

The Black Nest

P.S Bridge

By the same author

Hit

Hitback

The Black Nest

COMING SOON

Silent Service

Prologue

'There are no words for betrayal. Only empty, meaningless expression which drives us forward on our quest' – Mark King

London, six months ago

Journalism had always been Ian Hawking's first choice of career, even before St Andrews University discovered his talents for being able to get the scoop on any story. He had relished in the challenge and thought of himself firmly, as an advocate of the truth. His mother had always taught him to seek out the truth, whatever the cost, and this had driven him through his career but he had often pondered about what area was most in need of the truth being told.

He had decided to focus on the law and reporting on court cases as a way of discovering the facts of the cases from any available source he could find, and he wasn't adverse to using any method necessary to provide 'Herald News', his employer, with as much information as possible. He had a list of scrupulous informants in lots of different areas, from politics, to everyday people and would regularly visit them for information.

However, life had changed dramatically over the past few years and he was no longer bound by the constraints of one of the country's biggest newspapers. His reasons had also changed, and he was a different person now.

Hawking looked over the empty beer cans and take-a-way boxes which littered his small mahogany coffee table, threatening to engulf his laptop and knock over the over filled ashtray and empty coffee cup, precariously close to the edge of the table. Slouching down in his old blue dressing gown undone at the waist, he swiped his finger over the mouse pad and the shock of the sudden light emitting from the screen, made him shield his eyes.

He fumbled around for a bin bag and emptied the contents of the table, bar the coffee cup and laptop, into the black sack and wandered into the kitchen to make his morning coffee. He flicked the switch on the kettle, before deciding to open the curtains in the living room. On the way, he picked up a cigarette and lighter and lit up, unaware of what time of day it was. He had been working late into the night, as he did most nights, and the days seemed to merge into one, long faded and blinkered week. He no longer had any desire to keep track of time, as his work on Invictus Advoca and their organisation was his primary concern.

Pulling the curtain open, flooding the room with early afternoon sun, a notification sound rang from his laptop. He spun round immediately and moved quickly towards the table, the sofa, and the waiting screen. It was just what he had been waiting for, an email from a source providing information about the various businesses Invictus Advoca had investment in. As he opened the encrypted PDF attachment, his eyes widened with shock as page after page revealed a list of business names, mostly defence, research and development, applied sciences and pharmaceuticals, some familiar, some unfamiliar, created pages of reading.

He sat back, feeling a sense of accomplishment as he watched the screen loading more and more pages, seemingly endless screenshots, scanned photographs of business premises, maps, aerial photographs, and most importantly of all, financial reports of just what size investment this shady organisation had in each company.

Putting on his reading glasses, he screwed up his eyes as he got closer to the scrolling list of loading PDF pages. After a several minutes, the document had loaded and he began to scroll through the list, looking for any names he recognised. One in particular stood out, not because Invictus Advoca had a financial stake in small, barely noticeable pharmaceutical company, but because the list of staff members had reduced dramatically over the past six months. Never one to back down from a mystery, Hawking opened internet explorer and began to research the individuals who had "left" the company, mostly in what appeared to be mysterious circumstances. Within minutes, he had multiple tabs open with profiles of each staff member. But they were no ordinary employees as Hawking discovered; they were scientists and all in one particular field, the research and development of vaccines and antidotes. As he read, he was shocked to discover, flicking through each profile of professors and highly regarded scientists, that each one had a specialism in battlefield antidotes to Hydrogen Cyanide, OP Nerve Agents, Phosgene, especially research into pharmacological protection against these.

He sat back in total disbelief and confusion. Why would a clandestine organisation such as Invictus Advoca, be pouring resources into this area, and why were scientists in this field suddenly disappearing? Always suspicious, he quickly put the two together and concluded that Invictus Advoca, were either recruiting or kidnapping these scientists to work on some sort of biological weapon. With his heart beating fast in his chest, he stood up and walked over to the window to let some air into the smoky room. His head swam with theories, but that was all Ian Hawking had at the moment, theories. None of this was proof, certainly not enough to take to the authorities. He finished his cigarette and headed for the shower. He had to find out more about this and perhaps a trip to a few of these businesses may shed some light on what was going on.

