

David L Nightingale

A Fly on the Wallpaper

Fly on the Wallpaper takes the British love of animals to new heights.

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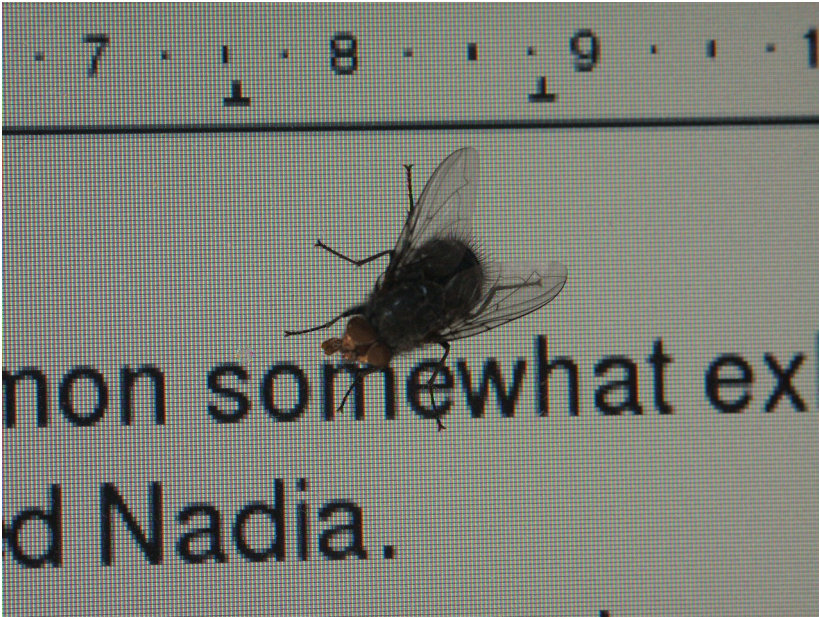
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Reference maps at rear of book.



Above: Editing the book.

1. Nasty Makeovers

I know what you are thinking, “Why do I want to read a book by a fly?” Well let me explain it was ghost written. You see we flies are too small to operate a keyboard. So you say, “How does a fly know English?” Because you taught us! Yes that’s right, why do you think people refer to their room being bugged. Miniature electronics, yea get real. It’s us flies, as in spies notice the similarity, it even sounds similar after you humans have become inebriated.

“Right that does it,” you’re thinking, “Flies are disgusting creatures that spread disease.”

At least we digest our food before taking it into our bodies, you humans have some weird and some flies might say, disgusting eating habits.

So why would a fly want to write a book for humans? Bad press, we have had such a bad press and the final straw that got right up my proboscis was all these home makeovers. Oh great, so now how do we hide on white with a delicate shade of pink? The older members of

you will remember those nice patterned wallpapers with dark colours, oh bliss. We could blend in and hide for days without you noticing. Members of FLU (Fly and Locate Union) were even considering flying pickets to protests at the Central Fly Command centres. You can imagine our shock when we heard that CFCs were going to be phased out. We have been blamed for a lot of things but destroying the ozone layer is not one of them.

In this book which of course could be titled a biography of a fly. We will try and show you just how vital flies are, and not just to those who ensure national security. You will understand how vital we are to the very survival of the human race. We hope you will help to form the Fly Protection League, a body that is long overdue. Please also consider writing to your MP to get us protected in law. We have enough natural hazards without the extra man made ones, such as fly swats, sticky paper and newspapers. Please ask your MP to ban newspapers these are currently our biggest threat. Not all flies have been government or security services trained, we need to set up training for ordinary flies, can you help? You can make huge donations to the human author of this book as he is our friend. He has risked much to bring our plight to the notice of the public. For years we have been attacked and exploited by government intelligence agencies around the world. Chemical warfare is a terrible crime call for a ban on those cans of fly sprays, boycott your chemists and retail outlets, let them know you will not stand for it.

Yes ok you can tell that many things humans do cause me concern. Well let me explain the life of a fly on the wallpaper and you will understand why.

It all began when I was just a little grub. You are supposed to think of a little grub and go ahhhh not go eughh and puke all over the carpet. Still that vomit looks a bit tasty, now where was I? Oh while we are not on the subject of language, you don't do up your birds, you do up your flies, you don't bird to Australia, you fly! What do you say when you are in a hurry? "I must fly." Yes we are very important linguistically, even time flies. Sometimes we wonder about you humans, you are so stupid, you leave your undigested food around then get cross when we land on it to sample it with our feet. That's right, we are so civilized we use our feet to taste the food first before we waste digestive juices on

it. Clever huh, you take a lick and if it is poison, bang you're down, dumb or what.

We interrupt this text to inform you that a small fly has just flown in front of the screen and asked that we consider a chapter on small flies who are not used by governments on account of them being less able to comprehend fully human linguistics. The fly informed us that in a bid to avoid detection, governments had hired them early on but sometimes the information received proved not to be coherent. I think that's what he said, or was it she?

Being a grub is fun no need to worry about flying into a spiders web. Crawling through rotting waste oh the pleasure. Sorry just reminiscing, but we literally do eat ourselves out of house and home. Even as grubs we help you humans, can you imagine the piles of rotting mammal and bird corpses that would litter the countryside without us eating them up. Not all flies eat flesh, some do, some eat living flesh to. Well I was assured this by a Blue Bottle who explained that Bottle and Blowflies eat dead flesh and the larvae of screw worm flies enjoy a good feast on living flesh, wound sites are like the penthouse suite. We are extremely concerned about these notices around parks and other places telling you to pick up your dogs faeces, have they no consideration for the Green Bottle flies.

Some cruel humans put chickens over Soldier fly larvae when they are about to pupate, that's gratitude after the larvae have disposed of the manure waste oh nice. We even understand that Iowa State University have dried the larvae, then squeezed them to extract the oil in an effort to make bio-diesel. We get rid of your waste then you waste us! Oh you humans are so nice, NOT. I guess when running your bus on this you call it Fly-drive?

I should point out that I'm a House Fly, *Musca domestica* to those more educated readers. I could go on about how fruit flies are helping scientists understand senescence, but you only bought this book to read about the gossip we have overheard, go on be honest you could not give a shit about us poor flies. Oh no you just live in a human centric world, but a word of caution, we were around when the dinosaurs ruled the earth and at the rate you lot are going we will be cleaning up the mess after you lot have followed them into the fossil

record.

You blot us on your car windows while driving the planet into CO2 meltdown, you fry us on those horrible purple things in butchers. Blame us for spreading disease because you're too lazy to cover your food and put up window netting to stop us getting into your rooms. "That's right moan moan moan, get on with it tell us about your missions," you scream.

I say to the author should we not tell you first about our training, but he says no, humans have an even shorter attention span than Goldfish. He assured me that most humans enjoy being ignorant and stupid, it's the only way they can blame others for their own mess and not feel bad about it.

So now I get interested in humans, "So are flies like human minorities I ask?"

He says, "That's right, blaming a fly is no difference than the stupid lazy minded people who victimized the early scientists who's teaching threatened their cosy power base."

A few species of flies do spread diseases, but it's just the way they live, and these flies may kill some humans. But don't humans have the brain power to prevent us from being a problem?

"Yes mostly we do," he says.

Now I ask, "Who kills more, flies or humans?"

The author had a long think, then considered the millions of animals killed each year to feed humans, all those killed by cruel humans, all those killed by chemicals and other human activities. So us flies aren't so bad then? Well you do want humans to be sympathetic to the cause don't you? As we flies are very smart well lets just say we can take off backwards you know!

2. Prepare for Take off

It was a sunny summers day when the local CFC assigned me my first mission. There are lots of CFCs the reason being is that we can only fly around two to twenty miles, now you understand that as we need to get back to base to report on our assignment the effective range is more practically limited to around ten miles. It was found early on that when flies were sent on long range missions few returned. Morale

amongst fly crews dropped and this adversely affected operational efficiency.

Well it was early morning, and a building near Whitehall was hosting a committee meeting. This was not a critical mission, but for me it was quite enough to start with. I told myself to remember the training, did a final flight check and off out of the window. For a moment I turned and hovered looking back as I had done on many training flights, checking my barrings. The old Georgian terrace house looked good in the sunlight, and I felt nervous at leaving the safety of the small top floor window. A light breeze caught me off guard, and startled I resumed course, heading down the streets to the old office block.

I managed to get in through a sash window, it was partly open. Very scary because if it fell down, well you might think good one squashed fly, but for us it is an occupational hazard. I hoped this was the meeting room, also that no one shut the window because of the draught, you have no idea what it's like trying to get out of a building. Windows, the only people who would understand are those head banging heavy metal folks. Glass is a nightmare for us, it's just like stiff air. One minute you are flying along nicely the next, bang . It might look like it does not hurt, and we might seem stupid to keep trying, but if you had just knocked your brain silly you might just do the same. It makes us forget, so we try again, bang. Still the room was empty so I flew low over the table, on it were some closed folders, yes yippee I was in luck. Below entitled, In Defence of Religious Education were six sets of documents laid out on the fine Oak surface. Now to find a hiding place from where to observe the meeting, ah yes a nice dark corner above the picture rails. We flies adore those with taste, those who hang pictures.

The first person to enter was a rather thin and elegant lady, and from my training I surmised she was the secretary. I heard voices outside, then six men in suits shuffled in, each seemed to want to sit at a particular chair. Perhaps like me on the picture rail they did not want to be in a conspicuous position. After some loud scrapping of chairs they all settled down. A man at the head of the table began to speak.

“Now gentlemen, we have a pressing problem our government is under attack for promoting religion in schools and we must respond.”

"They must realise it's good for morality," said Roger Drogal Urquart.

"What's that got to do with it?" said Bentley Crichton, a thin man with a moustache that reminded me of a couple of hairy caterpillars.

"What?" responded portly Roger.

"Divide and rule old chap, we must keep all these faiths going to help split the population, we can no longer do it on racial grounds," said Bentley who came across as one of those humans who knows he's right, even when he's not.

"Oh," said the over fed Roger, "And keep in with them all at the same time?"

"Isn't that right?" said Bentley confidently looking at the Chair.

"You are both wrong, we need to keep in with lots of countries around the world, upon which we are dependant."

"Euh, I'm sorry dear boy but what in the blazes does that have to do with the school system?" said an indignant Roger.

"Roger, I are you living in a vacuum ? have you no grasp on the economy?" The Chair was losing his patients.

"Economy? If we are worried about the economy surely we should be concentrating on science and languages, shouldn't we?" said Bentley using what passed as human reasoning.

"No, no, look think about our major exports?" he said with consternation.

"Oh the City!" exclaimed the portly chap in the corner.

"No, no, arms sales," said the frustrated chairman.

"What's that got to do with religion?" came a stern reply.

"Asleep during history lessons were we Roger?" said the chairman in a sarcastic tone.

"Ah, I see old chap got it, if we are seen to be supporting all faiths then those foreign chaps will buy arms from us for their sordid little conflicts."

"Yes Roger, yes, finally the penny's dropped," said the relieved Chairman.

"Religion being the route of all military budgets," laughed Bentley.

The secretary taking the minutes gave him a rather daggered stare.

She had some kind of metal thing round her neck and at the bottom resting just above the top of her plain navy blue dress was one of those crosses that you humans seem to wear, I am reliably told it's the equivalent to a club tie.

"So we should tell them that we are promoting single faith schools to ensure understanding of faiths which play an important role in our

society and to exclude religion from schools would be discriminatory and we are opposed to all forms of discrimination,” said man who had been sitting quietly at the other end of the table.

“Well done,” said the Chairman, “Could not have put it better myself.”

“I sense irony in that statement,” said another of the men.

“Shut up Hugo and just agree,” said the Chair, “Why do you always have to be so pedantic?”

“So can we all go to the bar now?” said Roger.

“Don't minute that Miss Frobisher,” said the Chairman.

Well you can imagine that upon my return the chief of my CFC unit was most pleased, I don't think you want to know what he gave me to eat as a reward, don't want you throwing up again do we, makes all the pages sticky and that would interfere with your reading enjoyment. My military masters were pleased that those running the country understood the necessities of warfare. I must comment here however that in general us flies are extremely peaceful by comparison. Your bin men or should I say people are our heroes. They, like us, clean up the crap you leave out and how many wars have been started by bin people? Exactly salt of the earth, fine people you should really value what they do, without them you'd be in deep shit, literally.

So you did not realise that we were used by the military to keep tabs on what the government is up to? You thought you the people who elected your representatives were being served by them, well I guess you are in a funny sort of way. Still why should we flies try and inform your tiny human minds, if you started thinking then we might not inherit the earth. An eternity of generations upon generations of flies subjected to newspaper wielding humans, gives me nightmares just thinking about it. If only we could find a way of communicating with those Silverfish.

The wonderful *Lepisma saccharina* eats paper. Just think how many flies could be saved if we could get them to concentrate on eating newspapers. They can live for up to eight years, just think even if one only lived two years. Wow all those newspapers that could be sabotaged. They can live for a year without food so don't think your siege tactics will work, how many of you can go for a year without a newspaper? Each female can lay approximately a hundred eggs in a lifetime, wow a hundred little silverfish munching through those nasty

newspapers. Ah but alas we have yet to find a way of communicating with these ancient creatures.

Oh not interested in other creatures, that's right go on have a go, "We want to hear what else you have heard?"

Most of you humans are so self obsessed with your own species it's vulgar. You seem preoccupied with gossip, excuse me rainforests are being destroyed by you at an alarming rate, you need them for climate stability and potential resources. The planet you live on is at risk, it's your life support system, hello!

"Shut up and tell us about another conversation you've bugged and give us something juicy none of that boring politics, got any sex scandals?"

Yes yes ok, I guess you did not buy this book to satisfy your copious desire for intellectual enlightenment.

What is it, do you humans feel insecure, do you need reassurance that you can breed like flies? Ok now I'm pissing you off, ok put the paper down slowly or I won't tell you this really amazing visit I made to a house in the country. Oh now you seem to be paying attention again. Yes well they put me in a nice travelling pack, all mod cons. I arrived one evening at a CFC near a small country cottage. I can't think what use the information I gathered was to my masters but, "Ours is not to reason why, but to fly and spy."

I flew some miles across fields and hedges, I can tell you now it took a bit longer than expected. Well I had to sample a few cow pats, what's the harm in having a rest on a nice warm gooey pile of, ops sorry. We flew low over a few hedges, but never too close. We flies have been warned to stay away from bushes, hedges, fences and anything with spaces between two edges. Those damn spiders are a bunch of body fluid draining vampires. You think we are bad, you imagine being bitten and becoming frozen, then along comes this eight leg monster and drinks your body fluids while you are still alive, surely that must contravene basic fly rights. Talk to your MP, get him to have a word with the local Vicar and get that God bloke to do something about it, what was he thinking of creating such a creature as a spider, and they frighten the ladies now even if you don't like flies, surely any man reading this must want to protect the ladies dignity, and any women well you can sympathise can't you? If you won't do it for us, do it for

the women of the world, some spiders are deadly to humans, come on don't just insist I get on with the gossip. Oh that's right be selfish, yes yes I'm going to get on with it.

Well I landed on a slippery window ledge, it was damp from rain and was on the north side of the house. Some green slimy plant matter was growing on it. After negotiating this I found a way in by a crack in the old wooden window frame. It took a while flying around inside the house to locate the correct room.

In comes a fat bald headed chap without those clothes that you humans normally wear. His little worm thing dangling down between his legs, and you think maggots are ugly! Sorry I must be objective on this. Now he lays down on this big double bed, just slumps arms and legs in all directions, reminded me of a dead spider. I still have no idea to this day why this bugging exercise was of any use to my masters.

Then a few minutes later I hear sounds, clunk clunk clunk, yes it was a human coming up stairs. Why you insist on trying to walk on two legs when you have four, it always seems so clumsy. Anyway all goes silent, then the floorboards creak, the door gives a chattering scream as it is slowly pushed open. In the doorway stands a tall woman. With black boots that have long pointed heels.

"Are you ready?" she asks, "My darling Brigadier."

"Yes!" came a smooth reply.

"Discipline is so important don't you agree darling?" she said.

"Vital," he snapped.

"You are not standing to attention, when on parade," she said firmly,

"You know that's an offence"

"Yes," came his short reply.

"Lack of discipline must be punished, we can't have sloppiness on parade can we?"

"No," his response was quieter, "Your husband, you're sure he won't be back."

You want to know what she was wearing! What ever for? Ok, well she had on stockings, and these were attached to the suspenders, which in turn were attached to the bottom of a corset, the top of which seemed to be straining to hold in two rather large appendages. I know we flies are not very good at describing human attire, it's not our thing.

"Darling stop worrying even the warden is on holiday, you know you

are supposed not to speak on parade,” she said with a frightening chill. He began to breath heavily, sweat rolling off his forehead. I can understand why, this woman was more like a bloody spider, she scared the shit out of me. Tied him up just like a spider ties up a fly. Then she puts her head between his legs and starts sucking on the worm, poor chap having the life sucked out of him. Orders or not I was not waiting around for her to do the same to me. No, I flew off back to the CFC. Apparently the information they got was enough, but for some reason they would have liked more. Oh, and so would you, what ever for?

Well back in London there was a major thing going on, seems a crack team of flies was being prepared for something big. I was chosen to be in on the action.

3. Operation Blue Bottle

Chocks away, this was the code word for when we all had to set off. Each of us had to go off to a pub and blend in with the local flies. Lay low they said, great atmosphere you humans do have some amazing smells. Get near to a human, wait for a sound from the lower regions then in a moment a wave of odour hits the senses. Pubs are great, you're all to sloshed to catch us, no spiders and those vapours wow. And I nearly forgot those loos once you've had a few the piss and shit ends up everywhere. I often dream about becoming a human, and do you know my ideal job would be? A lavatory attendant. Not your idea of a good job, well you humans have different values, if you don't like the idea of cleaning loos then maybe you should be more considerate of those of your species who have to do the job. Still it's not for a fly to tell you humans how to behave, but before you call us filthy insects, just look at what you do during a night out on the tiles.

I can tell you when they told us where we were going I was worried about how we were going to get a handle on any conversation those pubs are so noisy. Do you know they told us we were needed to gather vital statistics. Given a description of our target human and other details such as name, we were told to count how many pints this human consumed before collapsing under the table, or stopping in some other way. Mine downed nine, once I was sure he was not in a

fit state to further imbibe it was time to head back.

I set off into the dark, well it was not too dark all those damn lights. it's so confusing, do you humans realise how you screw up our navigation systems. I stopped to ask a moth directions. I won't repeat its opinion of you lot. When it gets dark why can't you do what you did for hundreds of thousands of years and just go to sleep. Ok so you might have to occasionally use a light to go to evacuate your bladder, but do you really need to leave millions of lights on, what a waste of energy. Security, you need them when walking at night for safety. Just get a dog, and the streets will be filled with poo, oh yes yes yes.

Relieved that the mission was over and having feasted on some, well you know! I was just about to nod off when some humans started shouting.

"You bloody fools, you risked our best flies, you know how long it takes to train a fly?" There was a pause the volume going up each time the speech continued, I only heard one voice. "We need all the flies we can get and you stupid idiots risked them on that."

Another pause, "Do it again and we will feed you to the next generation of maggots, got it?" came a piercing screech.

I recognised the voice it was the head of the Fly Squad. He sounded anxious, but neither we nor our human masters knew why. Usually he was very calm, full of humour. His demeanour had changed when his own elite Fly Corp started suffering high losses, we all wondered why he would risk losing so many.

It was late evening we were all restless, an event would occur that prompted me to make secret contact with the author of this book. Things were happening that had to be recorded. A lone fly of the Elite Corp flew in, the human second in command had disappeared without trace, the head was worried. This fly came in for a crash landing, his legs collapsing, wings twitched as he slid across the Fly Light Path. We had a team of Fireflies who would provide landing guides on night flights. I should of course let you know that Fireflies are actually beetles of the order Coleoptera in the family Lampyridae. They rushed to him, we ran across the Formica surface.

"There are three at the top," he stuttered, "Say we know to much."

“Go on,” said one of my colleagues.

“Want all trace wiped, us terminated,” he gasped and went limp.

This was serious stuff, we raised the alarm. The head and his CFC leaders knew that they and us were in great danger. They were expert at handling us, and we at gathering information, how could we defeat the plans of highly trained top operatives with a team of highly trained agents. These agents knew all our locations, even the mobile ones. Our Carriers were satellite tracked, and all human operatives known in minute detail. The problem was we were so secret even the politicians did not know we existed, oh they knew the secret services had ways of bugging offices, but they thought this was with sophisticated electronics. Rooms were regularly checked for these technologies, but information was still gathered, they did not know how.

So why were they so opposed to us? What did we know that frightened them?

4. We know Who but not Why?

It was getting colder and the daylight shorter, other CFC leaders had disappeared, the head knew he would be more difficult to vanish, he was known to others outside the department. He also realised the approaching autumn would compromise our abilities to travel, so he put operation Fly Wheel into action. Each remaining CFC leader was given a group of flies in a makeshift carrier, and told to disperse as best they could. Each of us was told of the three men who wanted us eliminated, and each leader and his group assigned a final mission, somehow to fight back.

My team consisted of old Jim, a kind human who had saved many an insect. He was the oldest and most experienced handler. We had with us flies from now leaderless CFCs, and their attendants, so a mere twenty houseflies, sixteen fireflies and couple of Blue Bottles in a modified shoebox were carried away down a dark alley into the cool night. Around the country we had arranged with some remote ant colonies to leave messages so that the groups could try and stay in touch. *Lasius niger* or know to you as the black ant, may seem like a pest when it enters your home but it actually is using its house entering abilities for your protection.

I know it is important that you keep up with what is happening to our group, but the ants are so vital to your national security yet you kill them with abandon. Yes ok, I know they get into your food, but think about it if they can get in so can others. The British black ant is a loyal operative, where we are the top when it comes to gathering data, this ant is the best when it comes to checking your food for subversive activity. People get sick and that damages the effectiveness of the economy, this helps foreign powers. Our ants, are carrying away food that might be contaminated, just remember how much food comes from abroad. Do you really think there are enough people to check it all when it comes through the ports? Only the ants have sufficient numbers to cope, and only they are able to analyse and decontaminate this food. These ants are not known to carry disease organisms so don't panic, you humans do get so paranoid.

Hopefully I will be able to tell you more about them, there is much you don't know as you blunder around in ignorance. Up until now we could not reveal all this information, remember this book is going to be made available to good people. Suspect anyone who asks to borrow your books, good people buy them, they don't waste their money on other things. Good people want to learn that's why they buy books. This book may be labelled fiction but that is only to fool the enemy, you're wise and clever you don't need me to tell you that.

Jim might be old but what he lacked in physical agility he more than made up for in mental skills. His cunning enabled us to elude capture. Of the twelve teams to leave, we learned that only two remained in operation by the end of September. Only if we could sit out the coming winter did we have any chance of counter attack. Jim has asked me not to reveal too much detail about where we hid, but I shall tell you what we did.

One long dark winter evening, we managed finally to convince Jim, that although we did not know why, we had to eliminate them, I am referring to those who opposed us, while some of us were left. An ant had arrived the previous day, travelling underground to avoid the worst of the cold he had tunnelled in and found us. It was bad news, the only other remaining group although not found was in an area crawling with agents, they could do nothing but keep their heads down and hope.

“So what are you going to do, just sit there?” said one tough looking female. I should at this stage inform you of a couple of additions to our number. Two lady horseflies, Tabanus to get technical, with some wicked looking compound eyes glinting blue. To a red/brown eyed House Fly you have no idea how this tickles our antenna.

“Just show us the bastards,” said the other Horse Fly, “We'll drink blood from some mangy animal then feed off these arse holes,” she said with a mean proboscis, “Let the microbes kick the shit out of their insides.”

“That won't get rid of them,” I said nervously.

“Keep them sick for a while though,” said the other dame, “No one messes with us flies and gets away with it.”

“Jim's looked after you but he's no match for them, you lot have to do something,” said the other Horse Fly.

“We need help from others, we're just houseflies,” said one of my colleagues.

For hours we paced around on the old table top, tasting crumbs for inspiration. One of the Blue Bottles shouted that the Horse Flies were onto something. I should explain the normal role of the Blue Bottles. They can only cover around three to ten miles so over this distance we are on our own, but when within range they are our search and rescue, either helping us back or if too badly injured they get the messages back to our human leader. Not many of them want to do this role hence why we only have two of them.

