

## CHAPTER TWO

I woke up at half-past six experiencing mild panic. It was Monday and our start was scheduled for 9 a.m., which meant I had plenty of time to make myself look presentable and have breakfast. And the manor, where we were rehearsing, was only a five-minute walk up the hill from The Dog's Watch.

But I hadn't toured in nearly ten years. The last time I'd gigged around England was 2009, the year Em died. I'd been on the road with my own band, desperate to "make it" playing concerts in pubs and clubs and converted churches and renovated city halls and repurposed corn exchanges. And staging late night turns at so many music festivals I'd lost count.

I really wasn't sure I was up to it.

I made myself a cup of tea with the clever all-in-one device on my writing table and tried to force myself to think past it. I wasn't at all the same person I was back then. I was ten years older. I'd settled. I was far more confident now, and much happier. And "making it" wasn't even in my lexicon anymore. I had "made it"—at the Blue Devil.

This tour was icing on the cake. And the feeling of apprehension was, I assured myself, temporary. It would pass.

I had a shower and a shave, and then I went downstairs for breakfast.

It was half past seven.

Mum and Bob were already there and had saved me a seat at their table in the dining room.

“Morning,” I said, trying to do my best impression of “awake”. It was a challenge.

“Bucks Fizz?” Bob inquired, offering me the menu. “To celebrate our first day on the job?”

“It’s a bit early for me,” mum said.

“I don’t drink,” I said. “But a straight-up orange juice would go down nicely.”

“Ah,” said Bob, in that tone of voice that people revert to when they find they need to express an understanding of alcoholic recovery.

“By choice,” I added. “Not any particular adherence to higher powers or staircases.”

“Well done,” said Bob, acknowledging that my willpower had control over the broken “off-switch” that many of my friends who actually have embraced AA enthusiastically own up to.

The menu offered a fresh fruit salad with berries, or yogurt, or porridge, or cereals. And the ever-popular Full English, which all three of us decided to order. There’s nothing like going to work on two free-range eggs, sausage, mushroom, baked beans and a roasted tomato. Even when you’re showered and shaved but your brain’s still upstairs buried underneath the pillow.

“I trust you solved the smoking issue?” mum inquired, conversationally, as I took the mandatory photo for Instagram.

“You know me too well.”

“I should think so,” she said, pouring out a cup of her favourite Yorkshire tea.

“A chuffer?” Bob inquired.

“I’m trying to quit.”

“He’s always trying to quit,” mum replied, humorously, stirring in some milk. “I don’t know where he got it from. Neither Tony nor I ever smoked.”

“Cigarettes, anyway,” I said.

I know it’s difficult to imagine a Shale and Lace granny regularly toking up. But when she was younger, she did. And so did my dad. Along with the rest of the band. There’s a wonderful ornate hookah from India somewhere in her loft and I can attest to the fact that it was exceptionally well-used.

“I reckon,” I said, “that as long as you keep trying, you’ve never actually thrown in the towel.”

Since The Dog’s Watch was a non-smoking establishment, last

night's bedtime ciggie had forced me to become inventive: take the battery out of the smoke alarm (not an option—it was hard-wired—I checked); open a window and aim the smoke outside (a possibility—if I'd been able to figure out how to unlatch the bloody thing) or retreat into the loo, shut the door and blow it down the—

“Sink drain?” mum guessed.

“I won't tell Arthur if you don't,” I said, embracing my first coffee of the day. Very strong. With cream and two sugars.

Stoneford Manor has an interesting history. It was built in the early 1800s by a widower, Augustus Duran, who'd arrived in the village after hurriedly abandoning a very draughty chateau in Amiens in the midst of the French Revolution. He'd remarried and set about raising a second family. But it turned out his new wife preferred to live in a far less ostentatious cottage at the bottom of the hill, and so the manor had been sold to the Boswell-Thorpes, who owned three other stately country homes and a townhouse in Eaton Square in London.

