



BEALES BROS.

HYDE.



The author was born in Stockport in 1947 and after leaving school was employed in widely differing capacities including being a police constable and sailing around the world in the Merchant Navy.

In the 1980s he started his own businesses, and in 2001 he became a volunteer, then professional yachtmaster, taking disabled people on sailing trips until 2008. Since then he has been able to pursue his love of writing, living at home in Bournemouth with his wife.

MARIA'S PAPERS

This book is dedicated to my Great, Great Aunt Maria and my
dearly missed, loving father Frank without whom I would not
have had the Chance.

Stephen F Clegg

MARIA'S PAPERS



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Preface

24th July 2002. Whitewall Farm, Wordale Moor, Lancashire

“*Berserk?* What do you mean something’s just gone berserk?”

“I mean exactly what I say; something just went absolutely mental in the room next to the finds room.”

“For pity’s sake,” said Crowthorne, “you’re supposed to be a scientist, explain yourself properly.”

The forensic archaeologist looked across the farmyard and said, “Look, how the hell am I supposed to know. All I can tell you is that some, some, bloody huge sounding animal, a dog I think, just had a major conniption fit in what we thought was an empty room and it’s scared the shit out of us...” he faltered as he saw the girl and said, “Sorry...”

“No problem,” said Naomi. She shot a quick glance at the occupants of the police car and realised that she was the only one who might be able to explain what was happening. She closed her eyes and desperately hoped that she was wrong.

The archaeologist cut across her thoughts and said, “I’m not usually so crass but whatever made that noise put the fear of God up me.”

Crowthorne looked across the deserted yard and said, “And have you checked to see if anything’s in there?”

“Absolutely bloody not!” said the archaeologist, “I wouldn’t go anywhere near that room. You should have heard it, it sounded totally deranged.”

Crowthorne frowned, put his hand up to his mouth and stared at the door in question; for once in his life he didn’t know what to do. He hated dogs and the thought of dealing with one, let alone a deranged one, filled him with concern. He took in a deep breath and turned back to face the others.

“All right,” he said, “here’s what we’ll...”

“*Sir!*” The police driver pointed through the windscreen.

On the opposite side of the yard the door had opened and Francesca Drake one of the female team members had staggered

out. She lunged forwards, stumbling and falling in an effort to get away from the room.

Without thinking Crowthorne jumped out of the car and ran towards her.

He got half way across the yard when a howl that would have stopped a charging bear erupted from the room in front of him. He didn't just hear it; he felt it. It plunged sickeningly icy fingers into his chest and squeezed his heart. Terror spread through him like a cold primeval wave and stopped him dead in his tracks.

He stood in petrified silence and listened as the sound of the horrendous howl receded across the top of the moors.

"Please help me..." begged Francesca.

Crowthorne heard her pleading but couldn't move, his legs felt like jelly. He remained motionless and stared intently at the door behind her.

"Please, Inspector..."

The second call for help shook Crowthorne into action; he ran forwards, grabbed the distraught woman and yanked her to her feet.

"Come on," he said pulling her towards the police car, "let's get you out of here." He looked up and saw the driver staring at him.

"Cooper get over here!" he shouted.

The driver didn't move.

Intent on dragging the stricken woman, Crowthorne didn't notice at first, but when he looked he was stunned to see that the driver hadn't moved.

"Cooper, get your arse over here now!" he shouted.

With an enormous bang, a door slammed behind him.

Francesca turned, looked back across the farmyard and said, "Oh God, no..."

Crowthorne could feel his heart hammering; he stared steadfastly at Cooper as he approached the police car but just knew that something bad was going to happen.

Suddenly, Cooper's eyes widened with fear and he involuntarily shifted backwards in his seat.

Chapter 1

August 1867. Wordale Moor

Silas Cartwright looked around at the moorland from the driving seat of his cab, he loved living in Hundersfield one of the subdivisions of Rochdale, it was such a mixture of growth and opportunity in the towns, and yet it was still ringed with breathtaking beauty once you took to the countryside.