Hawking didn't take long in the shower, but he felt much better for it as he entered the living room, fully dressed, smelling fresh and feeling more awake. He read through the list again but was still no clearer to finding out the facts, when he heard car doors slamming down on the street below. Being on the sixth floor of a luxury development of apartments overlooking the Thames had its advantages for him, and he didn't feel safe anywhere else. He felt protected high up with a good few of the street, however, what didn't make him feel safe, was the three black Mitsubishi four wheeled drive vehicles with blacked out windows which were parked across the street, with eight large men crossing the road towards the entrance to his building.

With the sudden feeling that something was wrong, he clicked the print button on his laptop and rushed to find his shoes, jacket and bag. He grabbed his car keys from the table and quickly grabbed the last page from the printer and gathered his laptop. He saved the PDF document onto a memory stick which he put in his jeans pocket and threw everything into his bag. He didn't have time to think and, once he was ready, he left his flat, locking the

door behind him and heading for the fire escape just as he heard the lift doors “ping” before they opened.

Hawking closed the fire exit door until only an inch remained open, and he peered through, his heart beating so loud he thought the whole world would hear him. Three men, armed with silenced pistols, stepped out of the lift and moved towards his front door. Ian Hawking disappeared just before the men burst into his flat, and he could hear them shouting for him as he jumped frantically down the steps, desperate to get away. He was now certain he was onto something he shouldn't know; after all, why else would they send hitmen after him? As he panted as he rushed towards the basement carpark, clutching his bag to his chest and prayed they would not think to look down the fire escape. It seemed like an eternity between the sixth floor and the basement level and with every passing second, the hitmen could burst out of the fire escape door and see him. Just as his hand touched the door handle for the basement carpark, his blood ran cold as he heard the fire escape door open, and voices calling his name.

Rushing towards his car, his heart was in his mouth and he wondered if he would get out of this alive. Luckily, he saw someone getting into their Porsche 911, parked next to his. He needed to swap cars in case his had been marked and was about to stop his neighbour when bullets ricocheted off the stone pillars surrounding him. His neighbour ducked and ran, leaving the keys in the ignition of the Porsche.

‘No time to think,’ he panted as he jumped in and turned the key, slamming the door.

He reversed out of the space and fortunately, was covered by other cars. He turned the wheel and drove away from the approaching hitmen. They hadn't noticed him; it was his neighbour they were focussed on, along with his car.

‘They think he's me!’ he panted, out of breath and sweating.

He watched as they forced his neighbour, face first on to his own car and searched him. His neighbour pointed desperately towards him and one of the men shouted and pointed towards Hawking, before more shots rang out, hitting the lights and pipes above. Hawking put his foot down and the powerful Porsche engine propelled him forward at breakneck speed. The exit ramp was in sight but it was blocked by a barrier.

‘No time!’ Hawking shouted as he felt the thump of bullets hit the boot of the Porsche.

Hawking pressed his foot firmly to the floor and tensed up as he shot up the exit ramp, smashing the wooden black and yellow striped barrier into pieces. He burst out onto the street with a screech of brakes and opened his eyes. He was alive. He shook his head to bring his vision back fully and sped off down the street. He had no idea where he was going, but Ian Hawking, was now being *hunted*!

Chapter One

Andalusia, Spain, Present day

The sun beat down on yet another beautiful Spanish morning as Wendy packed her straw Animal Poppy Beach bag with sunblock, a towel and other items she thought she might need. She turned to look at herself in the mirror, wearing her white linen trousers and light tan coloured, off the shoulder top and realised she had lost weight. Well, it had been quite a stressful time recently and it was really the only proper holiday they had had as a family. The children had begged her to come along and she relished in spending as much time with them as possible. She placed her straw sun hat gracefully on her head and put on her sunglasses as she walked confidently out of the white stone bedroom and into the hall. Stepping out into the sunshine, she took a long deep breath before breathing out the Spanish air. She felt in her handbag for her cigarettes and lit one up, hoping to have finished it before the children came out to meet her. Unfortunately, she was wrong.

Mark almost skipped down the small steps to greet his mother in law and smiled, still conscious of muscular problems which refused to go away, but he hoped the pain killers would soon sort that out.

‘Good morning Wendy,’ he grinned, kissing her on each cheek.

