

Chapter 1

'I suppose I could collect my books and get on back to school...'

The desire to write a book had been in the back of Paul Rostran's mind for some time. He didn't enjoy all books, he only enjoyed some. They didn't have to be a particular topic, but moreover a particular style, more concerned with action, detail and the thoughts of the main characters.

'Not bad. I've read better by him' he thought, but the book started well and tailed off toward the end, deteriorating into tirade of abuse and expletives, probably accurately reflecting the language of the characters but not really adding much to the plot.

Paul had just spent sometime working away from home, he had felt that the language in the office had been unnecessary, believing that it had been condoned by the girls in the office, their use of language giving license to the lads who almost appeared to be oblivious to the language that they were using, and caring little if it offended. Paul had made a half hearted attempt to bring attention to this, on one occasion surprising the three people, two lads and a girl, when he explained that is old English Teacher, Harry Gilbert, a man of some considerable stature and education, had explained that he had felt that the best swear words created an explosive sound in your head. "BASTARD!" Paul had bellowed in order to convey the point, causing the three dubious listeners to jump back, startled by such a voluminous sound, evidently Harry Gilbert was correct.

Mind you, Paul hadn't always agreed with Harry Gilbert, he sometimes doubted his interpretation of *Sons and Lovers*, and as a result, had never cleaned his mother's shoes again. He remembered his portrayal of *King Lear* in which he cried, and the insistence that they read a poem, for all intense and purposes about a man cleaning his rifle, but apparently the poem had other connotations.

Paul had then gone on to explain to the three that it was amazing how many people used swear words and were unaware of the fact, the classic in his opinion being *Berk*, few of his acquaintances, if any, knowing the true meaning of this expression.

Paul had always had an interest in etymology, as opposed to entomology, he had once purchased a *Brewers Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* but found it to be of little value when trying to establish the origin of everyday expressions, finding the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* equally as informative; purchased in 1978 in order that it would assist in his degree, not that it had helped, but it proved to be interesting reading at times, in comparison to some of the 'informative articles' that he was expected to read.

Unlike his former wife who had enjoyed College, Paul had not felt that the experience had been that beneficial to him. He had made a big mistake in choosing a college close to home and thus staying at home for the full 4 years of the degree, a thick

sandwich. Furthermore he had continued with activities that had become the norm for him, out every night, most of them clubbing or working as a DJ, not giving the necessary attention to his studies that were required. He still had dreams about his final exams now, knowing that he had done enough preparation for the exams, but also knowing that he could have done more, but not convinced that a stronger final result would have made that much difference to his classification, and on reflection all these years later, not convinced that a different classification would have presented him with a much different lifestyle.

Yes he had made mistakes aplenty, some of them financial, some of them in love, some of them in choice of career, but all of them in life. Given the choice would he go back and alter his decisions?, it's easy to be wise after the event.

'I could write a book, or a short story at least' he thought, 'But what makes for the successful ingredients?' He was aware that courses are offered on creative writing or books available explaining a simple formula to follow, but because of what he was and where he had been he had to make the mistakes himself, perhaps that this would be another of those decisions that at sometime in the future he would wish he could have changed, that he could go back and spend the best part of a days wages on a book advising on a simple formula to follow, or spend a term at night school on creative writing.

Clearly the modern authors that Paul read worked to a formula, they, in their own way, had found a successful way of working, and having been encouraged by the financial rewards, no doubt, had stuck with it. Honing their craft just like a professional footballer has his own style, but can be encouraged to improve other skills, or a musician can be instantly recognisable just from a few bars on the guitar or piano. Paul was always baffled by the fact that he was considered to be tone deaf, the only thing that he could play was the fool, and he didn't do that very well, and yet he could recognise a tune from just a few notes, far faster than anyone else he knew. He remembered reading that every one could play an instrument, it was finding the right one that made the difference. He was also astounded that an acquaintance of his had to choose between being a heart surgeon and a classical pianist, but claimed that he could not play the piano without reading the music. Paul wanted to be 'the sit down at the Joanna and play' sort of musician like the man in the Fox and Dogs who could play, couldn't read music and was sadly losing his voice because of cancer, not that he sang anyway, but his interpretations and nuances breathed life into the tunes that his mother and father had been so fond of; his mother's crooning causing waves of both delight and embarrassment to Paul and Jane.