He easily recalled the days of his youth when a lot of the area had been just farmland, but the mills and mines had taken a hold and the population had grown enormously. Rochdale was growing too with new civic buildings, parks and amenities complete with the endless rows of terraced houses, often with up to four families living together in separate rooms. He had read that in nearby Spotland alone the number of people living in the area had grown from about eighteen thousand in 1841 to over thirty thousand and he reckoned with no little amusement that if his old Pa had been alive he'd never have believed it.

All of this provided no end of employment for his horse and cab and as far as he could see, there would always be a need for his trade even with the railways spreading ever further across the country. The noisy, smokey cursed things might have been able to go from town to town quicksticks, but they couldn't go door to door like him and old Henry.

He reined the horse in to a walk as they breasted Wordale Moor and the familiar gateposts came into view. Remembering that her name was pronounced "Mariah" and not "Mareeya" he courteously tapped on the roof of the cab with his whip and called, "Drive's in view Miss Maria; would you like me to turn in or to stop?"

"Stop please Silas, it's a beautiful day, I'll walk."

The cabby stopped at the end of the drive and the elegant figure of Maria Chance stepped onto the roadside.

"You will wait?" she asked politely.

"Of course ma'am, I'll be here when you return."

Maria smiled and set off down the long drive.

Silas watched as she walked away from him; she wasn't exactly beautiful but some hard to define quality simply captivated him each time he saw her.

Maria looked from side to side at the panoramic view of the moors. She considered that it had been no wonder that her forebears had loved this place, it was stunning. From whichever direction she looked, she was confronted by rolling grassy farmland as striking as anywhere the country could offer. Cows and sheep grazed lazily in the warmth of the sun and the ubiquitous sound of insects filled the air; she inhaled the atmosphere and let it lift her.

As she made her way down the long drive she recounted the number of years that she'd been at the business. '*Heaven forbid,*' she thought to herself, '*seventeen long years!*'

When her father had charged her with her task she'd had no notion that it would take up so much time. '*Seventeen years!*' the words spun around her head, '*Good Lord the countless letters, solicitors, agents, and trips out to here...*'

The estate buildings came into view as she walked down the last part of the drive. They comprised two long grey sandstone constructions facing each other across an unmade courtyard, both only two storeys high and utterly devoid of any hint of classicism. On the right-hand side was the main house and servant's quarters, attached to which was a stable and barn; opposite was an equipment store, dairy and other ancillary rooms, whilst at the far end was a large byre.

As she crossed the courtyard her demeanour changed; she tilted her head slightly upwards, squared her shoulders and strode purposefully towards the main door. In doing so she caught sight of the hated inscription that was as surely carved into the stone lintel as it was indelibly carved into her memory.

In the form of a triangle she saw the three initials. At the top an 'L', below that the initials 'J' and 'M' separated by a colon, and the base of the triangle was the date 1748. The 'L' was that of Lincoln; the 'J' and 'M' were James and Montague respectively. *James Montague Lincoln - 1748*. She bristled with indignation every time she saw it.

She'd never met James Montague Lincoln: he'd died in 1788; thirty-two years before she'd been born and she'd had to conduct her business with his grandson Edward, a man of advanced years and at least an octogenarian himself. His years on God's good earth however had done nothing for his temperament, as she'd always found him to be a boorish and insufferable old man.

She was ready; she lifted her parasol and rapped loudly on the front door. The door opened and she was confronted by a presentable and attractive-looking woman who exuded warmth and self-assurance from the moment of her first smile.

"Good day," she said with the slightest bow of her head, "How may I help you?"

This threw Maria who quickly gathered her wits and recalled her reason for the visit.

"Good day to you too madam; my name is Maria Chance and I am here to see Mr. Lincoln on business. Would you please tell him that I am here yet again as promised, and that I have absolutely no intention of leaving until we have discoursed further on the subject of this estate."

