

1. The primary source

‘Resolve to find thyself; and to know that he who finds himself, loses his misery.’

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Monday 16th September – Day one

It is quiet, a few bottles and some food wrappings are all that are left from the partying by late night revellers now silent in sleep. He is alone on the streets. A tight knitted black cap pulled over his ears sits high on the upturned collar of his long dark coat that flaps its rear vents as he walks. His hands are buried deep in his pockets. From a distance the outline and posture of his body resembles that of a rook – dull, black and wary. The yellow streetlights follow his progress, like theatre spotlights they track him as he passes from one to the next, until finally he steps off stage into the dark and is gone.

In the blackness of the shadows his eyes peer forward as if staring into a dark underground tunnel, in the centre a rectangular shape: black upon black like the colours of a despairing Rothko painting. After a few seconds, his eyes adjust to the gloom and the darkness lifts. Ahead, the shape of the narrow alley’s perspective is defined. At the far end and about nine feet from the ground is the fire escape ladder that was added as a planning condition when the four-storey house was an old people’s home before it was converted into flats. Above he sees the window, no light just the murky darkness of months of unwashed grime. He walks slowly and silently down the lane.

His dark clothes cloak him from the street and his shape shrinks to no more than the weakest of traces as he walks on.

After eight, cushioned, but purposeful strides he is under the ladder. He looks up, draws out the extending pole from inside his coat, slides it to its full length, reaches up and clasps the end rung with its hooked finger. A sharp tug and the ladder jerks free. Supported by the pole it lowers gently to the ground like a flag from its mast. Then he telescopes the shaft into a short stick and slips it back into its pocket. It is the detail that matters and the detail is, as always, perfect. As he climbs like a trapeze artist, smoothly and silently skywards, his soft shoes make no sound. When he reaches the landing he rolls down his knitted cap, which instantly becomes a mask: a black Balaclava with three tiny slits. He takes off his coat and lays it down gently on the metal grill at his feet. From a pocket deep inside he withdraws a long thin bar. He guides the thin metal flange effortlessly between the top and bottom window frames and then with the smallest leverage releases the aged worn catch easily. After an audible intake of breath he pushes the window open in one easy movement. A knee on the sill, a little spring and he is up and in. He starts to close the window behind him, but when it is halfway down it squeaks so he stops pushing. A little extra pressure is applied in the right place and it closes without a sound. He raises his hands in the air, smoothes each of the wrists of his black latex gauntlets and listens. It is deathly quiet apart from the sound of his muffled breathing and his pumping heart. As his eyes adjust to the light from the neon brightness that spills under the door, he scans the room. He sees the outline of a bed and a desk with a computer VDU; its screen is blank, dull and idle. He is ready.

In the gloomy darkness he takes four paces and he is there. His legs slide apart as his right hand grabs the door handle, next he turns the round wooden knob slowly until there is a faint click

from the old brass latch as it frees itself from the jamb and then he stops. His fingers move from the handle to his side and flick up the leather retaining-strap, a second later the hunting knife's long steel blade is drawn clear of its holder. As if pulled by a magnet, the chink of light from under the door strikes the blade at its sharp tip and travels along its steel shaft like a strip of smooth silk, flashing as it traces its edge; a ridge of constant peaks, each sharper than a razor. He lifts the blade to his face and with a flick, like the blurred fingers of a poker card player, the blade and handle are reversed. The blade between his fingers picks up the whites of his eyes as he draws the grip up to the slit under his nose and breathes in deep. The embalmed leather handgrip secretes a pungent sour smell of salt and musky sweat. His first snort is like the rush from a line of coke, addictively stimulating, the second floods his senses as if it has been injected straight into his vein; he shivers once, throws his head back and then is deadly calm. A few seconds later he grips the door handle in his left hand and with the other lowers the knife to waist height.

He presses his shoulder flat against the wall, listens and then eases the door open just enough to scan the hallway with his right eye. All he can see is a small table with a lamp burning bright – it is clear. He puts his ear to the space and listens again – nothing. He takes another look along the corridor and then he slides his head into the space and checks both ways. He crosses the passageway and turns off the lamp. This takes away the bright glare, but there is still dusky light from the street through the window at the end of the corridor.

He makes his way to the first door, stops and listens. He switches the knife to his left hand and turns the door handle with his right. The door opens – the sitting room – he closes it again. Another few steps and then he follows the same procedure; he listens carefully

for the sound of breathing. All is quiet so he opens the door just enough to identify the room – it is the kitchen. Along and across the hallway to another door, he stops and listens – this is the one he is looking for.

The nasal draws of breath and the slow expelling snores confirm that there is someone in there. He puts his hand in his trouser pocket and takes out the newspaper cutting. In the gloomy light he can still make out the face of the man in the newspaper picture. Ernst Muche is smiling. In the black and white photograph his gold front teeth look like dark cavities. The head, frozen by the camera, shows a shiny bald pate with strands of hair standing straight up in the wind. He nods and puts the cutting back in his pocket.

As he opens the door wide the faint light sweeps across the dark room until the widening beam stops over the snorer's face. It is an ugly face with piggy eyes, a wide twisted nose and a walrus moustache. Long wisps of hair drape over the pillow, their follicles rising from the side of an otherwise shiny bald head. "The photo flatters you Mr Muche," he muses. "The next one will suit you better."

He walks right up to the bed and leans over to within a few inches of his face and smells him. Muche is heavily scented. It smells of the sea, biting and sharp, but sweeter. "Davidoff Cool Water," he whispers to himself. The scent blends uneasily with Muche's overpowering and foul smelling body odour. He lifts a magazine off the bed. It is pornographic with pictures of a man having anal sex with a woman who is tied to a bed while another man is whacking her with a studded belt. He lays it on the table at the side of the bed with many others, each of which display depraved sexual acts. He places the razor edge of the blade about an eighth of an inch from Muche's skin and traces it down one cheek, under his chin, around the swell of his Adam's apple, then up his other cheek, and stops just below his right eye. He holds it there as he closely studies

the mottled skin, its little blemishes, lines and folds. "What is in this face that tells us that you are a beast?" he asks himself. "Is it your thick nose hair with their long and springy thin strands of steel or is it your sparse and patchy eyebrows like stubble?" He wonders if these are clues.