Clearly there must be beginning middle and end, he therefore would need a plot, twists and turns, it would be no use the end being instantly discernible; skulduggery and sex had to be good, but whilst not wanting to attain any plaudits, he did not want the book to be too intellectual, but of course it must not be too trashy, trashy was not where Paul was at.

Paul picked up a pencil and paper and began to scribble and doodle, some of his writing indecipherable and some of the drawings being of plants, leaves and shaded sorts of objects. He had quit art at school having to make the choice between History, Geography, Biology and Art, two of the four to be chosen. But he had always liked doodling and had once drawn the odd portrait, the best compliment he had received had been from his eighteen month old nephew, who had recognised a portrait of his grandfather, Paul's father. Looking at the drawings now they appeared to be crude, lacking depth and refinement.

The scribble and the doodle continued for well over 30 minutes, Paul being distracted by the Moms in particular, and the Dads less so, that walked past his window to collect their 'little ones' from school. Designer Moms he had heard some of them referred to, immaculately turned out whatever the time of day, some of them with nice new sports cars, Four by Fours or MPVs, appearing oblivious to the distance that they were driving and the fact that walking the one half mile would actually be more beneficial for them, their children, and just to be ecologically correct, for the planet as well. They no doubt felt that they did their bit for the planet by driving to the bottle and paper bank in the village, an action which appeared to be of some futility to Paul, if he were to believe what he had read. One or two of the DMs attracted his eye, he wished life could be simpler, he wished women could think like men, he only wanted a roll in the hay, he didn't want them to leave their husbands, he just fancied sex with an apparently attractive female. He had had several disagreements with Jane about monogamy, not that he had been unfaithful to her, not physically in any event, but according to his old RK teacher, a small man of strong Irish decent, to even think about it was adulterous. In Paul's view to not think about it would be abnormal; monogamy, in addition to being hard to pronounce, appeared to be a 'reasonable' human invention designed to provide an equitable share of female companionship et al to the male of the species, brought on more by the by the ratio of women to men, rather than by any biological or natural factor. And which silly sod confused sex with love? Paul remembered reading about Russian women who apparently accepted that their men would have mistresses, this largely brought on by the number of eligible Russian men that had been killed in the Second World War.

Despite growing up in a sexually liberated era, he had no sexual advances made to him since he had met Jane. This was partially because of the situations that he had found himself in, and his general demeanour toward single women at work, sure he had been interested in some of them, but had not found one to compare with Jane and as much as he fancied this 'roll in the hay', he hadn't been tempted to make the first approaches.

Jane had reckoned that he wouldn't be able to spot them anyway, and she was probably right. Besides, Paul had never been the sort of chap that stole other people's girlfriends, step in after a convenient time had lapsed sure, but he had never tried to woo or encourage a girl to break up with her partner.

It had happened to him certainly on one occasion, when he and his girlfriend, Lynne, had visited a College friend, and subsequently a nightclub, in Burton On Trent. Paul

had adored the girl, being the epitome of everything that he wanted at the time, as time was to prove the attraction wore off, but on the visit to Burton she had been plagued by the toe rag, Warren, that he had deigned to call his friend, being unable to escape the sexual innuendo, constant pawing, and the occasional tongue down her ear, despite standing within half a metre of Paul.

After what seemed an eternity of this behaviour, but was probably intermittent over something like thirty minutes, Paul had left the club, advising his 'friend' that he would see him on Monday at College. And see him he did, but Warren only shrugged it off, excusing himself because he had 'had a drink', and 'that it had only been a laugh.' Their friendship rapidly declined after this, Warren's presence always causing an uncomfortable feeling within Paul.

