

SLEEPER

Part one

The sun rose steadily, spilling golden light across the bay, making the sand glow and the water sparkle. I sipped at a strong cup of coffee as I gazed over the beautiful scene from the balcony of the hotel. I breathed in a deep lung full of air and released it. I felt relaxed. I needed this holiday, a chance to unwind, re-adjust and re-connect with Jenny. That's when I felt the soft touch of her hands around my waist and her gentle kiss on my cheek.

"What are you looking at?" she asked softly. I raised my mug toward the sun cresting above the horizon. "Ahh," she said, "this really is paradise isn't it." I turned to look at her standing next to me on the balcony, her brown hair brushed to one side flowing over her left shoulder. Her slight body covered by a silk night gown that gently kissed her skin, hanging off her hips and resting high on her thigh. She really was beautiful and I regretted every second that we had spent apart. We hugged for a moment watching the sun rise until she parted from me with a smile, slid the straps from her shoulders and let the night gown drop to the floor; with that, she turned and strutted to the shower looking over her shoulder. "Let's get ready, go out and enjoy it," she teased. I threw on a shirt, grabbed my beech bag and threw in the things I needed for the day.

We left the room and headed to the lifts at the end of the hall. The hotel staff were busying around feeding their trollies with dirty sheets, restocking the mini bars and shoving the left over room service in to the small service lift in the store room; it was a well-rehearsed operation. We pressed the button and waited. The

doors slid open, with a ping, to reveal an attractive woman in her 40's dressed in 'active gear'.

"Morning Helen," said Jen. The two of them had hit it off in the bar on the first night over a cocktail, reminiscing about the 80's. Helen was here alone, why? We didn't ask, but she was living up on the top floor in the penthouse suite and so must have come from money, that alone was sure to provide a few reasons for her reluctance to share her story.

We found her warm, friendly and easy to get along with so we didn't pry. Back in the elevator, normal small talk ensued, "Off to the beach?" continued Jen.

"No," replied Helen, "I'm going down to the spar and then for a run, got to keep those wobbly bits at bay." The two women agreed and laughed about the fight to keep in shape, though both of them had nothing to worry about.

As the doors opened, we parted ways. Jen and I left the hotel making our way down the stairs and across the patio, passed the poolside bar and through a line of palm trees to the beach, some 20 yards from the hotel. We had been blessed by the proximity of the hotel to the beach; this had been a major selling point. The sun was now well established in the sky, soaking us in a warm glow as we walked the full length of the beach, hand in hand, toes in the waves. Everything was perfect.

The place was beginning to wake up as we laid out our beach towels. Restaurateurs placed out tables while delivery trucks brought in the day's spoils. A man to our rear was placing a sign advertising cocktails. Jenny looked at the sign, then at me with a coy look.

"We are on holiday," she said, with a grin lingering on the word 'are', in justification of what she wanted.

"Go on then," I replied. "I'll have one too. You go and get them while I go for a quick swim, to test the water." She smiled, grabbed her bag and skipped off in the direction of the bar. I turned, stripped of my shirt and walked to the water. I waded into my knees and then dove in, preferring to rip of the plaster when it came to the coolness of the sea. A few strokes later I came up for air and swept back my hair taking in the scenery. My eyes rested on Jenny walking back this way with two glasses in her hands and a smile on her face. She saw me and raised one in the air, we were indeed on holiday.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the horrific sound of a bullet whizzing through the air followed instantly by the crack of the rifle. The glass Jenny was holding high shattered in her hand. Time seemed to stand still as the bullet whizzed out passed me and plopped into the sea. I looked left and then right now seeing a bearded man wearing sunglasses, a white robe and holding a rifle. He fired again. Jenny's smile faded in slow motion as her brain worked out that things had changed, paradise was over. Another round whizzed by striking the tree spilling

dead leaves all over her. She instinctively ducked her head, her mouth forming a silent scream as she began to run straight at me, dropping the other glass.

I was already swimming at her. The three meters I'd swam out felt like an Olympic pool filled with custard. I thrashed forward as hard as I could until I felt my feet touch ground. I staggered to my feet out of the breakers, froth all around. I looked up to see Jenny slump to the floor. I cried out in desperation, sprinting toward her and diving in to the sand by her side. Two more rounds whizzed past, one burying itself into the sand, the other into the sea.