It is so easy now; the meticulous planning from somewhere deep in his subconscious takes over. He knows exactly what to do. He is no Jack Ruby. This isn't a one off: for Muche is number three. He is a ghost with no identity and he knows that there will be more.

He focuses on the eyelids and watches the fine blue veins dance as Muche's eyes roll from side to side. He wonders if he is reliving the rape of Miss Joyce Walters, a librarian, spinster, and virgin until Muche had got hold of her, dragged her to an alley and plundered her. There is a smile now on Muche's face, a kind of smirk.

"You knew she couldn't make you; corpses don't talk or point, you made sure she couldn't. You were lucky the prosecution was pathetic, but your luck has just run out." Muche's eyes, still closed, are even more active now. "Does your fantasy have more than one Miss Walters?" The black and white picture of Muche grinning flashes across his mind. "You, may have loved it rapist, but you don't deserve to be admired or loved even by scum like you." He traces the knife point down the cotton cover sheathing Muche's bloated body and stops at the pronounced bump of his penis. He draws around it. "Such a pathetically small salami for such evil hurting and degrading. Si mangiore," he whispers. Muche's body shifts, then settles.

He looks around in the gloomy light and sees what he is looking for. He leaves his sleeping victim and walks quietly to the chest of drawers. He slides the deepest drawer at the bottom and immediately the camphor fills his nostrils and his receptors identify it immediately – Eucalyptol. With one hand he empties the clothes

onto the floor. He picks up the glossy photographs that were hidden by the clothes. These are of battered and bruised women; each picture defaced – the eyes have been removed. His stomach churns and he throws the photographs down where they slide across the floor. He runs his hand along the inside of the drawer and then returns to the bed. He has work to do.

The invading grating sound of a bin lorry's rising arms as they swallowed the contents of wheelie bins ten floors below drew me out of my sleep. When I opened my eyes the bright light from my reading lamp momentarily blinded me. I drew back too quickly and pain shot from my neck through my body. The blood supply to most of my joints had been cut off by my unintentional yoga position on the sofa. My head throbbed and my swollen tongue pushed hard against my teeth, clawing for water. I could have been surfacing from one of my late night sessions in The Horseshoe bar, but I had been home all night. I was still dressed in my painting clothes – T-shirt and underpants. I felt like shit. It all flooded back, the whole fucking goodbye scene welled up in my head. I had been on my own for only two days since Liz walked out on me and I was already living like a 'dosser'. She warned me that I was heading for another one and she was probably right. That's the problem with mental illness you don't recognise it sneaking up on you and when it does it's too late to save yourself. Just then I never gave it a minute's thought: I had a job to do and that was all that mattered.

I levered my body into a sitting position and as I swivelled around I clocked the painting through the opened sliding door to the studio. I covered my eyes and groaned at yet another fuck up. The person that I had been trying to paint had a lot

to do with my wife Liz leaving. When her patience eventually ran out she was standing among the prints that had spilled: a collage of his butchery; his not for human consumption grisly handiwork surrounding her like a rug speckled with red, brown and black, releasing the dam of anger that she had been holding back for days. Thanks to him in my trance-like existence, however, I had been unaware of it building. I tensed and cursed myself for being so dumb. I sat where I was for a few minutes and stared out the window. Our apartment, on the corner of the top floor of a converted office block, had wonderful views south across Glasgow's city centre to the river and east over the M8 to the hills beyond. I could tell from the traffic, what time it was and if I was to catch the 8.45 BA flight I needed to get up so I slung my legs around and rested my naked feet on the smooth beech flooring. Just then the BBC's Breakfast television theme blared out from my plasma screen in the sitting room – 7.30 and my wake up call. Reluctantly, I got up.

I checked the phone – no messages; nothing from Liz. 'Fuck it' filled the air. I lumbered to the bathroom and squatted on the loo. I sat there with my head resting in my hands, elbows on my puny knees and unloaded last night's carryout pizza. Was this as bad as it could get I asked myself. I knew the answer was no. At least some of the crap from the past few days got flushed away. I dared to look in the mirror. The enervated face reflected how I felt. The heavy sunken eyes matched the growth of stubble that covered my chin – black and dull. I instinctively stuck out my tongue; its grey furry coat resembled something ejected from Iian Mellis' cheese shop. I pulled the disgusting organ back inside.

I hauled off my paint-splattered T-shirt, spun the taps until the sink was full and then plunged my head into the water. The shock blasted me into the here and now and there was no going back. As I towelled my face half-dry the echoing familiar voice of the newsreader only accentuated the emptiness of the place. It felt different – vacant and bare. My few bits and pieces looked pathetic on the bottom shelf of the stand that used to stock our toiletries. The upper two glass shelves cleared of the creams, hair products, brushes and cotton wool pads. Even the electric Braun toothbrush had been taken – in the ceramic cup in which we had kept our ‘his’ and ‘hers’ there was only my little white brush head, with its lonely blue ring.

I only realised that Liz had had enough when she gave me a clear and simple ultimatum; to give up my work and save my sanity and our marriage. But how could I? I had to go on. I had to help them because he had to be found, had to be stopped; and I was their last hope.

I slicked my hair back, squeezed out some foam, lathered my face and then erased the stubble with a few scrapes of my razor. I went back to the kitchen and switched on the coffee and blanked the TV.

It was at times like these that I could have stayed in the shower for hours, but I only had time to wash off the night’s sweat before I had to head for the airport and Manchester to find ‘The Sawman’.

I finished the shower, dried off and then rubbed my teeth and tongue with the tiny plastic lifeless stump of a brush to get rid of some of the stink of nicotine and stale whisky. I don’t know why I bothered as I was about to gargle with the previous night’s stewed coffee. A mug later, drunk in a oner; black and

no sugar, I was dressing fast. The final act completed when I slipped my portable computer into its case. I was ready for another day. I ignored the mess, threw my jacket over my shoulder and was out the door and on my way.