She looked up and smiling, lifting her cheek for him to kiss. It was something Mark had started doing almost immediately after he returned home, but for some reason, he couldn’t quite find the ‘right time’ to give up. Besides, it was difficult living in a house with two other smokers.

‘Good morning dear, sleep well?’ Wendy asked, smiling back as she chopped fruit for sandwiches at lunch time.

With one hand, he reached into her handbag and took out her cigarettes without her knowledge and lit one up before turning to face her. She gave him a friendly smack.

‘I think I preferred you as a Lawyer,’ she teased.

She didn’t really mind the smoking; they were on holiday after all. However, the children were not so forgiving,

‘Granny you are a bad influence on Dad,’ Hope scolded as she ran to give her grandma a hug.

‘Oh Hope dear, give your father a break,’ she replied standing up for Mark, ‘he has been through an awful lot lately,’

'That was ages ago,' Hope persisted, glaring at her father playfully.

'I'll pack it in once we're back home, I promise' he replied, feeling guilty having promised faithfully to quit once he got home from Ukraine eighteen months ago. He

'I hope so, or we're all going to have to start,' Hope joked.

Mark was worried about this. Hope was now fifteen and he didn't want her going down the same road as he did. He shot her a look enough to get his message across,

'Oi, pack that in,' he said, cuffing her head gently as she passed him, 'your too young and don't follow the same mistakes I made!'

Hope looked at the ground at this point, feeling slightly ashamed. She had spent a lot of time with Nadia before their holiday and had 'picked up' one or two tricks.

'Come along dears,' Wendy called jovially, changing the subject quickly, 'let's go for a morning stroll along the beach. I love the sound of the sea first thing in the morning,'

With that, they linked arms and crossed the road towards the beach. There were tourists beginning to leave their hotels and villa's to enjoy the early morning sunshine and Mark noticed they were typical tourists, taking selfies and pictures of each other and immediately uploading them to Facebook. Mark shook his head at the advent of such a platform and was glad he grew up in an age where there was no such thing as social media. He grinned though as it seemed the crowd of eighteen year old girls, dressed desperately to impress as many men as possible on their first holiday without their parents or adult supervision, laughed and frolicked along the road towards the seafood restaurant around the corner. Mark had heard them coming home from a club last night and he was slightly envious of their ages, thinking he could have done the same thing if he had been eighteen, instead of being at Sandhurst. It would have been much more fun.

Wendy patted his arm affectionately and smiled at him.

'How's Nadia. Have you spoken to her recently?'

Mark was not impressed on getting relationship advice from his mother in law, especially as she was supposed to be against Mark being with anyone because it would deface the memory of her daughter. However, Wendy was grateful Mark was moving on and she had put her demons to bed a while before their holiday. She just wanted Mark and the children to be happy, whatever that may be and she knew she would always be in their lives. In the nearly 4 years since Marie had been gone, she had gotten closer to Mark than she ever was before and spent more time with him and the children lately which she loved. They loved having her around too, especially because she was understanding and not too strict. Mark had noticed how much more relaxed she had become since Marie died. Beforehand, she was a strict disciplinarian but he believed Marie's death had encouraged her to live again.

Mark avoided eye contact with her,

'Yes, briefly,' he replied, avoiding eye contact with her.

She could always tell when he was lying by the way he used to look away so she wouldn't be able to tell. The fact that the looking away from her, was the 'tell', made her ability to tell when he was lying, a whole lot easier.

Wendy avoided further questions as she knew Mark was quite sensitive when it came to Marie. The two of them had been through such traumatic experiences; they still needed time to find themselves and where their relationship was going. Wendy knew how much they loved each other, but she also knew they needed time.

Mark enjoyed people watching as they stepped onto the hot sand and removed their flip flops. Hope and Ben ran towards the warm sea, splashing and kicking around, while Wendy shouted words of encouragement from a safer distance. Mark felt content and he wished Nadia had come after all, but he needed some time away with just Wendy and the children and Nadia completely understood that. Besides, she had decided she was going to California for a few days and would meet them back at home when they returned to New York.

It was at this point, that Mark recognised the man he saw yesterday when he and the children went to The Generalife Gardens, still walking with his camera around his neck. He greeted Mark with a wave and Mark waved back, hoping he did not want to stop and talk. Mark held his breath but the man kept on walking. He breathed a sigh of relief and lit up another cigarette, leaning back to enjoy the feel of the sun on his tanned face.