His thoughts and scribblings were broken by the pips on Radio Four, Four o'clock, there was an auction of some land at 5 o'clock in a nearby hotel, he had previously expressed an interest, the land being offered as pony paddock, but most interest would be shown because of 'Hope value'; that at sometime in the future you would be able to build on it, quintupling your investment at least. He decided to go, brushing his tousled fair hair into something more presentable, picking up his mobile phone, a pen, and the particulars that had been posted to him some two weeks previously. He couldn't possibly realise it, but attending the auction would change his life.

His first problem occurred as he pulled onto the road that would take him through his village, and ultimately onto the local hotel, he had neglected to remember that whilst he had just been distracted by the Designer Moms collecting their 'little ones', that they would now be collecting their 'bigger ones' from the local high schools. Paul did not like queuing at the best of times, but this seemed silly. As he sat and queued he recalled some of the moms he had seen in Long Stratford in the East Midlands, he did not know for sure, but they all looked old before their time, their clothes in the main being from the cheaper stores, a 'legging manufacturers dream', they appeared to be single and out of work, with each and everyone tied to both a pushchair and fag simultaneously, their badly spelt and naively crafted tattoos on display in both the summer and winter months.

What a contrast with the women surrounding him now, most of whom appeared to have been career women who had left the decision to have children a little later in life, 'until they could afford it.' But Paul knew that he was easily duped, he placed great store on appearance, dress, houses and cars, and had been fooled on more than one occasion, making assertions about people because of their material possessions.

The traffic lights went to green, and he managed to get through just as the lights changed, now driving through the village trying to watch the road rather than the well turned out sixth formers coming out of school. Some were undoubtedly attractive, most if not all looked young, and Paul wasn't into young. Of course he would be flattered to think at forty two, he was still attractive to an eighteen year old, but he certainly would not be interested in anyone younger than sixteen, and couldn't quite imagine the conversations and shared interests that they might have. At twenty nine he

had been chatted up by a seventeen year old, certainly mature for her years, too much make up huge knockers and a basque, and they had dated for a short while, but Paul had more in common with her father, and somehow felt guilty when Dad had interrupted their fooling around one time. It lasted about a month, he helped her through her driving test, and for some reason, he could not remember why, they called it a day. But he still remembered the awkwardness he had experienced when they had gone to the pub and had been introduced to some of her friends, Paul being by far the eldest.

Of course he did not avoid girls of eighteen, his local pub, The Gate Hangs Well, always referred to as the Gate and occasionally referred to by some wags as The Well Hung Gate, had recently become popular with the younger element in the village, as it did from time to time, and Paul was not oblivious to the talents that some of these young ladies exhibited in an unabashed way. What was an anathema to Paul was the attractiveness of some of the young rakes, who must have had plenty of money or big dicks, because they certainly failed to demonstrate any other desirable attributes.

Paul braked hard, even though he had only been travelling at fifteen miles per hour, someone in a red Audi, tired of waiting for a break in the traffic, had pulled out regardless of the prevailing traffic. Paul missed the Audi, this time he let it go, but he had been known to be quite demonstrative to what he considered to be bad and inconsiderate drivers. He arrived at the junction, Left on the dual carriageway and an altogether quicker route to the Pine View Hotel, Right taking the more scenic but altogether slower route. Right it was, he was in no rush, the Auction was 'to start at Five p.m. to the minute' and the journey would take him about twenty minutes.

He arrived unscathed and unflustered at the Pine View Hotel in good time, four forty by his watch, twenty minutes to go. He looked at the quaint hotel, a country period piece, built in the twenties he would imagine, lots of oak panelling, and beams, recently refurbished throughout with good quality carpet and fresh magnolia paint. Nothing too gaudy or brash, but not unpleasant, and he would imagine practical in terms of upkeep, no ripped wallpaper, any damaged or dirty walls requiring a wipe at best, or a lick of emulsion at worst.

