

P.S Bridge

HIT

Each one of us has a Mark King inside of us. Someone who goes through something horrific, who suffers immeasurable loss, and endures momentous pain, yet manages to grow from it and come out the other side, a stronger, wiser and better person. There is a difference between accepting the path that lies before you, and choosing to walk it.

So to those who have helped me, you know who you are and I thank you. To the others, those who said it couldn't be done, or wouldn't be done, I say look, read, understand and above all, judge not the faithful and the true, for there will be a day when those you have judged, judge you.

# *Prologue*

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*Syria – 3 months ago*

**T**wo black Agusta A109 Grand helicopters surveyed the landscape as they hurtled towards the rendezvous point just south of their current location. They cut through the air, flying low and kicked up clouds of smoke as they landed just opposite a stone building, one of the few still standing after the destruction of the previous few days. Seven heavily armed men got out wearing scarfs to cover their faces against the flying dust and dirt as they hurried towards the building away from the rush and noise of the rotor blades downdraft. A young man, dressed as if ready for battle, got out wearing a scarf over his lower face, and aviator sunglasses. He was carrying a small black Heckler & Koch MP5-K sub-machine gun and he had a large Kabar army knife, sheathed in his belt. He checked his silver Rolex watch and looked around him to make sure they had not been intercepted or followed. The other armed men stood on guard, either side of the doorway of the stone building as he marched through the doorway and into the darkness. Two guards then stood guard in the doorway, gripping their AK47's tightly.

The convoy of yellowish brown 4 x 4's kicked up clouds of dust as they rumbled through the war-torn brown landscape, destroyed by drone attacks and Syrian airstrikes. 22 months of war had transformed the once thriving town, into a barren, derelict wasteland. From his window, MI6 agent Nathaniel Williams scoured the ruined buildings behind a pair of aviators in shock at the utter devastation which had been reeked on this town, only days before.

The convoy rumbled on its dusty journey as the attaché from the National Defence Force's Government counter-insurgency force, spoke in Syrian to the interpreter sat next to Agent Williams, pointing out key strong hold positions which were active only days before their arrival.

At night, it was a no go area for anyone, with militia still trying actively to recoup lost ground. The hills around them, once inviting, were now foreboding and scarred where mortar shells, and artillery shelling had burst upon its surface, causing it to resemble the surface of the moon.

'We capture this town two days ago. Much killing here. Syrian air force they try to drive back insurgent militia until drone strike'

Williams turned suddenly.

'Wait, what, a drone strike did all this damage?' he asked, shocked at what the interpreter said.

The attaché, a man in his mid-40's and didn't speak English, looked confused at Williams. Williams, forgetting the need for the interpreter, apologised and turned to the interpreter, asking the same question for him to ask the attaché. He waited patiently for the response.

'Young boys used play football here. Middle class people meet and cook dinner, listen to music all night long. Gone now' he relayed to Williams.

The interpreter pointed down the road and waved his arm around

'He say cedar trees used grow along all three side' he translated as he waited for the attaché to continue

'No more. Taken for firewood'

Williams shook his head in disbelief. He had worked mainly in Europe and this was his first time in a warzone. The interpreter patted him on the arm to get his attention. Williams attention was taken away to huts, lining the roadside, with their tin rooves stripped off, probably to be used by the swathes of refugees who either passed through here or moved from here to escape the approaching onslaught.

'He say drone strikes like this happen all of time. He said western governments, mostly Americans, they know when Al-Azidi meets his commanders and they target him two days ago'

Agent Williams nodded and turned back to look out of the window before their driver, also with the National Defence force, and dressed in National Defence Force uniform, motioned that they had arrived. Williams jumped out first, his weapon at the ready. The group, made up of 6 men, mostly from the National Defence Force and one, agent Todd Greamer from the CIA, huddled together next to the lead vehicle, out of sight of the stone building ten feet away.

'Right, I want two at the back, two to provide cover fire and Greamer and I will go in the front' he commanded in an authoritative, Scottish tone. Greamer nodded and the interpreter relayed the message to their attaché. Williams rolled his eyes, frustrated with the language barrier and Greamer laughed silently, shaking his head. Williams waited until they were all clear on what to do and they crept out from behind the vehicle towards the building.