I grabbed her arm and rolled her over expecting the worse. She was alive but crying, "I fell," she blabbed. "I'm sorry." Her apology was a sign of the confusion of the situation, I didn't care, the main thing was that she was ok. We needed to move, so I grabbed her arm and ran, dragging her to her feet and across the sand to some upturned fishing boats. We cowered down behind them listening to the horrid sound of one bullet after another whizz past, seemingly fired in all directions. The only sound worse than this was the desperate screams of people that would suddenly fall silent, turning our blood cold.

I raised my head to look over the top of the boat. I stared in total disbelief at the scene that lay in front of me. Beach goers were hulking down behind any piece of cover they could find, from a small wall to a dustbin, even lying flat on the floor and wriggling into the sand like a flat fish. Across the short beach I could see the rows of hotel fronts now void of people. Furniture lay upturned and debris was scattered everywhere.

Another rifle report rang out but no whizzing bullet. It must have been fired in the opposite direction. The sound snapped my attention on to the gunman. A large dark-skinned man wearing a white robe and a black skull cap. He sported a large dark beard and brandished a rifle. He turned and shouted, my eyes followed the direction he was facing and came to rest on another gunman. He was wearing green combat trousers, a black T-shirt and a kind of vest full of pockets. He looked like an Asian Arnold Schwarzenegger. He too had a Russian style rifle and a dark beard. The two of them were traversing the hotel fronts taking pot shots at everything and anything.

Whizz! A bullet flew passed me very close. I scanned the area it had come from and found a third gunman approaching along the beach. He had seen us and was firing again. A loud Snap, cracked over my head telling me the bullet was much closer than the last time.

"We have to move," I said to Jenny.

"No. I can't! We must hide here. Please, I can't go out there."

"It's not safe. We have been seen," I motioned to the beach, but before I could draw Jen's eyes toward the gunman, two more rounds came our way, one striking the boat with a thwack, covering us in wood splinters. That was all the motivation

she needed, we were on our feet and moving. We kept low between the boats, until we reached the last one. There was a short gap of about 15 meters to the patio wall of our hotel. It was only 3 feet high but made of brick.

“Ok, we are going to run to that wall,” I said. “When I say go sprint as fast as you can and get behind it, lay flat.”

“Why? what are you going to do,” she looked panicked. Another round fired off but not in our direction. I heard some people screaming by the neighboring hotel.

“I am going to cause a distraction and I’ll be right behind you.” Then more screaming began and a huddle of people ran across our frontage in the gap between us and the wall. Rounds began to whizz past them followed by the terrorising boom of the rifle. One of the huddle fell to the sand lifeless only two feet in front of Jenny. She stared transfixed at the lifeless man in shorts and a blue t-shirt and began to pant as if hyperventilating.

“Jenny, JENNY!” I shouted. She snapped back into being, her eyes were glazed over telling me she was close to her limit. “You’re ok, look at me, stay quiet and get ready to run.” she nodded, swallowing hard trying to control her breathing. I crawled to the rear of the boat that was mounted on a trailer. I reached down and loosened its fastenings. Then I took hold of the Jockey-wheel clamp. “Get ready to run Jen.” I yanked back the clamp and the front of the trailer dropped to the floor. The boat slid forward and rolled sideways. Whizz, crack. Crack, thump. Rounds smashed into the wood.

“RUN!” I shouted and Jenny didn’t hesitate. I was right behind her and halfway across the gap when the gunman switched fire. Rounds begun to splash in the sand all around us, Jenny kept running but moved her hands to her ears screaming out loud the whole way. I caught her by diving the last few feet, connecting with her torso and rotating so I fell first and she landed on top of me. It knocked the wind from her. It took a few moments for her to regain her composure and then she punched me several times. “That was too close Dan. TOO CLOSE!” This time I agreed.

“It’s OK,” I replied, “we made it, but we need to keep moving, crawl to the end of this wall.”

We began crawling behind the wall which separated our hotel from the next. It was adjacent to the pool and I remember sitting on it a day earlier while Jen swam. The wall ended at the poolside bar that was set into the floor so bathers could sit at underwater stools and enjoy cocktails. It presented a barrier for us but I figured we could make it over the counter and we would be in better cover.

