener, and his work was admired by many people who visited the school gardens during garden open days. He was, rightly, very proud of them. Any Caddies who messed them never messed them again.

He walked past College House and could see John the Jannie locking up, and said his usual polite, "Good evening, sir."

"Good evening, Mr Salway," was the usual reply. John was the only member of staff that addressed him as that, and his tone of voice showed genuine respect.

The place still looked like Hogwarts with knobs on. There were still swallows going in and out of holes in the old house. Surely, they would soon be on their way to Africa. Keen young Caddies were practising in the Music Department. That would be last place that John the Jannie locked up, so it would be another half an hour before they got kicked out. The library didn't close until half past eight, and the librarian on the late shift would lock up.

There were groups of people from the Strathcadden Sports Centre training on the sports pitches. The First Fifteen wouldn't know what had hit them when he took them on their 2-k training run. Soon he was passing the Athletics pavilion, the one that had been converted from the cricket pavilion when the running track was laid. Christian had never got his head around cricket; it was one of those games that was like watching paint dry. Fast action cricket was a contradiction in terms. They could keep it south of the border. Last year distance markings had been placed on the path around the school grounds which, by total coincidence, was exactly one thousand metres in length. Start at the starting line opposite The Wests and two laps. The First Fifteen would not like the numbers neatly marked on the path every hundred metres.

Walk on, past Dibben, Edwards, and Fenton Houses. Christian wondered who these people were. He knew that the houses were named after benefactors to the community. He wondered if Granddad knew any of them. As he was a major benefactor to Strathcadden Academy, would there ever be a Walker House? It was, of course, due to Granddad that Mum was able to send him there in the first place, not that he knew about that last November. What made Granddad, who was a very wealthy man, choose to use a huge amount of his money to support kids at this school and do other community work? Other wealthy men spent their money on flash cars, or in a few cases, not just one, but five, superyachts. Surely one would do? Granddad was far too self-effacing to want a building named after him.

Walk on, Christian. Look at the surroundings. He looked up to Corr Hill. Many times, he had run up there with Aidy, Eejay and Jordan.

There was a large boulder at the top that Eejay would scramble up like a squirrel. He was known as Squirrel because of his long thin build and sandy colouring as well as his climbing ability. From that boulder, Ewan enjoyed superb views of the town and could see up and down Strathcadden. In the distance were the increasingly high mountains of the Western Highlands where he could already see the very first snow appearing on the highest peaks. With the choirs of upland birds and the incense of the heather, it was little wonder that Ewan called it his high altar. He would sit cross-legged on the rock for a good while, adopting a yoga pose. Ewan said that he opened himself up to God there.

Chris wanted to have a high altar, somewhere private, where he too could open up to God in privacy. A feeling came to him, “You can have one if you want to, but you don’t need a special place to open up to me. Just look around you. I am everywhere.” Christian could not disagree. The slant of the light on the hills, the colours of the trees and the tranquillity of that evening scene filled him with a warmth and peace. Each tree trunk seemed to be like the column of the nave of a great cathedral. Music came into his head. Not some little ditty, but a mighty piece played on a huge cathedral organ. He had no idea of where it came from, but it ran for several minutes and had a distinctive baroque style. Chris had learned that from Aidy. He could imagine Aidy playing it.

Chris had spent many happy hours listening to Aidy playing on the keyboard, piano, or organ. He had even turned the music. Chris wanted Aidy there to share it all. Somehow Skype seemed inadequate. He sat on a bench that overlooked the lower playing fields and the river. On the far side, a long-distance train headed north. The peace returned and a thought came through his mind, *to fear the Lord is the flower of Wisdom that blossoms with peace and good health*. The trees across the river seemed to be even more vivid a shade of green, with just the faintest hint of autumn colours. And, more clearly, “Christian, I will watch over those who obey me, those who trust in my constant love. I will watch over you.”

As Christian sat there, he was overwhelmed and tears streamed from his eyes, while more music he did not know flooded through his

head. He wanted to live up to his name. It sounded cheesy and sentimental, but he wanted to thank God for bringing him home to Corscadden. He was thanking the playful God, the joyful God, the star-shaper God, the one he imagined to be like the little boy in his spaceship racing around the Universe in defiance of all the laws of Physics. More than ever Christian Salway wanted to make his home there.

“Everything all right, Mr Salway?” The voice was that of John the Jannie, who was pushing the sliding gate over the entrance to The Wests before locking it.

“Everything seems fine, sir,” Christian replied.

“It’s a good evening for it.”

It was indeed.

Chapter 7

**Friday 26th September – Saturday 27th September
2014**

On the face of it, there was very little of The Tabernacle that suggested it was a meeting place for a church congregation. It was an industrial building of unspeakable dreariness that was typical of the buildings of its era that formed an industrial estate. There was a flat-roofed office frontage built to a very plain design. Behind it was a shed that was designed to hold machinery and store finished goods. At the back there had been a roller door high enough for a lorry to reverse into for delivery of raw materials or to take away finished products. Since the finished products of this particular unit were spiritual, they were to be taken away by angels rather than lorries. The raw material came in through the front door.

The removal of the roller door and the insertion of a large window was a source of friction between the Fatheringham Evangelical Church and its landlord, as it was one of a number of unauthorised alterations carried out at the behest of its pastor, Dr Waldron B Elsheimer. The power of God was deemed superior to the demands of a landlord that insisted rather pettily that the terms of the lease should be abided by. The pastor's own entrance was another such unauthorised alteration, as was the knocking down of several internal walls to make his elongated audience chamber. Now the special entrance was covered with a large piece of plywood which did nothing to enhance the appearance of the building.

That the rent cheques for the June and September Quarter Days had both been returned marked "refer to drawer" irritated the landlord even more. The results of consultations with solicitors had been delivered to The Tabernacle. It was unfortunate that Elder Garton had suffered a relapse and required more treatment in hospital.

The gift day had gone ahead the previous week, and the money had been paid in. Now Elsheimer had tried to cream a bit off for himself as a commission but had found the account pages unresponsive. The little

blue circle going round and round did nothing to improve his temper, and he gave up, as it was time to get the minibus for the Witness Journey from Fotheringham Self-drive Car and Van Hire.

Elsheimer's manner secured the church the oldest vehicle in the fleet. It had certainly seen better days. The paintwork had faded, and the finish was dull. The tyres looked as if this would be their last journey. The seats sagged and the seatbelts were fraying. The lining in the roof had two rips in it. It had last been hired out to a local secondary school which had taken some of its more delinquent pupils on an outward-bound course. There was a lingering smell that suggested that one of the pupils had been car sick. It would have been cheaper to purchase the vehicle outright than the extortionate sum paid to rent it, let alone the deposit that had been demanded.

The general tiredness of the vehicle was shown to all by the puff of blue smoke that came out of the exhaust when Elsheimer started it. He swore loudly as he put it into gear. In the United States, all the hire vehicles he had come across were automatic. A quick experiment revealed to him that the large pedal on the left could be pushed down, and when he did so, there wasn't a grinding sound from the gearbox. Gingerly he let the pedal come up, and the vehicle moved forwards. Who said that miracles didn't happen?

What irritated him was that the vehicle seemed not to go very fast in the gear he had selected. A thought occurred to him. Move the lever into the position marked 2. With a little more experimentation with the big extra pedal, the lever did that. He tried 5. The vehicle laboured and shuddered in a way that shocked his completely non-mechanical senses. "Goddamn son-of-a-bitch!" he muttered. He tried 3 instead. Better. By now several car-horns sounded as he weaved from lane to lane. Another miracle occurred. He got the minibus back to The Tabernacle without hitting anything.

The elders were waiting in the entrance lobby. A table with a white tablecloth had been erected for them to gather round for prayer, which was more centred on safety in their journey with their demented pastor rather than cursing a Scottish family in the name of the Lord. There were a couple of the congregation who were coming to increase their Talent Score with a trip up to Scotland where they had never been before.

These Witness Journeys were nothing new. If there were an LGBT march anywhere within range, IECM branches were expected to picket them with supplications to bring fire down from heaven to destroy fornicators. If IECM got its way, there would be virtually no young people alive, for notwithstanding those who committed abominations in the eyes of the Lord, other targets included those who read *Harry Potter*, those who did trick or treat, those who had pumpkin lamps for Halloween, and those who committed the most heinous sin of the lot – enjoying *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Nobody, except the pastor, was allowed to enjoy anything; enjoyment was sinful. On the other hand, the witness journeys led to Talent Points. The pastor hated everything that was not centred on Waldron Brain Elsheimer and loved everything that was.

For the elders this witness journey was going to be purgatory. Elder Garton normally drove. He had been a bus driver, so he had a lifetime of experience in safe, if rather steady, motoring. The journey to Corscadden would take at least seven hours. None of the roads was fast, which was just as well, considering how irascible a driver the pastor was. Things did not get off to a good start as the pastor was not yet skilled in operation of the goddamned pedal with his left foot. After the fifth attempt he got the old donkey moving, and with just a small crunching of gears managed to change up, having worked out that the best approach was to go serially from 1 to 5. Changing down was more problematic. The gearbox, which sounded like a washing machine that had emptied itself of water, was quite stiff. It would have worked fine with double-declutching, but that procedure would have been a long way beyond the pastor's skill set, even if he knew what it was.

There were periods where the pastor could keep the gear lever in position 5. There were fewer curses of “goddamned son-of-a-bitch” accompanied by lurches and grinding sounds. A faint metallic knocking from the engine suggested that things were not tight that should have been tight, and things had been left undone that ought to have been done up. A faint blue haze suggested that oil would need to be checked and topped up regularly. Judging from the pastor’s comments, progress was a painful crawl up the A568, his progress being impeded by goddamned dumbasses, assholes, and jerks. A plea by the elders to turn the language down a bit was met by an abusive tirade which consisted of some of the foulest words in the English language.

The A773 was even worse, and the A825 was quite intolerable.

It was late when the party arrived at Cardean. By staying there, they would at least be obeying the interdict as Cardean was thirty kilometres from Corscadden. There was nowhere to stay. There was the Cardean Show and Highland Games that weekend, and all accommodation was booked. Elsheimer had booked himself a room at The Stag Hotel, but it had never occurred to him that others might need rooms as well. Even the Route 825 Motel could only accommodate half of the remainder.

They weren’t to know that this particular establishment had rooms to spare for the simple reason that its reputation was dreadful. It was not a high-class hotel. The proprietor was none-too-fussy about standards of cleanliness and service. By contrast, she was very fussy about fleecing money out of her guests. Things that were complimentary in higher class establishments were charged for at a considerable mark-up. No, dinner could not be served, but there was a good chippy down the road. Good was not exactly the most appropriate term for the outfit. It served Scottish fast food at its worst. All the meaty fare dripped in cheap frying oil, and the fat, in which the chips were cooked, was burnt and rancid. It was as vile a gastronomic experience to their stomachs as the pastor’s language had been to their ears.

For those who could not get a bed, a night in the minibus awaited them. This may have been a bit of an adventure for teens and twenty somethings. For elderly people it was not going to be comfortable, especially as there were no facilities and the front door to the motel was locked.

Except for Pastor Elsheimer who had a good night's sleep but still found a lot to complain about the next morning, the night was almost sleep-free. The Route 825 Motel had a discothèque that lasted into the early hours. The elders who managed to get rooms were disturbed by drunkards in the corridor, as the walls were plasterboard, which seemed also to amplify the sounds of bonking in the next room. The beds, which were only changed once a week, were not comfortable and rooms had no en-suite bathrooms. There were communal ablutions at the end of the corridors.

Long distant memories were rekindled about what slumming-it meant.

It was much more comfortable in Brewster House, where there was the joyful conviviality of the Walker family. Neither stag nights nor hen parties, just a gathering of friends and relations for an evening of loving companionship shared over a beautiful meal cooked and served to perfection by Christian and his half-brothers. Jordan was there as he was most weekends. His father's work abroad resulted in his not being able to be at home. Jordan would, in other circumstances, be a weekend Caddie, which he could find rather lonely at times. He loved being with the Walker family who had adopted him as one of its own. There he could be curled up in bed snuggled up to his young boyfriend and felt very safe and wanted. He admired how Christian was the one who managed the family and agreed wholeheartedly that Joby was forty going on fifteen. Still, Joby and Laura were very much suited for each other, and that was what the next day was about. Christian was going to give his mother away in church, and it made him feel very proud.

Aunt Imm had arrived in good time. Her journey from Clinton Muncey had been a lot easier than her previous one. She had caught a direct train on the Great Central Line from Stoke Poges, her local station, and arrived in Corscadden feeling much more relaxed. She also knew that there was to be a Witness Journey to Corscadden, but her mum and dad were not going. That was a relief, and that horrible pastor would get his come-uppance with Police Scotland for contempt of court. Once she had heard what was to happen, she immediately alerted Charles Walker, and within minutes, Derek Yeoman had alerted all the relevant people. To prevent any disruption to the service, five court officials had been paid to act as bouncers.

Brewster House was full. The Proudlock family were there. The boys, who loved children, played with the twins and Kieran, giving their parents a good break. James Belson had arrived from Edinburgh. Charles and Muriel were there, of course, as were Jenny and Sarah with Uncle Simon and Uncle Jon. Richard and Bethan Fairbairn had arrived too with Uncle Alex. It was, quite simply, a lovely family occasion.

Sleep was a little bit in short supply, not through any anxiety or overindulgence. There was quite steady traffic to the bathroom and cloakroom, and the noise of *The Colossus* and *The Venerable* resounded around the house, with the pipes ringing like a quarter-peal. Still the interrupted sleep did not stop the boys hauling their father out of bed, and running him, Sam, and Jess up to the top of Corr Hill, where Ewan sat cross-legged for a few minutes on his favourite boulder. He was in prayer. Ewan's prayer was silent, more of a meditation and relaxing thanksgiving inspired by the wonderful scenery and the love of the beautiful people sitting around the trig point twenty metres away.

Prayer was also offered in the minibus. It was loud and showy, long on the English of the Seventeenth Century, and short on love and compassion.

While the pastor had enjoyed a good breakfast about which he had complained, the elders who had stayed at the Route 825 Motel had had less good fare. Those who had had to stay in the minibus were served breakfast with great reluctance until they paid the exorbitant price that was demanded. The proprietor had even charged them to sleep in the minibus. Even so, the service was slow, slipshod, and the food was unpleasant. The cereal was served from those little boxes which gave a child's portion. The bread was cheaply made and was not fresh. The coffee was instant from a catering tin. It was the same brand of cheap instant that was served at The Tabernacle. It was watered down to make it go further. Tea was made in a pot but stewed. The milk was slightly sour. The fruit juice had been watered down. The bacon was like leather and tasteless. The sausages were burned during cooking and shrivelled, swimming in grease, having been kept on the hot plate for at least three hours. The eggs were lukewarm and greasy. Cheap margarine was served in little foil-topped containers, as was cheap jam. It was not a gastronomic highlight.

The thirty kilometres between Cardean and Corscadden takes less than fifteen minutes on the train. On this day, it took the pastor and his witness group nearly two hours on the A825. There were three sets of roadworks with temporary traffic lights and queues to match. The pastor's driving resulted in a good number of frayed tempers as he drove on the wrong side of the road to get towards the head of the queue. He pushed in, in front of a large Volvo, which just happened to be an unmarked police car occupied by Constables Maxwell and Thompson.

"We'll pull this clown over at the lay-by at Renton Farm," said Constable Thompson. "I have been watching him fighting his way up the queue. He nearly pushed a Fiesta off the road back there. We'll really throw the book at him."

The lights changed. Almost at once, Elsheimer's mobile rang, and he answered it. It was one of his fellow pastors of the IECM. The answering of an important call and his incompetence at that goddamned pedal made his driving decidedly erratic, which was being observed by the dash-cam in the unmarked car behind. The two traffic cops were

incredulous as to what they were watching. The dash-cam didn't lie, of course, and it would be easy to convince the JP court and the sheriff court that a number of motoring offences had occurred beyond all reasonable doubt. What would take more convincing would be their mates in the canteen who would not believe a word of it.

When Elsheimer took it into his mind to start texting, which the cops could see him doing through his offside mirror, it really was time to pull him over. Elsheimer saw that there were blue lights flashing behind the radiator grille of the car behind, the one that he had barged in front of. He did not attach any significance to them and carried on texting with his right hand and steering with his left elbow, breaking off to move the goddamned pedal and that lever from position 3 to 4, and 5. The minibus weaved alarmingly as he did so.

“Right Al let's have the music on. We need to bring this clown to heel.”

Al Thompson set the siren going, while Nick Maxwell looked for the first safe opportunity to overtake. It was not easy, but it needed to be done to stop Elsheimer killing not just himself, but also his passengers and anyone else that was on the road that morning. Their patch on the A 825 had had more than its fair share of accidents and Constables Thompson and Maxwell had spent many distressing hours shovelling remains of cars, motorbikes, and their occupants off the road.

Eventually Maxwell managed to get past the weaving minibus. He would have to do a hard stop, a hairy manoeuvre, which at that point would require a hold up of all the traffic behind and in front, for they were on a very twisty part of the road. So, he lit up a sign in the back window which said *Police. STOP*. As the coppers looked through their mirrors, the minibus was still there, but the driver had disappeared. Elsheimer had dropped his mobile and was fishing about in the foot-well for it, while abusing his passengers for putting him off. It was only when Elsheimer's face reappeared that Maxwell started to apply the brakes. There was a loud bang as the police car was shunted up the rear. The minibus ended

up in the middle of the road, blocking everything and a furious Elsheimer got out demanding what the fuck the crazy son-of-a-bitch thought he was up to. Nick Maxwell got out and put his officer's hat on.

"And may I ask what you thought you were doing, sir?" said Maxwell, showing his policeman's identity badge. He had to remain cool and professional, despite the fact that the Volvo had had its boot considerably re-styled. "Could you get into the back of the car, please? I need to talk to you, but I also need to sort out this accident you have caused."

"Me, what the fuck do you mean? You put on your brakes, you fucktard."

"Sir, I need to warn you that I am recording this on a body-mounted camera, and all of this conversation may be used in evidence. Now if you continue to swear at me like you are doing at the moment, I shall arrest you for using insulting words and behaviour. Now please explain to me why you took no notice of my flashing blue lights."

"I thought they were decoration. It's not fair. You should have *Police* on a goddamned cop car."

"This is an unmarked car to catch people like you."

The message started to penetrate Elsheimer's brain that if he got himself arrested, it would destroy the point of the Witness Journey. So, he got into the back of the Volvo. In the meantime, Constable Thompson was taking a good number of pictures for the insurance claim. The Volvo would probably be a write-off. In its present state, it was undrivable as the rear axle had been twisted by the impact. Steam was rising from the minibus's radiator and a large puddle of coolant suggested that its driving days were over.

Aggressive attitudes to driving, driving while using a mobile telephone and texting, general lack of awareness of and courtesy to other motorists, and failure to stop when required by a police officer in the course of his lawful duty led Constables Maxwell and Thompson to charge

Waldron B Elsheimer with dangerous driving. He was given a ticket, which would be followed by a summons from Corscadden Court of the Justices of the Peace. Since the offence was so serious, it was likely to be referred to Buchanan Sheriff Court. The most likely outcome would be a hefty fine and a driving ban. Elsheimer did not have his licence with him and was ordered to show it to a police officer within forty-eight hours.

Back in the minibus, there was a lot of muttering afoot. The Witness Journey had turned into a journey into Purgatory. How were they going to get to their destination? The police told them that they were not a taxi service, so they would have to hire a couple of taxis at their own expense. And, after about an hour, two minibus taxis and a third normal one turned up. The last was for the Pastor who was concerned only about himself. They arrived at the same time as the recovery vehicles, having been escorted by a police car on the wrong side of the road. The sorry procession arrived in the town centre at midday. The A 825 was open again and the traffic queues had started to ease.

In Brewster House, the Walker Family had dressed up and each looked a picture. Imogen called her sister 'glam puss'. It was going to be a day to remember for Christian; he was going to give his mother away. It would be many more years, if ever, that he would give his own daughter away. It was a moment to savour. The family left in Granddad's Mercedes, but the limousine was late. The driver had rung to say that there was bad traffic on the main road, but it was clearing, so he would be there in about ten minutes.

The people of Corscadden are a close-knit community that likes to know what is going on. In other words, they are nosy. They certainly love to see a good wedding. One did not get much better than the marriage of the son of a well-liked community figure and the proprietor of the jewel in Corscadden's retail crown. One or two tongues had wagged that it was a little bit soon after the tragedy of his first wife. If anyone

had said such to Charles Walker, he or she would have been most politely invited to mind his or her own business.

Nobody paid much attention to the group of mostly elderly men who were surrounding a very fat shaven headed man, who had gathered opposite the doors to St Columba's Church. It was only when the old men saw a number of young men going in in kilts that the group started to shout "Fags! God hates fags!" One young man happened to be Aidan Walker, who was given special hair-dryer treatment by the pastor.

"Aidan," said The Reverend Matheson as Aidan hurled himself through the door, "what's going on?"

Aidan who was a very shy and sensitive young man was looking decidedly frightened and upset. "That fat man outside told me that I was a pervert for wearing a kilt and that God would strike me dead."

Mr Matheson replied, "Do you believe that?"

"No. But he was so aggressive. He tried to grab me. He wanted to beat me up."

"I am not having anybody upsetting this wedding. I am going to sort this out."

A conversation with the man on the door also confirmed that the fat man was the man to whom the court officials had given the interdict. A call to the inspector at Corscadden Police Station resulted in a promise to send some officers down.

The family had arrived, and the group of Witnesses started to shout, "Fags! Fornicators! God hates gays!" Local onlookers started to boo them and told the fat man to take a running jump back to The States.

Ewan Walker couldn't decide whether to be angry and take a swipe at the fat man, or just to take the piss out of him. He chose the latter. He and Jordan sauntered from the car, hand in hand. "God hates fags! Repent ye or into the fire ye shall go!" yelled the pastor. Ewan and Jordan stood right in front of the pastor who became beside himself with anger.

They kissed deeply in an exaggerated and sexually suggestive way that they would not do normally.

“O God that abhorest sin, we beseech thee that thou wouldst strike these vile fornicators with the fire from heaven, and that thou wouldst consign them to fire that never goeth out,” screamed the pastor. He uttered an unintelligible and strangled cry, which was intended to be a powerful curse.

No she-bears came from around the corner to tear the two boys to pieces. There was no lightning from the clear blue sky to leave them as piles of ash. Instead, the two boys went off giggling in a rather immature way. The pastor got up onto a bench and started to preach a sermon about the coming judgement that would ensure that God showed more mercy to Sodom and Gomorrah than he ever would to Corscadden. The onlookers laughed and booed. With faces as black as thunder came The Reverends Matheson and McEwan and they challenged the pastor with unbridled Midlothian fury.

“And what do you think you are doing to this family whose wedding you are trying to disrupt?” McEwan started.

“They are the spawn of Satan and God will throw them into the fiery pit,” shouted Elsheimer who couldn’t think of anything more original.

“I have known this family for my entire time here in Corscadden,” said Matheson. “They are one of the nicest families you could ever meet. Their father is a top businessman and donates a great deal of money and time to our town.”

“Look Jackass, what he does is for nothing if he is not in God’s elect.”

“He’s a Christian and is a well-loved member of our congregation.”

“Listen you goddamned retard, all fornicators will go to the fiery pit.”

The exchange continued in a similar vein. It was long on hot air and short on Godliness. It was getting nowhere, and Matheson motioned to the two men on the door. There was, though, cheering for both the Reverend Matheson and the Reverend McEwan, while each time the pastor opened his ample trap, the assembled crowd booed. The elders tried to support their pastor by showing banners about fags and judgement. The two court officials approached Elsheimer.

“I recognise you from the other day,” said the first menacingly. “I gave you a court order that was an interdict that you should stay away from this town.”

“And I have an order for you!” shouted Elsheimer. “Get away from us, you spawn of the devil! I come against you in the name of the Lord!”

“You are in breach of the interdict dated 1st of September that barred you from entering this town or Buchanan on this day,” said the second official. “Do you realise that you have disobeyed the Sheriff Court in Buchanan? Do you realise that it is a criminal offence?”

“I obey a heavenly court,” retorted Elsheimer. “My judge is the Lord Almighty. He has sent me to challenge the transgression of this sinful generation in this den of iniquity. It will all end up in Hell, I tell you.”

“No, it won’t. Your judge will be Dame Barbara Highwood,” said the first official, “and you won’t end up in Hell, just the nick at Barlinnie. Actually, it is pretty close to Hell in there. They’re not very nice people, a bunch of criminals if you ask me.”

Behind the pastor, the elders were holding up their banners with their hymns of hatred, but not with much fervour. Guests of the Walkers and Salways were barracked by the Witness Group as they went into church. It was too much for many of the passers-by who had paused to

take a peep at the commotion. Fundamentalist religion was anathema to the residents of Corscadden and these slogans went against the community's value of tolerance and respect. The Witnesses were booed and heckled. The banners were snatched away and torn to shreds.

The limousine arrived and parked at the front of the church. The bride and her son got out with the bridesmaids, who were some of Christian's female friends from Strathcadden Academy. Immediately the pastor saw Christian, he yelled, "Christian Salway, thou spawn of Satan, I come against thee in the name of the Lord Almighty and curse thee in the name of the Lord that he should strike thee dead and consign thee to the fires that never go out!"

A gasp of horror went up from the onlookers. The pastor moved forward. Christian walked towards him glaring at him. It was an absurd sight, like the face-off between a Manga figure and a Sumo Wrestler. Christian stood akimbo as the pastor came up to him snarling. After a short while, Christian spoke, "Mr Elsheimer, why are you persecuting me and my family?"

"You are the son of the devil, Salway! You were born and brought up in sin and fornication. Look at you: you are a transvestite in that skirt. Your hair is far too long. Are you a boy or a girl?"

The scene was like that of David and Goliath, except that Christian had no sling or smoothed stones. Many of the onlookers would have cheered if he had put one into that obese pastor's forehead. Except that it would have had little effect, as the head seemed to be filled with concrete. The court officials came up. There was going to be trouble. If Christian Salway knew what was good for him, he would have legged it. But, no, he stood his ground.

"Mr Elsheimer," he said in a calm but clear voice.

"Dr Elsheimer to you, Salway!" Elsheimer screamed as if the Doctor title meant a lot to him.

Christian was unfazed and continued, “I am not a son of Satan, as you say. I am a son, loved not just by my family, but by the living God, a God of life, love, and light. You have prayed on several occasions, not least now, that I should die. But my God, the God of life, light, and love chose to let me have life, light, and love. And he gave it to me here in Corscadden. These people are my friends and my family. Who do you think you are to judge them and call curses on them?”

A cheer rose from the crowd of on-lookers that was growing by the minute. Christian said firmly, “Mr Elsheimer, what I am wearing is a kilt. It is a very popular form of dress here in Scotland in general and this Region in particular. You also see it where you come from. Decency prevents me from showing you what is worn underneath. As for my hair, that’s my business.”

“It is an abomination before the Lord!” Elsheimer screamed.

“You, Mr Elsheimer, are the abomination. You have come up here to curse my family and friends. You say you are a man of God, but you don’t act like it. You have not mentioned Jesus once. There are people like you in the Middle East. You are nothing but a bully. It’s so clear you are full of hatred. It gives you a kick. You hate me, you hate my family, you hate my friends, you hate my town. God is a god of love, not hate. He gives life. You need to get a life. You should be ashamed of yourself. You need to change your direction, say sorry and ask to be forgiven.”

Elsheimer could not contain himself and screamed, “Salway, you are the spawn of Satan, and you are trying to teach me?”

“I have my family and friends to get back to. You think about it.”

Christian Salway turned on his heel and walked back towards the car where his mother was waiting anxiously with her bridesmaids. The Reverend Matheson was waiting at the door. As he walked away, the onlookers applauded.

Elsheimer screamed another unintelligible set of words that was a curse and started to run at Salway to knock him to the ground with a rabbit-punch to the neck. However, the two court officials who had witnessed the whole scene caught the pastor, and almost immediately Constables Maxwell and Thompson seized him and slipped on handcuffs. The elders started to sing the hymn *O God our help in ages past* to an accompaniment of jeers from the onlookers. A good number of other constables moved in to escort the impromptu choir to a police minibus, having arrested them on suspicion of contempt of court and abetting behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace.

“It’s alright Mum,” said Christian as he got back to the car. He looked at his friends and said, “Don’t let him spoil your day. Mum and I have waited years for this. Let’s go.”

As the bridal party went up the steps to St Columba’s Church, Mr Matheson said, “You did well, Chris. I could not have preached a better sermon.” They were through the door and Aidy was playing *Trumpet Tune* with Findlay Baird, a friend of Aidy’s, who was playing the trumpet. The congregation rose and applauded while Christian led his mother up the aisle. He had put his spat with the lunatic pastor well behind him and was bursting with pride. The bridegroom, his father, was standing at the far end of the aisle and was beaming.

The wedding service was an occasion of loving joy. As a surprise for his father, Ewan Walker had arranged with Mr Struther for the Strathcadden Academy Orchestra to play *The Prince of Denmark’s March* in an arrangement in which Aidan Walker played the organ part and Findlay Baird played the trumpet. They had rehearsed it on Thursday, and it had gone well. It was met with applause from the congregation.

It made Christian feel very grown up as he gave away his mother and later acted as a witness on signing the wedding certificate. It was widely agreed that he had acted in a far more grown up and dignified way than that loony American who had desecrated the street outside the church with his preaching of hate.

The reception was at the Glenclawe Hotel. The party travelled there in a heritage steam train that George MacDonald, Joby's boss, had organised. The family travelled in an observation coach at the back, affording them wonderful views of the Sliver Glen. Appropriately enough, the engine was a Black 5, number 45082, which was owned by a friend of Mr MacDonald's and stored at the Dunalastair Engineering Company. And they were ferried to the hotel in a fleet of heritage buses. Mr and Mrs Campbell ensured a reception that none would forget, fine dining with exquisite service in a glorious setting.

Fine dining with exquisite service in a glorious setting was not a feature for any guest of Police Scotland at Corscadden nick. Pastor Elsheimer had his own cell, not because the custody sergeant was particularly concerned about giving him any extra privilege, but because the elders had begged him to put the pastor away from them. They were not feeling particularly well disposed towards their leader who had got them into this bit of bother. In reality, they were simple men who had been manipulated to serve the malicious ends of a very nasty man. The pastor had spent the last twenty-four hours abusing them and showing that his only concern was for himself.

That evening the elders sat in their cells and sang hymns. These were mostly numbers that had their roots in the Moody and Sankey revival meetings of the Nineteenth Century, which was the predominant flavour of their church services at The Tabernacle. The lines of these poems were sickly in their sentimentality, while the tunes reflected a funeral wake. As the choir was none-too-tuneful, the musical experience did not afford the listener any pleasure. It drove the custody sergeant bonkers. A habitual drunk announced he was going on the wagon, and a drug user asked about rehabilitation. Pastor Elsheimer stood at his door shouting American insults but was drowned out by the hymns.

In the early evening, it was all over. The wedding guests were on the steam train back to Coruscadden, and the boys walked back to Brewster House. Mum and Dad were having their nuptials in the Buchanan Suite. As they walked past St Columba's Church, Christian reflected to himself about what had happened there a few hours before. Christian had never considered himself a hero; he was one of those who would rather run than fight. But there he had squared up to an American madman who could have killed him with one well-aimed punch. Something had given him the strength to stand up to what he saw as injustice. That man had clearly no answer to the question about why he was persecuting the Salway family. He just seemed to do it out of some kind of malicious enjoyment. The man was a psychopath and enjoyed bullying others. He was none-too-kind to his supporters either. He stood by his statement that his god was the God of Life, Light, and Love. As he did so, Christian Salway was able to accept beyond all reasonable doubt that his God, Aidy's God, and Eejay's God was real. That was how he was able to speak with authority, even though he looked the part of a stereotypical anti-hero.

After consultation with senior officers, it was agreed to release the elders with a caution for causing an obstruction. It was a sensible decision, as it really was not in the public interest to take to court a group of elderly and rather simple men who had been duped by one rather unpleasant man. Each of the elders accepted the caution after being informed that, if they did not accept this lesser charge, they would be charged with contempt of court, to which they would have to answer in the Buchanan Sheriff Court. They were taken to Coruscadden Station and given one-way tickets back to Fotheringham.

It also got them out of the custody sergeant's hair.

As for Elsheimer, Constables Maxwell and Thompson interviewed him. It was a one-way conversation, as their prisoner refused to speak to them, other than to say, "No comment." The overwhelming impression

was that their prisoner could not see that there was anything wrong in what he had done the day before.

On Monday, Pastor Elsheimer found himself in Corscadden JP Court charged with dangerous driving, contempt of court, and behaving in a manner that resulted in a breach of the peace or was likely to cause a breach of the peace. Although Elsheimer refused to recognise the court, claiming that he was answerable only to the Heavenly Court, the case went ahead with a plea of not guilty entered on his behalf. After two hours, he was found guilty on all three counts. For the dangerous driving, he was fined two thousand five hundred pounds and banned from driving for twelve months. He was additionally fined five hundred pounds for the breach of the peace. As for the contempt of court, Elsheimer was referred to the Buchanan Sheriff Court for sentence. He was released on police bail.

Elsheimer was in a bad temper as he left the court, intending to walk to the station. He would give those cretins whom he had to describe as elders a hard time when he got back. He was looking forward to making an example of the members Salway at the Main Mission next Sunday. As he walked down the steps, a tall thin man with grey wiry hair approached him and said, “Are you Waldron Brain Elsheimer?”

“What if I am?”

The man showed him his Warrant Card, and continued, “I am Assistant Chief Constable Richard John Smithells of the Middle Riding of Yorkshire Constabulary. I am arresting you on suspicion of fraud in regard to your dealings with the finances of the Fatheringham Evangelical Church. You do not have to say anything, but anything you do say will be recorded and may be used in evidence. It may harm your defence if you do not reveal something which you come to materially rely on in your defence. Come with me please.”

And to ensure that Elsheimer did go with Smithells, two constables came from behind and escorted the pastor to the waiting car.

Waldron Brain Elsheimer found himself as a guest of the Middle Riding of Yorkshire Constabulary. This involved spending Monday night in the cells at Alverston Police Station. For a man used to living in the lap of luxury, the Spartan nature of the place was difficult to get used to. The food was as vile as that served in Corscadden, although it wasn't haggis and chips.

The interview with Richard Smithells was another rather one-sided conversation as Elsheimer refused to comment on any question that was asked. However, the evidence that Smithells had garnered in the previous three weeks was certainly sufficient to bring charges. There was more to look for, so Smithells tried a new approach. He said, "We are not getting very far with this interview, are we? Would you like to do this interview at home?"

"If you took me home and left me alone, it would be very much appreciated," replied Elsheimer in a parody of what he took to be British politeness. It was certainly a change to "No comment".

"I wouldn't be able to leave you alone, Mr Elsheimer."

"Dr Elsheimer, if you please. I knew more when I was twelve than you ever will."

"Of course, I forget you are a very educated man, Dr Elsheimer," Smithells replied. "I am just an ignorant copper, albeit a very senior one. I did go to a very posh school though, so I can't be that thick. I will try to remember. I also understand that you get your congregation to address you as 'your reverence'. Very status conscious."

The sarcasm was lost on Elsheimer.

"So, when we get to your house, we will continue our conversation. But there is one condition. I know that your house is like

Fort Knox. I want my officers to be able to search it thoroughly for any other evidence. So, you need to let us in. If you do not, you will be back in the cells with our other guests. For someone who is as status conscious as you are, you will find them really rather low types. You will be hobnobbing with some very wicked people. By the way don't give them hell, fire, and damnation. They'll give it back with interest. If you don't let us in, we will make our own way in. And there won't be much left after we have finished."

"You can't do that. It's illegal."

"No, Dr Elsheimer, it's all legal. I have a search warrant signed by a judge. We do things by the book round here. We don't want to damage your property, but if we can't get in, we are entitled to make a forced entry by whatever means are required. Usually, the big red key is enough. So, shall we go to Fotheringham and continue our chat there? We'll go in one of our more luxury chauffeur-driven cars – a bit better than the van last night."

A couple of hours later, Smithells had arrived outside the Pastor's house near Fotheringham. "Doesn't look too welcoming," he said as they pulled up outside the cast iron gates which were there to keep the great unwashed firmly out. "Are you sure this is it? You tell me that you are a simple country pastor. This looks like a footballer's place. Are you going to let us in?"

In the company of a police constable, Elsheimer keyed in the wrong code and a red light flashed. He was trying to demur. That did not impress Smithells one little bit, and he spoke into the police car radio, "Big yellow key, please." About ten seconds later as the constable and Elsheimer got back into the car, a large JCB trundled down the lane. Smithells said nothing. Then the excavator backed up to the gate, raised its backhoe, and brought it swiftly onto the left-hand gate. The driver then uprooted the gate and dropped it on the grass. Then he meted out the same treatment to the other.

“You motherfucker!” screamed Elsheimer. “I’ll sue you for millions!”

“You keyed in the wrong number,” said the constable. “You must know what the number is.”

“That big yellow key is coming with us,” said Smithells, “just in case you forget how to open your front door.”

Then Elsheimer noticed two minibuses full of officers. “What are they doing?” he asked.

“Searching your house for evidence,” Smithells replied. “We’ve got enough evidence to lay initial charges, Dr Elsheimer, but we can’t afford to leave anything out. I expect full co-operation from you.”

“If I don’t?”

“We have the red key and the yellow key. We will use them as much as we need to on any locked door. If we have to demolish the house, we will tear it down to the last brick.”

Then they came round a corner and the pastor’s house came into view. Most people would be impressed, but Smithells was not. “My word,” he said, “this is some pad for a simple country pastor. It must have cost you a fortune. I think even a premiership footballer would struggle with this one. Certainly, no vulgarity has been spared. Country pastor? It doesn’t add up to me.”

With the big yellow key parked on the drive ready to start demolition work, Smithells took Elsheimer to the front door. Elsheimer still demurred and Smithells became surer than ever that the pastor had something to hide. Elsheimer fumbled with his set of keys and none opened the door. Smithells lost patience and motioned to the driver of the excavator to drive up to the door. The JCB climbed the steps easily, as was fitting for a machine of its versatility. It punched the front door with the backhoe. The front door was designed for high security and would not have been out of place in a bank. Ram-raid techniques would

clearly be needed, so Smithells ordered the driver to do just that. The eight-tonne machine charged the door with as much effect as a bull elephant and the door burst open, simultaneously setting off the burglar alarm.

The officers poured into the house with three big red keys. Many important doors were locked, but all except one burst open as they were battered down. The one that was of most interest was the study. It was unfortunate that this was the door that could not be broken down with the red key.

“Dr Elsheimer,” said Smithells threateningly, “I am giving you one last chance to open the study door. If you do not, we’ll go in through the outside. We learn a lot from our villains. Do you want to go back to the nick and join them?”

Elsheimer glared angrily at Smithells. His house was being done over good and proper. Then Smithells interpreted Elsheimer’s glare as a refusal to co-operate and gave the driver the order to break into the study. Clearly manoeuvring an eight-tonne digger through the front door and into the hallway would have been impossible, but the study had a very large bow window that looked over the driveway and stuck out prominently. The single storey extension was clearly built for security, but with persistence, the JCB driver managed to punch a hole in the roof and enlarge it. Then he used the hole to pull the frontage out so that officers could get in. Then they opened the study door from the back with the aid of an angle grinder and a crowbar.

The computer sang like a canary, not just revealing the extent of Elsheimer’s inability to keep church accounts separate from his own, but also his considerable interest in pornography, much of which was of a homosexual nature, and a good amount was extreme. The computer was turned off and put into a forensic bag for more detailed analysis. Several more computers and hard drives were also impounded. By the window was a large safe. Elsheimer refused to open it, as a result of which the JCB driver ripped it off its mounts and lifted it onto the drive.

Later it proved so difficult to open that Smithells decided to get a safe-cracking expert known as *Fingers* from HMP Leeds to do it, with the promise of twelve month's remission, which he did, revealing a considerable amount of evidence that was of interest in the case.

As well as extremely unpleasant material from the Dark Web, the officers found that Elsheimer was employing illegal immigrants and holding them in conditions close to slavery. By the end of the day, Smithells took Elsheimer back to the nick to charge him. A passing burglar would have been very ill-advised to do a job on Elsheimer's house that night as it was still crawling with coppers, as it was the next morning.

After returning from Clinton Muncey, Brian Salway had a difficult day. He had had a visit from the Inland Revenue to remind him again about the importance of paying Value Added Tax, of which he owed a considerable sum. A customer had complained about shoddy workmanship and suggested that he should be on *Rogue Traders*. This made him think about chucking it all in and retiring. He had a lot in his pension pots. During the afternoon, he checked the first pension, and everything seemed OK. However, when he checked the second account, he could not get onto it. The website, which worked perfectly before, was down, and nothing he did would persuade it to come up. A phone call to the telephone number given did nothing to assuage his fears. The number was unobtainable. Calls to some other members of the church made him decidedly alarmed. They too checked their pensions only to find the same thing.

Then there was worse. The post was late that day. In it was a bank statement that revealed that the Salway account was over its overdraft limit. Brenda was very particular in ensuring that a tight control was kept on their finances. It was easy to see where the discrepancy was. Almost the entire positive balance had been removed by Fatheringham Evangelical Church 'A' Account. It would be impossible to open the new account until the overdraft was paid off. The second envelope from the

bank contained a letter concerning the accounts of B Salway Engineering that informed him that the overdraft had exceeded fifteen thousand pounds and that if it were not repaid within twenty working days, the account would be frozen, and legal action would be taken to recover not only the overdraft but also monies due on several loans.

More calls to fellow members confirmed that the Salway accounts were not the only ones to have been raided. Almost everyone who had given the church authority to be a signatory had had their accounts cleared out. Unlike a scam, the banks would not reimburse the account holders as they had knowingly granted access to the church. Elder Garton had some explaining to do.

That morning, for the first time in three weeks, Elder Garton had gone down to The Tabernacle. He had done little on the finances of the Fotheringham Evangelical Church for the past four months as he had been so unwell. He went in through the main entrance, having been warned that the office entrance was still blocked off. There was a pile of correspondence that seemed to get more alarming as he worked through it. A very large number of cheques had been returned unpaid, with the same number of furious letters. The Landlord was seeking possession of the building since the rent cheques for the previous two quarters had bounced. Calls to the pastor would have to be made, which Garton did not particularly relish. The damned man was not answering his mobile. Not that Garton knew, of course, but Elsheimer was having a long one-to-one with Assistant Chief Constable Smithells over in the nick at Alverstoke. One-to-one was a misnomer; it was a series of questions asked by Smithells to which Elsheimer replied “No comment”.

Elder Garton pondered on how on earth it was that all the cheques were bouncing. The church accounts were flush when he had last done them. Many gift days had ensured that. He got his answer with one of the last letters that he opened. It was from the North-West Counties Bank that informed him that as a result of suspected fraud, the Fotheringham

Evangelical Church A and B Accounts had been frozen until further notice and that under no circumstances should any further cheques be issued. Any direct debits and standing orders were frozen as well. The North West Counties Bank would be closing the account permanently and would do no further business with the Fatheringham Evangelical Church. No appeal would be considered. Then there was a loud knocking at the door, and a postman came in.

“Registered delivery for you,” said the man with an economy of words, “sign here.”

Garton signed for the registered delivery letter. It was addressed to the Pastor and Elders of the Fatheringham Evangelical Church. Since he was an elder, Garton decided he ought to open it.

Dear Sirs

We, Crangle Foster LLP, are acting for our Clients, The Trustees of the Wilkinson Family Trust, concerning the property leased to the Fatheringham Evangelical Church at Unit 5, Melton Lane Industrial Estate, Fatheringham FM1 3XP. As a result of non-payment of rent for Quarters 2 and 3 of the Year 2014, as well as a number of unauthorised alterations to the premises in breach of Conditions 21 and 25 of the lease signed on 23rd January 2012, we sought judgement in the County Court this day, Monday 29th September 2014. You would know that we had sent a final warning letter on 10th Inst. The cheques received were returned unpaid. We enclose these. As you were not represented in the County Court, judgement was made in our client's favour.

Therefore, the lease will be terminated with immediate effect. We are issuing a Notice to Quit, and we will be taking immediate possession of the premises located at Unit 5, Melton Lane Industrial Estate, Fatheringham FM1 3XP. We have also petitioned that the Fatheringham Evangelical Church be wound up at the next sitting of the County Court at Fatheringham. This will occur on Monday 7th October 2014 at 11.00. This is without prejudice to any legal action to be taken on behalf of individuals and organisations who are owed money by the Fatheringham Evangelical Church.

The decision to terminate the lease is final and will not be altered.

Garton shuddered as he considered the implications of what he had read. The Pastor would blow his top and he would be the target. He had experience of this, and the hair-dryer treatment was not pleasant. A bank statement revealed that the money had indeed gone in a number of withdrawals. Over the previous ten years, there had been small withdrawals, but these had not affected the accounts that much. Although he could not prove it, he had suspected the pastor, who was, to say the least, shifty. However, the statements were quite alarming. About fifty very large payments had been made by church members and almost immediately withdrawn to the same mysterious account, *AJS Trust Securities*. Garton added up the amounts involved. They were horrific, adding up to £860000.

Then there were a couple of other letters, one of which was from Fotheringham Self-drive Car and Van Hire.

Dear Mr Elsheimer

We write concerning the Ford Transit Minibus NU 02 ...

The vehicle has not been returned to us as required by the contract. We have been informed by Police Scotland that the vehicle was involved in a road traffic accident with a police vehicle on the A 825 Road near Corscadden. This has not been reported to us by you in breach of the terms of hire. Additionally, the cheque paid to us by you has been returned unpaid. The deposit cheque has been refused. Therefore, the insurance has been rendered invalid.

We therefore demand immediate payment of the following:

<i>For damage to Volvo SM14 ...</i>	<i>£33564</i>
<i>Value of Ford Transit Minibus NU 02 ...</i>	<i>£3565</i>
<i>Hire fee</i>	<i>£450</i>
<i>Deposit</i>	<i>£1000</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>£38579</i>

We must receive payment within ten working days, otherwise we will instruct our solicitors to take legal action to recover the sums owed. Additionally, we would advise you that we will not be able to hire any further vehicles to you in the future.