A century or so later, in the 1960s, the house and its grounds became notorious for the social events thrown by Giles Jessop, whose mother was Gwendolyn Boswell-Thorpe and whose father was Gilbert Jessop, the 17th Earl of Brighthelmstone. Giles fronted a band called Brighton Peer, and he and his twin sister Arabella were part of The Scene. They attended all of the trendy night spots and all of the important parties. They threw important parties of their own. They wore the latest fashions, drove the fastest cars, and were on first-name terms with everyone who was anyone. If you wanted to meet a pop star, or a photographer, a model, or a gangster, they could arrange it.

It was still party-central until mid-1965, when Arabella ran into some unfortunate dealings with the police, the west wing of the manor caught fire, and Giles, wisely, decamped to the safety of Swinging London. His parents also decamped, had the charred remains restored, and let the house out to discerning clients, provided they paid a damage deposit and promised not to kick holes in the walls or smash the stained-glass windows or trash the antique suits of armour in the downstairs gallery.

Figgis Green had been one of the first bands to rehearse in the manor, and the tradition of being an accessible and desirable haven for musicians had continued for some years. But by the time my

sister Angie and I were scrambling through the wild undergrowth at its rear and exploring the crumbling ruins of its derelict stable block, its windows and doors had been boarded up and there were rumours the Boswell-Thorpes had plans to turn it into a bed and breakfast.

Which was what it eventually became, until 2016, when it was quietly boarded up again and its premises abandoned. And then, two years later—just in time for our Lost Time tour—it was back in business as a rehearsal space.

We were convening in the library, which was on the second floor in the east wing and was reached by way of an immense central staircase. One of the library's walls was fitted with exquisitely carved oak panels with mantels and twisted spindles and archways and linenfold inserts. In the middle of the wall was a massive fireplace, surrounded by blocks of white stone and protected by a filigreed iron fireguard. The wall opposite the fireplace was decorated with carved oak panels. And the wall opposite the doorway contained three bay windows overlooking the sea.

It was huge but completely appropriate for our purposes. Our crew had been busy—they'd arranged a collection of acoustic screens around the room to baffle the sound. They'd also set up our mikes and instruments and amps and music stands to replicate what they guessed would be our positions onstage.

I went in with mum and Bob and put on my best “new boy” face and manners. Bob was a new boy too, but at least he had a history with the band, subbing in on occasions when Rick, and then Ben, were unavailable. I was still in nappies when Figgis Green was riding the radio charts. Everyone else—even Bob—had spent years together, recording and performing, and they'd built relationships. My interaction had always been peripheral. I was Tony and Mandy's kid. I showed up in photos taken for PR pieces in papers and magazines. I attended Christmas parties and visited backstage during gigs and I was always around when there were band meetings or social events at our house. But I'd never played with them—not formally, anyway. And I was feeling incredibly uncertain as a result.

Mitch and Keith were already there, tuning up and testing out, impatient to start. Rolly, who was still recovering from jet lag and the eight-hour time change between Los Angeles and England, was slumped in an armchair in the corner, quietly snoring.

I'd brought a jar of Kenco Smooth instant coffee as my “housewarming” gift to the group. I'd assumed, a bit naively, that

someone else would be taking care of mundane things like a kettle. And mugs.

It turned out there was a kettle, in the kitchen, which was downstairs, and which looked as if it had last been renovated around the same time that Mary Quant had invented the mini-skirt. The kettle was electric and it still worked, though I wasn't at all confident about the plug. And there wasn't any milk.

A blank piece of paper had been tacked to the wall beside the kettle, along with a pencil on a string, and a note from Kato, our runner, explaining that if we needed anything to add it to the shopping list, which he promised he'd check and act upon every morning at 10 a.m. He'd helpfully provided his mobile number at the bottom, along with three smiley faces.

I added "a new kettle" to the list, and "milk", and, after checking the cupboards and drawers, "jammy dodgers", "ginger nuts" and "custard creams". There were two boxes of cubed sugar—I had no idea how old they were, though that sort of thing doesn't really go off, does it. There was a container of that disgusting powdered stuff that passes as coffee whitener, and there was a jar of generic instant coffee to go with it, and a box of teabags.

I was prepared, on that first day of rehearsals, to run through our two set lists, song by song—but it didn't happen. What did happen was a long discussion *about* the set lists, song by song—including how they would be lit and what they ought to sound like, and where and when we were going to stand—and sit—and what we were going to say in between the songs, and how long we were going to take to say it.