A few minutes of crawling later and we had reached the bar. I told Jen to lay still while I took a look over the wall. She instantly reacted begging me not to. I reassured her, telling her that it would be ok, but she felt it was too much of a risk so I compromised by using the underside of a stainless steel tray, the reflection

offering a partial view. The beach Gunman was easy to locate some 50 meters short of the boats but the other two were much harder with all the clutter by the hotels, this and the distortion of the reflection in the tray. I needed a proper look, so I told a small white lie.

“Looks clear,” I said. with that I raised my head and quickly scanned the area. It looked clear so I turned to Jen. “Ok when I say go, get over that counter and get as low as you can.” Once again she nodded. A loud scream interrupted my plan. I peered over the wall once more. ‘Asian Arnold’ had a blond woman by the hair and was dragging her into the middle of the next-door patio. That’s when I clocked the white robed terrorist who, now that he was close up, resembled an Arabian prince. He was closing in on them. I recognised the blonde woman as one of the travel reps from the resort. She still wore her blue skirt and white shirt. ‘Asian Arnie’ plonked her on her knees while ‘white robed prince’ held up a photo in front of her face. she shook her head. ‘Arnie’ not having any of it levelled his gun with her head. She cried out loud and pointed at our hotel. I immediately ducked not knowing if I had been seen.

“We are going to have to move again Jen are you ready?” she nodded quickly, displaying her nerves.

“Ok go!” as she stood to her feet a massive explosion from a grenade erupted on the other side of our wall, to the rear of the bar. The shock wave blew the thatched roof everywhere and flung Jen from her feet into the pool. I dove in behind her as debris splashed all around us. I surfaced to see her gasping for air. My ears rang but there was no time to spare.

“Dive and swim,” I shouted, pointing to the opening where the pool entered our hotels indoor pool, another selling point. We gasped a full lung of air each and dove as more debris splashed around us. we breast stroked through the debris strewn turquoise water bullets plopping and whizzing all around us like mini torpedoes. We emerged in the shade of the indoor pool and the immediate safety of the hotel. Clambering up the stairs and out of the water we could still hear the muffled horror going on outside but this felt a hundred times better.

I grabbed Jens arm and pulled her in for a hug. “You did good,” I said attempting to calm her. “Now let’s get our passports and head to the embassy.” We held hands as we made our way through the changing rooms and out into the hotel lobby. The place looked exactly as it would if everybody had dropped what they were doing and abandoned the place; discarded luggage and paper strewn around finished off the look. The reception was quiet so we headed to the counter. It felt weird going behind there even in this situation. I found our room key on the hook and we made our way to the lifts. The few seconds it took for the doors to open were painstaking with Jen tapping the button like an impatient child. Once inside we selected our floor and the doors began to close, but not quick enough.

Through the gap I saw 'Arnie' enter the lobby. The sound of the lift doors closing instantly drew his attention. The last thing I saw as the doors closed was him raising his rifle. I grabbed Jen and pushed her into the corner and shielded her with my body. PING! PANG! TWANG! Three rounds struck the doors just leaving dents on the inside as the lift began to move. I quickly pressed the button for the floor below ours.

"What are you doing?" shouted Jen angrily. "Don't stop, we need to get out of here."

"It's better this way," I replied, "they will be watching the lift to see where it stops." The doors opened and we ran to the stairs and up to our floor. Along the corridor many doors were wide open, though the occupants were long gone. We found ours still closed and went inside.

"Grab the passports, some shoes and a top, and any cash we have." Jenny was straight on it while I used my phone to call the police. A frustrating few minutes followed while I explained what was happening through the language barrier.

Now that the both of us were equipped with shirts, trainers, a bum bag with money and our passports, the next move was to get out of this hotel. Gunfire and screams echoed from somewhere beneath us. The chilling sound confirmed that leaving the lift on the floor below had both given us more time, but sadly taken it away from those downstairs. We were now ready to move so I cracked open the door a little to peek into the corridor. All was quiet. I gave Jen a nod and we moved into the hall and along the rooms until we found a door labelled 'staff'. Inside was a small store room with cleaning equipment and a dumb waiter. This was a small lift for sending room service up and down from the kitchens. I hit the call button and it groaned upward. The door consisted of two sliding hatches when you pulled the bottom one down the top half disappeared upward. Inside was a small compartment about the size of a large safe. After I had yanked out the two shelves a person could huddle inside. I climbed in.