Elder Garton was now feeling decidedly uncomfortable. He was Treasurer and responsible for the large sums of money that had been handed over in good faith by a congregation of people who were trying their hardest to live a good life. Twenty years ago, Pastor Thompson had run things more simply. They met in an old garage in the town centre. When Jack Thompson preached, it was about Jesus and living according to the Bible. They had lived a hand-to-mouth existence, but it was all so much friendlier. Then things started to change for the worse when Conall Devine took over as pastor, after Jack Thompson had been ousted in a manner that seemed far from biblical. He was the caricature of a bigoted Ulster fundamentalist preacher of hell, fire, damnation and brimstone.

Then ten years ago, the church had had a crisis, mostly because the lease on the garage had run out and the landlord wanted to sell the building. There was no way that they could have raised anything more than a small percentage of the price demanded. There was a massive problem in securing suitable premises. The premises that they could have afforded to rent were either far too small or needed vast amounts of work doing to them. That was when International Evangelical Church Ministries had stepped in. They had secured the lease on The Tabernacle. The intention was to buy it, but despite the repeated gift days, there had never been quite enough money.

IECM had let Devine go and parachuted in this man Elsheimer, who was radical and fanatical. Never a pleasant man, initially he seemed charismatic, but as time went on, Elsheimer became more puritanical and fundamentalist. He was a control freak, micromanaging things to the smallest detail. Garton had been Treasurer for many years, but the role was getting more of a severe pain in the arse, for he had very little in the way of real authority. He had done Elsheimer's bidding. He wondered what he did it for. Yes, he felt it was God's calling, but the Fatheringham Evangelical Church had become a sect that was a distortion and

manipulation of people's simple Christian faith. Elsheimer rarely mentioned Jesus.

The most nagging feeling that was rising in Garton was that he was responsible for the fact that many of the congregation had been pressured to allow the church access to their bank accounts. Yes, it made gift days easier to administer and the results more predictable. However, it seemed at least unwise. It could even have been illegal. The important thing was that the members had had very large sums of money removed from their accounts unexpectedly and that would not please them one little bit. And the person that they would not be very pleased with was him. His defence was that he was obeying orders, but it was quite likely to be viewed in the same light as the same lame excuse that the defendants at the Nuremberg Trials had used. He had been a small boy then. Now he was an old man and did not fancy spending his retirement years accounting for his actions in a crown court and spending at least a couple of years in the nick at Liverpool.

Garton's thoughts turned to the more immediate future that involved members of the church. After all, it was he that persuaded them to grant the elders and the pastor access to their accounts. It might well be wise for him to lie low for a few days, or a few weeks, or a few months. Probably a few years, actually. Memories of this kind of sting do not fade quickly. Rent a holiday cottage to start with. Then sell the house and not tell anyone where he had gone. At least one thing that was in his favour was that he hadn't had his fingers in the till. He had this feeling that he ought to get the hell out of The Tabernacle before a copper was sent down to find him. So, he did.

Chapter 8

Sunday 5th October 2014

On a windswept and wet carpark, members of the Fatheringham Evangelical Church were arriving for their weekly brainwash at the Main Mission. It had not happened the previous week and nobody knew why. The Melton Lane Industrial Estate looked as bleak and cheerless as it ever did. It was not an attractive place even on a sunny summer's day. The Tabernacle was still there, but there were no lights on in the building. It was locked. That was unusual. One of the elders would have been there to open up. Some peered through the windows, and there seemed to be something different about the place. It appeared that some items were missing, and others were stacked up ready to be moved. Somebody spotted it. A piece of A4 paper had been stuck to an office window.

As a result of the petition lodged in Fatheringham County Court on behalf of the Landlords, these premises have been repossessed. Please direct all enquiries to Crangle Foster LLP, 12 – 14 Barrow Street, Fatheringham...

The members looked for all intents and purposes like lost sheep. Where were the elders? Where was the pastor? Did you have your bank accounts cleared out? What on earth is going on? There was no answer, and none of the elders was to be seen. Perhaps they had gone to the pub, but it was too early for the footy. Besides, under Elsheimer, anyone caught with the demon drink had to beg for forgiveness at the next Main Mission and would lose Talent Points.

After about half an hour, and none the wiser, most people got fed up and went home. Some of them had even started to think for themselves.

At The Spread Eagle, the Elders had assembled to discuss what was going on. The last that they had seen of the pastor was on the previous Sunday when those on the Witness Journey had been taken down to Corscadden Station from the local nick. There was some rumour going around that Elsheimer had been arrested again, but they did not know

why. Elder Garton was not around. Nobody could contact him. He wasn't answering the phone, his house had all the curtains drawn and the car was not in the drive. They had heard rumours that there was something up with the finances. There would be hell to pay as they were meant to supervise everything; they had most verily left undone those things they ought to have done.

There was little constructive conversation, but a good amount of drink. The meeting had turned into something of a Sunday morning stag night, and Elder Smith had to be carried home. There certainly would have been hell to pay if the pastor knew.

What the pastor did know was that he had now been charged with theft, fraud, embezzlement of funds, and false accounting. On top of that, Police Scotland had become interested in the fact that Elsheimer was driving with no insurance, especially as it was their car that he had written off. On top of that, the driving licence that had been presented proved to be false. They had visited him in Alverston nick to tell him as much. So, it was a trip up to Corscadden on Thursday to the Justice of the Peace Court, where he got another fine of two thousand pounds and the driving ban was increased to eighteen months. He was banned from applying for a provisional driving licence for that period.

ACC Smithells had his teeth well into the case. There was a lot more evidence to sift. Each lead seemed to reveal yet another. There had been a number of complaints linking into the investigation that involved a company based in London called AJS Securities and Pensions. A call to the Met revealed that the address given was just a mailing box. The website, which had looked very professional, was now down, and the telephone number was unobtainable. But those small problems would not put a copper of Smithells' expertise off the scent. While Elsheimer was up in Scotland, Smithells and his team worked on the mountain of evidence. Since Elsheimer was being none-too-helpful, the obvious thing

would be to bring in the elders one by one to find out what their role had been. The Treasurer would be the most obvious starting point.

A message sent out to all police forces yielded quick results. A silver Honda Jazz car, registration KF 56 ... was soon stopped and the driver was arrested on suspicion of conspiracy to commit theft and false accounting. A couple of hours later Thomas Garton was at Alverston Police Station and ACC Smithells was on his way down and found Garton in the interview room. Smithells started the tape recorder and said, "Interview started today, Sunday 5th October 2014, at 14.35 hours at Alverston Police Station between Assistant Chief Constable Richard John Smithells and Thomas Robert Garton of 12 Melton Court, Fotheringham..."

Once the formalities had been completed, Smithells got straight down to business. He started, "Now, Mr Garton, could you give me the background of the Fotheringham Evangelical Church and what your role was?"

Garton, who had never been in trouble with the Law before, was more forthcoming than Elsheimer. He told Smithells all about the church and its difficulties, which became more acute when Conall Devine was there, and how Elsheimer had been landed on them. They had little choice in the matter because of the situation they were in. He explained how he had been Treasurer for twenty-five years now and it was all so much easier when Jack Thompson was in charge.

"So, what was Dr Elsheimer like when he came?" Smithells asked.

"Very dominant, a bully if you ask me." Garton replied. "But he seemed to be very charismatic."

"Did any of you think he was up to something?"

"Not at first. However, his preaching became fiercer and fiercer, and centred on money and giving. His preoccupation was with money matters. He insisted that the church should run at a profit, in order to do

good works. We moved to Melton Lane soon after he came. He insisted that we should do more than tithing to be members.”

“Tithing?”

“Yes. It means giving a tenth of your income. The Pastor’s view was that members should give at least twenty percent to the church, if not more.”

“That’s a lot.”

“It is, especially as it was worked out on our incomes before tax, national insurance, and pension contributions.”

“Didn’t you think to question him on that?”

“Yes, we did. But Elsheimer does not like to be questioned. What he says goes. If not, members get expelled in very humiliating rituals at the Main Mission in The Tabernacle.”

“Main mission in the tabernacle?”

“It’s the Sunday morning service. The Tabernacle is what the church is called. We are independent, you know.”

“So I have heard. Were there any controls on Elsheimer’s independence?”

“Not really. He was nominally employed by International Evangelical Church Ministries, an American company. I’m sorry but I don’t know a lot about them.”

“Don’t worry about that, Mr Garton,” Smithells replied. “I am interested in what you do know. I can get my team to find out about International Evangelical Church Ministries. You did a lot of fund-raising for the church. What happened to it?”

“The pastor had the Tabernacle done up. We did the worship area, but he had a lot of work done on the office space. We had to do five gift-days to pay for it. It cost the best part of a hundred grand. None of

us were allowed to use that space without his permission. He rarely gave it either. He kept it for himself.”

“A bit mean, if you ask me.”

“He was like that. He was obsessed with himself. You know how a pastor or a vicar helps their congregation when they are in trouble? He wouldn’t do it. If he did it, he was very reluctant. Members had to do a very detailed application form to see him. It was very industrial, you know.”

“Thank God I don’t have to do that to see my boss,” said Smithells and he meant it. “None of my officers have to do it either. I am there when they want me.”

“On the industrial theme, Mr Elsheimer set up the Talent Points scoring system. There were points to be had for every good deed, and you built these up. If you got so many, there were privileges like sitting towards the front. You could lose them just as easily, particularly if you got up Elsheimer’s nose. There were targets set, and if you didn’t meet the targets, there was trouble. He could expel you from the church, and there was a ceremony to curse you. He did that a lot of times to a lot of people. Even when he wasn’t threatening us, he would swear at us all the time. He had a mouth like a sewer.”

“You’re not kidding,” Smithells interrupted. “I have had to be very professional when dealing with him. It doesn’t sound at all Christian to me.”

“He is not a nice man. He has even threatened us with violence.”

“Why didn’t you tell the Police?”

“We did. They said they couldn’t really get involved as there wasn’t any evidence and it was his word against ours. They did warn him off.”

“So, when did he start getting his hands on the church’s money?”

“About ten years ago. He ordered us to allow him to be a signatory to the accounts. Before, it was the Treasurer, the Chairman, and Chief Warden. We had to have two signatures. Elsheimer deposed the Chairman and dismissed the Chief Warden who had both pissed him off, because they questioned him about his policies.”

“Why did you stay?”

“I didn’t want the same thing to happen to me, so I obeyed orders.”

“That’s what they all say.”

“I know.”

“When did he start putting his fingers in the till?”

“As I said, about ten years ago. It was small sums at first, twenty or thirty quid. He explained that it was for his expenses. It didn’t seem to make too much difference, so we ignored it. But the sums got bigger.”

“Didn’t you question it?”

“Yes, but he would curse and swear at us.”

“Do you know where it went?”

“He started off by cashing cheques at the bank. He got a bank card. He made us sign a whole book of cheques in advance, so that he could pay out the cheques.”

“Why didn’t you do that as Treasurer?”

“He took that job off me. There was some cock-up – I forget what – but he was very angry. He ordered me to hand over the church cheque books. I was told only to manage the money going in. As a result, he decided that we should have more gift-days.”

“How many were there?”

“About five or six a year. He didn’t want too many otherwise people would start to complain. But he would sometimes have them at the drop of a hat.”

“What about getting members to allow the church access to their accounts?”

“It was Elsheimer’s idea. He wanted the results of gift days to be made more predictable. We would have a gift day, and members would promise something but wouldn’t deliver. He decided that what they promised would be removed from their accounts.”

“When did he start doing that?”

“About five years ago. About a year ago, he would take more than what the members had promised.”

“You know that he has cleared out a good number of people’s accounts?”

“Yes. I feel bad about it because I had the job of setting up the system. I didn’t mean for people to lose their money like this. None of us are rich. There is something else you might be interested in.” Garton paused. “I hope I’m not boring you. I don’t know everything. I am not that clever, Mr Smithells.”

“Not at all. I am very interested and very appreciative of what you are telling me, Mr Garton. All you need to do is tell me everything you know. What you have told me is very helpful. So, what was that thing you were going to tell me?”

“Earlier this year, Elsheimer brought up a man from London who told us all about pensions. Lots of us are pensioners. He was a horrible man who smoked, and we thought he was drunk. He used lots of management jargon and suggested that we should invest in his pension scheme, AJS Pensions and Securities. He said he had the highest performing schemes in the City of London. He seemed thick in with Elsheimer and had stayed in his house. I can’t remember his name. It

might have been Scott, but I'm not sure. I know he came in a huge SUV. A Beamer, I think."

"Do you know where Elsheimer lives?"

"No. None of us do. He keeps it a secret. He just describes himself as a simple country pastor. We only know that his landline is on the Langerham exchange. He also has a mobile."

"Simple country pastor, my foot! It is outside Langerham, and it's a place that a premiership footballer would have. So, what happened after this presentation?"

"Elsheimer gave us orders to invest in the AJS scheme. We did so, and we got a statement after six months that showed that our pension schemes had grown by twenty percent. Elsheimer told us we should put at least half that into the church."

"Didn't you realise that it was too good to be true?"

"No, Mr Smithells. I am not that bright. Elsheimer told us that God was really blessing the church by giving us riches. Just a couple of weeks ago, suddenly the website went down, and the phone number was unobtainable."

"How much have you lost, Mr Garton?"

"About thirty grand." Garton gulped at the thought. "I am not the worst. Brian Salway has lost about fifty grand."

"Thank you for telling me this, Mr Garton. It has given me a new lead which I will need to follow up. I don't think that God was blessing your church at all. It sounds like Elsheimer was creaming things off. Now look, Mr Garton, you are in a certain amount of bother, but you will be a key witness. Now obviously I cannot promise you anything, but I am sure that your evidence, if corroborated, will help our case a great deal, and the judge will look more kindly on you."

“I have something else, Mr Smithells. There are other churches owned by the IECM. Mr Elsheimer is in charge of them as well. Forgive me if I am telling a lie here, but I wonder if he has done the same to them as well as us.”

“That is something I will look into as a matter of urgency. Thank you very much for that.”

Smithells felt sorry for Garton. He was a simple old man who had gone to church and tried hard to help there. He was as sharp as a sausage. He had been manipulated by a hate preacher who was clearly something of a sociopath. His evidence was clearly honest and truthful, for he didn't have the wit to make things up. Yes, he had done something that was unlawful and should be brought to account. Garton, though, was a very small fish in this big pond, and quite honestly it would be a waste of time to put him through the process of a trial. He would be of far more use as a witness for the prosecution. Although Smithells did not tell Garton, he made up his mind that if Garton agreed to testify, he would not proceed with any charges but issue a caution. On the other hand, if Garton refused to give evidence, there was enough evidence to throw the book at him. Garton was released on police bail.

A less pleasant meeting was again on the cards for Smithells. Elsheimer was still being uncooperative. When Smithells was a young copper, there had been big fish like Elsheimer. Usually, they were leaders of gangs who ran protection rackets and defrauded everyone and anyone. They would clam up and refuse to say anything. A couple of burly coppers would come in with their truncheons and soon the villains would be singing like canaries. Like all bullies, they were cowards. Nowadays they couldn't do that. He wanted to, but they would be done over for police brutality and Elsheimer would get massive compensation. With this sociopath who used almost every American insult that was possible, it was very tempting.

Smithells generally had some kind of rapport with his villains. Most of them were regulars, in and out of trouble with the Law. With Elsheimer there was no rapport at all. Smithells was not a religious man. He had been to a boys' public school and had had to attend chapel on a Sunday morning. The services were monumentally boring and half of it he didn't really understand. There had been one or two who had preached hell, fire, and damnation. He had been told he had to be perfect. He had tried but found it totally impossible. He never had much money and the thought of giving what little he had away did not appeal one little bit. The story of the rich young ruler did not seem to tally with a place that was full of the sons of rich men, many of which were rulers of some sort or another. All in all, it was easier to declare that it was all so much superstitious bunkum, just a tedious ritual that happened once a week for an hour. It was all about knowing the right people and getting into old-boy's networks. He had seen the effect of that in the Rounce case. He had always considered that the public school system was meant to be about producing gentlemen. With Sir Kenneth Rounce, it had failed abysmally.

He knew as well that there was a character called Jesus of Nazareth. He sounded a good bloke who would not pull his punches when dealing with pompous and bigoted religious leaders. He was also very gentle with the weak and humble. Elsheimer was the opposite. He took advantage of the weak and humble. He certainly didn't like those who stood up to him. Smithells' contacts in Police Scotland had faxed a newspaper cutting from the Cadden Guardian:

TEEN BOY STANDS UP TO HATE PREACHER

A wedding at St Columba's Church in the town centre on Saturday was picketed by a group from the Fatheringham Evangelical Church, led by their American pastor, Waldron B Elsheimer (55). Guests at the wedding between Dr Joseph Walker (40) and his bride Laura Salway (39) were subjected to homophobic and other hate abuse by the pastor. In a bizarre scene worthy of the biblical story of David and Goliath, Christian Salway (18) confronted Elsheimer about why he was persecuting his family in this way.

A small crowd of onlookers jeered as Elsheimer screamed abuse at Salway who kept his cool in a very dignified way, trying to reason with the hate-filled pastor. Salway walked off to applause from the crowd to join his mother, whom he was giving away in the service. Elsheimer screamed what sounded like a bizarre curse and made a lunge before being restrained. He was arrested and charged with behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace. Elsheimer was also charged with being in contempt of Buchanan Sheriff Court, which had issued an interdict to prevent the Fotheringham Evangelical Church from disrupting the event.

Elsheimer appeared at Corscadden JP Court on Monday and was fined a total of three thousand pounds for the breach of the peace, and a number of serious motoring offences. He was bailed to appear at a later date in Buchanan Sheriff Court on the contempt charge.

The Episcopal Minister, The Reverend Robert Matheson (62) described it as an appalling incident that threatened to disrupt what should be a very joyful occasion. "Christian dealt with the situation in a very dignified manner, and showed the pastor up for whom he is," he said.

"Seems to fit," Smithells muttered, as he walked away from another unconstructive interview with the pastor. He decided immediately to alert the Home Office to the presence of an American hate preacher, with the recommendation that he be removed from the country as soon as he were released from the custodial sentence that would be inevitable in this serious case.

Another unrelated matter had also surfaced. Elsheimer had demolished a Grade 2 listed house, Langerham Manor, to build that vulgar edifice of his. He had wilfully ignored the refusal of the Fotheringham District Council to grant him planning permission to make alterations. How a historic house had been demolished almost under their noses, and nobody had said anything was beyond him. Smithells liked old houses, and this ultimate desecration of a historic family home was too much. He would be in touch with the planning department first thing in the morning.

The next day, Elsheimer was in court again facing specimen charges of theft, false accounting, embezzlement, and fraud. The magistrates decided that the case was sufficiently serious that it should be referred to the crown court. There was a lot more investigative work to be done, so no date could be set for the crown court appearance. It was likely that there would be more charges as the case continued. Therefore, Waldron Brain Elsheimer was released on bail, the surety for which was provided by the other pastors of the International Evangelical Church Ministries. Conditions were set that Elsheimer would surrender his passport, remain at Langerham Manor except to report to the police at Fotheringham Police Station once a week, and not to conduct or attend any church services of any description. He would have no access to the internet. So Elsheimer was taken home and surrendered his passport, before making his first visit to Fotheringham Police Station.

On the morning of Wednesday 8th October, a very overweight American showed his passport at check-in at Heathrow Airport. He had shaved off his goatee-beard and had not cut his hair for four weeks. The picture matched perfectly with the gentleman in front of the official. The passport was valid. Richard Benjamin Springer boarded the Boeing 747 that took him back to New York.

Five hours later, one of Elsheimer's staff had been persuaded to go to the police station to make a complaint of repeated physical abuse. He was going to have the last laugh. He well and truly dropped the Pastor in the shit by telling the police about the secret shooting range in the basement. A visit to Langerham Manor confirmed the story and a number of illegal firearms were recovered, including three Glock pistols, two 12-bore shotguns, and two Remington carbines. These charges alone would keep the pastor in the slammer for a good few years.

But the Pastor was not at home.

Chapter 9

Tuesday 14th October 2014

At the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh, Joseph and Laura Walker were attending a routine mid-term scan to check on the progress of the next Walkers in line. Neither wanted to know what sex the infants were going to be. Secretly they wanted the twins to be girls. Joby had already launched three boys into the world against all odds. A few minutes into the scan, both realised that they were going to be Masters Walker. Although the ultrasound scan was, to Joby's untrained eye, just a blur, the sonographer was assuring him that everything was fine, and Laura, who had years of experience, agreed. The prenatal tests had shown that the babies were normal, although the sex was not revealed. It was obvious – each had a willy and a pair of bollocks. “They’re both boys,” said all three in their presentation to the University of the Truly Obvious. Against all odds, Joby had been responsible for launching three boys into the world and in a few months the number would have gone up to five.

Aidan Walker had now settled into his room at Chancellor's Court at Edinburgh University's Pollock Halls of Residence. He had a wonderful view of Arthur's Seat, the hill that dominates all views of the city. Although surrounded by Edinburgh and its suburbs, Holyrood Park, of which Arthur's Seat and Salisbury Crags are the main feature, has a definite wild side to it. For Aidan it was a good place to run. He had run there several times since he made his acquaintance with it during those bleak days in January. He would do so a lot more. Aidan made friends with those on his course. He joined the cross-country runners (the Edinburgh University Hare and Hounds, or the Haries). He also joined the badminton squad and could give advanced players a good game. A rather shy boy, Aidan preferred to be with other quiet boys. There were a good number of his year who had come from south of the border. Some were from normal schools, and he found these easy to get on with. There were some loud ones that had come from the public schools, and he tended to

avoid them as they were loud and arrogant. Not all of them, of course. There were some quiet and gentle ones that Aidan felt at home with.

In a single room, Aidan sometimes felt a bit alone. Of course, he would study or play his keyboard or compose music. He was inseparable from his laptop which had all his composing software. He did not take it out with him in case someone nicked it. This was the big city. He had never had to worry about that sort of thing in Corscadden, where there was very little crime. His friends would come round, and he would make lashings of coffee, and they would chat about things and put the world to rights. Like many young people Aidy and his new friends did not drink that much and rarely went to the bar. They found it too noisy and expensive. Above all, Aidan was finding his course interesting and enjoyed doing the extensive amount of background reading that was needed.

It was in the small hours that he missed Chris and Eejay. He was very close to them and wanted them with him. That would happen next year, of course, but he wanted them now. There was one thing that relieved the feelings quite a bit. Next door was an Auld Caddie, James Hepburn, who was a fellow prefect last year. Although James was a science student, doing Physics, Aidy was very close to him as they shared a lot of things in common. Both were quiet and shy. They played in the Badminton Squad together. James was a part of the group of quiet boys that had befriended Aidy, and with him, Aidy felt safe.

It was the loud ex-public-school types that got up Aidy's nose. They were the ones that made a positive virtue of not going to lectures or failing to hand in assignments. They got loudly and raucously drunk, and had, on occasions, made a damned nuisance of themselves in the town. It least they weren't as bad as the Bullingdon Club, the infamous student group in Oxford that would smash up a restaurant and immediately give the proprietor a cheque to cover the damage. These boys (and one or two girls) were noisy until about six weeks in when one or two of them vanished from view. Aidy and his friends suspected that it was the result of disciplinary action. Those left just reverted to their normal character of being snooty and arrogant.

Another group that Aidy and his friends tended to avoid was the Christian Union, whose members were so super-spiritual. It wasn't that Aidy had lost his faith. It was a very private thing with him, and he couldn't do with the message that those who didn't belong to the CU were the lost and would end up in the hot place. Aidy's friends had a wide range of beliefs, and he refused to judge. God would do that. Aidy would meditate using bible notes last thing before turning in, but said little about it, and only if asked.

On his course Aidy made a close friendship with Callum Hardwick who lived way down south in the village of Stoke Porges. He was the first of his family to come to university. His father and aunt were engine drivers at the locomotive depot there. Stoke Porges was very much a chocolate-box village that had an enormous station attached to it with extensive goods yards and was a major junction on the Great Central Line. His mother was a signalman in the large signal box that supervised over a hundred kilometres of line. Callum lived in the railway houses that were next to the station and had wonderful countryside views. Since the Great Central Line was built to continental specifications, it handled a very large proportion of the freight and passenger traffic from the Continent. Callum had been fascinated by where the trains came from and went to. He had even travelled on the Great Central Line right up to its northern terminus, the port town of Moranstounness on the north coast of Scotland. So, he knew about Corscadden. He had met the drivers of the international trains and was fascinated by their languages and homes. To his joy, Callum found he was good at languages. His family were thrilled that he got a place at Edinburgh.

Aidy was thrilled that Callum was just down the corridor from him in Chancellor's Court. Callum struggled a bit to start with and was very grateful for Aidy's support. Aidy also got him running, just as he had with Christian the year before.

Chapter 10

Thursday 16th October 2014

At Langerham Manor, the Chief Planning Officer of Fotheringham District Council, decided to have a look at what had happened to the house, and have a word with the simple country pastor who had made his residence there. What he saw appalled him. Like Smithells, he liked old buildings, precious few of which had survived in Fotheringham. Once a historic town, the architects had got hold of it in the Nineteen Sixties and had changed it beyond recognition. The town had the same visual appeal of a city built by Stalin in the late Nineteen Forties. Mr Maddocks would have a lot to say when he got back to the office. How could a man who had been refused planning permission to do alterations on a listed building manage to demolish it and put up this vulgar monstrosity that looked more like a golf hotel and not be noticed? He would find out from the man himself, who, he was assured, would be in.

There was no reply.

Before calling in his team, Mr Maddocks got back to the Police to report that the owner of Langerham Manor had committed a serious criminal offence in having a Grade 2 listed building demolished without good cause. The police replied that it was not the only serious criminal offence that that particular individual had committed. Their subject had hoofed it, and they were searching for him to charge him with serious firearm offences. Nobody had a clue where he was, although the staff at Fotheringham Station did report that a man of Elsheimer's description had been seen boarding a train to London. CCTV images confirmed this.

When Smithells heard this, he was thunderously angry. He had opposed bail, because he felt that Elsheimer was sufficiently shifty that he would try to pull off a fast one. The bleeding-heart lawyers had succeeded in persuading do-gooding magistrates to let this devious sod go free. Now they were after him for serious firearms offences. This particular vulture

had not just got out of its cage but also had flown off to make capture particularly difficult. Contacts at Heathrow confirmed that a man of Elsheimer's description had indeed boarded a plane to New York, under the name of Richard Benjamin Springer.

A check with the FBI confirmed Smithells' fear that Waldron Brain Elsheimer was an alias for Richard Benjamin Springer who had form as a conman and done time. He had "repented" and joined an evangelical church in Texas, which had views of the far right and had denied that the Holocaust had ever happened. About fifteen years ago, Richard Benjamin Springer had disappeared off their radar, which didn't bother them one little bit, as nobody had reported any offences. That he called himself Doctor Elsheimer didn't surprise them one little bit. There were all sorts of "universities" which would sell a PhD to anyone who paid them the right price. Still, they would keep an eye open for him. It was obvious. Elsheimer had given the police a false passport and kept the true one hidden somewhere. That too would go on the charge sheet as part of Springer's welcome back party. Smithells did not like those few who outsmarted him.

In the Spread Eagle in Fotheringham, all the elders of the erstwhile Fotheringham Evangelical Church were meeting in a more organised way than they had a few days before. They were not in the least bit worried what the pastor would say to them if he saw them with the demon drink in their hands. They certainly were not in the mood for hell, fire, and damnation, which they would happily have given back with interest to the pastor if he were rash enough to show his face. What they did have in front of them were unpaid bills, bounced cheques, letters from their bank that told them that the Fotheringham Evangelical Church would not be allowed to bank there in the future. Thomas Garton (they dropped the "Elder" title as it was no longer relevant) told them that his bank had threatened to stop his account, even though he had been with them for over fifty years and had never been overdrawn.

The thing that had really niggled the congregation was the amount of money that they had lost from their pensions. The amount ran into several hundred thousand pounds on top of the eight hundred and sixty grand that Elsheimer had helped himself to. The pension scheme was clearly some kind of Ponzi scam. Thomas Garton told them about Richard Smithells. Therefore, they decided to ask for a meeting with him.

The owner of the Church, International Evangelical Church Ministries had been contacted but were less than helpful. Although IECM had owned the profits, the contract was that each branch was liable to all debts howsoever incurred. In short, IECM washed its hands of the church in a manner similar to Pontius Pilate. This was very bad news for the Elders. There was no way they could raise among themselves the money demanded by various creditors. Nor would it be right to ask the congregation to dig very deep into their bare pockets. The decision was taken to declare the Fatheringham Evangelical Church bankrupt.

The elders met with the congregation at the end of their meeting to report back on what had happened. There was not much to report, other than to say that the pastor had legged it with a very large sum of money. The police were investigating. The church was bankrupt and was looking to appoint a receiver. The pension investments seem to have been a scam.

“Call this a church?” shouted one angry member. “I came to worship God, not be stung so that I am close to bankrupt myself.”

This set the tenor of the meeting. There were a lot of hurt people who did not know what to do. Brian Salway reported that he had lost fifty grand and would have to work until he was ninety to make up the loss. He would be dead before then. He was going to have to sell his house. That was echoed by a good many of the others. House prices had fallen a lot in Fatheringham, and some would be in negative equity. There was a unanimous call for a meeting with the Police, and Thomas Garton promised he would try to get hold of ACC Smithells. The meeting broke up and there was an overall sense of liberation, that they were human. If

Elsheimer reflected God, the less they had to do with him the better. To celebrate, a good number of members went to the bar and ordered pints of Best. They arranged activities for Sunday mornings like gardening, DIY, walking in the countryside, or going for a drive in the car. In short, they would be free of the shackles that Elsheimer had laid on them in the Main Mission.

For Brian and Brenda Salway, the future seemed quite grim. They would have to sell the house in order to pay off debts. Fortunately, they did not have a mortgage, so there would be something left over. They sat in the snug but felt anything but snug. They had been betrayed. They had been told that they were the chosen few, the elect, to be blessed by God. Their obligation had been to serve God through the church, which meant doing good works, giving lots of money, obeying all the commandments, and listening to Elsheimer's endless sermons. The missions were based on the Nineteenth Century Revival of Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey. They somehow did not seem relevant to the needs of the early Twenty-First. For many months, they had been getting less and less out of the services. The Main Mission had become more and more of a joyless chore. *A servant with this clause makes drudgery divine* went the old hymn. There was nothing divine about this drudgery. Elsheimer was a foul-mouthed American who had led his sheep well and truly astray.

They had lost their daughters. Imogen had told her father the last time that she phoned that they had been fun-loving people until they went to the Fatheringham Evangelical Church. She was right. They had become puritanical so that they could please God, whatever it was. Elsheimer had told them that they had to do lots of good works, but at the final judgement, only the elect of the elect would get in. Somebody had told them that it was a creed from the Sixteenth Century put together by a Swiss theologian called Calvin, whereby some were predestined to eternal life, while others were going to the hot place, but believers didn't know which path they were on. Not that Elsheimer was very reassuring on this one. Sure, Elsheimer was going to eternal life, and that was why

God was blessing him with riches. If you lost your money, it was a sure thing that the hot place awaited you.

Elsheimer was a fundamentalist. He had ordered the congregation to continue to believe Devine's teaching that the Earth was created in October 4004 BC because a bishop in Ireland had worked it out. Therefore, the viewing of nature and scientific films was banned because they promoted evolution. As for scenes of animals mating, that was totally beyond the pale. They would lose Talent Points. That was a strange thing. Nobody in any other church had heard of such a system. It didn't make sense. Nor did it make sense that a meeting with the pastor was something that had to be applied for with a process as thorough as an application process for a high-powered job. In other churches, the minister was available for anyone at any time (within reason, of course). Nobody even knew where Elsheimer lived.

They had lost their daughters. Laura had needed them at a particularly difficult time, and they had disowned her, because of that bloody man Devine. As they sat in the snug, they remembered the humiliating ritual that Devine had gone through to expel Laura as a fallen woman. The screams and foul-mouthed curses from Devine made their blood run as cold now, just as they had eighteen years ago. They had all but disowned their grandson. Would Jesus have done that? Elsheimer rarely talked about Jesus, the one who would never condemn the fallen, but would certainly take the piss out of those who were completely up their own religious arses. On the contrary, Elsheimer preached of a God who was an angry, vengeful tyrant who threatened hell, fire, brimstone and damnation. Like the others, they had been told to donate money to Africa Evangelical Support International that would, otherwise, go to children and grandchildren. It was Jelly Belly's pet project. Instead of Christmas Cards, they had to donate the money to the church's pet charities. They weren't allowed Christmas Dinner. They had to fast, and give the money saved away to the church charity.

Thank God that Imogen was trying to reach out to them. The week at her cottage had started to convince them that there was life outside

religion. She should not have had to do so. Laura had a lot to say to them, which would give them earache. As for Christian, he had every justification for never wanting to see them again.

If God was anything like the tyrannical bastard that J-Eli Bellis was, atheism was clearly a much more attractive prospect. Anyway, their money had gone AWOL in a Ponzi Scam, so they would be heading for the hot place. Hopefully they might have a bit of fun in the meantime and enjoy what the world had to offer. What a contrast to the church's teaching that if it were fun, it was sinful. How could all those people have fallen for it?

As they sat in the snug, a feeling that they failed their daughters grew within both of them. They had let them both down badly. As for Christian, they had more than let him down. They had prayed under Elsheimer's direction that he should die. If none of the three wanted anything more to do with them, it would be hardly a surprise. It would take a saint to forgive them, and they could never make it up to Imogen, Laura, or Christian. And that bloody man had taken elders up on a Witness Journey to disrupt Laura's big day. Brian Salway wished he had never mentioned it to Elsheimer. In fact, he and Brenda wished to God they had never gone anywhere near that church. They would have to eat not just a slice, but an entire feast of humble pie.

The next day, Brian and Laura Salway went into the estate agent to put their family home of forty years with all its good memories onto the market.

Richard Smithells was eager to talk to the congregation, as there would be a gold mine of evidence. On Thursday 16th October, the members were back in the Spread Eagle with lots of documentation that they would give to the Police. A projector had been set up and at 19.00 on the dot, Assistant Chief Constable R J Smithells stood up. "Thank you very much for inviting me here to talk to you about an episode that you have found very distressing. I share your distress, for as a policeman, my

job is to protect the weak from those who would take advantage of them. I am not going to tell you about the progress of my investigation, other than to say that we are following a good number of leads, and to reassure you that we will do our level best to get back as many assets as we can that have been taken from you.

“Mr Thomas Garton, whom many of you know well, has given me a wealth of information that has moved my inquiry forward a great deal...”

Smithells revealed to the congregation that their ex-pastor had hoofed it back to the United States and was now the subject of a search by the FBI. He also showed them slides about the known extent of the complaints but was careful not to do anything that would prejudice the outcome of a fair trial. He reminded his audience that in law, all suspects were innocent until proved guilty beyond all reasonable doubt. Smithells appealed for any further information. His team were ready to see anyone who had anything else to add to the investigation.

Some people told Smithells’ team about the way that Elsheimer had run the church in a very bullying style, including physical assaults. Others were very keen to share what information they had about AJS Securities and Pensions. Others showed that Elsheimer was indeed helping himself to the charity money raised by the church. It was so late into the evening by the time that they had finished that Smithells booked his team into the Spread Eagle and spent the night and much of the next day there. More complaints were made the next day. It hadn’t just been a gold-mine; it had been a treasure trove. There was enough evidence to put Richard Benjamin Springer behind bars for a very long stretch consecutive to the firearm offences. But they had to trap that particular rat and bring him back to face the music. As far as the rat metaphor was concerned, Smithells would have been glad to set some terriers onto him.

There was another rat in this colony. The name Anthony Scott came up many times. AJS Securities and Pensions had a link that would form a complete lecture series in the University of the Truly Obvious. Anthony John Scott. The name rang a bell. Smithells remembered that

he had interviewed a young man of that name during the Rounce case. Scott was the assistant of Crispin Lartington who had come up from London to sort out a financial mess in a minor public school in which his predecessor had had his fingers in the till to the extent of five million pounds. Scott was his assistant. Smithells found him a rude, arrogant, and generally repulsive young man. He was sure that he was up to something but couldn't put his finger on it. Anyway, there was a huge can of worms that the first case had opened, and it took Smithells several years to sort out the web of shady dealings and outright corruption that became synonymous with Sir Kenneth Rounce. Even if Scott hadn't been up to something at the time, Smithells' copper's instinct made him think that it would not be long in coming.

He didn't know what it was that prompted him to do so, but Smithells got on to his friends at Police Scotland to see if they knew anything. They did. In January, a Mr Scott had been involved in a serious case that involved drunken driving, causing criminal damage, causing injury by dangerous driving, driving while banned, using deception to hire a self-drive car, and driving without insurance. The case had been heard in February in a summary hearing at Buchanan Sheriff Court. Scott had been fined £10000, the maximum punishment in such a hearing. He also got a twelve-month prison sentence suspended for two years. He was ordered to pay compensation to the women that he injured as well as for their car. He also had to pay for the BMW sports utility vehicle he had hired and comprehensively wrecked. Motivation for some kind of Ponzi scheme perhaps?

Smithells wondered whether this was the same Scott that he had met all those years ago. The mugshot forwarded to him seemed to be very familiar. There also seemed to be similarities between the meeting that Scott had been leading on the January evening when there was the car crash, and the Scott who had addressed the meeting at the Fatheringham Evangelical Church. A visit to a couple of the ex-elders confirmed it. They recognised him immediately. CCTV footage had been recovered from the receivers who had taken all the church's assets. This showed

clear images of Scott, and the date was Wednesday, March 5th, 2014. It was a clear link and was worthy of pursuit.

Smithells called in his team and briefed them on what he had found. There were clear dealings between Richard Benjamin Springer (*alias* Waldron Brain Elsheimer) and Anthony John Scott. What was Scott up to? What was the nature of AJS Securities and Pensions? What methods had been used to launder the money? What was Scott up to on-line? Who were his contacts? A High Court judge would grant a warrant for Scott's communications to be monitored. Like Springer, Scott was a devious bugger and could well leg it if he got wind of anything. It would be a case of enticing this particular rat into a very tempting rattrap. If necessary, a sophisticated sting might well be justified, but there had to be plenty of other evidence before one was attempted, as evidence from entrapment was inadmissible in court.

As the days went on, the Scott line proved very interesting for Smithells. There definitely was a Ponzi scheme and several other scams, including several fake on-line relationships that had bled their victims dry. It was not the most sophisticated, nor was it the work of a bungling amateur. It was enough for Smithells to get his teeth into, without giving him too much brain-strain. For Scott, it would involve several years in the slammer.

At the same time Richard Smithells was on the phone to his counterparts in the United States. The FBI knew the whereabouts of Richard Benjamin Springer and assured him that they were looking for an opportune time to nick him. That said, the legal process to get him back to the United Kingdom would be protracted. If his legal team chose to, it could end up in the Supreme Court and that would take ages. Smithells sighed. He wanted this case over before he retired. True, he could give evidence after retirement, but if Springer fought extradition, it could be ten years before he would be extradited. Smithells reckoned he would have forgotten most of it by then. The only thing he could hope for was that Springer would find the prospect of a US penitentiary so

uncomfortable that he would leg it back to the UK. Compared to an American prison, a UK nick was positively five-star.

The phone rang and a piece of important news came. They had nicked Scott. The stupid bugger had knocked a cyclist off his bike while driving a hired SUV and texting. The cyclist had life-threatening injuries. Scott had failed to stop, and there was an alarming high-speed chase across two counties which had caused a number of serious accidents, and finally a pedestrian had been seriously injured. Scott's BMW had only been brought to a stop using a stinger to burst his tyres. The list of charges was long and serious. With his previous form, Scott was remanded in custody. This particular jail bird would not fly from the cage. The next day, Smithells was on his way to Bedford Prison where Scott was on remand.

"Long time, no see, Anthony," said Smithells as he made himself comfortable in the interview room at HMP Bedford. Smithells started to set up the tape deck for a long interview. Several cassettes were available. Like most coppers, Smithells thought that cassettes were decidedly old hat. Well, he was – an old-fashioned copper who was still dedicated to serving the public of the Middle Riding of Yorkshire. Fraud was, in his view, a despicable crime perpetrated by the most cowardly of villains. "I met you when I was doing the Rounce case. You have grown a bit since then," he said, slapping his midriff.

"Very funny," said Scott grumpily.

"Your hairstyle hasn't changed, though. You are still shaven headed. I've gone grey - all those villains who give us so much hard work to do."

"What do you want, Mr Smithells?"

"Quite a lot really. But you and I have got a lot of time to get through it."

"I don't see why. I have a business to run," said Scott.

“I wouldn’t worry about that. You should have thought about that before you took off in a hired car with a false driving licence, put that cyclist in intensive care, and so on. In fact, I will have at least seven years to work through it with you. As you get out from your stretch for causing injury by dangerous driving, I’ll have the charges ready for my case. You could get at least another fifteen years.”

“For what?”

“Fraud, theft, false accounting, money laundering to name but a few. Anthony John Scott, I am arresting you now on suspicion of fraud, theft, false accounting, and money laundering. You do not have to say anything, but what you do say will be recorded and may be used in evidence...”

Careful police work had pieced together much of the jigsaw puzzle that was Anthony Scott’s Ponzi scheme. The money had been traced through various laundering accounts and Smithells had a good idea of what Scott had done with it. The proceeds had been split evenly with Richard Springer (*aka* Waldron Elsheimer). The latter’s half had been traced to accounts in the United States of America. That had opened a can of worms in which the FBI was decidedly interested. Springer had run a similar scheme. Foolishly he had used his contacts with right-wing evangelicals to target a number of quite wealthy people and several groups of white supremacists. If he had any sense at all, Assistant Chief Constable Smithells reasoned, he would be fairly soon back in the United Kingdom. Those kinds of people didn’t go bleating to the police; they would have contracted some ex-marine with a chip on his shoulder whose main talent was to point a rifle and place a bullet with millimetric accuracy between Springer’s eyes.

And so it proved. Springer still kept up his disguise as a simple country pastor who had gone astray. There was a howling confession made on religious TV in which his Elsheimer persona confessed to many unspecified sins. The president of International Evangelical Church Ministries Inc, Logan B Trommelkopf III, was a party to Springer’s little

scheme. He had been found dead with a gunshot to the back of the head. The shot had been taken from a long range, about eight hundred metres, so it was clear that the murderer was a sniper of considerable skill. It was getting too hot for Richard Benjamin Springer, so he decided to get out of the kitchen. And when the plane landed at Manchester, Smithells and his officers were waiting for him and took him off the plane.

“Well, how the prodigal son returns,” said Smithells as they got into the car. “You can’t say we didn’t come running out to greet you. However, we don’t have a fattened calf for you. By the way, you were nearly dead, so I am informed. Another twelve hours and Crackshot Casper would have caught up with you with his hunting rifle. A Winchester, I gather. He doesn’t like the Kalashnikov – far too inaccurate. How they get anyone with those rotten old gas pipes, he has no idea. They think he did in your mate Logan. But don’t worry; you’ll be safe for a good few years here. You might get the odd con slitting you with a razor blade.”

“I demand to be protected,” said Springer.

“We’ll do our best, but other cons will find out about the hundred and fifty thousand images found on your computer, most of which are pretty extreme stuff involving minors. Video nasties as well, and very nasty they were too. By the way we have also had evidence of inappropriate activity with teenage girls and boys. Your common villains don’t like paedophiles in the nick. In fact, there is a special nick where they put all the nonces.”

“Nonce?”

“Yes. It means ‘nonsense offender’. There are some pretty vile people in the nick, murderers, robbers, terrorists, fraudsters, to name but a few. They all have one thing in common; they can’t stand sexual offenders. You will be able to go on the rule though. But I don’t commend it.”

“On the rule?”

“Yes, Rule 43 – Solitary confinement for your own protection. I can assure you, Richard, that there is going to be one hell of a party when you get sentenced.”

“Are you taking me back to Langerham Manor?”

“Are you joking? I don’t take kindly to people pulling a fast one on me and giving me a fake passport. We’re going to Alverston nick and there is a lot to discuss with you. I hope you are going to be more cooperative. The FBI wants you. If you don’t cooperate, you will go back to them, and Crackshot Casper may well get a chance to have a go. He’s an ex-marine sniper. He doesn’t miss. You will probably get thirty years here, which works out at about fifteen with remission. You will be deported and go back to the states. Crackshot Casper probably won’t be around. The FBI have quite a case on you. Ninety years they say. You’re fifty now. You will be nearly sixty-five when you go back to the USA, and another ninety years. You’ll be over one hundred and fifty when you get out. You will be decidedly dodderly. By the way, UK nicks are decidedly palatial compared with the American ones. You have form, so you should know.

“As for Langerham Manor, you can say goodbye to that. It will be seized under the Proceeds of Crime Act. Oh, by the way, Fotheringham District Council are pressing for a prosecution for demolition of a Grade 2 listed structure. Don’t worry about the sentence. It will be a couple of years to run concurrently with the others.”

“I worked hard for that,” said Springer plaintively.

“Oh, I know,” said Smithells. “I know how hard it is to dupe people to part with their hard-earned money. No expense spared, was there? Gold taps, cinema room with the most luxurious leather chairs? Top line computer system. We found your Bugatti in the garage – very pampered motor, central heating there. It will fetch quite a bit. It’s in showroom condition. Shame it wasn’t insured or taxed, nor for that matter did you have a valid driving licence. You will hardly notice the sentence for that: six months concurrent. We made a bit of a mess of your

house, but we'll fix it before it's on the market. I doubt it will pay off those you ripped off, but we will seize all your assets. By the time you leave prison, you will only have the shirt and trousers you stand up in.

"By the way, we found your secret arsenal. Your staff dropped you in it. That's good for at least fourteen years. Depends what mood the beak's in, whether you get concurrent or consecutive."

"It's the second amendment. I have the right to bear arms."

"Not here, mate. You're under UK law here. We don't put up with firearms."

Springer sat there in the car thinking of a long and nasty future. He had told so many others about how they would go to Hell at the end of their lives. He was approaching its gloomy portals right now. It was going to be death before death.

Smithells was feeling relieved. He had both his villains where he wanted them, inside. Springer would soon be on remand. The firearms charges would be enough to keep him there, while he unpicked the rest of the case. Scott would get a big portion of porridge for his antics with a motor car. It was highly unlikely that all the money filched by Springer and Scott would ever be recovered. Langerham Manor would get a reasonable price if someone wanted to convert it into a golf-course hotel. Scott's central London flat would also contribute massively. He hoped to have it all cleared up by the end of 2016 and he could retire in March 2017.