I made notes.

I checked my emails.

I uploaded a picture of my breakfast to Instagram.

I dashed off texts to Dom and Jenn. And Katey, who promised to come and rescue me from the doldrums of celibacy as soon as she could manage a day off work.

There was a break at half-past ten (during which I dashed outside and smoked two hurried ciggies, one after the other, and made friends with Tejo, our sound guy, who was also a chuffer and who, as it turned out, enjoyed the same brand as me—Benson and Hedges Gold), and came back to drink one of the worst cups of tea in the history of tea making. Much more of that, I thought, spying a box of chocolate-chip muffins that someone had brought up from the

village, and I'd find it necessary to resort to criminal acts.

And Kato hadn't put in an appearance.

By the time lunch rolled around, I was starving, in desperate need of another cigarette and craving a decently brewed coffee.

"There's a place on the other side of the Village Green," mum said. "At least there used to be. It was called The Four Eyes back in the day—they had a house band called The Spectacles who shared the pop charts with us for a few weeks."

"It's still there," Mitch said. "Independently owned and operated—not your average Starbucks."

Indeed, it wasn't. Smoking furiously, I trudged down the hill and across the little green and there it was, in a parade of buildings that was home to two firms of solicitors, the *Stoneford News*, a hairdresser's and Oldbutter and Ballcock Funeral Directors. The Four Eyes.

Its glory days had been roundabout 1965. There followed a long, slow decline in popularity and function; in the mid-1970s, when I was spending those long summer days with Auntie Jo while my parents toured, it was sitting empty and forlorn, its place in history on the verge of being forgotten.

I was happy to see someone had decided to rescue it and restore it to its former glory, albeit with a completely up-to-date take on coffee culture. I opened the door and went in.

Inside there was a huge silver Italian espresso machine on the counter and an authentic jukebox from the 1960s in the corner, though I doubted either of them were actually in working order and were largely there for their nostalgic value.

On the walls were photos of the place in its heyday. A little room crowded with earnest-looking teenagers. An exterior shot featuring a painted sign declaring that this was, indeed, The Four Eyes Coffee Bar, its name reinforced with a graphic representation of a pair of black-framed Hank Marvin-style eyeglasses. A smaller sign on the pavement advertising the house band—The Spectacles—and an amateur night when anyone could join them onstage.

Another of the photos showed a view of the counter, with that same espresso machine in use, and the jukebox lighting up the corner. There was also an orange juice dispenser, and a display case containing a few sandwiches and sausage rolls and a large bowl of what looked like spaghetti.

I ordered a coffee and a baguette with grilled veggies and generous slices of cheese, along with a very tasty-looking slice of

something smothered in chocolate for dessert.

I'd just arranged it all on my table so I could take a picture for my *Culinary Chronicle* when I was approached by a guy wearing a hand-knitted V-neck sleeveless pullover and a shirt and tie. You don't often see that nowadays. A shirt and a tie and a sleeveless pullover. I'd guess he was probably about my mum's age—early 70s anyway. He had very neat grey hair, combed carefully, and a pink and white face. He was carrying an old-fashioned leather school satchel.

"Hello, Jason," he said.

I was pretty positive I didn't know him. But that happens a lot. I perform. I'm in front of people. I enter their lives, and because of that, there's an assumed familiarity. On their end, anyway.

"Hello," I said, doing my best to convey the impression that I was actually looking forward to an uninterrupted lunch on my own.

"Duncan Stopher," he said, sticking out his hand.

I shook it. "Hello."

I sat down. He remained standing.

"I tried to see you this morning at the manor but your security guard wouldn't let me in. I'm a huge fan of Figgis Green."

Did he want me to sign something? Was he going to tell me all about his extensive record collection? His sister's grandchildren? His dodgy insides? He looked the sort of person who maintained a journal about his bowel movements.

*Excellent contribution this morning...*

*Nothing today. Requires an investigation.*

"I wanted to let you know how much I admired you for the way you tracked down Ben Quigley when he disappeared. I know you're good at solving cases involving missing people."