A few hours later, the 4 of them were enjoying lunch at the Chiringuito beachside restaurant, watching tourists, locals, market traders and worker pass by. Mark was contemplating going for a swim in the hotel pool after he had eaten and to enjoy some time in the Jacuzzi. Wendy had asked earlier if she could take the children shopping and Mark had agreed, allowing them some time with their Grandma. He smiled as he encouraged everyone to eat up and excused himself so he could go outside for a cigarette. The children glared at him and Wendy told them off, nodding to Mark to go. Mark kissed them both and got up from the table, reaching in his shirt's top pocket for the cigarettes and the Zippo lighter Nadia had bought him. He made his way through the restaurant and out through the door, his eyes taking time to adjust to the light change. He leant up against the wall outside and puffed away, feeling pleasantly full from lunch. He peered up and down the street and noticed a car parked across the road. He wasn't so much suspicious of it, but his instinct told him it just didn't fit in. It was a Volvo XC Coupe in silver and had blacked windows. Mark knew this place was frequented by celebrities and the rich and famous sometimes, it was one of the main reasons why Hope was so excited to come here, but it looked a little on the flash side even for here and was getting some attention.

Mark admired the cars sleek and slender bodywork, the highly polished paint and the shiny black of the tyres. Perhaps he could even be persuaded to buy one at some point. He checked the registration and it was brand new. Naturally he remembered it so he could search the internet for the model later and see how much they cost.

He was startled by Hope and Ben who jumped and grabbed both of his arms. They had finished lunch and were about to go shopping.

'Don't spend too much,' Mark said, putting some bank notes in each of the children's hands.

He kissed Wendy as she passed by and she patted him on the face gently.

'Go and enjoy the pool and Jacuzzi. You need to rest those muscles,' she ordered.

Mark knew better than to argue with her about things like this.

Mark smiled at her caring and attentive nature, it reminded him of Marie and he understood now where Marie got it from. There must have been a time when Wendy wasn't the tyrant Mark used to think she was. He made his way back to the hotel and up into the room, grabbing his swimming gear and heading back down to the pool.

The Greek inspired swimming pool was square and inviting as Mark stepped into the warm blue water. It was surrounded by pure white columns like that of the Parthenon and, at intervals along the wall, mock Greek goddess statues stood, faceless and quiet. At the far end of the pool was a series of sun loungers and painted images of ancient Greece filled the room with colour against the pale backdrop of the white columns and statues. Above, was a balcony which over looked the pool where the spa was based. At present, it was unoccupied. As Mark swam gently through the warm water across the pool and to the other end, before resting and swimming back in the opposite direction. He was feeling great and really enjoyed kicking back like this. Mark thought as he swam, perhaps to go with the new Volvo, he would install a pool in their home, an exact carbon copy of this one, he'd like that. He reached the white tiles at the far end of the pool and noticed there were people milling around outside the pool. He ignored them and carried on with his swim, oblivious to the man stood on the balcony above him taking pictures. By the time Mark had decided he wanted to swim backstroke, the man had vanished and he was none the wiser to his presence.

After one more lap of the pool, Mark pulled himself expertly out of the water and wiped his face over with the small, luxurious white face towel the pool staff provided, and headed towards the Jacuzzi up the spiral metal staircase which led to the balcony. He was still patting his face when, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed someone stood, just behind the reception area, in a doorway. He thought at first he was seeing things and finished wiping his face. When he was dry, he looked again, through chlorine strained eyes. No one was there.

'Hello, anyone there?' Mark called out, expecting a member of staff to come to his assistance.

There was no reply. Mark called again, looking behind the reception desk,

'Hola hay alguien ah?' he called in Spanish.

Eventually a Taiwanese lady shuffled out from a spa room near to where Mark thought he saw someone. He smiled and spoke to her

'Jacuzzi?' he asked, praying silently that she would understand.

She motioned for him to follow her and she opened the door to the Jacuzzi room for him. Inside was a circular room, illuminated in blue, and continuing the Grecian theme, with four Jacuzzi's built in a circle, surrounded by what Mark thought looked like a mock Stonehenge. There were also fake palm trees and plants placed at various intervals between the mock stone pillars. Mark was in awe of this luxury hotel. He gently lowered himself into the bubbling waters of the Jacuzzi at the far end and leaned back, closing his eyes.