He followed the signs to the Wimborne Suite where the Auction was being held. There were approximately thirty chairs in the room, and liberally distributed amongst them were details of the land being sold. Paul had brought his own, the guide prices being offered to him over the telephone by a very pleasant Scottish lady, an employee of Dickerson Wright, who was only too glad to be of assistance. At the top of the room were three long tables end to end, bedecked with papers, glasses, a bottle of orange squash and a jug of water. Behind the desk sat one man, late fifties early sixties, dark suit, grey hair, grey moustache; Paul was reminded of Mr. Pastry a televisual buffoon from the late sixties.

Paul chose a seat in the middle of the room, adjacent to, but not next to, an old farmer like chap, probably sitting on a fortune but would never show it. Paul's positioning was deliberate, he was here for the interest, not to buy. He had looked at the land and

considered it to be worthwhile, but his investment would need to be in the order of twenty thousand pounds, and right now he had other plans for the twenty thousand pounds he had managed to accumulate. If he had meant business, Paul would have sat close to the front in order that he could attract the Auctioneers eye.

Two men sat to Paul's left, something about their demeanour indicated that they meant business, something about their odour indicated a lack of deodorant. For some reason they moved, forward a row and to Paul's right, Mr. B.O. sitting close to the pillar that protruded into the room. Then in came a 'Farmers wife' who sat in the same seat next to Paul, she leant across him talking to the 'Old farmer' on his right, Paul offered to let 'Farmers wife' past to the seat between him and the 'Old farmer', which was accepted, and earwigged in on the conversation.

"I've offered him thirty five thousand for these two paddocks next to ourn, and ee's turned it down." she said.

"He'd o' turned it down if you'd of offered him double!" said 'Old farmer' "He's like that!."

She repeated herself drawing on the plan, and indicating the two paddocks she meant, "Nine acres that was, but ee's split it into two."

Paul's maths did not manage to get the two paddocks, as indicated from the corner of his eye, to total to nine acres. She was trying to do a long hand sum 35,000 divided by 9, it took sometime, 4,000 was close enough for Paul, particularly after commission and other fees would need to be paid.

The room was filling now, every chair occupied, Paul's view was obscured by an immense chap that had sat smack bang in front of him, unfortunately obscuring the view of the Vendors Solicitors, two very attractive women, business suits one black one grey, black briefcases, very well presented, circa thirty years of age, nothing like Paul's Solicitor, male mid fifties.

A smart rap on the table interrupted the general hubbub, Mr. Pastry announced that "it was one minute after five, and he was here to sell." In a convivial sort of way he described what was on offer and the terms and conditions of the sale, advising that he had "divided the land up into small paddocks to enable the towns folk to be able to purchase a piece of England", and announcing that he wasn't known as the 'Farm Breaker' for nothing. Off came his jacket and a transformation occurred, no more Mr. Pastry, this man meant business "No Reserve, I'm here to sell!, who'll bid me fifteen?..., fourteen?..., twelve?...., c'mon bid me, twelve it is at the back, we have twelve. This is cheap land!, who'll give me thirteen?, thirteen at the front, fourteen, fourteen on my right" Mr. B.O. was bidding. "Fifteen, fifteen down at the front, sixteen sir, c'mon I have to earn my commission somehow, sixteen sir on my right, seventeen at the front, eighteen on my right, nineteen at the front, twenty on my right, twenty on my right, any improvement on twenty?, twenty once, twenty twice, I'll take five hundreds, twenty thousand five hundred at the front, thank you sir!, twenty one thousand, thank you sir, twenty one five, twenty two, twenty two five." The bids were see-sawing between two bidders would Mr. B.O. bottle out? "I have twenty two thousand five hundred pounds at the front, any more bidders, you sir?" B.O. indicates

'No not this time'. "Twenty two thousand five hundred pounds once, Twenty two thousand five hundred pounds twice, all done then at Twenty two thousand five hundred pounds!" followed by a load rap on the table.

A trainee leapt forward from the wall, thrusting a pen and paper into the successful bidder's hands, "Can I have your name please sir?" The victor, a normally inconspicuous man, medium height, dark hair, moustache, late thirties early forties, ill fitting suit, much older friend, obliged.

"Do you want lot two at the same rate sir, as per the conditions?" Mr. Pastry enquired. A nod of acceptance followed.