Within seconds, they were met by a volley of automatic gunfire and dived for cover, shouting instructions at each other as the bullets bounced off the dry, crumbled stone around them. There were very few areas of cover out here and Williams' heart began to beat faster. He had been separated from his interpreter and attaché and he looked desperately around for Greamer, who had managed to find cover alongside one of the piles of rock further up the road. Greamer nodded to him and Williams nodded back, motioning that he thought there were eight or more men inside.

Just at that moment, he saw several men run out of the back of the building, towards a jeep with a waiting driver.

'Looks like we interrupted your meeting Azidi' Williams said aloud as he motioned for Greamer to follow him. The two men only got a few steps when one of the men running away, turned and fired on them from a hand held weapon. Williams and Greamer scattered, avoiding the bullets ripping up the ground between them. They were back on track in seconds but the jeep was mobile and heading off among a cloud of dust and smoke. Williams could hear gunfire back at the building behind them and ran towards the lead vehicle in their convoy. He jumped in and started the engine, wheel spinning into the dust as he thundered after Azidi's vehicle.

Azidi was firing on them from the back of the jeep and Williams threw the steering wheel left and right, swerving to avoid the gunshots. His windscreen was hit and Williams, in the panic, flung the wheel round sharply to the left, hitting a rock and causing the 4 x 4 to crash over onto its side. There was a satisfied cheer from the jeep as it quickly vanished out of sight in the direction of the Lebanese mountains. The other vehicles, having realised what Williams was up to, had chased after him and screeched to a halt at the side of the overturned vehicle. The wheels were still spinning and the engine was over revving, smoke billowing out from the undercarriage. Williams was hurt, not badly but enough to draw blood and he scrambled out of the passenger window which was facing the sky, covered in blood and dirt, looking beaten but ok.

Greamer grabbed his arm and helped to haul him from the wreckage and clear of the vehicle in case the fuel tank had ruptured. It was a good call from Greamer, for as they staggered away from it, the entire vehicle erupted into flames. The men threw themselves at the ground as the shock wave and heat from the fuel tank hit them like a tsunami, throwing them forward. Williams was the first to put his head up, spitting blood and dust as he checked around for everyone else. Greamer was cut but otherwise unharmed. The other men were all ok and everyone was breathless. Williams got up and kicked the stones in frustration.

'I HAD HIM!' he shouted to Greamer, who was walking towards him reloading his weapon and looking around for snipers.

'I bloody had him!' he cried again at Greamer. Greamer nodded as he handed Williams his water tank, which Williams drank from excessively and wiped his sweat laden, dirty forehead.

'Don't worry man, there'll be another opportunity to get the bastard' Greamer reassured Williams before checking the horizon to see the rush of vehicles coming towards them.

'C'mon man, we gotta get outta here' he warned.

Williams agreed and Greamer patted Williams back in support as the group began to run back to their vehicles. Williams jumped in the front passenger seat, his weapon ready. Greamer jumped in the drivers' seat and handed his AR 15 Tactical defence rifle to Williams. Williams took it and held it at the ready as Greamer wheelspun the vehicle around and headed off back in the direction they had come. None of them were very happy at getting so close to Mohammed Al-Azidi and letting him get away.

An hour later, Williams and Greamer were at a camp where they had spent most of the night before planning their assault on Azidi and gathering intelligence on where his cell would be meeting next. It had taken months of planning to get to this stage and Williams was angry and disappointed. He spoke quietly but firmly to his associate.

'We have to head back to London to report in. I need you to go to pick up the Azidi trail and report directly to me when you have a confirmed sighting' he ordered.

His associate, a younger agent nodded and left the tent, leaving Williams to pack the remainder of his gear, before heading out to the airport.

# Chapter One

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## *England – Present day*

**T**he public gallery paused with baited breath, as the prosecution stepped forward, smiling and clearly with a plan, the young dark haired learned man in the black robe and white wig turned around towards the Jury to survey them, gathered together in anticipation.