Did I mention that the Egyptians used flies? They were quite in tune with animals. That's how hieroglyphics started. You see the Egyptians' homes made of adobe, dried mud bricks, and they had mats at the windows to stop flies. They did not want the Pharaohs knowing what was going on. We could still get by, so each home had one or more fly catchers. Rather than use speech, for which you have to have a trained ear to hear what we say, the Egyptians who lived in a society where people were less educated decided to get us to describe in pictures what we saw and heard. So clay tablets were provided after one of our ancestors had made marks on a drying adobe, thus we used our legs to draw small images. Over time we standardised the forms so it would be easier for you humans to understand. The

Pharaohs were so impressed by our method of communication that they decided to use it when recording battles and other information on the walls of their buildings.

Back on the table top we all gathered round old Bluey as he was known, eager for his wisdom. "You lot need to find out the medical details of these three," he said.

"Why?" asked one of us.

"Because if they have an allergy or weakness that we can exploit it may help," he paused, "There is no way we can take them on physically."

"Army ants could," said the black ant.

"Nice suggestion but I think a few million Dorylinae wandering through the streets might be a tad conspicuous, not to mention getting a few pet owners up in arms as their furry friends become meals, and that's assuming that we had a friendly colony of *Eciton burchelli*," I said, hoping not to upset the ant who was just trying to be helpful.

"You're right," he said glumly, "Besides they'd hate our climate, hot and humid with lots of trees is what they dig."

"Perhaps we could lure the three nasty humans to a zoo, perhaps there would be army ants at a zoo?" said our youngest recruit.

We all looked at him then each other. "Ok silly idea," he chuckled.

Bluey spoke again, "First we find their weaknesses then we plan how to exploit them, just get your heads around that. For now lets all get plenty of rest."

5. Spring Offensive – know your enemy.

Jim awoke early in the day. It was spring, change was in the air. The sun was bright and penetrated the curtains, specks of light glinted in the material. He called for six volunteers, we were to fly nearly seventeen miles to a small medical facility. There is no way we would make it back in the same day so we would have to fend for ourselves. Getting there was the easy part, how to access the computer system was going to be the real challenge.

We flew low over fields at first, dodging tall stems of grass where those damn spiders had a habit of putting webs. Coming over a hedge a pied flycatcher just flown in from Africa spotted us. We peeled off

taking evasive manoeuvres, skimming through the blades of grass we escaped its beak, but a local fly was caught unaware. We felt bad for quite a while, we reformed and gained altitude flying at roughly two thousand milli feet above the ground.

Hospitals are not nice places, as we approached we could smell some really foul chemicals. "They don't like us in there," said the wing commander. I should at this stage point out that because we were recruited by your military we tend to assign terms to our formations that you can understand. Hence the name for the lead fly. He brought us in to land on a window ledge. Through one of the panes of glass we could see a lady sitting at a desk and another over at a filing cabinet. The lady at the filing cabinet turned and spoke to her colleague, then opened the door and left. The door closed, Wing Co was meanwhile looking for a way in. He noticed a small extractor fan with a flap caught open, it had seen better days. We managed to get through and high above the room we could see down onto the small array of desks.

As one of the best speakers I was given the task of flying down and speaking to the lady. You can imagine this is one of the most dangerous tasks, humans don't know about us, to them we are just a pest. I looked around trying checking for hazards, with a route planned I flew in low keeping close to the floor so that she would not see me. At first I thought of flying around behind her, but you humans have a real knack of seeing us out of the corner of your eyes, then reacting unpredictably. I wandered carefully over to her plain shoes, nice colour, black and smooth matt finish, I hopped on. Carefully picking a trail up onto the leg, covered in nice black material. I froze, hearing voices, it sounded like she was speaking and then the other lady said rather loudly, "I'm off to lunch." Great, only one woman in the office, I continued up and was soon up onto her long black skirt. If you can imagine for a fly this vast expanse was like a human having to cross the shifting sands of a black desert. When she made the slightest movement it was quite unnerving. Continuing slowly heading up to her waist. My plan to circumnavigate the encompassing band find the zip then wander up her back. So far so good, above imagine you were looking up at a sheer rock face. A human climber might look for a way up, my route was to follow the line of the blouse buttons. The worst part was to come, getting on her long flowing hair was a nightmare. She kept moving her head, hair moved away then back down, then

swishing from side to side, you try rock climbing during an earth quake.

At last I took a flying jump, not easy when you have already flown seventeen miles. You don't believe me, ok you go walk that distance over hills then see how you feel about jumping around. Thank you. Well I picked my way strand by strand, like you having to go from one tuft of grass to another in a piece of swampy ground. Just over her ear, and bravely uttered in my best English.

"Don't be alarmed you are not hearing things, and please don't look around," she was startled. Looking down I could see hear breasts heaving almost escaping as they bulged between the cups, the translucent material showing the lace on her bra, and its folds horizontally strained between the peaks. "Please this is a matter of the utmost secrecy you must tell no one or you may compromise national security."

"Yes," she stuttered, her gaze fixed ahead of her.

You see there is no way I could type at a keyboard like you, so we had to fool her into thinking there was a secret agent behind her, and that she had to do what he wanted. I got her to type in the names of each man, luckily they were in the national healthcare database, with my amazing capacity to remember it was no problem to take on board the medical details of each. It did go through my mind that access to each persons records may be monitored, and so to reduce the chances of detection I asked her to check half a dozen other people with similar names, interspersed of course with those of interest. This hopefully would protect her.

With the data gathered I told her to close her eyes, she did and you have never seen a fly move so fast. I was back up with Wing Co and the lads on full throttle. It was a good job too, as her colleague came back in.

"You youngsters! Late night?" said the older woman.

"Oh," said my helper, "No, no just resting my eyes, it's important if you work with computers all day to avoid eye strain, you should rest them and look away at distant objects every twenty minutes or so."

"Really?" said the colleague, her interest awakened.

"Also when you concentrate for a long time on the screen you blink less and this affects the lubrication of the eye," she said with confidence.

“Well Lucy Herdlitz, that might explain my dry eyes,” she paused,

“Thank you my dear I think we are going to get along well.”

“Old chap when you have quite finished getting your wings in order, and can take your compound eyes off your helper perhaps we can find somewhere safe for the night.” The Wing Co said this with his usual good humour.

“Couldn't we stay here?” said one of our squadron.

“If we stay here and they put this fan on we could be minced, besides my bet is this place is crawling with spiders,” he said, and he was usually right about these things.

We went back down onto the window ledge, where we saw the older woman walk over and look out of the window. “Don't worry chaps it's a sealed unit she cant get at us here,” he said with reassurance. We heard her alright and my lady.

“God you should see the flies on the window ledge outside,” said the older woman.

“Time of year for them,” replied Lucy.

Meanwhile Wing Co was looking around. Just for a moment try and see it from our view point. We are surrounded by a maze of buildings, each full of pest control systems. Chemicals, traps, and just plain old hazards such as fans, vacuum cleaners, ventilation systems. Only someone who has fought in a military campaign can appreciate our predicament. it's like you're permanently behind enemy lines, you also have natural hazards such as dripping water, puddles, birds, and predatory insects. One wrong move and you're no longer a functioning fly. So when you see a fly remember if it has survived for you to see it then it's one damn smart critter. You think we like kitchens, no we don't. The only reason we get attracted to them is the food smells, but we hate them, land in the wrong place and you are toast, literally. Fly in your soup, believe me it is no joke for the fly either, our members have been trained in survival techniques, but most flies have no idea and it's the end for them.

We set off for a small building away from the rest of the complex.

Flying in a loose formation to avoid being seen by predators we land on another window ledge. This time we could see the ground was quite close. On the final approach before landing I read a sign on the door. This brick shed housed various gas cylinders and was separate

from the main buildings for safety reasons. Finding a place to hide would be difficult, under the roof and in corners would be those eight eyed monsters, a fly's worst nightmare. The Wing Co told us to wait, he carefully walked over the edge of the window ledge and took a look. One thing about being a fly we can hang on to a lot of surfaces. You see we have two claws on each foot and pulvilli which are two membranous flaps full of tiny hooked hairs. So the next time you use Velcro just remember we got there first, and it's why we can walk on almost any surface, even hang around on your ceiling. Oh and we hear through our feet too, hey imagine that at a disco!

We got the all clear signal and followed underneath. It was a nice spot, out of sight, dry and no predators, although we did post a watch. Not all our enemies wait for a meal, some come looking. Thinking of food we would need to refuel before flying back, but for now we needed to rest.

In the morning we were all still hanging in there. The Wing Co started the debriefing session, you see six of us might not make it back. He also decided that we should feed back out in the countryside. He was sure we could find some cow pats to feed off on the way back, much safer than going into human dwellings.

Our sharp eyed youngster was first to spot a cow and where there were cows, just follow the smells. We all felt good, refuelled and ready to take on the world. You don't like them right, well neither do we and it was as we took off for home that one *Paravespula vulgaris* struck, it shook me. So close my friend and colleague was there one minute and in a black and yellow flash was gone, held in the powerful jaws of that nasty creature. Here we are doing our bit for recycling waste, and zap.

Now just five nervous flies made their way back. We wanted to get back quick, but caution slowed us down. It was spring and Wing Co knew that other animals on this planet were producing young. This required food and we were going to be prime targets. With no natural defences, no sting in our tails all we had to rely on was our cunning, experience and a bit of luck.

“Swallows ten o'clock, dive lads, dive,” shouted Wing Co. Now you

might like these birds, oh so pretty aren't they and eating those pesky insects. Well all I can say is these birds are best seen stuffed, taxidermists and those French folks who eat small birds great. Yes yes if you are a fly, you would understand. Alright keep your hair on, flies are not likely to take over the world yet. You keep feeding those birds, so we don't have to.

Shit old Robert had flown backwards to avoid capture, but the bird that got him was obviously wise to that trick. Wing Co had settled in a gorse bush, we made our way to his position. These birds were still migrating, sit still for a while and they'd be gone. Eventually the four of us returned back to base.

Jim was upset, a third of our squadron lost. He was on edge, ever worried that we might be tracked down. Vigilance had kept him away from us and awake most nights, we could see he had not been getting much sleep. Bluey offered to keep watch while Jim slept and we rested, but Bluey was needed by us as he was so smart. Bottletop the other Blue Bottle suggested he take the watch, with the little ant and the two Horse Flies for backup.

We planed to get some rest, but first it was decided that we should impart the information to the other fourteen houseflies and Bluey so they could do some thinking. We gathered around Bluey and Wing Co on the table top. It was reassuring to be in a nice warm safe environment on a table top littered with food waste which we would later digest at our leisure. For now though we all paid attention to the mission.

Wing Co began by explaining the medical records for each of the targets.

"Allergic to wasp stings, great anyone ever met a friendly one?" said one of our group expressing his thoughts as we analysed the data for attack vectors.

"Penicillin what's that?" said sexy Nadia, what a fly.

"I think it's derived from fungi," I offered.

"Oh like mushroom soup is the murder weapon!" Nadia's wit was priceless.

"What about the other one he seems to have no problems on a scale we can handle?" said Bluey.

Jim had been listening to our meeting and expressed his concern. Worried that at best we would only be able to deal with two of them he suggested finding out why they wanted to phase out all the CFCs. "Perhaps we could persuade them we are no threat," he said. This wound up the Horse Flies, they were not used to Jim's kind manner, all the humans they had ever met had tried to kill them. One spoke, "Look Jim, of all the humans we have ever met you are the only one we like, but these bastards are wiping out the flies and your human colleagues who look after them, you can't reason with these killers."

"I volunteer to try and find out," what was I saying had the cow-pats gone to my head?

Bluey spun on the spot, looked at Wing Co, then back at me. "Well there's one thing for sure we can't risk sending a squadron out again, if we do attack we'll need every fly we have."

"One fly might make it," said Wing Co, "Besides we have no idea what they are up to."

"Bloody dangerous," said Nadia showing a nice bit of concern, those curves on her abdomen wow, sorry, yes oh. She continued, "They'll have traps and spiders everywhere, it's suicide."

The little ant squeaked, "I'm sure one of our colonies will have information on their whereabouts and I'll help you. We can go via all the ant tunnels."

"Won't they be a bit small, he'll damage his wings," said Bluey, who was somewhat more portly than myself, and I guess having visions of a fly stuck in a tunnel, "Flies in tunnels it's not natural."

"We can make big tunnels," said the ant. With that he scampered off we saw him disappear down his tunnel entrance.

Thinking of things underground reminds me of the tomb of Tutankhamen. Perhaps at this stage I should let you in on a secret. You are probably wondering how the British Government came to have a top secret unit of flies and Fly Masters. I thought so. When the tomb was found it contained an ancient papyrus on which was written instructions so that the King could speak to flies from the afterlife. Well you can imagine the importance of this, and it was smuggled back to Britain. Now I think you'll understand why so many of the expedition supposedly succumbed to the curse of the tomb. Some ruthless

people wanted to get their hands on the information. After the terrible stalemate of the first world war many military people saw the benefits of using flies. I won't bore you with the detail but you will have noticed that even when outnumbered and fighting alone Britain was able to hold on, this I will just say was in no small part due to the operations of us flies.

6. Retreat

A day or so later one of the fireflies on night watch, signalled activity in the tunnel. Our little friend had returned but with a century of friends. He proceeded to explain how scouts had been sent out to the neighbouring colonies, who had then sent their scouts out, and within no time at all the men had been located not far away in an old mansion house. Each ant colony was digging a section of tunnel however as a precaution to avoid tracing and because there were numerous streams in the way we would have to venture into the open on occasion. The ants with our little friend were assigned to protect us and I can tell you they were fearless.

While the rest of the CFC remain with Jim to plan how to down the three men, I was off down the tunnels. I can tell you I stuck real close to the little ant, who's nickname was Fn8, well that's what it sounded like.

I was honoured we went before the queen and I elucidated the information we had so far and our intentions. She explained that although she had no knowledge of what the humans call Penicillin her ants were experts at collecting fungi and she was sure that they could find something very effective against humans. I asked if it could be used against all of them, as we did not fancy asking a wasp for help! Although a bee might do it was asking it to commit suicide and this bothered Jim's conscience.

"Oh yes little fly, humans use a lot of poisons against us, we can't do anything back because most of them are decent but misguided folks. Ah but with your help we could get rid of these nasty ones," she said, and in a way that made me decide you should not mess with her.

I tactfully as I could reminded her that my mission was just to find out

what they were so mad about. Wise she was, as she asked “How many times do you think you'll get chance to be close to them all in the same location. If they are bad and you don't think reasoning will work, lets get them. Anyone who does not agree can argue it with me.” Well her colony was helping us and she is the boss so why argue?

We soon set off down the tunnels. We had to move fast there was no knowing how long we had. Each colony along the way had provided guards to protect us when we had to leave the safety of the tunnels. At one point a harmless beetle blundered into our path, just imagine removal men carrying off a wardrobe. Actually in human terms it would be more like five men picking up a bus and walking off with it. Efficient, these ants are strong and so well organised.

Closing in on the house, we had to cross a stream. Climbing a log Fn8 and I were shitting bricks. Imagine you were wandering along through the woods and a Tyrannosaurus Rex popped up and said, “Hi, just in time for lunch.” That's just about the scale of it, Bufo Bufo may look cute to you and conjure up a silly toad driving a motor car, but they eat insects, yes us! They also excrete toxins, oh great.

However luckily ants have managed to survive over a hundred million years on earth, you humans have found ants in amber to prove it. My black ant guards and the local contingent diverted its attention while Fn8 guided me to the safety of the next tunnel. We waited while most of our guards rejoined us. Apparently the toad had not been particularly hungry and losses were light. It was evening when we arrived at the house, our guards suggested they wait and protect the tunnel entrance, if nearly a hundred ants marched through it would be too obvious.

I was exhausted, all that walking, but Fn8 said we must press on and he was right. I wanted to fly but the little ant pointed out, that's what they would be expecting.

“Think like an ant, be like an ant,” he said.

We followed around the edge of the wall, keeping in close, the first scary moment was waiting round a corner. Luckily the small spider was not keen on the formic acid that Fn8 sprayed it with.

“Can they communicate with humans like you?” he asked.

“No, but that was just a baby one,” I replied.

“Worried about the parents?” He waved his antenna.

“Yep,” I said as we moved on, going deeper into the old house. We would stop every so often to allow me to use my feet to listen. With a fix on the vibrations, we moved on again. His advice was good, looking up we saw all manner of fly traps, sticky paper, those purple light things, and plenty of webs left un-dusted.

We advanced along a corridor, a bar of light escaping from beneath the door lead us like a beacon. Fn8 wanted to go in but I assured him there was no need. The voices boomed, drowning out most other sounds. Occasionally I heard a pop or crackle as wood burned on the fire.

“There are only two left,” there was a pause, “And just us and five agents who know about those damn CFCs”

“So?” said a monotone voice, “Why wait? With the heads unfortunate accident they now have no links to the top.”

“Why worry about a couple of old blokes and their shoebox of flies?”

“Yes,” said the monotone, “The agents will get them, meanwhile we are loosing money.”

“Don't underestimate them,” said Over Cautious.

“Anyone goes up to their MP and says a Hey a fly just told me, shit they'll say he's nuts,” said the Optimist.

“He's right,” said the monotone.

My thought was interrupted by the arrival of three winged ants. Fn8 explained how they had followed a pheromone trail he had laid, these ants each carried a wedge of something in their jaws. I explained that it sounded like they were up to something big and with us around what they were doing might be found out, I guessed that they could elude the electronics systems. These men were on the inside of the services and seemed to me to be ready to use their positions to make some money. From what Jim had told us during training this sounded suspiciously like corruption. Curiosity made me want to know what they were going to do, but in the light of the slaughter of our forces, which now seemed to include the head, those winged ants seemed to have the answer.

Fn8 went first, one by one we snuck in, burying ourselves between the

wall and carpet edge. The men sat around the room, each had a drink and those ants had a nice addition, if only we could distract them long enough. If they saw the ants, they would not continue to drink. I asked Fn8 if he could get back to our guards. "Sure," he replied, "What's the plan?"

"If we could get some moths to fly into the windows, it might distract them. I would listen and at the right moment signal the ants to drop their loads," It was all I could think of. Luck is a strange thing, just as Fn8 was about to wander off the phone went, all the men turned towards it. One got up and answered it while the others put their drinks down and went to listen. The ants without even asking did a low fly sortie, dropped their payloads and returned unseen. It was magic, unbelievable that they could do this so well. Then they wandered off, to do as their ancestors had done and set up new colonies.

Fn8 and I hunkered down and listened. The men returned to their seats, each picking up his drink, they clashed the glasses together. With a loud roar they said "Cheers" and downed the whole drink, payload and all.

"Just one bugga to catch, just one left and his mangy bloody flies," said the Optimist.

We listened to a load of small talk, Fn8 reassured me they would succumb and they did.

High on our success we began the journey back to the tunnel, I however had not been paying enough attention to sounds within the house. We had been rumbled, it all happened so fast. An agent had spotted us, crawling towards the tunnel and grabbing a cup he placed it down over us so fast we were trapped. We were stuck just waiting, then the side of the cup lifted, not much but enough for us to crawl out. "Come on hurry," said a guard, just a few went into the tunnel with us. "Where are the rest," I asked.

The answer was, that when the guards saw what happened they attacked the agent's hand. Apparently he did not make the connection because the cup contained sugar and he assumed the guards were after that. We made our long journey back through the tunnels to Fn8's colony, the Queen wanted a full report. Understandable since she had lost a lot of ants helping us and this would weaken her defences. This

might not sound like much to you but red ants take black ants as slaves, so defence is vital.

7. Regroup

The following day Fn8 guided me back down the tunnels to our base. On route I thought about how we had just risked our lives and sacrificed many of Fn8's relatives to stop three humans doing who knows what? Sometimes us flies wonder at human arrogance, some homosapiens actually believe the earth was created just for them. Those that do are often the ones decimating it and each other with justifications that make us question your intelligence. Take away the engineers and scientists and you'd still be living in mud huts and caves, assuming you weren't already extinct. it's amazing how you evolved such a huge brain considering the tiny percentage of people that actually do something useful and constructive with it.

I told Fn8 how you humans make movies in which humans fear the world will be taken over by mindless robots. Do you know what he said, "It already has four billion or more and they are what they fear." Now Fn8 is a little young and spirited so please forgive him the exuberance of youth.

Eventually we came up through the tunnel onto the cottage floor. "Wait," I said, it was too quiet, and Jim's baseball cap was lying on the mat. He never went anywhere without that cap, even to the point of annoying people because he insisted on wearing it indoors. I told Fn8 to stay by the entrance while I did a careful re-con flight around the various rooms. A low pass over the kitchen table revealed a decimated carrier, and I could see around the room large numbers of my colleagues on their backs, legs in the air. Chemicals, the bastards had used chemical warfare. Bluey was on a kitchen seat, his fate the same as the rest, I searched the bodies for Wing Co. No sign of him or two others, had they escaped? The dames were also gone as were some of the fireflies, my hope began to rise, all was not lost. Had they escaped with Jim?

I headed back to the tunnel entrance. There we had a discussion about what to do next. We wondered if when we heard the agents say

they had got one of the CFCs it was actually ours? If so was the other remaining one still operational, or had they now gotten ours too?

We wandered back down the tunnels to Fn8's colony. The queen had received a messenger from another colony, apparently one of their foraging parties had spotted some tall men in black suits, and a balding elderly man heading through their woodland habitat. From the directions they gave we thought it possible the men were headed back to the house. We also learnt that the colony nearest the house had been wiped out, the queen was curious as how this could be done. I explained that sometimes humans sprinkle food around that is a slow poison.

"White powder?" she asked.

"Yes that's it really sweet tasting," I said.

Immediately she sent out messengers to the other colonies. Those agents probably did it after the incident with the sugar cup when we made our escape. She said Fn8 could stay with me and assist but she could spare no more ants.

We went off into a side chamber, workers brought us fresh food. After eating we rested, it was hard to know what to do. Sometime later an idea came. If Wing Co had escaped he would no doubt try and leave some clue as to where they were hiding. The only place would be back at the cottage, I persuaded Fn8 to take us back. Without the support of the ants we stood no chance of tackling the agents alone.

After a long crawl back, we once again entered the comparative safety of the cottage. It was lifeless, no noises nothing, just eerie. I flew back up to the table top and approached the cardboard fragments that were once the carrier. Would Wing Co put a message in the carrier remains? Now it might not be a safe haven, overcoming my fear that spiders may have filled the voids I ventured nervously in. Nothing, a bleak empty shell, no hieroglyphs. Even if they left in a hurry surely one of them would have come back and left some kind of indication?

I flew back down to Fn8.

"How do you know they weren't captured?" he said, making quiet a valid point.

"Why would they bother doing that?" I replied, my thoughts focused on Wing Co's flying skills. I imagined him leading the survivors to safety,

his flying skills were second to none. In my compound eyes I could see a mixed squadron flying off to some makeshift base, Wing Co and the dames, covering those heavy fireflies. As a vision of this fine formation formed in my head Fn8 nudged me back to reality.

“Look,” he said pointing a leg at the panelling below a kitchen unit. There in some white paint were faint scratchings. So tiny you humans would not even see them. Roughly translated it said “Gone to hole in Oak.” Outside the cottage was a big old oak tree, I remembered seeing it when we arrived.

“Fn8 how do you fancy flying?” I asked.

His head turned and looked back at his thorax, “Wings, have I not,” he said.

“I’ll carry you it will be much quicker and safer than you crawling all the way through the undergrowth then all that way up the side of the tree.” To tell the truth I had had enough crawling, all those tunnels.

Outside the cottage Fn8 held on bravely to my undercarriage and after a bit of a struggle to take off I flew up towards the tree. I had seen wasps flying with their captured prey and they made it look so easy. It was starting to worry me that I had Fn8 trusting me to fly him safely to the hole and I was beginning to struggle. Now something was coming towards us from the tree.

“Hold on Fn8,” I said. You can not imagine the relief, it was one of the Fireflies.

“Struggling I a bit old chap?” he asked.

“Yes,” I replied.

“You keep a steady line and I’ll fly underneath, Fn8 you hop onto me,” he said with confidence.