If I was to shake off my body's reluctance to wake up I needed to get a lung full of fresh air. I took the lift to the ground floor and snaked through the crowd of office workers who were waiting to fill my vacated space ten times over before they ascended to floors one and two that still functioned as offices.

I exchanged insomniac nods with Alec our security man, who was rooted to his desk as usual; his face as grey as the pictures on his monitors and indeed as the day itself. I went straight to the front doors.

When I pushed the glass doors open I was blasted by the trill of Glasgow's vocal commuters and the throb from buses that trundled passed. Another few steps and I felt the full effect of Renfrew Street. Even at that time in the morning the place was in full swing, it was like plugging yourself into a socket and everywhere you looked the attitude of Glaswegians was on full display – brash and unapologetic and just then I was happy to be one of them. I could feel my mood lift, helped by a hole in the rain clouds that promised the hope of a beautiful bright day. The painter in me took the time to appreciate the view that the watery sun's beam of light framed. Buildings nearby were transformed. Their void and colourless glass windows changed into solid shimmering orange mirrors and their flat concrete greyness into hollow silhouettes. It drew my eyes to the workers dangling from safety harnesses above the Glasgow Film Theatre, somehow invisible until then. I loved Glasgow and I was lucky enough to live in the heart of

the city, the main shopping streets of Buchanan, Argyle and Sauchiehall Street were just a minute's walk away as were cinemas, bookshops, galleries, the concert hall, restaurants, pubs and clubs – fantastic.

I went back inside and took the door to our communal garage. The sound of its voluminous air-conditioning filled the enormous cavern. Parking places were like gold in Glasgow but my dark blue Mk III Healey deserved every carat.

Like every other city in Britain the traffic at that time in the morning was nose to tail and I crawled along bumper to bumper in the queue for the Kingston Bridge and the M8 motorway – Glasgow's gateway to everywhere. The planners had bulldozed right through the city to enable drivers to get from Greenock to Edinburgh without a traffic light. Why anyone would want to go to Greenock I don't know, anyway in their wisdom they created one of the best commuter roads to serve a city airport, although at that time of day the normal ten minutes that it took to get there were extended to half an hour. I didn't care. I had time and my old classic's three-litre burble was providing my morning fix. The Healey took my mind off Liz and I enjoyed the drive over the Clyde with its grandstand view of Glasgow's new skyline.

It didn't take long to get over the bridge and the traffic wasn't too bad all the way to the airport. It was my lucky day, I found a space only two minutes walk away from Departures. I parked up and joined the other commuters at the gate. By then I was on automatic pilot.

The flight was uneventful, although my nap from take-off to landing made sure of that. Isn't it odd that you toss and turn in bed for hours before sleep comes yet when smiling

stewardesses get ready for their safety demonstration you fall asleep instantly.

I was to meet Inspector Ron Naylor from Greater Manchester Police at Arrivals. I had never met him before, but it turned out he was easy to find. He was the one wearing the uniform and holding the sign bearing my name, Dr Ahearn. Even without the uniform it wouldn't have been difficult to guess that Naylor was a long time policeman. He had that straight-backed, thick-waisted, big footed and hard-nosed look. His size underlined GMP's slogan, 'The force against crime just got bigger'. I introduced myself and we walked briskly to his car.

Naylor was to take me to Chester House, GMP's Headquarters in Manchester where I was to meet Assistant Chief Constable Robert Ullis responsible for Major Incidents, Crime Investigations and the Special Branch. Naylor never asked why I was there, I was glad because it would have led to "What is it that you do?" and I wasn't ready for that. Instead, we spoke of nothing important; just the rain in our two hometowns, which we measured in feet and United's likelihood of winning the European Cup as well as the Premier. In truth, I wasn't interested in football, but you don't grow up in Glasgow without being well versed in the country's national game.

The traffic was heavy and I spent the time looking at the other drivers. They all blanked us as we passed as though we weren't there. I've been there and done that you just hope that the uniform doesn't glance your way. We were still on the M56 when Naylor's new digital radio kicked into gear. The message was short. Naylor was to take me to Deansgate and the scene of 'Sawman's' previous night's handiwork. He

put on his flashing blue lights, hit the siren and I was pushed back into my seat.

It was about 10.30 when we got to the old brick apartments and the place was swarming with activity. It looked like the media people outnumbered the crowd and that was saying something because at that time of the day those streets were teeming with shoppers. I clocked the black Jaguar and guessed that Naylor's boss was already there. We double parked next to Traffic cars and nodded to the two beat policemen who were attempting to keep the crowd back from the blue and white tape. The constable at the steps told us the top floor and I looked up the abused decorative banister and the ladder of worn dark brown stairs and sighed.

As I climbed the last few stairs to the top I was met by the odour. Death has a smell all of its own; a clogging rancid stench that is like no other and just then the air was full of it.

The door was open and I walked along its dingy corridor to the bedroom – the crime scene, and Assistant Chief Constable, Bob Ullis.

“Excuse me sir, this is Dr Ahearn,” Naylor said.

“Good. Dr Ahearn,” said a long face with an ingratiating smile that meant everything and nothing. He looked intelligent but maybe that was just because of his receding hairline. He shook my hand.

“Nice timing,” he said with a booming voice that gave him presence and he knew it.

I weighed him up. He hadn't said much, but I detected a slight West Country accent that made him sound genuine, which from what I had heard about him I doubted.

“I’ll introduce you to Detective Chief Superintendent Geoff Wheaton; he’s leading the investigation. You’ll know Chief Superintendent Wood from the Met Office.” Ullis gestured towards a tall deep-set man with a crooked smile.

“Yes.” I said and nodded to Woods.

Bert Woods was a secondee from the Serious Crime Squad at the Met, someone I knew well, a crafty politician who I didn’t like.

Ullis was tall, slim and immaculate in contrast to the man he next introduced.