"Ah," I said. "Thanks."

A few years earlier, Ben had travelled to Peace River, Alberta—in northern Canada—to take part in a music festival. He'd never come back and people—my son, in particular—were understandably concerned for his welfare. I'd gone there to look for him. It had taken some work, but I'd found him...rescued might be a better word...and brought him home to England. His story had ended up in all the papers, and my second-string career as a PI had been launched.

"I have something I think you might be interested in. Might I join you...?"

Without waiting for me to reply, he appropriated the chair on the

other side of the table.

“It concerns a missing girl,” he said. “I’ve approached the police but they simply aren’t interested.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“They’re of the opinion that the young lady in question is dead.”

“Why would they think that?”

“She was declared legally dead by her mother a few years after she disappeared.”

“Well,” I said. “That more or less closes the book on the case. Really.”

“However, they are wrong.”

“You think they’re wrong or you know they’re wrong?”

“I know they’re wrong.”

He placed the old leather satchel he’d been carrying onto his lap, opened it and proceeded to transfer its contents to the tabletop in neat, perfectly aligned stacks.

“I took a lot of photos of Figgis Green when they were at the peak of their popularity in the mid-1970s,” he said.

And there they all were. Some were in colour, some in black and white. Each had a label affixed to the back, with meticulous printing identifying the date and location.

“Fairfield Halls,” he said, reading them aloud. “Croydon, October 1, 1973. Brangwyn Hall, Swansea, November 13, 1975. Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, July 10, 1976—”

“Yes, I understand,” I said.

“August 1, 1974. The Wiltshire Folk Festival.”

He wanted me to pay special attention to that one. Actually, there was more than one. There were six 5x7 colour photos, taken from where he must have been standing in the middle of a crowded grassy field. A stage at the far end featured Figgis Green. Behind that was a small forest—useful for damping the sound so the neighbours wouldn’t complain. The Wiltshire Folk Festival had only lasted a few years but was famous for who it attracted and how well it was organized. *The Old Grey Whistle Test* had done a story about it in 1972.

I glanced at all of the pictures. I didn’t have a lot of choice—Duncan was sliding them in front of me, one at a time, helpfully moving the plate with my baguette off to one side to accommodate them.

“I’d forgotten about this roll of film,” he said. “I’d put it away in a drawer and then, you know, things...”

He gestured in a way that suggested his unreliable lower colon or his grandchildren's tonsils had interrupted whatever plans he'd had for that particular summer.

"I found it last month while I was having a clear-out, and I sent it off to be developed. I'd labelled the film canister, of course, so I knew it was from the festival. But it's this which captured my attention."

He held the picture up for my benefit.

"Pippa Gladstone."

In the foreground of the photograph were a teenaged boy and girl. They both had long hair: his was dark brown and shoulder-length. Hers was dark blonde and wavy and hanging past her shoulders. The boy was looking away from the camera, but the girl was staring straight at it, and I noted that she had really striking blue-grey eyes. Both the boy and the girl were wearing trendy New York Yankees baseball caps. And they were dressed, like everyone around them, in rumpled Indian cotton shirts and grungy-looking bell-bottomed jeans and they both looked as if they needed a bath, which wasn't surprising as they'd likely been camping in a nearby meadow for the better part of a week.

"Who's Pippa Gladstone?" The name sounded familiar, but I couldn't think why.

"The young lady who disappeared in 1974 and was later declared legally dead by her mother."

"Did she disappear at the folk festival?"

"No, she disappeared while she on holiday with her family in Spain. She was 16 years old at the time and the locals claimed she'd been seen out and about with the son of a local businessman. But when the police questioned the boy he said he'd been to a party with her but he'd given her a lift back to her hotel and had dropped her off outside. He said the last he'd seen of her was when she'd got out of his car. He didn't stay to make sure she was safely inside."

"No CCTV or anything to confirm his statement, I suppose."

"That technology was still evolving at the time. It hadn't evolved as far as that particular hotel in 1974."

"And the police investigated...?"

"The police were unable to unearth any evidence to suggest that the boy had harmed or killed her."

"And that's where it ended?"