There wasn't a single person in the room who didn't know this man, and, from the way the newspapers had been reacting over the last few months, there wasn't a single person in the room who didn't know at least the very name of the defendant. Surrounded by wooden pews, lined with officials, and overlooked by a packed public gallery, the prosecution's star player, stepped forward and addressed the court, in his two minute opening statement

'Age old Law' he began, arms up as he looked high around the ancient courtroom, 'that pillar stone of the justice process, has brought us here together today'

The judge removed his tiny spectacles and leaned forward across his bench, intrigued by the opening statement. High in the press gallery, a small man, a journalist with a notebook and a fringe which dangled tattily over one side of his face, narrowed his eyes towards the prosecution as the two men's eyes met. The prosecution paused for a second as both men held their stare, before the journalist broke eye contact and scribbled notes in the battered looking note book. The prosecution smiled as he turned back to address the court room,

'As you well know, the prosecution has the burden of proof to prove its case' he smiled, acknowledging the judge who was by now, smiling, 'beyond ALL reasonable doubt'

There was chatter from the public gallery as tenseness came over the court, to the point where you could almost hear a pin drop and cut the atmosphere with a knife.

'Therefore, the prosecution must present evidence which proves, beyond reasonable doubt, that the defendant...'

There was another pause as he spun around like lightening, pointing a finger directly at the defendant, causing the defendant and the court room, to jump back and gasp

'This man, this clearly GUILTY man, did, on February 28<sup>th</sup> of this year, commit an act of atrocity against this country, against the free world and against humanity itself!'

There was a stir again from the court as the defence sat scribbling notes; some watched this master class of a closing statement.

'Ruthlessly, he did on that fateful night whilst we were all in our beds, seemingly safe and soundly sleeping, decide on an inauspicious and tragic course of action'

The defendant bowed his head, not wanting to face the inevitable truth that the country's best Lawyer, was against him and there was no way he was going to escape a momentarily long prison sentence.

'Evidence has been presented to this court, this wondrous house of truth and justice, which is unequivocal and inescapable in its legitimacy. We must send a clear message to those who would seek to travel to our shores, bask in our hospitality, benefit from our graciousness and take from our resources, that you cannot commit these kinds of crimes and escape justice'

The Judge, on hearing that this may be construed as interfering with sentencing legislation, sat forward and frowned,

'Mr. King' he began but was prevented from continuing by the prosecution's Mr. King, putting his hand up immediately in acknowledgement of what he had said and continued in his speech.

'Mr. Rahman, this young man, who, until now, had led a life of peace, tranquility and hard work. Indeed we have heard testimony from many witnesses as to his character, his reputation and his deeply devout faith and, yes indeed some may be swayed'

Mr King had gotten quieter and quieter at this point and those who knew him best, those who had seen him in action before, knew he was building towards a dramatic crescendo.

'That this somehow exonerates him from fault', he shouted, his voice raised louder as his climatic theatricality entertained the entire court room.

Mr King stopped, and turned to the jury who watched, drawn in by the theatricality and razzle dazzle of the show before them.

'Radicalization?' he asked, slowly walking past the jury, occasionally stopping at a member of the jury sat nearest the front, 'perhaps, but what the fundamental truth is that no matter what the reason for the crime, the crime WAS committed'

Mr King swept across the court room towards the defendant, arms outstretched like a warlock about to cast a spell on an unsuspecting victim

'BUT IT WAS MURDER!' he shouted, his hand held high as a finger pointed towards the ceiling, 'was it not, which occurred that night, MURDER, deliberate, calculated and pre-meditated murder, of an innocent civilian, all because Mr. Rahman wanted to obtain materials to build an explosive device and the victim, the innocent and ill-fated victim, a family man with children, whose wife sits in the public gallery surrounded by her friends and family, cries herself to sleep at night as she tries to explain to her children that, daddy isn't coming home'

Mr King pointed to the defendant whilst facing the jury,

'This man, the defendant you see before you, is the ONLY person responsible for this heinous crime. Richard Wilkinson, the deceased, sacrificed his life to prevent mass murder, to protect the innocent from what COULD have been, an atrocity, the scale of which has not been seen since the 7/7 London bombings'

There was a deliberate pause by the prosecution as he let the jury and the court room, soak up everything he had said as Mr King returned to his desk, his glasses in his hand and one arm of the glasses in his mouth as he turned a page over in his note book.