“Geoff, this is Dr Rob Ahearn.”

“I’ve heard a great deal about you,” said Wheaton. He was short and a little crumpled looking. A moustache hid some of his flushed face. I had never met him before, but from his body language and expression he looked a decent enough guy.

“I hope it wasn’t all bad. The name’s Robbie, or Rob, by the way,” I said.

“I understand from our colleagues in the Home Office that Dr Ahearn might be able to help profile our serial killer gentlemen,” said Ullis, addressing the other two.

“I hope so,” I responded.

“Have you familiarised yourself with the background?” Ullis asked me. “I’ve read the Conran file. I was looking forward to seeing the house where the Sawman killed his last victim, but looks like I’m in it,” I replied.

“I’m afraid you are right – our man’s been busy. This is Ernst Muche.” Ullis nodded towards the bed. “The important part is in the drawer.” He directed me to the bottom drawer of the oak chest of drawers, which was open. I could see that a large head crowded the space. The eyes were destroyed and his face was bloated. And there was something stuffed in his

wide mouth that filled his fat lips – it was like a wrinkled cocktail sausage though that one hadn't come from the local deli, no it was strictly Muche's own brand. Not to my taste, but it was difficult to shift my gaze from the frozen penis.

“Surprisingly small for someone his size,” I commented.

“Haven't you heard Rob, it's not size that counts.” It was Bert Wood.

“Yeah, yeah it's the tobacco.” I lit up a Marlboro.

“I thought that you kicked that filthy habit,” Wood said. He sounded like Liz. She had said that my excessive smoking was one of the signs I was slipping away again, the smoking, the heavy drinking a precursor to becoming more morose and withdrawn – I was already there.

“Ernst Muche was a bit of an unsavoury character; he has a record of indecent assault, rape and sodomy of a minor and it should have been longer. Last month he got off of a charge of rape and murder – insufficient evidence they said. I'd prefer you not to smoke here and if you are going to look around I'd prefer you to be suited up,” Wheaton muttered. I put out my cigarette.

“Okay.” Naylor's hand came around my side holding a plastic suit. I scrambled into the oversized 'baby-grow'.

“Hmm.” Muche had the face of a scumbag. “The eyes got a makeover.” I said.

“Sulphuric acid probably,” said an attractive looking woman with short blonde hair.

“Dr Ahearn, this is Doctor Jane Warren from the coroner's office.” Geoff said.

She had a nice pair of legs, not quite as shapely as Liz's, but they came close. She had the beginnings of laughter lines around her eyes, had to be in her late 30s. I thought that I'd

better keep my mind on the job, so I asked Jane for some answers to a load of questions that popped into my head.

“When was the time of death?”

“Around midnight I guess. I won’t know for sure until we’ve conducted the post mortem.”

In each of the previous murders, Sawman had carved something religious on the torso and had doused their abdominal area and eyes with sulphuric acid. Not to hurt them for they were sure as hell dead by then.

“I suppose the MO was the same?” I asked.

“Looks like a hunting knife was the murder weapon and the head was removed by a saw. A surgical I would say, but I need to check it in the lab.”

“Is it his?” I pointed to the penis.

“Definitely.”

That had finished that line of questioning. I returned to the head and began to speculate how the killer had carried the head to the drawer. I could feel one of my crazy moments coming on. I’m not sure what else to call them. I got these crazy thoughts at times like these and still do. Maybe they were signs that things weren’t quite right in my frontal lobe area, but I never noticed at the time. Just then I wondered whether The Sawman had put a finger deep into each of Muche’s ears and made a weightlifter’s snatch. I settled for his index finger being inserted into the orifices, his thumbs placed just above each ear with his pinkies positioned under his cheekbones for balance. That was it, his index fingers penetrated as far as the Eustachian tubes and when he unplugged them he collected the wax and moulded a miniature head for his collection; all tanned and shiny. “And it is my privilege

to present the National Academy of Design award to Sawman.”

I turned to Ulis.

“Hmm. Did anyone hear anything?” I enquired, as I studied the head.

“Nothing so far, but we’re still taking statements from the neighbours,” Wheaton answered.

“Who reported it?”

“A friend of his, a Mr Leon Melnar. Let himself in with his own key. Found him just like this. Melnar is next door with Steve Cale one of my detectives. You can’t miss Melnar, he looks like a pimp.” Wheaton said.

I checked out what was left of the rest of Muche’s body. It was anchored to the bed end like a gruesome crucifixion; pretty tasteless neckties bound the hands, but then Mr Muche wasn’t too bothered about that. The pillows were black and scarlet from the throat cutting and the carving. His chest was drenched in blood.

“Do we know what it says?” I asked as I stared at the grisly markings between his nipples.

“Steve says it’s ‘Gomorrah’. He might be right, but it is hard to make out. The message on the wall is clear though,” Wheaton said. His eyes arrived at the back wall just ahead of mine.

I read out the scrawled writings. “*Those, who have not done penance and have not known you, will never know you.*” Is it his blood?” I asked as I gestured towards Muche.

“I don’t know.” Jane responded.

“You can be sure it is. The person who did this is too tidy to drip any of his own.” Geoff said confidently. And he was probably right. On Saturday when I read the report of his first

murder last May I knew that there was something about the neatness of the murders that would make finding the killer difficult. There was an obvious attention to detail and the murders had been carefully planned suggesting that he was obsessive and likely to be well above average intelligence. The selection of his victims too had pointed to a complex character on a personal crusade. I was certain that he would do more and Muche was proof that we had a serial killer on our hands.

I scanned the bed and the surrounding area; I wasn't sure what I was looking for, but I'd know it when I saw it.

“Anything been moved?”

“No, nothing.”

“Good.” I looked at the bed. “Our killer must have looked pretty gruesome.” I said to no one in particular and got no reply for my trouble. It probably wasn't so certain because apart from the writing on the wall and the bed, which looked like it had been marinating in pomodoro sauce – the sheets glued together with the congealed blood – the room was remarkably free of the stuff.