The hubbub started up again, quick calculations followed, almost six thousand five hundred pounds an acre, they were corner plots but apparently not good for pasture, at least not according to 'Farmers wife' and 'Old farmer' next to Paul.

"Lot three then" announced Mr. Pastry, "Bid me!.. fifteen thousand at the back, fifteen thousand." The piece eventually sold to Mr. B.O. for a lesser rate but a greater price, B.O. declining the opportunity to buy lot four. B.O. accepted the piece of paper from the trainee, and scribbled his name and address on the paper, Paul read trying to be surreptitious, John Shovlin, The Moot House, Half Shire Lane, Claybridge, Worcs. At least, that was what he thought he read. There was also a telephone number but Paul only caught part of it treble six, two, nine, three; he did not see the prefix. Shovlin was fifties, portly, medium height, specs and vest, it was visible through his 'blue seen better days' polo shirt. It was his briefcase that appeared to suggest business, no one else in the room had one, apart from the two good looking solicitors, perhaps it was full of cash, or perhaps he had his sandwiches in there.

The bidding resumed and finished, Mr. Pastry commenting "Always a bid of fifteen from you to start sir!, no danger there then!" the remaining plots selling quickly to different purchasers. The two parcels that 'Farmers wife' had offered a total of thirty five thousand pounds for prior to the auction, selling for eighteen and seventeen thousand pounds respectively. She appeared to be less than pleased, and was telling 'Old farmer' so. Paul stood up to leave as Mr. Pastry was making announcements about the next auction on October the seventeenth, comprising some attractive cottages, but no one was listening.

Paul stepped through the people and into the foyer, looking for the Gents sign, he went in relieved himself, washed his hands, cursed the broken dryer and exited through the foyer and into the car park. 'Blast', he was blocked in by another car, a green convertible with trade plates in the window. He recalled seeing the car as he had driven to the Pine View, at that time it had been for sale on a garage forecourt, just over five thousand he recalled.

Unusually Paul got into his Mondeo estate rather than look for the owner, it was about to be changed, he had ordered himself a new BMW five series due in October, costing an arm and a leg, no discount, six months waiting list, and 'by the way we'll give you peanuts for your car sir!.' Shame really the Mondeo estate was a Ghia model, diesel,

electric everything, wood, air conditioning, no leather and no image, Mr. Steady, Mr. two point four children, except he didn't have any. It had been a practical choice, does the job, does it well, and at the right price, but what did it say about Paul?

He had owned several cars in his time, his favourites being the cheapest, a fifty pound transit van, a one thousand pound Renault; he'd once bought a 1971 Mercedes 280SE with a personalised registration for six hundred and fifty pounds. It broke down on the way home, the fuel pump being knackered, but fifty five pounds and his friends expertise had fixed it. It ran for eighteen months and then the mechanical fuel injection unit was shot. Several people tried to fix it, none succeeded, he called the local Mercedes dealership "I'd like a fuel injection unit for a 1971 280SE please, "Yes Sir"

"Do you do part exchange on these units?"

"No sir not on the fuel injection units, we can get you one, it will be one thousand and twenty eight pounds ten pence sir."

"Ah, I only paid six hundred and fifty for the car, I'll have to think about it, thanks!"

Times were hard then, no spare cash, overdrawn, and growing every month, so he sold it, four hundred and fifty pounds including the personalised registration, which would probably fetch two thousand pounds today, some fifteen years later, but it's easy to be wise after the event. He had towed it to the buyer's house, an old ambulance he was converting to a caravanette, a hole in the wall where he was building a serving hatch, carpet tiles on the floor covered in bread crumbs and other debris that Paul did not want to enquire about, and a disbelieving wife complaining about the purchase and the fact that he never finished anything. But he must have done, because on several occasions Paul saw the car being driven about, looking superb with its beige leather and shiny dark green paintwork.

He turned on the ignition, opened the roof and lowered his window, although it was early October, today had been a warm day, this partially excused Mr. B.O. He turned on the radio, radio four, the news was being summarised, it must be five thirty, something about Ireland, something about the Royal Family and the late Princess Diana.