'Members of the Jury, sadly, it is not MY decision to seek to enact justice against this man, merely to present to you, the truth. Not a version of the truth decided by one party over another, but the unavoidable truth because of the facts presented herein. I ask you, this man IS guilty, search your hearts and your feelings, and you WILL come to the right decision'

He walked towards the defendant one last time

'The ONLY decision' he paused again and stared into the eyes of the defendant.

In all Mr King's years of behavioural profiling, he knew when someone was about to crack and he sensed it here, now, as he took his final breath, he felt the tension in his entire body as he slowed his breathing down, centered his balance, took one final look deep into the defendant's eyes and turned,

'GUILTY!'

The loudness of the shout made everyone in the courtroom jump and a shocked gasp from the crowd, together with the drama and theatre of Mr King's statement, caused the defendant to begin to sob and nod his head. Mr King merely waved his arm towards the defendant as if he were allowing the jury to walk through a door he had held open for them. Their faces, one by one, became stern and unforgiving. Mr King turned, smiled at the Judge who gave a nod of acknowledgement, and returned to his seat,

'Your honour, the prosecution rests' he said pleasantly and glanced up towards the public gallery.

The journalist was shaking his head in anger but it wasn't Ian Hawking that Mark King was looking at, it was Mrs. Wilkinson, the wife of the victim, who smiled and mouthed the words 'thank you' to Mark. Mark smiled and nodded. Now it was down to the Jury to decide.

# Chapter Two

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**M**ark King pushed his way through the huddle of journalists with cameras, microphones and notebooks as he attempted to leave the court room, as usual, there was one journalist in particular who got there first, and it was Ian Hawking

‘Mr King, such an over dramatic and unnecessary presentation of the facts in your statement, do you really think that theatre and over acting will continue to win you cases on this scale?’

Mark King shrugged as he deliberately failed to even make eye contact with the journalist,

‘That depends, do you think that a gaudy suit, tatty hair and the smell of last night’s stale beer on your breath will obtain new better news stories?’ he said nonchalantly, continuing to walk past.

The pack of journalists Mark King hated so much erupted into laughter as a female news reporter stood next to Hawking caught a whiff of his breath and screwed up her face in disgust before backing away in a very obvious manner. Hawking looked mortally wounded, confused and angered as the rest of the pack pushed him to the back and followed Mark out towards the stone steps which lead into the courts marbled foyer. Hawking was left behind and threw his notebook on the floor in disgust.

There was a waiting mob of reporters; all set up with TV cameras on tri-pods, and TV news crews vans which had been camped outside the courts since the beginning of the trial. It wasn’t Mark’s biggest audience, but he took the hand of Mrs. Wilkinson, whom he had lead out onto the steps, surrounding by almost the entire litigation team of Lever & Sons LLP who had been instructed to prosecute Mr. Rahman. Mark smiled at Mrs. Wilkinson and winked before he held his hands up to silence the waiting mob.

Shouts came from the waiting press as each one of them wanted their question answered first

‘Mr King, did you expect a guilty verdict?’ shouted one, Mark chuckled but didn’t have time to respond.

Mrs. Wilkinson, are you pleased with the result and feel that you can now lay your husband to rest?’ another shouted.

She glanced at Mark, who smiled and put his hand up, signalling for her not to answer,

'Do you think this case will set a precedent for the government and security services to act quicker to prevent home grown terrorism?' came a voice from deep inside the crowd.

Mark patted Mrs. Wilkinson on the back as she took out her folded A4 sheet of paper she had prepared a speech on. As she began, the crowds listened and, fighting back tears, she described how her family are coping with the tragic loss and how they can now finally begin to move on after achieving justice for her husband. Quietly and stealthily, Mark King slipped further back until he was at the back of the crowd, and slipped away towards his parked car.

Had he done this moments, seconds even, earlier, he may have avoided the hounding and bitter questioning of Ian Hawking, who had eventually found his way out of the court room and spotted Mark tip toeing away and decided to follow him.

'Mr King, a word now if you please' he squirmed, fumbling for his notebook and pencil, upsetting his case of paperwork all over the concrete as the wind swept paper up into the air.