I followed a light trail of blood to the chest of drawers and noticed the photographs scattered on the floor.

“Has your photographer got these?” I asked Wheaton.

“Of course, he's in the back bedroom.”

“Is that where he came in?”

“That was the entry,” Wood interrupted. There was always the hint of sarcasm in his voice. I knew he didn't agree with my methods, I didn't hold that against him, but he was always trying to get one over on me. I returned to the photographs. Those were of battered and bruised women. Some of their faces almost obliterated with swellings that made them look

like footballs, a patchwork of black and blue. Each picture was also defaced so that the women's eyes looked as though they had been gouged out. Just looking at them made me feel nauseous, but I was numbed too, which seemed to at least freeze the feeling of nausea. I had seen scores of dead bodies before, many had been women including some beaten to a pulp, but there was something in those pictures that was worse than anything that my mind recalled. It was the scratched out eyes. The faces were strangely naked without them. The eyes were always the first things that I noticed when I met a woman. Liz's hypnotised me when I first saw hers. They had been very special and still were: wide, staring and defiant. They sparkled and glowed, snatching the light and beaming it back. They were also my last memory of her when she walked out on me, full of disappointment and sadness. What kind of man could have inflicted such horror? In Liz's case it had, of course, been me, but the damage to the women in these photographs must have been by some perverted fucker. Of course I already knew that it was someone like Ernst Muche. I looked again at the gruesome pictures. The Sawman had made him pay for the suffering that he had inflicted and a whole lot of me wanted to pat him on the back.

"A bit of a misogynist Mr Muche. 'The Sawman' could have done us a favour," I said to Uli.

"It is as well that you're not answerable for the violent crime statistics," he replied looking more than a little depressed. "Dr Ahearn, I believe people think you quirky. Well we don't do quirky here. I would like you to remain focused on the job in hand. What is it you do anyway?"

And there it was; that question that always led to suspicion and misunderstandings.

“I am a forensic psychologist, a profiler. I quite literally paint out the profiles of murderers from the imprint of their inhuman acts.”

I could have said I have a PhD in clinical psychology, but I was the first to admit that was where the similarity with other profilers ended. My methods were unconventional and distrusted, but my results were compelling.

“He’s not like other profilers, ” Wood interjected. “Dr Ahearn is a kind of clairvoyant.”

“No I’m not.”

“But you have the second sight I believe,” Wheaton retorted.

“I’ve heard people call it the second sight or a sixth sense, but I don’t. I just accept that I have a unique insight that enables me to visualise a crime through the eyes of both the victim and the perpetrator. As well as drawing up a personality and behaviour profile I’m usually able to paint his likeness. My reluctant employers at the Home Office send me as a last resort. I make them stop.”

“And how does this insight work?” Ullis asked.

“I have no explanation for it scientific or otherwise.” I wasn’t trying to be evasive, I simply didn’t know how.

“What happens?” Ullis asked.

“When I visit a murder scene my subconscious ‘captures’ a copy of what happened. Sometimes part of it is revealed to me there and then, at the scene, but mostly it comes later when I paint. The paint seems to transcribe the buried images usually revealing a profile of the serial killer.”

I could have added that those paintings weren’t for the squeamish for they tended to reflect the ghoulish images from

my morbid imagination, hellish visions that so far have accurately portrayed the people that I was after.

“With Dr Ahearn’s input we hope that we can help your officers achieve a quick arrest Sir,” Wood said.

“Provided we arrest the right person,” I sneered at Wood and then turned to face Ulis.

“I hope so. We need to stop him before we’ve another Muche on our hands.”

“I doubt that the good citizens of Manchester give a shit about what happened to this guy. If anything, they’ll be hailing his murderer a hero,” I said.

“You’re probably right and the last thing we need is for a few crackpots to set up vigilante forces to hand out their own justice. We have a psycho on the loose in my territory of responsibility, and the Home Office believes that you have something to contribute. If so I would like to see it sooner rather than later. I’ll see you in Chester Street when you are finished here.” The look that he gave me was a well-practised one, but I didn’t scare easily. “Are you coming?” Ulis said to Wood.

“Make sure I am copied in on your report,” Wood said to me.

“A pleasure.” I replied and with that he turned and left with Ulis.

I breathed an inaudible sigh of relief. Ulis was right though about the mood of the public. The media would use the Sawman case to highlight the police’s failure to lock up depraved bastards like Muche, even though they knew the real culprit was the Crown Prosecution Service. I was just glad that the Sawman had rid us of some of the scum that stalked our women and children.

If Wheaton was sceptical about my contribution he hid it behind a very polite facade. I could see though that he was happier doing what he did best, detection and I was relieved that he left me to my own devices.

I knew that with all the activity going on I wasn't going to relive Sawman's experience; I would have to come back later, but the exploration was useful background material that would help seed the detail. So I spent the next ten minutes studying the place. I made my way to a wardrobe, waltzing around the impedimenta of the Scene of Crime Officers who were crawling all over the place in their oversized suits. I opened it and registered the clothes that hung on the rail; most were dated, but they had been expensive. There were more ties, just as tasteless as those used as restraints.

The bedroom, like the house before it had been converted, had once been very grand, but that had been a long time ago, probably before Muche. Only the ornamental plaster, now with pieces missing, and the wide-board pine floors remained of what must have been a beautiful room. The ceiling was high, but sagged from water damage. The décor was dilapidated mottled by black and green mould and the new graffiti hadn't improved it. The walls were covered in maroon wallpaper, which had lifted here and there because of the damp. It hadn't been painted for some time; the woodwork and around the light switch at the door were covered in greasy filth. The rugs were pretty grubby too; they had probably never been vacuumed in ten years or more. The detritus of a sloth was also evident on the bedside tables. There was an ashtray full of butts; old tissues; shot glasses and what looked like the remnants of a pizza – artichoke and chorizo, if I wasn't mistaken – not one of my favourites, but protruding from that lot were

two expensive gold ornate art deco lamps. I could see that the tables themselves were also art deco and valuable.