In Fatheringham, Councillor Tony Mottram was considering what should be done with Langerham Manor. A visit to the place was a priority, so on Tuesday 25th November 2014 he drove there with two of his team, one of whom had been an Elder of the unlamented Fatheringham Evangelical Church. The question that he wanted to answer was whether the former Langerham Manor, illegally demolished and redeveloped, should be rebuilt as it was the day before Richard Springer had bought it. Legally it should have been, but to demolish the sprawling and tasteless

building that had replaced the old house would cost a fortune, and the rebuild would cost even more. To do that would mean that the price would be so high that nobody would be able to afford it. Otherwise, the council would make a thumping loss, which would thump down like a lead balloon when the press got hold of it.

“No vulgarity spared,” was Mottram’s verdict as he walked around the place. “Do you think we could get much for the fixtures and fittings?”

“Not much,” said Rob Gray. “We might get a couple of hundred for each leather settee. One hundred and fifty quid for the projector in the cinema room would be the max. You can get that stuff on E-bay. A lot of the stuff is bespoke, so would need to be adapted.”

“Who lived here?” asked Alan Dick.

“A bloke who said he was a simple pastor.”

“I would have said it was a footballer or some other self-made man.”

“Good God!” said Gray as they went into the study. “There’s a whole load of stuff from my old church. I don’t believe it.”

Gray looked at a communion plate and a chalice on which was marked “Fatheringham Evangelical Church – May 1988.” These and several other valuable items were in a display cabinet. They had disappeared from the church soon after Elsheimer took over. They were valuable items, and the police were involved in an investigation that had got nowhere. No wonder. Elsheimer had not done Holy Communion for several years, and it was offered only to those who were in favour with him.

“Who was the bloke?” asked Dick.

“Waldron B Elsheimer,” said Gray. “He was an American evangelical pastor who was foisted on our church after Conall Devine left. I was an elder there. He was devious and there was a lot of talk about him having his fingers in the till. He was into hell, fire, and brimstone. We

never knew where he lived. He would never allow us to come to his house. We always had our meetings in The Tabernacle.”

“Tab-a-knack-call?”

“It was the name he gave to our church building which was on Melton Lane Industrial Estate. Anyway, he legged it with all the money. All my pension has gone.”

“Not the name I’ve got,” said Mottram. “What did he call himself?”

“Waldron B Elsheimer.”

“The paperwork I have got here is concerning Richard Benjamin Springer. That’s the name on all the deeds and all the bills. Hang on, here is some stuff where he uses that name you had, Rob.”

Rob Gray was going to tell all the other elders when they met at the Spread Eagle that evening. There were pictures lying about the place. The police had not been over fussy about tidying up after they had turned the place upside down. Each picture told a story of this very strict pastor having parties that bordered on orgies. There was a bar that was well stocked with anything that a boozier might want. There were pictures of fabulous feasts of the kind that the simple members of the church could only dream of. The ex-elders still felt slightly guilty of having their monthly get-together at the Spread Eagle. It was a nice pub though, warm, friendly, congenial, and comfortable. The beer was good as well.

“Well, I never!” was the reply that evening when Rob Gray told them in the lounge at the Spread Eagle.

“It’s outrageous,” said Gray. Steam was coming out of his ears. “The man kept on going on about sin. Anything that was remotely fun was sinful and we would be condemned to the fiery pit and there he was living it up like a footballer. No wonder he didn’t want us to know where he lived. He would have all sorts of rave-ups with his friends.”

“It was our money that was paying for it,” said Geoff Marsden. He too had lost a good part of his savings. “What was his real name?”

“Springer. He had the house under his proper name.”

“Elsheimer was an alias, was it?”

“Yes. The bloody man has had us all for mugs these past fifteen odd years. And we were paying for his lavish style. Tony Mottram told us today that there were several supercars in his garage. He had that Range Rover with its personalised number plate. That was his daily run-around.”

“I feel a bit funny being here after all these years of Jelly Belly going on about drink.”

“Well, you needn’t. He had a full-sized bar behind the stairs. I saw some of the bills for booze. In September he had a party, and the booze bill was for twenty-five grand. A couple of pints here won’t do any harm. The man was a hypocrite.”

“Did he believe a word of what he told us?”

“Probably not. He just had us where he wanted us.”

“His qualifications were made up,” Rob Gray added. “I found out that his Doctorate of Theology was from a made-up university that existed on-line. He bought it. He bought all his sermons from an American website. When he ran out of text, he made it up as he went along.”

“That’s what they do where I work.”

Hypocrite was the least of the words that were used as more revelations were made of Elsheimer’s extravagant lifestyle that belied his preaching to his congregation. That he had taken the communion plate and chalice was a surprise to no-one, and the ex-elders decided to mention it to the police. They had been used by a devious and manipulative man who had claimed for himself a superior understanding of the Christian religion. It was not a faith, but a religion that demanded a joyless obedience to gain the approval of a man who was slow to bless and quick

to chide. When he chided, his mouth was that of a sewer. It was a religion that gave no joy but demanded endless giving of money so that its leader could live it up in a style that was beyond a king. It was a religion that had ended up cynically taking everything from simple people and giving nothing in return. Certainly, Jesus had been mentioned very few times. God was a harsh judge, as capricious as any dictator, in charge of hosts of celestial storm-troopers. He would order eternal damnation at Elsheimer's say-so. Love was never a part of Elsheimer's preaching or practice. But Elsheimer didn't practise what he preached. He loved his self-importance and nurtured his ego in the manner of all narcissists. As far as others were concerned, he regarded his congregation as beneath contempt.

What irritated the ex-elders was that Springer had done it at their expense and had had them for mugs. They had a lot of bones to pick with him. But this time, they would at least be able to have a Christmas.

Chapter 11

Thursday 30th October 2014

Any male student at Strathcadden Academy would bear witness to the fact the boys' lavatories were not a congenial place. Known as *The Wests*, this rather creepy looking block had been erected when Saint Oswald College had first been built at the end of the Nineteenth Century. Like all the other school buildings, this one had been erected to the design of John Motson, the engineer and architect of the Great Central Line. All his buildings had overtones of a railway station. The Wests echoed the least desirable parts. It was a utilitarian building, but like all of Motson's work, it had been built extremely well.

When the Great Central Line was closed in the late nineteen sixties, demolition was attempted, but all Motson's works were so tough that any single job was a prolonged affair and took at least three times as long as it was thought. Brick wing-walls of bridges and tunnels, as well as retaining walls had been back-filled with reinforced concrete. Station buildings and signal boxes had reinforcing rods running through the brick courses. They were not going anywhere.

The idea behind the closure of the line had been to convert the spinal railway in the north of England and Scotland into a motorway, but the scheme was abandoned. One of the reasons was because of the demolition costs. When the railway was rebuilt in the late nineteen eighties, most of the track-bed and engineering works were found to be in first-class order even after twenty odd years of abandonment.

The Wests was bomb-proof, as had been demonstrated after surviving an almost direct hit during the Second World War.

The Wests was a noisome place. When it was first built, there were no partitions at all between each pedestal. Dr Cowan had decreed that his pupils were to learn all the privations of the British Empire. He had originally ordered that each stall was to consist of a squat-type latrine, but sourcing these proved difficult. Very basic industrial wash-down pedestals

were ordered instead. These consisted of a cylindrical ceramic pot with a beige salt glaze. Inset into the rim of each apparatus, on opposite sides, there were two shaped pieces of unvarnished pitch-pine to act as a seat. The pedestals were designed not to be comfortable to sit on. The idea was that employers did not want their workers shirking their duties on the pretext of a rest break. Dr Cowan thought the same. It would also toughen up the boys. Although the facility was designed to accommodate two rugby teams with substitutes and officials, it had never done so. There was very little record of what the boys of Saint Oswald College thought about it at the time. Most were dead; a great many were dead within a few years of leaving the place.

There would have been no respite for the boys in saving up their bodily needs until they got back to their houses. The house facilities were exactly the same. The same did not apply to the staff, of course. Their facilities were decidedly handsome, and total privacy was assured.

Partitions were erected in the nineteen fifties to protect the modesty of users, but this was not the progress it was meant to be. There were no doors. Due to the shortage of plywood after the war, the partitions were not very high. They had more in common with stalls in a cow shed. A teenage boy of average height could stand and easily peer over the top. In the nineteen seventies doors were added of a twin saloon bar design with no locks. Old Oswaldians of the time remember having their peace shattered by an unauthorised entry followed by a mumbled and embarrassed “sorry”. Locks were fitted in preparation for Strathcadden Academy.

There was no heating. If the winters were very cold, an industrial space heater was set up, not to provide warmth for the users, but to stop the apparatus from freezing. The main entrance had no door as such. A sliding grille blocked the entrance at night. It was opened first thing in the morning by John the Jannie and locked last thing at night. The place had a long clerestory skylight set into the roof, on either side of which were louvres for ventilation. There were doors to the male changing rooms in the Sports Department. Although much of the Physical Education was

carried out at the Sports Centre, the changing rooms were retained for the rugby teams, the football teams, and the cross-country running squad. The Wests was considered a good place for teams to bond.

The most recent work had been done when the kilt became the uniform. Towel rails were added so that kilts could be stowed safely with no risk of them being snatched away by some little sod who thought that kind of thing was funny.

Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council had spent a considerable sum of money converting the old Saint Oswald College into a modern school fit for the Twenty First Century. The Wests was considered to be a low priority at the time. Male Caddies would try to avoid it, if at all possible. At break and other peak periods, there often was nowhere else to go.

In 2012, the Strathcadden District Council and the School Board decided that it was high time that the place should be refurbished and made an application to Region for permission to do the work. The council agreed that the place was a disgrace, and that refurbishment work should start as soon as possible. However, the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association got wind and had an interdict granted that such work should not take place for an indefinite period. The interdict would need to be renewed every two years. Although the council should have fought to overturn the interdict, it would have cost a fortune at a time of cutbacks. In fact, the money put aside for refurbishment had been swallowed up in the legal fees for the case. Therefore, The Wests continued its long but uncongenial service to the boys of Strathcadden Academy.

On this particular Thursday morning, Christian Salway had done something unusual for him. He had overslept, so he had to get up in a rush. Christian was on duty at break and lunchtime. He started his morning patrol that was the tradition. He was not that late; it was that he had had to rush to get up instead of sitting on his bed getting good vibes. It was cold and foggy. Christian was glad he was well wrapped up in his thick ski-jacket as well as the four layers underneath.

Visibility was down to fifty metres in places. It was unlikely that he would see boys coming back from unauthorised liaisons or bringing in illicit hooch. Not that it happened, even when it was crystal clear. Autumn was well into its swing. Leaves were dropping off the trees. Through the fog, Christian wondered if he could hear the fallow deer rutting in the woods. The woods around Strathcadden were one of the few areas in Scotland that supported them. More distinctly he could hear the house bells being rung for the distant Caddies to get up. At least it didn't happen at weekends, although those who slept in missed breakfast in the canteen. He saw John the Jannie opening up The Wests and passed a couple of minutes with him, before getting out his smart phone to e-mail the Headmaster that everything was in order. He was conscientious about this, although he wondered if Mr Mitchell ever read them. Mr Mitchell had told him that when he came back from his summer break, there were fifty thousand unread e-mails waiting for him.

As usual, Eejay was coming down to breakfast with Jordan. Chris had had some feelings towards Gemma at the start of the year, but those seemed to have gone off the boil, since she had announced she had a boyfriend at home. He liked Gemma a great deal and would have liked to be her boyfriend. Above all, he missed Aidy. Skype was good, but not as good as being there.

Christian put aside his thoughts about a girlfriend and got on with his classes. His latest business studies assignment had got a Grade A, which was reward for the time he had put into it. In Art he was able to get on with his design work. In Spanish, he did well on a vocabulary test. All in all, it was a good morning. The better he did, the more he wanted to do. There was, though, a feeling that he was getting a pressing need.

As Chris was on duty, he and the other duty prefects had an early lunch before going out into the grounds. As Head Boy, he had quite a beat to do, but he still found time to talk to other Caddies, for that was his style. He took his role modelling seriously. That didn't mean that he was po-faced. He enjoyed sharing in the humour and banter of other students, whether it was about driving tests, or who was tweeting whom. For

himself, he avoided Twitter. It had given him a lot of grief when he lived in Beckton. He had decided that Twitter was for birdbrains.

The pressing need was increasing, and Christian came to the awful conclusion he was going to have to use The Wests. It was a busy place at lunchtime, with all the unpleasant consequences. Several boys were playing footy on the hard area (the old Parade Ground – Dr Cowan would have had a fit). Some of the girls from the women’s rugby squad were practising their passing. Now he was inside the horrid building. A good number of the stalls were occupied. He found a stall, took off his ski-jacket before undoing his belt, folding up his kilt, and placing it on the rail. He sat down. It was cold.

As he sat there making his own contribution to the vile atmosphere of the place, he became aware of a kind of buzzing noise. There was a series of shouts and oaths as the buzzing got louder. In a parody of the Star of Bethlehem being stationary above the Stable, the drone hovered over his stall. He looked up at it. There were four propellers holding the machine aloft. A red and a green LED formed its navigation lights. The most obvious feature was a camera that was pointing towards him, and a little red LED was flashing. It moved right above him. Christian stood up, grabbed his kilt and tried to swat the damned machine, but missed. It rose out of reach, and he shouted the first words that came from his mind, “Fuck off!” It paused, before carrying on its mission to survey the quantity and quality of the occupation of The Wests.

A commotion ensued with a lot of cursing and swearing. “Right, lads, knock it off now!” shouted Christian as he put his kilt back on. To his surprise they knocked it off and reverted back to the kind of vulgar and juvenile chatter that a place like The Wests nurtures. The drone dived out of the door with Christian and a couple of others chasing. “Get that bloody thing, Lisa!” Simon Cairns shouted. He too did not appreciate his peace being interrupted in this way and had finished his task as quickly as Christian.

Lisa Hopwood was not the kicker in the women's rugby team for nothing. She gave the ball as much welly as she would for any drop-goal. The ball responded well in its new-found role as a surface-to-air missile. It missed the drone by just a few centimetres passing between two tall trees. Dichards at the Rugby Football Union would have wept for such a shot. It was more than textbook; it was classic. In a game it would have been remembered for years.

The drone disappeared behind the trees and headed off towards the back of Fenton House.

"I have never heard you say that word, Chris," Simon said to his friend.

"I thought I had forgotten it, too," Chris replied. "I need to find out who it was. I don't want my arse broadcast across You-Tube. I'll need to tell Mr Mitchell as well."

Christian got out his walkie-talkie that all duty prefects carried. "Chris to team. Chris to team. Could we all go to the back of Fenton House or Edwards House? A drone has been flown into the Wests and almost caused a riot. A lot of lads are upset at being filmed on the lavvy."

Christian and Simon trotted over to Fenton House to see if they could find the culprits. A drone of that size would not be easy to hide. Wrong. By the time the prefects had got over there, it was nowhere to be seen. It had actually been taken into a storeroom (out of bounds) in Dibben House and hidden there, while the memory card had been removed.

Christian Salway asked his prefects to keep an open ear. Some nosy Caddie was bound to pick up on what had happened and shoot his or her mouth off. He felt strongly that Mr Mitchell should know. It would also be a test to see if the Headmaster actually read his e-mails. If nothing got done, nobody could accuse Chris of not doing anything.

Two things had surprised Christian. Firstly, he had used a foul phrase that he hadn't used since he was at Beckton Sixth Form College.

He felt ashamed. He had started the uproar in The Wests. Secondly, he was even more surprised that when he ordered twenty teenage boys to knock it off, they had at once. Some Caddies had even said that he had knocked out that loony American pastor before half term. As if.

The school bell was trilling to warn of the end of lunchbreak and that it was time to go to afternoon registration before the sports and activity session. Now it was time to get the men's Senior running squad out for a 5 k. They were getting fast and several of them could fairly push him, not just Eejay and Jordan.

As Simon and Christian walked back towards Baxter House, they saw the familiar figure of Mr Mitchell. It was clear that he had read the e-mail. He trotted up to them and said, "What happened?"

Christian replied, "I had to go to the lavvy, sir," and went red.

"Salway, lad, don't be embarrassed. We all have to go, lad. So, what happened after that?"

"I was sitting there, and this drone came round with a camera on. It flew over all the stalls and there were lots of us in there."

"What happened next?"

"Simon and I chased it out. Lisa Hopwood tried to shoot it down with a rugby ball. She missed, and it went over to Fenton House. I called my team to see if we could find it."

"What do you think is going to happen?"

"I think it's the sort of thing that might well go onto You-Tube, sir. The camera was definitely running, and it hovered over me for a good while. I tried to swat it with my kilt. A lot of lads are upset because it was snooping at them while they were going to the lavvy. That's why I e-mailed you."

"Were you there, Cairns?"

“Yes, sir.” Simon Cairns replied. “I would agree with what Chris said. I don’t want all the world seeing what I was doing. Would you, Mr Mitchell?”

“Certainly not. It’s a serious matter and thank you for bringing it to my attention. It’s more than just a stupid schoolboy prank. You can be sure that I will investigate this. If you and your team hear anything, I need to know at once.”

Christian Salway and Simon Cairns went to their registrations before going back down to get changed for their training – Simon for rugby and Christian for cross-country running.

Mr Mitchell could have done with what could be regarded as another safeguarding case like a bullet through the head. The first thing he did was to call Margot Gledhill at Region. By a miracle, she was in and agreed to come over immediately. Mitchell called his senior management team in for an emergency meeting to start as soon as Margot Gledhill arrived. Twenty minutes later she was at Strathcadden Academy. The coffee machine was bubbling. They would all need it.

Keith Mitchell started, “Good afternoon colleagues. A serious incident happened at lunchtime today which could have safeguarding implications for our male students. A drone was flown into The Wests and was used to film boys sitting on the toilet.”

“It is certainly more than a stupid prank,” said Mrs Gledhill. “It’s the sort of thing that could go onto You-Tube. It could be interpreted as voyeurism.”

“Get the boys back into trousers!” snapped Mrs Horsefall. She had always been lukewarm about the kilt-based uniform.

“Hang on, Sue,” said Mr McEwan, “even if they were wearing trousers, they would have been around their ankles. So, the content of any such video-clip would not be affected.”

The initial discussions would have provided a doctoral thesis for the University of the Truly Obvious. It was McEwan who got the meeting to consider something more constructive with his idea of what should be done next.

“We certainly need to carry out an investigation, especially if it is put up on You-Tube,” he said. “If it is, it makes the situation a lot worse. But we need to do something about The Wests. The boys have been complaining about it for years. It is an equality issue.”

“How’s that?” said Mrs Gledhill.

“The girls have The Easts which is modern and comfortable. Each lavatory is in a separate full height compartment so no stupid business can happen.”

“So, how’s that different to The Wests, Andy?” said Mrs Gledhill.

“The Wests was put up when the old school was built and has hardly changed since. The lavatories are separated by low cubicles that were put in after the war. Before that, boys had to do their business in full view of everyone else.”

“You can’t be serious!” It had never occurred to Mrs Gledhill, who had been in post for eighteen months, that such primitive arrangements had existed in any of the Region’s schools. “That must have been against all safeguarding legislation.”

“There wasn’t any in those days. The first Headmaster wanted to put squats in there but could not get any. He wanted to toughen up the boys. So, he put in what’s there. It is over a hundred years old. It was only in the seventies that doors were added. Even then there weren’t any locks. Those were put on when we moved in.”

“Does Region know about this?”

“Yes, Margot,” said Mr Mitchell. “I have been going on to Colin Buchan about it since I have been here. He agrees the job needs doing.”

“Why hasn’t it been done?”

“The Victorian Heritage Preservation Association,” Mitchell replied grumpily.

“Victorian Heritage Preservation Association?”

“Didn’t you hear about it, Margot? We wanted to do the job a couple of years ago, but they were granted an interdict to stop us from doing it.” Mitchell carried on in a parody of a refined voice, “The building and its contents are a unique example of a facility that uses late Victorian sanitary ware applied to an industrial situation.”

“Industrial situation, Keith?” said McEwan. “I thought this was a school.”

“That’s what they said, Andy. I don’t think they would use it, do you?”

“If they’re that keen on it, why don’t they have it dismantled at their expense and take it down to Beamish?”

“What’s Beamish?” asked Mrs Gledhill.

“It’s an industrial museum that recreates a Victorian town, in County Durham,” McEwan continued. “They could build it as a gents – without all that terrible post-war plywood of course – and use it. I don’t think they would have many takers. We’ll find out soon enough who the film director was and the pilot. You all know what Caddies are like. Someone will shoot his mouth off and, hey presto, we have nailed them.”

That evening, Christian Salway and Ewan Walker were in Christian’s room looking at You-Tube on the laptop. They searched drone footage and found a new upload that looked rather familiar with a none-too-subtle title, *Caddies on the can*. The clip started at take-off, giving a clear shot of the pilot and his mates. It was controlled from a device as big as a lap-top computer which gave the pilot a clear view of where he

was going. It flew across the lower playing fields, clearing the trees by the hard area. There were groups of boys playing footy and Lisa Hopwood and her team-mates passing a rugby ball. The machine dived into The Wests, narrowly missing the lintel over the entrance. It slowly flew along the stalls revealing a range of Caddie Laddies perched on each apparatus. Some took no notice, while others swore at the machine. Next the commentary mentioned “We’ve well and truly caught our Head Boy, Christian Salway, with his kilt off!” There was Christian trying to swat the thing with his kilt, but it was too nimble. There was an imitation of a teacher shouting, “Salway, laddie, will ye no use lavatory language?” It showed the view as it hovered and there was a puerile and rather revolting commentary before it moved off revealing others whose privacy it had invaded. Finally, it showed Christian Salway and Simon Cairns chasing it out of The Wests. Neither looked very pleased. There was the narrow escape as the rugby ball in its new role as a surface to air missile missed it but was close enough to make the machine lurch. After that it made its way back to the space between Fenton and Edwards Houses.

There were 43156 views with 3429 likes and 2 dislikes. It had been up for two hours. It was clearly going viral. The comments below were asinine and puerile.

“I think Mr McEwan and Mr Mitchell need to know about this,” said Ewan. He could see that Christian was getting upset. He had been at the receiving end of online harassment before. It was an uninvited intrusion into what was a very private moment, and it made him feel embarrassed. If broadcasting it across the world wasn’t harassment, he didn’t know what was. He was over eighteen, so he couldn’t complain that it involved minors. Those who clearly were minors from Secondary One, Two, Three, and Four had had their faces pixelated out. The ones who were exposed were all from Secondary Five and Six. There was one slight relief, if one could pardon the expression. Simon Cairns had received the same treatment.

Christian e-mailed the link to the Headmaster and Mr McEwan and went down with Ewan to see the House Leader. Once again Jake was there to be the total centre of attention.

The next morning, Keith Mitchell and Andrew McEwan watched the video together. It was as Christian had described to them, except that there were now 560768 views. It was definitely viral. Not much in the way of sleuthing was needed, as the pilot and his friends were quite visible.

“I think suspensions are appropriate here, Andy,” said Mitchell.

“We need to get Margot Gledhill in on this as well. We will call the culprits in this morning. I’ll get on to their parents. They can sweat it out over the weekend.”

Keith Mitchell was soon on the phone to Margot Gledhill. The link had been forwarded to her. Her reply was, “I have watched it, and I agree it’s infantile and embarrassing for the main targets. Salway is eighteen and Cairns is seventeen, so it doesn’t involve a minor under Scottish Law. It’s a stupid prank. It’s also a dangerous act, but I don’t think the courts would be interested. I don’t think expulsion would be appropriate in this case, although you certainly should give the wee scallies the rounds of the cookhouse.”

“The way forward, Keith, is to see how Salway and Cairns react when the scallies come up for the disciplinary on Monday.” said McEwan. Mrs Laidlaw came through and a couple of boys from Secondary Four, Oliver Price and Jason Cairncross, came through.

“We’re sorry to disturb you, Mr Mitchell,” Oliver Price said. “We think we know who flew the drone into The Wests. Are you interested as well, Mr McEwan?”

“Of course. Who was it?”

“We saw the video,” Jason added. “It wasn’t very nice, and it upset Chris and Simon. They’re really good to us, and they don’t deserve it either.”

“It was Mark Arnot, Jon Burrow, and Julian Rowley,” said Oliver. “Please don’t tell anyone it was us, Mr McEwan.”

“Don’t worry. You know well how quickly things get around this school. Many thanks for telling us.”

The boys left. A couple of minutes later, Gemma Hammond, the Head Girl, was there with exactly the same information. Arnot, Burrow, and Rowley had all bragged about it. Nosy Caddies had picked it up quickly and were shooting their mouths off too. Sleuthing wasn’t in it.

Abigail Burwood, Head Prefect of Dibben House, was knocking at the door and offered a gift of a drone that she had found in the groundsmen’s store at the back of Dibben House. Nosy Caddies had shot their mouths off to her as well. It was coming together with great ease.

After she had gone, Andy McEwan said, “I told you so, Keith. You can’t keep a secret from Caddies for that long. They are a nosy bunch.”

The boys were interviewed. They denied it, of course. They were made to work in isolation that day, and their parents were summoned to the school on Monday morning.

On Monday morning, the three boys were there waiting for Mr Mitchell and Mr McEwan. Their parents were there as well and they were not best pleased, especially as Master Rowley had “borrowed” the drone from his dad. When they went in, Mr Rowley was relieved to see that the drone was sitting on the Headmaster’s desk. It was a valuable piece of kit that he used in his work as a construction surveyor. He would be careful to lock it up in future to ensure that thieving little teenage hands didn’t get on it again.

Despite the good number of statements from other students, the three boys continued to deny it. How did it get into the groundsman's shed behind Dibben House? Several had seen Rowley take it there. But he didn't, of course. Although the three had concocted a story, it didn't hold together and, finally, Arnot and Burrows admitted that they had uploaded the film clip to You-Tube. They hadn't meant to upset Cairns and Salway. It was only a joke. Rowley continued to hide his undoubted skills as a pilot under a bushel, but it was not in the least bit convincing. Eventually, after bluffing it out proved to be too much like hard work, Rowley gave up and admitted he was the pilot.

"I have been waiting for you to say that, Rowley, my lad," said Mr Mitchell. "So, we have established the facts and the motive. All three of you say it was a joke - not very funny, in my opinion, and everyone else's in this room. There are three main problems. Number One is that it is voyeurism. Storing it in any form could be considered as a criminal offence, let alone publishing it. Number Two is that publishing it without the subjects' permission is harassment, which is something we take a very dim view of here. Number Three is that flying the machine into a confined space where there are people could be very dangerous. There are flying rules from the Civil Aviation Authority. Drones are not toys. So, what are we going to do about it? In some schools, what you did could result in suspension or even expulsion."

Mark Arnot was now in tears. He liked Strathcadden Academy and the thought of having to go to Cardean High did not appeal to him. Mr Mitchell carried on, "We have tried to delete the video-clip, but it's still there. There are hundreds of thousands of views."

"I'll delete it now," said Burrows. "May I use your computer, sir?"

"Be my guest," said Mitchell.

Jon Burrows quickly found his account and, in the presence of all assembled in that place, deleted the clip. Mr Mitchell continued, "You need to understand that what you have done is unacceptable. The action we will take will depend on what Salway and Cairns have to say."

At that point, Mrs Laidlaw ushered Simon Cairns and Christian Salway into the office. They were going to be allowed their say. Simon Cairns started off with, “So what was your game?”

“It was a joke, that’s all,” replied Arnot.

“One that you have shared with half a million people,” said Salway. “Would you like me to share with everyone what you had done in a lavvy?”

“No.”

“So why did you do it to us?” Cairns asked.

“We thought it was funny,” said Burrows.

“Very funny,” said Salway. “Have you ever been bullied on-line?”

“No.”

“Well, I have. I used to live in a place called Beckton on Sower. It’s in the North-East of England. Other kids didn’t like me because I didn’t have a dad. They didn’t like me because I tried in my lessons. I got beaten up in a happy-slapping that was put up on You-tube and broadcast on Facebook. I had a lot of abuse on Facebook and Twitter. I had hard-core porn put onto my computer. I had people coming outside my house. It wasn’t nice. Finally, I was put into hospital by a couple of friends. I nearly died. So can you see why Simon and I are upset by what you did?”

“It was only a joke,” Rowley parroted.

“It’s not at all funny,” Cairns snapped. “I didn’t like what I was doing in a lavvy being broadcast to the world either.”

“So, what do you two want to be done?” said Mr McEwan.

Christian Salway said what he and Simon had prepared, “All three should apologise in assemblies for their behaviour. There were boys from each year group in The Wests at the time. They were all upset and annoyed. I hope they mean it as well.”

“Why should I?” said Rowley petulantly.

“Because,” said his father, “Mr Mitchell is well within his rights to kick you out. You have a choice. You can take the easier way, which is to apologise as the Head Boy suggests, or you take the hard way which is this. If Mr Mitchell decides to kick you out, the only alternative is for you to go south of the Border. Would you like to go to a school in Carlsborough? Your mother and I fought no end to get you in here. It is the best school that we know of, including Kolverford – which you messed up in. You are risking doing the same here.”

“Dad, that’s not fair! They are picking on me like they did at Kolverford.”

“You said that about Mr Stanton. He was quite within his rights to ask you to leave. Mr Mitchell was kind enough to take you in.”

His mates turned on him. “Jules, Mr Mitchell could kick us all out. We like the school. You nicked the drone from your dad. Are you going to man up and say sorry?”

“Sorry to whom?”

“Chris and Simon for a kick-off. Your dad for nicking his drone. The lads in The Wests. Come on Jules.”

Christian leant forward, looked at Julian Rowley straight in the eye, and said, “Jules, it’s the easiest thing to do. I want to repeat what has been said before. I know I’m only three years older than you, but I know what I am talking about. Now don’t try and shift your gaze from me or Simon. I came to this school just about a year ago. For many reasons I never wanted to come to a school again. But Mr Mitchell and his teachers really brought out the best. They made me do things I never thought I could do. I never thought I would be a Head Boy. I never thought I was a cross-country runner, let alone be a sports captain. They put their trust in me, and I will do my level best for them. I don’t know where you got your ideas from, but you need to change them. Don’t do it for me. Do it for yourself. Do it for your Mum and Dad. Do it for your friends.”

“Chris and Simon,” the others said, “we’re both sorry for doing what we did. We thought it was just a joke, but we now realise that it was unacceptable, as Mr McEwan put it. Mr Mitchell, we will say sorry in assemblies. And we want to say sorry to Mr Mitchell and Mr McEwan for wasting their time, and to all the mums and dads as well.”

Julian Rowley realised that his position was untenable. He was about to fall off his high horse, and it was going to be a long way down. So, he dismounted his steed before it was too late. “Sorry Chris, and Simon,” he mumbled facing the floor. Fortunately for him, talk of expulsion was just bluff. Expulsion from any local authority school in Scotland was only ever carried out as the last of last resorts.

It is cheesy, but true, to relate that that is what they did. They were grounded by parents for between two weeks and a month. They each attracted quite a lot of discredits, a House Leader’s detention, and a Headmaster’s detention. A notice from the Headmaster reminded students that the use of any flying machine was forbidden during school hours due to the risk to other students. Students were reminded that putting material online with a view to causing distress to any student would be counted as harassment and would be dealt with severely.

The Great Drone Flight took its place in the gallery of Caddie lore, with the usual exaggeration that was characteristic of the students of Strathcadden Academy.

To prevent a repeat performance, John the Jannie erected flyscreens that were normally used to prevent flies and other insects from getting into food premises. They were to perform the same function as wires hanging from barrage balloons during the Second World War. No drone would ever tangle with them.

Chapter 12

**Tuesday 11th November – Wednesday 12th
November 2014**

At Strathcadden Academy, the Autumn Term continued. As the rumour of the Great Drone Flight died down, the school had turned its collective efforts towards the Act of Remembrance. It was always a dignified event. Students from Secondary Years Five and Six attended the ceremony at The Memorial which was outside College House. Dignitaries from the town attended with old soldiers, sailors, and airmen.

It had always been done this way because the Old Boys of Saint Oswald College suffered grievously during both World Wars. The year group who left in 1915 lost almost three quarters of its boys. In 1916, almost 80 % died. Many of them were conscripted into the Army as junior officers. After six weeks' training, they were in the trenches and were expected to lead the troops over the top.

Strathcadden in general and Corscadden in particular lost a very large number of young men in the Great War. About fifty percent of those who left never returned. The Buchananshire Regiment was one of those that led the way over the top at the Battle of the Somme on 1st July 1916. On that dire Saturday morning, of 10 000 troops who went over the top, only 1750 were alive by midday. When they were forced to withdraw in the late afternoon, there were 735 left. Of those who did survive, many had suffered terrible injuries.

The same was true for Corscadden's twin-town of Dringhausen. Almost all the young men had been conscripted into the 17th Royal Saxon Infantry. Like the Buchananshire Regiment, it had suffered massive losses during the Battle of the Somme. Those who had not been wiped out in the Battle of the Somme were on Messines Ridge on Thursday 7th June 1917 when a number of huge mines were detonated as the introit of an extremely bloody battle. 10 000 German soldiers died in those explosions, including three quarters of the 17th Royal Saxon Infantry. The remainder suffered terrible casualties in the remaining days of the battle. Of the 26 000 who were enlisted in the 17th Royal Saxon Infantry in the four years

of the Great War, 3500 returned to their homes in Dringhausen, Mühlhausen, and Ekkelshalle.

Remembrance continued to be taken seriously. This year, a delegation came from Dringhausen to attend and honour the terrible suffering experienced by both towns. There would be a ceremony at the school, and at the town's war memorial which carried the names of many hundreds of fallen young men from the town.

Fortunately, on that Tuesday, the weather was relatively benign. There was no gale to whip up the kilts. It was a solemn and dignified ceremony. As Head Boy and Head Girl, Christian Salway and Gemma Hammond led the Service of Remembrance. For such an occasion, both wore the Oswald Boss and Sash. Christian gave a reading of the whole of R L Binyon's *For the Fallen*. Gemma Hammond read *My Boy Jack* by Rudyard Kipling, a poem about Kipling's son John who was killed at the age of 18 in 1915 at the Battle of Loos. Other prefects read other poems, while Mr McEwan gave a talk that moved several to tears. The prefects led prayers that were heartfelt and sincere. Ewan Walker and Tamsin Heady provided the music. A reading in German was given, with a translation projected onto the screen. A hymn was sung in German too.

It was a new approach, putting the students in the driving seat. The students had more than risen to the occasion which was marked by sincere and solemn dignity. Certainly, Mr McEwan and Mr Mitchell agreed with that. Ewan Walker spoke to the Germans in his perfect German which was much appreciated. The guests were all very complimentary.

Students continued to avoid The Wests as far as they could. While the whole rumpus died down quickly among the students, the incident made Keith Mitchell and Andrew McEwan even more determined to get shot of the Victorian apparatus and replace them with a more up-to-date

facility. There were two things that stood in the way: money, and the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association.

For Christian Salway and his team of prefects, the Autumn Term was following its humdrum but comfortable routines. Sunrise was getting noticeably late, so Christian or Gemma did their morning patrol accompanied by another prefect. There never had been anything untoward, but there was always that slight risk. It was riskier in the days of Saint Oswald College when boys returned from various illicit nocturnal activities. It was one of the tougher public schools, and some behaviour could be boisterous, even wild. On a few occasions they had been caught, and the Head Boy had been decked. All in all, it was easier for the Head Boy to turn a blind eye. Caddies were a much more biddable lot. Still, the Head Boy and Head Girl felt safer in the dark accompanied by another prefect, and both had powerful LED torches and walkie-talkies to communicate with John the Jannie.

Sunset was depressingly early, and by the time afternoon school finished at 17.00, it was quite dark. The weather could get quite rough, with gales and heavy showers, many of which could be accompanied by lightning. Ewan Walker, who hated lightning, found the evening patrol a bit of a trial on those occasions. Other times there could be dense fog. Being over two hundred and fifty metres above sea-level, Corscadden would be shrouded in this fog, when in Glasgow there was low cloud. On the other hand, the weather could be very calm, which would afford those on evening patrol wonderful views of the night sky.

A token effort was made on a Friday after school, and there was no patrol at a weekend, allowing any prefects who were distant Caddies a lie-in.

The Headmaster and his staff all considered the prefects of the Year 2014 to 2015 as one of the best bunches they had ever had. They knew that Christian and Gemma had managed the team very well and all pulled their weight. On several occasions they had seen how Christian Salway would handle things. He meant what he said but did it very quietly

but assertively and confidently. There was no shouting or bluster. It made Keith Mitchell and his Depute, Andrew McEwan very proud of the school they led, for Salway had not been there a year since he arrived after some ghastly experiences that would have sent most seventeen-year-olds completely off the rails. They remembered the shy boy who arrived as a waif and stray the previous November. He was still very skinny, slight, and girlish with his long blond hair, but he had a certain presence. Some Caddies even spoke about getting “the look”. It was “the look” with which he had faced down that loony American pastor outside St Columba’s Church some weeks before. It couldn’t really be described, but even the Headmaster and his Depute had received it, and they knew it.

Christian Salway and Gemma Hammond were the best Head Boy and Head Girl that had been appointed at Strathcadden Academy. They were well liked by the students. Both were gentle and unfailingly courteous to staff and pupils alike. They were straight-forward; what you saw was what you got. Therefore, it was agreed by the School Board that Christian Salway and Gemma Hammond should take part in the interview process for new staff.

Therefore, it was on this Wednesday that Christian Salway and Gemma Hammond found themselves doing something they had never done before, interviewing candidates for a new teacher, who was to start the next August. They even had a seminar room in Greatorex House as an office, complete with a computer, onto which they were to write up their impressions of each candidate.

Their first job was to take the candidates around the school, showing them everything. They had an hour off, while the candidates did some teaching, and each of the candidates had an interview session with them in turn. Ewan Walker, Simon Cairns, and Jordan Melhuish were also involved by taking the candidates around from room to room.

The reception area was the entrance hall to the big house at Dennistoun Park. It had heavy oak panelling with portraits of the Pollard family, Sir Walter and Lady Jane. Further along there was Jemima Pollard,

the eldest daughter, and her brothers Michael, and Antony. Where there would have been more Pollards, there were landscape paintings of Strathcadden, including an imposing red deer stag. There was a certain amount of artistic licence, as red deer very rarely, if ever, came anywhere near the town. There was an archway through to the main staircase that led to the headmaster's office on the first floor. Among the first-generation of old boys of Saint Oswald's, it had been not very affectionately known as the "Stairway to Chastisement". It was on those stairs that a teenage boy had been found dying after a one-to-one with Dr Cowan, and the old boy network had formed a protective circle to cover up the potential scandal as a "tragic accident".

The six hopefuls were sitting in reception and waiting nervously as they did before all interview days. Only one would get the job in this very sought-after school. Five would be unlucky, and would have to return to their existing places, which would have had something to be desired; else they wouldn't have applied out in the first place. There was always the hope that it would be noticed if you were the first there. There was hope that none of the others would turn up, leaving the field clear for you. But they would, one-by-one, and look far more confident and well-qualified. They would be in neater suits and have better briefcases. They would look younger and better looking. If there was one woman, she would get the job. So, there they were, eying each other up and down, earnestly wishing that some would drop out.

The prefects arrived and stood in a protective and self-conscious huddle. They had been briefed and would be asked to give feedback on their impressions of the candidates. And the candidates knew it, despite all the assurances that all the conversations would be entirely informal and relaxed. Mr Mitchell came down wearing the obsequious grin that all headmasters and headmistresses had when greeting candidates.

"Good morning, colleagues," he said, "and a very warm welcome to Strathcadden Academy. I am Keith Mitchell, the Headmaster, and I do hope that you all have a very constructive day with us."

He handed out the schedules for the day, before continuing, “The first part of the morning will be spent with Secondary Six students, Christian Salway, our Head Boy, Gemma Hammond, our Head Girl, Ewan Walker, Head Prefect of Asher House, Jordan Melhuish, Head Prefect of Baxter House, and last, but not least, Simon Cairns, Head Prefect of Edwards House. Now Ewan Walker is going to give you a short history of our school, which is quite unusual, as is our uniform. Please do feel free to ask any questions you like, and please feel relaxed about the whole process. The students will tell you everything as it is. We do hope you enjoy the day. Now, let’s move through to the Board Room, where Ewan will give his presentation.”

Ewan Walker was well practised in giving the presentation. He had researched the history of Saint Oswald College in Secondary Three and had tweaked it here and there for each time he gave it. If he learned a new fact, he put it in. His early attempts were amateurish, but he was only thirteen when he wrote it. Now they were much slicker and more professional. Certainly, his peers and the candidates were impressed.

One of the candidates was a middle-aged man in his fifties, who had a distinctly posh accent from south of the border. Despite his spoken airs and graces, his voice was monotonous, and his manner of speaking was a slow upper-class drawl that came across as patronising. He was decidedly tubby and was balding, with an unsightly lump on the left-hand side of his neck. He was not the best looking either. The trousers of his suit strained around his waist. It wasn’t that he was any posher than the rest of the candidates, or the students for that matter. He just came over as such. He had come up from Leeds and stated how he looked forward to teaching students who were not gutless, clueless, and useless. He mentioned that they could play for the football team he supported. None of them had ever heard of it, but it ended in “Victoria”. As the students pointed something out, he seemed to have some asinine comment that he thought was funny. No one else thought so, but the man was so oafish that he didn’t pick up on it.

The students took their guests around a typical boarding house (Asher House).

“How many students board?” one of the candidates asked.

“About a fifth of the school board,” Gemma replied. “That’s about three hundred students. The majority are in Secondary Five and Six. Most are weekly boarders because of the distance they have to travel. Students from local high schools where they live don’t have Secondary Five and Six and they come here. The main road is very slow. Some students stay at the school at the weekend because their parents work away from home. A small number come from a very long way, as far as Northern England.”

“Do any of you board?”

“We all do except Simon,” said Christian. “Ewan and I board during the week, as our parents work away from home. Gemma’s home is quite a way, so she boards during the week as well. Jordan is what we call a distant Caddie. His parents live a long way away.”

“Sounds like golf players,” said the tubby man, but his joke fell flat. It didn’t put him off and he came out with some asinine comment about dormitories.

“We don’t have dormitories as such here,” said Christian who was succeeding in sounding very professional. “The younger students share a room, three or four at most. Secondary Three, Four, and Five have two to a room, while Secondary Six have their own rooms.”

To forestall some ill-judged comment about students bonking, Christian said, “The boys are on the first floor, and the girls are on the second floor. Funny business does not happen here.”

“Who looks after boarders?” asked another candidate.

“Each house has a House Leader,” said Simon. “In the old school, they were called Housemasters. Mrs Batchelor is House Leader for Baxter

House. Mr Batchelor is an accountant in Buchanan. There is also a house tutor who has a flat in the house.”

“What do you do at weekends?”

“There aren’t any lessons,” said Jordan. “Most of us have weekend jobs. There are often sports at the weekend, like footy, rugby, cross country running and so on. On Sundays, Mr McEwan does a short church service in the rear chapel for us, but it’s entirely voluntary. They lay on meals at the canteen. We may go round to friends’ houses. They don’t mind what we do as long as we tell them what we are doing and what time we’re going to be back and don’t do something stupid.”

They passed the canteen, before going into Greator House. The student common room was quiet, but it would get livelier at lunchtime. They went past the old sports hall, to which was attached The Wests. And the oaf from the South came up with, “I was looking at You-Tube a couple of weeks ago and I saw a video-clip of someone flying a drone in there, showing loads of boys sitting on the lavatory. It was rather funny, what?”

None of the students shared his mirth but were far too polite to say what they thought. The other five candidates were rather bemused. It would all go down on the feedback to Mr Mitchell. They went into Harrison House. They heard Craigie Boy telling off a lad from Secondary Two. He had not connected a scope thing across the mains. They came onto the corridor, and Mr Farjeon stopped. Ewan introduced him to the guests, “This is Mr Farjeon, who used to teach me Physics.”

It was a comprehensive tour of the school that also took in other departments, the IT suites, the library, and the chapel that doubled up as the theatre and assembly hall. The portrait of Dr Cowan still had a small rip at the end of his hooter. Finally, they passed through the music department that had been transformed by Mr Struther after Michelin Woman had gone. And bang on time, they delivered the candidates back to Mr Mitchell’s office.

“What a plonker!” was Christian’s considered view of the candidate from Leeds.

“That prick will get the job,” Simon replied. “Do you remember how Michelin Woman got the job after Mrs Saxton retired?”

“She was a female prick. She was horrible,” replied Ewan. “She hated boys. She didn’t want any boys in the department. She really hated me. She kept on telling me I was a sexist degradation of women, until I told her that she was the biggest sexist degradation of women that I knew. Boy, didn’t I get into trouble? And I still stand by what I said.”

“She didn’t like Aidy, either,” said Gemma. “If you didn’t like Aidy, you must hate the world. None of the girls liked her.”

“Still, I hope Mr Mitchell doesn’t choose that one,” said Jordan.

“Clod of the South,” said Ewan, showing his quick-witted mastery of the English language.

“I didn’t like any of his comments,” said Christian. “All the others had something sensible to ask. The Clod didn’t. I certainly didn’t find his joke about The Wests at all funny.”

“Neither did I,” said Simon. “Good name for him.”

“As for his comments about kilts and transvestites, that was the pits.”

Gemma added, “He asked if the Headmaster got me and Chris mixed up and said I looked like a boy. I didn’t want to make a scene with the others. He even said that I was a girl that had been converted from a boy.”

“What?” Jordan squawked. “We need to report it to Mr Mitchell. He wants a report from us anyway. If I never meet the Clod of the South again, it will be too soon.”

Within twenty minutes, a full report was written and e-mailed to Mr Mitchell. Five of the candidates were lovely people, but the one from

Leeds was dreadful. There was a comprehensive explanation of his many character defects. Mr Mitchell had formed a similar impression of the man. The observation report from the demonstration lesson that each candidate had to do was for him excoriating. The candidate from Leeds had tried to wing it and the resulting session was confused and showed little content or purpose. He had taken the “be relaxed” comments too literally at the lunchtime buffet prepared for the candidates and senior staff. He had eaten considerably more than what was really decent on such an occasion. He had aired his prejudices between mouthfuls (or sometimes with his mouth full) without listening to what others had to say. There were no leftovers to go to the staffroom in the afternoon. Mr McEwan overheard the Clod’s words about how he was soon going to be transitioning from an old curmudgeon to an old fart on his sixtieth birthday in September 2016. McEwan was sixty-two and did not like to think of himself as an old fart yet. He wasn’t even a curmudgeon.