Fn8 looked down at the ground far below, “You sure, hmm?” He was so nervous, poor little fellow. The old firefly was brilliant, Fn8 was soon transferred and I seemed to go up at a rate of knots when he let go below. The old firefly took up the lead and guided us in, we landed in a tiny hole, perhaps started by a woodpecker but never finished, the trees bark had tried to close it but had not quite closed up. Inside it was spacious enough and the joy of seeing Wing Co with the two dames at his side was overwhelming. Also present were Nadia, two other colleagues and five fireflies and my old mate Bottletop.

Wing Co was so eager to hear about our mission we had to tell him

first, then we listened to him explain what happened at the cottage. "Took us completely by surprise," he said, as he explained how the kitchen door had swung open, and the suits came in with aerosols on full blast. Two had held down Jim on the floor while the other three sprayed with a vengeance, one slammed his fist down on the table smashing the carrier.

"When did this happen?" I asked.

"Not long after you had gone off with the ants, why?" said Wing Co with his usual curiosity.

"The three top men celebrated the destruction of a CFC, we thought it was Simon's as we knew they had been close to his base," I replied.

"So Simon and his squadrons may still be operational," said Wing Co, with some hope in his voice, "If only we knew where they were?"

Wing Co sat and wiggled his proboscis for a moment then asked, "Fn8 could we get back into the house?"

"With the nearest ant colony destroyed we have no way of tunnelling in," said Fn8, his antenna waving about, thinking to himself, "Like you expect me to dig a vast tunnel network on my own?"

"Shouldn't we try to find the other CFC first?" I asked, worried that we were up against ruthless agents.

"No, no time for that they have Jim and besides if we all go off flying about the place there may be none of us left to do anything, or have you forgotten the about our predators." Wing Co could be quite blunt at times.

We spent a long night resting and restless, ideas and strategies were mumbled and muttered about. Flying in seemed just as impractical as tunnelling as Wing Co said chances are that's what they'll be expecting.

The morning light shone through the tiny hole, Wing Co decide we should move closer to the house. "The existing tunnels might get you reasonably close," said Fn8.

"Take too long," he said, looking at our little friend, who I think was not keen on flying. So we formed up, Fn8 riding on the back of the firefly and followed Wing Co's lead. He had wanted to get as near as possible, which is why we left so early. Unfortunately there are a lot of birds around looking for breakfast at this time of the morning. The squadron had to break formation rapidly, I saw Fn8, panic struck as

his firefly friend narrowly missed the beak of a swallow. Nadia stayed close to me as I dived low, we narrowly escaped becoming a spiders breakfast. Had it not been for a glint of sunlight on a dew covered web you would not be reading this.

I looked up and again saw a swallow going for Fn8's firefly, it looked like they were gonners, the beak came so close then the birds head shook away. We had settled on a plant stem, and called out to them. The firefly, took a dive straight for us, landing with such force that the bush moved.

"Bloody hell that was close," he said.

"We thought you were done for," I said with some relief.

"Formic acid, right in the eye," said Fn8 proud of his gunnery.

"Where are the rest of them?" said Nadia.

"Who knows, Fn8 could you get us across country back to the cottage, at least we could then use the tunnels," I asked eager to avoid the hungry birds.

"I think so," he said. He guided us down the stem and we kept low, hidden by the plants and avoiding open ground we slowly walked back. This was no picnic, you have no idea how dangerous it was. Just imagine every time you leave your home there were muggers and bandits waiting to catch you. Paranoid, you humans have it easy, try being a fly.

It was great to be back down the tunnel. We passed through various colonies, some still willing to provide guards where we had to cross open ground between tunnels. Fn8 tactfully asked each Queen if we could have a few ants to help but word had got around and the fear that their colonies may be wiped out was too strong. So we continued on towards the extinct colony. Eventually making our way into the house.

8. Find the Agents

Jim was no youngster and the interrogation was wearing him down quickly. They were asking him where the other CFC was. He of course had no idea. All we could do was watch from our vantage point in the old wood panelling.

“What are we going to do?” said Nadia looking to me for leadership. “Oh, well we will have to wait till they leave the room, or it's fly spray for us, then we need to undo the ropes so that Jim can surprise them next time they come in and then we escape, find Simon and get the rest of them.”

“So how do we cut the ropes?” asked the firefly.

“Ah, we might need a bit of help,” I replied.

“Don't look at me,” said Fn8 “My jaws will never get through that lot.”

“Quiet,” I said, seeing one of the other men had come into the room.

We listened, as they decided it would need all five of them to dispose of their three fallen comrades' bodies.

“Leave him, he ain't going nowhere,” said the man who had come in, he gestured with his head towards Jim.

“What about the woman?” said one of the other men.

“Let the bitch sweat,” he said, staring at his colleague.

“But?” started the man.

“With those three gone we're in the shit, now I'm the only one who knows their contact, so you do as I say or we all end up in the crap, GOT IT?” he said scarily. The other two men looked at each other, and nodded. Jim had passed out, even when the men slammed the door he remained unconscious.

Nadia looked at me, “What woman?”

“I don't know? Maybe from one of the other CFCs, there was old Hilda,” I replied, as she was the only woman I knew in our operations.

My mind now focused on trying to rescue Jim, but unconscious there was no hope. So I suggested we try and find the woman. If we could free her I reasoned maybe she could help Jim.

“Good thinking,” said Nadia, with a twinkle in those beautiful compound eyes. It was a big house but my hunch was that if Jim was on the top floor then the woman was probably also on that level, out of the way of casual visitors.

We kept together for safety working our way along the corridor, carefully poking our heads under each door, antenna on full alert for predators and agents. Eventually at the opposite end to Jim's room we found a small bedroom. I was surprised as to who we found. It was a close thing we had buried ourselves in a crack underneath the skirting board when an agent moved in our direction. We still had a good view

of the room, he turned and walked back over to the woman.

9. Rescue Lucy

The bastards had tied her up, ropes like a spiders silk were wrapped tight around her wrists and ankles binding her to the chair. Other ropes were pulled tight around her waist and chest, and at this point if I could have become anything it would have been one of those terminators and boy would I kick some butt. You know I'm sure some of you humans must have spider genes, you use fibres, threads, string, ropes, cables and the like everywhere and you kill flies, sorry I'm just a bit pissed off.

An agent approached her, "Why were you looking at those records?" "What records?" she responded fearfully.

"How long have you been working for the flies? huh," He barked menacingly at her. I tell you I wished I could have given him plague right then, oh you have no idea how helpless a fly can feel.

"Flies?" she said looking at him like he was some kind of loony.

"Don't deny it, no one else would have known and you said you saw no one in your office that day, so it had to be the flies." He was getting impatient.

"You're mad, humans don't work for flies, they are vile creatures that spread diseases, you're crazy." She sobbed, a tear rolled down her cheek and dropped of onto the white blouse. I must say the way she described us was a little hurtful.

"Crazy am I?" he questioned, looking menacing in his dark suit and those shiny shades, "If you don't tell us, you'll be the crazy one, you have no idea what we can do."

The door opened, the leading agent stared at them. "Come on shift your arses," he barked.

"We have to find that other unit boss," he said "She knows, and she'll talk."

"Later, they're beginning to stink, that attracts those bloody flies, I hate flies, so we get ride of them, then you can play with Miss Lucy all you want and we can go find the last lot," he said.

It looked like this agent was less afraid of him than the others.

"Then what?" he replied, like a cocky child to a father.

“We do the deal, like they were going to, but we can't while we have loose ends and those bastards won't wait all year for us to come good, GOT IT?” he shouted, his patience clearly strained.

The cocky bastard grabbed one of Lucy's, well you know what's, squeezed it hard and gave her an evil look. “You'll talk,” he said, and I could see the fear in her eyes, this guy was the psychotic one. Even the boss agent seem to sense danger.

Fn8 suggested we watch and listen near a window to see if they leave the house, he reasoned we could do nothing until they had gone.

Some time passed before we heard cars drawing up outside in the rear courtyard. We managed to scurry along a passage, under a door and into a rear bedroom. Looking down we saw one man keeping watch while the others brought out the corpses. Three cars were waiting, each body was unceremoniously loaded into a car boot. The suits got into the cars and drove off down the long drive.

“Why didn't they just bury them here?” asked the ever curious Nadia.

“Because if the bodies were found here they would get the blame, I expect,” I said thinking of the most plausible reason.

“Of course, that's why he said they were in the woodpecker!” said a bright little Fn8.

“Woodpecker?” Nadia was curious.

“We are their favourite food, so it's not a good place to be.” He explained, “Humans don't like falling into excrement, for them it's not a nice place to be.”

“Ok, now we must work quickly to free Lucy,” I said impatient to free her, I felt responsible for her being in this place.

“Who is she?” asked Nadia.

I explained that she was the woman at the hospital who had looked up the medical records. It seemed sensible to first let her know we were here, also to explain. So I left the others to try and work out how to cut ropes while I flew up and landed on her hair above an ear.

“Oh, I'm going insane, now I'm hearing voices,” she sobbed.

“No, no it's me, remember the one who asked you to look up those medical records.”

“Oh, so that's what this is all about, those men were mixed up in something bad,” she paused as the penny dropped, “Well hurry up and untie me.”

“Well, err,” I stuttered wondering how to explain that she was speaking with a fly.

“Hurry up,” she shouted.

“Well let me explain about Central Fly Command and the Government,” I replied.

“What is it about flies?” she said. Well I can tell you it took quite a while to convince her that we were intelligent intelligence flies, only with Nadia's assistance was I able to finally make her understand that she was not hallucinating.

While we stayed with Lucy, Fn8 and Firefly had gone off in search of a friendly insect capable of chewing through the ropes. She was curious to know why flies, ants and friendly fireflies would want to help humans. I explained as best I could that by helping the good intelligent humans, such as our friend Jim we hoped to stop humans how shall we say politely... completely fucking up the planet on which we all depend. This might sound like a terrible word to use. Have you checked out the state of the rainforests lately?

It was quite a while later that, our friend and may I in hindsight say exceedingly brave Fn8 arrived with what I can only described as the cavalry. It was an amazing sight Fn8 was leading a column of Formica rufa they were twice his size. He was a mere 5 mm long they around 11 mm long, their fearsome big jaws at the ready.

I flew down to greet him, as I did so the column halted. Firefly stood by his side.

“There's a conifer plantation on the side of the hill near the drive into the house, as my black ants would not help thought I'd ask these chaps, found them on a foraging mission,” he said proudly presenting his new friends.

I asked him to thank them, not understanding their language. Soon they had climbed up and were chewing through the ropes. Once free I told Lucy to remain still while the ants marched off, we did not want any casualties. Fn8 guided them off to the kitchen to load up with supplies. He told me later he had warned them not to come back for more as the humans would soon return. They understood and happy with their booty set off back to the forest. Firefly went with him because we thought it would be safer for him to hitch a ride and fly back. Lucy did have dainty small feet by human standards, but

compared with a black ant any human foot is a massive hazard to be avoided.

Meanwhile Nadia and I sat on Lucy's hair and guided her down to Jim's room. Quickly she untied him. He had by now come to and she explained that she was with us. He looked up pleased to see two of his team still in active service. Then in came Firefly who made a less than elegant landing on Lucy's nose. It was so funny, Jim laughed as he watched her go cross-eyed looking at Firefly, with Fn8 on his back looking up into her big blue eyes.

“Come round ear,” I shouted, which she heard and laughed as she got the joke, the four of us perched on a rather large earring, which was perfect for transporting us and avoided the tickling affect that us flies have on human skin.

Our problem now was where to go and what to do, there was no way that Jim and Lucy could tackle the agents alone and who would believe them if they went to the authorities. We also wondered if any of the others had survived the swallow attack.

Lucy and Jim carefully made their way down stairs to the ground floor in the hope of making an exit. You see we had to be cautious, these agents may have left traps and alarms. All the doors and windows were locked. Lucy wanted to break a window, but Jim advised against it, there was quite a drop as the floor level in stately homes is often raised above the ground level. Fn8 suggested looking for a cellar, his mind was most subterranean. Sure enough below stairs were the service areas and after much searching we located the cellar, unfortunately its outer doors were also locked.

Lucy was starting to fret about the agents returning. Jim suggested she gathered some food and a few utensils from the kitchen while we checked some of the other service quarters. Jim meanwhile had found a small door off a corridor from the pantry, he called to her. The two of them looked at the huge old lock.

“There must be a key around here somewhere,” said Jim, thinking back to the tours he had done as a child around various stately homes.

“Who would look after them?” she asked.

“The butler or housekeeper I suppose,” he replied.

“Maybe they are upstairs?” she suggested.

“No, the main house keys maybe but the servants would not be expected to run up and down every time they needed to receive goods for the kitchen. That door has not been opened in a long time, so I think somewhere down here must be a key,” said Jim, heading towards a room that looked like it would have been the butlers. The two of them searched high and low. We had a ride not dissimilar to one of your fairground attractions as Lucy's earring swung about.

Jim spotted a small draw in a neat little desk, in it he found a key, a small key.

“That's no good,” said Lucy.

“Might open a key box,” he replied.

“Like this one?” she said pointing to a box hidden on the back wall of a built in cupboard.

Inside they found a collection of keys on a big ring, Jim closed the box and kept all the keys.

“We might need to sneak back in,” he said.

Covering their tracks, the two of them went back to the door. After several goes they found the right key.

Lucy then made a suggestion, “Why don't I quickly go upstairs and open a window nearest a drainpipe that way they will assume we climbed out.”

We all thought this was a good plan, Jim took the parcel of food from her, he offered to go but she insisted she was faster. We dismounted and settled on the hair fringe surrounding Jim's bald patch. She quickly and quietly made her way back down the corridor and we saw her disappear up the stairs. For a few moments we could still hear the swish of her skirt and the clonk of her shoes as she made her way up the stone steps.

Jim started to worry, he knew down below we could not hear much, the thick stone walls and small barred windows kept things quiet. We all wondered if the agents had returned, we could see it was getting dark outside and several hours had now elapsed.

“I'll go and find her,” I said, persuading Jim to stay put with the others.

At least there were no swallows to worry about, but my senses were alert for the slightest hint that the suits were back in residence. I was going up the main stairs to the top floor when I heard noises in one of the rooms. I landed and crawled under the door. It was Lucy, but what was she upto?

I flew up and landed on her nose, seemed a good way to let her know, and besides I did not want to frighten her.

“What are you doing?” I asked, “Jim and the others were worried.”

“Go and tell them, I won’t be long,” she said.

“But what are you up to?” I knew Jim would ask and if I did not know then he would want to come and see for himself.

“There must be something that will give us a clue as to what they are upto, then we can go to the authorities,” she said and I agreed but reminded her that it was getting dark outside and the agents were sure to return. She told me to go see Jim and tell him to see if there was a spare key to the door, if there was to hide it and then send me back to tell her. She said he should make for the forest as she knew he was none to nibble on his feet.

I relayed this message to Jim, who then proceeded back to the key box, there was a second ring of keys, he took off the one for the door, locked the cabinet, then checked that the key worked.

“You, go tell her and what ever you do keep watch for those agents, oh and see if those other stairs go to where she is,” he said pointing to a small spiral staircase in hidden in a dark corner. I flew up them as fast as my little wings would carry me, round and round until I reached the first floor where I found a door blocking my way. Door handles do present a bit of a problem for us flies, so I did the usual find a crack to crawl through routine and proceeded back to Lucy. She was still meticulously searching, leaving everything as she found it. Clever I thought, while listening with my feet for the vibrations of cars.

I flew over to a window and saw the silhouette of Jim sloping off into the darkness. Fn8 had told us of a good place to meet deep in the forest, no doubt gleaned from one of his Wood ant friends. I did wonder if Lucy remembered she was not in a civilized clerical office but the lair of some desperate men.

I decided to go make a landing on her ear and drop a subtle hint.

“I know, little one, but if we have no evidence we will have no way of

getting people to believe us and then there is no way of stopping them,” she said. Her logic was good but suppose these guys were smart and don't just leave incriminating evidence for amateur women sleuths to find.

“The door,” I said in her ear.

I could feel her heart beat increase, she whispered, “Maybe it's Jim, I never heard any cars.”

“Suppose they dumped them and walked back?” I reasoned.

“Why would they do that?” she said with disbelief.

“Perhaps if you have had a dead body in the boot of your car you wouldn't want possible DNA evidence and a bit of a smell following you around behind the back seat?” I said, it was the best I could come up with.

“You're a damn smart fly, oh shit.” She was starting to panic. An agent is trained for these situations, hospital clerks obviously aren't, can't think why!

“Stay calm listen to me, I will guide you down some back stairs to the service quarters,” I said trying to reassure her, “And try to stay calm.”

“Ok,” she whispered. She bent down and removed her shoes, then walked over to the door and delicately pulled it open, just a tiny fraction, enough to see if all was clear. It was, so we ever so quietly went to the door leading to the stairs. I told her to keep close the the wall so as to avoid creaky floor boards. Unfortunately we could do nothing about creaky doors, downstairs we could hear the agents talking quite loudly. Lucy opened the door just wide enough for her to ease through, closing it as quietly as possible behind us. It did not creak much but from lack of use and an equal lack of maintenance it gave a slight creak which under normal circumstances would have been no bother. Now it sounded like siren going off. There was a bolt on the door, presumable to stop drunken aristocracy falling below their station. I said to her to bolt it, which she did without hesitation.

“I heard something and it came from up there.” It was the voice of the psychotic.

“Go check our guests,” barked the leader, “And Dakrone check out your noise.”

Lucy had frozen sitting on the stairs.

“Fucking doors locked,” said the psychotic as he tried to open the door.

We heard him walk away, then all hell let loose as one of the men

shouted, "The bitch has gone." One of the others then called to tell them that Jim was also missing.

"Bloody drainpipes," shouted the leader. We assumed he had found Lucy's open window. "Search the grounds they can't have gotten far," he continued with a voice like a megaphone.

I managed to persuade Lucy to go down the stairs, out of earshot of the door.

"We can't leave now," she whispered, "You heard them."

"I know and we can't hide here, they are bound to search the house eventually and they'll find the entrance to the stairs." My tiny brain was trying to work out what to do next.

"When was the house built?" she asked.

"How should I know I'm a fly not an architect!" Was all I could say. She gave a slight giggle, "I just wondered if there might be a priest hole?"

"I doubt it dates back to the 1600s, but perhaps the owner had a mistress down a secret passage?" I said, you see we flies are quite aware of how you humans breed like rabbits and given any opportunity will seek to procreate.

Lucy wandered down the stairs, she wanted to check from the bottom up. I guess we had assumed they had all followed their bosses orders. Then we heard an eerie chilling voice, "Hello Lucy, I knew you wouldn't leave me. Our new leader is a prat, said to search outside."

There was nothing I could do, he grabbed Lucy from behind. She tried to scream but he put one of his big hands over her mouth. She tried to kick and struggle, but he was having none of it. He dragged her up to the top floor, I followed at a distance, wishing that one of those lights I could see searching the grounds would come back in.

We were up in a tiny bedroom which would once have been used by a maid servant. Lucy was thrown down onto the bed. My mind was racing, how can a fly stop a man? Not easy is it? Speed was of the essence he had already ripped off her blouse. His hands moved so fast, creating a diversion had gone through my mind but then call me a coward but the idea of a hand fly hand sandwich stopped me from acting.

By now he had also torn her skirt off, and had paused to look at her.

She was trembling, the poor woman overcome with fear. I flew up onto the pelmet above the small window, walking along it I spotted a ring. I pushed as hard as I could, it fell and made a clink as it hit something. I looked, he was on edge, his reflexes were so fast, just a bit too fast and may I compliment the person who thought of squashing the servants into the attic. Low ceilings may have been fine for five foot tall maids, but this giant of a man didn't know his own strength. With an almighty thud his head made violent contact with a beam above, like a volcano erupting, a red lava flow of blood exuded from his skull. For a moment he looked at Lucy stunned but still standing, I thought he was just going to carry on but would be madder. Then he just collapsed, like a big ox receiving a bullet to the head. The floor shook as he made contact.

I flew onto Lucy's nose, then onto her ear. Her breathing was laboured, and she was still mighty scared.

"Is he dead?" she whispered.

"I hope so, because it's payback time for old Bluey," I replied all macho like.

"Who, who's Bluey?" she asked.

"The finest Blue Bottle you would ever meet," I pause recollecting what Wing Co had told us, "He was clever, but modest and never boasted about all the rescue missions he had flown. Wing Co told us..." if a tear could come to a fly's compound eyes then one was welling up inside me right now, "He told us of how Bluey had used his skills to bring many a downed fly back to CFC safely. If we get out of this I'll tell you so much more."

"I'd like that," she cried, "I'm frightened to go near him, you see in the movies where someone looks dead, and they're not and they grab you."

With that I flew over and landed on his neck, right over a vein. I could feel no pulse, nothing, I went back and reassured her as best I could.

"We must hide, if the other agents aren't back they soon will be and when they find Loghead, it will probably rile them up a bit."

She agreed. Lucy pulled her feet round to the side of the bed and sat up slowly. Looking across the room her eyes focused on the tiny ring that had saved her. She stood up she walked a few steps and bent over to pick it up. Inside the simple but elegant ring was an inscription. It read 'To my darling Elle may this keep you safe'. I saw a tear run down Lucy's cheek as she slipped the ring on one of her exquisite

fingers. She shivered, there was a small cupboard which she investigated. In it was a rather dusty set of clothes, in fact the whole room seemed lost in another time. For some reason Lucy, left the cupboard and with all her might pulled the psychotic Loghead along with the mat onto which he had fallen, out of the room and across the landing into an even smaller room. It was barely bigger than a stair cupboard and perhaps had been used for storage as there was no sign of a bed.

Once the oaf was out of the way she went back into the maids room, closing the door.

“Don't you think we should find a hiding place?” I said considering my chances of taking out another human.

“This was her Sunday best, little one.” She pulled the clothes from the cupboard.

“Yes Lucy but perhaps now is not a good time to debate 19th century fashion.” We flies have a grasp of sarcasm.

“I'm cold and I can hardly wear my clothes, look at them.” She pointed at the torn blouse and skirt lying on the floor, and the a strap on, well you know, that was broken.

“You sit on the pelmet and let me change.”

Now us flies don't believe in all that superstition stuff, but that ring did seem to have some kind of effect. Lucy removed all her remaining clothes and began dressing in what I can only describe as Elle's Victorian best. Silk stockings, a pair of long billowing knickers, and chemise, now don't complain I'm doing my best to describe it, you must make allowances for us flies. Now what is she doing, she's put a strange thing around her body, clipping it up the front. There are ruthless agents downstairs, and ok, now she is pulling at, oh my that reminds me of a giant spiders web closing in on an unfortunate fly. You humans must have spider genes, you must. I say though, hmm head, thorax, abdomen yes it is an improvement, very insectious. To finish what a lovely day dress of rose pink and grey. Lucy looked over towards me, then said, “Come on then my little hero.” We left the tiny room in search of safe haven, her delicate hands pulled the door closed.

We were about to go down the stairs when I noticed something at the end of the corridor. She pushed gently at a panel and to our surprise it

opened, we ventured in. There was a small oil lamp on a shelf just inside the door and a box of matches.

"I wonder if they work?" she said, pulling the glass chimney off the lamp, she took a match and struck it. Amazingly it worked and she was able to light the lamp. With our new source of light burning bright she closed the panel and put a small latch in place.

I wondered about Elle, who was she and who gave her the ring? I mentioned this to Lucy who was also wondering the same. Where did this passage lead?

10. For those who precede us for we are they.

It was quite spooky, yet not at all cramped. Lucy was walking upright, a tall man might stoop a bit, but not uncomfortably so. The sides were vertical interleaved boards, painted in a ruby red. A carpet covered the floor, possibly to reduce the sound of feet that would have otherwise clattered along bare boards. After only a few yards or metres, depending upon your preference, the passage turned a corner, one that seemed to go on for a long way. We surmised that Elle's quarters were in one wing of the house and that this corridor went along the centre of the building.

This eventually went around another corner and before us was an almost identical panel. Lucy instinctively put the latch on that too. So this seemed to be no more than a passage allowing the servants to communicate without disturbing the gentry residing in the main part of the house. Lucy turned and wandered back down to the middle of the passage, whispering to me that she thought it best to stay away from the panels where we might be heard, although we had no idea what was below us and I doubted they would hear a fly speaking.