"That is indeed where it ended, although there were a number of

so-called sightings over the years, and a few claims that her body had been found. All proved to be false.”

“So why is this picture relevant?” I asked.

“Because,” Duncan replied, “the date I took that photo was August 1, 1974. You can verify when the Wiltshire Folk Festival ran that year. I have all of the details—”

He paused again and removed some more papers from his satchel and laid them out on the table. A set list from Figgis Green’s performance. A very tattered handbill advertising the festival—signed by my mum and dad.

Some scribbled writing in peacock blue ink on lined paper.

“I made note of which guitars your father chose for the performance,” Duncan provided, helpfully. “And where he played misplaced notes in three of the songs.”

“And Pippa...?”

“She disappeared on March 23, 1974.”

“Five months before that photo was taken.”

“Yes. So you can see the problem.”

“Are you sure it’s her?”

“I’m absolutely positive.”

“But you didn’t know it was her when you took the picture...?”

“I was taking a picture of Figgis Green and she happened to be in the frame. I didn’t actually notice her until I got the film developed and recognized who it was.”

There were even more things in the satchel. Pippa Gladstone’s last school photo, a colour headshot. And an 8x10 enlargement of the photo from Duncan’s camera. I put them side by side. The girl in Duncan’s photo was turning to look at him, so her face was visible full-on. It certainly did look like the same person.

“Who’s the boy she’s with?”

“I don’t know his name, alas.”

“And you’ve been to the police with this.”

“I have. As I told you, they’re not interested. They don’t consider it worth their while to re-open her file on the basis of just this one photo. In fact, they were quite dismissive of me.”

“And what’s your interest in all of this?” I asked.

“I’m a bit of an obsessive,” Duncan replied. “I’ve followed your parents’ band faithfully from the beginning. But Figgis Green is not my only passion. I have also been intrigued by Pippa Gladstone’s disappearance. There are some who have never quite believed that

she is dead. I happen to be one of them. And that photo has, at long last, proved me right. As I said, I know you have a certain amount of notoriety as someone with an ability to track down missing people. I would be very honoured if you would take this case on. I will, of course, make it financially worth your while.”

The fact that the photo was taken five months after Pippa was reported missing did stir up a certain inquisitiveness in me. If that really was her.

“Could I borrow these pictures?”

“Of course.”

“Can we meet up here tomorrow? Same time? I’ll let you know what I’ve decided. And I’d like to see the negative of the one from the music festival.”

“I’ll bring it tomorrow.” Duncan took his phone out. “Would you mind...?”

A selfie.

Him and me.

I gave him my best smile. He beamed into the lens and refrained from draping his arm over my shoulder, which I appreciated.

“Thank you, Jason. I’ll see you here tomorrow.”

I arrived back at the manor with most of my baguette wrapped in paper napkins, Duncan Stopher’s photos in an envelope tucked under my arm and carrying a plastic bag with a carton of milk in it that I’d bought from a little grocery on the High Street.

I popped the milk into the fridge and went upstairs to find Rolly, our drummer, fuelled by undiluted caffeine, ranting about a senatorial candidate from his adopted home in California.

“Todd Wolfe,” he said. “I don’t wish evil upon anyone...but in this moron’s case, I’d make an exception. He’s a Class A asshole.”

“Does he stand a chance?” I asked.

“More than a chance, son. He’s climbed aboard the golden escalator and he’s riding it all the way to the top.”

I try not to think a lot about American politics these days. It gives me indigestion.

Mum had spent her lunch break with a mug of fishbowl tea and an egg salad sandwich someone—not Kato—had fetched from the bakery at the bottom of the hill.

“And how is The Four Eyes after all these years?” she inquired, saving me from a further earful about sexual harassment complaints,

accusations of tax evasion and rumours of unpaid child support from three different relationships.

“Happily nostalgic,” I replied. “Pictures on the walls from its glory days. Espresso machine and jukebox lovingly preserved.”

“I must go and see for myself,” mum said. “I remember in 1965 the walls were decorated with discarded eyeglasses. It was all very clever. If you didn’t know better, you’d think you’d stepped into an optician’s shop. Did you go downstairs?”