I checked out the corridor, opened each of the doors, viewed the rooms and got a feel for what the ‘Sawman’ had confronted in his search. Each room seemed gloomier than the one before. The general ambience was definitely seedy, particularly the bathroom, which looked like it had been raided by the Vice Squad. The place was strewn with unlaundered towels and sex aids. An old brown plastic bucket was half full of water and stuffed with dildos of all shapes, colours and sizes – most were extra large or, I should say, gargantuan. I felt a pang of inadequacy. I wondered what the Sawman would have made of these if he had seen them because that place gave me the creeps, but I could tell that he hadn’t been in there. The atmosphere throughout the house at night must have been pretty eerie, but I knew already that The Sawman wouldn’t have been bothered by it. From the forensic reports that I had read I had gleaned that he was a cool customer. They had combed the previous two murder scenes and, despite the skin and hair samples recovered, none of his were identified, not even the slightest trace of his sweat or body oil, so I didn’t expect any DNA samples of the Sawman to be found.

As I looked around I had the feeling that, even before the previous night, Muche’s apartment had witnessed some horrible scenes. There was a lingering rancid smell, not from the body, but from the walls. I opened the lounge door and saw another of GMP’s detectives. We introduced ourselves. She was called Dawn Burns. I recalled her insightful input to the reports that I had read.

“Anything interesting?” I asked.

“Nothing so far. I don’t think he was in here.”

I closed my eyes. Dawn was right, he hadn't been in that room. I was at college when I first discovered that I had an ability to visualise crimes of murder or significant violence. It was all a bit weird at first, but I have grown to accept it as a gift of an extra sense.

"It's a strange looking room," I said. And it was. One wall was stripped of paper down to the plaster and had been left unpainted. The floor had no carpet and there was very little furniture.

I left her bagging and tagging and headed next door to the back bedroom where a photographer and a forensic investigator were working. I introduced myself. The photographer was called Jim Sloan, a big man, tall and fat. The investigator was called Andy Cooper, black and handsome with broad shoulders and bright eyes. He was dusting for prints and acknowledged my greeting with only the slightest of movements of his head, his eyes glued to the patch that he was brushing.

"Anything?" I asked as I watched Andy's wrists flick the brush along the window frame like a conductor encouraging his first violin. Andy shook his head. I surveyed the room and settled on the wall beside the door, certain that he had stood just there. "Can you check this area out thoroughly?" Andy nodded.

"I've already told him to check that out." It was Wheaton again.

"Any fresh ideas on this?" I asked.

"Fucking mental case, but I can't say I'm weeping any tears for Muche. Any idea what that smell is?" He asked me.

"Mothballs" I replied.

"Not that. You any idea Andy?" Geoff asked.

“What?”

“That sort of herb smell,” he said. There wasn’t much of a trace that I could sniff other than the general rancid smell of the flat.

“Can’t say that I can smell it over the stench of shit and spunk Chief,” Andy replied without turning his head.

“It smells familiar, but it doesn’t feel as though it belongs here. Can you detect anything Jim?”

“No Chief, don’t think I do. Could be my sandwiches though.”

“What’s in them?” I asked.

“I never know, but they always smell like cheese,” Jim laughed. He had a belly like a sack of gravel that hung over his belt, and when he laughed it jiggled up and down.

“Very witty Jim, but I think this smell is too upmarket for your sandwich. Hmm, there’s something here.” Wheaton sniffed the air theatrically and wafted his hands under his nose, but I had the feeling that he already wished that he had never mentioned it. I crossed to the window.

“Did you check around these light switches?” I asked.

“Not yet, but I will,” Andy replied.

I instinctively looked at my wrist again.

“Are you looking for the time?” Jim asked me.

“Just habit, my watch is broken. I rely on the clocks on microwaves and cookers and passers by.”

“Have you been over the fire escape?” Geoff said to me.

“No not yet. Has it been checked?”

Andy chipped in, “I’ve been up and down there. It was definitely the way he came in. The bottom ladder has been down recently, but there’s no sign of him anywhere, no foot-prints, nothing.”

“I’ll take a look,” I said and left them to it.

I looked out the window and down the fire escape. I put my hand on the safety railing and ran my fingers along the rough rusted metal. It was hard to believe that Andy hadn’t found any forensic evidence there. It was time for a cigarette so I stepped out onto the grating and took out my Zippo. I shook it and opened the top with its reassuring clink. A solid thumb and the fresh air helped it fire first time. I leaned against the wall with my Marlboro. The nicotine penetrated deep. I thought about going down the steps, but I didn’t want to spoil the moment, so I just leaned over and looked down.

The view through the diamond holes reminded me of when I used to spend a lot time up trees. When I was a boy I would camp out in the bluebell woods near my home to hide from friends and watch them search the bushes below. Sometimes in the summer I would spend most of the night in my tree hideaways. I used to take a thin blanket with me, just thick enough to smooth out the jagged bits and I would lie belly down on it, hang my head over the top of my makeshift bed and stare through the branches to the ground below. I even slept up there and once I saw the O’Neil boy have sex right below me. Even now I’d swear that the girl had been smiling up at me as her lover pumped his bare arse up and down like a piston. I guess she had never said anything to him or I wouldn’t still be walking around today.

“Rob?” It was Geoff at the window. I should have known that those few seconds were too good to last.

“Steve’s in the kitchen drinking coffee with the person who found Muche. I’m going to interview him; want to join me?”

I threw my pleasure over the safety barrier and climbed back inside.

“The pizza – find out where it came from and if it was delivered,” Geoff ordered Andy as we passed him in the hall. I suppose the delivery boy could have seen someone lurking around, but it was a long shot.

“Introduce us,” Geoff said to Steve.

Like the prosopographer that I was, I scrutinised the small thin agitated man that was antsing on the edge of the chair next to the table. His skin was olive and waxy like a new tin of boot-polish. His shirt was loud and he was wearing a lot of gold; on his wrist, his neck and most of his fingers, but it was the shoes that were a dead give away. They were snake-skin with silver buckles; the ubiquitous footwear of a pimp.