The Clod of the South was politely eliminated from the interview process after lunch. He missed the train by five minutes and had to wait an hour for the next one.

After lunch the candidates had their interviews in turn. As well as oral interviews, there were written tasks, each candidate being supervised by one of Jordan, Ewan, or Simon. Christian and Gemma had their Heads of School interview. They had written four questions: (1) This school has a lot of boarders. What kind of activities would you be able to offer to boarding students as well as day students? (2) What do you think of the kilt as part of a school uniform? (3) The school has a really good library. What book is your favourite? How would you encourage a student to read it? (4) You like your subject. How do you share your enthusiasm with students?

One by one, each candidate saw Christian and Gemma. Their answers were genuine and practical. Extra support sessions for struggling students were the most popular answer followed by sports coaching at the Sports Centre. All supported the idea of the kilt, saying it was distinctive while being very practical and promoting gender equality. A variety of

books were the favourites. Christian was impressed that one had enjoyed *Something Wholesale* by Eric Newby. Christian had never thought of Physics as a beautiful subject before. It was not just a collection of facts, but a wonderfully fitting jigsaw and a testimony to human endeavour.

During the intervals between candidates the students had to write up their notes. They entertained themselves as they imagined what the Clod of the South would have said. For number one, their choice was, “Oh, I wouldn’t bother with that; I just want to get home at the end of the day.” For number two, it was, “Do the girls go commando?” For number three, “I’m surprised you lot read.” For number four it was along the lines of, “Good God! Do you really expect me to be enthusiastic?” They shared their compositions with the other three.

The new Physics teacher was Mr Jason Jackson who taught at a school in the Borders. Certainly, the youngsters thought he was the best, although any of the others would have done the job well. Craigie Boy, who had become a different Craigie Boy in recent months, asked them what they thought, and he agreed that he was looking forward to working with Mr Jackson.

At their house in Fotheringham, Imogen Salway was talking with her parents, who were starting their first course in their feast of humble pie. A politician had once said to keep one’s words simple and sweet, because sooner or later one would have to eat them. Their words were going to be indigestible. It was going to be hard, but it was going to be needed for the healing of a lot of hurt. Brian and Brenda Salway had been very hurt indeed by the scams that had cost them half of their pension savings. Brian had recently become rather slapdash in running his business and had quite a lot to pay off in VAT and recalled bank loans. These would be covered by the equity on their house of forty years. A buyer had been found, and completion was due in six weeks.

Fotheringham was a cheap area to buy a house, but with the equity left, they could only afford a very small, terraced cottage in the old steel-

mills area. The prospect from those terraces was not inspiring with views over derelict industrial land. It had been ear-marked for redevelopment for years. There had been promises that work would start soon, but it never had. They certainly did not want to spend their retirement there. Indeed, they didn't want to spend the rest of their lives in Fotheringham, especially with the memories of the Fotheringham Evangelical Church and that foul man, Elsheimer (aka J-Eli Bellis). He was not, as he claimed, a man of God. He was a criminal of the worst kind – a narcissistic bully who was a complete fraudster. Like all bullies, Elsheimer was a coward. Like all cowards, he had legged it when the going got tough.

Elsheimer's methods ensured that the congregation of the Fotheringham Evangelical Church had to compete for his approval, which was rarely forthcoming. What was much more readily forthcoming from their pastor was a torrent of curses and verbal sewage. Brian and Brenda knew that they would have been thrown out of the church had Elsheimer not fled back to The States.

A new start would be needed. But where? They could go to Stoke Poges, just five minutes' drive from Clinton Muncey, but it was quite expensive compared with Fotheringham. But they would be close to Imogen. The alternative was to go to Sowerland, which was one hundred and fifty kilometres almost due East. They could afford to live in Beckton, where Laura had been, but it was even worse a dump than Fotheringham. As for Carlsborough, that was indescribable. Brian doubted that he would get a job at sixty-one, but he would have to work to make up his pension again. At least it wasn't as bad for him as some of them. They had had their savings completely wiped out.

A chance view of a plumbers' trade magazine revealed that a person qualified in plumbing work and electrical work was needed at Strathcadden Academy in Corscadden. Neither he nor Brenda had heard of the place until Laura had a wedding there. They both felt wretched about letting Elsheimer know about it. If Laura heard that they were coming to live there, she would, not unnaturally, have a fit. Christian would not exactly be pleased either. They had let both Laura and Christian

down very badly. Both would be well within their rights to tell them to take a running jump.

“That job has your name on it, Dad,” said Imogen.

“That’s the school that Christian goes to. What would he say if I was doing a job in a room where he was? He is not exactly going to say, ‘Hi, Granddad, great to see you,’ is he?”

“Have you seen anything anywhere else?”

“No. All the other jobs are for apprentices.”

“Well, that’s the one you will need to go for.”

“What are we going to do about Laura and Christian?”

“Make up with them, of course, like you have with me. I will talk to Laura. After all I stuck with her when you and Mum didn’t.”

“That church was good when Jack Thompson was there. Why we stayed when Devine came, I don’t know, let alone Elsheimer. Some saw through him, but there’s a silly bugger born every minute and I am one of them, being taken in by either of them.”

“Two silly buggers,” said Brenda. Imogen detected a faint spark of the fun people that Mum and Dad were before they had been stolen by Devine and Elsheimer.

“Now, Mum and Dad, you are going to have to make it up with Laura, and we are going to do it next weekend. Now, Dad, you get on the phone to that school and ask for the job details. Do it now, while it’s fresh in your mind.”

With that, Brian Salway picked up the telephone and dialled 01781 46 2464.

“They’re doing what?” Laura squawked down her mobile.

“Dad’s applied for a job at Strathcadden Academy. Mum and Dad are coming to live near you in Corscadden. They want to make it up to you and Chris.”

“They’ve got a lot to make up with us, Imm.”

“I know. That’s what they have told me, so they have a lot of grovelling to do.”

“You bet. They almost disowned me when I got pregnant with Chris. That church of theirs prayed that Chris would be born dead. Some of the stuff they came out with about Chris was unthinkable. I don’t know how they could have. Chris won’t be exactly pleased to see them either. He’s going to have a fit when he hears about this. Over our dead bodies!”

“Laura, you know me as well as anyone. That church has gone tits up, thank God, and I mean that. They have had a lot of money nicked off them. All those donations to Africa Evangelical Support International went to Elsheimer and his American mates. Very little of the money ended up in Africa. That mountain bike that they so-called bought for Chris was actually sold on a loan basis to the pastor. It was not given to him. He has to pay back at ten percent interest. With his income, he won’t ever be able to pay off the loan. All those charities are scams. The cops are after Elsheimer, but he’s flown the nest. Elsheimer is a false name. Mum and Dad are gutted as to what happened.”

“Well, so am I, what they did to me and Chris. I don’t know what we would have done if you and Grandma and Grandad hadn’t helped. Chris would probably have had to be adopted. I don’t know how I could repay you for what you did.”

“Laura, we were in it together. I helped you and I know how you can repay me. It’s going to be hard for you I know.”

“So, what do you want me to do, Imm?”

“It’s like this, Laura. I want my mum and dad back. You want your mum and dad back too. They were stolen from us by the Elsheimer sect.”

“It was meant to be a church.”

“Church, my foot! It was a weird sect for the benefit of Waldron Elsheimer, or whatever his real name is. It was no more Christian than believing in Santa’s Little Helpers. Elsheimer took those people in and brainwashed them. They became like automatons doing his dirty work. You know that I am not that religious, but I recognise a religion when I see it. That was the Elsheimer religion. Mum and Dad were fun people. Remember that when we were babies, they were in their early twenties and gave us a lot of fun. Do you want that fun back?”

“Of course I do. I want them back. They were stolen from me as much as from you.”

“Right, you need to do what I say. I said it was going to be hard, but you must do it. You are still a Christian, aren’t you?”

“Yes - just. Not a very good one and Joby isn’t either.”

“But you know about forgiveness?”

“Yes.”

“Laura, you and Chris will have to forgive Mum and Dad if you are going to make up with them. More importantly they have to make it up to you. It’s something that won’t come naturally for you or Chris. Do you want Mum and Dad back?”

“I do, yes. But it’s going to be hard. Look, can I talk to Joby and his mum and dad about it? I also need to talk to Chris.”

So that is what Laura did that evening with Joby. It was one of those things that he found hard to get his head round. He had had the most loving parents that it was possible to get. They were devout Christians, and he had picked up a faith from them, but he was certainly

not as devout as they. He and Mary had looked for “common sense” Christianity, which could at least address problems that everyone had from time to time, not with pious platitudes or amazing Bible verses, but with a listening ear and a gentle approach. He found this kind of thing quite difficult to deal with; hysteresis losses in large electric motors were much easier. Still, he gave it his best shot and said, “What do you feel about what Imm said to you today?”

“What do you think, Joby?”

“It’s going to be bloody hard work, the way that your mum and dad turned their backs on you. You have every right to be angry with them. They dumped on you when you were at your most vulnerable. It was Imm who brought you through. What do you think would have happened if I had stayed with the boring old farts with their Black 5s and Type 4 diesels?”

Laura thought hard, before saying, “Something else would have come up. Devine could not stand Imm or me, because we would not accept his teaching that the world was created in October 4004 BC. He was trying to teach us that the world was flat, and the moon was made of green cheese. The problem was that Mum and Dad had allowed themselves to be brainwashed by him. I think, given a year or two, Devine or Elsheimer would have thrown us out. He used to say something in a strange babbling noise that was meant to be a curse, and two she-bears were meant to come out of the woods and tear us to pieces.”

“I didn’t think there were bears on these islands.”

“I didn’t think so, either. When Devine did it to Imm and me, we went outside, and there was a cat that wanted to be stroked. But it was what that church did with Chris that sticks in my throat. They prayed for him to be still-born. They prayed for him to die when his drink was spiked.”

“Laura, love, I thank God that he didn’t answer those prayers. I am proud that Chris is our son. What they did was monstrous, but it was

part of Elsheimer's power games. He ran that church, if you can call it that, for one purpose only – to con those who went there. Typical of someone like that – he brainwashed them, he bullied them, and he manipulated them.”

“Joby, the trouble with Mum and Dad is that they are not very bright. Dad has run a plumbing and electricity business for thirty-five odd years. He used to be good, but he's become slipshod in recent years. He's a better electrician than a plumber. More recently he tended to cut corners. That was so he could get more money as Elsheimer tried to bleed him dry. Mum and Dad were scared of Elsheimer, that's the trouble.”

“I think your mum and dad are more victims than villains, if you ask me. Elsheimer is the devil in this case. I don't know the Bible that well, but we are told to beware of false preachers. This one had a hate agenda. What I also know as well as you do is that we have to forgive, even when it's easier said than done. Can you do that?”

Laura sat there and thought it through. “I'm not sure,” she said in the end.

“It's easy for me to sit on my butt here and say things about forgiveness. I have never had anyone who had hurt me as badly as they did to you. How much do you want your mum and dad back?”

“I want them back as much as Imm does. I want the fun people that we had when we were girls. I want them back. But I can't forget what they did.”

“Of course you can't. Laura, there is an answer. You need to forgive them. You won't forget. It's not a case of forgive and forget. A couple of years ago, I had a bit of a spat with a manager at the university. He was one of these accountants who was only interested in money, not what was going on in my department. He tried to pull one over on me and suggested that I had had my fingers in the till. It went to an investigation. If I had been found at fault, I could have lost my job at both the University and Dunalastair. Fortunately, there was no substance to his

allegations, thank God, and I was in the clear. He was one of those types that bully their way to the top. He tried it on with someone else. I hate what he did, but I still have to forgive him as an act of the will. That's helped me to move on – I know that sounds trite. There is almost twenty years of hurt between your mum and dad and you. You won't forget it, but you do need to forgive."

"I will try for your sake, Joby."

"And for Christian's sake as well."

The next day, Christian Salway was on duty with his team of prefects. He saw John the Jannie taking a man who looked very like his granddad around the place. They were talking earnestly about something, but he could not tell what. The two went into The Wests and came out again a few minutes later. Christian was far too polite to eavesdrop what was being said, but he was sure that the voice of the other man was that of his granddad, especially as John the Jannie had used the name "Brian". Surely not? After all that weird and loony church that they went to had described Corscadden as "a den of iniquity and even more cursed than Sodom and Gomorrah". So, what was Granddad doing here? Christian knew that there had been some funny goings on there but didn't know the detail. Nor did he care. Anyway, it was entirely possible that there was another similar looking man who happened to have the name Brian.

Christian's fears were confirmed that evening in a phone call to his mother. Grandma and Granddad were looking for reconciliation. Yes, Granddad had accepted a job at Strathcadden Academy. "The world is going fucking mad!" Christian shouted down the phone before switching it off.

He was in a spin. For the first time ever, he did not do his evening patrol, not that anyone noticed, but he was incandescent. He shut himself away in his room to get on with his homework, which would keep his mind off things. But it didn't. He sat cross-legged on his bed trying to

make sense of what his mother had told him. These were the people who took the piss out of him by telling him he was getting a mountain bike and saying some pastor in Africa had been given it. And they helped themselves to a legacy paid for by his mum, great grandparents, aunt and his own hard work to give it to this loony church they belonged to. Mum had tried to explain that Grandma and Granddad were victims of the pastor. But that gave them no excuse to pray for his death when his drink had been spiked with ketamine and that other shit whose name he could not remember. He was incandescent. Christian wanted to shout and swear at God, life, the Universe, and everything.

But that wasn't his style. Nor was it his style to put his phone down on his mother. He had never done it before. He got on really well with her normally. They had stood together against Grandma and Granddad's loony ideas from that loony church. That church was a complete piss-take on what he and mum perceived the Christian faith to be. If that was what it was really about, he wanted nothing to do with it. He'd far rather be the humanist that he was before.

Gradually his anger subsided, and he slumped into a depression as his anger rebounded on him. He felt sick.

He should not have put the phone down on Mum. He had lost his temper, and he hated himself for it. He wanted Aidy who would talk to him. Eejay would do his best, but he wasn't in his room. He was probably with Jordan discussing their homework and doing what gay boys do with their boyfriends. No that was cruel – they didn't do that sort of thing. It might have happened at Saint Oswald College, but not at Strathcadden Academy. He would have liked a friend as close as Jordan was to Eejay. He was struggling. He was being asked to forgive Grandma and Granddad for rejecting him and allowing that loony church to pray that he should die. He was being asked to forgive them for allowing that loony church to say that he was evil because he was “queer” (their word). That was because he was comfortable with other quiet boys. They weren't there when he was beaten up. They weren't there when he wanted to finish it all on Tanswold Viaduct. They muttered “typical” when he was

charged with obstructing the passage of an engine (it would have been a one-way battle: 56 kilograms of him against 3000 tonnes of heavy freight train). They were there to carp and criticise when he didn't need them. But when he did, they were nowhere to be seen. He was being asked to say, "Don't worry, that's fine."

He wanted to talk to Mr McEwan, who seemed to know how to deal with this sort of thing, but he didn't want to bother him. Mr McEwan was no doubt extremely busy in his work as Depute. (Most thought he actually ran the school, using Mr Mitchell as a puppet.) He had seen him two or three times in the last few months and didn't want to push his luck.

Christian heard Eejay coming back. He asked Eejay to come into his room and told him about what had happened. Ewan was out of his depth with this one and did the wise thing. He listened to Christian's rantings and said nothing until the end. Finally, he said, "You need to talk to our Grandma and Granddad about this. They'll say the right thing."

Chapter 13

Friday 14th November 2014

Christian did his morning patrol. It was cold outside and there was snow on the hills. Soon the snow would come down to lower levels. He said his usual polite “Good morning, sir” to John the Jannie who was loading things onto his wee...ae...vannie. It was appropriate that it was a *Volkswagen Caddy*. He didn’t trot up to him and ask him about his new colleague. He felt withdrawn and his walk was rather perfunctory, and it was not just due to the cold. He ate little for breakfast. He was withdrawn during lessons, and it was noticed by Miss Birch in Economics who said, “Salway, laddie, will ye no pay attention?” It was the first time that that remark had ever been pointed at him. At Saint Oswald’s it would have been the board rubber. In the staffroom at lunchtime, there were remarks about, “Salway is well off the boil today. I don’t know what’s up with him.”

Christian wanted the day to finish. He liked being at Strathcadden Academy, but on this day, he would have quite gladly been anywhere else, preferably in some other country. He thought about Matti at Dringhausen. It probably wouldn’t be so bitter and cheerless. He thought of Beckton on a cheerless day like this and it made him feel worse.

At the end of the day, he did his evening patrol after school finished. Like all Fridays, the evening patrol was a token effort, but nobody minded – well nobody important anyway and if anyone did, they knew what they could do. Fortunately, it was a short walk to Brewster House. He wanted to make it up with his mother and was anxious about what she might say. He had rung late last night but only got the messaging service. He was eighteen and the Head Boy of Scotland’s foremost state school. He should have known better. Well, at least Mr Mitchell wouldn’t find out.

As he walked up the drive, he saw Mum and Dad’s car, and next to it was Aunt Imm’s sports car. He opened the front door nervously and there was a bark from Poppy who rushed up to him and without ceremony shoved her nose right up him. Aidy came out of the kitchen and the two

half-brothers hugged and held each other closely. Christian said, “I really needed you last night.”

“Why didn’t you ring? You know I have my mobile on in the evenings.”

“It was late. I lost my rag with Mum. I want to say sorry to her.”

They went into the kitchen and there were Laura and Grandma (the one he liked). Christian felt like a very small boy as the emotion overwhelmed him. His voice quavered as he said, “Mum, I’m sorry for what I said last night. It was all a bit of a shock. I needed to get my head round it.”

“Don’t worry, pet,” Laura replied. She used the term ‘pet’ only in moments of great intimacy with him, and tears filled his eyes. Christian got a grip of himself and said, “I still haven’t got my head round it and I need help.”

“You have all the help you need,” replied Muriel.

“How do you know what has happened, Grandma?”

“Eejay rang last night and told me about it. Granddad is through in the living room with your Dad and Imm. You go through and your mum and I will be through in a minute.”

“Can I talk to Aidy?”

“Sure. But don’t be too long.”

In the games room at the back of the house, Chris and Aidy sat down on the old sofa. Aidy had known this piece of furniture for his entire life. He and Eejay had played on it as small children. They had snuggled up as their mum or dad told them stories. They had listened to music on it or watched telly. They had had intimate talks with their parents on it, pouring out all the angst that typical teen-boys had. A couple of years ago it had been moved to the games room when the new suite had arrived. They played with their *X-box* on it. Their friends had sat on it. It

was battered, but it was part of them. It was totally comfortable and a place where Chris and Aidy could talk freely.

“I’ve had a bad day today, Aidy,” Chris started.

“What’s happened? You aren’t yourself tonight.”

“No. I got mad at Mum last night and put the phone down on her. I have never done that before. I feel so awful about it. Miss Birch shouted at me in Economics. She’s never done it before.”

“Let me guess, ‘Salway laddie, will ye no pay attention?’”

“Exactly. I just couldn’t concentrate today.”

“So, what’s bugging you?”

“My grandma and granddad – not ours.”

“The ones who went to that loony church and sent your mountain bike to Africa?” Aidan was well on course for his doctorate at the University of the Truly Obvious.

“Exactly. Mum and Aunt Imm want to get back together with them. Granddad has got a job at school. I am not happy about it. If I never see him again, it will be too soon. I am angry about it, and I don’t know what to do about it.”

“You have every right to be angry about it and let them know. But you must be careful not to let it get to you. I’m not the best person to give you advice. That’s why Grandma and Granddad are here. Eejay rang me and told me you were in a state about it. That’s why I came home this weekend. What do you think about our Granddad?”

“You know how much I respect him for what he says and does. He doesn’t just say things; he gets them done. He has looked out for me ever since I came here.”

“So, will you listen to him and act on his advice? He knows far more than I do.”

“Aidy, of course I will.”

The front doorbell rang, and the familiar sounds of Mr Matheson and Mr McEwan could be heard in the hallway. Jake rushed in with no ceremony and was sniffing Poppy in a manner most unbecoming to a drawing room of a Victorian gentleman’s residence. The boys made their way to the living room.

The living room in Brewster House was the warmest in the house, due mostly to the wood-burning stove that burned brightly in the fireplace. It belted the heat into the room and played a significant part in heating up the rest of the house. A big, detached villa, Brewster House was otherwise difficult to heat, even when the central heating was turned up full. It was snugly in the living room. Muriel and Laura had made tea and toast to be accompanied by jam and honey. Muriel had baked a cake. It was Mr McEwan who spoke first, “Christian, why didn’t you come to see me last night?”

“I thought I would be wasting your time. I have seen you quite a lot these past few months. I thought you would be fed up with me. You must have so much to do in running the school.”

“Nonsense, laddie! I am here for everyone. The first priority I have is to the students. The paper and computer work can go hang. What is bothering you?”

“Mum and I had a spat on the phone last night about her mum and dad. You know the situation between them and me.”

“Of course I do. And Rob and I have been talking about it for a couple of hours. I want you to know that everyone in here is on your side.”

“So, what is happening with your parents, Laura?” asked Mr Matheson.

“You know that they had a lot of their savings stolen by that so-called pastor at the loony church they went to?”

“Yes, I have heard a lot about it.”

“They want to make up with us. Imm and I want our parents back, and we have to forgive them. It’s going to be hard for us, but Chris is finding it impossible.”

“Christian,” said Mr Matheson. “Do you believe what we have talked about this last year or so?”

“Yes, I do.”

“I have seen the way you have come on as a person. I saw you face down that pastor a few weeks ago, and you did it far more eloquently than a whole series of sermons. What do you feel towards the old men who were with him?”

“I haven’t given it any thought. I suppose they came up with him without thinking. I was pissed off with them but put it behind me and soon forgot about it.”

“What about the pastor?”

“He was a horrible man.”

“But what did you do after you turned round and came into the church?”

“I put him behind me and just got on with it. I was dead proud to give Mum away to Dad.”

“Do you know what putting difficult things behind you is called? We often discuss it in church, and we all need it.”

“Forgiveness?”

“Spot on.”

“But how can I forgive my grandparents whose church prayed that I should die when my so-called friends spiked my drink and put me in intensive care? How can I do it when they rejected me as a baby, and their

church called me the spawn of Satan? How can I just forgive and forget? I can't!"

"Of course you can't forget," said Mr Matheson. "None of us expect you to. You have every right to be angry and hurt. What you're being asked to do is not easy. Jesus, when nailed to the cross, said 'Father forgive them. They don't know what they are doing.' He could have cursed them, but he didn't as an act of the will. For as long as he lived, he didn't forget what they did. He died, but came back to life, so he won't have forgotten. Your grandparents have let you down very badly. I have spoken to them. They want to make it up to you. What they need to do is to apologise to you for what they did to you. The challenge is for you to forgive. It will be an act of the will."

"It certainly will for I hate them with every cell of my body."

"What you need to do is change that to 'I hate the memories of what they did with every cell of my body'. And you have to do it as an act of the will. It's a big challenge."

"Chris," said Joby, "it was my fault in the first place. I was the one responsible for getting Mum into trouble in the first place. I should have stayed with some boring old farts talking about Black 5s."

"Black 5s?" The expression sounded like urban street culture more than the kind of conversation piece of old farts.

"They were a steam engine designed and built in the nineteen thirties. They were very good and lasted for thirty years. Several still exist today."

"But Dad, I wouldn't exist at all if you had stayed with the boring old farts."

"Exactly, Chris. I am proud that you are my son, every bit as proud as I am of Aidy and Eejay. In fact, I am prouder because you have had a lot of difficulties which you have handled with great dignity and grace. If I had had them, I don't mind telling you that I would have gone

completely off the rails. And that would apply to most of the others in this room.”

“Christian,” said Mr Matheson, “what do you think the Christian life is about?”

“Life after death,” said Christian, hoping he had the right answer.

“True, but not wholly true. It’s life before death as well. You have had enough difficulty to last you a lifetime, but as your dad says, you have handled it with dignity and grace. Now you have the choice here. You can ignore everything we say. That’s your right. That’s your choice. But it will eat into you, and you will always have bitterness there. I have seen it happen many a time. Or you can choose to put it behind you. You won’t forget it, but as an act of the will, you put it behind you. It won’t be able to fester to make you bitter. Think about it.”

“I need to go upstairs to think about it on my own. I may be some time.”

Christian went upstairs and sat cross-legged on the bed. He needed space and wrapped the duvet around him. His head was in a spin. It was going to be hard, but it was to be his choice. At school, he could do what other Caddies did and hand in the minimum required. That was human nature. He chose to spend much more time to do the work, and he knew full well that he had given it his best shot. Most of the time, the reward was in the high marks and increased confidence in the subject. The school had encouraged that. So had his friends. His mother had always encouraged him to achieve the best. And that’s why they hated him at Beckton because they had no aspiration. Now he had two of the kindest and most encouraging of young men as not just his half-brothers, but also his closest friends. And he had many other friends at the school, such as Ryan Fleetwood whom he worked with in class. There was Simon Cairns who was now captain of the rugby squad. Simon had looked to Chris to help him get his squad fitter by leading their training runs. Running? Christian was now competitive as a cross-country runner at county, if not

national level. He had Aidy and Eejay to thank for that, as well as his very light build.

Over the last few months, he had decided that he was a Christian, living up to his name. Not that he thought that his humanism was bad. He wanted to see the best in other people, and it was easy to see in the Walker family. But with the Fatheringham Evangelical Church, people were considered evil, unless they were in the good books of that pastor. Only those chosen by the pastor were considered to be elect and the rest were going to the hot place. According to the pastor he was going to be first in, followed quickly by his mother and father. If that was true, God was the ultimate bastard and the sooner Christianity was defeated, the better. Maybe it was true that when you died you just decayed to molecules as the scientists said. It just didn't add up. Granddad and Grandma Walker were both religious people. Walker Bros did not trade on a Sunday because Granddad felt strongly that it was against his Christian principles. Granddad was a well-respected man in Corscadden as well as one of the town's foremost businessmen. He ran his business on Christian principles, and it worked. There must have been something about it. Mr McEwan was an ordained minister and was one of the best teachers he had ever had. There was something of authority about him. Although nobody ever said it, it seemed that it was Mr McEwan who ran the school. He had made a pretty good fist of it, since Strathcadden Academy was a foremost Scottish state school. McEwan made no bones about his Christian faith. Christian concluded that there must be something real about it.

Now it was challenging him head on. He had to forgive his other grandparents who had rejected him for his entire life. They had taken the piss out of him, and it hurt. It was not simply a case of kissing and making up, saying, "That's alright. Let's forget about it." If he could do it at all, he would have to do it repeatedly, actively, and frequently. He could never forget the way they had behaved towards him. What they had done was totally wrong and they should have known better. True they were not very bright, and they had been scammed by that pastor. On the other hand,

they had had the choice and could have told the damned man to take a running jump.

But he had the choice as well. He could stay as he was, getting angrier and ever more bitter. That would be the most natural and the easiest thing to do. But it would be a slap in the face for the Walker Family who had taken him in as one of its own. Well, he was one of its own. He didn't want to do that, as it would no doubt hurt Mum and Dad, and Grandma and Granddad. Instead, he would have to tame his ego and take the harder route. It would be hard at times, but it would enable him to leave that baggage behind. There would be enough burdens in life as it was. Yes, he was angry, but the most grown-up thing to do was to accept Mum's parents as his other grandma and granddad. Loving them? Well, he would have to work on that.

Christian got off the bed and looked at himself in the full-length mirror. He still was the baby-faced long-haired blond eighteen-year-old. He liked his appearance and physique. Some would have said he was the text-book wimp, but he could certainly out-run them. He wasn't going to bother with six-packs which would only turn into middle-age spread as the years went on. He would keep himself fit. He was like many of his age, conscious of his appearance, but proud of it too. He was fashion-conscious as a designer of lovely clothes and enjoyed the beauty of the young men and young women who wore them. He was blessed with a true talent in art and design. He was very grateful for it. He was relaxing after a very tense day.

As Christian went downstairs, no huge revelations or visions came, just a very quiet assurance that he was doing the right thing, the still small voice of calm. Chris snuggled up to his mother and said, "I will do the right thing. It won't be easy, but I will do it as an act of the will. I will do my best to put it behind me and love my grandma and granddad for what they are, not what they did. I will need all the help I can get."

"You will get all the help you need and more," said Charles. "It will be hard, but we are here. We will help you, Imogen, and Laura."

“I have spoken to Brian and Brenda,” said Mr Matheson. “They will need a lot of counselling and a religious detox. I have suggested that they keep away from churches until they are ready. I know that’s not a very spiritual thing to do for a minister, but they need to get a life. We all believe in life before death, and that it should be full. That monster, Elsheimer, has fed them a spiritual version of Class A drugs, and they need a complete detox programme. They have said as much. But before they do that, they want to see you all at the Crown Hotel tomorrow morning.”

Charles said, “Chris, don’t worry about being late for your shift tomorrow. They all know you’ll be in late. This is far more important.”

Somehow the atmosphere in the living room became warmer. It seemed that a cloud had dispersed with the summer sun. A peace came over everyone there. It was going to be alright. Christian said, “We all need some dinner. Aidy, Eejay, I need you in the kitchen. Dad, you look after Mum and everyone else.”

The Walker family was one to party at the drop of a hat. Andrew McEwan didn’t stay. His daughter, Anji, had come for the weekend and Joan was busy in the kitchen at Asher House. The Reverend Matheson called home and his wife, Margot, soon joined them. It was a simple meal, but there was the joyous harmony that was the feature of life at Brewster House.

The next morning, the focus was at The Crown, the hotel in the centre of the town, just round the corner from Walker Bros. A room had been booked, so that any washing of dirty linen would be done strictly in private. It was one of the lounges with comfortable chairs that had been arranged in a circle. Waiters were on hand to serve coffee and biscuits. Brian and Brenda Salway had arrived early and were sitting nervously. They were wondering how this whole thing would go – dreadfully by all rights. The Walker family traipsed in quietly with Muriel acting as mistress of ceremonies. There was little ceremony. Imogen and Laura started off the proceedings, “Mum, Dad, what do you want to say to us?”

“Laura, Imm, and Chris,” Brian started, “we have let you down badly. We’re sorry.”

“And so you should be,” said Imogen.

Christian added his bit, “So why did you pray for me to be still born at birth?”

“It’s what the church was telling us. It was sinful to have sex outside marriage.”

“Isn’t it just as sinful to pray that a child should be born dead?” said Muriel. “Why did the church do that?”

“Pastor Devine told us to.”

“Grandma and Granddad,” continued Christian in a quiet voice whose tone disclosed that he was very angry indeed, “whatever you believe, isn’t it plain wrong to wish someone was dead? Eighteen months ago, I was lying in a hospital bed after having my drink spiked. I distinctly heard your church elders praying for my death to rid you of the embarrassment before the church. I heard them, so please do not deny it.”

“How could you have heard it?” Brenda snapped. “You were almost dead. You were deeply unconscious. You are making it up.”

“No, Mum,” said Laura. “One of the nurses heard them as well. She was horrified. She called security. Chris can tell you of many conversations that happened while he was lying unconscious. The last thing that goes is your hearing. That’s why nurses have to be careful about what they say next to unconscious patients.”

“It was cruel of you,” said Christian. “I didn’t ask to have my drink spiked. Have you ever been close to death?”

The old couple looked down at the floor, and mumbled, “No.”

“It has little to commend it. I was in a red fog. I felt all the catheters as they were inserted. They were not comfortable. Every second

lasted a minute; every minute lasted an hour; every hour lasted a day. I heard all the conversations about me being a vegetable. I heard them decide to take me off the life-support machine. I heard two of the doctors discussing whether they should help me on my way, or bump me off, whatever way you want to say it. They called me an awkward little bugger for not dying at once. I heard them discussing about getting me to Durham. I remember the ambulance. Yes, I am an awkward little bugger.”

The old couple continued to stare at the floor.

“I haven’t finished yet. The mountain bike episode hurt me a lot. I was fifteen and looking forward to having the mountain bike. I did not expect it to go to Africa. My mates got stuff from their grandmas and granddads. I got letters saying that the money went to buy goats for African families to revolutionise their lives. How many of them actually got there? How many ended up as cat food when they did get there? And what about the legacy that Mum, Aunt Imm, Grandma and Grandad Hayward, and I paid money into to help me out at university? What happened to that?”

“Pastor Elsheimer took it off us,” replied Brenda.

“How on Earth could you be so stupid to allow a loony sect to help itself to your money?” said Imogen.

“Elsheimer told us that it would make us one of the elect. Only the elect get into heaven.”

“Bollocks! You were the elect of the truly stupid that allowed Elsheimer to cream off a considerable sum of money, not just from you, but from a hundred others.”

“We didn’t lose everything,” said Brian. “Others lost more.”

“But you lost a lot, which is why you are both going to have to work well beyond your retirement age,” said Laura. “Or is it because you

want us to keep you as Imm and I have fallen on our feet and got good jobs?”

Christian added, “Is what you did Christian?”

“No, I don’t suppose it is,” said Brian.

“So, what is the point of this meeting?” said Christian. He was giving them “the look”.

“We want to make up with you, Chris, and Laura, and Imm. We have treated you very badly. Please forgive us. We are so sorry.”

Christian’s expression was one of angry contempt for the two snivelling people in front of him. Uninvited came a saying he had heard several times in the last few months, *The one who has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her. They started to leave, the oldest first. ‘Is there no one left to condemn you?’ ‘No, sir.’ ‘Then neither do I. Go and don’t sin again.’* His face changed visibly. He got up and went over to the old couple. He could have thumped them. Instead, he hugged them both and said, “Grandma and Granddad, I could hate you. It would be the easiest thing to do in the world. Some people say that I will be soft for saying this: I am going to forgive you. It isn’t easy; it’s hard. But I will do it. I forgive you. I am not going to condemn you. I will love you. Please love me back. I have grandparents from Dad. I want you to complete the set. Elsheimer stole you from me. I want you back. I want to share my achievements with you. By the way I am living to my name – I am a Christian.”

“Thank you, Chris,” said Brenda. “I promise we will make it up to you.”

“You cannot make it up to me, Grandma. Instead, I want you to be my Grandma as well. I want you to be the fun people that Mum and Aunt Imm knew as girls.”

“Of course,” said Brian.

“And one other thing: don’t go near a church for a good long time. Get a life instead. Now I have to go to work.” With that, Christian Salway excused himself and, ten minutes later, he was serving his first customer.

Aidan and Ewan were not there. Aidan was doing an assignment at home. Ewan was also at home with his boyfriend. They discussed their homework and completed it. They never copied it, just discussed it so each could give the work his best effort. They learned a lot off each other. After lunch the three of them went to the Strathcadden Sports Centre and played badminton.

As for the others, reconciliation was an excuse for a party. At the Crown, Laura and Imogen were making it up with their parents and, like the slightest glimpses of the sun peeking through the heavy clouds, they could detect the first signs of the fun people that Brian and Brenda had been when they were in their twenties and thirties. After a couple of hours, Muriel ordered lunch. Optimism abounded and the future was bright.

Brian and Brenda were going to move into the gatehouse at the end of Dennistoun Avenue. When Dennistoun Park was built for Sir Walter Pollard in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, the gates to the estate were next to Corscadden Bridge. There was a fine avenue of trees that were planted either side of the drive. The trees were still there but houses and a small factory had been built behind the trees and Dennistoun Avenue was a quiet residential street. The gate house had survived and formed a compact house for any of the janitorial staff that needed it.

That afternoon, Laura and Imogen helped their parents get their belongings in there. They had brought up all the religious paraphernalia which had cluttered up their lives. All went to the tip and the Salway family felt a tremendous sense of relief and peace without them.

Chapter 14

November – December 2014

Christian Salway and Gemma Hammond were steady young people who took their duties of Head Boy and Head Girl seriously. It brushed off onto the other prefects as well, and several members of staff who had questioned the effectiveness of the prefect system could see its value. Unlike in some previous years, the prefects could be relied on to attend to their duties and were gentle and fair in the way that they dealt with the younger students. It gave the school a sense of calm that the teachers appreciated. Lessons could be started quickly and easily. Caddies were naturally a biddable lot anyway, but this year there seemed to be even more of a sense of purpose in the atmosphere of the school.

Christian started to find it quite amusing to see his granddad about the school. Granddad seemed to be getting on well with John the Jannie and the others. There always seemed to be laughter coming from their bothy at lunchtime. It was true – Granddad seemed to be returning towards the fun person that he was until he was snared up in that Elsheimer sect. Christian could not bring himself to call it a church.

The cross-country running was going well. Christian's input had also improved the stamina of the rugby squad. Simon Cairns' team were now winning – not all the time, but much more often than the previous year. Christian was winning his races and had been chosen to represent the County of Buchananshire. At national level competitions he was well up the field, and in the All Scotland 10 k, he achieved a time of 36 minutes, coming only fractionally behind the leader. He cut a distinctive figure, with his long blond hair tied into a ponytail, and a sweatband across his forehead. His tactics were to hang back slightly until the last kilometre in which he would let it all loose, fighting every step of the way. At the end he would collapse in a heap like a cheetah whose prey had just got away.

Although Ewan was a good runner, Christian could out-run him any time in competition. Jordan too was a good club level runner, but not in the same league. He tended to be in the middle field.

Christian often wondered how he got things done at that time. Naturally he had a pile of work to get through for his Advanced Highers. They were much more demanding than the A-levels he had started at Beckton Sixth Form College. On top of that he had his duties as Head Boy. He had his running training and competitions. He worked for Walker Bros doing the photography for the website, as well as his shifts waiting on in the restaurant. Somehow, he managed to pack thirty-six hours into each twenty-four-hour day. Despite his action-packed days, Christian had a sense of peace that he didn't understand. By all accounts he should have been stressed. Occasionally it happened. He was not superhuman. Nevertheless, his confidence grew, nurtured by this new feeling that he was loved and appreciated for what he was. Although he looked like a classic teenage wimp, he had a growing strength of character. Christian liked his time in the morning, sitting cross-legged on his bed. He had bought himself a Bible (a modern translation) and used notes to help him meditate. His spirituality was very quiet and private, shared only with his closest friends. He gave daily thanks that he was a Caddie.

During the last week in November, Strathcadden Academy was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate on behalf of Education Scotland. It was a rigorous and thorough process, intensely stressful for the teachers. At Christian's previous school in Beckton, The Grange School, the pupils would act up when the inspectors arrived, in order to show up the teachers and cause them maximum embarrassment. On one occasion, a maths teacher left the room and never came back. Christian felt ashamed and disgusted that he had had a part in that teacher's downfall. At that moment, Chris had decided that the last job he ever wanted was to be a teacher.

Here at Strathcadden Academy, things were so much different. The students worked harder than before with their teachers to show what they could achieve. The school had a real sense of unity and purpose.

Christian and Gemma were both inspected as well. They were shadowed one day throughout all their duties as well as their lessons. The inspector, Mr Gladwin, was almost like a limpet, but he declined the invitation to come on a training run. He did watch Gemma doing her footy training. A student council meeting was observed, and Christian's and Gemma's meetings with their prefect team. At the end of the day, Christian and Gemma had to give a presentation to the whole inspection team. There was a lot of interest from the inspectors, and they had many questions. It was late when they finished. Both Gemma and Christian were glad that they were boarding, for they were quite exhausted at the end of the day. Both were anxious that they had said the right thing.

They need not have worried. The prefect system had been described in glowing terms in that it was one of many major strengths of the school. It was highly praised in the way that it not only encouraged responsibility in young people but also was developing good management skills. *The Head Boy and Head Girl are excellent ambassadors for the school. They take their duties seriously and manage their team of prefects very effectively. That team is a real asset in helping the staff on duty. All students involved have shown exceptional maturity and have a well-developed sense of personal and corporate responsibility which will be a great asset to them in their future lives.* The school was praised for its outstanding leadership as well as outstanding attitudes of students to teaching and learning. Overall, the school was rated as Excellent and was put forward as a sector leader.

Mr Mitchell was beaming as he read it. There was only one fly in the ointment, The Wests, which was described as *an unpleasant facility that was out-dated in the nineteen fifties and should be replaced as soon as possible.* Everyone agreed and the comment made him more determined than ever to get rid of the disgusting and antediluvian apparatus in the building. At the School Board's meeting, Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council agreed to find the money come what may. The only thing standing in the way was the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association. An application would be made as soon as possible to the Buchanan Court of Sessions to have the interdict that prevented the work lifted.

For Christian Salway, Christmas was going to be radically different. He was going to have a family Christmas. Instead of just having Mum, he had Mum and Dad. He had two half-brothers. Instead of no grandparents, he had two granddads and two grandmas – just like most of his friends.

Chapter 15

Wednesday 3rd December 2014

It was raining heavily as Christian did his patrol that morning. That was not at all uncommon. He wasn't sure whether he liked the term "mild" on the weather forecast, as it usually meant that it was damp as well as cold. At least when it was frosty, the humidity was lower, so the cold wasn't quite so penetrating. His kilt kept the rain off his thighs. If he were wearing the normal school trousers that students in other schools wore, they would be clinging to his legs and making him feel decidedly uncomfortable. It was another aspect of the kilt that he liked.

Simon Cairns was doing patrol with Christian and both of them were chatting about how the Senior Rugby Squad was getting fitter. They thought about what more training they and the running squad could do, especially as the playing fields were getting sodden and many of the paths used for cross-country were so slippery that they were becoming dangerous. They wanted to keep things going now that it was getting dark at half-past three.

"I was chatting with Aidy last night," said Christian, "and they are having the same problems with the Haries."

"Hair-reefs?" said Simon, as he tried to imagine Aidan with dreadlocks.

"It's the Hare & Hounds; the name they give the cross-country running team at Edinburgh. They are doing a lot more gym-work. It keeps them going. Aidy showed me some of the exercises they do – things like press-ups, burpees, squat-thrusts – all the usual things."

"No, we've only done training for rugby, passing the ball, set scrums, mauls, and so on. We've done it on the all-weather pitch. Fortunately, it's been dry for all our sessions. If not, some of the squad don't turn up – they make excuses."

"You can't be serious! What does Mr Drummond say about it?"

“He’s not always there, either.”

That was not a surprise for them both. Mr Drummond had clearly gone soft in middle age. Although quite fit for a forty-five-year-old, he was not as trim round the middle as he had once been. He tended to train when it was dry and warm. There had been quite a lot of rain in November although there had been some drier spells. So, when it was wet, the men’s rugby and running squads looked after themselves, as Mr Drummond had a lot of other work to do, like they all did.

Since running was an individual discipline rather than a team sport, there was always something of a drop-out and the Strathcadden Academy Running Squad tended to reduce to a consistent number of die-hards who were out in all weathers. Christian always said that he would prefer to train with two or three who were consistent than have thirty in his squad who might or might not turn up. In a couple of events, he, Ewan and Jordan were the only ones competing for the men. A three-man rugby team would not get very far if the opposition fielded fifteen players as they were entitled to.

“I need to get fitter,” said Simon. “If I am telling my squad to get fitter, I need to be fit myself. That’s why the opposition are still pissing on us. Sam was useless last year. We were all unfit, which is why we hardly ever won a game.”

“E-mail Mr Drummond and book the Old Sports Hall. I’ll set up some circuits,” said Christian.

The two boys continued their morning patrol, and they saw a figure carrying a torch. It was John the Jannie, who greeted them with his usual, “Good morning, Mr Salway. Good morning, Mr Cairns. Anything to report?”

“No sir. Everything seems in order.”

John the Jannie disappeared into the pre-dawn gloom. “Chris,” said Simon, “is that new guy who works with John the Jannie anything to do with you? I saw that his name is Brian Salway.”

Chris could have denied any association with his grandfather, but that would have been dishonest. He was trying very hard to put the difficulties from the past behind him. Although it would have made very boring telly, he was now getting on well with his grandparents. “You might be surprised at this. He’s my granddad on Mum’s side. I won’t go into detail, but he moved up from Fotheringham, which is south of the Border. He used to run a plumbing and electrician business there but decided to give up. He had never heard of this place before he saw the ad, but he likes it. He and my grandma live in the old lodge. He gets on really well with John the Jannie.”

Just as they came to the janitors’ bothy, there was a cheery call of “Hello, Chris. You two look soaked. Come in and get warmed up. Coffee?”

The two boys were grateful for a mug of steaming coffee. It was instant, but it warmed them through as Jannie Brian chatted to them about the Hibs game the previous evening. Although Brian had never been to Easter Road, he had followed Hibernian since he was a small boy. That had stopped because of Jelly Belly, but, as part of his detox, he had started to follow Hibs again and picked it up as if he had never left off. Dad followed Hibs as well; Christian did to an extent limited to the scores.

Simon supported Hearts.

“Chris,” said his granddad, “come for your dinner this evening.”

After his evening patrol, Christian found himself at the Lodge at the end of Dennistoun Avenue. It was a small house, but cosy, with two homely people that made it warm and welcoming. Whatever the detox was, it was clearly working. This time last year, his grandparents were two of the most miserable people he had ever come across, chained as they were to their joyless membership of a sect that had been well and truly led astray. The cooking was simple but tasty. Food was to be enjoyed. Last

year food was a fuel, enough to keep going, but enjoyment was sinful. Everything was sinful. Not now. Christian was instantly at his ease.

Grandma had just got a job as a bus and coach driver at Cadden Roadways.

“What made you go there in the first place?” Christian was curious to know why his grandparents had got so entangled with their vile sect.

“It was my fault,” said Brian. A distant look had come across him. “Your mum and Aunt Imogen have often told you about us being fun-loving people. We were. We had them when we were very young. Grandma was twenty-two and I was twenty when Imogen came along. Two years later, Laura came along. We weren’t married, but in those days... well once was careless, but twice. Dad went into orbit when he found out and practically marched me and Brenda down to the vicar. Your great grandma Hayward took Brenda to the outfitter for the wedding dress and Dad took me to get a decent suit. I even had my hair cut to look respectable. It was even longer than yours.”

“It sounds a bit like my dad. Aidy was born not long after his mum and Dad got married. Aidy’s mum was quite a bit older than Dad.”

“It was. One thing I have never found out from our Laura was how she met your dad.”

“It was a strange story. Mary, Aidy’s mum, was Dad’s fiancée, but one weekend he was off the leash at a conference of railway engineers. He went with a couple of engineering students to a party in York that was of dubious taste. The alternative was to spend the evening with boring old farts (his words) going on about Stanier Black 5s or BR Type 4 diesels, whatever they are. Against all expectations, I came along as the unexpected by-product of a student party. Dad was twenty-one going on thirteen and three-quarters. He has moved on; he’s forty going on fifteen and a half.”