Her sharp eyes noticed a worn area of paint, gently so as to minimize any creaking sounds she pushed it and voilare it opened. Lucy froze, we heard shouting, the megaphone mouthed leader had found his psychotic buddy. Both our hearts pounded as he ordered his men to search the house, we could only hope they did not notice the panels. There was the clatter of feet as they scurried about the big house like raging elephants.

With this racket covering any noise, Lucy regained her composure and moved or should I say floated into the small room. She closed the panel door, then turned to survey its contents. Apart from a layer of dust it was as it had been probably for over a century.

There was a writing desk and a small chair, Lucy, pulled a small cloth from her sleeve and wiped the surfaces of both. She sat with fine posture and placed the lamp on a shelf just above the main writing area. Examining the contents of the draws she found two piles of letters, one laced in a red ribbon and the other tied with string. More searching revealed a diary kept in the most elegant handwriting. In this sanctuary we were taken away from the present into a past, spoken to by the magic of writing.

Is it not a marvel that people can learn from those in the past? Words of wisdom spoken by great philosophers and touching stories full of human frailty. On that night we opened a book and a man and a woman spoke to us from their time. The letters and the diary like a jigsaw, put together they formed a picture. Oh some pieces were missing, there are some things we will never know.

It was in 1860, imagine if you will a woman her clothes poor and old from the previous decade. Dejected she turns to a man for help, Sir Charles Pennington, of Wadleton Hall. This was the name of Pennington House before it was renamed. It's a dark winter night, a coach draws up in front of the grand hall.

It appears that Sir Charles had taken on this lady as a servant and omitted to tell either his wife or their trusted butler. She noted in her diary, yes it was her writing that was impeccably neat, how hard she had found it to adjust to the life of a servant.

The other servants had become resentful of her sudden rise to a position where she had little of the hard work they had to endure. Mrs Pennington was very severe making her life miserable during the times when Sir Charles had to go away on business.

She would regularly receive letters from a Mr S E Larch and more so during Sir Charles's absence. Interestingly the other letters were those

she sent to him, but why did she have them in this secret room?

She wrote to S E Larch thanking him for his kindness to her, telling him how she felt about her life in service. She explains how the Lady of the house is so beastly and the servants conspiring against her because Sir Charles has excused her from certain duties.

He wrote back telling her how he wished things could be different. That she should not have to endure such a life. This last letter Lucy read so many times, I know it by heart.

Saturday 29th November 1862

My dearest Elle,

How you must endure such a lowly position. I find it almost unbearable that you should suffer so. I shall speak with Sir Charles as you know I do and ask that there is not more he can do. Oh but alas dearest Elle, please forgive me for you know how I am constrained by circumstance. Be strong my dear, your last letter did so upset me. Things must be this way for a while longer, be patient my dear.

S E Larch

What does it all mean, is there a connection to the present events? Who was Elle? Was that even her first name? Who was the mysterious S E Larch and what's the connection of them both to Sir Charles Pennington? Why was this Lady forced into service when she seemed to come from a highly educated background? Was she hiding, funny because at this moment Lucy was hiding in Elle's writing room, wearing Elle's clothes and reading her words. Human lives are so fascinating to us flies, perhaps in a similar way to the ancients were fascinated by the many gods who they imagined were in another realm with powers beyond their mortal reach. Like door handles are beyond our reach!

Lucy saw me sitting on a small shelf to the side of the desk. "Are you tired my little friend?" she whispered so sweetly, "Lets sleep." She turned off the lamp and laid her head back in the chair. There was a tiny window concealed in the roof, presumably it was not visible from

the grounds. Looking up it was a clear night and the stars, shone down as they had done for millions of years. I wondered if Elle had sat in this room dreaming of the stars and a better life. That letter was written on the same day the composer Friedrich Klose was born, he went on to study in Vienna. Funny old stuff history, possible because of language, funny things words.

In the morning all was quiet, there was light shining bright on the middle of the desk. Yet at night when I looked up the light had been shining down from the other direction. Clever, the small window had behind it a mirror so that daylight shone on Elle's desk. I wondered had the room always been there? Or when perhaps did Sir Charles have it put in? the house usually being full of people. What happened to miss Elle? I looked at Lucy so beautiful, obviously not as beautiful as the fly dearest to my heart the lovely Nadia.

Lucy awoke. "Hello little friend, I'm so hungry," she said looking at me. I too was feeling like a nice cow pat or any scrap of food would do. The only slight problem was our other residents.

11. Food, atoms arranged which please us

I did wonder if the clothing of the 1860s was quite appropriate for a stealthy mission to the floors below, but as was pointed out what else was there? Our guests were most inconsiderate as when they had cars we could determine roughly their whereabouts, but now we had no way of knowing. The only thing we did know was that they numbered only four.

Our first choice was which wing of the house we should enter and which panel to open. We knew they knew Lucy had been in what turned out to be the servants quarters in the attic of the west wing. We thought they may be waiting for her to come out of hiding there, so it seemed sensible to try the east wing.

I volunteered to peer under the panel which was so tightly fitted that there was only one tiny gap through which a housefly could pass. Looking around, this wing too had a layer of dust. Most odd I thought, flying around careful to avoid spiders webs of which there were many,

it seemed like this was in an equal time warp. Things left, like everyone had just walked out one day. Why? Call me curious fly, but I wanted to know. Had Sir Charles had some kind of difficulties and had to move in a hurry? Anyway, looking around I saw no sign of life.

Venturing a short way down the servants stairs I settled on a window ledge and listened. Silence, there was nothing so I went a little further coming to a door that would open onto the second floor. I landed at the base of the door, the carpet was filthy, it did smell nice. I crawled under and looked around, just dust and cobwebs down a long corridor. The strange thing was travelling down the corridor I could see no door leading to the rest of the house. There was however a staircase descending to the next floor, this was much grander than the tiny one used by the servants. It rounded the corner and spiralled around the corner of the wing, leading to a corridor which faced out away from the courtyard, towards the formal gardens. There were rooms all the way along it but no apparent connection to the other parts of the house.

Puzzled I hoped Lucy was staying put, while I ventured down to the ground floor. The staircase at this end of the corridor, made a shorter more abrupt turn as it allowed for the servants staircase which was concealed in the corner. It opened into a large dining room, then onto a lounge, then a small library and finally a reception area with a door in from the side of the house. It seemed to be a totally separate wing, only connected at the top of the house by the servants passage.

I returned back into the servants staircase, following it down to the basement quite expecting to arrive back in the familiar service quarters. Here was another kitchen, full of dust, it seemed as though it had not been used and it was all on a much smaller scale. I decided to fly back up and tell Lucy. Although worried, I had apparently been gone for nearly half an hour, she had decided to wait.

I explained that the only connection between the east wing and the rest of the house seemed to be the hidden passage in the attic. Lucy was concerned that even if it was separate they might see her from the windows. This I assured her was most unlikely as with few exceptions all the curtains were drawn, although due to their age it seemed prudent to avoid touching them. We flies know plenty about the effects of the rotting process.

I hopped into her earring for a rest, while she wafted elegantly down the servants stairs. We were soon exploring the basement and service areas. There was an external door which was locked and like the one above it, faced away from the main house to the east. From its position and a small window we could see there were sunken steps leading down from the outside.

Lucy quickly pulled back as we heard footsteps on the gravel. The small door shook as one of the agents tried it.

"This one's locked too," he shouted.

"Any sign of forced entry?" said the megaphone mouthed leader.

"No, I've been right around it's all secure, checked them all," he shouted back.

"Ok, she must have gone into the forest, you two go take a look I'll stay here," he bellowed.

We listened as the footsteps faded. Lucy whispered, "What about the fourth man?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

She explained her reasoning, that there was Mr Loudmouth and he had told two of them he would stay at the house, like he was on his own.

"Perhaps the other one was sent off with the body of the psychotic?" I said my fly brain having no concept of how heavy a human is. Lucy assured me it would need more than one to shift his bulk any distance.

The kitchen and larder revealed some juicy morsels for me, unfortunately nothing suitable for human consumption. Lucy on route back up to the attic decided to wander around and take a look at the rooms on the other floors. Sure enough this wing was totally self contained. In a drawing room on the first floor she liberated a red Bordeaux and glass from which to sample this old wine. We then had to search for a guzunda as her plumbing had come to life. We found one in a rather sumptuous bedroom on the second floor and it seemed safer than trying the plumbing, quiet being the modus operandi.

There were footsteps on the gravel, this time it was someone running. We listened for clues, minutes went by, then we heard two people running.

“I'm going to chance a raid on the kitchen,” she said.

So off we went up to the attic, through the passage and with some care entered the west wing via the hidden panel. In this wing the rustle of her Victorian dress seemed deafening, I was worried. Lucy seemed almost careless, perhaps a whole bottle of wine on an empty stomach is not to be recommended when behind enemy lines! She headed for the kitchen without stopping to check all was clear, amazing.

I managed to persuade her to leave it looking like we found it, as she carried off a large bundle of assorted foodstuffs. Then we went back up to the attic, as she strolled down the corridor we heard faint voices echoing up from below. Quickly she made for the panel, which I had to remind her to secure with the latch. I also suggested it might be better to go back to the bedroom in the east wing because it was furthest away from the main building and separated by the corridor. We had no idea what was under Elle's secret writing room, I had visions of Lucy dropping something on the floor with Mr Loudmouth sat right below.

Back in the sumptuous bedroom Lucy began tucking into the food. Having satisfied her hunger she just sat back and fell asleep on the bed. “Ok don't worry, I'll take the watch then shall I?” I said to myself. I flew into the corridor and landed on some of that nice old Victorian wallpaper, lovely pattern. The old feet were tuned in and although faint because of the thick walls I could just make out the situation.

What we had not known was that one of the agents who was searching the forest the previous evening had met with a log. I surmised that Jim who normally would not hurt a fly or any other creature was hiding behind a fallen tree. A dead branch lay near him, as the agent closed in his head had a disagreement with a section of timber. Jim had obviously snapped, no one gassed his flies in cold blood and got away with it. Good old Jim, so now there were three.

So Lucy was right, and now they were arguing, what to do with the bodies, catching Jim and Lucy, oh and finding the last CFC. Their voices were getting louder, and louder as the arguments raged. Mr Loudmouth was getting some lip from the other two who were questioning his competence.

12. Van Ish

The house eventually went quiet. The three of them left on foot and it was several hours later when they returned. This time with a car and a van, Lucy was still sleeping off the food and wine. The agent from the forest was loaded in the back of the van first, then the psychotic joined him. Mr Loudmouth then got into the car the others followed behind and they again disappeared off down the drive.

I flew over to Lucy and settled on the earring, whispering into her ear to wake up. Now I know what you have been wondering, how does a fly with no vocal chords speak English. This minor technicality is bothering you, hieroglyphs drawing with our feet you're ok with, but sound! Well you know how a speaker works on your headphones, oh you don't well would you like a fly to explain? Ok, lets keep it simple for you.

Sound is transmitted through the air in waves, the gas molecules collide and part. A speaker has a membrane, this can be moved back and forth to move the gas molecules thus generating sound. Now a fly has wings, normally they make a buzzing sound because we use them to fly. Ah but we can also move them so that they simply move the air in the same way as the membrane of a speaker. Thus we can mimic the sounds familiar to your ears, just like an earpiece on your Ogg or MP3 player.

Lucy did respond, I was beginning to wonder if she was sleeping beauty. After explaining that the men had gone I wondered if Lucy was still under the influence. She wanted to go back into the main house and continue the search for some evidence. Now at this point I started to wonder if people who choose to work in clerical positions have a bit of an obsession with paperwork.

We stopped by at Elle's room in the servants quarters of the west wing. Lucy checked the small store room opposite, followed by a visit to the little bedroom. No sign that blood had been spilt or of her clothes and she seemed relieved. Then to my amazement she went to Elle's wardrobe and took a peek inside, human females do seem to have a fascination with garments. She closed it but then removed her

dress, put her hands behind her back, untied the chords at the back. Her fingers seemed to be plucking at the strings, like a lady with a harp. She then pulled on the chords closing the gap further and after retying them, slipped back into the dress.

There I was sat on the earring of this elegant woman as she wandered down the stairs into the rooms below. Each room was searched systematically, thorough, methodical and meticulous attention to detail, upon leaving you would have never known she had floated in. All the more amazing when you consider the dress she was wearing, with its wide skirt that almost swept the floor.

In the drawing room a newspaper caught her attention, with the headline, ***Another Disappearance***

Lord Pennington was yesterday reported missing by his long time friend and colleague Lord Ravensbury. Lord Pennington is the last in the line of Penningtons. His disappearance follows that of a young office clerk at a nearby hospital. Although in the same region Police believe there is no connection.

The rest of the article described in minute detail his political career and little else. I did remark to Lucy that our head did have a secret political contact, you can guess where my tiny fly brain was heading.

We had both become preoccupied with the quest for information, my suggestion that we leave and find Jim had been summarily dismissed. I had learned from Nadia not to argue with the female of any species. Taking a rest on one of the large windows I heard voices. It was the men, and they were in the house.

“What are we going to do little one?” she whispered. “They sound like they are almost outside the door.”

I scanned the walls, there was fine oak panelling, intricately carved by a master carpenter on either side of the fireplace.

“Check the panels,” I replied.

We were in luck, the one to the right of the chimney had a concealed door. Most ingenious, Lucy slid into the darkness lifting the skirt of her dress up as she stepped over the lower portion of the wooden structure, gently closing the door. It was pitch black, feeling around

she found a wooden ledge on which to perch.

The agents had grown louder, a door opened, footsteps, it closed. Voices, as though we were in the same room, imagine our safety dependant on an oak tree that had grown hundreds of years ago, its wood and the skill of a carpenter the only things between us and the unknown. Next time you visit an historic house take a tip from a fly, tear your eyes away from the porcelain and paintings and check out the woodwork, beautiful.

“How the hell did a stupid woman, one old man and a bunch of flies kill our bosses and those two?” said Loudmouth.

“Maybe it ain't the flies?” said one of the agents.

“Ghosts, is it Spiky?” said his colleague.

“I don't care what you say this place is creepy,” replied Spiky.

“Your stupid hair cuts creepy,” said Unknown.

“What do we do?” said Loudmouth.

“You're the boss you tell us?” said Spiky, who sounded like the most inexperienced of the remaining team.

“Suppose the police come sniffing around after Pennington,” asked Unknown.

“Suppose they do, we are the fucking police, we tell them we are here investigating, it's our case being as how it's intelligence and all that,” shouted Loudmouth.

There was a pause in the conversation, then Spiky spoke.

“So what are we going to do with Pennington? We can't keep trashing cars.”

“Some how we have to get that CFC and what's left of the other one,” said Loudmouth in a more subdued tone, “I don't know how but it must have been them, it's us or them.”

They continued talking for a while, then all went quiet. Lucy wanted to leave the safety of our hiding hole, I asked if she had heard footsteps, or the door. My hunch was that they were all slouched on the seats in that room.

Lucy had a rather uncomfortable night, which was rudely ended when Loudmouth started throwing his weight around. We listened as he barked orders, the other two scurrying around. It sounded like they had received some information, neither of us could make out the detail. They were like a bunch of rats running through drainpipes,

scaled up of course. The heavy front door slammed shut, Lucy bravely opened the panel, the room was empty. The car and the van clattered up the drive, it looked like they were off again.

Sitting in Lucy's earring again I took things easy, watching her as she collected the oil lamp and returned to the panel beside the fireplace. This time with a light we were going on an expedition. At first glance it just seemed like a concealed cupboard and it took a while for Lucy to find a small lever. This opened a smaller panel, much lower and at an angle into the wall. It was difficult for her to negotiate in the dress, constrained as she was by the corset.

I asked if we would continue looking for evidence, she said, "Later". Her logic was most valid. Understanding the layout of this house would give us an advantage and staying here did give us intelligence as to what they were up to. Jim she decided would probably guess where we were and if he could he would make contact.

The corridor went from wood to stone, turning slightly to again run parallel with the wall. Who had built this part of the house? Why was this tunnel here, what kind of person would need such a thing. The clue lay in the Penningtons, which unbeknown to me Lucy had already got the scent of. The narrow tunnel descended down, Lucy hitching her skirt up to ease her passage. The stones were bare, and cold, it had a damp feel. Deep below ground level it returned to a horizontal path, turning at an angle, heading somewhere under the parkland above. The cold was rather uncomfortable for a fly, damp and warm is nice, damp and cold, you don't like that either, I thought not.

Around a corner, a door blocked any further progress. It was of an extremely solid construction, the lock fit for a giant. Without the key we had to turn back, just as well because the lamp was beginning to flicker as the oil ran low. The effects of the wine had definitely worn off, Lucy was back on form, exercising extreme caution before going back through the panel. It seemed the house was still ours, so she proceeded first to find oil for the lamp which she placed back in the attic corridor. Then she checked the keys in the service quarters, none looked anywhere near big enough.

This time she started her systematic search from the basement,

working up to the ground floor. Her plan to work back towards the room where her previous search had ended. We now had to look for a key as well as evidence. My main task was to take up position where the drive could be monitored and alert her if they came back.

She worked tirelessly, until I spotted their convoy. Quickly we ascended to the attic, with the latch secure behind us we travelled through to the east wing. My warning had given us plenty of time and the agents had only just parked in the courtyard. Lucy found a small window where a tear in the curtain allowed a one eyed view of the scene below.

Loudmouth got out of the car, then Spiky and Unknown got out of the van and went round to the rear. Opening the doors, they pulled out three men, heads covered with sacks and hands bound. Spiky grabbed a bag, which seemed to contain a box judging from its shape. One man was rather portly, one seemed quite skinny with shoes that looked familiar.

“Lucy,” I said, “I think the skinny one is Jim.”

“How do you know that?” she asked, still watching them as they went up the main entrance into the house.

“His shoes, Jim is not a man of fashion, he never wears anything different.” I knew him so well.

“Perhaps the big man is Pennington?” she said, like a hound hot on a trail.

“And Simon, the other CFC leader, which would explain the bag,” I reasoned.

“Little friend you could be right, but why not kill them, why bring them back here?” She had a good point. What were they up to?

“There were originally twelve CFCs, they have already killed ten Fly Masters and the head, plus they have had to dispose of their two comrades and the three bosses,” I said, not sure where I was going.

“Disposing of sixteen bodies without trace would take some doing,” said Lucy, she was smart, “So perhaps they are getting edgy and running short of ideas.”

“Too many in a short space of time and in one area and someone might get nose,” I finished.

“Little one, you’re smart and cute.” She smiled.

“That’s not what you said about flies when psychotic was giving you a

job interview,” I joked.

“I can't remember, beside people say anything to get jobs these days.” She grinned.

We went back to the sumptuous bedroom, a plan was needed.

“Nice place, mind if we join you?” said a familiar voice.

I looked around to see Nadia hovering with Firefly and his gunner Fn8.

“You took some finding, Jim thought you'd had it,” said Fn8.

We had a long discussion. They told us how after Jim had slugged the agent, the group had made for a safer location. Fn8 had checked back with the ants for any messages from Simon's group and discovered they had moved. Jim needed to rest so he arranged to join up with Simon. Nadia, Fn8 and Firefly had volunteered to return here and see if they could find us. We explained to them how we were monitoring the agents and trying to get evidence, we left the bad news till last.

Our friends were tired they needed rest, we decided to do something in the morning but we did not know what. Lucy made us a cosy bed on the dressing table, then after removing her dress she slipped into the large double bed. I should add that she checked it first, you must remember that it had not be slept in for many years. Luckily there were no other creatures in residence.

13. Plan and chaos

A shaft of light through a crack high up in one of the curtains signalled sunrise in the east. Lucy stretched her arms out and gave a big yawn, she then pushed back the bed covers and walked over to her little stash of food. First she put some for us on the dressing table, then she tucked in to her breakfast, supping some more wine. I broke from my meal, concerned about the effects of the fine vintage. She assured me that a small amount with her food would present no ill effects.

We watched her pull on the laces of the corset closing it a little further. Nadia was worried that Lucy was trying to look like a fly and that she had competition. I assured her that she had no worries Nadia was the only female for me. Nadia was curious, and asked Lucy, “Why do you do that?”

“What?” she replied.

“Pull at those laces, you remind my fly of a spiders web closing on struggling insect,” said Nadia, moving her head beautifully.

“This dress belonged to another Lady and she wore it over this corset,” Lucy said, “It fits better if the corset is tighter, but I have to close it slowly so my body adjusts.”

Neither Nadia or any of us were any the wiser, you see clothing is something pretty much unique to humans and hermit crabs. Lucy pulled on the dress and sat down at the dressing table where we began to plan.

It seemed simple, get the three agents, find out what it was all about, free the three captives and what was probably a CFC carrier containing the last of our comrades. However when you only have two flies, a 5mm long ant, one firefly and no disrespect to Lucy a delicate woman, you begin to see that three agents, armed and dangerous do present a slight issue. Up until now we had been extremely lucky, the two recent agents that had met their end were taken completely by surprise and circumstances worked in our favour. Our initial enthusiasm and optimism became quite gloomy. Even if we knew where the agents were, even if we could persuade the wood ants to chew through more ropes, the odds were not in our favour. Fn8 started daydreaming about his relatives in the rainforests, telling us how army ants could strip a carcass bare while still on the march.

Nadia worried about me getting hurt wondered if we shouldn't just try and save ourselves.

“it's not like you haven't tried,” she said, trying to convince us. Fn8 so brave and confident recalled all the ants that had died getting us this far. “Was it worth it?” he asked, “We're only a bunch of insects and Lucy an honorary one.”

Lucy looked at him, he looked back and explained, “You are our friend and without your dress you have a segmented body like us, head, thorax and abdomen.”

She smiled as only you humans can, in fact thinking about it there are so many things you can do it really annoys us when you misuse your abilities or waste them.

Do you realise we flies normally only live for four weeks, assuming parasites and predators don't get us. Luckily our friends the fruit flies

have been helping your scientists understand how to extend the lifespan of a fly. You are given education and in twenty years many of you learn less than we do in a week of training. And what do you do with all that knowledge? Sit in front of the television or moan about the weather, while we are helping a few good humans combat the really dysfunctional amongst you. Nadia is right why should we risk fighting those agents, so you can sit undisturbed slobing it on the sofa.

There are a few humans who study, work hard, learn and become engineers and scientists who generally make life easier for the rest of you. Half seem overworked and the other half are lazy free loaders, Fn8 says if ants had half your technology you lot would not stand a chance. Perhaps this is a fly and ants stereotyping of humans, but the things you lot get up to and what you worry about. Oh some of you are concerned about the ecosystem, but most are more concerned about a footballers hairstyle. A crisis is a broken finger nail!

Sorry folks this fly is letting of steam, but please remember our best friend Jim is for all we know about to get the chop and we feel so helpless. I reasoned with my colleagues that we needed to find out what this lot intend doing before we can even begin to try and find a way to combat them. I also said that we must keep Lucy safe because now they have the other three she is the only human who knows what they are up to and the only one who can open doors and untie ropes. "So what are you suggesting?" said Nadia.

"I will leave you all here, you must wait until I return," I replied. Nadia looked at me her proboscis hung low.

"Don't look so worried, Lucy and I have been over every inch of this place, I'll be alright."

Well that is what I told Nadia, to tell the truth I was one scared fly setting of for my reconnaissance mission. The attic was clear, as was the second floor, moving carefully towards the voices it appeared the men were in the drawing room with the panel by the fireplace. From the sound of their voices they seemed more relaxed and pleased with the capture.

Making my way down to the service quarters I looked in each room, where would you put captives? What is the most valuable item to the gentry? Wine and the cellar has a locking door and low and behold still

hooded the three of them were tied up and spread around the room, almost reminded me of pheasants. Although on reflection Pennington, if that's who it was could almost escape detection disguised as a barrel of Port, which may be what had contributed to his demeanour.

It was time to return to the others, I had a mind to earwig on the drawing room. There was a small table in the hall, near to the door. Perfect cover, I hid underneath with my feet on the wall, just as you might put a glass to the wall to hear a conversation on the other side. The acoustic transmission properties of a well built house with solid walls are a dream for a spying fly.

I had come in part way through a conversation they were having about the deal. It seemed Loudmouth wanted to go ahead with it and get rid of the three in the cellar later, he did not see why they should worry about a lone woman.