He wasn't sure how long he was there for but when he got out, he was wrinkled and pale. He headed back up to his room and showered, drying himself off and changing into fresh tan coloured linen trousers and a tight fitting dark blue polo shirt. On his way back downstairs, he noticed someone in the lobby reading the newspaper. Although Mark could not see his face, he felt something familiar about him. Picking up the nearest heavy magazine, Mark walked past the man reading the newspaper and dropped it directly on top of the newspaper, causing it to fall to the floor, sheets flying everywhere.

'Oh damn, I am SO sorry,' Mark apologized as he helped pick up the pieces of the newspaper and put them back together.

As he did, he noticed the man's mobile phone was sticking out of the top pocket in his suit jacket and the small, red light confirmed to Mark that it was filming. The man glared at Mark, then smiled

'It's ok my friend, please,' insisted the stranger, with a worried look on his face at possibly having upset a tourist.

Mark got up, and greeted the man. He was Arabic, judging by his accent, from Dubai, with short spikey jet black hair and aviators on. He took them off so he could see Mark properly.

'Please, let me buy you coffee by way of apology' Mark insisted, as the man smiled but shook his head

'I am sorry, but I am waiting for someone,' he replied gratefully.

Mark shrugged his shoulders, 'That IS a shame. I don't know what I was thinking. I am in a world of my own' he explained, hoping for some adult conversation which didn't involve taking about that godforsaken boyband Hope was into right now.

'Must be the Spa,' replied the stranger, his eyes slightly narrowing and the smile gone from his face.

Mark looked puzzled. How did he know Mark had been in the spa?

'Spa?' Mark questioned, concerned as to how the man knew where Mark had been.

'Yes, I can smell the chlorine,' the man replied. Mark's concern vanished as he realised he did wreak of chlorine a bit.

'Ah ha' Mark replied, smiling, 'well some other time then?'

The man stared intently after him and responded with almost a distant but menacing look on his face Mark suddenly found uncomfortable.

'Some other time,' he said.

This man made Mark feel uneasy and he nervously smiled and walked away and exited the hotel. He immediately noticed the Volvo XC Coupe he had seen earlier, parked outside the hotel. He wondered if it belonged to this man, but he could see someone was in the car as the passenger front window was open a few inches. He turned to look into the shop window next door to the hotel and, in the reflection of the window, saw the unmistakable lens of a camera, just inside the blacked out window of the Volvo's passenger side. Mark froze, rooted to the spot. Surely he was not under surveillance? He paused, turned around, and headed in the opposite direction, towards a small shopping arcade.

Chapter Two

Once in the cool, air conditioned, busy shopping arcade with its pure white and blue coloured walls, familiar shops selling mostly western items, Mark found a stand selling mobile phones. They weren't great and didn't have too much technology, but they were cheap. He got out his wallet and paid cash for the first handset he found which was small enough to conceal. He activated it and put in the sim card and dialled the number for the British Consulate in Malaga. Once through, he requested to be put through to MI6 Intelligence agent Nathaniel Williams as a priority one case. He was asked for the access code for such a call and he read it out carefully. He tutted while he was transferred. Seconds later, Agent Williams answered

'Williams,' Mark said sternly.

'Well, well, Mr King. I was hoping to catch up to you,' Williams replied

'Not the time Williams, and don't bother tracing the call, I'll be gone from here in an hour' Mark warned, knowing exactly what Williams would be doing all the while they were on the phone. Mark was still a wanted fugitive in the eyes of Agent Williams and MI6, they just couldn't catch him, 'listen, do you have me under surveillance?'

There was a long pause,

'Sadly no I'm afraid. Because Mark, if we did, you would be arrested by now,'

Mark shivered at the thought but he didn't have time for games on the Spanish Inquisition.

'So you're telling me MI6, CIA, FBI, and all the other agencies, do NOT have me or my family under any sort of surveillance whatsoever,' he asked, insistent that Williams tell him the truth,

'You dropped off the grid Mark; we had no choice but to let you go. Are you in some kind of trouble?' Williams asked, concerned now as Mark was asking all the right questions of someone who thought they were being followed.