"Mr. Lincoln you say?"

"Correct!" Maria confirmed.

The woman paused briefly as she assessed her visitor and then decided that some conversations were better held indoors. "Then you'd better come in; I have something to tell you."

'*Come in?*' Maria was astonished! In seventeen years of visiting the estate this was only the second time that she had been invited in. The last time had been her first visit in the autumn of 1850.

The woman led her into a small but tastefully decorated parlour. The small Tudor-style windows made the atmosphere rather stuffy and restricted the amount of natural daylight coming in. Numerous unlit candles in a variety of candle-holders were sitting atop various pieces of solid oak furniture in the darkest corners of the room and she surmised that the atmosphere would have been even stuffier with all of them alight.

She walked across to an offered chair and sat down.

"Now," said her host, "Please let me introduce myself; I am Margaret Johnson the daughter of Edward Lincoln."

"Daughter? But, I thought..."

“You thought that he was a bachelor without issue?” said Margaret taking the initiative.

Maria nodded.

“Well you were wrong.”

Maria was taken aback by the bluntness of her host and said, “Forgive me madam it is not my intention to pry, but I have been coming to Whitewall these past seventeen years and have never seen you here before.”

She watched as Margaret walked across to the window. The daylight illuminated the cut of her ankle length brown tweed skirt and her side-laced leather shoes.

Margaret turned and said, “That is not surprising because I didn’t live here.”

“But...”

“But nothing madam, you are a stranger to me and the details of the relationship between my father and me are of nobody’s business but my own; suffice to say that I am indeed his daughter and was the subsequent heir to this estate.”

Maria’s feathers ruffled.

“The heir to this estate?” she said trying to remain calm after the curt riposte.

“Precisely my reason for asking you in. My father died fourteen months ago, taken by consumption in the end.”

Maria needed time to compose herself. So much had changed with that one sentence. She appreciated that Edward Lincoln had been an elderly man but she had never entertained the possibility that he may die before they’d concluded their business together. She responded by being direct; the only way that she knew how.

“Since some considerable time has passed since the departure of your father from this earth, may I enquire if you were his sole heir?”

Margaret said, “I was.”

“And do you think that sufficient time has now passed for you to attend to your late father’s affairs?”

Margaret frowned and said, “To what exactly, do you refer?”

“To the Whitewall Estate.”

Margaret raised her eyebrows, walked across to a vacant chair and sat down. She looked at Maria and guardedly said, “What about the Whitewall Estate?”

Maria turned to face her host and tried to assess her disposition; she seemed to be readily given to passion but this was not a time for meek submissiveness. She said, “I apologise if this comes to you as a shock, but your late father and his father before him conspired to cheat my family out of our rightful ownership of Whitewall and if he bequeathed it to you, he had no right to do so. It was not his to give!”

Chapter 2

7th May 2002. Walmsfield Borough Council Offices - 2 months before the incident at Whitewall Farm

“Ooh, you bastard thing!” Sandra Miles aimed a hefty kick at the rickety stepladder and looked down at her broken fingernail.

“Bugger!” she said exasperatedly. She stared up at the old leather handle sticking out on the top shelf and cursed that every time she was asked for a dossier from the ‘Inactive Files’ room it always seemed to be the most difficult one to retrieve. She looked hawkishly at the stepladder and then manhandled it a little closer to her quarry; she climbed up slowly, grabbed the protruding handle and extracted the container from the tightly packed, dusty bundles. She saw the faded lettering ‘Whitewall Farm’ on a mostly detached gummed label and then climbed carefully back down.

Back in her office, she placed it on her desk and looked at it carefully. The Whitewall dossier was everybody’s favourite; it looked like an old small brown travel case with crossed straps around it that were sealed with a hefty looking padlock. Nobody had a clue how old it was, or how long it had been in the Council’s care, but now it had been requested by Naomi Draper from Historic Research and it was up to her to open it.