"Our psychotic friend scared the shit out of her, she'll be long gone," he said, keen to close the deal.

The others sounded nervous, they did not like the idea of the evidence in the basement. Now were they referring to our three friends or something else?

"Suppose those three escape while we're gone?" said Spiky.

"They are trussed up tighter than a Christmas Turkey?" said Loudmouth.

"Yea, but so was the bitch and she escaped," said Unknown.

"So they get untied, you think they can get through that cellar door?" he responded.

"We should kill them now," said Unknown.

"Oh yea and stink the place out!" said Spiky.

"And what do we do with the bodies?" said Loudmouth, sounding cocky, "This area is crawling with cops looking for Pennington, he moves in high circles we can't risk it."

"Suppose they search here when we're gone?" said Unknown.

"They already did dumbo, and we have the place staked out all official and above board," said Loudmouth, confidently.

The room fell silent, they still had given no clues as to what this deal was all about. The patter of human feet came towards the door, one of them left, then another. I waited for a bit to see if they returned, no

luck. Time to tell the others, but with two humans wandering around stealth was needed. We were trained to fly low and avoid the field of vision. Fighter pilots will tell you what that's like, ask one and they will explain the hidden hazards of power lines, trees and other bits that can catch the inattentive, for us the equivalent are spiders webs, shoes, and clutter.

The others were eager for news and after a thorough debriefing we all sat thinking.

"So," said Lucy, "If Loudmouth gets his way and they go off and do the deal, we have a window of opportunity to free the others."

"Assuming we can find the key to the cellar door?" I replied.

"But if Unknown gets his way then they get toasted," she said, with a worried frown.

"When is this deal?" said Fn8.

"No idea, but sounds like it might be tomorrow, just from the way they were talking," I replied, making an educated guess.

"Suppose they don't all go?" said Lucy.

"Maybe the people they are dealing with are still expecting three men, and being as it's all hush hush how do they know these are not the original three?" said Firefly, with a flash of inspiration.

"So if they go, and we can find the key, then Lucy can free the captives and we can set a trap," said Nadia.

A plan began forming. All of which hinged on Loudmouth and possibly Spiky's dislike of rotting corpses.

"Look we have a rough plan, but we have to keep monitoring them, I should return and keep watch," I said.

They all looked at me, Fn8 could not go as his grasp of English was not too good and Firefly had a habit of lighting up which was a bit of a give away. Lucy obviously was a tad conspicuous, so it was either Nadia or me.

"I should go," said Nadia, "You must be exhausted you have been flying missions for days now while we have been sitting around with Jim."

"I know the territory," I said, trying to persuade her not to go, although I was feeling exhausted.

"Tell me the layout," she said.

I explained in as much detail as I could remember, the route to the table outside the drawing room. This location gave us the best chance

of getting more information. She was soon off, Fn8 and Firefly tried to bolster me, sensing my concern for the loveliest fly on earth.

We decided to get some rest, retiring to the bed Lucy had constructed for us. She slipped off her dress and slid back into bed. Now all we could do was wait, Firefly volunteered to keep watch for Nadia's return. He was a strong little chap, the fireflies took some bashes when flies crash landed returning from night sorties.

The hours had rolled by without event, when suddenly Firefly nudged us and then flew over to Lucy and tickled her nose. We all kept still, my feet straining to pick up sounds. There it was again, another thump, it seemed distant yet close. Lucy carefully slide back out of bed, pulling the bed covers back neatly to cover up her presence. She then hid the food parcel and taking a bag she had found carefully folded up the dress so that it could be carried, she also put the shoes in as these would make quite a noise.

I watched her move like a preying mantis, so slow and and careful. She came to the dressing table, and stopped as we heard another sound. It was difficult to know what it was, or exactly where it was coming from. Standing still like a statue Lucy's only perceptible movement was the rise and fall of her, well you knows. I started to look around the room, if the agents had discovered the passage in the attic our only hope was to hide. Her eyes were also scanning, the quietness was as disturbing as the sounds.

Surely Nadia would have flown back to warn us if the agents were onto us, I reasoned, thoughts racing through my mind as it analysed the sounds we had heard. On this floor the sumptuous bedroom had one outside wall, another wall adjacent to the stairs leading down to the next floor, one where the door was, into the corridor and the servants staircase. So my reasoning suggested that only the inner wall would be capable of having some hidden place, assuming Sir Charles Pennington had reason to need such facilities in this part of the house. I flew over to Lucy and explained this, she remained silent, but with the grace of a swan she glided towards the wall. We looked hard, there was no panelling as in the drawing room of the west wing. Furniture cluttered each side of a fireplace, which I should remind you that in stately homes are a bit bigger than your ordinary domestic affair. It

had a marble frontage to the hearth, with marble blocks up each side and across the top forming the mantel, I'm sorry but us flies aren't experts in these things. In the centre was a cast iron grate for burning logs. Lucy moved into the area and probed the back, it was sooty, and seemed solid enough. This was a large recess and I directed her to the sides, both looked identical. She gave a gentle push to the one on the right and froze.

We heard the sounds again, in a moment Lucy regained her composure and tried the left hand side, it did not give. On the inside behind the mantel was a bit of stone that looked like it was loose, a distinct lack of mortar perhaps nothing. Lucy gave it a prod then a pull, we heard another sound, not the one that had frightened us. The stone released a counter weight which lifted the heavy stone at the side of the fireplace. This was rather neat, as anyone tapping the side would not know it was hollow behind. There was a small tunnel going in behind the wall at an angle. We flew in ahead so as not to get squashed, as it was not very large and even Lucy would have trouble getting in. She managed it very well and before closing the entrance, I flew back out, landed near our bedding and left a tiny hieroglyph in the dust, then I returned to her earring. She stood up in the small space and looked around for any form of light. Resting in a crevice was a partly used candle in a holder, and some very ancient matches, probably of the same era as those in the attic. She lit the candle, somewhat more dangerous for us than the oil lamp, so we all resided on the earring. With the stone back in position sealing the entrance we went on another tour into the unknown.

Lucy stopped again a few steps into the tunnel, taking the shoes from her bag she put them on, apparently the stone floor was cold and damp, and it was unlikely that anyone would hear us so deep within the wall. We had made little progress when further sounds, much muffled reached our senses. I've seen humans frightened at night, they hear some strange sound, only to find a beetle stuck in a carrier bag, brought in with their shopping when they brushed past the hedge unloading the car.

The candle flickered as we rounded a corner, the passage went down, it became very low, so low that Lucy had to stoop. Then it ascended back up to the same level we had been on previously, after

a short distance it again followed the same pattern. In all it did this four times, then it rounded another corner, and again seemed to take this same pattern, as though we were passing below a window, the tunnel height constrained by the windows above and below.

I wondered again about Elle, and Sir Charles Pennington. What secrets was this house hiding? Lucy came to an abrupt halt, before us was a shaft, and on one side was a metal ladder built into the wall. She and I both decided that this must be in the far corner of the west wing at the rear of the house. Another thing was the silence, we had moved away from the source of the sound. The ladder went up, presumably into the attic and down to who knows where or how many other tunnels.

She looked at the ladder testing it, the Victorians had used wrought iron which because of its fibrous nature is less prone to rust. She placed the candle holder with the still flickering candle down on the floor. After securing the bag, she stepped onto a rung, holding on tight to rungs above, with one foot she snuffed out the candle. Climbing slowly in the darkness she ascended to the attic, after an awkward crawl off the top of the ladder, made difficult by the low corner of the roof above, we entered a rather spacious room, it like Elle's writing room had a small concealed window.

There was a desk in a similar position, Lucy looked around to see if there was another exit, perhaps into the attic passage, but no, this seemed unconnected apart from the ladder. Assuming Loudmouth did not change his mind we had the rest of the day and all night. I asked her about the candle, she pointed out that left burning we would have nothing to light our way back.

She began exploring, this room had a different feel to it. Definitely a man's room judging by the objects on the shelves. Most of the furniture must have either been installed before the room was completed, or brought up the ladder in bits. On the wall behind the desk was an old hunting rifle, below was a pistol and ammunition box. On the wall adjacent to the desk was an old map of the county. Below it a map of Europe, the wooden strips that made up the panels were not painted. However there was a thick carpet, no doubt to prevent the sound of shoes on wood echoing below.

Lucy began delving into the desk draws, we were all of the opinion that there may be more to Sir Charles than first appearances might suggest. Throughout history, those in government have had people involved in covert operations. The draws revealed nothing other than paper, ink and quills, just what you might expect. Lucy had an idea that this desk might mirror the house in concealing secrets.

Well while we all perched on a shelf for a snooze Lucy, beavered away. Tenacious, she was very and eventually found a hidden draw containing some interesting letters. They seemed a very frivolous mixture of poems, small talk and the odd song. No keys, she was hunting for keys, we now had two doors to open and no keys. Lucy decided that even here it would be to obvious a place to hide keys.

Off we go again, Lucy decided that for getting up and down the ladder her bag with Elle's dress was best left here. She pulled the small box of matches from the bag and placed it down between, well you guess. Then we proceeded on a journey back down the ladder in the darkness, this marvel of your species had only counted the number of rungs up the ladder, so she knew exactly when we arrived back at the tunnel with our candle. She collected it and stuffed the candle with the matches and put one of the corset laces through the handle of the candle holder, and did herself back up. How do I know this in the pitch black, you forget our little friend with a tail light.

During a spell in the dark, a fly's mind is apt to wander. Did I tell you the reason fish stocks are dwindling. Oh no its got nothing to do with huge trawlers dragging vast nets across the ocean floor vacuuming up all the fish. No no, it's those seals, you see they want to starve you in order that your numbers decline, that way they get the beached back, so they can balance balls on their noses. Now where were we, oh yes.

Descending past the first floor level there seemed to be no passages, nor on the ground floor. Not until the basement level did we find another tunnel, it seemed to go away from the house, Lucy untied her corset laces and removed the candle holder. She knelt down, Firefly the helpful fellow providing a bit of lighting. She pulled the candle from between her, ok I'll say it, cleavage, and placed it back into the candle holder, then can you guess what she did or must I describe every little

detail. That's right we now have illumination. Lucy left it down on the floor while she retied the laces, then picked up the holder and we were off down a slight incline, this tunnel had curves, corners, straights it was most indirect. It must have taken a lot of building. The walls appeared to be rendered and painted white.

Eventually this too came to a big heavy door, with a giants lock similar to the one in the other tunnel. Lucy was frustrated.

"Where's the key?" she whispered, I think realising that we had know idea what was behind either door. Where the tunnels connected?

"If you had a nosey wife and a house full of servants, and knowing how, when you put a key somewhere safe you can't find it, where might you leave a spare?" I asked.

"With my mother," said Lucy quietly.

"And who might have resided in the east wing, who would you not want to have direct access to the running of your home?" I said knowing human nature.

"Mother," she said, with a pause then continued very sweetly, "You are a clever little fly."

If flies could blush I would have outdone old Firefly.

We headed back to the east wing, as we got nearer the strange sounds emanating from an unknown source began to fill our feet and Lucy's ears.

"I know what it is," she whispered, "The house is cold and they are trying to get the boiler going, the noise is from airlocks in the pipes. That must mean they intend to come back after they have done the deal."

Proceeding with caution we re-entered the sumptuous bedroom. Lucy suggested I go on ahead and check the rooms just to be sure. I flew a sortie down to the basement and back up to the attic via the servants stairs, then back down.

"Nothing, and the panel door at the other end of the attic corridor is still firmly latched so unless there is another way in this part of the house is still under our control," I reported, exhausted I settled in the our insect bed on the dressing table.

Lucy sensed I was tired. "You sleep little one."

Firefly and Fn8 joined me while Lucy took a well deserved nap in her bed.

14. Where men become confused

It was an hour or so later when, Lucy started stirring. Sometimes when you humans can't think of something, a period of horizontal meditation can work wonders. Lucy explained to us how she wondered if Elle might not have at some stage taken on the role of companion to Sir Charles's mother. We were unsure of what she was getting at, continuing with her hypothesis, she proposed that maybe the tunnel was in the mothers room, this being the best bedroom but perhaps one of the other two bedrooms may have been used by Elle and as we had not found a key in the mothers room perhaps it might have been with Elle.

We all perched on that lovely earring and off Lucy went, the first bedroom was quite sparse, but the one nearest the servants stairs, and most convenient for the attic had some surprises in store. We sat on a shelf while Lucy opened a wall of wardrobes, it was a Victorian ladies dream. The clothes were of a quality that only the richest people could afford. Stitching so fine you would have thought it done by machine, yet it was hand sewn with backstitch.

It was while she lost all sense of our current predicament that one of these garments revealed a rather useful piece of engineering. Intricately designed with a shaft almost as thick as a pencil it did seem our giants lock might be opened, but which one?

She found one of the more compact dresses and after negotiating its intricacies, no doubt the designers had assumed the lady wearing it would have a maid to assist, we then went down to the basement. She liberated another oil lamp from one of the many storage cupboards, and some string. Then returned upstairs to the sumptuous bedroom and entered the tunnel, she trundled down it at quite an excited pace. Sitting on her earring was an experience that would have made even your most thrilling rides seem tame. Before we went down the ladder, she turned off the oil lamp then lowered it to the bottom of the shaft on the string. Once it was safely on solid ground she climbed down, reignited the flame and then proceeded to the door.

There followed a moment of trepidation, we knew not what lay beyond or if the key would open the lock and if it didn't open but made a noise would we draw attention to our presence. Lucy offered the key to the hole with great precision, her hand steady. She gently turned it first one way, nothing. Then the other, there was a clunk that seemed rather loud boosted no doubt by the acoustics in the tunnel. The door opened with a chilling creek, Lucy had the presence of mind to remove the key. Beyond lay yet more tunnel, we decided to close the door behind locking it then proceeded quietly and at a rather slow pace.

Now we flies do get a sense of deja vu at times, and these bends seemed somewhat familiar, especially when looking back from whence we came. This was confirmed when we arrived at the steps leading up through the wall to the secret panel in the drawing room.

“So the other door was the other side of the other tunnel,” she whispered, knowing we were near the west wing.

She retraced her steps and did not stop until we were back on our side of the door and it was firmly locked. She checked it was so, several times, we knew they could possibly break through the relatively feeble panel in the attic, we did not want them coming up our back passage.

“Perhaps each tunnel is made to appear that it leads out towards the parkland to somewhere else,” I mused.

“Yes little friend, that way anyone discovering one of the tunnels would look in the grounds for the other end, not in the house,” she said “Very smart, and it would give Sir Charles a secure exit from one part of the house to the other, or his secret room.”

“And perhaps when Sir Charles's mother passed on they left it undisturbed?” I said.

“Then following generations, keen to reduce costs just left it unused,” she replied.

We went back to the sumptuous bedroom, still cautious upon entry. Lucy was keen to find a way of ensuring that the panel accessing the attic tunnel in the west wing could be made more secure. She reasoned that even if we managed to spirit our three comrades to safety, we may not have time to get them away from the house. The large man would be unable to make it up the ladder so we could not use the drawing room tunnel.

We again checked our part of the house, Lucy was keen to ensure

that we were as secure as we could be. The basement door was locked and some hefty bolts top and bottom would prevent even a key holder from access. The small windows were all barred, so satisfied we then checked the ground floor. The relatively small entrance door was locked and again bolts top and bottom secured it, all the windows were relatively high up above ground level, with the added height of the basement below the only way in would have been to use a ladder. So we wandered back up to the sumptuous bedroom, Lucy sat and talked to us. It had to be accessible, but she wished it was built like the tunnel door.

“Have you looked closely?” said Firefly, who did not speak often but when he did it was well thought through.

Lucy ventured up the stairs to the attic, with her group of advisers sat in the earring. I had begun to worry about Nadia and let the others know my feelings. Lucy suggested that first we check the attic panel, then from there I could go and see if she was ok. Fn8 looked worried. “You have been doing so much flying around why don't I go, I know where you sent her to keep watch, if I keep to the edge of the carpet it'll be ok,” he said.

“It'll take you ages to walk all that way,” I argued.

“So, I'll go now,” he insisted.

“Let me give you a lift to the top of the stairs,” said Firefly.

Without further discussion the two of them had gone through the crack in the panel and were off to the servants stairs. I knew roughly how long it would take to fly the length of the attic quarters and Firefly seemed to take much longer, it turned out when he arrived back that he had flown Fn8 all the way down to the first floor exit. Lucy and I were both taken aback at the risk he had taken. It would have just needed an agent looking in on the captives to have come back up those stairs and we may well have been rumbled.

Lucy, looked over the area behind the panel. We found it hard to believe that Sir Charles would have gone to so much trouble to secure the other routes and left this one relatively weak. In fact it was nothing of the sort, and Firefly redeemed himself by pointing out a well concealed feature. We had been looking at the walls to either side, Firefly had looked at the ceiling. The only way to open the door was inwards, the carpenters had made the surround solid which pretty much prevented it being pulled open from the other side. Yet if anyone

had pushed too hard on the panel the feeble latch would have easily given way. However, there was a heavy hinged door that swung down from the ceiling. Lucy tested it, the great bulk pressed hard against the panel, and three heavy bolts went down into a metal bar that ran across the floor. Even if someone removed the panel, this would take some serious moving. When we had looked up at it, it seemed just like the boarding you might find behind a decorative wall fascia, and that was its disguise. But with it closed was there a gap through which Nadia and Fn8 could return?

I did some exploring and eventually found a route from above going down near one of the hinges. Just outside the crack in the panel that us insects had used I left a tiny hieroglyph for Nadia. Returning to Lucy we waited for Fn8 to return before putting this hatch in place for the night.

Almost an hour had passed when brave Fn8, crawled back into our attic. He was utterly exhausted, for a tiny ant it was a long journey on foot. We let him get his breath back, Firefly gave him a lift up to Lucy's earring and we listened to his news.

Nadia, had remained in position hanging upside down under a corner of the table to avoid detection. She had monitored the agents thoroughly, Fn8 struggled a bit to recall her message, his brain being considerably smaller than a fly's and untrained for this work. Apparently they were going ahead with the deal tomorrow, and they reckoned they would be back before dark. Loudmouth had prevailed delaying the liquidation of our comrades. Nadia was happy to continue monitoring until they left in the morning. This worried me, but the others did point out that it would give us firm data about when they left and if all three had gone. I consoled myself knowing that she was trained for dangerous missions like this. Lucy lowered the the door down and put the bolts in place.

We were soon back in our favourite bedroom, Lucy breaking out some more food from her stash. Outside we could hear the wind, its eerie sound made us insects huddle up in our bed on the dressing table.

Lucy was still up, the light was fading outside and with the curtains drawn it was becoming dark in the room. She wandered over towards

the bed, slipped off the dress and slid into bed, looking at her I could well see why Fn8 had made her honorary! I just hope Nadia could not read my mind.

15. A vintage operation

I awoke to a buzzing sound, Nadia was trying to wake us up. "They've gone," she said, aware as we were of our limited window of opportunity.

"They went early it's, not even light," said Firefly

"How long ago?" I asked.

"About half an hour ago," said Nadia.

Firefly had already flown off and was on Lucy's nose, his little tail light flashing frantically. As she came too he flew off, humans when semi-conscious can be quite a hazard. In the gloomy darkness she got up and came over to us. Nadia explained how the three of them had left early as they had a long drive ahead of them. A shaft light from the rising sun came through the crack in the curtains. Lucy, closed the gap in her corset a little more then put on the dress. You may of course be wondering if she had taken it off to take a bath. Unfortunately in our wing of the building there was no water, possibly we could have turned it back on from a stopcock outside but this was not an acceptable risk. Also we had no way of generating hot water, as the coal bunker down near the basement boiler was completely empty. Even if it had not been so, if the noises emanating from heating system in the other part of the house was anything to go by, we would have surely alerted them to our presence.

Lucy took some nibbles from her bag, sharing them with us she insisted that breakfast was the most important meal of the day. Well we had to agree. Once she was dressed, with us in her super ride ring, we headed to the wine cellar in the west wing.

Frustration began to set in, the door lock did not answer to the tunnel key even though it was of a similar size lock. We took the little key in the draw and opened the key box at the back of the cupboard, it was empty. The agents had removed them. I mentioned to Lucy about the back door key that Jim had hidden. It was still where Jim had left it, but it too did not work, we guessed the wine cellar lock was unique. Jim

had taken the duplicate set of keys which may well have contained the one we wanted.

I went into the cellar and crawled up under the hood covering his head. He was drowsy, but comprehended my question. I then decided to check with Lord Pennington, as it was his house he seemed an obvious choice, unfortunately he was like a slumbering giant. Lucy was not pleased with the answer, the men had found the keys on him, so now they had both sets. She did not think Lord Pennington would have any more knowledge than us, he probably used the sets in the key cupboard.

We decided to have another look below stairs. Our reasoning went something like this. Lucy had already made a meticulous search of the floors above, the cellar would no doubt have been used to the present day so it is unlikely a spare key would have resided in the east wing. Each time we visited we always used the servants stairs, however there was another stairway that leads up to the cloakroom in the main reception hall. This no doubt allowing the butler to answer the door when visitors arrived. Lucy's smart brain had gone through all the people that would have held a key to the cellar, Sir Charles probably had one stashed somewhere in case of emergencies, there was probably one on each of the key rings now in the hands of the agents, the only other possible person to have need may have been the butler, but surely he would use one of the two sets we found in the key box?

The time was getting on, it was nearly midday and we still had no way of getting into the cellar.

"What about the barrels?" I said to Lucy and the others. She was sitting having a rest, no conceivable location had been missed, the other stairs, the cloakroom nothing.

"What little friend?" she said tired but curious.

I explained how in a movie that Jim had been watching we saw that one of the barrels hid a secret entrance and just look at that door. We all took a good look at the cellar door it was so familiar, solid as the one in the tunnel. Who ever made that one also made this one, and was intended to be mighty secure just to keep servants from sneaking a drop?

"But where do we search for the other end, it could be anywhere," she

cried, her face sad.

Then oh, you are going to think us flies are so smart, I started listing the tunnels we knew of, starting from the top. Her face lit up, praise well she lavished it on me. Fn8 was pleased, he loved tunnels and the fact that we might be onto another one gave him a buzz.

Just after midday we were back in the east wing with the attic door firmly bolted. Lucy made a beeline for the cellar, we knew the two attics were joined so it seemed logical that the two cellars may also be connected. The wine cellar in this part of the house only had a metal gate, and after nearly an hour Lucy had moved on to one of the other rooms. She found two hatches within the coal bunker room, both identical. You would assume that this was where the coal was slid down a ramp from a hatch above ground.

Both were locked, Lucy's sharp eyes, now alert to mortar less stones, caught a glimpse of a stone on the floor which had a chipped corner. To the casual observer you might have missed it or put the damage down to the heavy coal bags landing on the floor. She eased it up and hidden below was a straggly piece of hemp rope sticking out of a crack, again you may have dismissed it as a bit of sacking fallen through the crack. She pulled on it and hey presto, it fitted the lock on the hatch furthest from the coal bunker.

Lucy went into the kitchen and found a candle and holder along with some matches. Here she removed her dress, taking care to hide it from view. There were lots of small barred windows at the top of the kitchen wall which faced east, a patrolling agent might look down through them, especially if we succeeded.

It was a difficult task getting into the start of the tunnel which quickly descended down another ladder to the bottom of a shaft. Here it was level and at first went away towards the east, then various disorientating turns, and curves finally leading to another solid door. Lucy carried with her the giants key as she called it and we were in luck, both subterranean doors had the same mechanism. Her pace quickened, although it was not yet fourteen hundred hours as we in the military say, this is two pm, we knew that they would be back before dark.

Ahead in the flicker of the candlelight we could see another ladder. Lucy climbed up it leaving the candle burning behind us a few metres down the corridor. The shaft came to an end and scanning around she spotted a small wooden door closed by two bolts. She undid these, and carefully pushed it open. I received some more praise.

"You little genius, oh I love you little fly," she said, unaware of Nadia's jealous streak.

We all entered the wine cellar. Lucy managed to get all the men on their feet and after a quick explanation, I should explain that Lord Pennington's eye's popped out on sticks when he caught sight of his rescuer, my turn to be a bit jealous. No doubt the vision of a woman in a corset and silk stockings has that effect on human males, as I noted Jim and Simon also seemed a little distracted.