“This is Leon Melnar. Mr Melnar found Mr Muche,” Steve said.

“Detective Chief Superintendent Geoff Wheaton.”

“Rob Ahearn Forensics.” I looked straight into his eyes the whole story was there, liar, cheat and fucking scumbag; a murderer, probably, but not Muche’s. I could also see that Wheaton was thinking that Sawman would have done him another favour if he had bumped into this guy.

“Must have been a bit of a shock Mr...” Geoff said.

“Melnar, Leon Melnar. This is weird shit man I’m freaked ok. What mental case could have done that.” The whites of his eyes flashed as they flicked towards the bedroom.

“I was hoping you might help us work that out,” Geoff said as he narrowed his eyes.

“I don’t know anything about this crazy stuff man. I told your guy everything I know. I don’t know any mad mother-fucker that could do something like this.”

“When did you get here?” Geoff asked slowly.

“About half past seven,” he fired back.

Geoff paused and then asked: “Where had you come from?”

“From my home man, of course.”

Leon Melnar showed signs of anxiety and a little aggression crept into his melodic voice.

Geoff paused again. I could see that he planned to frustrate Melnar a little more. I was certain that Geoff knew instinctively that Melnar wasn’t the murderer, but you could tell that he thought the sleezebag was involved in some way and he seemed determined to find out what it was.

“And where is home?”

“I already said.”

“I’m sorry, but not to me. You must have said it to Detective Cale.”

“Salford, I’ve got a loft in the Quays,” he said smugly. The Quays was the new fashionable place where old warehouses had been developed into lofts and it was rising fast in the trendy stakes.

“How’s living among the upper classes?” Wheaton said sarcastically.

“I’m comfortable in anybody’s hood.”

“Did you get here in your own car?” He asked ponderously.

“Sure man, my BMW, crimson red. Why?”

“I ask the questions,” Geoff retorted.

I watched Melnar’s eyes get smaller and his mouth tighten.

“So you left home when?”

“I don’t know 7.10, 15 whatever.”

“And you let yourself in with a key?”

“Yeah, I had a business meeting with Ernst.” He was trying to play the role of a responsible businessman – as an actor he was a Hollywood BA (failed).

“What kind of business meeting was that Mr eh?”

“Melnar, Leon Melnar. It was just business, man, you know stuff.”

‘Stuff’ the language of the inarticulate, crooks and liars.

“No I don’t know Mr Melnar what stuff?” Wheaton asked with emphasis.

“I was here to make some arrangements man about some entertainment for Ernst.” He used the word ‘entertainment’ like an uptown business consultant uses made up words to bewilder clients.

“What kind of entertainment?”

“Hey what is this? I just found the man, okay.”

“I am sorry to bother you Mr eh.”

“Melnar man Melnar.”

“Well Mr Melnar we have a very nasty murder here and I am sure you want to help us find the person that did this to your friend.” Geoff’s slow speech cried out for an interruption and he didn’t have to wait long.

“Hey he’s just an acquaintance man, someone I know, right.”

Geoff didn’t believe him, but the moment called for patience.

“An acquaintance who gives you a key to his apartment, as I was saying, if you prefer to answer my questions at our Headquarters we can go there now, but I thought that you wanted to co-operate.”

“I am co-operating man, go on ask me your dumb questions I don’t care.”

I took out my cigarette pack and offered one to Melnar, neither Geoff nor Steve smoked. He took it eagerly. Geoff waited patiently until my trusty Zippo lit us both then said:

“Right. Can I ask you again what kind of entertainment are you both involved in?”

“You know, girls man. I run an escort agency and Ernst was one of my clients.”

“An Escort Agency and Ernst was one of your clients,” he replayed back.

“Yeah man.”

“Yours is a legitimate business yes?”

“Sure man.”

“Had Ernst used your services before?”

“Sure many times.”

“Maybe you could furnish my colleague with receipts confirming dates and times.” Leon almost spoke out but instead tightened his lips around his teeth. I was glad because his flashing gold caps were irritating my sense of good taste. Geoff carried on.

“Do you usually have keys to your clients’ apartments?”

“Some. What is this? I had nothing to do with this fucking shit”

“So you have told me. Someone took a serious dislike to Mr Muche.”

“Some mad fucker you mean,” he interrupted again.

“Maybe. You’ll understand that if Mr Muche had enemies we would want to know about them. Did he have any enemies?”

“I don’t know man. The truth is that Ernst was a peaceful man, but everybody’s got strange dudes that would like to shit on them man, I don’t know anything about his

murder. As far as I know there was never no reason for nobody to have drama with him. Anyway I wasn't a friend, just a business associate."

"Oh he was a business associate I thought that you said he was a client."

Just then Melnar had an unfortunate accident. It happens to all smokers at some time. The filter had stuck to his lip, well I suppose he had good reason to be dry in the mouth, and his fingers had travelled down the length of the cigarette until they gripped the tip. In case you don't know, a cigarette burns at 700°C at the tip and right then Mr Leon Melnar was playing with fire.

"Oh shit, shit." He jumped to his feet.

"Are you okay?" Steve said.

I was just sorry that it didn't melt those gold teeth.

"Yeah fuck; cigarette shit."

I offered him another light, but his cigarette was still burning.

Geoff carried on with his pointless questioning. "You just said that he was a business associate I thought that you said he was a client."

"Hey it's just words man. He was client, a good client. He sometimes slept late and his hearing was dull man so he gave me a key to let myself in."

"Tell me about how you found him. Did you ring the bell?"

"No I just let myself in and shouted on Ernst." His voice wavered and almost shifted up a key.

"Did you go straight through when he didn't reply?"

"No I went to the kitchen and switched on the coffee."

"And when he didn't come?"

“I went to his room to get him up.” Melnar’s hands twitched constantly.

“And then.”

“And then I ran like hell.”

“Where? Down the hall? Down the stairs?”

“No I went back to the kitchen.”

“Oh the coffee.”