She carefully looked to see if a key was somehow attached, but there was none; she tried flicking open the case locks to see if she could lift a corner of the lid, but they too were locked. This meant another trip to the basement to see if a key had become detached from the case *and* manhandling again, the heavy wooden stepladder.

Half an hour later the only thing that she had to show for her effort was her broken fingernail and a good deal more dust up her nose.

She returned to her office, looked dejectedly at the case for a few minutes longer, then reached for her phone and dialled the Head of Planning.

“Carlton, Sandra here. I’ve had to retrieve that old Whitewall

file from the basement and it's locked. Do we have any keys for it?"

"Now you're asking," said the puzzled Head, "I haven't seen that file for years, so if they aren't evident, Heaven knows where they could be. You'd better bring it up to my office and we'll see what we can do."

A few minutes later there was a tap at Carlton Wilkes' door and Sandra walked in with the case. She leaned over, carefully placed it in the space that he'd made on his desk, and sat down. The two of them looked at it for a few seconds as though it was a favourite meal about to be devoured.

"Well," said Carlton, "I'd forgotten this beauty and I don't think I've ever had to open anything like it before."

"Neither have I, and I thought you'd be interested."

"Quite right, my life has too little mystery in it nowadays, so something like this is a real bonus! Now let's see..."

He reached into his briefcase, extracted an impressive looking Swiss army knife and prised open the main blade. For several minutes he cut, hacked and poked, but to no avail. The straps were thick leather similar to horse trappings; their ages had toughened them up and try as he may, no function the knife had to offer could cut through them without potentially taking them way beyond office closing hours.

"Sorry Sandra," he finally said, "This is pointless. I'll take the case home tonight and set about it with a full set of tools. Come to my office in the morning I'll have it open for you".

Dejectedly Sandra bid her boss 'good night' and left the file in his care.

It was a lovely spring evening when Carlton wandered down to his shed with the Whitewall file. Despite being a widower he still prided himself on being able to prepare a good meal and having eaten, and partaken of a small beer he now had the immensely pleasurable task of opening the intriguing case.

He unlocked the shed door and stepped inside. The day long sunshine had warmed up the interior and the woodwork smelled pleasantly of creosote. This was his domain, even when his wife had been alive this had been his domain, it contained all of his

tools, his old chair and workbench and all of those unidentifiable objects retrieved from long gone pieces of equipment. It really needed a good clear out, but that was never on the cards.

He placed the container on his workbench selected a small hacksaw and carefully sawed through the top leather strap; he then turned his attention to the side straps and sawed through them until he had full access to the lid. Next were the case locks; he recalled for a few moments the ease with which television detectives picked locks armed only with a small knife and a hairpin, but unlike them, and despite having a wide variety of tools at his disposal, he'd had to concede defeat within fifteen minutes. One or two hefty blows from his ballpein hammer and a blunt chisel, and the job was done; with a contented smile he put down his 'picklocks', lifted the lid and peered in.

Lying in the bottom and looking diminutive compared to the size of the container, were two items; a brown leather document holder tied around the middle with a faded red silk ribbon and an old envelope. He reached in, carefully picked up the envelope and saw a handwritten inscription on the front.

MOST IMPORTANT!

The accompanying documents and the contents of this envelope are to be read only by the incumbent Mayor and District Clerk.

*By order of
Surnh Horrocks, Hundersfield District Clerk 1869.*

This was both a surprise and a disappointment; the curious instruction made him want to investigate further but the letter was sealed with wax and he knew that if he opened it, it would be patently obvious to any subsequent examiners. He set it down and took out the folder. For a nano-second he considered looking in that too, but it was never going to happen; he was an honest, principled ex-military man and the use of sophism to defend his actions wasn't his style. With a resigned sigh he returned the items to the case, closed it and took it back indoors.

At 9:10am the next day Sandra sat resignedly in Carlton's office and being of a similar disposition to her boss, understood perfectly well why he hadn't opened the folder.