'I don't know yet. I think I may have been compromised but I'm not 100%,' Mark explained worriedly,

'It's not us Mark,' Williams promised, 'I can assure you of that. I'll make some enquiries and get back to you. I presume this is a burn phone,'

'What, you thought I was gonna call you up to see how you were doing from my LANDLINE!?' Mark joked with him, thinking that in the 18 months Mark had not spoken to him, the man still hadn't learned,

'I know you better than that,' Williams laughed. There was a pause, 'Spain eh. Nice this time of year I hear?'

'No extradition either!' Mark snapped back.

Williams remained silent before sighing down the phone,

'I'll call you back,' he said sharply before hanging up the phone.

Mark hung up his end and put the phone back in his pocket, and became panicked. He had to find Wendy and the children and get them back to the hotel. So much for a quiet life, Mark thought to himself as he hurried back towards the hotel. The Volvo had now gone and Mark found the security office of the hotel. He found it empty, just as he had thought, but was faced with a dozen CCTV screens. He rewound the footage back to the time he bumped into the newspaper man and found a blank disc, making a copy of the footage. He also took pictures of the newspaper man's face and slipped out of the room quietly.

He found Wendy, Hope and Ben gleefully walking down the road towards the hotel, armed with shopping bags and waited until they came in. He ushered them into the room and sat them down, looking grim faced,

'Mark, what's wrong?' Wendy asked, a worried look beginning to grow on her face.

Mark looked concerned at Wendy, realising he couldn't hide the truth from her even if he wanted to. It was OK, it didn't intend on hiding anything from her where their security and safety were concerned.

'We've been compromised. Someone's been watching us,' he replied, slowly and quietly so as not to be over heard.

Wendy looked horrified as she stared at Mark, terrified that at any moment, men would burst in and start shooting the place up,

'What? Are you sure?' she asked in a shaky voice.

'Positive,' Mark replied, an air of panic in his voice,

Wendy thought for a moment. She was aware of Mark's nightmares, and the times she had stayed over, she had regularly heard him waking up screaming about people coming to kill them all and then heard Nadia trying to calm him down as Mark's voice would grow more and more scared. She used to listen for the stairs as both Mark and Nadia would tip toe down to the conservatory for a cigarette so that Mark could calm down.

'Oh Mark come on dear, you don't really suppose we've been followed here do you?' she asked, praying that he was wrong and that they wouldn't have to cut their holiday short, 'I am sure it was just tourists taking photographs,'

‘Wendy, listen to me,’ Mark exclaimed, getting impatient and taking her by the hand, ‘while eating lunch earlier, I saw a car outside the restaurant,’ he explained,

Wendy instinctively looked around her, suddenly viewing everyone as a potential threat. She knew Mark was becoming more paranoid, taking different routes to and from wherever they went, even to the local store, but she also trusted his instincts.

‘Then earlier’ Mark continued, ‘outside this hotel, I saw the SAME car and ran into someone in the lobby who was filming something from his pocket. Before that, I thought I saw someone in the spa but by the time I looked properly, they had gone’

Wendy looked hesitantly at Mark,

‘So you saw someone? Doesn’t mean they’re after you,’

Mark sighed; frustrated at the fact that his gut was telling him he was right,

‘I was outside the hotel and I saw the window of this car wound down a bit. In the reflection of the shop window I saw a camera lens in the car window,’

‘But, the children? Mark the holiday!’ Wendy pleaded,

‘I know, I know, we’ll have to cut it short,’ he said sharply

‘This was meant to be all over,’ she said, half sobbing.

Mark put his hands on her shoulders and tried to calm her down

‘Wendy, I need you to focus! Start packing, I’ll tell the kids,’

Wendy wiped her eyes and nodded, reaching for her suitcase. Mark made a call on his burn phone to the airport and booked the next available flight to New York. Then he went down to reception and explained there had been a family death and they had to check out early. He paid the bill and tipped the reception desk extra for them to tell ANYONE who came asking about them after they had gone, to advise them they were going to the Island of El Hierro. The man behind the counter nodded and whispered that he understood.