We had a big problem, his name was Lord Pennington, who's ancestor Sir Charles was obviously of a more athletic build. His Lordship did however have a spare key to the wine cellar hidden in his room. Lucy helped Jim and Simon get into the tunnel, handing them the bag containing our last CFC carrier. She then followed but did not bolt the panel behind her, reasoning that if she got down to the cellar and the agents came back then she could at least give his Lordship the hidden key to the door through which Jim had previously escaped, and then dive back down the cellar tunnel. This of course seemed like a good backup plan. Jim was to wait at the tunnel door ready to lock it should an agent get into the tunnel first. I hope you are following this. We deposited the CFC carrier in the sumptuous bedroom with Nadia, Fn8 and Firefly to fill the squadrons in on the situation. Simon being the fittest, came with Lucy and myself up to the attic tunnel, he was to wait behind the panel, ready to close the hatch. This was the only route open to Lord Pennington.

Lucy made her way into Pennington's bedroom, a rather untidy affair and soon located the key. The time was chiming on a mantle clock, it was three o'clock. Lucy darted back into the servants stairs and was soon opening the cellar door. Lord Pennington was extricated and Lucy locked the door behind us.

"Look my dear, I can find my way up these stairs to the attic, but I'm rather slow on my feet, no sense in us both getting rumbled, so in case the blighters return you get yourself down the cellar tunnel," he said with a firmness of voice.

Lucy thought about it for a moment, we did need to lock the panel in the cellar, and he did know the way, the time was now getting on for half three. Lucy told him to hurry, then re-entered the wine cellar, locked the door and entered the tunnel closing and bolting the small door behind her.

We soon reached Jim, once we were through, this tunnel door was locked, and we continued back up to Simon's position in the attic. By the first floor, with all the steps and extricating himself from the tunnel, Jim was fatigued. We left him there with instructions to wait in the second floor corridor, and not to touch the curtains.

Simon was still waiting, now with the time gone four. You should remember that this is a big house and the tunnels and stairs cover quite a distance.

"Where's Pennington?" he asked.

Lucy explained, and Simon understood. We told him about Jim feeling the strain. Simon was in his fifties, so he could sympathise with Jim who had now reached sixty four. Recruiting Fly Masters was no easy task and the good ones were held onto. Under normal circumstances they never had to get involved in this cloak and dagger stuff. The agents who had gone bad were there for that work. The only person in Government who knew about the agents and us was Lord Pennington. "I'll go and see where he is, have you heard any sounds that might indicate the agents are back?" she asked.

He replied not, and wanted her to stay while he looked for his Lordship. Lucy did not want to argue or go into the detail of the house, but she made it quite clear that we knew where to hide, and that she was far more agile. Simon backed off, and Lucy was soon on her way down the servants stairs. I was on full alert, listening for any sound that might signal danger.

Lucy was nervous, the sound of heavy breathing got louder as we descended. If the gradient had not been so steep you would have thought a great locomotive was headed towards us at full throttle. Looking down to the first floor level we could see a rather slow lumbering shunting engine, trying to push far too many wagons up a steep incline. Lucy made contact with his Lordship, who had tried to do his version of running up the stairs. Unfortunately this had slowed him down further. He explained to Lucy how living alone in this big old

house he tended to eat for comfort, much to his doctors dismay. Far from reducing weight he had put it on, in the last month his health had worsened as his body, struggling under the strain began to fail.

As she helped him up to the second floor she explained how we had looked for some incriminating evidence related to the deal the agents were involved in. Lord Penningtons mind was almost as slow as his body, only when we reached the safety of the attic did he recall some information. It took him rather a long time to get to the point.

16. The night they came

It is a week earlier, Lord Pennington was sitting in his favourite room, yes the one in the service quarters with the liquid refreshment. Unlike his predecessors, Lord Pennington was not drawn to the sports, he loved books and had an almost obsessive fascination with information. Where most men of his age may have found computers hard going, his Lordship was a closet Geek. In an age of information, this had stood him in good stead.

When Sir Charles headed the agency there were barely a handful of men. When you ask who watches the watchers, you would do well to know that an elite band of men even unknown to the secret services are keeping an eye on those who are there to protect you. So I think now you may begin to understand that whoever has found out about the agents and turned them is certainly up to no good. Those recruited by the Penningtons over the centuries have been from all walks of life, thus making detection much harder. You see many in the secret services are recruited from the military or police so this somewhat narrows the field for those up to no good.

The three bosses, knew Pennington and that evening they invited themselves over. Lord Pennington's ill health and lack of an heir had necessitated one of the men moving into a position of second in command and heir apparent. He also had a key to the house, so they were able to effect an entry without disturbance.

Lucy had wondered why his Lordship had no issue. This only added to the delay in our discovering what he knew. We learned that as the only

child his mother doted on him, as did nanny. At the time the house had a rather excellent cook and at the end of rationing she was able to excel. Her predilection for baking cakes which would tempt all but the strongest man was legendary. This combination made him balloon rather and as a spotty youth the young ladies were not enamoured by his demeanour. Unfortunately his father who had played a key role during the Second World War was still heavily involved in activities vital to our country, thus there was no man around to guide him in the ways of cricket, rugby and other fine outdoor pursuits.

Lady Pennington and nanny did their best, but they both loved literature, this rubbed off on our portly friend. Why exhaust yourself doing energetic things contending with foibles of the British weather, when you can read about it while eating cakes in a nice warm room. I must say at this point that I was warming to his Lordship especially after venturing down his predecessors dark dank cold tunnels.

As a consequence he became rather introverted and his awkward attempts with the ladies had become ever more disastrous. His mother would try to guide him, but sometimes he wondered if it had not been misguidance. As the years passed and his hopes faded he became rather secluded, not a bad thing in view of his position as head of a secret organisation. Sir Charles had obviously had to do rather a juggling act between family and duty.

Well back to the evening in question, the three bosses had appeared in front of him. At first this had given him no cause for alarm. It was only when they explained they had received a better offer that he began to wonder. It appeared that someone had got a sniff of the Penningtons and put two and two together which with some surveillance revealed some of the people involved. The unknown man had boasted about finding an obscure passage in an old history book that only made sense if Sir Charles Pennington was involved in other activities. This person had then wondered if the reason someone was onto his activities was because the Penningtons still had something going.

It had been cold in the cellar, not a problem if you have wine in your veins but the men did not, so they moved him to the Library. He saw from the corner of his eye one of them place a book into one of the

cabinets, as though they were trying to hide it. Where better! From their conversations he deduced that this might be related to the deal.

Back to the present. Lucy looked at Simon, and suggested he help his Lordship back down to the sumptuous bedroom, then come back and stay behind the panel. One of the flies from the other CFC had found us and reported that his colleagues were in position around the east wing's windows, there was no sign of the agents. It was gone five pm, Lucy was determined to find the book and she knew where the library was on the first floor, at the top of the main stairs next to the drawing room.

I suggested it was too dangerous and that I should go down and see if it was there first, she was concerned by the lack of time. There would be the added wait before I returned which would delay her and make it more dangerous, this would be our only chance. So we set off, my role to keep watch. We were soon down in the Library. Her eyes scanning the shelves, for all we knew they may have taken it with them. "Just as he described it little friend," she whispered to me as her hand grasped a book that although it blended well with the other hardbacks, rather carelessly interrupted the flow of a numbered series.

What we did not learn till later was that some police on foot were at the behest of the Chief Constable doing a check of the grounds. Members of the upper house had asked a few questions, these officers had left their car at the closed gates and entered via a footpath that ran across one corner of the parkland. Had they not done this the agents would have driven in much earlier, unfortunately the agents had parked elsewhere and after seeing the police leave, made their way across to the rear entrance which looked out over the ha-ha using it to conceal their arrival.

We could hear any noise from the entrance into the west wing as the door was rather solid and impossible to open quietly. However maybe because we were well away from the rear and sound proofed by the walls of books, my feet did not pick up their presence until they were inside. I told Lucy, neither of us sure what to do, once they found the cellar empty no room would be left unsearched.

A loud cry boomed out, Loudmouth screamed, "They're gone."

There was fury in his voice as he barked orders that we could hear. Unknown was sent to check the grounds, Spiky was sent to check the first and second floors of the west wing. Lucy was trembling with fear, as she crouched behind a large reading chair.

The door flew open, Spiky ran round like a whirl wind.

“Oh you're mine,” he said smoothly, “You keep quiet because if my boss gets you, you're dead.”

He mocked a shot at her with his pistol, she shivered. Keeping an eye on her he closed the door.

“Strip and make it quick.”

Lucy did as he said, a loaded gun with a nutter on the end of it has that effect.

“Now remove the laces.”

She did as he said removing them from the corset.

“Lay down,” he said. Still smooth and cold, his gun pointed at her head. I had hidden amongst the books, helpless. He then used the laces to tie her feet, rolling her over onto her front he tied her hands. Rolling the stockings he pulled back her head from behind and stuffed them in her mouth.

Now what was he doing? It was as though he was looking for something, he tapped each of the panels below the built in bookcases. “Neat,” said this man of few words, pushing a panel which sprung loaded slid behind its neighbour to reveal a hole. Big enough for Lucy. He stuffed her in like you'd put a turkey in the oven. He then picked up the chemise and bloomers stuffed one in each jacket pocket, picked up the shoes and corset halves, then wandered out of the room. Replying to a shout from his boss, “Nothin on the first floor.”

Could I get in behind that panel? Well I was damn well going to try. Old houses are so great, in time what was straight loses its shape. Just like you had a flat tummy when you were young and now it's, well just a little bit, you know! Hey I was in but it was very dark all I could do was home in on the sound of Lucy's breathing. I can tell you there were a few scary moments. It hurts when you bump your head, yes we flies do feel pain. Dark spaces make you feel claustrophobic, us too, and it brings on arachnophobia, well you know where they hide.

Eventually I landed on Lucy's ear, she was pleased to hear a friendly

voice, I could tell from the way she mumbled. Actually she was trying to push the stockings from her mouth. It was possibly one thing in our favour, that twisted Spiky was non to professional. I mentioned to Lucy that if these men were as in the past chosen by the Penningtons then his Lordship had definitely had his head too deep in a book when hiring these villains.

There was a considerable commotion going on outside. It sounded as though Unknown was loosing it with Loudmouth, Spiky siding with the latter. The stockings, ejected Lucy whispered to me, to hang on. She bent double trying to reach the laces binding her feet. After various contortions of which I have no visual recollection she had freed them.

"I wish we had Fn8's wood ant friends," she whispered struggling to free her hands, "The bastard has done a granny knot."

"A what knot?" I asked.

"I'll explain later little friend," she whispered, "Right now I'm not keen to wait for Spiky."

"You mean your going to jilt him, how could you?" I said with incredulity.

"Oh, I'm a mean bitch," she sniggered.

Above the sound of continuing bellowing from the agents, there was a scrapping sound, moving around Lucy had somewhere pressed a hidden lever, the space had just got larger. She wiggled like a grub in an old fallen tree, from the space we were in to one behind. With a bit more feeling around with her feet she closed the ingenious dividing panel.

"Can you do anything to free my hands?" she asked.

"Unfortunately I don't have the jaws for it," I replied.

"Perhaps we'll find a rough surface," she said hopefully.

Lucy began to feel her way around, she was sitting on cold stone, in what to her felt like a narrow passage. Frightened of falling down stairs or a shaft, she moved very caterpillar like inching along with her feet, posterior, and her hands behind her, huh you thought I was going to say the B word, well she is a lady you know.

We began to wonder just how many passages there were. Lucy's feet made contact with the top of a flight of steps. Carefully she edged down them, and then abruptly stopped.

"What's the matter?" I asked, as us flies do.

"I've found a rough one," she said, my brain working out that there was a step suitable for wearing through the laces.

At last Lucy's hands were free, and we made faster progress, still keeping her rear on solid ground because we were in complete darkness. Both of us were cold, it was also damper the deeper we went.

"I could do with a bath little friend," she whispered.

"You smell quite lovely," I said reassuring her, which made her giggle.

"Did you see what the bastard did to my corset," she said with some anger, "Shit, the book. I pushed it under the chair, we have to go back."

"Go back?" I was a bit disturbed. However when you are fly size there is absolutely no point in arguing with a human female. You humans reading this will I am sure agree this applies to males of your species equally well.

We went back up the steps and after some fumbling she found the lever. There was a tiny chink of light breaking through the outer panel, I offered to go and check the room was safe to enter. After flying a reconnaissance mission, I crawled back inside and told Lucy. She slid back the panel and crawled on all fours to the chair, feeling around under it she liberated the book and quickly returned into the hole. Just before she put the panel back in place she whispered, "Wait." Like I was going anywhere. She had spotted a candle holder ready with candle and matches inside a glass case. I assume it was backup should there be a power cut.

Like an angel dancing on cotton wool she walked over to the case and very gently opened the door. I was waiting near the hole, in case you were wondering. There was the sound of the west wing door.

"Well shouted?" Loudmouth.

"No sign of any tracks," replied Unknown.

"Spiky, get down here now," shouted Loudmouth.

We both heard his heavy footfalls go right past the door, then fade as he went down to the others. Lucy had frozen in the corner near the cabinet, her hand steadying an ornament that had tried to escape of a glass shelf that was none to secure. You can imagine if that lot had crashed down. Carefully she fixed it and closed the cabinet door. She walked quietly back to the hole. You humans do look funny, all soft

skinned and wobbly.

She knelt down, her breasts hung down like two water drops about to fall from the edge of a tile. Please excuse a flies poor attempt at a poetic description of human beauty. She crawled inside, lit the candle then closed the panel. I had of course hopped back into the lovely earring. In case you're wondering she does have two of them, shaped from the outside like a golden half moon, backlit by an eclipse of the sun, with a hollow like a hammock. We moved into the tunnel entrance, she grabbed the stockings and the lace that had bound her feet, then closed the inner panel, which did not have a locking mechanism.

With the candle she was able to descend the stairs rapidly. Considering we were only on the first floor this did seem to be going a very long way down. It must have been well below the level of the basement when it finally levelled out. The walls were rendered like the other tunnel, white paint yellowed with age and in places flaking. The passage took a sudden right turn then continued but with a very slight slope downwards. It turned right again but this time at a lesser angle.

My guess was that we were going somewhere out towards the extensive parkland that surrounded the house. The tunnel seemed to go on forever, occasionally there would be a slight change of direction but nothing drastic, and as yet no doors. There was a faint light ahead, Lucy slowed wondering where it was coming from.

When we got nearer, the tunnel merged into the side of a brick lined well. There was a ladder hidden in a recess leading up. Lucy bravely reached out and grabbed it, her other had holding the handle of the candle holder and the small book. She stepped back, into the tunnel, without the candle climbing this ladder would be difficult, the last of the ambient light was fading rapidly. Now I have told you this is one smart lady. We have one of those conundrums, a pair of stockings, one book, one candlestick holder with candle, one box of matches, a ladder and only two pairs of hands. All of course need to get to the top of the well, this is complicated by the fact that the candle must remain lit. Before you ask the book is too large to go inside a stocking, she just tried that. No they're not those ones with stretchy Lycra, these are old fashioned silk stockings and the candle stick holder didn't look to

practical in them either, didn't suit it, colour clashed.

Well the first attempt, tie the stockings around the book, and through the handle of the candlestick holder, with the match box in the foot of one stocking, candle in mouth. Ok now what? No still need a hand to carry it.

Ok plan B, oh now that is cunning, remember folks how some hardback books have a space between the spine and the cover, I hope this is a quality publisher. Then one stocking tied to the other with matchbox inside followed by the candlestick holder handle, now other ends of stockings tied together, what a lovely necklace. Candle in mouth, and up we go, I told you she was clever, not sure that the necklace design will catch on, but hey it might be an idea to boost book sales when all has gone digital. With both hands free she ascends the ladder. It was a long way up, and a bit awkward near the top because to conceal the ladder it came up under a bit of an overhang, there were a few bricks left sticking out of the well wall that made it climbable. The heavy book around her neck was receiving a few choice expletives even with a mouth full of candle, as were a couple of other large soft things that kept getting in the way.

Lucy expressed relief, at the top even though we had absolutely no idea where we were. Climbing off the low brick wall that surrounded the well she took the candle from her mouth, for the moment leaving the necklace in place and holding our illuminating friend in her hand at an angle to avoid wax dripping. I did point out that we might leave a trail of wax which could be a clue to a sharp eyed agent. Lucy though had more pressing concerns as she looked around, nothing but trees and bushes, walking around the well she traced a stone path leading away from the well and of between two of the trees. Lucy shivered, it was cold, luckily though not raining.

This was the first time we had left the house, I wondered if they would see our light, but thought it unlikely hidden as we were. We still had the option of returning which I suggested, Lucy did not fancy our chances of getting either into the drawing room or the attic, assuming the attic panel was not bolted. The other factor was the lack of the key to open the tunnel door.

The path led us along eventually to a large lake, there was a rowing boat tied up hidden in an inlet. It was wet in the bottom but floating and both oars were present. She put the candle back in her mouth and got in then removed the candle stick holder from the necklace and placed the candle in it, placing it on a plank. She rowed out to what appeared to be an island in the middle.

After a couple of attempts we found a jetty, hidden behind lots of reeds. With the boat secured Lucy went to check out the place, the jetty joined a path, this went to a small summer house. It was wooden, dilapidated and obviously the current Lord Pennington did not have it on his list of endangered buildings. It had a door, windows and was dry, the bench seat inside made an acceptable bed for Lucy.

17. Up with the Lark

Lucy woke to the dawn chorus, the light streaming through the windows. She sat up, stretched her arms out and gave a yawn.

"Morning little friend," she said.

"Morning," I replied, "So back to the house?"

"What do you know that I don't?" she said, somewhat sarcastically.

"Ah," I said.

"We have no way back in, unless you know of a similar tunnel back into the east wing, and I can't imagine there can be many more."

"Sir Charles did seem to have an affinity with moles," I said.

"Yes, and in this part of the country he must have put them out of business," she giggled.

"I'm going to look at this book little friend, then we shall see if this is an island," she said, opening it still attached to the necklace. Clues that's what this lady is looking for, maybe the book will help us.

"Who's the book by?" I asked.

She turned it around and looked at the cover.

A Gentleman's Garden
by Mr S E Larch

"Miss Elle's..." Lucy's voice trailed off, but my little fly mind was thinking the same thing. In the daylight the book seemed almost fresh

off the press. First she looked at the contents, then skimmed through the index. As she flicked through the pages we saw both text and drawings, mostly plants, or garden design ideas. There was a lot of information on soil types, when to plant, a short piece on garden buildings. Why was this book so special?

After forming a committee we decided that it would need a lot of reading if we were to find any clues, so Lucy put the necklace over her shoulder, now the remains of the candle joining the matchbox inside the stocking. She did a short walk around a circular path which brought us back to the summer house, sure enough it was a tiny island.

“This is hopeless,” she said, wandering back into our temporary lodgings.

“Why?”

Call me an optimistic fly but as far as I knew the agents had none of us, and we had the book so we weren't exactly loosing.

“Our friends are trapped in the house, and we have no way back in,” she paused, “Even if we do get back inside what then? We have no food, Pennington is like a baby elephant.”

“The lack of food might actually be an advantage in his case,” I said thinking positively, “Couldn't we go for help?”

“Oh, my little friend, firstly the grounds are surrounded by a security fence.” She pointed to some wires just visible over the tops of some bushes, “There are angry agents on the prowl and call me vain but I don't have anything to wear.”

We sat for a while, she removed the necklace and placed it on the end of the bench seat.

After some time contemplating, I said, “I could fly back and get Simon to check for another tunnel in the east wing.”

“In a town maybe, but out here there are so many hungry birds you'd never make it,” she was mellow, “Besides we've come this far together, I don't want to loose you.”

She stood up and walked to the door.

“No you stay safely tucked up in my earring.”

She opened the door and stood on the small verandah, “If it was not for those nasty men this would be so beautiful.” Lucy's head moved around as she took in the nature around us, for a human I guess it

would seem nice, for a fly it seemed very scary.

Lost for the moment, removed from the stresses she wandered down the path to the jetty. Lowering herself down she sat on the end of it, our little boat down one side, her legs swinging back and fourth. It worried me that from the shore she would be clearly visible, she responded, "Little fly allow me just a few minutes." It wasn't me she needed to ask it was the bastards with the pistols and automatic weapons.

"Lucy, quick into the summer house," I said with some urgency.

"Just a little longer," she replied.

"I can hear a helicopter," I said, pressing the need to move.

Quickly she shifted like a deer spooked, she bounded away down the path, went into the house, and closed the door. She grabbed the necklace from the seat and huddled down, laying on her back under the side with the door and windows. Some way in the distance we heard it land, the pitch changing as the slowing rotors whistled.

"We best go now while we still can," she said, thinking that if it was more nasties then a rowing boat would be a cinch to spot.

We were soon back onshore, Lucy headed away from the path and into the trees, not sure where she was headed, but sure that we had to stay in cover. I felt for her, as she winced at the sharp stones and prickles that she occasionally stepped on. Picking her way carefully to something we had glimpsed, it was a grotto, that's all it was, no secrets hidden in this place. We moved on, in effect circling around from the west side of the house through the gardens and parkland to the north and were soon in sight of the east wing.

Because of the size of the building, if we could get close enough we may be able to make it across the lawn, and drop down into the sunken entrance to the service quarters, without being seen from the rest of the house. The helicopter was visible, but seemed to be empty, and we noted a ladder up at one of the windows.

"Shit, little one, they're in our bit," said Lucy, her mind racing.

"Yes but are they still in? or was that left there from last night?" I reasoned well, Lucy decided we had to get back to the house, we could not get over the fence, and what better place to be than the part

they have already searched.

Various hedges, and ornamental bushes gave us cover until the last fifty metres. Like a paranoid person, about attempt a crossing of a motorway on foot, she looked and kept looking to make sure we had a clear run. She still kept low in a slower but more controlled run, this was just as well as she was able to stop just short of the gravel. It was wonderful stuff for alerting you to the presence of people. She stood up and like a person walking over eggshells, made her way across. Not to the door, but to the ladder, she reasoned our friends might be in hiding, and we did not have a key to a door which is probably still bolted.

Once inside she breathed a sigh of relief, then not wishing to linger moved cautiously to the servants stairs and the attic. The panel would not budge, so I went in search of a way through. Lucy was greeted by Lord Pennington, who one assumes had never seen so much woman so close before.

“Perhaps you might move so I can come in your Lordship?” she said with a bit of humour.

“Oh, yes, err, ssssoorry, mmm.”

He could hardly speak, doing his best to usher her in. I can't imagine what it did for his blood pressure when she turned and closed the panel, securing the door behind it.

“Nice, nice.” His Lordship still had vocal difficulties.

“Necklace?” she said, “Yes a little something I picked up, all the rage in London I hear.”

“Oh, reee, really, how a, how interesting,” he uttered. I do believe he may actually have believed her.

From Fn8 and Firefly we received a much more fluent account of the events in the house the previous evening. The agents had obviously found a ladder, and forced open one of the sash windows. Simon's squadrons were on top form and had alerted the group well before the window was even open. Fn8 recounted how Nadia had gotten Jim and Simon with the carrier and the Fly Squadrons into the passage behind the fire in the sumptuous bedroom. His Lordship's bulk making such a manoeuvre impossible, had been guided by Firefly with Fn8 as top

gunner into the attic, where Firefly had spotted a similar hinged door for the panel in the east wing. His Lordship had pulled this down and bolted it. So as far as we knew the agents would have found no evidence that we were there, unless they heard the laboured breathing of Pennington! Fn8 thought not as they had guided him into Elle's secret room which was well away from their operations.

18. Pennington's gardener

Lucy sat at Elle's desk, while Lord Pennington took an well deserved afternoon nap. She was diligently reading the book. She had almost finished when I buzzed in her ear that she might do well to nudge Lord Pennington whose snoring was becoming rather loud. I also checked with Fn8 and Firefly if he had done this before. Luckily he had had so much sleep in the wine cellar that he had been restless all night.

Lucy asked what was wrong. I had detected the vibrations of more vehicles and the unmistakable scent of dogs.

"Dogs," she said, worry evident in her expression.

"Dogs!" echoed his Lordship, "Bloody hell, if they get our scent we're done for, went with father once on a hunt, not nice."

"They don't necessarily have all our scents, we took the hoods and ropes with us," I said offering reassurance, "And you have your stockings."