"I have an appointment with Giles Eaton at half past nine," said Carlton, "I think he's as intrigued about this situation as we are. You can't normally get to see him without at least two weeks' notice, but as soon as I told him what was written on the envelope he re-scheduled his early appointments."

Sandra's lack of vitriolic response about the Town Clerk, one of her least favourite characters, caused him to take a closer look at what she was doing. She appeared to be distracted as she studied the rear of the envelope from the Whitewall file.

"Have you noticed this?" Sandra leaned across the desk and pointed to what looked more like a stain than anything else.

Carlton took the envelope from her and looked carefully at where she had indicated.

"It's writing," he said.

"Yes, I know that, but what does it say?"

Carlton looked a little closer and said, "Part of it appears to be scribbled out but I can just about make out the rest."

"And?"

"It says 'Cestui que Vie'."

"What?"

"Cestui que Vie; or more correctly given the scribbled out part, 'Something or other,' - Cestui que Vie"

"What on earth is that?" said Sandra.

"I've no idea; I've never come across it before." Carlton glanced up at the gold plated carriage clock on his bookcase, a leaving gift from his old unit and said, "Time to go and see the Town Clerk, I'll ask him; he had an Oxbridge education so he may know. I'll pop in and see you when I get back."

Following Carlton's departure Sandra returned to her small office and sat down. On one side of her desk was a photo of her daughter Helen in the mortar-board hat and gown that she'd worn on her graduation day; she picked it up, kissed it and put it back down. It helped her get through the day sanely.

She quietly pondered the events of the past twenty-four hours and though there weren't many times that she enjoyed being at

work anymore, she found herself hoping that there would be more intrigue for her to savour in the days to come.

She looked up at the clock on her wall; 10:10am. Seven hours and twenty minutes to home time; it ticked loudly as the seconds passed by. Tick, tock, tick, tock...

What Sandra didn't know was that the other clock had started ticking too, the one that had started the moment she'd retrieved the Whitewall file. But that one was on a three week countdown, and when it stopped she'd be brutally murdered.

Chapter 3

The Town Clerk's Office, Walmsfield Borough Council Offices

“Sit down er...”

“Carlton Wilkes... Head of Planning...” said Carlton with a soupcon of sarcasm as he sank into one of the Town Clerk’s uncomfortable office armchairs.

Giles Eaton coughed awkwardly as he realised that he should at least have made the effort to find out the name of the departmental head visiting him.

“Yes of course; Carlton. Now what’s all the mystery? You have me quite distracted up here.”

Carlton opened the case and placed the contents on the Town Clerk’s desk.

Giles picked up the envelope, studied both sides of it with furrowed eyebrows for awhile, put it down, and then examined the leather document folder without actually opening it.

“Hmm, intriguing,” he said gently placing the folder down on his desk, “What do you think, should we open them now or do what’s instructed and wait until the Mayor gets in?”

Carlton knew that the Town Clerk had no intention of opening either item but was making small talk in an effort to be pleasant. He said, “It’s not my choice to make Mr. Eaton.”

“No, no, of course not, forgive me, I wasn’t thinking straight. Tell you what, I’ll put a call in to him and I’ll let you know what this is all about in due course.”

The silence that ensued made Carlton realise that it was time to leave; he stood up and walked across to the door.

“Oh Mr. Eaton,” he turned and said, “before I leave, did you notice the faded writing on the rear of the envelope?”

“Yes,” said Giles off-handedly.

“Did you understand what it said?”

“What? Oh no, all a bit mumbo-jumbo to me; ‘que’ is Spanish for ‘what’ isn’t it? ‘Vie’ is French for ‘life’... you know, ‘ce’st la vie’ etcetera, and I don’t know what the other bit is, so it’s

‘something or other - what life’ as far as I can make out.”

“O.K. thank you.” Carlton closed the office door and frowned. Eaton had lied to him; there’d been no puzzled look when he’d read the wordage, he’d simply read it.