"Send it down and if it's clear I'll send it back up, then you get in. I'll call it down, ok." Jen agreed "OK, go and lock the door and stay quiet."

With that the doors closed and the lift groaned its way down. When it stopped I waited and listened, all sounded quiet. Opening the doors from inside was easy and I stepped out into an empty kitchen with what smelled like food still cooking. I sent the dumb waiter back up and counted to ten then called it again. It groaned its way down once more and Jen stepped out with an angry face.

"Don't leave me again," she said. "I could hear people outside in the corridor, I was scared Dan." I comforted her as we worked our way through the kitchen to the double doors that led to the dining room. I peered through the glass circle into the large dining area. There were twenty or so people sat on the floor back to back with the gunman from the beech looming over them. Now up close I could see he

fit the same profile as the others, dark beard, combat trousers, his only identifiable characteristic was the dirty red cap on his head.

I eased back from the door and shook my head at Jen. We picked our way through the hotel kitchen once more. To the rear, the catering manager had an office. This room was dark with no window and a desk in the middle. Plenty of paperwork was piled up on most of the surfaces and a computer hummed away on the desk. The other side of the room was a closed door. I moved across to the door leaving Jen watching over the kitchen. Easing the handle, I softly cracked open the door just an inch. The door opened into a small hallway which led to the reception. I had a view of about two feet to the right of the counter. I could hear voices so I waited, keeping quiet. Then into my view came the white robed guy dragging a man in a green suit who looked like a hotel employee. Then two more armed men passed by. These were new members of the gang I hadn't seen yet. Both of them again fit the same profile. One tall the other shorter. This was feeling more like an organised attack rather than a simple bunch of lunatics. I eased back into the office. It was no good we were cut off from both exits. I gave Jen the shake of the head telling her door number two was a no go.

"There must be a place for deliveries out the back somewhere," she said. I agreed, it was worth a look. The sound of sirens approaching directed our attention away from the conversation and back to the hallway. A screech of tires followed by a volley of shouting confirmed the police were here. This was when I heard one of the terrorist's shout.

"Great! police, let's get this done!" He had an American accent which didn't suit his appearance. There was a scurry of feet in the corridor toward the front entrance so I softly closed the door. What followed was a cacophony of weapons fire. The ruckus brought dust from the ceiling. The sound of gunfire was magnified, echoing off of every wall. This sick orchestra was accompanied by smashing glass and splitting wood.

Jen and I cowered behind the desk until the firing began to ease. Shouting followed, in various languages that was backed by the vocals of the guests singing in C sharp. The Screaming finally subsided so I decided to take another peek out of the door. Laying on his back soaked in blood was the tall terrorist that walked by earlier. His body lay only a meter from the end of the small corridor. There was no activity outside so I thought I could reach him, maybe secure a weapon or find out something about them that I could tell the police.

I eased the door open more and Jen sparked into life.

"Wait, what are you doing?"

"It's ok, I'll check if the coast is clear, wait here."

"No, Dan, don't leave me again," she sounded scared.

To reassure her I had her wait by the open door but with her back to me watching the kitchen. I moved the few feet to the end of the corridor and got a view of the lobby. The front doors were full of holes, glass smashed and debris scattered over the carpet. The view was like a tornado had blown through. A chain rested around the handles in an attempt to keep hostages in and police out. The terrorists seemed to have retreated to the dining room so I decided to act quickly. I moved to the now deceased tall guy.

As I approached things instantly seemed out of place. I could now see that his skin seemed covered in make up or fake tan to make him look darker. Patches of white showed around his cuffs and ears. I knelt down and noticed his beard looked fake. I gave it a tug and it came away revealing a Caucasian face. Something was very wrong about this. His rifle had been taken by someone but inside the flap of his body armor I found a knife. I took it and searched his pockets. The only other thing he had on him was a photo. I immediately thought of 'white robe' thrusting a photo in front of the terrified rep earlier. My suspicion was correct, this was organized, and they had a target. I opened the photo and my blood turned cold as staring back at me was Jen's friend Helen. She looked slightly younger and wore a suit. The photo was not current but it was definitely her. Below simply stated her name, Helen Bowman. I folded the picture, picked up the knife and retreated to the office.

Jenny was full of questions, "Well, what's going on? Who are they? Was he dead? Did you find a way out?"