“Sounds like me,” said Brian. “I’m sixty-one going on sixteen.”

“You can say that again,” said Brenda.

“Dad always said that Mary would have murdered him if she had found out, so he kept his mouth shut. Anyway, Mum had no idea who he was when it happened. None of them did.”

“So how did our Laura meet up with your Dad?”

“I came here just about a year ago. Mum got me into the school as a distant Caddie. I didn’t know anyone, but Dr Cuthbert introduced me to Aidy. He and Eejay took me under their wing, and I got adopted into the Walker family. People said how like Aidy I was, just that Aidy has short black hair and I have long blond hair. Aidy’s a bit taller. Aidy is the spit of Dad. Mum came up at Christmas from Edinburgh. Dad has a flat in Edinburgh.”

“Yes, I know. He’s dead brainy is your dad. Our Laura and Imogen are both brainy. I don’t know where they got it from. I’m not that bright, you know. What happened to Mary?”

“She hadn’t been well for a bit but thought it was just the work she was doing. She went to Switzerland at the end of January and collapsed at a conference. Heart attack and stroke, they say, brought on by leukaemia. It was a shock to everyone.”

“Sure. I bet Aidy and Eejay took it hard.”

“They did. So did Dad. After the funeral and so on, Mum went to see him at his flat to make sure he was OK. She caught him on the rebound. The rest is history.”

Brian continued, “That church caught me and Grandma on the rebound. My history is not something I am proud of.”

“What happened?”

“In 1993 my mum and dad were killed in a car accident. A Range Rover ran into them at high speed. The driver was drunk. He got twelve months suspended – he knew people in the old boys’ network. It’s very

strong in Fatheringham. He lost his licence for a year and was fined £500. That's all my parents were worth. We were all very close to them. Laura and Imogen were very, very upset, of course. I was too, but I had to stay strong for Laura and Imogen. My younger brother, Raymond, went to pieces and ended up in the drugs scene. I tried religion to ease the pain. We went to the Anglican Church in Fatheringham. There was more life in the graveyard. No one talked to us. We were the youngest by far. They were completely up their own arses. The Methodist church was like the lounge of an old folks' home. Soon after, I found out about Fatheringham Evangelical Church.

“It was good when Jack Thompson was pastor. Laura and Imogen felt good too. Things changed, though. A man came from Northern Ireland and ousted Jack Thompson. Conall Devine was not a very nice man and was livid when our Laura found out she was pregnant. You know what happened. A year later, the landlord wanted the premises back. We couldn't afford to buy the building from him. We had a hand-to-mouth existence. The whole thing was about to go tits-up when along came this American outfit, who imposed a new pastor on us and got rid of Conall Devine. We should have gone then. Some people did. But we had nowhere to go to. We felt that we would be giving up. Elsheimer was not very nice to start with but got worse as we went on. Raymond was found dead. I was scared rigid. I tried to talk to Elsheimer. All he said was that Brenda and I would be the next if we didn't watch our step. We were to do exactly as he said. He seemed to think that he had a hotline to God. Neither of us is very bright, so we fell for it. When they threw our Laura out of the church, we should have gone as well. Brenda wanted to, but I was scared. It's my fault. I'm so sorry what they did to our Laura, to you, and our family.”

There were tears in Brian's eyes, and he struggled to keep composed. Christian reached out to him and said, “It's alright, Granddad. Put it behind you. I have.”

“You are a good lad, Chris. We're dead proud of you.”

“Mum has never told me any of this.”

“I don’t blame her. She was bloody angry with us, not surprisingly. I had kept it from her and Imogen because she had enough on her plate. I am also quite old-fashioned. Men are meant to be big boys and not cry. They aren’t meant to let their feelings be known. They should tough it out. That’s what I tried to do. There was a lot of stuff about victorious living. Feeling down was all about sinful self-indulgence. But victorious was the last thing I felt. It was like a drug. We were hooked. We wanted out but were scared at what Jelly Belly said. He knew where we lived. He had people, so he said.”

“Why didn’t you go to the Police? He was making threats.”

“They would have believed him rather than me. We’re not that bright. He was a brainy Doctor.”

“What happened that you broke free?”

“Elsheimer legged it back to The States. The cops were closing in on him. He has scammed the congregation of their money. All the charity giving went to him. Thousands went missing. Some of our pension went on a Ponzi scheme. Others have lost everything. That bloody man bled us dry, as dry as any drug-dealer.”

“It’s a good way of describing it. You both seem to be doing well with your religious rehab, though.”

“It is like a rehab, but a pleasant one,” said Brenda. “We are getting our lives back. Our Imogen has told us that. The Reverend Matheson is helping us. We have learned more in six weeks with him than we did in fifteen years with Elsheimer. It’s like eating healthy food, not junk. I hope they get him. There was no life, light, or love from him. I would like to see him go down for life.”

“If you never go into another church again, I wouldn’t blame you,” said Chris.

“We’re keeping out of church for a good while, until we are ready for it. That’s what Mr Matheson has told us. He does care for us.”

“I know that. And I want you to be happy up here.”

“We will be. This place is helping us to rebuild our lives.”

Christian gave both his grandparents a big hug, and it was genuinely meant.

Later that evening, Chris sat cross-legged on his bed thinking over what he had said to his grandparents. For the first time he felt real sympathy for them. The death of his great-grandparents was a crushing blow, and it was no wonder that Granddad had wanted to find solace in religion. However, it had been used to hijack him and grandma and had emotionally abused them both. Great-Uncle Raymond had fallen prey to a drug dealer. Grandma and Granddad had fallen prey to Devine, then Elsheimer. Elsheimer was no better than a drug-dealer, for that’s what Elsheimer’s perverted view of Christianity was – legal highs for the simple, little better than the ketamine and that other shit whose name he had forgotten. It was not the first time, and it wouldn’t be the last. Many Christian people came to faith at vulnerable times of their lives. Fortunately, most ended up with gentle and caring people like Mr McEwan and Mr Matheson. But some found themselves being led astray in “churches” that were led by fruitcakes and not-so-closet fascists. The most charitable word to describe these was loony.

This time last year, Christian’s life was being rebuilt here in Corscadden. He was set to achieve far more here than he ever would have in Beckton, even if he had passed his A-levels. He felt very blessed in the way that he had been adopted by Aidy and Eejay and now had found out who his father was. It was a weird story, that tasteless party and a duff Johnny, in addition to Dad’s lack of prowess in matters to do with mammalian reproduction. He was there for a purpose, and not just to take over from Aunts Jenny and Sarah in fifteen years’ time. His church

was not a huge cathedral, or even any of the churches in Corscadden. It was there in a study bedroom in Asher House. It had been a big challenge to forgive Grandma and Granddad. Now he had done so, which seemed inconceivable just a few weeks ago, there was a genuine love there.

At a particularly difficult time in Granddad's life, he had searched for love, light, and life. Typical of the Anglicans that there had been more life in the graveyard. Christian's own experience of English Anglicanism had been similar. Granddad seemed to have got a glimpse of love, light, and life, but the light had been turned out. With Devine and Elsheimer love, light, and life had become bigotry, ignorance, and puritanism. His brand of victorious living was the victory of fascism over humanity. Like all bullies, Elsheimer was a coward. After all Christian was no superman and even he had faced him down.

It was quite comical the way that Granddad was now Jannie Brian. That fact would get round the school quickly. Caddies were nosy and gossiped. That was their nature. It would be no good denying it either, nor did Christian want to deny his Granddad. The most important thing had been kept secret, though. Only Aidy, Eejay, and Jordan knew about the tasteless party, and the fact that he was Aidy and Eejay's half-brother. They could be trusted not to shoot their mouths off.

Chapter 16

Tuesday 9th December 2014

The run-up to Christmas was marked by eager anticipation by Caddies, like all other young people. There was a new addition to the life of Strathcadden Academy, a concert of carols and music organised by Peter Struther, the Head of Music. Actually, it was based on an old tradition from the erstwhile Saint Oswald College, but it had fallen into disuse because Ms Bryant, the previous Head of Music considered it elitist and irrelevant. She had told her students that if they believed in Christmas, they might as well believe in fairies in the garden. That was her pitch, but it was more likely that it was too much like hard work. She had “heart and kidney trouble”; she was heart-lazy and ci’dnae be bothered. Her Xmas (which was not a skin condition) consisted of a round of drunken and drug-fuelled parties and self-indulgent gluttony. She would have just about cleared her hangover by the time she returned to Corscadden in January.

Since she was overtly biased against boys, she had lost a considerable amount of musical talent. Under her watch, music, which was always at the heart of the school, had all but withered away. Last year she had left under a cloud.

Peter Struther’s first year had been like gentle rain on the withered plant that was the music department. In response it sprouted new leaves and was now blossoming. There was now a full orchestra, a wind ensemble, a brass band, as well as a junior and senior choir. Many musically gifted boys had found their way to join the gifted girls in the music department.

Like all such occasions, the Christmas concert was going to be about the students. It would also have elements of the Christian message of Christmas, as well as poetry, readings, and a lot of music. Unlike previous occasions, this one was going to be open to the townspeople. It would be free, although a retiring collection would be made for charity. The good people of Corscadden would flock in droves to any event like this, mostly because it was free.

Tamsin Heady was a talented keyboard artist but had sprained her left wrist on the netball court. Therefore, much of the keyboard performance fell on Ewan Walker, her understudy. While Ewan was not as talented at the keyboard as his brother, he was still quite handy on the ivories, and now he was starting to master the organ in the Old Chapel. Since its restoration using a legacy from his late mother, the instrument was not the cantankerous leviathan that it had been when Aidan had played it. That was just as well, as Ewan spent many hours practising his pieces. Aidan could play well at the first reading; Ewan had to practise before he was satisfied with his performance. He also had to rehearse with the choir, and orchestra. At first the whole thing was a bit ragged, but Mr Struther was infinitely patient and supportive to everyone. Ewan preferred not to imagine what it would have been like if Ms Bryant had been bothered to do something. Even so he had occasional nightmares about Michelin Woman screeching at the choir, the orchestra, and him in particular. Still, it came together, and Peter Struther enthused about the concert to his friends.

Christian and Ryan had put together some graphic design work to form projected backdrops to the event. They had lifted some of the ideas from their art portfolios.

Outside, the weather had turned decidedly cold. Since Strathcadden was so high up, it was above the snowline at this time of the year. White Christmases were quite common. There were frequent showers of hail and snow over those last days of the Autumn Term. Distant Caddies were glad they didn't have to catch a bus every day, for the buses would not always manage to get back to the far-flung villages. In previous years, some pupils had walks of up to two hours in blizzards to get home. The playing fields would become flat expanses of white. The weather would go mild (relatively, with temperatures of 5 degrees Celsius) and the fields would turn to slush. Caddies enjoyed the snow and so many snowmen were made that the fields looked like there were football teams

that had got frozen in time and space. They also liked throwing the stuff at each other.

It was warm inside, though. Dr Cowan would have said that they were all soft. The only place that was cold inside was The Wests. Dr Cowan would have approved. The industrial paraffin heater did little to raise the temperature there but made the noise and fumes of a jet engine. It was used by Caddie Laddies to blow much appreciated warm air up their kilts. They had to be careful not to get too close to the machine, as its vent glowed slightly, and flames licked its edges.

The problem of The Wests exercised the senior staff and members of the School Board. They could no longer ignore it in the hope that it would go away, or better still, fall down. That would never happen. It was bomb-proof. It had proved that by surviving an almost direct hit from a 250 kg bomb in the Second World War. The apparatus inside had worked perfectly for a century and would continue to give at least another thousand years' service. It did its purpose. But it was an unpleasant place in every sense of the word and afforded its users an uncomfortable and undignified experience. Dr Cowan would have condemned the partitions as showing that today's generation of boys was soft. That there were doors, which could be locked, would have made him have a pink fit. Not that Dr Cowan led by example. His own inner sanctum had the most modern possible fittings and was strictly private.

Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council owned the place. And they wanted rid of it. The Victorian Heritage Preservation Association had obtained an interdict, or an injunction, that forbade any alteration to The Wests on the grounds that the Council wanted to destroy a unique example of Victorian industrial sanitary ware. The time had come for the interdict to be reviewed. This time the Council legal department had done its homework and had a number of witnesses to give evidence to the Sheriff Court at Buchanan.

This was one of the more unusual cases to come before the Sheriff Court. For Sheriff Jonathan Kimmerghame it was something different

from the more usual diet of anti-social behaviour and domestic violence. On Tuesday 9th December 2014, Christian Salway and Simon Cairns found themselves with Mr Mitchell and Mr Buchan waiting to go into Court 5. They sat in silence in the waiting room while the initial statements were read to the judge by James Mullins, the Director of Legal Services for Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council, and by Sir Malcolm Wilson QC, the Advocate for the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association.

Sheriff Kimmerghame started the proceedings, saying, “This is one of the more unusual cases that I have to deal with. We are here to review the interdict granted to The Victorian Heritage Preservation Association on Wednesday 3rd October 2012 to restrain the Regional Council of Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil from the removal of thirty-five water-closet pedestals and their associated cisterns from a building at the premises of Strathcadden Academy, in the town of Corscadden. The interdict was granted to the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association to preserve the historical significance of the said apparatus within a unique setting, with a lifetime of two years. The interdict has now expired, and our duty is to consider whether a fresh interdict is necessary, or whether it should lapse. I call on the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association to present their case for the renewal of the interdict.”

“My Lord, I want to outline the historical significance of the building as a uniquely preserved example of sanitary ware of the late Nineteenth Century in its correct context. It was a building that was designed by John Motson, the Chief Engineer of the Great Central Railway, who also was the architect of the school buildings of Saint Oswald College at Dennistoun Park...”

Sir Malcolm continued to outline the significance of the high quality of all the buildings at Strathcadden Academy. There was no doubting that. Many of the buildings that had been inherited from the erstwhile Saint Oswald College had been built to last, constructed as they were to the same specification as the buildings of the Great Central Line. All were designed to last a thousand years. It would be a public scandal if

this unique collection of Victorian wash-down pedestals were to be removed because the present generation of boys didn't like to use them. That was the gist of the case, but it took forty-five minutes to state it in terms that no one other than the legally trained would understand.

Mr Mullins understood the legalese. He was not the council's legal eagle for nothing; in fact, he was very highly paid. As he started, Sir Malcolm wondered when his witnesses from the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association would turn up. Their absence would make his case more difficult. Nonetheless he was even more highly paid than Mr Mullins and he was guaranteed an eye-watering fee, win, or lose. It was just a matter of who was going to pay it. Mullins started his speech, "My Lord, the council taxpayers of this county may well be wondering what we are doing spending a very large sum of money arguing in court over a block of boys' lavatories. I have the answer, which is in three parts.

"Part 1 is the fact that the facility, called by the pupils *The Wests*, is over one hundred years old. Although each lavatory works well, the whole facility should have been replaced years ago. It was going to be replaced in the nineteen fifties, but the money was not there. The money was not there in 1988 when the present school was founded. This was due to a budget overrun in refurbishing the buildings. It is true that the block could be considered as an important heritage item, but I will argue that it is not fit for purpose in the present day. I will be calling witnesses from the student body of Strathcadden Academy.

"Part 2 is that the block does not allow boys decency or privacy. Originally the individual pedestals were not screened in any way. Boys had to do their business in full view of their peers. This was at the behest of the first headmaster of Saint Oswald College, in order to prepare boys for the privations of serving in the armed forces and the British Empire. Seventy years ago, there was considerable concern about issues of privacy and dignity, so in the early nineteen fifties, partitions were installed. These consisted, and still do, of plywood. The sheets were of limited size due to post-war rationing, so even today, a boy of average height can peer over the top. In the nineteen seventies doors were added, but it was only when

we took over the Dennistoun Park site that locks were put on. And, I am told, these are not totally effective.

“Each pedestal is, I am told, very uncomfortable to sit on. The block itself is very cold in winter, but hot in the summer. The atmosphere in there is disgusting. This is why we intend to refurbish the block by replacing the existing fittings with full-height modern cubicles with tiling and a false ceiling, so that privacy is assured. This is the case in the block that is used by the girls. Modern floor tiling will be laid, instead of the unpainted concrete which is hard to keep clean.

“Part 3 of my submission is based on the Council’s duty of safeguarding all of its young people. My witnesses will describe incidents which have caused concern. When a boy needs to attend to his natural needs, he is entitled to the privacy and dignity that girls enjoy, and that we as adults enjoy. Ex-pupils at Saint Oswald College would state how this block was synonymous with unpleasant initiation ceremonies as well as humiliating breaches of privacy. These do not happen at Strathcadden Academy, but there remains the risk that boys will take advantage of their peers and commit acts of voyeurism. The school is very aware of it and deals with matters of harassment and bullying very seriously. But it can only deal with what is reported.

“Therefore, I am submitting to the court that the refurbishment should be allowed to take place as a matter of urgency.”

Sheriff Kimmerghame made a brief observation, “I was a pupil of Saint Oswald College in the nineteen seventies. I agree with everything you have said.”

“I object, My Lord,” said Sir Malcolm. “How can my clients and I be assured that you are impartial in this case?”

“Sir Malcolm,” retorted Sheriff Kimmerghame, “I can assure you that I am totally impartial. I can guarantee that my judgement will be based solely on the evidence that has been put before me, not on my own experience as an Old Oswaldian.”

Sir Malcolm made a quiet note to himself that Sheriff Jonathan Kimmerghame's comment would form the basis of an appeal, but only if the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association could afford it.

It had not been the intention of the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association to allow Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council to call its witnesses before theirs. However, since nobody from the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association had arrived, Sheriff Kimmerghame ordered that the Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council witnesses should give their testimony. Mr Mitchell went in first and swore the oath.

"You are Keith Robert Mitchell?" asked Mr Mullins.

"I am indeed."

"What is your role as witness?"

"I am the Headmaster of Strathcadden Academy, and I am here to testify to the court on behalf of the School Board and the Regional Council about the need to refurbish the toilet block used by the boys at the school."

"Why do you think such action is necessary?" Sir Malcolm asked.

"It is not just necessary; it's essential. There are issues that involve the privacy of boys using the block. There is also a major problem in keeping the block clean, as it has an uneven and cracked concrete floor which potentially can harbour microorganisms, even though it is cleaned twice a day."

"How is it cleaned?"

"It is hosed down with water and disinfectant is spread across the floor."

"What's wrong with that?"

“It is possible that microorganisms from waste can be missed and go on to cause an infection. It hasn’t happened yet, but there remains the risk.”

“Is that the reason to destroy a perfectly functional piece of our Victorian Heritage?”

“Yes. My primary duty is to protect my students from...”

“...a dose of the squitters?” Sir Malcolm interjected.

“If you want to put it like that, yes.”

Sheriff Kimmerghame added, “He is right. When I was at Saint Oswald’s, a serious outbreak of a gastro-intestinal infection was traced to The Wests.”

“The Wests, my Lord?”

“That is what the lavatory block was called when I was there. I believe it’s still called that. Is that true, Mr Mitchell?”

“Yes M’Lud, that’s true.”

“That means you are definitely biased, My Lord.”

“This is not a line I should pursue, Sir Malcolm,” replied Sheriff Kimmerghame. “I should remind you, and I will do so for the last time, that my duty is to be impartial. My judgement will be based entirely on the evidence that is presented to this court. What happened to me in the past is immaterial to the case and cannot be part of the judgement. Mr Mitchell, please will you continue with your evidence?”

Mr Mitchell continued, “I have two of my students, Christian Salway and Simon Cairns, who will tell the court what it’s like to use the toilet block. Apart from the unpleasant nature of the block, I consider that there are safeguarding issues. We have had trouble from time to time of boys deliberately invading the privacy of other boys when they are occupying a stall. In October, a drone was flown into the block and took pictures of boys on the toilets. It was uploaded to You-Tube and both

the witnesses that are being called had their faces and a lot more published, along with their names. The video clip went viral before its author took it down. We dealt with it severely and were supported by parents in our actions.”

“Sounds like a schoolboy prank to me,” said Sir Malcolm.

“I don’t think the targets of the prank, as you put it, would consider it very funny. Would you treat it as such if your face and name were broadcast across You-Tube?”

“So what support, Mr Mitchell, do you have in your proposed course of vandalism of a major part of our Victorian Heritage? Have you ever used it yourself?” Sir Malcolm demanded.

“Not at all. There is no way that I would use it, nor would I allow my staff to do so, for safeguarding reasons. Not that any of them would want to use it in the first place.”

“So, what support do you have?”

“Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council, my School Board, the parents, and the students. You should be asking what support there is for keeping the block in its present state.”

“I decide what I should ask when I cross-examine witnesses. I am speaking for my clients when I say that this is a grotesque act of vandalism that is being proposed and that Heritage Scotland should be called in to legislate to keep it as it is in perpetuity.”

“The Victorian Heritage Preservation Association is welcome to take the building and its contents at their own expense and pay for the re-erection of the building.”

“What the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association is demanding is that the building is kept in place with its current fittings, and that it is restored to its original state.”

At that point, the clerk of the court slipped into the court room. Sir Malcolm's witness had arrived. Sir Leonard Handley, an elderly landowner, was the local chairman of the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association, although he did not live in Scotland. In fact, he lived in Cheshire on a very large farming estate. Sir Leonard looked askance at the two young witnesses sitting nervously in the waiting room outside the court. A spell in Afghanistan would have made men of them, he thought, or, better still, returned them in boxes on the back of the *Globemaster* freighter ZZ175.

Simon Cairns and Christian Salway thought that the old fossil who had joined them was a relic from the Victorian era. He did not even acknowledge their polite "good morning, sir". They thought that that was rude and that he should have known better at his age.

"My Lord," said Sir Malcolm, "my witness, Sir Leonard Handley has now arrived. May I call on him to give evidence?"

"My Lord, I object," said Mr Mullins. "The court should continue to hear our witnesses, since they have started to give evidence."

Sir Malcolm stared at Mr Mullins with ill-concealed contempt. He was an eminent Queen's Counsel with a well-resourced and lucrative practice, while his "learnèd friend" was only from a local authority legal department that should have stuck to determining speed limits.

"I agree with Mr Mullins," said Sheriff Kimmerghame. "The witnesses for Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council must continue with their evidence."

Christian Salway and Simon Cairns were the summoned by the court clerk and took the oath. They stood nervously in the witness stand.

"Please will you give the court your names?" said the Clerk.

"I'm Chris... I mean I am Christian Dominic Hayward Salway."

"And I am Simon Richard Cairns."

“What is your role in the school, Mr Salway?” said Mr Mullins.

“I am Head Boy, and I am responsible for a team of prefects, who are students from Secondary Year Six.”

“And you, Mr Cairns?”

“I am a prefect and Head of Edwards House. I am one of Chris’s team.”

“So, Mr Salway, please tell us about the block called The Wests,” said Mr Mullin.

“It’s not a very nice place, sir. It’s cold, smelly, and you don’t get much privacy.”

“What do you mean by that, Mr Salway?” asked Mr Mullins.

“The lavvies... I mean lavatories are separated by plywood partitions that are not very high. I’m not very tall, as you can see, and I can see over the top. When you go into the stalls, you can see who’s sitting next to you. You have to keep your eyes straight ahead to avoid embarrassment. When you are sitting on the lavvy you can see the laddies’ legs and feet next door. And ...” Christian went red and stopped.

“Yes, Mr Salway?” Sir Malcolm interjected. “Will you carry on?”

“It’s embarrassing, sir.”

“What the devil do you do when you sit there?” Sir Malcolm was starting to push Salway.

“If you really want to know...”

“Yes, we do want to know, Mr Salway.”

“The lavvies make all the horrible noises people make much louder.” Salway was crimson with embarrassment. He looked appealingly at the judge, “I’m sorry, My Lord, it’s not very nice.”

“Don’t worry,” said Sheriff Kimmerghame, “I know exactly what you are talking about. It was just like that when I was at Saint Oswald’s. And I agree.”

Mr Mullins said to the judge, “My Lord, I need to make an objection, that my learned friend should not be cross-examining my witnesses until they have finished their evidence.”

“Agreed, Mr Mullins,” said Sheriff Kimmerghame, who had started to think that this case was a complete damned waste of time.

“Mr Cairns,” said Mr Mullins, “what is your perception of The Wests?”

“Exactly as Chris has said. Most boys don’t like using it and use other lavvies around the school if they can. Sometimes we have to though. The lavvies are not at all comfortable to sit on as well as everything else that Chris has said. And it’s not at all private. And there is something else I have to say.”

“Please tell the court.”

“In October, some kids flew a drone into The Wests and took a video clip of all the laddies sitting on the...ae... lavvies. They hovered over Chris and took a clip of him trying to swat the drone with his kilt. I have never heard language like it. And Chris never swears. It did the same to me. They uploaded everything to the internet. They named Chris and me and showed everything. It was very embarrassing.”

“Thank you, Mr Cairns,” said Mr Mullins. “Mr Salway, what do other male students think about The Wests?”

“They hate it, sir. As Simon said, they try to use other lavvies... I mean lavatories around the school. Every school council meeting there are complaints. The girls have The Easts.”

“The Easts?”

“The girls’ washroom. It’s a block that was built when the school was moved from its Langhouse site. It’s a mirror image of The Wests, but it is far more comfortable. It’s more like a bathroom at home. It’s discrimination against boys.”

“Thank you, Mr Salway. That concludes my questions to the witnesses.”

Sir Malcolm got up and looked down his nose at the two young witnesses. “Mr Salway, how do you know that the girls’ lavatories are more comfortable? Have you ever been in there?”

“Certainly not. I am relying on what I am told.”

“So, you are telling the court second-hand information? Why should the court believe what you say?”

“I wouldn’t go into the girls’ lavvies, sir. I would get into serious trouble.”

A thought shot across Sir Malcolm’s mind. He wondered if Salway was actually a boy with his effeminate face and long hair. He felt sure that Salway could go into The Easts and nobody would bat an eyelid. He resisted the temptation to say so, let alone apply the test of the kilt. The last time he had made such a personal comment, he had been severely rebuked by the judge. That judge happened to be Jonathan Kimmerghame.

“This incident with the drone, Mr Salway: are you not overreacting? It was just a prank. We did all sorts when I was at Fettes.”

“No, sir. It upset all the boys who were in there. I told Mr Mitchell straight away.”

“When I was at school, we never told the headmaster. That was sneaking.”

“I am Head Boy, sir. It’s my duty to tell the headmaster or his depute if things get out of hand. My prefects do the same. If flying a

drone into The Wests is not getting out of hand, I don't know what is. Mr Mitchell took it very seriously."

Sir Malcolm was determined to make the next question as humiliating and embarrassing to the young witness as possible. "Mr Salway, many people found the video-clip of the drone flight rather amusing. Why do you and Mr Cairns not share the idea that it was just a bit of fun? Just because you are Head Boy, it doesn't mean you should be quite so po-faced."

Christian Salway gave Sir Malcolm "the look" and said in a tone of voice that suggested that he was trying his best to keep his temper, "Because it upset everyone in there. Besides they broadcast across the whole world me trying to hit the drone, me swearing, and me with a bare bottom. And they showed what I had done as well. They did the same to Simon. Would you like someone to do that to you?"

"Of course not," snapped Sir Malcolm.

"I don't either."

"Surely you should be prepared for pranks at school. All schoolboys do them. I bet you did, Mr Salway."

"No, sir. I have had plenty of pranks played on me, and some of them were not very nice. One very nearly killed me." It was tempting to go into the incident with the ketamine and that other shit whose name he had forgotten, but Christian decided against. "I might just be a school student, but I am entitled to my dignity every bit as you are."

"I agree," said Sheriff Kimmerghame. "Sir Malcolm, I am finding it hard to see how your line of questioning is relevant to the case."

"My Lord, the case I am making is that the boys at Strathcadden Academy are too sensitive to a few silly pranks and that it is not an adequate reason to destroy heritage that is one hundred and twenty years old." Sir Malcolm glared at the two boys. There was something in that look that he had received from Salway that made him decide that no

further questioning was needed. He had done some silly pranks in his time, and had often got into trouble with the headmaster, resulting in six of the best. It hadn't done him any harm.

It was the turn of Sir Leonard Handley to come to the witness stand. He started, "I shall show the court a picture of the glorious piece of Victorian heritage that this school is proposing to destroy."

The picture was displayed on computer screens so that everyone could see. It was the interior of a magnificent gentlemen's lavatory with oak cubicles, a tiled floor with patterns that were as bright as the day that they were laid, and highly polished brass pipes. The lavatories themselves were genuine *Thomas Crapper* fittings and could seat a bull rhinoceros. They reminded Christian of *The Colossus*.

"This school wants to destroy that and put in something that is modern, just because the girls have a modern facility. If the boys in this school are anything like the two specimens seated over there, I can quite see why."

Christian Salway and Simon Cairns were quite justified in their assessment of Sir Leonard as a rude and ignorant old man who should have known better. Public schools in England were about producing gentlemen, so they had been told. In this case they had failed dismally.

"Sir Leonard," said Sheriff Kimmerghame, "I have two observations. Firstly, I would ask that you do not go down the line of insulting witnesses. The second thing is that the picture that you have presented to the court bears no resemblance whatsoever to the facility that you have been tasked with protecting."

"What?" snapped Sir Leonard. He was one of those types that dealt with embarrassment by getting angry and confrontational. "Do you mean to tell me that the heritage I am supposed to be protecting is something else completely different? Good Lord, man!"

"The correct way to address a judge in a Scottish sheriff court is 'My Lord'," said Sheriff Kimmerghame loftily. "You need to be aware

that failure in court etiquette can be interpreted as a contempt of court. If I have to rebuke you again, you will be considered to be in contempt of court.”

Sir Malcolm was not feeling impressed with his client’s standard of preparation. He asked his client, “Would you like to see a picture of the facility that you have asked me to defend?”

Two pictures of The Wests were shown. The first one was the building when it was first commissioned. The second was an up-to-date version with the partitions and stalls, but it was early in the morning, and none were occupied.

“Would you give the court your opinions on the facility?”

“I don’t have any yet.”

“That’s all I want to ask, Sir Leonard,” said Sir Malcolm sitting down. Pigs would fly if this case were successful. He only hoped that the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association would have the funds to pay his massive bill. He made up his mind immediately to add an extra £500 + VAT, firstly for the abysmal preparation by Sir Leonard, and secondly that he had been stopped in his tracks by an effeminate eighteen-year-old runt in a kilt.

Sir Malcolm’s learned friend, whom he despised and did not consider learned at all, was not stopped in his tracks. He was going to enjoy his cross-examination of this rotund buffoon from the south. He started, “Sir Leonard, now that you have seen the building that this case is about, may I take up my learned friend’s question about your opinion?”

“It’s...um... a good piece of Victorian heritage, which it’s...um...important to save. The school should not be...um...”

“Which school is the one you are talking about?”

“Stra...” The rest of the word failed Sir Leonard.

“Which town is it in?”

“Cor... How the bloody hell do you expect me to know?”

“Strathcadden Academy is the school we are talking about, and it’s situated in the town of Corscadden. How much do you know about Scottish Victorian heritage? You don’t appear to have heard of Corscadden?”

“Good Lord!” snapped Sir Leonard who seemed to have ignored the judge’s warning. “How the bloody hell should I know? I don’t know these parts, and frankly I care even less!”

“Where are you based to do your work for the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association in Scotland?”

“I live in Cheshire, my man,” Sir Leonard retorted. “I have come here at considerable inconvenience to myself to protect a valuable piece of Victorian heritage that is under threat from a second-rate school.”

“Why is Strathcadden Academy second rate?”

“It’s a school I have never heard of.”

“Which school did you go to? I assume it was first rate.”

“Charterhouse, you little fool! We were brought up to be men, not the two wimps I see over there.”

“Sir Leonard, I have warned you. You are now in contempt of court,” said Sheriff Kimmerghame.

“Sir Leonard,” said Mr Mullins, “the Council has a proposal that may be satisfactory to the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association. You may wish to dismantle the existing structure at your expense. You may purchase all the fittings and fixtures at the equivalent price that an architectural salvage company would pay. You would also need to finance the rebuilding of the boys’ toilet block in the previous style. The internal fitting out would be done at our expense.”

“What the hell do we do with a pile of numbered bricks and a good number of lavatory fittings?”

“You could have it erected at the North of England Industrial Museum at Beamish. You could erect it in the way it was initially built without all those ghastly post-war bits of plywood. I wouldn’t count on many male visitors wanting to use it. Or if you wanted it closer to home, try the Coalbrookdale Museum in Shropshire.”

“It stays where it is and as it is,” snapped Sir Leonard. “If the nancy-boys at Strath Academy are so damned soft that they don’t like it, they should use the girls’ lavatories. I can’t say anyone would notice the difference.”

“Sir Leonard,” said Mr Mullins, “what do you propose Strathcadden Academy should do about the boys’ toilet block?”

“Keep it, you blithering idiot! Take away those partitions and restore it to its original condition. It would make men out of those boys in skirts,” Sir Leonard shouted.

Sheriff Kimmerghame banged his gavel several times until the irascible witness was quiet. He spoke with a low voice, “Sir Leonard Handley, it is very clear that you have no respect for any of these proceedings. You have shown clear contempt of this court, its advocates and its witnesses. I shall be dealing with you at the end of the case. In the meantime, you will be taken down to the cells. I would suggest that you reflect on your actions, consider the need for appropriate etiquette in a court room, and consider how you will purge your contempt.”

“You can’t be serious! Have you taken leave of your senses? I went to Charterhouse. I know the Chief Advocate in Edinburgh! I shall be on the phone to him tomorrow and will make sure that you are sacked and that little runt from the council is struck off for good. Good Lord, man, you will pay for this!” barked Sir Leonard as he was led down the stairs.

There being no further discussions to take place, Sheriff Kimmerghame summed up and adjourned the court for two hours while he made his decision. In reality he had made up his mind already, but he

decided that that obnoxious member of the Cheshire landed gentry should sweat it out for a couple of hours. He wanted to be seen to be thinking about what he had heard. An immediate decision would make people think he was making it up as he went along, and that simply would not do. Also, he had earned his lunch after listening to all the drivel that he had heard in the last couple of hours.

Mr Mitchell took the two boys out to lunch with Mr Mullins. The court proceedings had been stressful to the boys, and they felt tired and anxious. Mr Mullins said to them, “Actually I think it went pretty well. It was pretty obvious that the judge was more sympathetic to you two – and to you Keith. He knows what we are talking about. Where the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association got that picture from, I don’t know. I can tell you this. Sheriff Kimmerghame does not look favourably on cases that are badly prepared.”

Over in the far corner sat Sir Malcolm Wilson, who was on his mobile to a colleague at the office. “Honestly, Jamie, it was a complete wash-out. How on earth did the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association elect a bad-tempered old curmudgeon from Cheshire to represent them in Scotland? He hardly knows the place. He had never heard of Corscadden, let alone Strathcadden Academy. He presented the court a picture of a gents in Alsay which has Grade 1 listing with Heritage Scotland and bears no relation to what’s at Strathcadden Academy. Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council wiped the floor with us...”

While Mr Mullins and Mr Mitchell chatted easily to each other, the two boys sat quietly. They would have loved to make fun of the old buffer from Cheshire, but this was not the appropriate place.

If a couple of hours in the cells were going to make Sir Leonard Handley contrite, Sheriff Kimmerghame was badly mistaken. Sir Leonard played second fiddle to nobody. He had a strong streak of narcissism. On his estate in Cheshire, what he said went. Any view other than his own was met with contempt. If that did not work, the next stage was unbridled

fury. To get on with Sir Leonard, members of his network had to agree with every word he said. He was accepted in Cheshire high society for the simple reason that he was very rich and ran many events for the well-heeled.

A spell in this dirty and dismal dungeon was not something he was going to take lying down, especially as when luncheon was brought to him, it consisted of tepid haggis and chips from the police canteen. He was hungry, so he ate it, but it was not the haute cuisine that he was used to and expected. He had been told that this was a posh cell, suitable for a nob, and there was an en-suite. It was certainly an apparatus that any lover of Victoriana would appreciate. It consisted of a cylindrical salt-glazed pot with no seat except for two curved pieces of pitch-pine set into the rim. A length of clothesline went up into a hole in the ceiling. The whole thing had more than a passing resemblance to the thirty-five pedestals whose futures he had come to assure.

Unfortunately, he needed to use the apparatus, and it was neither a comfortable nor dignified experience. It was made even worse by one of the security staff coming in to collect his lunch tray. This warder had a smirk on his face as he picked up the tray. Sir Leonard would have given the man a damned good hiding for his insolence but was prevented from doing so by the nature of his task.

It was now not only a dirty and dismal dungeon, but a stinking one when Sir Leonard was taken up to Sheriff Kimmerghame's court room. It was matched by Sir Leonard's stinking temper.

Sheriff Kimmerghame entered the court with everyone standing, except for Sir Leonard who sat muttering about very important people that he knew. Kimmerghame bowed to the court, and all sat down. His judgement was on a number of sheets of A4 paper, and he started to read, "This has been one of the more unusual cases that I have had to deal with. It concerns the review for possible renewal of an interdict granted to the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association against Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council to prevent the Council from removing

Victorian sanitary ware from a building that houses boys' lavatories at Strathcadden Academy, Dennistoun Park, Corscadden in this Region. This building is commonly called 'The Wests'.

"I will give my judgement, before I explain the reasons. I find in favour of Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council, and I confirm that I am lifting the interdict awarded to the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association with immediate effect. I can also confirm that the application by the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association to have the building and its fittings listed by Heritage Scotland as Grade 1 has been turned down.

"As I have said, it is certainly extraordinary in its context. Many years ago, I read a book by the French author Gabriel Chevalier called *Clochemerle* in which the mayor of this village decides to install a *pissoir*, a public urinal outside the local church. His story relates the rumpus amongst the locals that resulted. This particular case had a certain rumpus to it that reminds me somewhat of this particular story. Indeed, when Dennistoun Park housed Saint Oswald College, there was such a structure called *The Vespasienne* situated not far from The Wests. It was removed, I gather, when Strathcadden Academy moved to the Dennistoun Park site. It was in a dangerous condition when I was at Saint Oswald's; it was only the rust that supported it. I can only imagine what would have happened in this case if *The Vespasienne* still existed.

"I have had an undertaking from the council that the three substantial urinals will be retained for their historical interest, along with the tiled inscription from Germany that was placed above them in the nineteen twenties, which reads *Das Pissoir*.

"A number of factors minded me to lift the interdict. Firstly, the lavatory block is not fit for purpose. It was designed by the first headmaster of Saint Oswald College whose mission was to toughen up boys for careers in the military. Protection of dignity was not a high priority for Dr Cowan. Indeed, many of his disciplinary methods would be regarded nowadays as serious abuse."

Sir Leonard snorted and muttered, “Never did me any harm. No wonder the bloody country has gone to the dogs. All this European legislation has made boys soft.”

Sheriff Kimmerghame banged his gavel and replied, “Silence in court! Sir Leonard Handley, if you continue to interrupt, you will go back to the cells.”

He continued, “Clearly attempts were made to improve the situation in the nineteen fifties and the nineteen seventies, but the facility is far from satisfactory in this regard. Additionally, there are serious safeguarding concerns, in that boys can easily have their privacy and dignity violated at a time in which they should have a reasonable expectation of privacy. Such invasions of privacy may be considered to be little more than schoolboy pranks, but in reality, they constitute harassment. At an extreme, they could be construed as voyeurism. Voyeurism is a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009.

“As for the escapade with the drone, I shall be writing to the Civil Aviation Authority to urge them to make the rules for flying such machines stricter. It is of great concern that anyone can currently operate such a machine with no training. I am a private pilot, and I had to do a lot of training to get my licence. Like all pilots I have to obey strict rules in flying so that I do it safely. Flying a drone within a metre of somebody else has no end of risks, even though the pilot showed considerable skill. The broadcast of the material so gathered constituted harassment, and I have to say that although the school dealt with the matter seriously, the pilot got away with it lightly.

“As far as comments made by the two students from Strathcadden Academy concerning the mismatch between the facilities enjoyed by the girls and the boys of the school, I agree with them. I see no good reason why the male students should not enjoy the same level of comfort, privacy, and dignity afforded to female students. As for the comfort of the

lavatories themselves, I, too, used them when I was a student at Saint Oswald College. The experience was as awful at that time as it is now.

“The case presented by the witness for the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association seems to be based on a sentimental attachment to equipment that, while functional, is not fit for use in the twenty-first century. If the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association wishes to preserve the fittings of the building, they are quite within their rights to purchase them from the council at the same price as that which would be paid by an architectural salvage yard.

“I found the standard of preparation of the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association’s case utterly lamentable. Their witness’s assertion that the building should be restored to its original condition with no partitioning at all is incomprehensible in this day and age, as well as unacceptable. I consider failure to prepare a case properly as tantamount to contempt.

“To re-iterate on my judgement, it is that the case for retaining the interdict granted to the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association has not been proved. Therefore, there is no case for the retention of the old lavatory block for male students, known as The Wests. Indeed, the block is not fit for purpose and its continued use in the long term is unacceptable. Therefore, Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council should look to a speedy refurbishment to bring The Wests to an acceptable standard.

“The main witness for the Victorian Heritage Preservation Association seems to have treated this court in the same way as he treats his staff on his Cheshire estate. He arrived late, and his knowledge of the case was completely lacking. His behaviour in court towards the advocates of both sides was one of contempt. Additionally, he treated the two young witnesses for Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council with a breath-taking disrespect. Mr Cairns and Mr Salway, I apologise on behalf of the court for this.

“Sir Leonard Handley, will you please stand? The period of time that you spent in the cells clearly did not make you reflect on your deplorable behaviour towards this court. This was obvious during my reading of this judgement. I therefore fine you the sum of five thousand pounds. You may be seated.”

With that Sheriff Kimmerghame stood up, and everyone else rose. He bowed to the court and left.

Chapter 17

December 2014 – January 2015

Two days after the court case, Christian Salway reported to the student council that the days of The Wests were numbered. If the students had been the board of directors of a large company, there would have been champagne and caviar, and the bubbly would have flowed. Instead, they made do with instant coffee and *Hob-Nobs*, but the sentiment was there. The girls were as pleased as the boys. Abigail Burwood admitted that as a dare when she was in Secondary 4, she and several other girls had gone into The Wests and used it. Never again.

Christian and Simon had never known about *The Vespasienne* but Ewan, with his knowledge of the history of the school and its predecessor did. He showed them the site, about thirty metres from The Wests. There was a tarmac area off the path on which were situated a couple of teak park benches. Christian had often sat on them. At one end was a rainwater drain. These were the only evidence that such a structure had stood there.

On that same evening, the School Board and the Regional Council met in an emergency meeting to consider the implications of the court ruling. The refurbishment of The Wests was passed unanimously. Building work would start as soon as possible. The plans had already been drawn up. The work would be done in house using the skills of John the Jannie, Jannie Brian, and the team. The Portakabin Company in York was contacted on Friday to deliver a portable facility as soon as possible.

Over the weekend of 20th and 21st December 2014, a number of lorries arrived, and buildings were placed on the hard play area in front of The Wests. It was a textbook Portakabin job; the buildings were installed on time, on budget, and by Monday morning, everything worked perfectly. The installation had been observed by some of the distant Caddies, but early birds from the town were somewhat bemused by the presence of the portable buildings on the hard play area. The buildings would somewhat cramp up the kick-about footy games. The door grille to The Wests was

pulled shut and there was a notice that proclaimed the area as being out of bounds.

On the Monday morning, John the Jannie was travelling backwards and forwards in his wee vannie to collect stuff for the project. Later in the day a lorry arrived from Cookson's, 'The Builders' Merchant with all sorts of other stuff for the refurbishment. Although not everything was there, there was enough to be getting on with. Later that day, the grille that had guarded the entrance to The Wests had been removed and a proper door had been put in its place. At least the inside would be able to be kept warm to enable the materials to set and the builders to be reasonably comfortable, a privilege that had never been afforded to users for the previous one hundred and twenty years.

The removal of the partitions was easy enough. If they were leant on, they almost collapsed of their own accord. The wood would keep the stove in the bothy fed well into the spring. The towel rails used to hang the kilts were still quite recent and would fit into the new design.

The removal of the pedestals was not so easy. They had been placed in such a manner that it would literally need a charge of gelignite to shift them. That had been proved over seventy years before. They were bolted to the floor using surplus fittings from the Great Central Line that were intended to hold signal gantries to retaining walls. There were four of these bolts set into the concrete. The nuts were recessed into the base of the pottery and had rusted solid over the previous one hundred and twenty years. It would have been easier to set about each pedestal with a lump-hammer, but undertakings had been made to remove intact as many of these heritage items as possible. The concrete underneath had to be chipped out and Brian set about each bolt with an angle grinder with a diamond edged disc. It was a tedious but steady procedure which kept the team busy until Christmas Eve. In the end thirty three of the thirty-five pedestals were removed intact. The other two were in the corners and of the four bolts that held them in place, three could be dealt with. In the end, the sledge-hammer treatment had to be applied. Even so they didn't surrender without a good fight.

For the male students of Strathcadden Academy, the temporary facilities were welcomed. They were infinitely more comfortable and civilised than what they had had before, and nobody mourned the passing of the old order. Each pedestal, once removed, had been neatly laid out in an area separated from the outside world with a temporary fence, awaiting collection by Karl Myers, who owned the local architectural salvage business on Cluny Road. Each one was laid out like a body in a morgue, and the area took on the atmosphere of a sanitary chanel house. Soon the thirty-three would be doing service as planters in the gardens outside posh houses. They were soon joined by the cast iron cisterns that would, once repainted, grace trendy bathrooms in union with reproduction pedestals marked *The Venerable*.

The end of the Autumn Term was marked by the revived carol concerts into which Peter Struther had put a great deal of energy. Christian Salway and Ryan Fleetwood had put a similar amount of energy into the design of the stage and decoration of The Old Chapel. For the audience, there would be the old favourites, while for his choir there was a lot of contemporary Christmas music. A service of nine lessons and carols it was not. There would be readings not only from the Bible, but also Christmas and wintery poetry. Although Tamsin Heady's arm was getting better, it was stiff, and she was glad to have had a competent keyboard understudy in the form of Ewan Walker. She had a fine soprano singing voice, which Mr Struther put to work. Craigie Boy had been discovered to have a fine tenor voice that was also put to work. Unlike in many other schools, it was cool for Caddies to sing. That was hardly a surprise as Corscadden had a strong musical tradition. The audience sang lustily as well.

To mark the one hundredth anniversary of The Christmas Truce in 1914, two songs were in German. One was in French, and one in Italian, for Corscadden was not just proudly Scottish, but also had embraced the European ideal.