"Spiky has some of my clothes," said Lucy.

"Yes but if he reveals that to Loudmouth," I said, running the scenario.

"Spiky," said his Lordship. You must remember that unless a fly is up close to someone's ear they would have difficulty hearing us, so his Lordship was only getting half the conversation. During CFC training sessions and meetings where more than one Fly Master is present we have microphones to amplify our speech.

"The reason I'm naked your Lordship," said Lucy.

"What a bounder."

His Lordship looked dejected and started sobbing, "My father, Sir Charles, all of them," he paused, "Let the lot down, my own silly fault." He mumbled a bit, "Sorry my dear, I do seem to have cocked up rather badly during the selection process."

He sat up, "Still, I'm not helping am I?" he said, " You know the dogs

will either track a persons scent, this includes body odour, food eaten, clothing smells, or they can track ground disturbance, impacts due to crushed vegetation that sort of thing, so even if they don't have our scents they could still follow us.”

“Could we hide the scent?” asked Lucy, unaware that his Lordship was not speaking from experience in the field, rather from experience in the library.

“I suppose you might persuade God to arrange another little flood, make sure he is aware of the hight of this attic, oh and our friends down below,” he mumbled, “I don't suppose you brought any food with you did you?”

Lucy, heard a little fly chuckle, she grinned, “No.”

“Oh, doc will be pleased,” said our portly host.

“I'll be back,” I said.

“Where are you going?” asked Lucy.

“We can't see what is going on up here, so I shall check out the grounds from the second floor windows.” This seemed sensible.

The grounds were swarming with police. The ladder was gone and flying down to the ground floor I could see that the window was now closed.

Flying back around to view the north lawn, Loudmouth and his two cronies were talking to some uniformed officers. There were search dogs combing the grounds, the helicopter was now hovering around doing sweeps of the parkland, and other officers were walking along checking for clues. Flying back round to a window that overlooked the courtyard I saw police going into the west wing, some in white forensic suits. Several vans were parked on the gravel drive. It also seemed like there was a media van outside the gates and what looked like the Greater Spotted Long Lensed Paparazzi floating around.

I went back up to tell them the good news.

“The grounds are crawling with police and there are paparazzi at the gates, so we can leave the building,” I proudly announced to Lucy who, relayed this to Pennington.

“I don't think so,” she said, Lord Pennington nodding in agreement.

“You could get some clothes first,” I said.

Apparel was not the problem, "Trust me little one, all is not what it seems."

She would not say any more, turning back to the book. Lord Pennington eagerly looking over her shoulder, Lucy's breasts were disproportionately large on her slim frame. But when I looked at his eyes, he was as absorbed as she was in the book. Well excuse me but are we having a bookworms convention, don't worry about the baddies oh no. We have no food, no water, and an opportunity to contact the authorities and what are we doing learning how to garden. Well I was told that the British variety of humans are rather interested in the pastime, but this is ridiculous. Perhaps I wondered his Lordship was worried about the state of the lawn, it being trampled by plod, maybe Lucy was to become the new gardener? Just getting my wings in a bit of a buzz when Lucy whispers, "I've got it."

"Well done me dear," says his Lordship.

"What?" I said frustrated, Fn8 and Firefly were also getting a tad anxious.

"For the time being it's best that his Lordship stays here and we'll tell the others to stay hidden also," she said, "We have some things to do."

She told Fn8 and Firefly to stay with his Lordship who was instructed to avoid snoring. We then went down and found the others still hidden part way down the tunnel behind the fireplace in the sumptuous bedroom. They were asked to go up to Sir Charles's secret room Jim was not comfortable with the current accommodation, so was pleased to be going somewhere. Simon, was like me wanting to know more, but unwilling to disobey a direct order from a female. Quite a wise man I'd say. She also told them to stay away from the walls.

"Why?" questioned Simon.

"Because they have ways of listening for heartbeats in walls," she said, "Elle's room and Sir Charles's, are both above high ceilings and have been insulated."

With that we left them and headed down the servants stair case.

We took a cautious peek through a tiny hole in the curtains, there was a lot of activity in the grounds, and around the west wing.

"They'll search here soon."

With our friends re-hidden, she moved out of the room and down to the basement. In one room she spent a lot of time feeling around, pulling from behind a kitchen cabinet a small bunch of keys. It seemed

to have the keys for the giants locks and some others. She picked up a couple of candles, more matches and another candle holder from the kitchen, then we went into a store room and she found a hatch that I tell you, you could have looked at for your whole life and never noticed. In no time we were descending into another subterranean passage courtesy of Sir Charles.

We came to one of those strong doors with the giants locks. She went through, locking it behind us. When Lucy turned around you could have been forgiven for thinking you were in an old railway signal box. Along one wall was a array of levers, all in pristine condition, handles colour coded like those of a resistor. Now you may not be familiar with a resistor, it is a small electronics component that drops a voltage across it depending upon its resistance to the flow of electrons through it, like you standing on your neighbours hose pipe and watching the water dribble out. To identify what value it is they are generally colour coded, it's just like looking at a rainbow. Each colour has an associated value, and the number of bands can be more if the precision is greater. So if we knew what the colours indicated we could work out the number of the lever.

Lucy took a sweeping scan around the room, there were three other doors both with the giants lock. A small wall cabinet, and a desk below, beside it was a tall cupboard which when Lucy opened it turned out to be just like a wardrobe. Interestingly there appeared to be two sets of clothes, you will work out why, one set was smaller. I flew off and sat on top of the wall cupboard as Lucy climbed into the smaller brown boiler suit, which she proceeded to button up, it seemed to be a bit tight across the chest can you work out why? Well then donned the smaller boots, lacing them firmly.

Once clad in her most fashionable Victorian engineers garb, she headed for the wall cabinet and took a look inside. There was such a lovely musty smell when she opened the door, oh decay decay. Relocating back to her earring was such a pleasure as she withdrew an old notebook from within. It was entitled, Notes for the master, and was hand written in the most exquisite pen.

“This is it my little friend,” said Lucy as she sat down at the desk, leafing through the pages.

“Master?” I said, not sure who it referred too.

“Penningtons' larvae,” she said with a giggle.

“Ah!” I said, “A sort of training manual and that writing looks like Elle's.”

“Yes little one, and these clothes are the masters,” she said, “This sort of thing was strictly for the men in her time.”

“Oh, I see,” said I, understanding that unlike us flies you humans were always trying to change things with rules and social attitudes that seem so trivial to us.

Well the book was quite fascinating, each lever it seemed operated some kind of mechanisms located above in the walled garden. First we had to apply power to the system, these Victorian Engineers were very clever. Lucy pulled other documents, drawings and maps from the cabinet. Its fine oak construction had protected them and allowed us to understand the whole system. What we had thought of as a well was in fact an access shaft to a water outlet tunnel that rejoined a stream far down in the valley beyond the trees through a crack in some rocks. The lake was a reservoir, normally fed by a stream which gently flowed in at one end and out at the other. When Sir Charles needed power he did the equivalent of pulling a plug in the bath. Below the island and it's summer house was a water inlet system, unleashing this hydraulic force would power giant wheels deep underground. Through an ingenious system of gears, chains and pulleys the power was transmitted to the machinery operated by the levers.

Its only limit was the water supply, which was why we set off down the right most door. Another long red brick lined tunnel took us to a small room, eerie in the candle light, at one point I was terrified at seeing the shadow of a giant fly on the wall. Down here there was a damp dank feel to the air, cold and still. Lucy looked around, it was very sparse with what might you might think of as the go button, actually a large lever that would open the sluices above. It was very hard for Lucy, she pushed and we thought it would never move, which it did not. I won't at this point recall what she said because it seemed rather inappropriate for such a delicate lady. All I will say is that the MAN who designed the contraption came in for a little criticism. Can't think why because it all looked rather fine to me. In the dim candle light you could not really appreciate the beauty of the green and red painted iron mechanisms, it had been well maintained in the past. On a small table rested a grease pot and old rusty can of oil.

Lucy trotted off in a rage, almost running back along the tunnel to the control room.

“No tools, no hammer, how are we going to use the equipment if we have no power?” she said, making some other strange sounds.

“You could try checking the manual again,” I suggested, which she did.

Within minutes we were racing back down the tunnel with the book. She pulled a small clip which when released hung on a chain. Then with almost no effort she was able to move the lever, we heard the sound of water gushing and swirling down the funnel from the lake above. There followed an almost slow motion dance as large gear wheels interacted like dancers in a ballet, pulleys like the arms of a beautiful ballerina transmitting energy so elegantly. Music to a fly's feet, you see we hate your modern machinery which runs as such high frequency, this was nice and slow. You could feel the vibrations of the immense power as the water took its course.

Lucy like a shuttle cock racing back and forth through this brick loom went back to the control room, on the wall beside the levers there was a panel, she pulled it down. There were a series of tubes plugged like the old communication pipes on board an ancient ocean liner. Above them were a series of viewing tubes, when Lucy unplugged one we could see a beautiful view of the garden above from one corner of the wall. It was beginning to get dark, Lucy checked each of them seeing what they saw and working out their relationships to each of the levers which she tried. The results were quite impressive, we then went back to the sluice lever and shut off the water.

“Tomorrow little one we shall test Sir Charles system for real?” she whispered.

We then went through the left door. It led into another tunnel off of which was yet another door. We wandered past this door, Lucy knew where she was headed. This tunnel ran parallel to the control transmission tunnel, and on the other side the power transmission tunnel, with service access points along the length. In the first plan only one tunnel had been envisaged this would have been larger to accommodate all the mechanics however cable failure or that of the power rods could have endangered and even blocked human passage through the tunnel. If a breakage occurred it could have severed the controls to all the mechanisms under the walled garden rendering it useless.

Below the walled garden was a series of tunnels each leading to a subterranean room, more on this later. Back up the in the control room we entered the third door. Inside was a neat well equipped room. Unfortunately Lucy almost through up at the amazing smell. This refuge of Sir Charles's had every necessity including a food store, which when she opened the cupboard doors let rip an amazing odour which had me in such a frenzy. The flies equivalent to an old vintage wine, the olfactory stimulation was overwhelming. Lucy wanted to open a window, difficult when there aren't any! Holding her nose with one hand and the candle holder in the other she looked around for some means of transporting the offending tin that had given in to the ravages of time. Finding a metal bucket and releasing the grip on her nose, she held her breath and placed the bucket on the floor in front of the shelf with the offending tin, flicking the tin off the shelf with one finger it tumbled down somersaulting down. As it spun particles flew away from it ejected by the centripetal forces, as gravity drew it to the bucket. It hit the bottom with quite a thud, when Lucy picked up the handle and pulled it up the sides parted from the base, a rusty circle of fragments lay on the brick floor. The tin still largely intact lay in the middle of this debris. With a strange delicate hold on the tin, Lucy picked it up and held it at arms length. This tin was now on a journey, at first Lucy wanted to take it back to the house but I suggested this may leave a rather nice scent trail. So it eventually ended up in one of the rooms under the walled garden.

Lucy and I retired to the refuge with the door open to the control room, the smell had permeated the room for some time and although attenuated was still present. That night for Lucy was not so good she tossed and turned in the bunk, but for me was wonderful, oh the dreams.

20. Agent in a hole

When you are underground it's difficult to know what time it is, and when Lucy awoke she had no idea. She used the viewing tubes with their intricate series of prisms and lenses, try to imagine one side of a pair of binoculars on a larger scale, each tube had to follow an underground path and so those covering the longest distances were

rather dim. It was early morning and although it was quite in the walled garden we had no idea about the rest of the house and grounds. Were the police still searching? What were those rogue agents up to? Were our friends still safe?

Looking at the maps and drawings we could see that the complex we were in had no other entry point, so the only way in and out was from the store room in the basement of the east wing, Sir Charles had obviously gone to great trouble to make this part well hidden and secure, knowing his organisation was small and vulnerable. Without his attentive observations and those of his agents there were many who would have misused their high position to further their own ends. Our small nation has for centuries had its enemies, but we seemed to have been able to achieve much, unlike other and some may say more corrupt nations. Why? well thanks in part to Sir Charles routing out those mischievous men who would have changed the course of history. It was no accident that the sun never set on the British Empire and Victoria's reign was a long and largely successful one.

Sir Charles had left a diary and although we did not have time to read it all, Lucy did find a note that indicated his subterranean engineering had never had to be put into use. Thus knowledge of it in future generations had faded quickly. Only the book now in our possession and known to the one who controlled the turned agents eluded to something more than just a stately home and garden. We had to find out why this person was eliminating the CFCs, but first we had to overcome the agents.

Lucy unplugged one of the communication tubes, it linked to the drawing room. This seemed a good place to listen as they seemed to like it. We had to be very quiet so as not to send our sounds to them. Now if you are wondering why Spiky found the house spooky, just imagine the various sounds of the house picked up by these tubes and the faint echoes that would emanate in a quiet room during the night.

Lucy's stomach prompted for breakfast.

"What the fuck was that," said Spiky.

Yes they were there alright.

"Shut up," said Unknown, "Probably the crap you had for breakfast."

"Where is he?" said, a nervous Spiky.

“He'll be back soon,” barked Unknown, his patience wearing thin. We listened for some time, until the sound of the door opening filled our room.

“Right, he wants us to find Pennington and the others, they must still be here somewhere,” said Loudmouth thumping something hard, “Because that Police Chief has had this area staked out and his lads have seen nothing.”

“Then what?” said Spiky.

“We waste them, stupid!” said Unknown.

“Right,” shouted Loudmouth, “We don't need them any longer, just that bloody book.”

“What about the woman?” said Spiky.

“Fuck her,” said Loudmouth, almost laughing.

“So we keep her alive?” said Spiky.

“Use your brain not your cock,” said Unknown.

“Spiky she knows to much, so you have some fun then waste her like the rest of them. Now I've spoken with him again, he reckons there are some hiding places in this heap of crap.”

“Why not burn it down?” said Unknown.

“Because we don't have the book and unfortunately paper has a tendency to ignite when exposed to flames!” said Loudmouth in a condescending tone. Loudmouth was great, we could hear him much more clearly than the others whose voices were muted by the length of the tube.

“Now we have no time to waste, so lets find them,” said Loudmouth.

“Who looks where?” said Spiky.

“We look together, remember what happened to our two colleagues?” said Loudmouth, “We check a room then seal the door, understand?” We heard a mumble of agreement and then after a few minutes and some footsteps the door slammed shut. Lucy put the plug back into the communication tube.

“I can't get them to the walled garden and operate the controls,” Lucy sighed with a note of despair.

“We could go back and get Jim, Simon and his squadrons,” I said without thinking it through.

“They are searching the house, we have to get from the basement to the second floor without being seen, get through the tunnel and up to the roof, then back with the others then down to the basement.” She was feeling down.

“We have to try,” I said, trying to get her going, “The sooner the better, we go up while they are still searching the rest of the house, then while they are in the east wing we move our friends down from Sir Charles's attic room and through the other part of the tunnel to the drawing room and down to the west wing cellar back through its tunnel to the basement in the east wing. Then out of the coal bunker and round to the store room.” It seemed so simple, what could be wrong with that? Lucy pointed out the seals on the rooms. I suggested they might not bother with their favourite room, or the cellar.

After a bit of delay Lucy pulled herself from the desk chair and we went from the room locking the door behind us, and heading along the tunnel to the east wing. As we approached the hidden entrance she stopped, pulled an oily rag from a pocket and wrapped the keys in it. Smart woman is Lucy, don't want any jangling do we?

Then she moved the few remaining metres to reach the hatch. We both listened I flew over to the wall to try and pick up any vibrations from human movements, nothing, it was all quiet. She snuffed out the candle and put it in one pocket and the holder in another buttoning them up, then with great care opened the hatch. All was still, looking around there were no seals which was a good sign. Quietly she lowered the hatch back into place, and slowly she crept through the basement to the servants staircase, it was the quickest route up. Easing the door to the second floor open, all was still silent, Lucy turned and carefully closed it. Not far now, and then she froze. From below we heard a rumble, it was a sash window being pushed up. “They're coming in via the ladder,” I said. I took the swaying of her earring as she nodded as a sign she understood.

We heard the first faint footfall as two floors below one of them jumped in. Quickly Lucy moved, her body trembling. She slid into the sumptuous bedroom, hardly opening the door. That fireplace was a welcome sight and it was only moments before we were hidden again within the it's hidden passage. For a moment she stopped, heaving a deep sigh of relief and taking some long deep breaths. She lit the candle now back in its holder and we were of quieter than a mouse along this strange tunnel that dipped below the windows and back up again, until we reached the shaft and its ladder in the corner of the west wing. Leaving the candle in the tunnel she climbed up to the roof and Sir Charles's hidden room.

We reached Jim, Simon and his carrier force and my beloved Nadia. There was a brief exchange of whispers and then Lucy had them climbing down the shaft. We followed down last, Lucy collecting the candle. At the bottom we entered the tunnel and were soon through the door. Now with luck we would make it through to the drawing room. It just seemed too easy, we cautiously entered and moved to the door listening for signs of humans, nothing. Lucy signalled to the others who entered the room and closed the secret panel, careful not to leave any clues. The door was not sealed but all the other rooms we passed were, including the door on the servants stairs. We headed back quickly to the main stairs, all was still quiet, but nerves were on edge, Jim was struggling with the pace. He was getting on in years and not cut out for such manoeuvres, but he did well even if he was steaming a bit under pressure.

Luckily the cellar was not sealed and we made a very fast dash for the cellar tunnel. If you are wondering about the cellar door, the keys in Lucy's possession seemed include one for every lock. There was much, gathering of breath and Nadia took refuge with me in Lucy's earring as neither of us fancied being sucked up as Jim and Simon breathed in like vacuum cleaners on full power. This bothered Lucy as in the tunnel it sounded like a howling gale.

After calming them down, we moved along venturing through the giants door and on to the coal bunker. Lucy stopped a bit before we reached the exit in the coal chute, explaining that we knew they had been in the east wing. Nadia and myself flew ahead, we crawled through a tiny gap. No sounds nothing, crawling under the door to the coal bunker room we took a look around. Blue and white police sealing tape was sloppily fixed to the door, like a Christmas parcel badly wrapped. The store room door was also sealed, we flew back and told Lucy.

“Shit, we can get through the coal bunker room ok and reseal it after us, but not the store room,” she said, looking at Jim and Simon.

“That assumes we don't damage the tape doing so,” said Jim.

“It's a risk we will have to take,” said a pragmatic Simon, “But one of us will have to find another way out.”

“Could the flies help us remove the tape and put it back?” asked Lucy,

unaware of a flies aversion to sticky tape.

“Even if they could, we would probably lose half the squadrons in the process,” said Jim, who tried to argue that he should remain behind, him being the oldest and all that, but she was having none of it.

Lucy remembered her dash up the ladder before and explained that as she knew the grounds it had to be her, besides the other two were looking a tad knackered and sooner or later the agents would return to check the seals.

“How will you get into the control room?” I thought this needed a mention.

“Little one I have an idea,” she told Simon about the sluice room, and where she had found the information about it. Then we carefully pulled the door open, luckily Lucy's gentle touch left the tapes still stretched across the doorway, Jim and Simon carefully followed her path through the tapes, she stood on one side and Simon the other to steady Jim through the narrow gap between two tapes. After closing the door, Nadia and I instructed how the tapes should look, and with the room resealed we went through the same exercise to get into the store room. I flew in and instructed Simon on opening the hatch, he also now had charge of Sir Charles's keys. Lucy was given the giants key and cellar key then Jim, Simon and the squadrons disappeared below.

Flying back between the tapes, I assisted Lucy with how they looked on the door, Nadia was on watch listening for the agents. After all was back in place I flew ahead with Nadia and Lucy followed us up the main steps which came up near the door to this house, it was still quiet. Lucy moved like a gazelle along the corridor, swift and silent. The window was closed but the ladder was still in place.

Lucy pulled the window up a fraction and Nadia and I flew through the gap on a reconnaissance mission, Nadia banked right and I left. We swung round to either end of this wing of the house. Sure that there were no agents outside we flew back at higher levels checking for signs of them on other floors, nothing. We flew back down, Nadia just beat me. With the coast clear Lucy made a swift exit down the ladder, then keeping low off into the grounds using the shrubs and hedges for cover.

We were enjoying the ride on Lucy's earring, as she made her way

down the slope that led away from the formal gardens and to the trees. She had soon picked up a path leading behind the walled garden, and down to the lake.

“What's the plan Lucy?” asked Nadia, echoing my thoughts.

“We need to get them to search the grounds, then I go down the 'Well that isn't', descending below past the library tunnel down to the water pipe,” she was interrupted.

“The water from the sluice?” said I, as we flies are not fond of swimming.

“Yes there is a drain from the sluice room into it, you see the room is below the lake so it is prone to damp and so the engineers allowed for that by putting a drain in. That's why there is a grating in the middle of the floor which slopes down from the sides,” she said softly.

“So you plan to wave at them, they count to ten and allow you to escape then they blunder into the walled garden after you have had time to wander up the drain!” said Nadia a tad sarcastically.

“If we're lucky,” she replied with a distinct lack of confidence.

“If not you're dead,” I said remembering Loudmouth's orders.

This was not a good thing to say as it made Lucy even more nervous. Sometimes if you think about something too much you see all the problems that might arise. The wheel was not invented by someone sensible, such a person would have perceived all the dangers of creating things that roll. This probably explains why the general public suffer from mad scientist paranoia and engineers often seem eccentric in attire or from another dimension as they converse in gobbledegook.

It was afternoon, the sun was high in the sky, and Lucy's stomach was rumbling again. Food for all of us was becoming an issue, more than we knew.

“Won't they wonder where you got that clobber and what about the keys?” said Nadia, her little analytical fly brain doing overtime. I gave her a nudge and in fly suggested that we leave off any more comments as Lucy was getting very worried.

Lucy wandered a bit further along the path then veered left through the trees towards the end of the formal gardens to the south of the house. “Bye, bye,” said a familiar voice. Lucy turned we saw an agent pointing his gun at her head. A shot rang out, just missing her and taking a chunk out of a young sapling.

“What the fuck did you do that for?” shouted the agent with the gun, it was Unknown.

“What the fuck are you doing?” shouted Loudmouth.

“You said to waste them,” he shouted back, as Spiky came up behind them, Loudmouth still gripping Unknown's arm in a vice like grip.

“Do you have any idea where the rest of them are?” said Loudmouth glaring at him, “No you don't but she might.” He let go of the man's arm flinging it as you might a log.

“You said they may be hiding in the walled garden,” Unknown said defensively.

“And if they aren't?” Loudmouth snarled back, “Every inch of this place has been searched and none of them have been found, yet we find her! So somewhere they must be.” He poked Unknown's forehead with his index finger, then turned and looked at Lucy.

“Spiky I trust you will use your brain?” said Loudmouth, his eyes still fixed on us, “Take the bitch lock her in the Mausoleum and get back here fast.”

“Aren't we going to question her?” said Spiky with a puerile grin on his face.

“Yes, first I want the walled garden taped off.”

Loudmouth was getting very frustrated, he had made the decision and seemed intent on doing things in a certain order. The other two looked at each other, you could see them thinking.

Spiky came over and grabbed Lucy cuffed her then Loudmouth chucked him a set of keys and off we went. Nadia and I kept well hidden, our plan to go with Lucy then when we know where she is being held to fly down the 'Well that isn't' and warn Simon and Jim.

The Mausoleum was over to the east on a promontory that looked down over the valley below. Its old door creaked open, Spiky pushed Lucy in making her stumble to the dusty floor.

“This time you're mine,” he pointed at her and gave a big smile, then with lightening speed slammed the door shut and was off.

Nadia and I swiftly followed leaving Lucy to try and pick herself up.

Spiky was sprinting, and we observed the agents regroup, with no time to stay and watch we flew over the trees and down into the clearing containing the 'Well that isn't'. It was dark down there, we could have done with Firefly, all we could do was to try and fly straight and look for

Simon's candle light. There it was the faint flickering light ahead and just before it a massive grating, Sir Charles did not want anyone coming up his back passage. Lucy would not have been able to get past it, we could and did. Flying on we saw the shaft leading down from the drain, it did have ladder rungs so obviously it was also intended for maintenance purposes.

Simon was sat in one corner on a little wooden stool.

"Hey you two," he said as we landed on one of his ears, "Where's Lucy?"