The early excitement of the day gave way to routine and by late afternoon Carlton was lost in one of his more pressing projects when the telephone rang on his desk; he picked it up and placed it to his ear.

“Carlton, Giles Eaton here. About the Whitewall documents, what exactly did someone want with them, and do you know who instigated the enquiry?”

“Sandra Miles is handling it and I didn’t ask her who had requested the file.”

There was a pause and he could hear muffled speech; clearly the Mayor was in with the Town Clerk.

“O.K. thank you, that will be all.”

“Mr. Eaton is everything all right?” said Carlton quizzically, “We haven’t compromised any procedures or anything have we?”

“What? No don’t concern yourself old chap, Mr. Ramsbottom and I have got it all under control and we’re going to handle things from here.”

Carlton sat back in his chair and stroked his chin. The words ‘*under control*’ puzzled him. The intrigue level stepped up another notch as he tried to consider what could possibly motivate the Town Clerk *and* the Mayor to handle an apparently routine enquiry?

He got up from his desk, went down to Sandra’s office, courteously tapped on the door and let himself in. As he sat down he noticed that she had a puzzled expression on her face too.

“How odd,” said Sandra, “Mr. Eaton just rang to ask the name of the person wanting the Whitewall file and when I told him that we’d got it from Naomi in Historic Research he told me that he’d be dealing with her direct from now on.”

Carlton frowned and said, “He told me the same. Something odd’s going on.”

“I agree,” said Sandra, “Giles Eaton doesn’t get involved in routine office work. In fact thinking about it, I have no idea what the greasy slime ball *does* get involved in; so why he’s got his

fake-suntanned snout in this trough is beyond me.”

She paused as she saw Carlton give her a chiding look and then said, “So what do you think was in the file?”

Carlton shook his head and said, “I haven’t the slightest idea, but there’s more to this than meets the eye that’s for sure.”

The two of them sat in silence until Carlton finally drew in breath and stood up.

“Naomi Draper in Historic Research you said?”

“Yes.”

“Right, first thing tomorrow I’m going down there.”

“Are you sure that’s a good idea? The Town Fart did tell us that he and the Mayor, God help us, would be dealing with things from now on.”

Carlton gave Sandra another disapproving look and said, “That may be so, but he didn’t impose any restrictions on me, so if I as Head of Planning have a few questions of my own, I see no reason why I’m not entitled to ask.”

“It sounds as though you’ve made your mind up.”

“I have,” said Carlton heading for the door, “I’ll be in touch.”

Sandra watched as he walked out of her office. She knew that he was forty-ish; he was tall, strong and handsome with square shoulders and a full head of dark hair just starting to show traces of white around his temples. His military bearing and no-nonsense attitude was evident in everything he did and he appeared to be utterly unafraid of anything or anybody. Most of her office colleagues considered him to be a bit of a stuffed shirt but she disagreed; she could visualise him in combat situations, and on more than one or two occasions he had been the central character in some of her more intimate flights of fancy...

Upstairs in Giles’ office the Mayor Tom Ramsbottom, was staring out of the window into the distance; he had a churning inside his stomach telling him that his ulcer was unhappy. Having taken in nothing of the vista, he lumbered across to one of the narrow green leather office armchairs and dropped his bulky frame into it. At first he thought that the springs had failed because he kept sinking farther and farther down, until with a sound a little too reminiscent of breaking wind, the cushions finally arrested his

descent.

He was in no mood for niceties and didn't care whether Giles thought that he'd made the sound personally or not.

The Whitewall documents and the letter from Surnh Horrocks lay open on the desk and he eyed them irritably.

"How could this possibly be?" he said in his brusque manner, "How could this have gone on for all these years and us not know about it?"

How could that bloody case sit on a shelf in our basement for a hundred and thirty years and us not know what's in it? It's bloody ludicrous!"

"But..." Giles tried to speak.

"And why the hell didn't anybody think to open it and look inside? The letter was addressed to us for Christ's sake!"

Giles remained silent.