'For God sake man, who the hell are you anyway, can't you see I've got a home to go to?' snapped Mark as he quickened his pace to reach his car before Hawking had a chance to follow.

'Always got a snappy remark haven't you King' Hawking snarled as he attempted to pick up the paperwork from the floor.

'Look, where do you get off on this.....whatever your name is, why do you feel it necessary to harass me?'

'I just want some answers from you; you avoid me all the time, what have you got to hide?' Hawking replied sarcastically.

Mark shuddered as he reached his car and remotely unlocked it, putting his case and court papers into the boot. Hawking was quick on his feet and the two men were face to face as Mark turned to speak to him. Hawking smiled a wry and sycophantic smile as he felt his anger build,

'You will fall one day Mark King and I will be there to catch every second of it'

Mark watched as the pathetic little man chewed on his gum and smiled through stained teeth,

'Good luck with that Harrington' he remarked as he got into the car and drove off, leaving Hawking stood there alone still smiling,

'It's Hawking' he uttered in a disgruntled voice, 'my name is Hawking' before he turned to leave.

As Mark walked in through the doors of Levers & Sons LLP law firm, he was greeted by a joyous and triumphant welcoming party of laughing and victorious staff who patted him on the back and shook hands with him as he tried, with difficulty, to make his way towards his office.

'Well done Mark' a voice shouted,

'Wonderful performance' shouted another

'Magnificent achievement, a great victory! Another one cried, as Mark reached the lift and the doors opened.

He smiled a reluctant smile and put his hand up to wave in appreciation as the lift doors closed. When he reached his floor, he was greeted by almost as celebratory group as the one he had just left downstairs, although this one was much more reserved. As Mark walked towards his office, he could see the familiar suited, white haired and short, trimmed white bearded figure of his boss and half of the creators of the firm, Hugo Leaver.

'Hugo' Mark smiled as he stood in front of his senior partner,

'Mark, well done boy' Hugo said his face broadening with a beaming smile, as he firmly shook Mark by the hand and slapped him on the back.

'Thank you Hugo, I'd really like to get back to work now'

'On the contrary old boy. Now listen, I have just had word from my contact in the security services' he explained as Mark rolled his eyes in wonder as to how Hugo was so well connected.

'Oh really?' Mark said, feigning interest,

'He advised me that thanks to your performance in there, they are now investigating a second Person of Interest higher up the chain of command of this splinter group of terrorists'

'That's good' Mark nodded and smiled as Hugo walked Mark towards his office with his arm firmly around Mark's shoulder.

'Now, the rest of the day is yours, why not go and have a rest, celebrate with Marie, think of it as a thank you for all your hard work'

'That's very kind of you Hugo but I.....'

'I insist' Hugo interrupted, his eyes narrowing into a serious frown.

Mark knew better than to argue with Hugo on matters like this, and reluctantly placed his paperwork and case down, and reached for his car keys.

'I'll see you tomorrow' Hugo said insistently as he directed Mark towards the door.

'Thanks Hugo' Mark uttered as he left the room.

Hugo shut the glass door behind him and walked towards his desk phone. He picked up the receiver and dialled a speed dial number, and awaited an answer,

'Yes, this is Hugo; I think we need to have a little chat'

# Chapter Three

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**W**ithin the halls of MI6 Headquarters, London UK, Counter-terrorism Division, a young agent with an impressive track record in catching international terrorists was pacing the floor looking through intelligence files.

Agent Nathaniel Williams, of MI6 Counter Terrorism skulked into the main operations room and various admin staff and agents turned to see the ominous figure as made his way down to the main plasma screen in the centre of the room. The head of MI6, together with the team tasked with discovering and illuminating threats to UK security, have been tracking the movements of a known terrorist Mohammed Al Azidi. Williams was reading his file as he silently moved around the room.

Mohammed Al Azidi, the 29 year old jihadi and eldest brother of 3, was a well-known Person of Interest within several intelligence agencies, but none had managed to get close enough to him to gain anything useful against him. Williams had a personal interest in this case; his younger brother was maimed in an explosion several years ago, with Azidi as the only viable suspect. Williams was, although he would never admit it, treating this as personal, something an M16 agent should never do. His superiors knew of his interest in this case, and if it wasn't for his superior skill and methodology over his fellow agents, he would never have been assigned to this case. Besides, he thought if anyone was able to catch Azidi, it would be him. He just hoped they wouldn't give him another case which would take away precious time he could be spending hunting down Azidi and finding out about his terror cell, and who was funding it.