“No man I was ready to throw up.”

I didn’t believe him. He wasn’t the squeamish type.

“Hmn, right the pizza,” Geoff said. Melnar looked bamboozled. “Never mind. Then what?”

“I called you.”

“From the phone in the kitchen?”

“No man on my mobile.”

“Why didn’t you call from the kitchen phone?”

“It was easier man to use this.” Melnar held up his mobile, which sparkled like his gold teeth. What a sad character he was and useless with it. I was warming to The Sawman.

“When you went into his room did you touch anything?”

“No nothin’ man.”

“Are you sure?”

“Like I said, nothin’.”

“How did you know it was him?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well it wasn’t as if you recognised his grin was it.”

“I just knew.”

“So you didn’t see his head in the drawer.”

“What?”

“Mr Muche’s head. His head was placed in an open drawer beside some intriguing photographs. What do you know about the photographs?”

“What photographs?”

“The ones showing women’s beat up faces.”

“I don’t know anything about them man, I ain’t never seen no photographs.” Melnar had begun to sweat profusely. I knew from his face that he was lying.

“Did you make any other calls Mr ...” Geoff was at it again.

“Hey man, what is it with you? I told you a hundred times its Melnar, Leon Melnar okay. And no, I haven’t used the phone since I called you.”

“Well Mr Melnar you have been very co-operative. We’ll want to speak to you again I’m sure, do we have your mobile number?”

“Yeah can I go now?”

“Well I’m sure my colleague will just want a few more details then you are free to go. Detective Cale will get you a lift to your next appointment.”

“I don’t need a lift.”

“Oh yes you have a BMW outside waiting for you, a bright red one License LM 100.”

“Sure.”

Geoff smiled, turned away and walked out. As I was leaving I heard him ask: “Hey how do you know about my BMW?”

Geoff carried on walking as Steve replied.

“He knows a great deal about you Leon. A great deal.”

I bumped into Andy who was brushing the light switches.

“Anything yet?” I asked. He shook his head.

“Andy can you check Melnar’s records and fingerprints. He’s done time for a series of sexual offences. And see if there are any matches on the photographs next door,” Geoff said. Andy nodded.

“You know this guy?” I asked Geoff.

“Sure we go way back. He doesn’t remember, but I do. What do you make of all this?”

“It’s too busy here for me to get much. There’s just too much disturbance. I’ll come back later when everyone’s gone, maybe after the post-mortem. If you don’t mind, I’d like to take a look at Conran’s place.”

“Sure, Ron will take you there. I’ll get him.”

Geoff returned with Naylor.

“Ron will take you to the Conran flat and when you’re finished there he’ll take you to Chester House. There’s an office for you there, Ron will show you where and give you a quick tour of our communication centre where we have our major incident room. We can meet up at the autopsy.”

“Okay I’ll see ...” I was interrupted by a shout from Dawn Burns.

“Chief!”

I followed Geoff through the door to the lounge and could hardly believe my eyes; it was as though I had stepped through the door of a tardis into a different world. Dawn was standing in a photographic studio. The walls and ceiling were mirrored and there were cameras everywhere, both still and cine. I’d only ever seen that much equipment in a television studio.

“I found it behind that back wall. The room seemed too narrow, so I had a closer look and when I slipped off the strip that covered the join, the wall parted easily. If the filming was against that wall,” she pointed to the greyish matt finished wall, “you wouldn’t be able to tell the location.” Dawn was very good at her job, but was clearly one for the obvious too.

“I want prints of everything here and call up the Vice Squad and tell them to get someone here fast,” Geoff responded.

Dawn got on her mobile and I mooched around. Judging by the number of new and used videotapes that lay around it was a highly prolific studio. There was a hook on the ceiling and the floor was scratched and worn directly below. I shut my eyes.

I could see the woman with the dyed blonde hair in the photograph, her struggling hands were tied at the wrists and pulled high above her head by a pulley attached to a chain that was hooked to the ceiling. Her mouth was gagged tight, binding her desolate screams and forcing the blood and mucus to flee from her nostrils. Her pointed toes scraped the floor as she performed involuntary pirouettes. As she tried desperately to anchor herself to something solid and familiar, Muche beat her senseless and her eyes, full of anguish and fear, searched for mercy as Melnar pawed her spinning body. I opened my eyes and shivered. I wasn't sure whether the videos and the studio had anything directly to do with the case, but I was sure that they had everything to do with Leon Melnar.

“It was the blonde in the photographs. Muche and Melnar.”

Geoff looked surprised, but I could tell that his thoughts about Melnar had been close enough to give my statement credence. “Bastards.” He said and was gone. I stayed behind, but I could hear his shouts from the kitchen:

“Right Mr Leon fucking Melnar enough fucking bullshit you're coming with me.” A few seconds later Geoff came back dragging Melnar by his jacket lapel and threw him into the middle of the studio.

“I want to make a phone call.”

“Listen you fucked up asshole I want to know what you had to do with this and I want to know now.” Geoff grabbed

Melnar's golden cellphone almost before it was out of his pocket and whacked him over the head with it, smashing it into tiny pieces.

"Wait," I shouted and stepped between them.

"Rob keep out of this, okay?" Geoff spat at me.

"You better come clean scumbag or you'll be pulling cell-phones out of your arsehole for months."

"Geoff hadn't you better stop?" I intervened.

"Hadn't you better get going?" His eyes were ablaze with anger.

"Dr Ahearn leave this to us," Steve Cale said apologetically.

I left them to it. I went back through to the bedroom where I met Jane.

"Sounds like trouble," Jane said.

"Apparently, Geoff's on top of it." I answered sarcastically.

"Well I'm all done here," she said.

"When will you have the results?" I asked.

"After the autopsy; it should be underway about two. Are you attending?"

"Don't see that I've any choice. Will you be doing it?"

"No, I am on the road today. Do you need a lift?"

"No. Ron is looking after me. Thanks anyway."

"Okay, well it was nice meeting you."

I found Naylor outside the secret film studio and we left for Moss Side.