The convertible owner returned, short, tubby, black Tee shirt, no apology jumped in drove off. It was then that Paul noticed something amiss, buyer of Lots one and two, Mr. Inconspicuous, looking extremely pleased and being exceedingly jovial with buyer of Lot number three Mr. B.O. Paul thought this strange as effectively they had between them bid the price up on the land, O.K. it ensured that one of them had managed to get the land, but could they have got it at a lower price?

He turned down the volume on the radio, could he here what was being said?, no, only the road noise from the adjacent A road, and the four men laughing. The only thing he managed to catch was "Later John" and "Yes bye Peter." as the men headed toward their respective vehicles, Green Discovery for Mr. Inconspicuous and friend; Silver Mercedes E class for Mr. B.O., new model; and Jaguar XJ6, old model for B.O.s friend. Why Paul made a note of the registrations was a mystery, but he did, scribbling

them down on the details that he had taken to the sale. The cars and their occupants pulled off heading in different directions on the A road. Paul started the Mondeo, waiting for the yellow glow plug light to extinguish, and pulled off in the same direction as the Mercedes.

He had no intention of following the Merc, in any event he couldn't see it in the distance, furthermore he was stuck behind a Metro, Jane's object of hatred when it came to cars; "You can always bet there's a Metro at the front of a queue of traffic." she had propounded. This had in fact turned out to be true on several occasions, for some reason the cars appeared to appeal to elderly men and women, and the men still insisted on wearing flat caps or trilbys whilst driving their cars.

The Metro turned off, giving no indication, the road was clear Paul accelerated, he crested the brow of the hill and remembered he needed some spuds, he indicated and pulled into the local farm shop.

He wandered in, looked around, no one about, he perused the bags of spuds, names he had never heard of before, he wanted Wilja, but only Maris Bard were available 'a good all round potato' the sign read. Two pounds fifty pence for a fifty five pound bag, one pound eighty for a twenty eight pound bag. Normally he would have bought the larger bag, but now he was on his own, he thought that he had better buy the smaller of the two. Still no one appeared, he called out, still no reply, he checked his change, one pound eighty was deposited on the scales, he picked up the half bag and left slowly, trying to be more obvious than usual, driving the Mondeo very slowly from the shop in case an assistant, rearranging her clothes after hanky panky in the hay barn, should come running after him, but no one did. Paul had never had a roll in the hay not literally anyway, it struck him that it could be rather unpleasant, or was he thinking about straw rather than hay?, "No sense of adventure." Jane would have said.

He continued homeward, calling in at a local garage, inquiring as to whether the proprietor would like to buy his car.

"Not my type of vehicle Old Son" the dealer had replied "But it's a shame to pass up on an opportunity"

A rapid series of questions followed and he wrote the answers in a large A4 book.

"Miles?"

"Owners?"

"Colour?"

"When?"

"Extras?"

"Name and Number?"

"So you want eight two five o!" the dealer had said

Paul screwed his face up "More if possible, I know what it's worth, you'll sell it for nine and a half"

"I'll be in touch, see what I can do." the dealer said.

Paul left, 'Prat' he thought.

He drove home and pulled slowly onto the drive, parking so that Jane could drive straight into the garage. Then he remembered, Jane wouldn't be driving straight into the garage. Jane wouldn't be doing anything with him anymore.

He still hadn't got used to the idea even though a month had passed. Arrived home one Friday evening from London to find a note "Gone to Mom's, will call later." 'That's unusual' Paul had thought 'hope Jane's Dad's O.K.' But it wasn't Jane's Dad and it wasn't Jane's Mom. When the phone rang it had been Jane.

Upshot was that whilst Paul had been working in London, eating in Sainsbury's at night, buying reduced jam doughnuts for breakfast, and drinking the crap beer alone, in the pub next door so he could sleep through the noise from the six track railway, main line into Paddington, Jane had been 'comforted' by a colleague from work, the one who's wedding they had attended two months earlier, the one who appeared to know more about Paul than Paul would have expected.