The section chief had been alerted by Williams, who had been tracking Azidi since before he encountered him in Syria 3 months ago.

Williams answered his mobile which caused the entire room to turn to look at him. In his thick Scottish accent, he answered in his usual dour tone,

'Williams.'

The voice from the other end of the phone was Williams contact within Mossad, the intelligence agency for Israel. Williams was not impressed by what he heard.

'NO!' he shouted down the phone angrily, 'MI6 are have tracked Al Azidi to London because he plans to blow up the houses of Parliament and other UK targets that we have intelligence about in a systematic attack on the UK. I do not plan on sharing any intelligence until we know what we're up against'.

Williams hung up the phone and sighed, frustrated with the seeming lack of inter-agency co-operation.

All of a sudden, a phone rang out of the blue and one of the other agents answered it. Williams head was instantly up as the tone in the room completely changed. The agent looked across at Williams and his face went white. Williams rushed over and took the phone off the agent and answered it. Williams face also dropped when he was informed over the phone that another field agent tracking Al Azidi, had been found dead, his throat cut and Azidi's whereabouts where at this time, unknown.

Williams wasn't going to wait to get authorisation to enter the field. He had finely honed skills as a covert field agent and wasn't going to hang around to lose this lead. During the last 18 months, alongside tracking Al Azidi, Williams had also linked Azidi to a faceless and mysterious group of individuals, an organisation of professional hit men, who he believes, are pulling the strings behind a multitude of terrorist organisations and probably helping to finance them. Williams was convinced there were some members of this group within MI6 but he didn't have enough evidence, nor did he realise how far up this organisation went, that he was finding it difficult to wade through the murky waters of the secret service.

'When was the last time Waters checked in? Williams asked, his voice full of regret at leaving someone else in charge of watching Azidi. They had, at their disposal, the largest database of active terrorists and terrorist group profiles in the world.

Mark King appeared from the living room of his home in rural London, into the kitchen to find Marie, his wife, making breakfast for them both, and his children Benjamin and Hope, sat at the kitchen table eating theirs already. He held onto the brief case and files he was carrying and grabbed some toast, kissed Marie and children goodbye tried to rush out of the door. Marie, experienced in this sort of early morning manoeuvre, tried to persuade him to sit down and eat.

'You need to eat before work today; it's a big day for you!' She said with her usual air of concern.

Mark smiled at her, adjusting his suit jacket and his tie in the large hallway mirror. He wanted to look his best and also to look slightly menacing as it made the defence nervous. He popped his head round the hallway to the kitchen. 'I'd love to spend the day with you guys but remember me telling you about a new case that came in a few months back? Well today is the first day and I've been called in early'

Marie tutted at his level of ambition but that was one of the things she loved about her husband, he would do anything to make their lives better and he wanted a practice of his own soon.

'Oh excellent, sounds interesting, let me guess' Marie responded, smiling.

There was silence before they both simultaneously chimed,

'But I can't talk about it?'

They both chuckled as the children continued to eat their breakfast, not interested in their parents working life.

'Darling, this could be THE case which will make and define my career', Mark pleaded excitedly,

'Don't forget we are going away at the end of the week. I've packed all my stuff and the children's clothes too' Marie replied distantly.

Mark had forgotten they had arranged to go away this week. He had been fighting for time off for weeks now and had finally got it. He winced as he imagined the villa in the south of Spain, with its warm golden sandy beaches and drinks at the bar, Marie in a swimsuit and peace and quiet. But he had a feeling he was going to have to postpone.

'Honey, will you look for the passports for the children? I think they may be in the study in the safe?' Marie asked, thoughtfully.

Mark agreed although he wasn't really listening. His mind was focussed on preparing the case against this terrorist and he had been going over and over it in his mind for most of the night. This could really be the case that makes a name for him in the industry. He really wanted to be noticed, maybe then, he would get the chance to own this practice, and if not one he wanted to start of his own.