"And what about all the other Town Clerks and Mayors, what were *they*, sodding Ostriches?"

"Maybe they were just as unaware of the contents as we were until today," said Giles mildly.

"Oh that's all right then, that makes me feel much better! Now what shall we do, jam our heads up our arses like all the other Town Clerks and Mayors and keep them there until it all goes away?"

Giles glanced across to the case, it looked small and unassuming and completely out of keeping with the explosive contents.

"And to think that we've been blithely going about our business completely unaware that we are sitting on documents that could bankrupt the shit out of us! Hah!" said Tom, "It's so bloody preposterous it's laughable!" He stopped speaking and shook his head.

Giles said, "We can't ignore it now, other people have seen it, and the contents."

Tom let out an exasperated snort, leaned forwards and held his head in his hands. A few seconds later he said, "This is intolerable Giles, if this old Horrocks guy is right, the consequences for this Council would be utterly unthinkable."

Giles was troubled, too, but knew that of the two of them, he would have to be the one that remained steady. He needed to buy

time.

“I appreciate that Tom, but so far we are the only ones actually aware of what the contents say.”

“That’s as maybe; it could still become public knowledge, and this is just the sort of stuff the media would have a field day with.”

Giles leaned forward in his larger and more sumptuous chair and said, “Look, let’s just do nothing for now. I’ll go and see the Draper woman in Historic Research tomorrow, establish where the enquiry originated and take it from there. Until then I suggest that we keep this strictly between ourselves.”

Tom looked thoughtfully at Giles for a few seconds and then slowly nodded his head.

“And Tom,” said Giles in his most patronising manner, “not even wives. Do you understand?”

To the straight-talking Mayor of Walmsfield Borough Council this was one of the more annoying habits he had to put up with from the Town Clerk; it immediately rubbed him up the wrong way.

“Perfectly!” he said in his most indignant manner, “You might think I’m nothing more than a thick farmer but even *I* can grasp how serious this could get, so I don’t need wet nursing by the likes of you!”

“Sorry Tom, I didn’t mean to offend,” said Giles as obsequiously as he could muster, “but the thing is, it may just be an innocent enquiry and amount to nothing so it’s best not to over-react right now.”

Tom disliked Giles intensely but had to agree.

“I suppose so, but I’m warning you, I have a very bad feeling about this. In my entire working life I’ve never heard of anybody being put into such an outrageous and disastrous predicament as this, so I don’t want you screwing it up now!”

Giles nodded and remained silent.

“*And*,” said Tom, “if you think for one minute that things are getting out of hand I want to know about it immediately; do you understand?”

Giles said, “Yes, of course.”

Tom placed both hands on the high arms of the office chair and pulled upwards; he was aware that he’d put weight on recently but getting out of the ludicrously soft and narrow armchair was a work

of art for anybody with a few pounds on, let alone a person of his 'manly' stature. The struggle up aggravated his ulcer and gave him a nasty twinge.

"For Christ's sake Giles, who did you buy these ridiculous chairs for, Lowry's bloody stick people?"

Giles watched in silence as the Mayor wrestled his way out of the chair and then walked over to his office door.

Before leaving Tom turned and pointed to the contents of the Whitewall file.

"Be sure to put that lot under lock and key!"

"Of course I will. Trust me," said Giles, "you take yourself off home now and try not to worry about a thing. I'll be in touch as and when."

Tom closed the door behind him and trundled slowly down the corridor towards the lift. The words '*Trust me*' were ringing in his ears. '*Trust me*' indeed!

He shook his head and quietly said, "I wouldn't trust you Eaton if you were the last man on God's bloody earth."

Giles listened to Tom muttering as he retreated down the corridor and knew that most of his ire would be vented on him.

He glanced across to the little case on his desk, reached over and pulled off the partially attached label. Now it was anonymous, now it was nothing more than a harmless bit of old luggage that could so easily be disposed of.

He stared at the innocuous looking container, tapped his fingers on his desk and quietly pondered his options.