Paul did not bear a grudge 'Say Tara Tara!', he had never expected their marriage to last as long as it did, seven weeks and two days short of ten years, not these days anyway, too many temptations, too easy to split up and different mores. Strange thing was, he hadn't expected the split to be caused by Jane.

Once he had recovered from the shock, he thought that he had got over it, but as yet he hadn't gotten back into the swing of being single, and didn't feel he could go through the Night Club routine again, not at forty two. He had friends that still did, and well remembered some of the guys that frequented the clubs and wine bars when he was younger, good looking guys, tanned well groomed, wad of cash and bimbos in tow, car dealers, double glazing factory owners, ex footballers and scrap merchants.

Paul hadn't been to a Night Club since he had met Jane, well only once on a friend's Stag Night, truth was he had told Jane that 'The only reason that he went to Night Clubs was to Pick Up Women', not that he had much success, that's probably why he had spent so much time in them. He remembered a doorman he had been friendly with, five foot six, but built of 'skin and concrete.' 'Better off going down the Library!' he had declared to Paul one night, Paul didn't exactly agree but knew what he meant. Dead now, died in bed with his girlfriend half his age, heart attack, too much booze they said.

Anyway next week could be different, Paul had decided to go away for a week, last minute availability, S' Algar in Menorca, somewhere quiet, although there was method in his madness, on past holidays with Jane he had noticed that when they went away, there were always lots of single Moms, usually with Gran and the kids or something like, hopefully looking for a holiday romance with a good looking cheerful chappy, that would treat them well and bring a smile to their faces whilst Gran was baby-sitting. But that was Saturday and today was only Tuesday, three more days to go.

Things were not going well at the moment, just as he had thought their life was on the turn for the better, he had suffered a number of blows. Whilst in London he had been

offered a twelve month contract working for the local authority that was in the process of rewriting their systems. Systems was what Paul did, he never tried to explain to people unless they pushed, he simply said he worked in computing, when asked. This was marvellous news, seven miles down the road, a good rate of pay and guaranteed for twelve months, rather than renewable every three months, offering some security for the next year. He was enjoying the job in London, but disliked being away from home, it wasn't as bad as he had imagined it would be, but his time in London had had other repercussions.

One night whilst in the hotel he had been startled by two loud bangs against the wall, lowering the volume on the television, he listened and heard raised voices, they subsided and no more was heard. During the night he awoke at three thirtyish, he could hear voices in the next room, but everything seemed to be O.K. At six o'clock he was awakened by a loud bang against his wall, this time the voices were raised, he heard at least two slaps or thumps and a female crying; "Why do you always have to hit me?" she had said through the sobbing.

Paul did not know what to do, he had looked in the corridor, nothing, no one else, there were no telephones in the room, so he couldn't call reception and it wasn't in the same building, but he did have a mobile phone, should he call the Police? Retrieving the hotel bill, from his overnight bag he found the telephone number and called reception

"O.K. we'll send someone across." said the night porter.

The sobbing continued the male voice getting louder, some half baked apologies, what should Paul do?, he had shaved washed and dressed, but still no one from reception had arrived.

He craned out of the window to hear more, "Stay away from me", the sobbing continuing, another slap? yes, louder sobbing, then a train thundering past.

Paul left the room, he made down the corridor for the room next door and hesitated, Why couldn't anyone else here this?, he turned went back to his room and collected his car keys.

He left his room and went downstairs to the car hurriedly, his legs were aquiver, he opened the door, and sat in the drivers seat with the key in the ignition. Thumping the steering wheel hard, he got out of the car and opened the boot, he rummaged amongst a crate that he carried all sorts of rubbish around in, shutting the boot he went back upstairs and back to his room.

More craning out of the window, more sobbing "It's all swollen now." from the female voice.

"Be quiet you fucking whore!" the male voice had said, another slap louder sobbing, then the roar of another bloody train as it sped on into London.

Paul left the room, he stood in front of the door his legs uncontrollably shaking and thumped on the door with the palm of his left hand.