"Calm down a moment," I said. "Things aren't what they seem."

"How so," asked Jen.

"It looks like they are here for your friend." I showed her the picture. Jen slumped into the office chair.

"What would terrorists want with Helen?"

"That's just it," I said, "I'm not sure they are terrorists." I explained about the beard, the American accent and the fake skin colour.

"Then what is this Dan? What's going on?" she asked.

"I don't know but it looks a lot like someone wants Helen gone and wants to make it look like a random act of terrorism." Jen went silent in the chair taking it all in for a moment. I decided to look out into the kitchen to see if it was still clear and where the delivery bay may be.

"Dan look at this," called Jen. I moved over and she had used the office computer to do a search of Helen Bowman. "Look she is the daughter of some corporate big wig called Arthur Bowman. He sounds like one of these big city players." She flicked through pages of property deals and photos of handshakes with big political figures. "He's certainly a player," she continued, "He's been in some

big tax haven scandal and some million-dollar dispute over building rights on two of his high rises.” She looked at me wide eyed. “Do you think this is Mob related?”

“Let’s calm down. We have no idea what she or her dad are into. Let’s concentrate on getting ourselves out of here.”

“Well, we can’t just leave her Dan. I don’t care what her dad has done she doesn’t deserve it.”

“But How Jen, we have no idea where she could-,” she cut me off.

“Yes we do, she was going to the spar,” Jen spoke pointing to the basement. “It’s downstairs, I’ll call her”

“Wait, you have her number?”

“Girls chat Dan,” she said, disgusted at my lack of understanding. I had to give it to her, when Jen got her teeth into something there was no stopping her.

She took out the phone from her bum bag and dialed. A few minutes of hearing only the yes’ hm’s and the oks of a one sided conversation, she hung up.

“Ok, she’s fine she’s downstairs hiding in one of the treatment rooms, she thinks there may be a way out. I mean there must be fire exits Right?” it was as good a plan as any. And I was interested to hear the reason our lives were put in danger from the horse’s mouth.

“Right then, we need to find a way downstairs.”

“well,” started Jen, “they must serve food down there let’s try that lift thingy.” I agreed so we packed our stuff away closed the computer.

I led the way opening the door to the kitchen and moving in with the knife in my hand. It seemed a pathetic gesture against the Russian automatic weapons that the terrorists had, but it gave me confidence. We moved quickly and quietly through the kitchen and back to the small food lift. A quick check revealed it only went upward. A brief search around the other rear rooms found a large service lift with a cage door that seem to go to basement. I looked at Jen and shook my head.

“Too noisy, there must be stairs.” I was right a brief search found a small stairwell that descended to what seemed like staff quarters with sofas and vending machines. Exiting the staffroom, we were in a corridor that looked like a deliveries area with those rolling shutters and the bottom. We turned and headed inward. A couple of doors later and we were behind the reception counter of the spar. I still couldn’t shake that feeling that we weren’t supposed to be back here, demonstrating how deeply ingrained social conformity was.

It was at this point Jen took over. She felt familiar here knowing what the different treatment rooms were and were best to look. I had to remind her that it may not be safe. Finally, we pushed open a door to a tanning salon with 3 booths either side of the room and a desk at the end.

“Helen,” Jen whispered. With that we heard some shuffling and Helens face appeared behind the desk. Upon seeing us she stood up to reveal she was wearing

a bikini top and disposable knickers that tanning salons give their clients. She was in good shape for a woman of her years.

I cleared my thought, "Nice outfit," I smiled.

"Dan," chastised Jen, "Give the woman a break honestly." Both women looked at each other and said in unison, "Men!" Jen grabbed a robe and handed it to Helen. Giving her that woman to woman pep talk that only they did. "You look amazing Hun, even in paper pants. I wish I had your legs."

"You're too kind sweetie-"

"OK," I interrupted. "I suggest we move back and check out the delivery area as opening fire doors may set off an alarm in reception which would be bad for us." A strange moment befell me as I pictured our escape plan. Me in my swim shorts, a polo shirt and trainers, Jen in her Swimsuit and a sarong and Helen in a bathrobe, paper pants and hotel slippers. We were an unlikely posse.