There were three performances, all of which were crowded. Strathcadden Academy was well known for the quality of its music. And, more importantly, the performances were free. On the final night, a friend of Mr Struther's brought up a team from *Scottish Classics* to record the performance live, warts and all. The broadcast was on Christmas Eve and was listened to across the town.

As always, Christmas at Brewster House was a very convivial affair. Imogen had arrived from Clinton Muncey. Laura was still an elegant woman, but the buns were clearly getting ready in their oven. She was now on maternity leave and making plans about the birth. The Strathcadden General Infirmary had a birthing pool, and Laura thought it was the most natural way of giving birth. She subscribed to the theory that humans were descended from an ape that lived on lakesides rather than being a tree-dweller that hunted the savannahs. Giving birth in water was the natural thing to do, and there would be no crocodiles at The Strathie. Unfortunately, she wouldn't be allowed to use it since she was going to give birth to twins. To keep her mind active, there was plenty of professional development that she would do, as far as baby-brain would allow.

Laura would not allow the late stages of pregnancy to stop her doing other things. She was determined to remain active, except for when *Rustic Refuges* was on. She loved this lifestyle programme that showed a couple, usually from London usually visiting the Southwest of England and having 850 grand to spend on a house that in Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil would go for a quarter of the price. There was lots of carefully scripted and well-rehearsed spontaneity that was the hallmark of such programmes. They would visit two houses, and a mystery house that had everything they dreaded, for example, a thatched barn conversion that was all on one level and needed a huge amount of work doing on it. It would be above their maximum budget, but the presenter would soothingly say, "I know it's above your maximum, but I have spoken to the owners, and they are aware of your maximum budget. It may be the start of a sensible

conversation...” Even Joby was hooked, and they would discuss each house in detail. Nothing would better Brewster House, even though it was a bugger to heat.

There were the Christmas cards which flowed in to both Brewster House and Laurieston Villa. Muriel was old-fashioned. She kept in contact with distant friends by writing a personalised letter to each and every one. It took ages, but it was personal. Too many cards arrived accompanied by round robin letters, where the authors word-processed two sides of A4 and put in lots of pretty pictures. They were oh so busy and went off to oh such sophisticated places for their holidays and had so many friends that they had met and their children were oh so talented that they could hardly keep up with them. Joby had done the same the previous year, but this year he could not be bothered. Mary’s passing away still hurt him, even though he had caught a wonderful woman on the rebound, and he was genuinely proud of his three sons. The round robins this year had a particularly treacly quality to them that made him and Laura feel sick.

Although the house was full of the warmth and conviviality that was usual, there was something missing for Aidan and Ewan. Last year Mum was there and this time she wasn’t and never would be there again. It hit Ewan on Christmas Eve, and it made him cry. Fortunately, Jordan was there. Ewan was fifteen when his mother passed away. He was far too young to have had to put up with a shock like that. A year later at sixteen, it was painful, and he did not subscribe to the adage that big boys don’t cry. It was comforting to have his boyfriend to snuggle up to. Dad had shed a tear or two and he was forty.

Jordan’s father was away on business that year, and his grandparents were on a cruise. Jordan’s ex-mother had separated from his father three years before. Now she had met a banker, Rupert, and had made it clear that her partner did not want anything to do with her son. Jordan’s attitude was that if that were the case, both could take a running jump, preferably off a cliff that was at least two hundred metres high. He was a daddy’s boy, but even so his ex-mother’s rejection of him could hurt

at times. Instead, he had Ewan whom he loved as the brother he had never had, and the Walkers had adopted him just like they had with Christian the year before.

For Christian, he had his parents, and both sets of grandparents. That was enough of a Christmas present to him, although he did enjoy the new lenses for his camera.

For Brian and Brenda Salway, this Christmas was the birth of a new beginning. They had been released from the prison of a fundamentalist pseudo-Christian heresy. Their jailer was now inside awaiting trial for a good number of very serious criminal offences. They were free to breathe in the fresh air of humanity at its best. And they did not mind at all that Ewan was gay and had a steady boyfriend.

For those who loved white Christmases, their dreams were fulfilled. A blast of polar air came screaming down on a northerly gale which resulted in frequent snow-showers. It had started to snow when the Walker family returned from Midnight Mass, and it was settling. In the small hours some of the showers had merged to give long periods of snow and were accompanied by thunder. Several bright flashes of lightning, made brighter by the lying snow, had woken Ewan, but he felt safe, snuggled up to Jordan.

The next day, Christmas Day, was a winter wonderland and everyone piled out into the garden like so many excited puppies and threw handfuls of snow at each other. The boys spoke to their German friends on *Skype*. In Dringhausen it too was a winter wonderland. The aerodrome was covered in drifts, so the Fischer family aeroplane would stay safe on the ground snuggled up in its warm, dry hangar. It must have been one of Germany's most pampered general aviation machines.

Soon after Christmas, Mary's parents arrived with Uncle Alex, and they were going to celebrate Hogmanay at Brewster House.

Almost as quickly as it had started the Christmas Period was over. 2015 had arrived. Aidan had gone back to university and was studying

hard for his Semester 1 examinations. Ewan, Jordan, and Christian had their mock examinations looming at the end of January, while Joby was busy setting his Electrical Engineering papers. Caddies were back at school. The refurbishment of The Wests was now well underway with Jannie Brian working all hours on it. With good quality materials, he was determined to produce a quality piece of craftsmanship that he was more than capable of delivering. There was no rush, and he was determined that the job was going to be done properly. Although the boys' facilities were in temporary buildings, they were much more commodious than what they had had before. They allowed the boys to attend to their needs in total privacy and comfort. They were warm and they did not stink to high heaven.

Snow built up that winter, and Caddies enjoyed hurling handfuls of the stuff at each other. Teams of snowmen covered the games fields, and one enterprising girl from Secondary 4 made an ice sculpture of a boy in athletics strip running on the track. Christian's fitness training sessions in the old gym were becoming popular as it was all but impossible to get on with training out on the pitches. The only sports squad that was doing meaningful training was the running squad who stuck to cleared paths and looked forward to the spring when all this white stuff had gone, and the normal paths were ice-free. The Football teams made do with five-a-side at the Strathcadden Sports Centre, and the Rugby teams did seven-a-side. Ewan Walker and Jordan Melhuish spent many a happy hour on the climbing wall in the Strathcadden Sports Centre.

Christian Salway continued to build his portfolio for his Advanced Higher in Art. While Brenda was not driving her bus in Fotheringham, she had been an expert baker until she had been imprisoned by the Fotheringham Evangelical Church, because that man Elsheimer had preached that even something innocent like baking and decorating cakes was an abomination before the Lord. She had been told by Elsheimer to throw away her baking equipment, for it was better for her to earn her way into Heaven with no baking equipment than to be thrown into the fires of Hell with a full set of rolling pins, moulds, and piping syringes. She had

kept the lot and was making a renewed acquaintance with them. She had tried her recipes on Brian's colleagues in the Bothy. She started to provide samples to the Staff Room, where they were particularly well received.

Thursday 22nd January and Friday 23rd January were both difficult days for Ewan and Aidan, because those were the first anniversary of their mother's passing away, and when they got to hear about it. Aidan felt rather subdued. At least his Semester 1 examinations kept his mind off it, but once he was out of the examination hall in Adam House, the feelings came back to haunt him. The same was true for Ewan, who tried his hardest to keep focused during the German mock. Fortunately, it was well within his capability.

Both Aidan and Ewan had felt the loss keenly and had taken it hard. While most of the time they kept it together, anniversaries like this would be difficult, especially as the two brothers were not together this year. Next year they would, for Ewan had applied to Edinburgh University and everyone was confident that he would get a place, if he didn't blow it. Aidan decided that he would catch a train home on Friday, as a race with the Haries had been cancelled. What both brothers needed was time out. Brewster House seemed to be the best place. Chris was there and he would keep them together. Also, Dad would want them there. He needed them as much as they needed him. Friday evening was quiet, but there was the warmth and well-being brought about by gentle love that gave all great comfort.

Jordan was not overlooked of course. It would have been unthinkable to leave him on his own for his eighteenth birthday which fell on Friday, so it was natural for the Walkers to take him out on Saturday evening to the Glenclawe Hotel. It was not a huge family gathering, of course, but Mr and Mrs Campbell made sure that a fuss was made of them. Jordan certainly enjoyed it. He would have liked Dad and his grandparents there, but Dad was overseas until June and Grandma and Granddad were still on their cruise.

Saturday 24th January 2015 was the celebration of Jordan's 18th birthday. As far as his ex-mother was concerned, the less said the better. She was living it up with her partner, a city banker, in the flesh pots of Surrey. She did not want to admit to the existence of her eighteen-year-old son, and he was safely in the wilds of Scotland, but the divorce settlement would still cost her a fortune. The boarding fees of Strathcadden Academy already were. It did not surprise her that Jordan was openly gay and had a boyfriend, but she had no interest in him. Her only interest was in her own pleasure. Her partner's mortgage was frightening; their house was small for her pretentiousness in every way except the price. She preferred not to think of what would happen if Rupert was let go.

It was as well for Jordan that he had Ewan, the brother that he had always wanted but never had (since his ex-mother was too posh to push), and now they were inseparable. It was little wonder that he regarded the Walker family as his own. Dad had been sent away to boarding school at the age of eight and things had happened to him there that he did not want to talk about. Mum was a fair-weather friend to Dad. She had simply got bored and had walked out, ditching Dad. Now she had met Rupert, she did not want anything more to do with him. It was Jordan's nightmare that she would come back snivelling to him and Dad because Rupert was no longer the rich bastard that could keep her in her glamorous lifestyle.

On Sunday Jordan and Ewan spent the day on the climbing wall at Strathcadden Sports Centre. Ewan had found out about competition climbing, but no one had devised a competition on that particular climbing wall. Both Ewan and Jordan had taught each other and were excellent climbers. This and Ewan's light brown, almost sandy, hair had given him the nickname "Squirrel" as he seemed to be able to race up the climbing wall (or any boulder) with as little effort as a squirrel would run up a tree.

Aidan went back to Edinburgh, as his next Semester 1 examination was at 09.00 on Monday. The weekend had done him a lot of good.

Chapter 18

Friday 20th February 2015

For students at Strathcadden Academy, half term had started on Friday 13th February and went through to the following Tuesday, 17th February. The staff had Friday to complete the marking of mock examinations so that a mock results day would be held for Secondary Years 5 and 6 on Wednesday 18th February. The mock results for Secondary 4 were given out the following day. The whole thing was a practice for the real thing and real emotions were experienced from elation at getting top grades to the despair of failing everything. Ewan had felt the latter last year, as he had bombed out spectacularly, having forgotten almost everything after the loss of his mother.

This year was different, and Ewan's scores ranged from 78 % to 92 %. Christian's were from 75 % to 89 %, and both felt a boost in confidence as the real exams approached. Ewan, Christian, and Jordan were invited for interviews at Edinburgh University, among others. Each hoped that he would get an offer from Edinburgh. They liked the idea of being in halls together or sharing a flat.

The week that they went back, Laura was staying in Brewster House rather than going to Edinburgh. Joby was going to be at work all hours marking Semester 1 examinations. The buns were almost ready, and the timer was about to go ping. She had felt the babies for five months, and the boys (and she knew that the babies were identical boys) had enjoyed playing footsie with her bladder, making for hurried exits to *The Venerable* or to the wet room next to the utility room, which was behind the kitchen. Now the boys had got footsie with the bladder down to a fine art. They had also made their presence known to Joby by poking their hands from Laura's tum while she was in the bath. Christian opted to stay with his mother in case he was needed. This week, Joby would be incommunicado because he was busy verifying examination papers and chairing meetings to determine the marks and grades for several hundred engineering students. It was extraordinarily tedious, but it had to be done.

On Friday 20th February, Ewan and Christian came back in from school and made a meal for the family. Half-way through dinner, Laura excused herself and went to *The Venerable*. When she came back, she said “One of you get Dad. The timer has gone ping.”

Ewan tried hard to get his father, while Christian rang the Maternity Unit at Strathcadden General Infirmary. While Ewan could not get hold of Dad for love nor money, Chris was more successful. Laura spoke to the midwife. Yes, it was clear that the waters had broken. Yes, she needed to get down as soon as possible. Although Christian felt he would look a bit of a prat in his uniform in a hospital, there was no time to change. He got his mother into the Fiesta, and drove down to The Strathie, parking outside the Maternity Unit.

The contractions were starting to be regular, and Christian went in to get a wheelchair. A helpful porter arrived, and Laura was wheeled into the Maternity Unit before being checked over by the duty midwife, who called another porter to wheel Laura to the delivery suite which had been prepared. One of the porters said to Christian, “A Caddie, eh?”

With his distinctive uniform under his anorak, Christian certainly looked like a Caddie. The porter was definitely attending the University of the Truly Obvious. He said cheekily, “You look a bit young to be the dad, eh? How old are you?”

Christian would have liked to say, “I’m sixteen. I’m her toy-boy.” It might have been appropriate for his existence owed itself to a tom-boy’s toy-boy being a naughty boy and spreading his wild oats in a party of bad taste and a defective rubber product. Instead, he truthfully said, “I’m eighteen and her son. My dad’s not here yet.” The words “my dad” meant a lot to Christian. He sat down next to his mother and held her hand, waiting for the arrival of what he hoped to be a little sister.

Christian went out to the reception area and rang Ewan to see if he had managed to get Dad. No luck yet. So, he rang Aunt Imm, saying, “Mum’s having the baby.”

“She’s not due yet. She has another week to go,” said Aunt Imogen who was deciding whether to try to get the train from Stoke Porges. She would need to change at Canterbridge and get the fast train north, but by the time she got there, it probably would have gone. She would have to get into her sports car and clog it up to Corscadden. It would be five or six hours, but the roads would be empty.

A false rumour had started in the porters’ bothy that a woman had gone into the delivery suite accompanied by a Caddie, and the boy was her toy-boy. One or two porters took sneak glances at the skinny, baby-faced, and long-haired boy on his mobile in the Maternity Unit reception. He was clearly more of a stud than he looked. Surely not, it was a wind up.

It was late evening when Christian managed to get hold of his father. The verification meetings for Semester 1 examinations had taken for ever and a day, spilling well into all the evenings that week. Since the deadline was Monday, it all had to be sorted. And it had been, with all the marks and grades e-mailed to the Dean. Joby much preferred to be in Corscadden, doing his day at Dunalastair Engineering, but these meetings were part of his job and had to be done. His thoughts had turned to getting home the next day and finishing off the nursery. Laura had been nesting for some time now, and he had his orders to finish the furniture for the end of the month.

He had spent the last few weekends with his big boy’s toys in his workshop with a large amount of oak bought from Emerson, the timber merchants. He had made a large amount of oak shavings with a lot of noise and used a lot of electricity to produce several items of nursery furniture, the last of which was a cot. It had not been completed.

The phone rang in the living room and Joby stomped through from the kitchen. He was half expecting the Dean to be telling him that they had done it all wrong and there was going to have to be another meeting on Saturday. It was therefore a relief to see it was Christian’s mobile number when he picked it up. “What’s up Chris?” he asked. A

call at this hour suggested that the boys had somehow blown up the house.
“Where are you?”

“I’m at The Strathie.”

“What’s happened?” Joby’s first thought was that Chris had taken the Fiesta up the A 825 and wrapped it around a tree. Surely not. Christian and Aidan were both steady and cautious drivers.

“It’s Mum.” After a week of tedious verification meetings, including a good number of re-marks, Joby had forgotten that he was going to relive happy days of being the father of two very small infants.

“What’s up with her?”

“She’s having the baby.”

“What?” Joby was much more at home with hysteresis losses in large electric motors than the results of mammalian reproduction. “Are you sure?”

“Dead sure, Dad.”

“It’s not due yet. It’s next week. I’ve got time off on Thursday and Friday.”

“Dad, the bun is coming out of the oven now. She’s sprogging. You need to get back now. How long will it take for you to get to The Strathie?” Chris had no idea that he was about to be the brother of two very little people.

“Not sure.” The first thing Joby wanted was sleep. The last thing he wanted was a drive across Fife, Perthshire, and Buchananshire. The last train to Coruscadden had left Waverley Station twenty minutes before.

“Dad,” said Christian in a voice that was not to be argued with, the vocal equivalent of The Look, “Mum says that if you are not here in time for the birth, she will murder you. You’d better clog it.”

“I’ll be there as soon as I can,” said Joby. He remembered Aidan and Ewan’s births. He had tried to get some sleep by knocking himself out with the gas and air. He went floaty for about ten seconds and came back to earth with a bump and a vile hangover. He didn’t rate mammalian birth much, which was confirmed by the experience with two of his sons. As for the third, he had never known the result of being a naughty boy until seventeen years later. All in all, the birds had it right. They laid eggs and the little bugger would chip its way out. The worst you could get was a peck up the bum.

Christian went back to the delivery suite and had a momentary temptation to try the gas and air. He remembered the effect of ketamine and that other shit whose name he had forgotten.

Aidy was home. Ewan had rung him, and he got a late train to Coruscadden and the two boys felt useless, so played some music on Dad’s Hi-Fi. The right-hand speaker still had the scorch mark where Ewan had pushed a screwdriver through the grille fifteen years before.

The births were textbook and easy. At 01.00 Joby arrived at The Strathie, and at 01.34 on Saturday 21st February 2015, Benjamin Thomas Salway Walker emerged, followed by Daniel James Hayward Walker. Immediately Christian could see that he was not going to have a little sister, but two brothers. Despite his ineptitude at mammalian reproduction, Joseph Oliver Baxter Walker was now the father of five boys, one of whom was openly gay, while two were more than likely of that orientation, and the fourth and fifth were not of an age to know about that sort of thing anyway. Laura held her new sons to her breasts, and they immediately started to feed. They were checked over, before Laura and the babies went to the ward. Christian and his father went back to Brewster House. Both Laura and Joby thoroughly deplored the current fashion for celebrity children’s names, considering such strange names a form of child abuse. Although a name was not something that Benjamin

and Daniel recognised at the time, in later years they were always very grateful that their given names were mainstream.

Ewan and Aidan were waiting up, although they had fallen asleep next to each other on the settee in the living room. Chris went up to them and said, “We have two baby brothers, Benjamin and Daniel.”

“What sex is it? Isn’t it a girl?” said Ewan who was hardly in touch with the real world and believed that he was going to have a sister.

“What do you think? A brother tends to be a boy,” said Aidan.

“They are boys, Eejay. Each has a willy and two bollocks,” Christian added.

“Oh,” Ewan replied, not being able to think of anything more constructive at that time of night, and his eyes promptly fell shut. He curled up on the settee again and his hand twitched.

“Aunt Imm’s coming,” Christian announced. “She should be here in an hour. Aidy, you and I will stay up until she comes. Dad, you go to bed. You have that cot to finish tomorrow. Leave Eejay where he is.”

Later that morning the first people to visit Laura were her parents. For them it was the perfect way to celebrate their release from their prison of fundamentalist pseudo-Christian bigotry. They felt deeply ashamed that they had not done the same for Laura when Christian was born. That damned man Devine had a lot to answer for. On that occasion, it had been Laura’s grandparents, Mr and Mrs Hayward who had visited their new great-grandson. They had not been at all up their arses about Christian’s birth and saw through the pious claptrap that Laura’s mum and dad had come out with. Laura had always been very close to her grandparents who had despaired about what that loony church had done to their Brenda. They had given a lot of support to Laura and Chris, without which both would have gone under. They were overjoyed when the Fatheringham Evangelical Church had folded, and they had got their

daughter back. Now in their late eighties, they would have a few years to enjoy some time with her and Brian. More importantly, Laura had given them a second and third great-grandson, which was definitely worth the long train journey from the south.

And on Sunday evening, little Benjamin and Daniel arrived at Brewster House. The nursery had been the dressing room next to the master bedroom but was now nearly ready to welcome its tiny occupants. In the meantime, Benjamin and Daniel were kept warm by sleeping between Mummy and Daddy. Early on the Sunday morning, Joby was woken up by tiny little fingers playing with his back.

Like all babies, Benjamin and Daniel Walker remembered nothing of those early days of their lives. Each didn't realise he had a face, or that the baby in the mirror was him. It was secure and warm for them as they went around in a pouch with Mummy or Daddy, or his three brothers. They were fed on demand and were centre of attention. They were still only tiny scraps of life when Ewan had his seventeenth birthday on Friday 27th February 2015. They slept all through the meal that the Walkers had at Glenclawe Hotel. These were getting regular now – not that Mr and Mrs Campbell minded it; the Walker money was good.

Like all babies, Benjamin and Daniel Walker had their moments. They cried in the middle of the night, but being in, or next door to, the master bedroom, the noise did not carry into the rest of the house. During the day, when they were not at school, their brothers and Jordan helped to look after them. After all they could be fathers themselves one day. They played with them, for they all loved children. They had a doting mother and father, and were spoiled rotten by two sets of grandparents, as well as their two aunts. Their great-grandparents were totally taken by them and commented on how much like Chris they looked. Ewan uploaded a picture of his baby brothers onto a piece of software (app to you) that he had found on the net that would predict what Benjamin and Daniel would look like. At the age of eighteen, Benjamin and Daniel looked exactly like Chris.

Benjamin and Daniel Walker had particularly beautiful eyes, another Walker family trait, but one that was always picked up on when women stood around their pram and cooed over them. In short, Benjamin Thomas Salway Walker and Daniel James Hayward Walker had as good a start in life as any child would ever want.

Although Benjamin and Daniel were only a few days old, Joby went down to see the Headmistress at St Lawrence Primary School and applied for entry to the nursery in August 2018. Joby went to see Mr Mitchell to ensure that Benjamin and Daniel would be Caddies in August 2026. Ewan's comment was, "I bet Craigie Boy will be headmaster then."

Ewan was proved entirely correct in his prediction, for Craig Michael Farjeon was appointed Headmaster of Strathcadden Academy in March 2025 to take over from the then Headmistress, Mrs Spencer, who retired at the end of July 2025. Still, many days would pass before Benjamin and Daniel Walker would wait nervously as Wee Caddies, each in his sweatshirt, white polo shirt, kilt (Douglas Grey Modern), blue knee-length socks, and black shoes. Like Ewan, they would be the youngest in their year.

In the more immediate time, a letter arrived at Brewster House confirming that Laura Walker had been appointed as Senior Staff Radiographer and Advanced Nurse Practitioner at Strathcadden General Infirmary, starting work when she came back from maternity leave in August 2015. There was a lot for her to get her head round, but she was determined not to let baby brain prevent her from hitting the ground running. She had had experience of The Strathie as a customer. While Benjamin and Daniel were emerging in the delivery suite, she had been making careful mental notes of what was going on around her. Much of the practice was good, and some was outstanding. But there were things being said in patients' earshot, including about Christian being her toy-boy. She would have a quiet word.

For Joby, things were changing too. George MacDonald at Dunalastair Engineering had decided that he would retire, so there would

be new appointments made among the senior staff. Joseph Walker was appointed to be Director of Engineering Research, which meant that he would be at Corscadden full time. The Dunalastair Chair of Electrical and Electronic Engineering was to be kept, and it was passed to Samuel Malcolm John Chamberlain Proudlock, who at thirty-one was the youngest professor at the University of Edinburgh. James Belson got a promotion to Reader in Engineering.

Chapter 19

March – April 2015

Brian Salway had worked hard on his project for weeks now, and at the start of March 2015, the refurbishment of The Wests was now complete. Karl Myers had sold all the old fittings. The pedestals were now at work in their new role as planters in several gardens spread across Buchananshire and Perthshire. The indestructible cisterns, still bearing the legend *The Roboro'* had been enamelled and installed in bathrooms of decidedly up-market houses, where they would reliably work for another hundred years.

On the morning of Monday 2nd March 2015, early birds arrived to see that the hard area outside The Wests was clear and ready for the various break-time kick-about, and the brightly lit interior of the Wests looked inviting for the first time in its one-hundred-and-twenty-year history.

The Wests was now decidedly commodious, and it exceeded the highest standards required for safeguarding of young people. The floor was covered with top grade tiles that would be found in the gents of a good country house hotel. Users were shielded from interruption by hand-made oak doors with moulded architraves. John the Jannie was a first-rate joiner. Total privacy was assured with a false ceiling with modern lighting. Each cubicle had its brass towel rail to enable users to hang up their kilts if they wanted to. Each cubicle was more spacious, for there were twenty-five of them instead of thirty-five. The place was warm and welcoming.

Jannie Brian and John the Jannie had converted it from an embarrassment to a jewel in the crown. Caddie laddies were told to keep it nice, just as they would want to find it. And they did. John the Jannie and Jannie Brian both received fulsome letters of congratulation from both the Headmaster and the Chairman of the School Board.

The weather had got milder now and the days were noticeably longer. The covering of snow on the playing fields had disappeared, along with the teams of snowmen. It had been relatively dry from the middle of February, and the fields were now fit to play on, so the rugby and football squads were out training properly. Christian Salway's running team were now out on clear paths and even venturing up into the hills. It was paying off as well. Simon Cairns' First Fifteen rugby team had beaten Cardean College 64 – 36, which had ended a long run of defeats by Strathcadden Academy's local rivals. The women's rugby squad had enjoyed even more success than in the previous year.

Strathcadden Academy was the winning team in the Buchananshire Schools Cross Country at Inverloker, with Christian Salway coming in first, with Ewan Walker not far behind to arrive second.

On Wednesday 5th March 2015, Christian Salway, Ewan Walker, and Jordan Melhuish found themselves on the train to Edinburgh to attend their university interviews. Christian was to visit the Business School in Buccleuch Place for an interview to do an MA in Business and Economics. Ewan was going to do Law with German, so he was going to Old College on South Bridge. Jordan was going to do French and German. He had always found them interesting, but quite difficult, until Ewan became his boyfriend.

They were in suits and looked the part of young professionals. Christian had even had his hair cut (a bit) and styled so that it looked neat. All of them looked a picture and didn't they know it, taking selfies on their mobiles? As the train arrived at Waverley Station, they started to feel somewhat overwhelmed by the scale of everything. The buildings seemed four or five times bigger than in Corscadden. The traffic moved in huge volumes, but not necessarily faster. There were people everywhere. That was hardly surprising; Edinburgh is a city of 495000. Ewan remembered that Dr Moore had told them in Biology that the total biomass of human bodies in Edinburgh was nearly 40000 tonnes and that the bathroom scales of the city groaned under about 6000 tonnes of excess fat. Several

of the specimens walking in front of the boys seemed to be carrying rather more than their fair share of it.

Like Aidy the year before, all three of them were completely overwhelmed by the size of the buildings at the University. Everything was so massive, and each felt so small. Greator House would have been swallowed up tens of times by a single department. As for the Library, the entrance atrium occupied a bigger space than all the libraries at Strathcadden Academy put together. Wishing each other luck, the three of them hugged before making their separate ways to their destinations.

Old College was not as old as its name suggested, having been started just over two hundred years before. Indeed, the building was at one point new, designed by the leading architect, Robert Adam. It was a heroic building, and in its time, one of the largest buildings in Edinburgh. It still had a commanding presence on South Bridge. It was one of those places that made even the highest status people feel small, let alone a seventeen-year-old candidate competing for a place at the country's most prestigious academic institution. Ewan was worried about the impression he would make and that he would overdo it and make a fool of himself to boot. At first, he had to do a written exercise which asked him what particular skills he had to offer that would enable him to perform well in the course. Ewan had expected that and went through the usual stuff about being thorough, conscientious and working in teams. He discussed how he had helped to support Christian when he landed as a waif and stray. It was true of course, but others would surely have done more fantastic things than he. The second question was to write freely about something that he had done out of school that was entirely for pleasure. Ewan chose to talk about his music, both on the keyboard and the guitar. He mentioned the band *The Killed Spice Boys* that he and his friends had performed in at the Corscadden Festival. He also talked about his love for poetry, and how he would get inspiration from the beautiful countryside of Strathcadden. There was a piece of German to translate into English and some English to translate to German, both of which Ewan did with ease.

Ewan took his offering to the secretary, who ushered him into a waiting room. His anxiety rose as he went in to join the other interview candidates. Unusually they were all boys, for the Law School tended to have many more women than men. All the Law School's programmes were heavily over-subscribed; there were about ten applicants for each place. The other candidates seemed to be from south of the Border and spoke in loud and haughty voices. Listening to their conversation confirmed Ewan's suspicion that they were from top public schools in the South of England. Ewan didn't say anything and tried to reassure himself that he had every bit as much chance of success as they did. True, he did not go to Thailand for his holidays. Dringhausen was good enough for him; he enjoyed being with Matti. Dad didn't have a Bentley Sports Utility Vehicle. A Volvo V70 estate car was good enough for Dad. He actually enjoyed being with Grandma in her Honda Jazz.

These boys had been given Mini Coopers for passing their driving tests and boasted about burning up Porsches from traffic lights along with a prodigious amount of petrol. Dad would foot the bill for the petrol, of course. There were races around the M25 during the few hours of the night when it was not a giant circular carpark. Dad's golfing partner was the chief constable, or commissioner, and strings would be pulled. Ewan was glad that he wouldn't be sharing the road with these arrogant dickheads. Yes, both Aidy and Chris were both steady drivers, and Ewan preferred to arrive late in the present life rather than early into the next. The chances were that his driving would be like that of his brothers.

Somehow these boys thought that, because they had been brought up in homes that cost the price of five or six houses like Brewster House, and had everything on demand, they would have the red carpet laid for them. They thought it so cool to miss handing in their essays by the deadline. Dad would have a word with the teacher to make sure that she knew her place.

Ewan had always handed in his assignments on time. It was the right thing to do. A missed deadline was nothing to boast about. These boys seemed to know so much about Law because that was their A-level.

They certainly knew the law about obnoxious plant materials that they had used for recreational purposes, making damned sure that they didn't get caught. And if they did, they could plant the muck on somebody else entirely innocent, so that he had to carry the can. One had bragged about doing just that. It had happened to Andrew Cunningham who had been in Aidy's year. It was not in the least bit funny.

Another told a tale about how he and his friends had spiked one of their mate's soft drink with some shit or other. It was so comical that their mate had been done for drugs and driving and had lost his licence for a year. It was just the mentality that Chris' mates had when they had spiked his drink with ketamine and that other shit whose name he could not remember. Although they were underage, they would all meet in a pub and get smashed before they went back, presumably to their posh public school. Ewan had come across this sort of thing before whereby the public schools were meant to produce gentlemen, but in an increasing number of cases were failing abysmally. It made him think back to his research project on Sir Kenneth Rounce, that Yorkshire landowner whose name was synonymous with corruption. Rounce must have been like that as an eighteen-year-old.

When each one went in, he could not hear what they were saying, but their haughty voices came through the door, arrogant in their self confidence that had more than a hint of narcissism. If he never met any of them again, it would be too soon. As far as he was concerned, they could cause as much mayhem and distress in Oxford and Cambridge as they liked. The trouble was that it would be more than likely that each would hold high office in the Conservative Party sometime in the future.

Eventually Ewan was on his own. He was a very young seventeen-year-old and felt very nervous. He wanted Jordan there. Thank God those public-school types had not cottoned on to that fact that he was gay. Would the tutor reject him because he was gay? If he did, Dad would do his nut and throw all the university's policies about equality and diversity at the Law Department. Better not to say anything. Ewan had done Higher in Law, from which he knew how different Scottish Law was to

English Law. Also, he knew that in reality the Law School preferred to start from scratch, and that no previous knowledge of Law was needed, just the ability to learn. That he could do and had proved on many occasions.

The secretary came through and said, “Dr Broadhead will see you now, Mr Walker.”

As he went through to the office, Ewan saw the body-language of Dr Broadhead. She looked thoroughly fed up, as if interviewing teenage prospective students was the last thing she wanted to be doing. She looked up and pulled herself together. She was sitting on a comfortable easy chair by a coffee table, on which her hand-written notes were spread out. The top sheet seemed to have a lot of doodles on it, as well as some writing. She picked up the papers and put them onto her clipboard, before hiding them under a couple of sheets of fresh lined paper. She stood up to welcome her young visitor, saying, “I am Melanie Broadhead. I am one of the tutors on the Law and German programme. And you are?”

“Ewan Walker from Strathcadden Academy.”

Broadhead went through the usual spiel about how Ewan would be interviewing the Department as much as they were interviewing him. She came out with the expected first question, “Why do you want to study Law at Edinburgh University?”

“I thought about Law in Secondary Four, where I had a successful work experience placement with Gordon Morton Solicitors in Corscadden. I worked with Derek Yeoman, the Senior Partner, who showed me many different aspects of his job. I found them interesting, in that I was allowed hands-on experience in several different departments. I was well supported, and I found that I could understand the reasons for different kinds of legal requirements. I did small assignments on house conveyancing, and motoring law. It was hard work but very satisfying, and it made me want to do Law as a Higher.”

“Why didn’t you do it as an Advanced Higher?”

“I knew that the Department wants to start students from scratch. My Higher would give me a basic background, but I want to take Law across national boundaries. I am good at German and French, so I want to use my language skills to understand the complexity of law in other languages. For example, legal German is very complex indeed, and it will be a challenge to explain it to an English-speaking client.”

“So why Edinburgh?”

“It’s the leading Law School in Scotland that has trained many of Scotland’s finest legal minds. Mr Yeoman told me a lot about his degree course here, and I could imagine it for myself. He told me of the library and other resources that would help me to be successful. He told me about how he would frequently visit the Law Courts that are so close by. I felt that I could learn the theory and see how the Law is applied.”

“Thank you, Ewan. You have answered much of my question about your work experience. Now tell me: in your application and your reference, you are a Head of House and a School Prefect. How do you think these roles prepare you for an LLB course?”

“I have been given a lot of responsibility to look after and support younger students. Sometimes I have to help to support students who have had upsets with others, and the challenge here is to see who’s telling the correct version of events. I need to find a solution. As a legal professional, I will have the same kind of disputes to sort out, but on a bigger scale. It could be that I would have to support a client’s big contract worth a lot of money that has somehow gone wrong.”

“You have discussed how you support younger students and your tutor at school has backed that up in her reference. What you have done is as an individual. How well do you work in teams?”

“We are encouraged to do a lot of learning in teams, in which we have a big task to do which would be a lot for one person to do on their own. So, we split the task up so that one student does one job, and one another job, and so on. I have led such teams, being responsible for how

the work is split up. I lead from the front and take on the most challenging part of the task. In addition, as a prefect, I am expected to work as part of a team, responsible to the Head Boy and Head Girl, who are responsible to the Headmaster. We have a briefing and a debriefing every day. We are given particular tasks, and we have to report what we did. Our Head Boy and Head Girl are very thorough”

“Your English tutor has commented about how you are proactive in team working. I can understand why you chose to continue with German and French, but why did you want to do Advanced Higher in English and History?”

“With History, I wanted to understand the context into which certain laws were passed. They will still be on the statute books and relevant to today, for example the Treason Act in 1708. In the First and Second World Wars, a number of people were hanged for treason for acting to help the enemy, for example William Joyce, Lord Haw-Haw. The Second World War was a period of intense suffering and mercy was in short supply...

“...I enjoy English, not just for beautiful writing, but also for the use of language, trying to work out the subtleties of meaning. That is a skill that I will need a lot in Law.”

“What aspect of English do you like the best?”

“I enjoy literature, especially poets.”

“Who are your favourite poets?”

“A E Houseman and T S Eliot,” Ewan expanded on that, selecting a passage from *A Shropshire Lad*.

“What writing do you do?”

“I have done narrative writing projects. I put together a history of our school which has been published locally. I also have just completed a project where I investigated the story of an independent school in

Yorkshire where the bursar had had his fingers in the till. It happened at about the time I was born. It's quite a complex tale with a lot of threads."

"I heard about it. Do you do creative writing?"

"Yes. I write poetry, and lyrics for the songs our group sings. The songs are mostly about teenage love and angst. The poetry I write is inspired by where I live. It's a nice area."

"It is. Do you have any here?"

"I have got some files on my mobile," said Ewan as he got out his smart phone and fiddled with it to show to Dr Broadhead.

*Will you walk with me to Barrock Cross,
Where the steep slopes wear their coats of trees?
Will we walk through cloistered paths,
Where trunks form columns of nature's cathedral
And branches make a vaulted roof?*

As you and I walk to Barrock Cross.

*Birds sing out their angel song
As they flit in dappled shade
And sunlight filters rays
As through stained glass of gothic windowpane.
It serves our heart to thrill,
High on that sun-kissed hill.*

As you and I walk to Barrock Cross.

*Above the treeline we now come
And on heathered moor we now tread
Where grouse do fly and curlew calls
With rippling sound on summer breeze.
Our hearts a pound as we tramp on,
Towards Barrock's boulders grey.*

As you and I walk to Barrock Cross.

On Barrock's boulder up which we shin

Atop the sun-kissed trap

We entwine thighs bare,

Caressing face and hair,

And hoods up against the breeze

We speak of light and life and love.

As you and I sit here at Barrock Cross.

“That is very beautiful,” said Dr Broadhead. “Who is the ‘you’ in the poem?”

“Jordan. He is my boyfriend. I wrote it for his eighteenth,” Ewan said and paused. To show that he was genetically related to the rest of the Walker family, he had put his foot in it. He went red and continued, “Does it matter that I am gay? Will it affect my place?”

“Not at all. We have strict policies on equality of access. This interview is to determine how well suited you are to study on our programme. Now you want to study Law with German. I need to assess your ability with German...”

“Ich kann Deutsch fließend sprechen²...” With that, the interview carried on in German, and Dr Broadhead, who was bi-lingual, found that Ewan needed no prompting at all with grammar or vocabulary. He understood and used German idiom. The Skype conversations with Matti had prepared him well.

It was now early afternoon, and Ewan had spent more time with Dr Broadhead than the allotted forty-five minutes. That was one advantage of being last in the queue, although it could have had the

² I can speak German fluently.

disadvantage that the tutor was so pissed off with the quality of the candidates that she would have just gone through the motions. Clearly that was not the case, but Ewan didn't dare to count his chickens. He felt he had done well, but surely there would have been lots of candidates who would have done much better.

Back in the office, Dr Broadhead didn't think so. "You don't get ones like that too often, Jane. He's definite. He should walk his Advanced Highers."

And with that, the box marked "Offer" was ticked on Ewan's database record.

Ewan felt shattered as he left Old College and the walk back to George Square was done in a daze. He had given it his best shot, but he wished he hadn't blurted out that he was gay. An interview was not really the place to discuss that sort of thing. Well, he had an interview lined up at Aberdeen. He didn't fancy St Andrews which attracted a lot of public-school types. Not every ex-public-school boy (or girl) was a Hooray Henry, of course. Some had landed as waifs and strays back at Strathcadden. They were all very pleasant, even if they had had some quite traumatic experiences. Perhaps Mr Mitchell was good at filtering out the Hooray Henry types.

Aidy was waiting for him. The others had finished their interviews, and they went over to the Student Union at Teviot Place. It was an old building but had a vibrant atmosphere in it. They got food in the student canteen and found a table.

"How did you get on, Eejay?" said Aidy.

"Most of it went well, I think," Ewan replied. He didn't want to talk things up too much, just in case that letter arrived that started, *we regret that...* "I think I put my foot in it though."

"How?"

“We were talking about my poems, and she wanted to see one. I showed her Barrock Cross. I blurted out that I was gay. I hope they don’t hold that against me.”

“Eejay, students blurt out worse things than that. You ask Dad. Did you get the academic stuff right?”

“I think so. I think I answered the questions right. We did the German oral assessment. She didn’t stop me at all.”

“Who did you have?”

“Dr Broadhead.”

“You must have done well, Eejay, because she’s a real stickler for proper use of language. She would even stop Germans if she thought they weren’t talking proper, you know. She does some teaching over in the Languages department. She will even pull up the Professor. Besides Melanie Broadhead has a girlfriend. They have a flat together.”

“How did you two get on?” Ewan said turning to Chris and Jordan.

“Like you. We think we did everything OK, but we’re don’t want to say definitely.”

As they sat eating their lunch, three other interviewees appeared and sat at the next table. Ewan recognised them as the toffs who were in before him. Their conversation was conducted at a higher volume than was strictly necessary. Some of it was raucous in nature and at times bordered on the rather vulgar. Ewan kept his head low. He wanted above all never to see them again, but there they were in front of him.

“That interviewer was a bit of alright,” the conversation started off on this rather sexist note and deteriorated thereafter. Suddenly it changed direction to the relief of everyone else in the room.

“Mrs Dewhirst wrote on my reference that I did not always hand in my assignments on time. She asked me about that. I said that I could

learn just as effectively whether I hand in work or not. My results were just as good. Dad's going to have something to say to Mrs Dewhirst."

"She was stopping me all the time in the oral assessment. '*Deine Grammatik ist schrecklich*³'. That's what she said. They should learn to speak English, I replied."

"I said that A-level Law was brilliant. I have a good grounding in Law, to which she said, 'Do you realise that Scottish Law is completely different?' I said I strongly believed in The Union."

"Don't like it here anyway. Oxford's much better. They expect you to work here. Grandmother told me that none of the undergraduates did any work at Oxford. It's more about the experience, as long as you get your exams. Do a couple of weeks' swotting up and it will be all tickety-boo, what?"

"Have you got the stuff for the journey back to Town?"

"Yes. We'll be smashed. Can't wait to get out of this dump. Food's disgusting."

The young men and women on the neighbouring tables unanimously agreed with them; they could not wait for them to get back to Waverley Station and get on that train. Pity the poor sods that would have to share a carriage with them. The conversation plumbed the depths of locker room banter which featured sexism of a particularly crude and vulgar nature accompanied by some equally obnoxious behaviour. Finally, some students had had enough and complained; a couple of burly security blokes arrived and escorted them out.

Although the audience to this performance were not to know it, the behaviour of the Hooray Henries deteriorated (if that were possible) while they were on the train. So many complaints were made by fellow passengers that the guard had no alternative other than to challenge the Hooray Henries, and they became very abusive. Since the rail company

³ Your grammar is dreadful.

had a strict zero tolerance policy to such outrageous behaviour, the guard ordered that they be ejected from the train. At Newcastle, several burly coppers from the British Transport Police came to escort them from the train. They did not go meekly which led to time spent in the cells, followed by charges including possession of controlled substances. There was no welcome home party, but rather difficult meetings for their parents with the Headmaster of their very prestigious and expensive public school. The parents could not dig their sons from this particular hole, even with the offering of substantial donations and help from old boys' networks.

Three days later, Ewan, Christian, and Jordan got letters from Edinburgh University in large envelopes that had the phrase, *I am delighted to offer you a place on...* They were accompanied by various brochures for the services that they would need to settle in to their new courses at the start of October.

At the end of March, Aunt Imogen had a rather nasty shock. She was made redundant when the firm that she had worked for as a management accountant for the last fifteen years went bust. There had been rumours that the bank had been eying the company up for asset-stripping and that some high-ups in the bank had made a lot of money. The business was sold to a London based company, and all its work would go there. Therefore, Aunt Imogen decided to put her cottage in Clinton Muncey on the market. Its value had increased by quite a bit, so that the mortgage would be paid off. Additionally, she would get a pay-off.

Laura's response was immediately to offer to put her up and support her while she got back on her feet in Buchananshire. It was the least she could do for Imm's support when Chris was born. At least there would be company in the house during the week, for Chris and Eejay continued to stay at Strathcadden Academy during the week.

Imogen's cottage had sold quickly, thanks to its featuring on the programme *Rustic Refuges*. The couple loved it and made an offer which Imogen was glad to accept. She wanted to make a new life in Buchananshire and wanted to find work there as quickly as possible. Finishing work at the start of April, she went up to Brewster House during the week, going back south a couple of times to make sure that nobody had taken her cottage away and that everything was going alright with the sale. At the end of April, contracts were exchanged with completion at the start of May.

Meanwhile, Chris, Ewan and Jordan stayed on at school as if they were Distant Caddies. This was to help them get a good night sleep in case their baby brothers did not. Also, there was not the distraction from their academic studies which were at this point getting decidedly intense as Advanced Highers were looming. Another method in the madness was that Christian Salway did not want nosy Caddies to find out the secrecy of his true relationship to Ewan Walker. As far as Caddies were concerned, he was a very close friend of the Walkers, and his mother had married into the family. Jordan had done a sterling job of keeping his trap shut. It was not in his nature to shoot his mouth off.

Chapter 20

Spring 2015

Richard Benjamin Springer (alias Waldron Brain Elsheimer) was not shooting his mouth off either. In fact, he was still saying nothing. Assistant Chief Constable Richard Smithells gave up with him and left him safely on remand at HMP Carlsborough. It was an appropriate contrast to Langerham Manor, as it was the most Spartan of the entire estate of Her Majesty's Prisons. HMP Dartmoor was positively five-star compared with HMP Carlsborough, situated as it was in the most deprived estate in the entire UK. There was plenty to keep him there. For a start, there was his cache of illegal firearms.

By contrast, Smithells was having a much more constructive time with Springer's Computer. It was "singing like a canary" to use the old copper's phrase, spilling its digital beans by the gigabyte. There was enough evidence to convict Springer for theft, fraud, and false accounting from his time with the Fotheringham Evangelical Church. That had allowed him to live like a footballer at Langerham Manor. But how had he bought and redeveloped the place?

On Wednesday 3rd December 2014, Smithells found out in the form of a thick report that thumped down on his desk. One of the tech-guys had found a secret partition on a second hard-drive. It was heavily encrypted and took a week to find the correct decryption algorithm. There was a lot of stuff that was going to ensure that Springer was going down for a very long time indeed. Firstly, Springer had been running a people-trafficking racket with contacts with an Albanian gang. This had been confirmed by the presence of a number of Slovenian men and women who had been found living in cramped quarters in an annexe behind Springer's house. They had worked under conditions of modern-day slavery. Evidence had also come from these people about cruel treatment including physical assaults. He had tried to distance himself from the gang when a refrigerated lorry was found in Austria with twenty-five migrants, some of whom had died of the cold and the rest were in a very bad way.

It was not that he was sorry for the people, whom he referred to as “the meat”, but that the finger could be pointed at him. Smithells was going to make sure that it damned well would.

The second thing was the extent to which Springer had been involved with Scott with a number of Ponzi schemes and a long list of phishing scams. In 2003 he had made enough money to redevelop Langerham Manor. In 2012, he had made more money than a footballer, which explained the presence of the supercars. Much of the money had been laundered in off-shore tax-havens. As for British income tax, Springer (in his role as Elsheimer, the simple country-boy pastor) had paid none whatsoever, and only three thousand dollars in the United States. His scamming activities in America were also detailed on the drive, including how he had worked with the late Logan B Trommelkopf III to rip off a number of very rich people. The FBI would no doubt be interested in giving him a welcome home party when he eventually got back to the USA, but that would have to be in the future. There would be no yellow ribbons tied round old oak trees.