Mark rushed out of the door leaving Marie watching after him, worried. She turned to go inside and cleared up some of the breakfast things. Ben and Hope, Mark and Marie's children, were both plugged into MP3 players and Hope was reading a fashion magazine. She put the breakfast dishes in the dishwasher and grabbed her handbag, car keys and moved some of Mark's paperwork from the side, to the kitchen table. She tutted and shook her head when a half empty packet of cigarettes fell out and onto the floor. She remembered back at University when both of them smoked, Mark more so, but only when he was stressed. She thought to herself as she picked them up, how long it had been since then and whether she actually fancied one, but the feeling that Mark had hidden it from her made her slightly cross. She soon dismissed the thought as she knew he had been under serious pressure at work lately and had been responsible for prosecuting a large number of criminals linked to an organised crime ring operating in the north and midlands. She smiled as she thought she'd smelt it on him the week before but put it down to him meeting clients on the way home from work. She would have to invite Hugo Weaver, Mark's boss and senior Partner at Mark's law firm, and his wife over for dinner again soon, and then she could moan about the pressure he was putting Mark under.

'Hope! Benjamin!' shouted Marie as she left the front door open for them. 'Now please or you walk to school'

The children, not being needed to be told twice, both ran past her and out to the waiting car, still attached to their MP3 players. Marie wondered how it was they managed to hear her now whereas when she is stood next to them, they could never hear a word.

She glanced around as usual before she left for the day, to acknowledge the neighbours but no one was around today. However, she wondered if someone had bought a new car as she noticed a Range Rover 4x4 parked across the street, blacked out windows and a strange number plate. She'd never seen the car before. Perhaps it was a friend or Marks or someone who was waiting to give someone a lift. She brushed it aside and got into the car herself and left to drop the children off at school.

Mark smiled as he drove to work, listening to the music in the car. He pulled out one of his 'emergency' cigarette packets from the glove box and lit it, enjoying the feeling of exhaling the nicotine as he wound the window down. His mind took him back to the halls of St Andrews University where he and Marie first met. He remembered the way they used to look at each other and listen to music while they studied together, the plans they made and how life seemed so distant from pressures, other than the pressure of getting in their dissertation on time. They had been so caught up in life and trying to succeed, he thought they had forgotten how to have fun and relax. He would have loved to have gone on holiday, where he had planned to do as little as possible and forget the rush of life and just relax. Mark was aware he had not spent much time at home lately and he felt guilty about it, but he knew Marie was behind him even though sometimes it hurt her that they were away from each other for long periods of time and when he WAS home, he was in his study working on active cases. Marie meanwhile, would be looking after the house, the children, and getting herself to work as well. He wondered what he would do without her and how precious she really was to him. He would win this case, for her, and show her that all the sacrifice and distance, was worth it in the end.

He pulled up outside the Barristers chambers and solicitors firm Lever & Sons LLP, the most successful legal firm in the country. Before he had the chance to enter the building, a journalist, Ian Hawking rushed towards Mark with a notebook and Dictaphone and a camera slung across his shoulder firing questions about his previous case and personal life.

'Mr King, Mr King, is it true that the police made you aware of the link between Al Azidi and the recent crime syndicate you prosecuted?' Mark, irritated by this invasion of privacy, put his hand up to Hawking's face.

'Go away. I'm not going to jeopardise this case to give YOU a scoop on this. Please leave'

Hawking persisted, paying no heed to Mark's warning. Mark spun on him

'Who are you anyway, head of the Chigwell gazette?' Mark mocked as Hawking looked mortally offended. Mark knew full well who he was. Ian Hawking, freelance journalist and bane of Marks life, was always trying to get him to give a story and had hounded him for years, just waiting for him to trip up so he could write another one of those sick, twisted celebrity gossip smear stories. Mark was having none of it. He did the usual thing of pretending not to know who he was as he knew Hawking was insecure about his status as a reporter.

Mark rushed through the doors into his office, stopping to harmlessly flirt with Margaret La Tour (Maggie to those who knew her best), the aged secretary behind the large beach and chrome reception desk at the front of the building'

'Good morning beautiful!' Mark cheerfully chimed and winked at her as she smiled at him, 'wow you really do look amazing this morning and I love the perfume, very seductive!'