I took the lead and we walked back down the corridor toward the delivery area. I cracked open the final door an inch to check if it was clear and instantly it was obvious things had changed. The large rear shutter was open and a van had been backed in. Two of the terrorists from earlier were unloading items. I watched for a while and saw them carrying what looked like suicide vests, then flags with terrorist insignia, then cameras and lights. This looked like a film crew not a violent gang. I couldn't make out any actual words but they were speaking in English. I closed the door and took Helen by the hand, pulling her into the staff room.

"Dan! Wait, what are you doing," demanded Jen.

"It's time she told us what we are mixed up in, there is some weird shit going on here,"

"OK, ok," said Helen, rubbing her wrists. "It's only fair, I suppose. I guess you've seen the photo."

"That we have, Miss Bowman."

"And you have heard of my father?"

"The internet has," I stated.

"Well, what the internet won't tell you is that My father owns this entire beach front and all the plots on it, this hotel too. He purchased these as a gift to my mother before she passed away, and now he refuses to sell them. He has had many offers but always turns them down. The team you see through there are not middle eastern terrorists but they work for the largest opposition of my father, 'Stanford Holdings'. They want this land for redevelopment and have submitted plans for high rises etc. The trouble is my father won't sell. It's my guess that this stunt is a deliberate attempt to drive the prices down and make the hotels go bust. Who wants to holiday at a terrorism black spot? If it makes the news, I dare say they will be successful. The shareholders may force my father to sell with their combined majority.

“Isn’t it a bit odd that you happen to be here,” I asked.”

“Not at all. I’ve holidayed here every year since my mother died. It’s the last place we spent time together. It makes sense that they would target me to teach him a lesson. I swear after this I’m selling up and moving away.” I couldn’t help feeling sympathy for her. She had gotten mixed up in her father’s crap while simply trying to be close to the memory of her mother. Jen helped her wipe her tears and we tried to think of another plan.

“Hellen, what do you know about this hotel that may help us get out. The front door is chained and the terrorists have some staff and guests at gunpoint in the dining room. The delivery bay is occupied. Can you think of another way out?” she sat thinking for a moment.

“The fire exits are no good on this level as they lead to the delivery ramp. There is a staff entrance but that’s across the lobby to the rear of the reception.”

I shook my head “That’s no good, they have that place covered.” I heard some commotion outside in the delivery bay so I took a peek through the door. It was the same two terrorists as before only this time carrying the dead tall guy and placing him in the van. “OK try hard and think Helen, maybe a toilet window we could break, or a service tunnel, anything.”

“Wait!” she exclaimed, “Directly below my apartment is a corner room with a balcony. it’s so close to the balcony of the next hotel I bet you could hop across.”

“How close?”

“Close enough that they put a privacy screen up.”

“OK which floor,” she paused while thinking.

“Err, four,” she said, “as I’m on five.”

“Ok here is the plan. We will make our way through the kitchen to the Dumb waiter.” Helen looked puzzled. “It’s a small lift for food. We will one at a time move up to floor 3. That’s our floor as we know the store room door is locked. Once we are all up there safe I will move up to floor 4 and check it out; if it’s clear you guys follow.” I was expecting resistance from Jen as she had specifically asked me not to leave her like that again, instead she had taken the roll of mentoring Helen.

“It’s ok Hun, we did this before and its safe.” The girls reassured each other which suited me fine. We collected ourselves and headed up the stairs to the kitchen. A quick look round made sure everything was clear and I ushered the girls to the lift at the rear. On passing I turned off the ovens as I didn’t want some burning food to draw attention to this area. I sent Jen up first, then Helen.

“This is a first,” she said, as she clambered into the dumb waiter.”

“Still better than being shot,” I replied.

“I’ll give you that,” she said, as I closed the hatch and sent it up. Finally, I climbed into the lift. Before I could close the hatch a loud bell rang out from somewhere in the kitchen as if some device was warning the chef it was done. I slid

the hatch closed and waited for the girls to press the button. It felt like a long time but was probably seconds. As the lift started to move I heard banging as if someone was trying to open the hatch below. I arrived at floor 3 to see the girl's anxious faces. They may be onto us we need to move quickly. I slid the hatch closed again and rode up another floor this was much quicker. I climbed out and sent the lift down.

I moved to the store room door and looked out. The corridor looked quiet. I listened for any movement but heard nothing. Until the sound of the hatch opening made me turn to see Jen Jump out. She pressed the button to send it down and we waited watching the lights but it didn't stop. It went all the way to the bottom.