Mark walked calmly back up to the hotel room, stopping by the lift at the stand of sight-seeing booklet’s, he spun it round until he found a magazine on the Island of El Hierro and began to read intently through it. He knew whoever was after him would check the CCTV footage and think they had gone to El Hierro. The lift pinged as the doors opened. Mark walked into the lift and pressed the button for his floor, and the floor 2 floors above. He ignored his floor when the lift arrived and went up to the floor two floors above. He walked down towards the last room before the stairwell and knocked on the door. The door opened and Mark made up a story about how he was looking for his friend who was staying here. He asked the person who opened the door, to stay where they were for a second

while Mark used the open hotel room door as cover from the CCTV camera at the end of the hallway, and entered the stairwell, checking up and down for CCTV. There wasn't any so Mark made his way down to his own floor.

Before he exited the stairwell on his own floor, he reached around the door and knocked the room door next door to the stairwell. He waited until he heard the door squeak open and walked out of the stairwell. Again, he told the same story and asked the occupant of the room to keep the door open a few seconds. He went next door to his own room and quickly placed the key card into the door lock and rushed inside. Wendy and the children were all packed up and the looks of worry and dejection on their faces. He pulled them all in and hugged them tightly.

'I'll sort this out,' he promised as he led them out of the room and downstairs into a waiting taxi. He put the luggage in the boot and paid the driver to take Wendy and the children to the airport

'Dad! Don't leave us! Where are you going?!' Hope cried, fearful her father was going to go away again and come back injured, or worse, dead.

'If we are being followed, I want them to follow ME not you,' he explained, 'I will go as if I am going to get a boat to El Hierro, then come back to meet you guys at the airport,'

Mark turned to his son 'Ben, look after everyone!' he said, holding his son close to him, 'you're the man of the house, I'm putting you in charge. Take care of granny and your sister,'

Ben smiled and nodded. Wendy tried her best to smile at him and took his face in her hand.

'Take care dear. We'll see you soon,' she said, wiping a solitary tear from her eye,

'I promise. I love you all,' Mark replied as he stepped back.

He shut the taxi door and waved them off before walking over the road and down towards the boat charter office. He put himself and his children's names down for a boat trip to El Hierro and paid in cash. Next he doubled back all the way into the town, amongst its winding, narrow streets, where he could tell easily if he was being followed. Confident the coast was clear; he got into a waiting taxi and ordered the driver to go to the airport. He put on his aviators and sunk down low in the seat as the taxi sped off.

He glanced left and right out of the windows to see if he could see the Volvo or anyone else following. His phone rang and he answered it, knowing it only to be Williams.

'Mark, I've checked,' he said solemnly, 'no agency has you in their sights. I promise I have done an extensive search. No one has you under surveillance. If anyone does, it's not us or the Americans, or Mossad,'

'Thanks,' Mark replied, knowing that would be the inevitable truth, 'I'm sending you something'

Mark logged onto the internet and started a new email with a slideshow of the pictures of the newspaper man from the CCTV footage.

'Can you use facial recognition to find out who he is?' he asked quietly,

'Mark!' he said angrily but not surprised at Mark's question, 'you can't just call up and ask for favours. We have no interest unless it's a threat, you know the rules,'

'Fine!' Mark snapped, 'I'll use my own technology when I get back,'

Mark was, irritated and worried. Williams could tell that there was real panic in Mark's voice and began to soften.

'Send it over, I'll see what I can do,' he said reluctantly, 'where you headed?'

Mark wasn't going to fall into this trap. If he told Williams the truth, or if there was someone listening, he wasn't going to be able to tell the truth. He knew he had to lie, even though it put his position at extreme risk,

'El Hierro. I'll call you in a few days,'

Mark hung up before Williams had the chance to reply.

'Eh Seniora, you sleepy?' The driver asked. Mark nodded,

'Heavy night,' he replied, gazing out of the window hoping he hadn't been seen.

Mark arrived at the airport just before their flight was being called. He was careful to use Wendy's name to book the flight and not his as this would give them ample time to cover their tracks. As he paid the taxi driver, he found the nearest toilet where he locked himself in the cubical, placed the phone in the toilet and flushed, then retrieved it and stamped on it until it was nothing but pieces. He then wrapped the pieces in tissue and placed it in the bin before washing his hands and leaving the toilets. Wendy and the children were relieved to see Mark arrive and the four of them boarded the plane to New York, to Safety.