'Oh go on you' she replied playfully but secretly grateful for the compliment, 'or I'll tell your wife'

'Oh she already knows I'm madly in love with you and I plan to leave her for you and run off into the sunset' Mark laughed as Maggie began to turn bright red.

Mark dearly loved Maggie and always welcomed seeing her sitting behind the front desk, in front of a sign which read 'welcome' in 100's of different languages against a white background. Mark always made a point of picking one out each week to try to learn it throughout the week and Maggie would regularly give him pointers on how to pronounce it.

He was about to continue when he was met by his young and attractive PA Penny who proceeded to give Mark a rundown of his diary for the day and handed him a coffee.

'Oh Mr King, your 2.30 has requested a rescheduling as they cannot make it, those case files you requested have arrived and are on your desk, I've filed your expenses claim and I've emailed you that client list you asked me to provide for you' she panted, smiling proudly.

Mark smiled at her and valued her efforts hugely.

'Oh and don't forget to buy a present for Benjamin, call your mother in law and don't forget you're 1pm lunch appointment at Carlo's restaurant with Mr Ling

Penny was about to turn away, when she remembered one last detail

'Before you do any of that Mr King, Mr Leaver needs to see you urgently in his office'

Mark nodded and kissed her on the cheek gently. In another life, he may well have got together with her but they were more like brother and sister. He laid down his case, notes and jacket on his desk and walked into Hugo's office to face a serious looking Hugo.

'Close the door' Hugo grimaced, which Mark thought was highly unusual but obeyed his boss nonetheless.

'Mark, I need you to clear your diary for the next 3 weeks, have Penny see to it right away'

'Three weeks!?' Mark exclaimed loudly. Hugo filed some papers from his desk and handed them to Mark.

'It seems your popularity, no thanks in large, to Ian Hawking, has earned you particular acclaim 'Mark read through the papers that Hugo handed to him and narrowed his eyes before his eyes scanned across the part which described that Mark had been specifically requested.

'Hugo, this is insane, I've got other cases to work on, Marie has booked a holiday which I am supposed to go on, and incidentally, have been looking forward to, at the end of this week', Mark argued, handing the papers back to Hugo. Hugo shook his head. 'Can't you give it to a senior partner?'

'Mark, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you are doing this and that's the end of it'

'No can do Hugo, I've told you, I haven't had a holiday in 3 years and this time Friday, I shall be on a beach in the south of Spain, enjoying a well-earned rest' Hugo glared at Mark and slapped the papers on the table.

'You'll have your holiday Mark, but you are working this case' Once again, Mark tried to argue but Hugo threw the case notes on the desk in front of Mark and his tone changed to a sterner, commanding tone 'Downing Street is watching this one very closely'.

Mark was worried and intrigued

'Why me?' he asked nervously, almost afraid to hear the answer, 'what's wrong with the Crown prosecuting?'

Hugo turned and sighed,

'Mark, as you know, the CPS can instruct external counsel in private practice and, because of your higher court advocacy qualifications and experience, they have requested us or rather YOU, to prosecute on behalf of the CPS'

Reluctantly agreed and Hugo summoned Penny in via the internal phone line. Mark stood reading the file and his well-trained eye found the section which described what the case was all about. He placed the case notes down and stared in disbelief at Hugo, watching the sly grin grow on his white bearded face. Penny entered the room with her usual flounce and her notebook and Mark kept staring at Hugo. In a scared, serious but slightly excited tone, Mark gave her instructions

‘Penny, clear my diary of everything for the next 3 weeks at least. Meetings, client visits, conference calls, emails, everything. Penny stopped scribbling and stared at Mark

‘Everything? But Mr King.....’ She questioned, slightly stunned and confused but was cut off mid-sentence.

‘Everything’ Mark confirmed. ‘At all costs.’

Penny looked at Hugo for inspiration and further details. Hugo smiled and nodded at her to do as he said. She looked at him and, with uncertainty, nodded back and left the room. Mark then pulled out his mobile, all without his eyes leaving Hugo, dialled Marie’s mobile his wife and advised her that the holiday was off, and then hung up.

Mark had been given the opportunity to prosecute on the Al Azidi case.