"Shit!" I said, they have figured it out. Let's go.

"Wait," Jen was pulling away from me. "what about Helen, we can't just leave her Dan, they will kill her.

"OK, I have an idea, quick!" I grabbed her arm and we ran down the corridor toward the lifts and the room that Helen had described. The door was closed. I moved to the next room where the door was open. "Go in here and wait, lock the door, I'll go get her and I'll knock three times ok." Jen nodded nervously. I didn't hesitate as speed was my only ally now. I moved to the stairs next to the lifts and descended two at a time. I cracked open the door to the lower floor to hear Helen scream. Two men dragged her from the store room toward the Lifts. I closed the door and headed back up the stairs. Damn it I was too late. The sound of footsteps coming down from upstairs froze me to the spot. I looked around for anything I could use as a weapon and my eyes came to rest on the fire extinguisher. I waited my heart pounding on the landing between two floors. I raised the extinguisher above my head ready to throw it hoping it would buy me a few seconds.

Then rounding the corner was a man with a woman and a baby. They saw me and looked relieved.

"OH thank god, have they gone? is it safe?" said the woman, cradling her child. I shook my head holding my finger to my lips.

"Follow me," I whispered. With that we made our way back to the room and knocked three times.

"Where's Helen?" demanded Jen in a panic as I ushered the family in.

"They have her, there was nothing I could do." Jenny slumped on the bed crying, the other woman instinctively passed the baby to the father and comforted her.

"You can't help her now sweet heart, but you can help us, we have a lot to lose." She nodded to the small bundle in her husband's arms. Jen dried her eyes apparently accepting the offer. The dad brought the baby over and Jenny took her from him and stared at her in a dotting way.

The mother whispered, "Her name is Hope." Jen Smiled at the baby then looked directly at me drying her eyes.

"We need to go Dan, NOW!" I concurred. I opened the balcony doors and moved outside. The balconies were separated by a thin plastic screen which I broke with ease. We hopped the fence and on to the corner room balcony one at a time passing the bundle along.

After breaking the second privacy screen Helen had been right, it was close. I climbed the fence and was able to stand with one foot on either balcony. Like this I helped each member of our new gang over, once again bundle in hand.

We were finally safe in the next door hotel. A few minutes of forcing the doors and we were inside the room. I hugged Jenny and Baby mummy hugged Baby Daddy. We cautiously made our way down the stairs to the lobby and outside where the police intercepted us and moved us off to the flank. We found ourselves taking up residence on the outdoor seating of a nearby café surrounded by many other displaced tourists. Baby mummy and daddy who had become our newest friends joined us on the chairs.

Everywhere we looked our hotel was plastered on TV screens. Harrowing images flicked by of terrorists in suicide vests parading hostages around in front of terrorist insignia. Then the screen would cut away to clips of the beach horror with people running and hiding filmed on someone's mobile phone. That's when the screen rested on an image of the people in the dining room. Sat in the middle of them her face now filling the screen was Helen. She was being used exactly as she said, as propaganda. Her face all over the news so her father would undoubtedly see. The only way to hurt a man so Cold and well connected as Arthur bowman was through his daughter.

Jenny began to cry, "Dan you can't leave her there, please!" Baby daddy heard this and jumped in.

"I understand sweet heart but what can he do? These men are dangerous and the police are handling it." Jen looked directly at me again this time more serious.

"Dan, I don't ask for much, please do this for me." Baby daddy shrugged and gave up writing her off as nuts."

"Babe you know I can't, it's not that easy, this is not my fight."

that's when my phone began to ring in the bum bag. Baby mummy put her arm around Jen, come on Honey don't be hard on him it's not his fault. What is he supposed to do?" Jen never took her eyes off me, staring intently.

"It's them isn't it," She smiled, wiping her tears and pointing to my phone as I answered. "It is, isn't it?" She said, as I spoke softly into the handset.

"Who is it?" asked baby mummy.

"He has to Now. Ha h," she said, as I hung up the phone "Watch this," she said excitedly, turning to baby mummy. "Watch him now."

“Order me some breakfast,” I said. “I’ll be back shortly!”

* * *

Can Dan do anything? Who was that on the Phone? Will Helen Survive. How will this horror End? These Questions are answered in part two. Available at www.michaelbisley.com.

To Be Continued...