No reply, more sobbing, he thumped again, seconds passed and the male voice asked from the other side "Who is it?"

"Hotel Management." Paul replied hoping that the tremor in his voice was indiscernible to the guy on the other side of the door, "We've had a complaint about

some noise, we want to make sure everything is all right, can you open the door please?"

Paul knew he didn't have to open the door, the Management had to be invited into the room and could not enter uninvited, he hoped that the guy inside did not know this. The door opened six inches, nine inches, a foot; Paul, six foot two and fifteen stone but not exactly all muscle, pushed hard and rapid, sending the guy backwards, at the same time Paul had swung his right arm in a rapid downward movement revealing and extending a steel wheel brace he had just recovered from the car. Left arm outstretched, and with the wheel brace resting on his right shoulder, the cold of the steel was perceptible against his neck, he entered the room.

Paul moved further into the room. The guy moved back toward the bed standing there, all of five four, nine stone, clad in red and white striped boxer shorts and white socks an Asian guy in his twenties, a real 'rough tough hombre.'

Paul viewed him with complete contempt, no one deserved to be treated like this. The room itself looked a wreck.

Over on the sofa bed by the window, curled up, was an Asian girl, twenties, probably good looking, but not at the moment, swollen and bruised face, and streaked mascara, dressed only in red knickers and red bra. Paul noticed the damaged wall where an empty bottle of Budweiser had been thrown against it, still intact, it lay on the floor. "You stay exactly where you are, or so help me I'll let you have it." Paul announced. The Asian girl did not move.

"Are you O.K.?" Paul stupidly asked of the Asian girl.

"Just go, leave us alone." she blurted trying to hide her swollen face.

"What?" exclaimed Paul "After what he has just done to you!"

"Just go!"

"Yeah just go, it's none of your fucking business man!" the Asian guy moved toward Paul, Paul flipped and brought the brace hard against Asian guys upper left arm "You Bastard." Paul said and hit him again on his thigh. Asian guy collapsing on the bed. Asian girl sobbing louder, but this was somewhat drowned out by the wails of pain from the Asian guy.

Paul backed out of the room, glancing over his shoulder as he went, as he stepped into the corridor he was aware of several other people's doors ajar, concerned about the commotion, and standing right behind him was Sammy, the Hotel Assistant Manager.

Sammy ushered Paul into his room, "You shouldn't have done that Paul, he's bound to call the Police. You get off to work and I'll try and smooth things over' Sammy disappeared next door to try and placate the Asian couple.

Paul went of to work mulling the incident over and over. He knew that two wrongs didn't make a right, but what should he have done? Glad the Asian guy hadn't been six foot six and twenty stone, still that was why he had taken the wheel brace.

When he returned back to the hotel from work that night, there was a Police car in the car park, two officers. He was asked to accompany them to the local Police station to answer certain allegations that had been made against him by a Mr. Khan.

The Police had been semi sympathetic, but had warned that he should not have taken the law into his own hands, it could have been dangerous, and they were trained to deal with these sorts of situations.

Despite all of his protestations Paul left the station two hours later, feeling guiltier than the 'rough tough hombre' that had beat up on his girlfriend. They would be in touch.

With the threat of legal action hanging over him, Paul had spent many restless nights. Not only that, but it was during his last three weeks in London, that he returned home one Friday night to find the note from Jane.

So he was glad when the contract came to an end and his new contract started.

Everyone at the new site was amicable enough, a fair mixture of blokes of differing nationalities, ages and origins. The first week went well, the work was of interest to him and being at home was a big help.

It was on the Wednesday of the second week that he realised something was wrong rumours were spreading that the Project was being terminated.

When he turned up at seven forty five on Thursday morning, there was an abundance of security guards. No one could log on, people milled around, an announcement was made at nine a.m. Two hundred contractors were told to clear their desks and leave by lunchtime. They would be paid for fourteen days in lieu of notice. 'Bugger!'

Hence Paul had no job, no wife, a threat of a court case, and time on his hands, which was why he had attended the auction. When he told one of his neighbours he remarked dryly "Did you ever run over a Nun?"