“I didn’t know there was a downstairs.”

“Oh yes. The cellar. Unfit for human habitation. But that was where it all happened back in the day. That’s where the stage was. Where the Spectacles played. And anyone else who wanted to take part in Amateur Night, which was every Friday. Your dad and I decided we’d do a turn. That’s where I discovered how much I loved being in front of an audience.”

The rest of the band was trickling back in, along with Tejo and our lighting guy, Dr. Sparks, who also had the advantage of being a fully licensed physician (incredibly useful when you’re travelling with four senior citizens).

We reassembled for the afternoon like ragtag schoolkids forced back into their classroom on a gloriously sunny day. Our morning had been spent standing around, drinking coffee and tea, listening to technical discussions and making notes. I’d felt useless. And impatient. I wanted to play.

I knew everyone else was feeling the same way. The sentiment wasn’t lost on mum.

“Enough of this technical stuff,” she said. “Let’s have the encore. Everyone up front.”

“I Can’t Stay Mad at You” was a Gerry Goffin/Carole King country and western/pop crossover that Skeeter Davis had made famous in 1963. It had a catchy beat and throwaway lyrics and it was a song, mum always maintained, which represented a study of unhealthy obsessive love. It was also an inside joke about the starstruck fangirls who used to lust after Ben Quigley and, before he was married, Uncle Mitch.

The Figs did the song *a capella* at the end of every concert, and although they’d never actually made a recording of it, their audiences not only expected it—they demanded it.

Back in the day, mum handled the lead while the guys abandoned their instruments and came down front to gather around a second

single mic to do the “shooby dooby doo bops” while she sang. They had a little choreography to go along with it, too, just like the doo-wop bands from the early 1960s. It never failed to break up the audience, especially when they tackled the high notes that the Anita Kerr Singers did on the original Skeeter Davis recording. There was also an instrumental string section three quarters of the way through that was entirely performed by the guys using just their voices.

I’d spent an entire day mastering that song at home. I joined the line-up beside mum with Keith, Mitch, Rolly and Bob.

Rolly tapped his sticks together to count us all in, and we were away.

It’s a tricky piece to get right but after about six attempts, we nailed it. Choreography and all. Including the high female chorus parts which were relegated to me—since I was the youngest and still had the range—and the bit in the middle where we all pretended to be the string section.

It was a grand way to finally start our countdown to the opening night of Figgis Green’s Lost Time Tour.

“Henceforth to be known as the Last Time Tour,” my mum quipped.

We all agreed it was entirely appropriate.

We finished at five.

Dinner at The Dog’s Watch was on the house again—Arthur Ferryman had obviously read my thumbs-up on his website and possibly my account on Instagram.

I arranged my dishes and drink and cutlery to its best advantage and took the mandatory photo: *Spinach and ricotta ravioli with baby gem lettuce, shallots and pine nuts*. Sixteen people loved it immediately, two commented on the food, three asked me to pass on their good wishes to Mitch, four to Keith and one to Rolly. Another four wanted to know what mum had for dinner and one just wanted to reminisce about the time he’d met my dad after a gig in Birmingham, where he’d got his program signed and he still had it and it was too bad my dad had died as he’d have been fantastic on this tour and was going to be sorely missed.

I didn’t disagree. I missed him too.

Another 214 people recorded their appreciation of my ravioli over the next hour.

Power to the Figs.

After dinner I went back to my room and sent the smoke from my evening ciggie down the bathroom drain while I had another look through the photos Duncan Stopher had given me.

My gut instinct told me it was very likely a case of mistaken identity. But I had to admit, the girl at the Wiltshire Folk Festival did look almost identical to the 16-year-old in the school pic.

What I really wanted to do was go online and read everything I could about Pippa Gladstone, her family, and the circumstances surrounding her disappearance. But it was getting late and I was tired and we had another 9 a.m. start in the morning.

I popped onto Instagram to check my dinner post. My “likes” had risen to over 600 and there were 231 comments.

I couldn’t possibly read them all in one sitting, let alone react or reply.

I settled on wishing everyone good night in a single, very genuine message, and stumbled off to bed.