The third thing was the extent to which Springer had accessed the dark web. Smithells was a seasoned copper who thought he had seen everything. But this was horrific. It would be a trial for the jury when they considered the case. If all the sentences were consecutive, as they should have been, it would be highly unlikely that Springer would ever see the United States again. Springer and Scott were clearly well-honed criminals who had been cleverly remaining under the police radar. Springer had been the silly bugger in this case. He had got greedy and too used to the high life. Even so, it would have been less likely that he would have been caught if he hadn't done that silly escapade to Scotland. In HMP Carlsborough, there was going to be plenty of the low life. Smithells was determined to ensure that Springer remained there for a good long time. When, eventually, he was released, he would be deported and the only time he would not see grey cell walls was when he was on the aeroplane back to the hospitality organised by the FBI.

Like all babies, Benjamin and Daniel Walker did not pay any attention to the comings and goings at Brewster House, the lovely home into which it had been their privilege to be born. Most of the time, they were asleep. When they were awake there were just lots of people who paid lots of attention to two very young infants. They thrived on it. Their two doting brothers would come in the evening to check up on Mummy and do anything she needed for help. They loved children.

One Saturday, Joby announced to his three other sons at breakfast, “I will be working full time in Corscadden from September. I have been promoted at work, and they want me at head office.”

“Does that mean that you won’t be at KB⁴ anymore?” said Ewan.

“Yes. Sam Proudlock is taking over from me.”

“Won’t you miss it, Dad?” For Christian the word ‘Dad’ still carried a deep and significant meaning.

“I will, but I won’t miss being away from home. The older I get, the more of a home-bird I become.”

“Dad, you’re only forty,” said Aidan, who had only once been over to the King’s Buildings, to run the KB 5 Road Race with the Haries. He had won it. Dad was an also ran.

“What are you going to do with your flat in Edinburgh?” Ewan asked.

“I’ll rent it out. In fact, I have an idea. Would you four like to rent it off me next year? You will have to look after it, mind.” Joby knew that Mary would have had a fit at that suggestion.

“There are only three of us.”

⁴ KB is the shorthand for the King’s Buildings, the Science campus at Edinburgh University, situated on an extensive site at Blackford, 4 km south from the city centre, with stunning views over the Pentland Hills.

“Jordan could make up the four. Is that right, Eejay?”

“Yeah,” said Ewan who felt decidedly excited at sharing a flat with his boyfriend. Ewan was inseparable from Jordan, who had done much to rebuild his confidence after the tragic events of the previous year.

“I certainly wouldn’t mind, Dad,” said Christian. “Halls tend to be quite noisy.”

“That’s true,” said Aidan, who had on several occasions had his sleep interrupted by idiot boys arriving loudly drunk in the small hours. The real low point was when one of these imbeciles had set off the fire alarm and everyone had to stand outside in the snow for three-quarters of an hour until the fire-brigade had declared the building safe. The culprit was identified; his mates dropped him in it. He was hit by a hefty fine from the university and had to pay the call-out fee for a false alarm.

“The Accommodation Service will be looking after it and will check up each term that you are keeping the flat in good order. You will need to tell them if anything is wrong, and so on. You will be renting it as any other students would. For your sakes I don’t want it to be known that Dad is renting a flat to you. They might think you are stuck up.”

“So, what do we need to do?”

“Apply for accommodation. I will tell them what’s going to happen. Others do it as well, so there’s nothing underhand. The immediate thing you two have to do, and Jordan, is to get your grades. Aidy, you make sure you pass your Semester II exams in June.”

Christian Salway, Aidan Walker, and Jordan Melhuish had their first opportunity to vote in the General Election that was held on Thursday 7th May 2015. Although the Walker family was well off, it had not forgotten its roots, for Richard and Raymond Walker were from an agricultural family. At the time they set up the business that bore their name, farming was in a bad way, and the family could not make a living.

The farmhouse was cold and dilapidated. There was no running water, and the brothers had to use a two-hole privy in the garden.

Even when the business was succeeding, both retained some good stout hobnailed boots in case they had to go back to labouring on a farm. And Richard Walker instilled a sense of generosity into his son, Charles, who ran his business on firm but progressive Christian principles. Charles Walker was at first a Christian, from which stemmed his socialism.

Strathcadden had been traditionally a safe seat for the Conservative Party until the late nineteen sixties when the trains were taken off. The MP at the time, Robert Clayden (father of Sir Hugh Clayden, the High Marischal of Buchananshire) resigned in disgust over the closure of the Great Central Line and forced a by-election. The result was the election of a Liberal, John Munroe, a local landowner and farmer. He was well liked in the community and continued to serve for many years. He was never quite Father of the House, but in 2015 he decided to retire. In his words, he was past his sell-by date. A sparky young woman, Shona Young stood for the Liberal Democrats. The Labour Party parachuted another young woman from London who just about knew where the Strathcadden constituency was but was completely out of her depth now that she was separated from the Islington chattering classes. The Conservatives sent a man who lived in Surrey and was in great favour with the party, having gone over the heads of the local constituency party. He was even worse than his Labour counterpart in that he knew nothing about his intended constituency and, with his refined received pronunciation, stood out like a sore thumb.

The only other local candidate was Iona Mills for the Scottish Nationalist Party. She had stood in 2010 but had narrowly been defeated by John Munroe. She was a partner in the veterinary practice in Corscadden and had been close friends with Aunts Jenny and Sarah since they were children. She had always attended to the veterinary needs of the Walker family pets. Above all her surgery was next door to the doctors' surgery where Mary Walker practised and the two would often have a good blether at lunch time.

A candidate for the United Kingdom Independence Party stood. He once tried to run a hustings in the town centre, where he made a number of inflammatory remarks about the European Union. Since Corscadden and the rest of Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Region had benefitted much from EU support, his remarks went down like a lead balloon. He lost his temper and made a number of remarks that were overtly racist towards some refugee families who had been taken in. He was booed out of town and never returned. He picked up five votes.

On Friday 8th May, Iona Mills was returned as MP for the Constituency of Strathcadden in the SNP landslide. Shona Young had narrowly lost. The swing against her was put down to the coalition of the Liberal Democrats with the Conservatives. The Liberal Democratic Party in Westminster had been ravaged to the point that the whole party could have fitted into a Ford *Grand C-Max*. (The party's fortunes did revive sufficiently in subsequent by-elections so that the MPs would have needed a Ford *Tourneo*.)

On Sunday 24th May 2015, Benjamin Thomas Salway Walker and Daniel James Hayward Walker were christened at St Columba's Episcopalian Church in Kirkstoun Place by The Reverend Matheson. The church was busier than usual, as many friends and relatives came up for the service. It was a good reason to have a party at Brewster House. The boys' godparents were Sam and Jess Proudlock, and Imogen Salway. It was particularly significant for Brenda's parents, Mr and Mrs Hayward, as they had got their daughter back, and now they had two new great-grandsons. It was the first time that Brian and Brenda Salway had darkened the door of a church for some months and were pleased to know that there was nothing whatever in common with The Tabernacle. When Mr Matheson poured the holy water onto Benjamin, he held his hand out to see if it was raining. He contently chewed the order of service. Daniel fell asleep.

For Richard Benjamin Springer, (aka Waldron Brain Elsheimer) accommodation had been arranged for several months now. He had a very small room in a very big house. Unusually for one of the housemates that lived there, his room was single. His housemates were generally very low types; in fact, they were a bunch of criminals. He didn't particularly like his accommodation, and would have done anything to move out, but it seemed that he was going to be there for a very long time. For Springer, six months on the Rule had felt like six years, having been banged up in the slammer for twenty-three hours a day. His constitutional around the exercise yard was often accompanied by shouts of "Yankee Nonce!"

Now Springer wasn't going to spend all day every day there for a while. Early in the morning he was taken in a large vehicle, considerably less commodious than the Range Rover, to a big building in the town centre at Fotheringham. Now he was into a big room with lots of people in it. He was accompanied by a couple of the flunkies from the big house (otherwise known as screws). There was an audience of twelve people who looked bewildered and lost. A very important man came in wearing a very heavy Santa coat and white wig. Everybody stood up, while he bowed. And everyone sat down. This Santa did not have a beard, nor did he say "Ho! Ho! Ho!" Instead, one of his little helpers stood up and said, "Richard Benjamin Springer, you are charged on the following counts..."

There seemed an awful lot of them, ranging from driving with a false driving licence and no insurance, to demolishing a Grade 2A listed building, to theft of £850 000, to fraud, to perverting the course of justice, having possession of several illegal firearms and legal firearms with no licence, possession of child pornography both homosexual and heterosexual, physical abuse of minors, people trafficking, holding immigrants unlawfully under conditions of slavery, assault and grievous bodily harm.

"How do you plead?" asked Santa's little helper.

“I am Doctor Waldron Brain Elsheimer. I am a simple country preacher of the Good News. I do not recognise this court. God is my judge.” Springer replied.

“I am your judge,” said Santa. “Are you going to plead or not?”

“I do not recognise this court. God is my judge.”

“Enter a plea of *Not Guilty* to all charges,” ordered the Judge.

Thereafter Springer (or Elsheimer, depending on your take) was not co-operative with the court. His defence, such as it was, was to quote the King James Bible, *And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.* He stated that he was entitled to his reward, wherever it came from and that *God provideth for the just.* He also maintained that ACC Smithells was persecuting him because he was a Christian. The judge stated that that was not likely as he himself was a practising Christian. The only reason that Springer was in court was that there was a long list of unlawful behaviour and actions that he was alleged to have committed. When asked things, Springer would either say, “No comment”, or “God is my judge”. Although his adopted persona of Elsheimer claimed to be a servant of God and that those who opposed him would be consigned *to the fiery pit from which the fire and brimstone never goeth out*, Springer himself didn’t believe a word of it. Springer was out for himself. His mates in his far-right groups were the same. The British insistence that cars should be driven with valid licences and insurance was very petty of them. As for guns, under the Second Amendment he was totally entitled to bear arms. If Brits didn’t like it, tough. What was wrong in duping people out of money? If they were so thick as not to recognise a fairly simple scam, they deserved to be fleeced.

The judge and jury were not impressed by those arguments, and the very large amount of time that was wasted as Elsheimer put them forward. After seven weeks, Richard Benjamin Springer was found guilty on all counts. The case of the Ponzi scheme with Scott was still on-going and would be the subject of a separate trial. On Friday 15th May 2015,

Judge William Owain-Jones delivered his sentence. With concurrent and consecutive sentences, Richard Benjamin Springer was sentenced to a total of twenty-five years in prison, with the recommendation that he be deported back to the United States upon release. Before he was taken down, Springer swore at and threatened the judge, and got another two years to run consecutively for contempt of court.

Brian and Brenda Salway were relatively satisfied, although no suffering on Springer's part would ever atone for the twenty lost years of their lives. Nevertheless, they made a conscious decision to put Springer and Devine behind them and to concentrate on their new life in a particularly pleasant town in a lovely area, their two daughters who were now nearby, and their three grandsons, one of whom was about to go to university, and the others were two very little people, each of whom loved to play with his feet and didn't know enough to have a care in the world.

Chapter 22

June 2015

While all of this was going on, the Highers and Advanced Highers examinations took place. Students from Secondary Four, Five, and Six spent a lot of time in the Old Chapel, the Old Gym next to The Wests, and any other place into which examination desks could be shoehorned. It was a cramped experience, as National 4 and 5 examinations had started as well. There was revision, followed by revision. When that was done, the students got on with more revision. The examinations lasted until early June. German was one of the last of the Advanced Highers.

For Secondary 6 students the challenge was to keep them going for the last three weeks of the summer term. There was the Celebration Day to be looking forward to. Under the guidance of the head boy and head girl, the older students would organise the event, which was the curtain-raiser for the Corscadden Festival, an arts, sports, and cultural event that took place during the first week of July.

This year, there was a new departure: there would be a bigger range of sports, modelled on the Wenlock Olympian Games held annually in Shropshire. It was an event established in the nineteenth century by Much Wenlock's highly respected local doctor, William Penny Brookes. It had been the inspiration and model for Baron Pierre de Coubertin who was the father of the Modern Olympic Games. It seemed an ideal community event to enhance the Corscadden Festival.

As well as the usual athletics, long distance running, football, and Highland Games, there were to be new events like cycling, 7-a-side rugby, biathlon, triathlon, archery, tennis, equestrian events, and golf.

A sport new to Strathcadden was rowing. Thanks to a weir below Corscadden Bridge the River Cadden above was wide enough to race two eight-oared racing shells side by side. The usable stretch of water was just less than two thousand metres, and it gave a good racing course of one thousand metres with plenty of room at either end. Corscadden had never had a rowing club before, but in 2014 a fledgling club had been formed by

a number of enthusiasts, who found a home on a spacious piece of rough ground behind Fenton House. Initially the premises consisted of a couple of shipping containers end-to-end to act as a boathouse and, later, a shed made from corrugated iron that was clamped onto scaffolding. A second-hand wooden hut served as a clubhouse.

The ground had at one time hosted the Saint Oswald College Officer Training Corps, where there were buildings that contained all sorts of military equipment to ensure that Old Oswaldians would have the necessary initiative to lead the men over the top. There had been an assault course and an outdoor shooting range. There was even an area where the boys were made to go skinny-dipping in the winter. Contrary to the generally prudish culture of the time, Dr Cowan rather approved of this; it was a good, clean, and wholesome way of making men of his charges.

After the nineteen sixties, when men didn't want to be toughened up for military and empire service, the buildings became more or less redundant, and the wooden ones collapsed. There was one building that survived, the armoury. It had been designed, like much of the rest of Saint Oswald College, by John Motson. As well as an impregnable storage facility for the weapons, there was a long, low extension that served as an indoor shooting range. This had now been converted with minimum effort to serve as a boat house. There were still the shipping containers end-to-end. The Strathcadden Rowing Club obtained the site at a peppercorn rent. Its later buildings had been erected at a sufficient height that the probability of the club's assets being wrecked in a flood was low enough to be acceptable to the insurers.

The outdoor rifle range and assault course had been flattened some years before. Having been in-filled with ballast from the old Great Central Line, the site had formed a large area of hard-standing, but nobody really knew what to do with it. The site had been ear-marked for building, but the idea was quietly dropped due to the risk of flooding. Once cleared of shrubs and brambles, the area was ideal for crews to put their boats onto the water, and several pontoons were made for the purpose.

The membership worked like Trojans, roping in their friends and friends of friends to do the hundred and one thousand things that would be needed to convert a derelict area into something that resembled a sports club. Somebody knew someone who could lay tarmac at cost price. Somebody else knew someone who was a dab-hand at building, including adapting John Motson's work. The old armoury was like all his buildings, very over-engineered and could take a direct hit. Although the armoury had lain derelict for close on fifty years, it was still in remarkably good condition. The simple task of enlarging the double doors at the end of the old indoor rifle range to take in racing shells proved to be a pig of a job and took three times longer than initially thought.

Strathcadden Academy backed the project by encouraging John the Jannie and Jannie Brian and their team to get involved. John the Jannie's wee...ae...vannie was put to work on many occasions. Brian did the plumbing and electrical work as soon as he had finished with The Wests. By the end of May 2015, the members had a facility of which they could be genuinely proud. True, some of it still looked a bit ramshackle, but so did the premises of many a sports club. People had been generous with money, but without the time given so freely, that money would not have stretched nearly as far.

The Region of Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil was new to rowing, but in its first year, the club membership grew from twenty to nearly a hundred. This included Craig Farjeon who wanted a new challenge after his departure from Corscadden Town Football Club. A demonstration regatta had been held late in 2014, which was entirely successful. Now the Strathcadden Regatta was a new event on the Scottish Rowing 2015 racing calendar. On Saturday 4th July there would be 1000 metre knock-out races upstream from Corscadden Bridge, and on Sunday 5th July, there would be 600 metre sprints downstream. This would be the finale of the Corscadden Festival.

Craig Farjeon had generally kept his membership of the fledgling rowing club quiet. Nosy Caddies had noticed that he looked generally slimmer and fitter, but only a few had seen him drive down the track

behind Fenton House. Much to his surprise, he found himself to be a natural as a rower. He started to train with the Senior Men's Squad and by January, he had become a stalwart. They trained each weekend despite the snow and ice; it had to be an exceptionally cold year for the Cadden to freeze. Water froze on the oar-blades during some of the coldest outings. His first open race was the Aberdeen Eights Head, in which the Strathcadden crew came tenth.

It was in February that Craig Farjeon had his annual appraisal with Mr Mitchell, the Headmaster. The latter had been enthusiastic when the rowing club committee had approached the school to secure the site of the new boathouse. He had also put the new club in touch with The Walker Family Trust which gave a great deal of support in setting up. Now that one of the Strathcadden Academy staff was a member of the rowing club, it would be a good idea for rowing to be established for Strathcadden Academy students. Craig Farjeon was ideally placed to take it on. It was a challenge that Mr Farjeon seized on with great enthusiasm. One or two other members of staff with rowing experience heard about it and offered support to coach the different squads. Others said it was all Craigie Boy's castle in the air, a jibe that he ignored. For a while nothing much seemed to be going on. Members of Strathcadden Rowing Club were looking for equipment. Their pride and joy was a thirty-year-old Janousek eight-oared racing shell that they had obtained from Sheffield, which rejoiced under the moniker *Damfast*. It had recently been refurbished and was in excellent condition.

In March a trailer and a number of used four oared racing shells arrived, each with a set of blades. The source of funding was from an old lady whose husband had passed away recently. Several sculling shells arrived, along with a double sculler that could easily be rigged as a coxless pair.

Christian Salway and Gemma Hammond had the organisation of the Celebration Day well in hand. Of course, there would be music in the

Old Chapel. Mr Struther could be relied on to sort that out. Aidy would do an organ recital. There wouldn't be the fashion parade that had been so successful the previous year. Instead, an art and photography exhibition of works by local artists as well as art students from Strathcadden Academy would provide a centrepiece. There would be the usual range of sports and athletics on the fields. The model aeroplane club would also organise an air display. In addition, several Caddies had risen to a challenge from Corscadden Model Railway Society to build a working layout on an ironing board.

The day after the last examination, Mr Farjeon asked for an assembly of Secondary Six students in Greatorex House. People wondered what Craigie Boy wanted, and they soon found out, "As you are aware, ladies and gentlemen, a new rowing club has been set up on the patch of land behind Fenton House. I joined the club late in 2014 and have been training and racing with them since. Mr Mitchell has asked me to set up rowing as a sport in the school, which I will be starting next academic year. This is what it's about..."

And with that Mr Farjeon showed a very slick presentation that he had made that showed his racing with Strathcadden Rowing Club and included the work that the members had done on the premises. It was a surprise to most in the room that all of this had been going on virtually under their noses and few had known about it, even among the nosiest of them. True, there was a tall hedge and a copse of tall trees that separated Fenton House from the new club. One or two of the nosier ones in Fenton and Edwards houses had looked at the activity but had made surprisingly little sense of what was going on.

"You may wonder about why I want to set this up now," continued Mr Farjeon. "The reason is that I want the school to make an entry onto the rowing scene by competing at the Strathcadden Regatta. I would like to have a squad of ten men and ten women, which would allow me to enter two fours in Junior Men and Junior Women. The rowing club have also offered me the use of one of their two eights. I want to prepare the squad so that everyone gets at least one race. You will be racing on

Saturday 4th July and Sunday 5th July. Those are the last days of the Corscadden Festival, and the Regatta is to be the jewel in the crown.

“You may think that you have to be like a prop-forward to row. I have news for you; you don’t have to be. Actually, it’s quite a technical sport. And it’s one that’s like riding a bicycle. Once you have done it, you don’t forget it. You will know me as a footy player. I started only a few months ago and I can’t get enough of it. I have one month to convert you from complete beginners to race ready. I did it, and if I can, you can as well. Miss Birch was a rower at university. She has offered to help. So, who’s going to join me? Anyone?”

Christian Salway felt he had to lead by example and shyly put his hand up, half expecting Mr Farjeon to tell him that he wasn’t worth eating and not to take the piss.

“Well done, Salway. One down for the men’s squad... Thank you, Hammond, one down for the women...”

Some more hands went up and Farjeon wrote them down. In a few minutes he announced, “I have these names: for the men – Salway, Walker, Melhuish, Cairns, Fleetwood, Thompson, Campbell, Leigh, Goodwin, and Humphreys. For the women, I have: Hammond, Burwood, Hopwood, McCarthy, Ward, Grey, Williams, Nesbitt, Nelson, Allen, and Young. Training will start today. We will start in the indoor rowing room at the Sports Centre immediately after break during lessons 3 and 4. Come in sports kit.”

“What about being able to swim, sir?” said Chloe Grey.

“I was coming on to that,” said Farjeon who didn’t want to admit that this had slipped his mind. “I need to see your twenty-five metre swimming certificates in the next couple of days. If you don’t have them, please tell me and I will need to check with Mr Drummond. I certainly can’t take you out on the water until I have seen them.”

Ewan Walker was relieved that he had managed to get his twenty-five-metre certificate. He was not a good swimmer and did not like it.

The ability to swim twenty-five metres would allow him at least to get to the bank if the worst happened.

The rowing training took place in timetable slots in which Mr Farjeon would have had Secondary 6 Physics and when Miss Birch had Secondary 6 Economics. The first couple of sessions were at the Strathcadden Sports Centre. There was a room with twenty high quality rowing machines. Many of the squad had seen bulky men thrashing away on the machines. Some had tried it themselves. One or two had posed for selfies on the things. They wondered if Craigie Boy had done the same.

Mr Farjeon opened up proceedings, “Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce you to the Concept II Model D rowing ergometer. The mirrors here are to help you improve your technique. They are not there for selfies, no names mentioned, Fleetwood...”

Farjeon got on the machine and went through the display. The most important figure was the time for 500 metres. He started an easy pace on the machine. Its display read 1 minute and 50 seconds.

“It’s all about the technique. I used to thrash up and down on this machine and I was doing about 2 minutes and 30 seconds for every 500 metres. And that was on a good day, going downhill with the wind behind me. If I can do it, you can do it as well. Anyone who has been taught by me will know that I would never expect anyone to do anything I couldn’t...”

Some got it straight away, others took a bit more time, but at the end of it all, Farjeon and Birch were both satisfied that they had a potentially good squad. And they chatted idly as they went back towards College House. Farjeon was thinking out aloud, “Emily, we’ll get two women’s fours at Junior 18. I don’t know how many other entries there will be, but if there aren’t any, there will be at least a final.”

“What about the men?” said Birch. “You know that Salway is over the cut-off date for Junior: only just, by a couple of days, but he’s still past it.”

“If he’s past it, Emily, I hate to think what we are,” Farjeon replied with a smile. “He’s eighteen and we are mid-thirties: twice his age.”

“Craig, you know what I mean! So how can he compete as a Junior?”

“He can’t. I am going to enter his four as novices at Senior.”

“Have you seen how skinny Salway is?”

“Oh yes, but he’s very fit and he looks like he will make a good technical oarsman,” Farjeon replied with all the authority of about eight months’ experience as a rower. “There is little meat on any of them, actually. Walker and Fleetwood wouldn’t make barbecue spareribs. With the right technique they will at least make a good fist of it. Just think what the forwards in the First Fifteen would be like in a boat. They would have the strength but wouldn’t get that far. Besides, Salway, Melhuish and Walker are all very fit. They can do a 5 k and have hardly broken sweat. All they need to do is go like hell for three minutes and they’ve cracked it.

“By the way, the committee have offered us the use of *Damfast*.”

“Damn fast?” Birch asked.

“It’s the older of the two eights. Our squad want a race. So, if we put the girls against our women, and the boys against our men, it will make a race.”

“It will be a bit of training for them,” said Birch who felt it was going to be something of a challenge to get a squad of Caddies race ready in about a month.

“Craig!” The voice was that of Alan Drummond, the Head of PE. “Don’t you knacker up Salway or Walker. I need them for the Scottish Schools 20 k at the end of term.”

“The chances are that you will knacker them up for me. I want them intact for 4th July.”

There was a certain amount of planning in Craig Farjeon's mind. Firstly, the entry of four fours and two eights would make a fair contribution to the weekend's racing (and the finances with the entrance fees). Secondly it would at least give his own crew something to win. None of those boys was big and surely, they would blow up at about eight hundred metres. It was a pure piece of luck that Salway was over the cut-off date, even though he could pass for a sixteen-year-old. For Farjeon's crew, it would be a bit of light training with a pot at the end.

The first week involved the squads doing work on the ergometers, and at the end, there was a race to one thousand metres. The first one in for the men was Ryan Fleetwood, followed a second later by Ewan Walker, while Simon Cairns and Christian Salway dead-heated half a second after that. Lisa Hopwood was first for the women and equalled Walker's time.

"They've got a good work ethic, Craig," said Miss Birch at the end of the session.

"I didn't think Salway would make it when we first started," replied Farjeon, "but he's equalled my time. There's not much of him, but what there is, is pure aggression and technique. I think we'll have Salway, Fleetwood, Walker, and Cairns in the Senior Four. Who do you reckon for the women's first four, Emily?"

"First four in: Hammond, Hopwood, McCarthy, and Grey. Craig, they aren't going to be rowing ergometers up the course. It may well be all different once they are on the water."

"Of course," replied Farjeon with all his assurance of eight months' experience as a rower and the authority of five days and several *You Tube* video clips as a coach. The thought tickled him of two eights that had been adapted to work with eight ergometers. The spray rising from the ergometers obscured the sight lines of the coxes and the two contraptions crashed into each other.

"Have you ever heard of the Stämpfli Express?" said Birch.

“No. It sounds like a narrow-gauge train in Switzerland,” Farjeon replied.

“It’s three eights end-to-end and has a crew of twenty-four with a cox. I’ve seen a video.”

“You’re taking the piss.”

“No. I’ll show you now,” said Birch, finding the link on her Smart phone (which was anything but smart; in fact, it was rather scruffy).

“Good grief,” said Farjeon as he gazed at the contraption that resembled a very co-ordinated centipede. “I don’t think it would get far on our river.”

“It’s forty-four metres long. You would never turn it. I don’t think it would go round bends either.”

The following week the Strathcadden Academy rowing squad took its tentative first attempts at paddling on the water. Peter Struther came down to help. The quid-pro-quo was that Craig Farjeon was to sing a solo at the concert on the Thursday and Friday of the end of term. Farjeon had a fine baritone voice. He and Birch were also going to join other rhythmically challenged members of staff to play some of the bells, whistles, and footy rattles alongside the Junior Orchestra in Leopold Mozart’s *Toy Symphony*.

Like all rookie rowing crews, it started off as a mess. Rowing is a sport in which the most elite practitioners make it look very, very easy. To start off with, it’s anything but easy. Racing shells are intrinsically unstable and require a high degree of harmony and togetherness to make anything like progress. If that is missing, the boat will wallow and roll as if in a storm. The oar-blade has to be handled with precision; otherwise, it gets stuck in the water, a situation known as “catching a crab”. A crab can stop a boat almost dead, wind the rower, and can even lift the rower from the boat into the water. Needless to say, that was the lot of the four Caddie

crews in those early days, but after a few hours training, they were getting the hang of it. On the Friday of the first week, all four Caddie crews could do a paddle along the thousand metre course without any undue mishaps.

One of the most satisfying experiences for any rowing crew and its coach is when they first really get it together. The shell glides smoothly through the water as if on rails. It goes fast with very little effort. Suddenly the rhythmic harmony goes AWOL for a bit, and it's time for more coaching input. Rhythmic harmony may sound rather musical, but many rowers are musical people, and many musicians have been rowers at one time or another. The same can be experienced with orchestras – when rhythmic harmony goes AWOL, the most harmonious melody can end up as an appalling din. Peter Struther knew that well.

While the squads were not on the water, Christian Salway and Ewan Walker would take them for a 5 k. While Walker, Melhuish and Salway barely broke sweat, some of the others sounded like the old steam engines hauling the heavy trains that had trudged through Maunder Tunnel sixty years before. When Mr Struther and Miss Birch had come along, both had run low of steam after 3 k and the brakes had leaked on. Walker and Melhuish went back to rescue them. However, as the members of the squad got fitter, even the slowest of them could put up a good pace. Mr Drummond had noticed it, and the squads were dragooned to make up numbers for the Schools Race on the last day of term. Mr Farjeon had told Drummond firmly that all of them were to be returned to him in the same condition as when he lent them.

During the final week of term that started on Monday 22nd June 2015, the Caddie Squads were out twice a day and were starting to practise racing. All they needed to do was to go like hell but keep it together for about three and half minutes. The trick was to ensure that the point at which they came apart was at least one metre after the finish line. It also didn't matter how ugly it looked, as long as their bow-ball⁵ was over the

⁵ All racing shells are required to have a bow-ball, a spherical piece of soft rubber 4 cm in diameter that is mounted on the sharp end.

line first. Well, that was Mr Farjeon's view, borne out of experience with the Corscadden Rowing Club. The CRC perfection of harmony could become rather ragged around the edges after about seven hundred and fifty metres.

Since some of the squad were over eighteen, the four Caddie crews were allowed to train when the staff weren't available. Mr Farjeon would give his "lesson-plan" to Christian Salway who would brief the rest of the squad. The coxes had picked things up over the last couple of weeks and could do some basic coaching from the back. While there was a lot of excitable banter on land, all the crews took the training seriously. They were hungry for success. They all wanted to leave their school on a high and winning an engraved pewter tankard would certainly fit the bill. Christian Salway was focused, and those who weren't rapidly became so.

As well as focusing on the race, Christian Salway was focused on the Celebration Day. Ewan had told him about the Speech Day at Tanswold School in 1998 and the last thing he wanted was something like that to happen on his watch. No, Mr McEwan would never allow it. Even so, he wanted everything ship shape and Bristol fashion so that the Headmaster and his Deputies could get on with what they were best at, smarming up to very important people. For Christian, he also wanted a perfect day to thank the community that had taken him and his mum to its bosom. The school was much loved and cherished by the community it served, and the Celebration Day was about the community as much as it was about the students.

For Christian, it would be quite an emotional day. Although it wasn't much more than eighteen months since he had first landed at the place, he was a Caddie in every sense. On that first day in November 2013, he remembered that weird feeling that he had when he wore a kilt for the first time. Now he wore it with pride. Soon his school kilt (Douglas Blue Modern) would go in a drawer with his jacket and jumper, ready to be a hand-me-down for Benjamin or Daniel. There was no Salway Tartan, but he wore the Walker tartan with as much pride. He was

a Walker, and as soon as he left university, he would change his surname to Salway-Walker.

His successor as Head Boy was Daniel Thomas Scott Taylor, while Gemma Hammond's successor as Head Girl was Tamsin Mary Pearson Heady. Both of them were like their predecessors, quiet, thoughtful, and serious young people. Christian and Gemma showed them the ropes so that they would hit the ground running. Although Christian thought (like most others) that Samuel Fulton was a bit of a prat, the latter had taken Chris under his wing the previous year, for which he was very grateful.

Christian checked and checked again that everything would be in place for all the stuff that the departments would do. In the canteen, the model railway exhibition was being set up, with the teams of Wee Caddies who had risen to the challenge of making a functioning model railway on an ironing board. Dad would like that.

In Inman House, which housed the Technology department, there were a large range of artefacts that had been made for project work. There was furniture that had been made in the workshops that would not be out of place in the shop of a cabinet maker. There was a range of woodturning from not only the students, but also local craftsmen. Each piece was unique and lovingly finished: a joy to handle. There were some beautifully tailored clothes, several of which were Christian's designs. Even though Chris hadn't organised a fashion event, it did not mean that he had ignored that part of his artistic flair completely. Both Grandmas had shown their talents as needle craftswomen for his designs. There were also plenty of Caddies who were a dab hand with the needle, not all of them girls, either.

On the second floor of Harrison House, there were all sorts of science displays with very scientific stuff. Gemma was a physicist and tried to explain it all to Chris, but the oss-scope thoroughly confused him. There were computers everywhere. Wasn't Science wonderful! Craigie Boy and his mates knew all that stuff standing on their heads. Christian was more at home on the Ground and First Floors which housed the languages department.

The Art and Photography departments were in Jordon House and while all the rooms would be open, the best work was going to be exhibited in the Old Chapel as soon as the Initial Celebration Events (Speeches) were over. And he had to do one. Not as long as the Headmaster's, but he had to deliver it, nonetheless. Fortunately, he had it done, with a few tweaks to complete it. He had practised it on Ryan and Ewan. Gemma was going to be Mistress of Ceremonies.

It all looked ready to go. Nevertheless, neither Christian nor his team had ignored the possibility that someone would do a prank to embarrass everyone. There was a plan by a couple of Secondary Two distant Caddies to crack stink-bombs during the Initial Celebration Events. It didn't need much expert sleuthing to find out more about it. Caddies were notorious for shooting their mouths off, as well as being very nosy and long eared. The two boys started their summer break a day early and were awarded five discredits for the start of the new academic year.

For anyone, it would have been a hard week. Added to the organisation needed to ensure the success of what was, in all but name, a Speech Day, there was the training for the rowing race. It was tiring but satisfying. Christian and his mates could normally out-eat a horse. The men's and women's rowing squads descended on the canteen like a plague of locusts.

Thursday 25th June 2015 was the last time that Christian did his evening patrol. This time he was accompanied by his friend Ryan Fleetwood and his successor Danny Taylor. A few months ago, it would have been pitch black. Now it was about the longest day; it never really got dark. The sun was still high in the sky even though it was not as warm as it looked. All three were grateful for their sweaters and jackets. They walked closely to each other, not saying much, but with a strong feeling that a phase of their lives was coming to an end. They sat down on the bench that was on the site of the old *Vespasienne*. There they shared their feelings, which were strange feelings for each of them. Ryan had been a Caddie for six years, while for Christian it was only eighteen months. They

were coming of age. Ryan's eighteenth birthday was in about three weeks' time. A couple of months, and Christian would be nineteen. There was a certain sadness that they would not be at university together; Ryan did not get a place at Edinburgh but had been accepted into Stirling. Whatever, they were Auld Caddies from the end of tomorrow. Indeed, Christian would not be Head Boy from the moment he passed the Oswald Boss and Sash to Danny. He would have a tie to the place at least until next Sunday, after the Strathcadden Sprint Regatta. Christian wanted tomorrow to go like clockwork. There was the Leaver's church service, which was for parents and the local community, followed, after a break, by the speeches. There would be demonstration races after the speeches, in which the four Caddy crews were going to get some practice in side-by-side racing. There would be other sporting events like rugby, football, and athletics. Badminton and squash contests were to be held in the Strathcadden Sports Centre. The other exhibitions would go on all day. In the late afternoon there were the Scottish Schools Races, where there would be some pretty fine athletes who would give Chris a good run for their money. And he would reciprocate in kind.

Ryan and Danny both left. It was high time they went home. Both lived in the town. So did Chris, but he was staying overnight. Dad was at home with Mum and there was still a lot to do. But not so urgent that he could not spend a few minutes on the site of the *Vespasienne*. Yes, he was coming of age. He counted that as when he left school and went on to university. He could be called up if there were a war, like they had a century before, and died in droves. It had happened seventy years before as well. Not so many had died, but even so the rollcall was depressing enough. Christian hated anything to do with the military. Like many of his friends, he would have made a lousy soldier.

The sun was still up in the North-West and Christian gazed toward Barrock Hill, whose summit he could see ten kilometres up the valley. He had gazed down from there through binoculars towards Corscadden and picked up the school grounds. They looked so small in the vast landscape but had been so important to him over the last eighteen months. Having

sworn three years ago that he would never have to go into a school again, nor would he ever be in a school uniform again, here he was sitting in one, and a strange one at that. He would have rather be seen dead than in a uniform that consisted of a blue jacket, a pale blue shirt and blue tie, a green V-necked pullover, a kilt (Douglas Blue Modern that was slightly short but was the only size that would fit his very skinny waist), knee-length socks and black shoes.

This time two years ago he was very nearly seen dead, due to that combination of ketamine and that other shit whose name he had forgotten. They hadn't succeeded in bumping him off in Beckton, but they surely would have had another go. He would not have been able to go back to the Beckton Sixth Form College. The Headmistress had made it quite clear that she did not want him back, even though he had been the victim of an attempted murder. He would not have lasted two minutes at Carlsborough College, which every year was rated as inadequate by OFSTED, and was permanently in special measures. Violent disruption was regular there.

And now he was here in the place that he still thought of as Hogwarts with knobs on, wearing this outfit of which he was very proud. And he was as proud as he was thankful at what they had enabled him to achieve in the eighteen months that he had been there. He had got good grades in his exams; he had been given responsibility in spades and was an athlete who was competing and succeeding at the highest levels. Now he was being given the opportunity to try a new sport of which he had known nothing. His pride was not arrogant. Caddies had a fine nose for arrogance and cut it down to size very rapidly. It was a satisfaction in the knowledge that he had done his best. He was genuinely grateful for the chance that he had been given. Unbidden came a thought, *"Well done, you good and faithful servant. Come and share my joy."*

He had found his family. He was very close to Aidy and Eejay. It was awful how they had had to put up with their mother passing away so unexpectedly. But they now had Mum, and both had taken to her as if she were their own. Now they all had their baby brothers who were now

taking a lot more notice at things going on around them. Benjamin and Daniel would be Wee Caddies in eleven years' time. Eejay had said that Craigie Boy would be headmaster then.

Christian liked the kilt. It was cool in the summer but warm in the winter. It was a garment that promoted inclusivity and was regularly worn by lots of young people in this remote and individualistic part of Scotland. They were proud of it and so they should be.

Of course, he would wear a kilt for a posh do. He would wear it for his job at Walker Bros. The customers liked to be waited on by young men in kilts. He would wear a casual one at home in Corscadden, but at uni it would be jeans.

Christian would miss being a Caddie. They were a truly inclusive community, taking in all sorts under their wing. There had been a good number of waifs and strays this year, including several who had fled the hedonistic and deliberate cruelty of an extremist group in the Middle East. He and his team of prefects mentored them, and, with the help of a specialist teacher, they were now speaking English with confidence. One or two had picked up the local accent. They were all thriving. The students and teachers had taken him under their wing eighteen months before and it was the least he could do. Being a Caddie had given him the opportunities that he never would have had at Beckton. Also being a Caddie had led him to find his father, a desperately intelligent man who was utterly worldly unwise. Professors were like that. Christian's values had developed beyond his teenage Humanism, as he understood it. For they were very much underpinned in the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. He was not one for shouting out aloud; he preferred to be understated. The quiet Christian faith that he had picked up from his family now meant a lot to him. He had now been reconciled to his grandparents. He found it amusing that his granddad was Jannie Brian. Despite that, no nosy Caddies had made the link.

Fortunately, they didn't do drugs up here. Obnoxious mind-altering chemicals had very occasionally reared their ugly head, but Mr

Mitchell had dealt with it swiftly. It was always his fear that he and his prefect team would stumble across it, and he would have to report it. Christian hated the drugs scene. Drugs were rife at Beckton Sixth Form College. The Principal knew as much, but she refused to do anything about it. He had refused to have anything to do with drugs, but even so they had nearly killed him. If he had discovered drugs, he would have told Mr Mitchell without a second thought. Fortunately, it hadn't happened on his watch. Caddies were a much tamer bunch than the posh hoodlums of Saint Oswald College.

No, he had to move on. Another thought entered his mind as he sat there, "*Do not look back at the past. Move on to the future.*" A tune that Ewan was practising for the Leavers' church service came into his mind. It was called *Servant Song*, written by a Richard Gillard in New Zealand at about the time that Dad was born. The gentle lyrics seemed to sum up what being a Caddie was about.

A wet nose pushed itself up Christian's kilt and snorted. The nose was attached to a furry black body with a wagging tail that belonged to Jake. Mr McEwan came. Christian started to stand up.

"Don't stand up, Christian," said Mr McEwan. "You're looking rather pensive."

"Good evening, sir," Christian replied. Jake had finished exploring between Christian's legs. There were lots of interesting scents and pheromones to interest his doggy brain. Now he sat down and put his paw up on Christian's leg. "I have come to the end of an era. It's a strange feeling. I am going to miss this place."

"It happens to us all. We are all on a journey and have moved on from places we liked. There is always going to be something better. I really believe that, and I tell others that, as you know."

"I hope that everything goes well tomorrow. I have done everything I can. I can't think of anything I have missed out, Mr McEwan."

“You haven’t. Christian, you and your team have really worked hard on this one. I have checked everything you have done. Normally something gets overlooked but I can’t see anything missed out this year. You have done really well. I have seen through several of these events, and they have all gone well. I am sure the same will be true of tomorrow. If something goes wrong, I have the explaining to do.”

“This may sound daft, sir, but the lines of *Brother Sister let me serve you* are going through my head. I think it really sums up what Caddies are about.”

“You are absolutely right, Christian. It’s people like you and Gemma and your team that make it like that. I mean this when I say this: you have made Mr Mitchell’s and my jobs so much easier. Students like you really make me enjoy my job.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Christian bashfully. “I really appreciate that.”

“I knew you would. Jake come on!”

Chapter 22

Friday 26th June 2015

At Asher House, Christian was up with the lark. He had found time to squeeze in some last-minute prep. Wi-Fi on. Some files downloaded. E-mailed the briefing for the day to his team of prefects and the new team. Nerves under control – just. Today was the day.

This was the last day of the morning patrol. Ewan joined him, having left Mum and Dad in bed with a cup of tea. Danny and Tamsin were there too. Not much had changed overnight; nobody had taken Strathcadden Academy away during the small hours. No Caddies were returning from distilling illicit hooch. John the Jannie was around with his “Good morning, Mr Salway. Good morning, Mr Walker. Good morning, Mr Taylor. Good morning, Miss Heady.”

To which all replied, “Good morning, sir.”

There was a quick pit-stop for a delicious breakfast in the canteen. After breakfast there was the final prefects’ briefing in Greatorex House. The room was crowded with the two teams of thirty prefects. Christian and Gemma were not sticklers for ceremony. The prefects wandered in at the right time, with cheery calls of “Hi Chris” and “Hi Gemma”. The two would smile at their team showing genuine pleasure at their company. Gemma called the meeting to order, as usual, and continued, “This is a very important day for us all. We have all worked hard for this, so we all want it to go really well. Mr Mitchell and Mr McEwan are depending on us as they always do. We’ve worked out what we are all doing throughout the day. So just do it. As you know, I am Mistress of Ceremonies this morning. Today Chris and I are passing on the Oswald Boss and Sash to Danny and Tamsin, and the new team take over. I want to wish them all the very best for next year. Chris.”

“I would echo that. Good luck Danny and Tamsin. Good luck all of you. You will need it, but I know how much Danny and Tamsin will look after you. As for us who after today will be Auld Caddies, I want to say thank you from both of us for all your hard work and support to

Gemma and me. Mr Mitchell is really pleased with what we have done. A couple of years ago, they were seriously thinking about getting rid of the prefects all together. Some said it was a relic from the old public school. But we have made all the teachers' jobs much easier by what we have done. That's what Mr Mitchell has told me and Gemma several times. One other thing I nearly forgot; Mr Farjeon has asked that we make sure that as many visitors as possible go down to the river at 12.00 for the demonstration regatta. The best place to see it will be from the lower playing fields behind Fenton House.

“Remember that we are all up on the stage in front of everyone. There will be eight hundred in church for the leavers' service, and at least seven hundred for the speeches. No falling asleep when Mr Mitchell or Mrs McCrae give their speeches. So good luck all of you for today.”

A spontaneous round of applause burst out around Chris and Gemma. The meeting broke up and the prefects went to their places to start meeting the guests. Gemma and Chris went up for their final weekly meeting with the Headmaster.

The importance of the weekly meeting held first thing on a Friday, with the Head Boy and Head Girl, was such that even high-up people had to wait until it was finished. It served to remind Mr Mitchell and his senior staff that that's what their jobs were about: the students. Mrs Laidlaw ushered them through and announced in her usual way, “Salway and Hammond to see you, Headmaster.” Mr Mitchell showed them to a sofa. This was unusual, as they normally sat at his desk in the oriel window. But this was an unusual occasion. All the deputies were there, Mr McEwan, Mrs Horsefall, Dr Cuthbert, and Mr Robertson. Mr McEwan, Dr Cuthbert, and Mr Robertson were in their kilts, while Mr Mitchell had his best suit on, tailored to perfection, and Mrs Horsefall was dressed as elegantly as she always was. Mr Mitchell served coffee. Christian and Gemma would need a caffeine high to get through the day.

“I have given the prefects detailed instructions of the running of today, which I have e-mailed to you all,” said Christian. Gemma added,

“I have sent round the plans for the Leavers Service and the Celebration Event.”

“Yes, we have got those,” said Mr Mitchell. “So, what would you like us to do, apart from keeping the members of the School Board from getting under your feet?”

“Be there for the guests. Look after the teachers...” said Christian, who was far too polite to tell them not to make a bloody nuisance of themselves. “Tell the guests what the students have done.”

“And help Danny and Tamsin,” said Gemma.

“Is there anything that we have missed out?” Christian asked. “Mr McEwan? Mr Mitchell? Mrs Horsefall? Dr Cuthbert? Mr Robertson?”

“No,” said Dr Cuthbert, who had a great eye for detail. “I honestly can’t think of anything. It’s all there. And you know how fussy I am.”

“I think it’s going to be a cracking day,” said Mr Robertson. The others nodded. “You two should be proud of what you have done. You have left us with nothing to do!”

“Open confession is good for the soul,” said Mr McEwan. “I haven’t finished my sermon. What do you two think about what makes Caddies what they are.”

“Do your sermon on the words of the last hymn, sir,” said Christian. Gemma nodded and said, “That’s why I chose it. *Brother, sister, let me serve you.* That should be the school hymn. It’s what we Caddies do, even if we aren’t Christians.”

Christian said, “Gemma’s right. You all took me in as a waif and stray eighteen months ago. I was in a mess. You picked me up, dusted me down, and set me going again. You have given me a new chance. I will be grateful for this for the rest of my life. And I mean that.”

“Of course, you do,” said Mr Mitchell. “You have just reminded us all that that’s why we do our jobs. It is too easy to get bogged down in

the thousand and one admin and desk things we all have to do. And we see the way our students develop and wow! I want to thank you both for all the effort you two and your team have put in this year. It has made our jobs so much easier, not just me and the deputies, but all the teachers. We are very grateful. Now we would like you to accept a very small token of our gratitude...”

And with that Mrs Horsefall passed over two large and weighty packets. They were pictures mounted in frames, both of which were signed *Diana Mitchell*, who was the Headmaster’s wife and an accomplished artist. The two young people were tongue tied at first. Finally Christian said, “This is beautiful. Your wife has a wonderful skill, Mr Mitchell. I mean it when I say that I will treasure it for all my life.”

“And I will, too,” said Gemma.

(*Author’s note:* The pictures had pride of place in Uncle Chris and Aunt Gemma’s dining room in Laurieston Villa. They remain in our family to this day.)

The Leavers’ Service was a relic of the Saint Oswald College. Unlike its forerunner, there was no *Songs of Praise* 333 B (*Lord dismiss us with thy blessing*). Instead, the songs were contemporary - those that the students knew and enjoyed. The service was informal, being led by students. Tamsin Heady accompanied the staff and student choir in John Rutter’s *The Lord bless you and keep you* on the grand piano, while the organist was Ewan Walker. As Ewan sat at the keyboards, he looked at the plaque that was engraved, *In grateful and loving memory of Mary Claire Bethan Walker (1965 – 2014), a warm friend of Strathcadden Academy*: his mother, who had gifted him music, but was taken away so suddenly last year. Yes, she was strict, but she had loved him and nurtured him. She would have been so proud to see him seated at this mighty instrument. While Aidy and Chris were definitely Walkers, he was definitely a Fairbairn and was a younger version of Uncle Alex. Dad, Laura, and Aidy would be somewhere in the congregation along with Grandma and Granddad. He couldn’t see them;

they were at the back and there were eight hundred people in church. The music he played was not as sophisticated as Aidy's, but it sounded good enough for the congregation. The hymns, *I the Lord of Sea and Sky* and *Brother Sister let me serve you* had tunes that were, for him, a doddle to play, as was *Spirit of God*, sung to the traditional tune *Skye Boat Song*. Gemma had thankfully kept it simple. Even so, keeping eight hundred people in unison was not always easy.

There were sixty young people on stage, the prefects from this year and next. Mr Robertson and Dr Cuthbert were sitting up primly, and Ewan was convinced that they too had The Secret to hide. Mr McEwan was in his clerical outfit. Sitting at the organ console, he was guaranteed privacy, except during the sermon when he would enjoy a more comfortable perch.

Chris and Gemma did the readings, and Mr McEwan went to the front to give his talk.

"We have just heard the reading, *Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know. Remember the Lord in everything you do, and he will show you the right way. Never let yourself think you are wiser than you are; simply obey the Lord and refuse to do wrong. If you do, it will be like good medicine, healing your wounds and easing your pains.* This passage is called *Advice to Young Men*. I hasten to add that it applies to young women as well. It is from a collection of sayings that were relevant three thousand years ago and are still relevant to us in the Twenty-First Century. The technology has changed, but human emotions and needs have not.

"You are all going out on a journey. You will be leaving this place at the end of this afternoon. You will be Caddies no more. Instead, you will be Auld Caddies. It is a change. It can be scary. Our school has been where you have studied and played for the last six years. For many of you, it has been the place where you have lived as well. And now this phase of your life is over. For many of you, it must seem a long time when you first put on your kilts and arrived at our community to be Caddies. For me, as I grow older, these six years have flown past at a rate of knots and

in a few short weeks, we will be welcoming the next brood of Wee Caddies into the bosom of our community. There will be the waifs and strays, which Caddies take to their hearts. Ours is a unique community for it has a great heart. For in our second reading from Matthew's Gospel, we read *I was hungry, and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger, and you received me into your homes, naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me...* The King will reply, *I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me.*

“Every time you helped one of your fellow students, every time you put an arm round a distressed little one, every time you mentored one who was having difficulties, these verses apply in full to you. Even if you are not religious, you too have done that, and you have done it in Jesus' name without ever realising it. Remember this as you go out from here and do the same wherever you go.

“Most of you are going to university. They are big places and will seem quite overwhelming. The same is true for when you start a new job. So, remember your lives as Caddies and put what you have learned into practice. Refuse to do wrong, watch out for others. If you pray, do so, listening to God's guidance. If you don't, make sure your motives are honourable, being for others and not selfish. Above all, seek harmony in all that you do.

“I was talking to one Secondary Six student yesterday evening. These verses from the hymn that we will be singing at the end of this service sums up what the Caddie life is about:

*We are pilgrims on the journey
We are brothers on the road
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.*

*I will hold the Christ light for you
In the night time of your fear*

*I will hold my hand out to you
Speak the peace you long to hear.*

*I will weep when you are weeping
When you laugh, I'll laugh with you
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through.*

“Caddies help each other; they bear the load. I have seen that in many of my classes. You know how challenging my homework tasks have been, but you have supported each other to rise to them. Caddies can become anxious and afraid, but how many times have I and others seen how you support each other. Caddies laugh together. We are generally a very happy bunch. Caddies cry together. I have seen some family tragedies that have been harrowing, but you Caddies have brought each other through, even though your journey has taken you through the deepest darkness. As a Christian, I believe that whoever gives one of Christ’s brothers or sisters even a drink of water will receive a reward. *When you did it for the least important of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me.*

“This church has seen thousands of young people depart on their journeys over the past one hundred and twenty years. This time one hundred years ago, those journeys were tragically short, for the rollcall of those who died in the squalor of the Great War is long and depressing. A shorter rollcall seventy years ago but depressing all the same. I give thanks that we have moved on so much more nowadays and that you have much better opportunities for the taking. And I pray that that will continue.

“As you set out on that journey with the first step, you may be confident that all Caddies will be rooting for you. Most of you will from time to time come back to Corscadden. You can be assured of the warmest welcome, for we in this town are a family community. For some, the journey will be straight-forward. If that is for you, give thanks, and give your help and support to those who struggle. Some will find the road

steep and hard. Do not despair, for the vistas that lie ahead can only be seen from the mountain top.

“In conclusion, I wish you God’s speed on your journeys. Support each other in the way that Caddies always have done and always will. Bear each other’s load. And remember this: *Come to me all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. For the yoke that I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light.* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Ewan Walker slipped back onto his perch at the organ console and opened his music at *The Servant Song*, a gentle piece that was easy to play. He loved the piece as it was one of his earliest musical memories and he had learned to play it on the piano when he was ten. He had to play it slowly to enable eight hundred people to sing more or less in unison.

Jeremiah Clarke’s *Prince of Denmark’s March* was a slightly more challenging piece. He remembered Aidy’s advice to go right-hand only if it threatened to go tits-up. Nobody in the congregation would notice. If they did, invite them to show how it should be done. It did happen once during the piece, but Ewan covered it up, and nobody said anything. When he finished playing, people were filing out of the Old Chapel while John the Jannie and his team were sorting everything out for the Celebration Event. Chris and Gemma had gone into College House for the break to meet the members of the School Board and the very important people from the town. He had twenty minutes to get some coffee in Greatorex House and prepare himself for his next keyboard performance. *Highland Cathedral* was Mum’s favourite tune. After the hand-over of the Oswald Boss and Sash to the new Head Boy and Head Girl he would play *Ashokan Farewell* that had a Scottish flavour to it, although it was actually American. He would play the piano part normally but play the cello part on the pedals. His finale would be *David Johnson’s Trumpet Tune in D*.

“Just relax and enjoy it,” said Aidy when the two brothers met briefly before the Celebration Event.

Christian’s nerves were just about holding. A quick pit-stop in Greatorrex House and he was ready to go again. He was going to smash this presentation. Ewan was at the keyboard again. Chris wished he could play like Eejay, let alone like Aidy, but his musical talents were yet to be developed. As far as musical instruments were concerned, Christian was digitally challenged. He set up his laptop and ran through his presentation. Projector on. Projector connected to his laptop. Both screen and output showing. First slide on, looping, as the audience came in. And there was Gemma, getting ready to be Mistress of Ceremonies. Both had the Oswald Boss and Sash, but Highland Chief neither of them was. Yes, he was going to smash this presentation.

Highland Cathedral is a tune that has a distinct verse and chorus, so it could be played as many times as needed while the audience came in and settled down. All the prefects were sitting at the back of the stage. At 10.15 prompt, Gemma Hammond came to the microphone, “Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen. The Council, the School Board, the Headmaster, the teachers, and all the students give you the warmest possible welcome to our Celebration Day here at Strathcadden Academy. We very much hope that you will enjoy not only this Celebration Event here in the Old Chapel, but also the many activities that the teachers and students have laid on for you. You will have been given a programme for the day, and you will have found a programme of the Celebration Event. I would like to thank all the teachers and students who are putting on activities for your enjoyment, and all my team of prefects who have worked so hard to organise it all. I would also thank Ewan Walker who is providing us with the music this morning on the mighty instrument that we inherited off Saint Oswald College. Last year it was restored and will continue to give beautiful music for Caddies for many years to come. I must also thank Mr Mitchell and Mr McEwan who have guided us as we have organised the event.

“We particularly welcome Councillor Mrs Helen McCrum, Mayor of Coruscadden, who is giving the prizes this morning. We also welcome Sir Hugh Clayden, High Marischal of Buchananshire as our Guest of Honour, and Mr Colin Buchan, the Director of Education for Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Regional Council. We hope you will enjoy your day with us. Now I would like to pass you over to Christian Salway, our Head Boy, who is going to show you a presentation about the vibrant life of our school this year.”

Today was the day. Yes, Christian Salway was going to smash this presentation. It was slick, showing many pictures that he had taken of all the events during the school year. The school had once used a professional photographer, but in more recent years, a number of students had shown that their work was every bit as good, thereby saving a fortune. There were video clips of different sporting events. In one running race, Christian had worn a headcam. Mr Mitchell and Mr Farjeon had even taken some video-clips of the new rowing squad. Christian made his final comments, “...I hope this has shown to you the vast range of activities that students at our school can take part in. I have shown you a truly vibrant school community which I am proud to have been part of. I joined the school eighteen months ago as a waif and stray. Strathcadden Academy challenged me and gave me so much. I thank all the teachers who have given us all so many opportunities. Like all Secondary Six students I am about to be an Auld Caddie. I am about to pass the mantle of Head Boy to my successor, Daniel Taylor. Good luck to all of you as you move up the school. Look after the Wee Caddies. Thank you all of you from Gemma and me who have given our team and us so much time and help.”

He had smashed the presentation. The applause was enthusiastic, and Mr Mitchell smiled at him. Carefully he shut down his laptop and put it in its case. It was time for Mrs McRae to smash her presentation. It flowed over Christian. Mrs McRae was of the old school; her presentation was low-tech, hand-written on lined A4, and very much the sort of thing that the Chairman of the School Board would say, wouldn't she?

Fortunately, it was not too long, and Gemma was bringing on the next act, which was a performance by staff and students from Secondary Five and Six singing *Brother James' Air*, accompanied by Tamsin Heady on the grand piano. If anyone was going to make a living out of playing the piano, it would be Tamsin. Miss Birch had a powerful soprano voice. Craigie Boy was a good baritone.

The next act was the Headmaster's Address. As befitted a manager of his status and salary, he had been up with the lark squeezing in some final prep. He had his Wi-Fi on and downloaded the latest figures. His nerves were under control. He had had a quick pit-stop in the kitchen and had a delicious breakfast that his wife had cooked. He had had another quick pit-stop at break. There were lots of tables with lots of numbers comparing different years and exam results. They would have delighted any number cruncher and his spreadsheet.

At the end, he turned away from the lectern and managed to catch the wire from the laptop, which missed the stage and fell over two metres onto the tiled floor of the Old Chapel. It fell on its side, split open and several keys were dislodged. The battery came out of its compartment and slid across the floor. Today was the day. Mr Mitchell had smashed his presentation in front of eight hundred people. Mr Mitchell was a consummate pro in that he did not yell out any obscenities. Later he confessed that he really had to restrain himself. There was one of those pregnant silences in which nobody was quite sure what to do. Several Caddies were tittering only to be hushed by their embarrassed parents. Gemma Hammond immediately showed the initiative that had served her so well, promptly came up to the microphone, and announced that there would be a musical interlude before the prize-giving, in which Ewan Walker played Phil Cordell's tune *Stone Cross* (the B-side of the single *I will return* that had been a hit in the early nineteen seventies). Aidy had written a keyboard arrangement of both tunes, providing an ending because the music merely faded out on the record.

In the meantime, the ICT technician was clearing up the bits, tutting all the time, while Mr Mitchell had gone behind the scenes to avoid

having a complete melt-down in front of the parents, members of the School Board, students, Uncle Tom Cobley, and Aunt Jane Cobley. Gemma Hammond and Christian Salway went behind the scenes in order to get their star back on stage.

“Is there a mouse-hole about?” Mr Mitchell asked. “If so, I want to hide in it.”

“We need you back on stage, sir,” said Gemma Hammond, “They’ll notice if Mr McEwan has to do the prize giving.”

“They will have noticed when my laptop fell to the floor. It must have woken most of them up. I could tell. Eight hundred people jumped in unison. To me it sounded like a bomb exploding. What Mr Culshaw is going to say to me I dread to think. Tell Walker to keep playing for a couple of minutes while I get a grip on myself.”

And that’s what happened. Ewan played *Stone Cross* twice with different registrations and it had the desired effect, to give the Headmaster a chance to overcome his embarrassment. After a couple of minutes, Gemma Hammond led her star back on stage, and announced, “Mr Mitchell and Councillor Mrs McCrum will be giving out the prizes.”

During the addresses by the Chairman of the School Board and Headmaster, Ewan sat on his chair next to the organ console. Like all the prefects, he made a determined effort to pretend to be interested. It was good manners, after all, and it would be a skill that he would need in the future when stuck in one hundred and one interminable meetings. At least on this occasion he would not be quizzed on what they had been droning on about. Instead, his eyes strayed over to the portrait of Dr Cowan, which still had the tiny rip on the end of his hooter. He imagined Dr Cowan schmoozing with lots of high-class Edwardian parents. He imagined the Doctor’s interminable speech on a Speech Day. It would have been of unlimited smugness. Speech Days in those days were not about celebrating the students; they were to make the Headmaster look

good in the eyes of parents who were completely up their own arses. He had studied the history of Saint Oswald College in detail. Cowan would have gone on about keeping the modern boy tough and ready to advance the Empire. At best, that would involve strutting about some unbearably hot country in a ludicrously heavy uniform and trying to upstage each other with one's snobbery. At worst it would involve a spear through the chest.

Cowan's mission was to produce the toughest young men to export Victorian Christianity with its snobbish and self-righteous sanctimony and impose it on the natives. If the natives didn't behave themselves, they would jolly well spank their bottoms until they did. If this involved opening fire on unarmed crowds, that was what was required to teach them a jolly good lesson. And they would go to church that Sunday to give thanks to The Almighty that they had successfully quelled the native unrest.

Thank God, mused Ewan as he sat there, that young men had rebelled against being toughened up. Cowan would have found out that he was gay and caned him and Jordan until they stopped being gay. Neither would have had a backside left by the time Cowan had finished. And there was that lad who had died "as a result of a tragic accident" after falling down the stairs immediately after getting six of the best from Cowan. Ewan was satisfied that the boy had given Cowan some back-chat and the latter had lost it and thrown the boy down the stairs with some considerable force. He stared at Cowan's portrait and muttered under his breath, "Henry Cowan, you are a complete fucking bastard."

As soon as Ewan had got the words off his chest, Mr Mitchell smashed his presentation.

The final act that Gemma Hammond announced was the transfer of the Oswald Boss and Sash to the next Head Boy and Head Girl. It seemed to be a ritual that had belonged to the early days of Saint Oswald College. In reality it wasn't. Dr Cowan would not have tolerated any

attention being taken away from himself. It was a short and simple bit of ceremonial that Mr Duffy had invented when the school moved down from Langhouse to Dennistoun Park. By tradition, the Head Boy did the swearing in for the new Head Girl and vice versa. So, Gemma Hammond said the lines, “I, Gemma Louise Hammond, have come to the end of my term as Head Girl of Strathcadden Academy. Daniel Taylor, you have been asked to undertake the role of Head Boy for the Academic Year 2015 to 2016. Do you accept this role and promise to undertake the role to the best of your ability?”

“I, Daniel Thomas Scott Taylor, accept the role of Head Boy of Strathcadden Academy. I promise that I will do my best to support all my prefects and give guidance to all students of the school to the best of my ability. I promise to act as a role model for all students, and act as an ambassador for our school.”

Gemma took off her boss and sash, before pinning the boss onto Daniel Taylor, and placed the bright yellow tartan sash over his left shoulder.

And it was Christian Salway’s turn, “I, Christian Dominic Hayward Salway, have come to the end of my term as Head Boy of Strathcadden Academy. Tamsin Heady, you have been asked to undertake the role of Head Girl for the Academic Year 2015 to 2016. Do you accept this role and promise to undertake the role to the best of your ability?”

“I, Tamsin Mary Pearson Heady, accept the role of Head Girl of Strathcadden Academy. I promise that I will do my best to support all my prefects and give guidance to all students of the school to the best of my ability. I promise to act as a role model for all students, and act as an ambassador for our school.”

Christian took off his boss and sash, before pinning the boss onto Tamsin Heady, placing the bright yellow tartan sash over her left shoulder.

For some of the audience, the sixty-five minutes had felt like sixty-five hours, but Caddies made a polite audience, clapping at the appropriate

points and not hurling rotten vegetables at the speaker. For others, the sense of occasion took them through. Ewan had sat staring daggers-drawn at Dr Cowan's portrait. The portrait had paid in kind; Dr Cowan stared back with icy contempt at the long-haired scrawny youth in a kilt. "Walker," it seemed to snarl, "I hate homos. If I had my way, you would stop being homo with Melhuish, otherwise I will cane you until you learn to stop being a homo. How dare you call me a fucking bastard? By the way, you have tried to get to the bottom of the Grayson scandal. If you let anything more out, Walker, I will kill you with my bare hands. Who do you think you are?"

Perhaps it was the tiny rip on the end of Cowan's hooter that did it. If ever Ewan Walker became headmaster, he would have the portrait removed and make a special bonfire for it. No, that would be unlikely as Ewan had no desire whatever to teach. Probably the removal of the picture would cause an unholy rumpus with Old Oswaldians.

Ewan played his last two pieces and was surprised in a pleasant way when he saw that most of the audience had stayed and applauded him. They were quite a cultured lot in Corscadden, especially when the performance didn't cost them anything. As Ewan was locking up the organ console, Aidy came up like a puppy and threw his arms around his brother. "You were great," he said. "You have really come on. Dad and Laura are thrilled."

Ewan smiled gently and said, "Thanks Aidy. I did it for Mum."

Dr Cowan continued to stare at the two brothers with a mixture of outrage and icy contempt.

For the new rowing squad, there would be a late lunch. Mr Farjeon had arranged that enough food to feed an entire camel train should be kept behind in the Canteen. At least they would not have to queue. Mr Farjeon and Miss Birch took the squad up to the common room in Greatorrex House and there were a number of boxes for the new

rowing kit. Originally Farjeon and Birch had intended to buy all-in-one kit in Lycra. But there was a problem. Mr Drummond had mentioned to Craigie Boy that students were not allowed to wear Lycra for any sports as it was considered to be too revealing. So, each got a dark blue singlet with two diagonal mid-blue parallel stripes and black running shorts very much like those worn by the running squad. All students received a dark blue hooded sweatshirt which had their surname on the back in large mid-blue lettering, below which was *Strathcadden Academy Rowing*. On the front was the school logo with *Strathcadden Academy Rowing* underneath it. Along with the other freebees, each got a pair of knee-length socks with horizontal stripes of dark blue and mid blue.

There was a bite to eat, so they all had enough energy to give the parents a good race. It was time for the students to change and make their way to the boathouse at the far end of the school grounds.

The section of water that was used by Corscadden Rowing Club was missing one factor that blights many a rowing club's training stretch. There were no anglers. Rowers and anglers do not make good bedfellows. Anglers get very cross when racing shells go past them. They shout and swear and catapult their maggots at the crews. It gets even more fraught if there is a coaching launch. However, the river bank that passed through Dennistoun Park was private land. There was a towpath that was open to the public, but angling had not been permitted from Sir Walter Pollard's time. He had wanted it for himself. Saint Oswald College had kept the land private as they did not want the great unwashed tramping over their hallowed acres. When Strathcadden Academy took over the land, the towpath was opened to the public, but angling was still forbidden. On the other bank was the Great Central Line which ran on a stone-faced embankment. There was an access path that was strictly for railway use only.

Each crew had three one thousand metre races which gave the audience gathered on the bank a total of six races. All crews were told to ignore the audience completely and treat it as a bit of training. The real racing was the following weekend. There were lots of stills and movies

taken that would be proudly uploaded onto computers as soon as the owners got home. All the coxes were given headcams as well, ostensibly for coaching purposes, but Craigie Boy would put them up on *You-Tube* later.

The races passed without incident, although Craigie-Boy managed to beach the launch much to the amusement of onlookers. The incident was well recorded and that too would go on *You-Tube*. As expected, the Men's Senior crew won all their races, although the Women's A crew (Hammond) gave them a very good race, fighting them every stroke of the way. The men won by less than half a metre. One or two rowing cognoscenti commented that Lisa Hopwood (rowing at 3) would be an asset to the powerhouse in any men's eight.⁶ One member of Corscadden Rowing Club commented to another member, referring to Salway as a "skinny runt" when he first saw the crews go out. Later he changed his assessment, stating instead that Salway would make a "good lightweight".

Among the audience were teams that had arrived early for the Scottish Schools' 20 k. This was just the name of the event. Only the Elite runners did the 20 k. There was a 10 k for less experienced runners, and a 5 k for the younger students. There was an event for teachers over the 5-k course, which left most of them puffing in like ancient steam engines in which the fires were about to go out. A couple of coaches from the other schools had seen Salway and Walker in the rowing race. The two would clearly not be racing in the 20 k, would they? Therefore, there would be two less in the opposition. The little nugget of information was fed back to the teams, especially those who were in the Elite divisions. Even if they were racing, they would be too knackered to be of much concern. Today was their day. They were going to smash this race.

After lunch, Christian Salway and Ewan Walker flopped out in Asher House for an hour. While the others would be doing the shorter

⁶ The *Powerhouse* is a term used in rowing to refer to the rowers in positions 3 – 6 in an eight-oared racing shell. They are usually the largest and strongest in the crew.

race, they were representing Strathcadden Academy in the elite men's race. It was going to be a tough call. They changed into their running kit. The sweatshirts had *Strathcadden Academy Running* on them. This was, no doubt, to remind the wearers what sport they were meant to be doing. (Several news reports at the time had shown professional English cricketers passing a rugby ball to each other during training, which may have gone to explain the parlous state of English cricket at the time.)

At 14.30, the Women's Elite 20 k started. At 15.00 hours prompt, Mr Mitchell sounded the air horn that sent the Men's 20 k runners on their way. Salway and Walker were determined that they would be in the first two, despite the fact that they had done three one thousand metre full-pressure rowing pieces. There were fifty other young men who were equally determined that they would be first. They were the elite and the object of being an elite sportsman was that you went all out to win.

Salway and Walker were masters of deception as far as race tactics were concerned. They would hang back sufficiently to allow those at the front to set the pace. They weren't slow, however. They knew the course like the backs of their hands. The steep climb from Rowallan Country Park to Barrock Cross would sort out all but the toughest competitors. Now it was downhill most of the way along the flank of Ben Morcharrie towards Sliver Glen. It was a well-made path; the National Trust for Scotland had spent a lot of money improving the paths to enable access for the disabled. That was when both would start to go for it. And that is what they did. Both Salway and Walker were determined that the other would come in second. They fought each other every step of the last 5 k. And there was a group of other fighters as well. The first five came in within ten seconds. Christian Salway beat Ewan Walker by less than a metre and was champion. Both flopped on the grass in heavy oxygen debt and Craigie Boy came up to them and said, "Salway! Walker! Don't you dare drop dead on me! I need you for the regatta next Saturday. Remember we're training two sessions on Sunday."

The opening act of the Corscadden Festival took place that evening in the Old Chapel. Last year, Aidy had given an organ recital. He was going to do another on Wednesday. Now it was Tamsin Heady who was not only playing the organ but did a couple of solo pieces on the piano, as well as playing with the orchestra. Aidy had passed Grade VIII piano but never felt he had the finesse that would be required to make it as a professional. He would remain a gifted amateur who loved performing and writing music. It would never be his day job. Tamsin Heady was something else.

Daniel Taylor was Master of Ceremonies. The Junior Orchestra gave their performance of Leopold Mozart's *Toy Symphony*. Craigie Boy and Miss Birch operated the whistles and the footy rattles. It was their quid-pro-quo for Peter Struther's input into the rowing squad.

Christian Salway and Ewan Walker were exhausted. They sat with Aidy and Jordan and allowed the music to flow over them. They remembered little of the concert. It had been a very long and tiring day. It had gone like clockwork apart from Mr Mitchell taking the phrase "smashing the presentation" rather too literally.

When they got back to Brewster House, all four of them crashed out and spent their first evening of being Auld Caddies fast asleep. Christian was holding one of his baby brothers to him as if he were a teddy bear.

Chapter 23

Saturday 4th July – Sunday 5th July 2015

Craig Farjeon and Emily Birch, with the help of Peter Struther, had managed to convert a squad of Secondary Six Caddies from raw novices to race ready in three weeks. It had required a lot of dedicated coaching and many hours down on the water. Emily Birch had now joined Corscadden Rowing Club and was well on the way to converting herself from something of a couch potato to a lean mean rowing machine. Both had taken part in the teachers' running race at the end of term and had come in high up the field. During the previous week there was training for the squad at six in the evening, which enabled the Caddies who had holiday jobs to finish work and get down to the boathouse. There were also a couple of very early morning sessions, starting at seven o'clock. These reminded Christian and others of the morning patrol.

On the Wednesday, the men had a go in the Eight. *Damfast* was designed for 90 kg rowers. The average for the Caddies was just under 70 kg, so the shell rode slightly higher in the water and was more challenging to keep level. However, the crew got used to it and it certainly sharpened up the technique. Therefore, after about half an hour, the shell was slicing through the water and seemed to be running on rails. An occasional stomach-churning lurch to one side or the other was enough to stop the crew from getting complacent. The women had a go on Thursday and found it the same.

The entries had been made, and the event was going to be bigger than the committee had thought. The race secretary spent a couple of evenings sorting out the programme of racing. The crews were coming from all corners of Scotland, including from the Clyde, Castle Semple, Tayside, and Edinburgh. It was one of Tay Rowing Club's first regattas; they had been founded only a couple of months before. Craigie Boy had had a quiet word with the race secretary to make sure that the Strathcadden Academy men's eight would have a hard first round so that it would be

more likely that the Corscadden Rowing Club senior eight would be in the final.

“Why are your lads rowing Senior, Craig?” said the secretary.

“Our stroke, Salway, was over eighteen at the start of last September. Only a couple of days, but that’s the way it goes.”

“He doesn’t look it. I’m sure he could get away with rowing junior.”

“I felt tempted to try it on, Davy, but I always get caught.”

Saturday 4th July dawned sunny and clear. The whole of the Corscadden Festival week had been blessed with glorious summer sunshine. While the winter could be fierce in Strathcadden, summer could be very benign, with temperatures well into the high twenties Celsius. The combination of the high temperatures and the mountainous terrain that surrounded Strathcadden could spark off ferocious thunderstorms, but these were rare in early July. Certainly, the weather was set fair for both days of the Strathcadden Regatta.

The Women’s Junior races were early, so Craig Farjeon and Emily Birch had got everyone down to the boat house for half past eight. The squad had diminished to eight men and eight women, but there were two enthusiastic coxes. A couple had dropped out over the previous three weeks, and a couple more distant Caddies had gone home. Farjeon and Birch had anticipated this, and everyone in the squad had been given a booklet on how to cox. Mr Farjeon had written it with the authority of eight months of rowing experience. Actually, it was a thorough document with Craigie Boy’s humour all over it.

It had helped a great deal in getting the students to know what this strange sport of racing in boats was about. As far as the rules of racing were concerned, it didn’t matter if coxes changed about for different races as long as they weighed more than 55 kg for the men and 50 kg for the women. Farjeon and Birch had made sure that all their squad had coxed, so that all knew the vital nature of the cox for the team. All of them were

competent and some were outstanding. Liam Cosgrave and Charlotte Allen were worth their weight in gold. Christian Salway (at 57 kg) would cox if both others were racing.

Junior Women's races had four entries, and both Strathcadden Academy crews won their first rounds. There was little difference between the two women's crews in training. Both Gemma Hammond and Shona Nelson were good leaders, and all the women were good athletes. Each crew could give the other as good as they got and there was quite a competitive spirit between them. And so, it proved that Saturday morning. The final was between Strathcadden Academy (Hammond) and Strathcadden Academy (Nelson). Each crew was determined that the other was going to come second.

The Strathcadden Regatta had a stakeboat start. This meant that crews had to back onto one of two small craft which had been firmly anchored into the bed of the River Cadden. In each were a couple of young lads (Caddies) who held the stern of the boat, releasing it when the umpire called "Go!"

The crews were now off the stakeboats, launching themselves up the course. Three and a half minutes does not take long, but when you are going totally flat-out, it seems ages. It did for the girls. Hammond and Nelson were at stroke (the rower who sets the pace) in each crew and they were not going to give in to each other, even though they were close friends. And the other girls backed each up. By the five hundred metre mark, both crews were neck and neck. There were hundreds of people on the bank, and the cheering was loud. It was a nice day out and there was a lot of racing to entertain the crowd. More importantly, like everything else during the festival, it was free. And they did not get much better value than this. Here were eight girls pulling their hearts out. Although they were very new to the sport, both crews stood out for having very neat blade-work, every bit as good as much more experienced teams. The situation remained the same at nine hundred metres and the commentary was, "...and this can be anybody's race. The girls are working incredibly

hard as they go into the last fifty metres. I think that the Hammond crew have a slight advantage over Nelson, but there is little in it.”

The commentator was right. There was little in it, half a metre at the thousand metre mark. As both crews crossed the finish line, all eight athletes collapsed in heaps over their oar handles, and the shells drifted in an ungainly way to a stop. It didn’t matter; both were over the line. “A win for Strathcadden Academy Hammond over Strathcadden Academy Nelson by half a metre. Please raise a cheer for both crews who have done so well, having started the sport just three weeks ago.”

For any rower, this kind of racing is all or nothing. The “all” consists of the elation of winning the final. The “nothing” is a gut-wrenching disappointment, although it can be tempered later by the fact you were very close and gave a truly good race. And this was the experience for the girls. And they were met by both Mr Farjeon and Miss Birch who were ecstatic. If they had tails, they would have been wagging furiously. Mr Mitchell and Mr McEwan had come down to watch the racing. Mr Mitchell had a good quality digital movie camera and had recorded the action from his vantage spot at the five hundred metre point.

Now it was the turn of the boys. There were three other junior men’s crews. There was no novice section for the senior men. So, they had to race crews who were not only older, but had more experience (and, in one or two cases, had drunk more “Heavy”). Benjamin Leigh was stroke for the Strathcadden Junior Men. In the first round they beat Castle Semple Junior Men by one length (about 9 metres). They had Clyde in the Final. For Christian Salway’s crew, the first round was a tough one. They had Corscadden Rowing Club, whose four was an experienced bunch, having trained and raced together for the best part of a year. They were also cock-sure of themselves, as not only were their opposition not worth eating, but also, they had only been together for three weeks. As they prepared to go onto the stakeboat, Christian said to his mates, “They’re big, but the bigger they are, the harder they fall. Don’t look at them. Just go like hell with me for three minutes.”

Perhaps it was complacency in the Corscadden crew, but they were slower off the mark than the Strathcadden Academy crew. Later one of them described the Salway crew as leaving the stakeboat like “shit off a shovel”. Once they had the advantage, the Strathcadden crew sat on their opposition. As the Corscadden crew fought to come through, Christian Salway took the rate of striking up. The larger crew did start to make ground, but not quite enough. If the course had been one hundred metres longer, they would have got through, but they ran out of course. Just as well, for the last ten strokes were getting scrappy; Christian’s crew was losing it rapidly and were about to fall apart. Like the girls, the boys collapsed over their oar handles after crossing the line. They had Stirling Rowing Club in the final.

As the squad had lunch Emily Birch set up her laptop and played the video clips that had been recorded, bringing out coaching points. There was a point to this. After lunch, the women were to go out in the eight to race. Theirs was a relatively easy race, for within twenty strokes of the start, the Glasgow crew’s 4-rower caught an almighty crab that stopped their boat dead, and it was a case of getting to the finish. It was certainly a misfortune for the Glasgow crew and Lady Luck was on the Strathcadden girls’ side that day, but it was all part of the game.

Stirling Rowing Club is one of the oldest clubs in Scotland. They have a reputation for turning out very competitive crews. For the Strathcadden crew it was going to be a very hard race indeed. Emily Birch briefed the boys about it, “They’re big lads with lots of experience. You though have good technique, and the crowds will be rooting for you. You must ignore them completely, like you did with Corscadden. Get up from the start and hold them.”

It was a nervous crew that left the hard standing. Their journey to the start was tense and they weren’t quite together. Liam Cosgrave was in the driving seat, and some exercises at the five hundred metre mark settled things down a bit. After they had turned, Christian said to his mates, “We are going out with a bang, not a whimper. They are big lads, fit, and good. I am going to fight them every stroke of the way and I need you to follow

me and back me up. It's going to be three minutes of the hardest work you have ever done. When Liam calls 'Up Two', don't shorten; keep it long. A burn for ten." They reversed onto the stakeboat. And the Stirling crew did the same. They were not complacent either, for they too knew that there was more to this lightweight school team than the sum of its parts. They had expected to meet the Corscadden crew in the final.

As in the first round, the Strathcadden Crew were off the stakeboat quickly and were a third of a length up after two hundred metres. The commentary said it all, "This is a very hard-fought race... It's very close, but Strathcadden Academy have a very slight advantage... The Stirling boys are fighting back... The Strathcadden boys have taken up their rate of striking to 43... This could be anybody's race... They are neck and neck as they go into the last hundred metres... It's a win for Stirling Rowing Club by less than a metre... An excellent race by any standard, please give a cheer for the Strathcadden boys who have only been together for three weeks..."

Craig Farjeon and Emily Birch greeted the defeated finalists with the same enthusiasm as they had the victorious women's squad. The Stirling crew sought the boys out after they had put their shell away. "That was a hard row you gave us. You did really well. Have you got any other races?"

"Yeah, we've got the Men's eight in two hours. We're racing the Sprints tomorrow."

"A piece of cake for you tomorrow. In a sprint, you would have beaten us."

Twenty minutes later, Benjamin Leigh's crew lost to Clyde by a similarly narrow margin. The Senior crew were there to greet them. They were looking a bit crest-fallen, so Christian said to them, "We've got the first round of the eight soon. We're going to get this race. Yeah?"

The first round of the Open Men's Eight event was next. Strathcadden Academy were drawn against Stirling again. As they waited to go onto the stakeboats, Christian Salway spoke to his crew, "Look, lads, they're big. They're good. But they only just beat us in the final in the fours. We're as good as they are. I told the four that we're going to fight them. Now I'm saying the same to you. When Liam calls 'Up two' at the five hundred mark, you must back me up. Keep it long. It will be quicker than the fours race. Let's smash this race!"

Again, the Strathcadden boys were off the start quickly. This time they were well ahead before Stirling got into their stride. For some reason, the Stirling eight did not seem quite to get it together. It can happen with any crew; however good they normally are. "... A win for Strathcadden Academy by half a length."

Craig Farjeon was not around. He was keeping a little low, because he was feeling a little uncomfortable that his Corscadden Rowing Club crew might well be beaten by his little... well they were no longer scrawny runts; they were a good lightweight crew. Still, the Corscadden boys had the advantage that they were fresh. Craigie Boy's lot had been racing all day, and they must have been knackered. Well, time would tell.

Which it did. The day's racing was not far off complete. Some spectators had gone home, but others had come down after a day's work. Included in these were Charles and Muriel Walker, whose interest was in two grandsons who were racing. Aidy had come down earlier, to be joined by Dad and Laura, with little Benjamin and Daniel in pouches. They loved riding on Daddy's shoulders and lots of people paid lots of attention to them. They were both very bonnie babies.

It was a hard race. The Corscadden crew gave no quarter, and it was neck and neck. It was declared a dead heat. The committee had borrowed photo-finish equipment from a friend who was in the trade. No amount of scrutiny could reveal a winner. The commentator announced, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted that we will be running an encore. The Open Men's Eights final was declared a dead heat and will be re-

rowed as soon as the crews get down to the start... We can be sure of a really close fought race..."

"Right lads," said Liam Cosgrave, "we're now going to show Craigie Boy and his mates a thing or two. Three minutes like you never have before. Usual up-two at the five hundred. Back Chris up like you did before. Back him up all the way to the thousand. Once past the thousand you can blow up, but not before. Craigie Boy asked the race secretary to give us a hard first round..."

"We will show him," said Chris.

The race was the hardest that any of them had ever done. As far as crews were concerned, it was something of a well-worn cliché to say it was David and Goliath. The racing shell, *Damfast*, had forced the Strathcadden crew to get well together by punishing lapses in technique by horrible lurches from one side to the other. On the other hand, it rewarded technique that was spot on by running as if it were on rails. The Corscadden crew had a newer shell that was much better matched to their size and was more forgiving. Both crews fought each other every stroke of the way. It required a superhuman effort, but Christian's tactic of up-two served them well at the five hundred, and they pulled up almost half a length. They had a "burn for ten" two hundred metres from the finish, and one hundred. It paid off. This crew of lightweight rookies had won the Open Eights Final by one quarter of a length.

The boys were all-in. The girls helped them out and helped them to put the shell away in the boathouse (the old rifle range). The elation at winning overcame their tiredness. There was no throwing the cox into the river as was often done in previous years at other regattas. This was a definite relief for Charlotte Allen and Liam Cosgrave. Not only would Craig Farjeon have had a fit, but also the practice had been banned by the race committee with the sanction of disqualification. The previous year there had been a scare in which a cox had almost lost consciousness on being thrown in as a result of cold shock. Fortunately, he had been fished

out in time but spent the night in hospital. What was said to his mates was not recorded, but they never did it again.

The Caddies sat chattering excitedly with other crews while they waited for the prizes. There was the prize-giving which was done by the Chairman, Mr MacKay, and the Patron, Sir Hugh Clayden. There were lots of divisions and the ceremony ran for half an hour before the Strathcadden Academy crew got their pots.

Mr Mitchell and Mr McEwan were still there and took pictures for the school magazine that was sent out every half term. Craig Farjeon and Emily Birch were noisy in their excitement as well. Although deflated by losing to his trainees, Craig Farjeon and Emily Birch were identified as being clearly talented coaches. They had booked a place on a coaching course over the summer. They would both be in demand at the rowing club as well as the school.

It was now getting late and both squads set out for home. As they walked past Fenton House, they saw that lots of tents had been pitched. It was a two-day event and there were the Sprints tomorrow. There were boat trailers on the running track with shells stored waiting for the next day's racing. There was a beer tent behind Dibben House and a marquee that hosted a disco behind Edwards House. The school had supported the event by making its facilities available. The Wests and Easts would see a lot of traffic, and each was left open overnight, as were the changing rooms and showers. The canteen staff had done the catering which not only provided ample good food but also turned in a handsome profit. By the end of the weekend, John the Jannie and Jannie Brian would certainly be entitled to their holiday, as well as being paid handsomely for their overtime.

Those of the squad who were distant Caddies came back to Brewster House. (Jordan had stayed there all week, as he was inseparable from Ewan.) Joby and Laura cooked plentiful good food for them all. They needed it, for they would be doing it all over again the next day. There was a lot of excited chatter downstairs. For Benjamin and Daniel

Walker, it was a feed and singsong with Mummy and sleepy time. Each was laid down in his cot, bunching up around the large toy dog that was his bed-time companion, and went out like a light.

(Author's note: Many years later, Benjamin told me that he could very vaguely remember being by the river in a backpack, and there were lots of people. He couldn't be sure if the memory was real, as it would be very unusual for a child that young to remember things. He said it could be a synthesised memory that came about when told little stories of himself as a baby, as he could imagine himself in the situation in a place with which he was very familiar. Daniel couldn't remember it at all.)

And on the Sunday, they did it all over again, except it was a 600-metre sprint downstream. This time there were no Junior Women, so the Caddie girls' crews had to race in Open Senior Women. Again, both crews made it to the final. And on this occasion, it was a win for Strathcadden Academy (Nelson) by two metres. Honours even.

The boys were in their element. When one of the Stirling Crew had told Christian Salway's four that they would have no trouble beating them in a sprint, he was right. First round in Senior Open Men, the Strathcadden crew (Salway) beat the Stirling crew by three-quarters of a length. And that set the scene for the semi-final and final. There was one entry for the Junior men (one other entry had withdrawn), and the Strathcadden crew (Leigh) won by half a length.

Not enough entries had been made for Women's eights, so for the rest of the day, the girls could relax by the river and enjoy the rest of the day's racing. Joby (with Benjamin and Daniel on his back), Laura, and Aidy were there, while Charles and Muriel Walker came down after morning service. Brenda Salway was there as well; she hadn't been able to be there on Saturday as she was driving her bus. She had been thrilled to hear of her grandson's success. It would have been wonderful if Brian had been there as well, but he was getting double time.

The crowd atmosphere was nothing like that of a similar event in the south of England. On the banks of the Thames people were there to be seen and seen to be seen. There were areas where only the “right type” could go in, while the riffraff had to make do with bits of the bank near the start. In Corscadden, it was a lovely family day out in the shade of the trees that lined the river. Food was available in the school canteen, and the caterer had pushed the boat out (if one could pardon the expression). The sun shone on. It was set fair for the next couple of days although later the next week the forecast said that there was likely to be a breakdown. In Strathcadden that could mean ferocious thunderstorms. So, the crowds enjoyed the good weather and harmonious atmosphere while they could.

Men’s Open Eights final was the last race of the day. Keillor Boat Club had sent an eight for the sprints and they had beaten Corscadden by half a length. Now they had Strathcadden Academy. They had only seen one race from this rookie lightweight crew but heard how well they had done yesterday. The boys must have been running on fumes. They were fresh. This was going to be an easy race. They were good at sprints; they only had a short length of water. Their coach was a graduate of Sheffield University and had raced in *Damfast*. He knew that with a lightweight crew, it could be a bugger. And you didn’t get much more lightweight than this bunch of Caddies. It would be a pushover.

Emily Birch had managed to earwig the conversation and fed it back to Christian Salway and Liam Cosgrave. “Right, Lads,” said Christian to his crew, “this is our last session together. We are going out with a bang. One and a half minutes, that’s all. This lot are dead-sure of themselves, and they are good. But we’ve been good as anyone this weekend. We’ll do a burn for ten every hundred metres. At the three-hundred-mark, Mouse will call ‘up two’. Back me up. Keep it long. Hard on the catch. By the time we get to the four hundred, there’s only thirty seconds left. Keep it there. At 601 metres, we can let it go. Keep alert and eyes in the boat. We must keep it together; otherwise, this boat will punish us. Keep it together, and you know what this boat is like.”

The Keillor crew gave as good as they got, and for the first four hundred metres it was neck and neck. Christian Salway was rating at 44, while the Keillor Crew were at 42. At the four hundred metre point, Liam Cosgrave called, “Up-Two and burn for ten!” Christian Salway took the rating to 47. His team gave as much as they could and took half a length. The Keillor lads took their rating up but tended to shorten their strokes as well. The Caddie crew sat on them for the final two hundred and collapsed as the shell had just passed the finishing line.

On the bank, the girls were sitting together and had been joined by Tamsin Heady. On the other bank (strictly out of bounds) sat a man and a woman partially hidden by some bushes. They were both in their thirties. Tamsin had brought her binoculars as she was an enthusiastic birdwatcher. Her subjects were definitely pair-bonding, not caring a hoot whether they could be seen by nosy Caddies. There were plenty of those in the crowd.

“Well, what do you know?” she said. “There’s Craigie Boy and Emily Birch over there. Gemma, you have a look.”

“Craigie and Emily are having a good snog,” Gemma replied. “Well, I never. I always thought Craigie Boy was a confirmed bachelor.”

“You know, I fancy Ewan Walker,” said Chloe Grey. “I’m going to catch him one day.”

“In your dreams, Chloe,” said Shona Nelson. “You know as well as I do, he’s gay with a steady boyfriend. You’ll make Jordan jealous.”

“Besides, you smacked him one in the gob in S3,” said Gemma.

“Well, he nearly gave me one back!”

“The Dragon did him over good and proper,” Shona added.

“I’ve always felt bad about that,” Chloe replied. “Ewan stood up to The Dragon. She used to go on about him being sexist. He shouted at the class that he was gay, and she went mad at him. Do you remember when Ewan finally flipped and said to her, ‘You are the ultimate sexist

degradation to women that I have ever met'? I think Ewan is so cute. He's so gentle. He's going to be mine."

"I fancy Christian Salway," Gemma Hammond replied. "He's not just fit; he's so cute as well."

"You fancy baby-faced boys?" said Tamsin.

"Oh, yes. I hate beards," said Gemma. "Chris hasn't started to shave yet and he's nineteen next month."

"He doesn't have any hair on his legs either," Tamsin replied. "They are like a girl's."

"Ewan's got lovely long legs and they're hairy," said Chloe, "and he's got such a lovely tight bum. I love it when he wears his short running shorts."

"Chris has got a lovely tight bum as well," said Gemma. "*Il a des jambes sublimes*. Besides, he's so sweet and gentle. In fact, he's a gentle man who is a gentleman."

"Craigie Boy wouldn't have had him in the squad if he had heard him try to say 'oscilloscope'. It was funny when he was trying to say it to you, Gemma."

"It was so cute," Gemma replied.

"You definitely fancy him," said Shona. "I thought you had a boyfriend."

"Yes, him from home. He dumped me. Dad said he was a loser. So, I'm available for Chris. He will be all mine. Tamsin, I thought you fancied Aidan Walker."

"I do. I want to lay my eggs in his nest. But he's so shy. Chris looks very like Aidy, doesn't he?"

"He does," said Gemma. "His mum married Aidy's dad last year. They had twin boys in February. I could swear that they're the spit of

Chris. In fact, Chris looks just like Aidy, except that he has long blond hair, while Aidy's is dark and shorter. They both look very like Aidy's dad. I think there's more to it than meets the eye..."