"She was captured by the agents they have her locked in the Mausoleum, they are now heading for the walled garden," I said as quick as I could.

"Jim's been doing some reading," said Simon.

Just then one of the other flies flew down and joined us.

"Message from Jim he has spotted agents in the walled garden," the fly paused, "He will send Brewster down when he needs power."

At this point it may be worth noting that the usual human reaction to slap insects when they land on part of your body has been trained out of our Fly Masters.

We sat silently waiting in the dim light of the candle, waiting. Several minutes passed, Simon checking his watch, us doing a bit of preening, one has to keep oneself looking nice especially with Nadia around. Do you know I did not like the way that other fly was moving his head in her direction. Had to give him a gentle hint, without of course letting her see I was getting all macho over her.

We were all distracted as Brewster flew down, "Power, Power," was as much as he could say. The youngster had flown at top speed down the tunnel, no mean feat in the semi-darkness lit as it was only by a candle at both ends. Simon jumped up from the stool, swiftly reaching the lever, releasing the clip on the chain. A great roar ensued as he pulled the lever opening the sluice. The power unleashed was transmitted down the gears to a series of chains, like on a bicycle but much bigger. One loop driving a gear wheel further along the small tunnel, the another gear on that axle drove the next loop and so on.

Simon had not been idle, he had walked along the tunnel and through the service access holes had greased up the gears and chains. The

sounds were very much more gentle than Lucy's earlier tests, this slow but powerful machinery harnessing nature's power. I took Nadia to see Jim, it seemed like a good way of getting her out of that other fly's ugly compounds.

Jim was busy checking each of the viewing tubes as we landed on his right ear.

"How's it going Jim?" we both said.

"Oh my last squadron, it's good to have you back," he paused, checking another viewer. "Lucy, how is she?"

We explained what had happened and that even if we had gotten her down the drain she would not have got past the grating.

"Ah," said Jim as he spotted the agents, "Yes keep going, this corner good." Jim was muttering as you do when you want something or someone who you have no control over to go where you want. Jim pulled a bung from one of the communication tubes, and shouted, "Shit, they've found us, Simon back down the hole quick."

This instruction was not meant for Simon. Jim pulled one of the levers, and above a slab of a doorway opened.

"Quick quick help me close it it's stuck," he shouted, we saw the agents moving towards the source of the sound.

"So that's where the bastards have been hiding, I knew it," shouted Loudmouth, "Come out with your hands up."

"You'll have to catch us first."

Jim moved the lever a fraction, the slab moved slightly.

"It won't shut," he shouted, but away from the communication tube as though he was talking to someone behind him.

Then Simon appeared, and shouted, "Leave it, let's go."

"Shit they're getting away, after them," shouted Loudmouth. The agents set on capturing us bundled down the steps into the hole, Jim moved the lever back to its resting position and the slab moved back over the doorway. He placed the bung back into the communication tube, then turned to Simon, "You can put the plug back in the bath now."

"Ok," chuckled Simon heading back down the sluice room tunnel.

Simon and Jim with a few attendant flies wandered down through the second door from the control room down into the labyrinth of tunnels under the walled garden. These gave access to the rooms or one might more accurately describe them as capture chambers, not far

short of the old mediaeval dungeons. The agents had slid down the forty five degree angle shaft then down vertically into the pit, where they now raged in a state of fury and Loudmouth was bearing the brunt of it.

Perhaps you would understand a bit better if I explained how it worked. The slab covers a set of steps, these lead into a tunnel. When the slab is open even a tiny amount the floor of the tunnel is flat, however this great cast iron monster is lifted back into the closed forty five degree position as soon as the slab is back across the entrance. Think of the base of the tunnel like standing on a see-saw, except it is not your weight that moves it up and down. The machinery pulls it down horizontal overcoming a massive counterweight, when the slab closes, wham the other end goes down and the agents with it slide into the chamber. There is no way out as the top end of the see-saw closes off the entry tunnel. Simon moved his candle to take a look down through a grill above the pit, one of them took a badly aimed shot.

“We have the woman,” shouted Loudmouth, “Let us go or she dies.”

Simon looked at Jim who nodded, and we were off back up the labyrinth to the control room. With the door firmly closed behind them Simon, Jim and us flies made our plan. First task was to release Lucy.

21. Dress rehearsal

We were still operating with caution, the only remaining Fly Carrier with its squadrons was left in the control room, with a firefly escort, flies would take turns keeping watch on the captives, we hoped to learn something useful from their conversations. Jim was left to listen in on the house via the communication tubes, this seemed prudent as we knew there was still Mr Big at large.

Simon, Nadia and myself then went back up the tunnel to the store room in the east wing. From there to the ground floor, using the ladder to get back into the grounds and made with some haste directly for the Mausoleum.

The light was now beginning to fade and as the sky grew redder it cast

a strange light on the white walls of the building of bones as Simon called it. This light cast quite a sinister blood red shadow into the doorway as the old hinges creaked under the load. There sat on the floor was our friend and most brave lady.

Simon helped her up, she was stiff and struggling with pins and needles. He held her gently and we were soon standing on the steps of this large round windowless edifice. Simon left her for a moment, with a moan from those hinges the door of the building was once again firmly closed. Having semi released Lucy we now made tracks back to the house, she had very wisely suggested that we remove all the agents tape, it was rather obvious at the moment that the store room door had been disturbed. Simon wanted to undo the cuffs but it was no good they were the chain less solid modern ones and he did not have Houdini's genes.

“Help me to the sumptuous bedroom then go to it in both parts of the house with that tape,” she said.

I could see him wondering if he should have left miss bossy boots back with her bony friends.

Simon returned, in his hands a masterpiece of blue and white art, sort of a secret policeman's ball almost. Not to Nadia's taste, all the sticky stuff in it made her rather upset, you see on one mission she had been sent to listen in on a rather well connected elderly gent. His favourite household item was flypaper, lots of it hanging from the ceilings in every room, imagine you had to go and sit in the morgue with all the bodies laid out, oh dear I'm making you puke again, sorry.

So now to release Lucy, attempt two. Simon mumbled something then disappeared again, we heard him clunking up the main stairs, still muttering. Well if you think a saw will work forget it, the metal was not budging, the blade was getting hotter, he was using another form of English, some call it French. After further profanities he disappeared again, you know how humans once they have a challenge won't let go, we are now on attempt three or if you prefer it plan C. Over half an hour later he returns, pulls out a little key and hey presto Lucy is loose.

“Now where is she going?” said Simon somewhat exhausted.

“Where did you find the key?” asked Nadia.

“Oh went into the main house, drawing room to be precise and then

rummaged through the agents things," he said, laying back on the bed for a doze.

"I'll keep watch here," said Nadia, "You go see what Lucy's up to."

So off I went, the sounds, just listen to the rustling of fabric. In Elle's dressing room Lucy was out of the boiler suit and pulling the laces tight on a corset. Wow for a human she was looking very insectish, black as well. It was not long before we had a very elegant lady in our midst.

Now forget any plans Jim and Simon may have had, Lucy was back on the case. In a functional day dress she glided up the servants staircase. At the top she went along the corridor in the servants accommodation and gave the knock signal on the panel.

"I can hear something," I said, "it's very faint, like an animal or dodgy plumbing."

"He's asleep," she said, referring to his Lordship.

"Should I go in and try to wake him," I offered.

"And risk getting sucked into those nostrils?" She had a point.

Gliding like magic Lucy made for the sumptuous bedroom, Nadia was sat on a shelf, Simon too was snoring for Britain.

"Great!" said Lucy plonking herself down on a rather over upholstered chair. Then no sooner had she sat down than she was up again, and in case you are wondering, there will be 'Lucy's tunnel and stairs workout' DVD in the shops soon. She pushed and nudged him but with no success, some people just go into a deep sleep and there's little hope of waking them.

Nadia flew over to us, "Shall I go and get Jim?" she said.

"Excellent idea, then we can have another go at waking Simon and Lord Pennington," said Lucy her mind active, "I'll go to the west wing kitchen and get us some food supplies, we'll meet back here."

Nadia did a most impressive take off, oh that abdomen. Sorry, my mind is wandering, Lucy left the room with me riding the earring.

Descending down the main stairs to the corridor on the ground floor she noticed the ladder.

"Let's get that in, we don't want any uninvited guests do we little friend," she said, pulling up the sash window and heaving the ladder in, she took great care not to damage the fixtures and fittings, placing it neatly behind some cabinets that lined one wall. Closed the window,

drew the curtains and we were off down below stairs. I thought she would disrobe again, but her knowledge of the tunnel entrance and finesse in the dress allowed her to slip down into the coal bunker hatch with some ease. We were soon wandering along the tunnel, I know there are lots of them and you are probably getting confused as to which one, well this is the one if you recall that takes us to the cellar in the main part of the house.

Once in the kitchen she began looking for large napkins, now this at first confused me, until she cleverly made them into food carriers knotting the corners together. Most ingenious, and so swift at loading up supplies. It was not long before we were back in our east wing. Lucy had left the food down in the store room ready to take back to the control room. We then hastened back to the sumptuous bedroom, Nadia was waiting but no Jim and Simon was still sleeping for his country. I put it down to all the sheep in this rural location, we flies are not stupid, we know you count them. Nadia reported that Jim had also decided to count them, I guessed this was a male data analysis thing, the three of them would add the counts together, divide by three and get the average number of sheep in this location. In hindsight can't think why, maybe it was just test data to check their counting systems. Lucy went over to the wash basin, tried one tap, nothing nor from the other, then she found what was left of the wine from many days ago. Worried that she might hit him with it like in the movies, I flew over to stop her only to be reassured that she was going to waste a good vintage.

"Like beer shampoo?" I asked.

"Yes, little friend but more of a waking potion," she said pouring it over him.

He spluttered like an old car that does not want to start. Dribbles of wine were running down his nose and over his mouth, wearily he mumbled, "Is this a dream." His eyes heavy as lead were just open a crack, and staring at Lucy in the dress.

"Wake up sleepy," she said nudging him, and trying to pull him up, he was far less cooperative than the ladder.

Eventually roused, we all ventured up to the attic in an attempt to wake his Lordship, with the coast clear we hoped to get him down into the control room with us. Simon had already done a rough measurement of the narrowest point which was the tunnel entrance, this is the one in the store room, in case your brain is still not following us. It was no use

we might as well have told the rest of the planet where we were, most of you probably heard banging and shouting, I was not your neighbours that's why they denied it.

Some time later having given up we arrived back in the control room, Jim was still snoozing in the chair his head slumped over the desk, arms folded. According to Simon Lucy's sandwiches would win an award, the smell of food had the same affect on Jim as the wine had on Simon. We flies tucked into some real crap that Lucy had sniffed out. Simon's squadron leader told him to hire her as head chef.

That night Nadia, myself and our human friends all slept while Simon's squadrons took turns to listen on the communication tubes. 'Why did you not sleep in the east wing?' that's what you're thinking isn't it hey, I'm right aren't I. Well you see whoever nobbled the CFC's and turned the agents must be both well connected and be a very very naughty human, chances are he might come poking around, ok.

In the morning candles were lit and Simon debriefed his flies, no activity no sounds other than the plumbing and the odd rat or mouse scurrying around. His flies also reported the agents had gone quiet in their chamber. Jim plugged the tubes while we had breakfast, you must remember communication works both ways. Lucy decided she would try again to rouse our sleeping Lord.

Jim sequentially removed bungs from the communication tubes, nothing, then from one we heard voices. During breakfast the house had taken in new guests, but they did not seem hungry for muesli.

"Any sign of the agents?" asked Nasty.

"No sir," said Underling.

"However did Pennington hire such dunderheads?" asked Nasty, we imagined him shaking his head.

"Good for us though," replied Underling.

"If we just had that book then we could find it," said Nasty, "Tell the men to start searching."

"What about the grounds sir?" asked Underling.

"Our blue friends have given that a thorough going over," said Nasty.

"You relying on Police Intelligence," he paused, "Sir." The tone was a little flippant.

"For now my friend, for now," said Nasty with a hint of sarcasm. "Our

men?”

“Two on the main gate, four dog patrols around the perimeter fence, three dog patrols around the laser fence,” he paused, interrupted by Nasty.

“Bloody clever that, the beams are staggered so they can detect direction of movement as well as breach,” said Nasty in a hand rubbing tone, “No Police interference either, all paid off, and the rest of the men?”

“Ready to start searching for that book,” said the confident Underling.

“Best start here in the west wing, Pennington den,” said Nasty.

“Sir,” said Underling, then we heard footsteps fade into the distance, some voices and then many footfalls. These two had been standing in the main entrance, we knew that from the manual and tube we were listening on.

Jim put the bung back in the tube.

“These are well organised pros,” he said, the worry evident in his voice, “Little friend go and check on Lucy.”

“I'll go and help her,” said Simon.

“No, they might pick-up your movements who knows what they are putting in place,” said Jim, “Our little friend can check first then guide them back.”

Jim was erring on the side of caution. I had let Nadia go with Lucy because the other flies had so many questions and they wanted what you humans call a breakfast meeting. Flies are just like humans when it comes to listening to stories, their proboscises hanging on every word.

Lucy's trick of taking a bit of food had worked, the smell had wafted into the sleeping Lord's nostrils and woken him. Now she was helping him down the servants stairs, when I told her about the new visitors she became very concerned. Lord Pennington was not a fast mover, every step down seemed to take forever. His Lordships legs spindly through lack of exercise were none to stable with his great weight bearing down on them, and it took a lot of effort to help him stay upright.

I explained to Lucy the conversation we had heard, she thought for a while then said, “So what is it? The clue must be in the book, but why is this thing so important?”

Pennington just shook his head his breathing too laboured to reply. By

the time we got back to the control room the best part of an hour had passed, at one stage it seemed like Lucy would be trapped on the outside because Lord Pennington had got stuck like a cork in a bottle, luckily one of Simon's flies was on watch for us and had summoned Simon, who had then sent a fly back for Jim. It was quite funny, but in a way sad to see the poor old Lord being pushed by Lucy with Jim and Simon each tugging a leg. This most undignified procedure exhausted everyone and when the story got back to the flies they all had rather a giggle.

When suitably recovered Lucy grabbed the book and sat with a lamp and candle reading it at the desk in the control room. During her several reads I caught up with Fn8 and Firefly with whom I learnt a lot about Lord Pennington. To pass the time while stuck in the attic he had told them many things about his family history. However these I will keep until later when they become more relevant.

Lucy read the following passage aloud several times.

Even in the winter it stays red, with delicate green edge. Power from the light so far away but how to apply we do not know, so in our garden parsnips we do grow.

I flew onto her ear and asked what it meant.

She replied, "I'm not sure little one it's in this passage on growing cabbages. Words can hide their meaning." Now I thought she was talking in riddles.

"Like the words of a song might have special meaning for two lovers but not for others around them?" I asked, checking my understanding of human psychology.

"Yes, so for a Pennington this book might do something but not for you or I?" she said, turning to his Lordship who was in a rather undignified slump on the floor.

"More oxygen down here me dear," he said, looking back at her.

"Why would someone refer to parsnips in a section on growing winter cabbages?" asked Lucy, looking expectantly at him.

"Seems a bit odd, unfortunately I'm no gardener," he said, rubbing his chin which was rather stubbly, "I do seem to recall you'd plant the seed around February March time. Harvest them in October, yes because that's when Martha my housekeeper does me some roast

Parsnips.”

You could see his mind wandering into the dining room.

“Red Cabbage it's not red with a green edge is it?” asked Lucy.

Lord Pennington trawled his encyclopaedic mind, “No, don't believe it is, power from the light was puzzling me. Why put it in a bit on cabbages?”

“The Victorians did have electric didn't they?” asked Lucy.

She had caught a thread of something and was trying to pull it.

“In the later period yes, telegraphs that sort of thing,” he said, wandering in his knowledge jungle.

“I have to go to Elle's dressing room,” She expressed with an excited and determined voice.

“Why?” said Jim, “What are you onto?”

“And the lot that are in the house?” asked Simon.

“I'll be careful,” she said, like a child trying to win round a concerned parent.

“What's wrong with the clothes you are wearing?” asked Jim, looking at her with a frown on his face.

“I don't know what it is, but I think I know where it is,” she said with great confidence, “The longer we stand here arguing the less our chance of getting it before they do.”

“Take your little friend, be quick, quiet and careful,” said Jim, his respect for Lucy's intellect had grown considerably.

22. In the Closet

Elle's wardrobe was quite extensive, and it was taking Lucy some time to methodically check all the wardrobes and chest of drawers. The fine oak furniture had stood the test of time, finely crafted drawers would slide open with ease to reveal a multitude of garments.

Lucy's face suddenly lit up, beaming like the sun when a cloud has moved from its obstruction.

“Look little friend,” she said with great cheer and enthusiasm, holding up the red corset. My first thought was she was back on her fashion spree. “I hardly think Sir Charles would have wanted to keep that a secret?” said I, my fly brain not comprehending the relevance.

“Corsets are also known as stays,” she said with some excitement.

“So?” I replied, still none the wiser.

“Think about what the book said,” she urged, “There is an old saying never judge a book by its cover.”

Riddles, riddles, I moved my little head around, looking for inspiration, “So?”

“Whatever it is, Sir Charles hid within this Corset, who would think to go through looking in a woman's wardrobe?” she said, confident of her analysis.

In our eagerness to locate the secret item we had paid no attention to events within this wing of the house. It was almost at the last minute when Lucy had finished tidying up that I flew over to the door, intending to take a look before we left. Vibrations and lots of them came thick and fast, my little feet were shaking with a mass of disturbances. I told Lucy, who in her fine Victorian costume chose to hide on the left side of the largest wardrobe. You see most people when entering a store glance left but tend to go right, according to her retail research and I understand women are more adept at these areas than men.

We hid in the nick of time, voices muttered then we heard the door open.

“Looks like someone's been here recently,” said a deep voice.

“Why?” said another man.

“Dust,” Came the reply.

“Oh yea,” said another.

“Hey it's those so called agents,” came a rourcus laugh.

“How du ya know?”

“Tape marks in the dust on this door.”

“What's in there?”

The right hand door of the wardrobe opened, Lucy froze but I could feel her heart pounding. A hand thrust into the clothes, pushing them about.

“Just a loada dresses, du ya want me to check them?” said the man rummaging.

“Don't think they'd fit you!” Came a jovial response.

“Leave it out boss.” His voice rather serious.

“We aren't here to look for Victorian fashion - Ok lads follow procedure start at the bottom and work up,” said the deep voice.

There was a shuffle of feet, some mumbling, the door slammed shut. Lucy's breathing went hyper, as she relaxed, relieved.

"What next?" I asked Lucy, my proboscis twitching.

"The sumptuous bedroom," she said without further comment. I checked ahead, with the coast clear we made our way along the corridor. Lucy slid in through the door like butter off a hot knife. I can tell you no time was lost getting into the passage behind the fireplace.

With no candle progress was slow, Lucy's hands reached out in the darkness, like the whiskers of a cat sensing the space around her. Sir Charles's room in the attic provided a source of light and a place to rest. We only had two options, back to the bedroom or through to the drawing room in the west wing. We knew they were searching and would no doubt soon reach the bedroom. There was a chance that with the men searching there would be fewer of them in the main house.

Lucy climbed down the ladder to the base of the shaft, making her way along the tunnel to the giants door, once through she raced faster and faster, hitching her skirt. A split second faster and she would have got caught, you know how sometimes events conspire, fear does strange things to the human mind. We heard laughter grow louder like someone hiking up the volume control, the door to the room let in a rush of jubilation. It was Spiky, Loudmouth, Unknown and some of the other men.

"Did you see Pennington's face when we pulled him out of that hole?" shouted one of the other men.

"Fucking, priceless," said a voice we recognised, Nasty continued, "They ain't going to escape again."

"What about the bitch," said the distinctive Loudmouth, his voice booming.

"We'll get her, she's helpless without them, besides it's Pennington we need, the fucking bookworm is sure to know what it is and where it is," said Nasty, in a spine tingling tone.

"Anything in that book?" said Spiky.

"Nothing, it's a bloody red herring, loada gardening bollocks," said Nasty, confident and very arrogant.

"What about the flies?" said Loudmouth.

"Don't give a shit, we filled those tunnels with insecticide," laughed Underling.

There was a pause while glass chinked against glass.

“So why is this thing so special, what is it?” asked Spiky.

“If I told you that I'd have to shot you,” came a chilling reply, Nasty was not joking.

Lucy had frozen just behind the panel, at the roar of laughter from the others at this remark she eased back down into the relative safety of the passage. Once we were out of earshot, she raced along, almost slamming into the giants door. Once on the other side with it locked behind us she slumped down on the cold brick floor.

“It's hopeless, little friend they have won.” She cried, tears flowing over those rosy cheeks.

“While they don't have whatever the thing is, I think our friends stand a chance,” I said trying to offer reassurance.

“And when they do?” she sighed.

“I suspect they will arrange something nice for Pennington, Jim and Simon.”

“And me,” she said snivelling, “There's no way we can save them, not with all those agents, they will have posted guards, and it's only a matter of time before they discover our tunnel.”

“If they knew about it they'd have sent men down,” I said working through the situation, “ We could go back to the east wing and” I trailed off not knowing what we could do.

“You heard them we can't go down to the control room they filled it with insecticide and besides it is no longer secure.”

Lucy was not totally finished, I think I gave her a spark, and now her mind was racing.

“What's in that corset?” I asked.

In a recess behind the door was a candle, holder and matches in a small wooden box. Lucy lit the candle. She took it and examined it in the dim candle light, an area of stitching was just a little different as though someone had replaced a broken bone.

“Lets go to Sir Charles's room it will be easier to look at in there,” she said, getting up from the cold floor. Ensnconced within the attic she began to delicately unpick the stitches. Above the steel bone was a strange metallic object the like of which we had never seen.

“What is it?” said Lucy with an air of curiosity, holding it to the light, a ray of sunlight caught it causing her to drop the object. It gave a loud thud as it hit the floor, Lucy stood still, listening, her fear that someone

would have heard only distracted by the need to blow on her fingers.

“Little friend when I put it in the sunlight it became very hot in just seconds,” she whispered, “It must be some kind of solar energy collector, and a very efficient one.”

“So why would they kill to get it?” I asked.

“People make a lot of money selling energy,” she said in reply.

Us flies aren't up with all human endeavours and it took a bit more explaining before I understood the implications. She explained how certain companies bought up patents for alternative energy sources which they then sat on in order to reduce the threat of competition. With uncertainty in supplies of gas and oil alternatives were going to be in demand and those who controlled them would wield much power and accumulate wealth.

“So Nasty?” I asked for her thought.

“He is probably working for more powerful men, probably the right hand man of one of them,” came her guess, “I could be wrong, but it seems plausible.”

“How would they have known about it?” came another question on my brain.

“Probably some obscure reference in a book, Sir Charles's son was known to dabble in engineering, he apparently did a lot of experimentation and was well know in the Royal Society,” she said.

“How do you know that?” I enquired.

“Oh Lord Pennington is quite a chatter box,” she replied, picking up the object and placing it back into the corset.

“So he probably babbled too much to someone,” I said reasoning the possibilities.

“Very likely,” said Lucy looking in the desk draws for a needle and thread.

“I hope my friends escaped, poor Nadia,” I said getting a bit worried, “If they've hurt Nadia, I'll, I'll give them plague.”

“What are we going to do?” said Lucy trying to thread a needle.

“One woman and a fly against say twenty men,” Came my reply.

“The odds are in our favour then!” she said, at first I thought in jest.

Her hands were now very active dancing along the row of books on a shelf to the side of the desk. She clasped a particularly thin notebook, pulled it down and placed it on the desk. Upon opening it revealed a handwritten title, ***Solis Incitare***. It was the beginning of some notes by

Sir Charles's son, for a lecture at the Royal Society. After only a page and a half there was a note, *Lecture cancelled, father is most wise. The world is not ready, it must wait for more civilized generations.*

Lucy replaced the book and suggested we try and escape, rattling around the tunnels was no good, we knew they had already found those below the walled garden, the east wing was now well and truly compromised. She carefully and quietly moved back down the ladder picking up the tunnel back to the sumptuous bedroom. All was quiet the agents no doubt still celebrating. With great caution she opened the hidden fireplace tunnel. The room was empty, once the tunnel was closed she wandered to the window, easing a gap in the tattered moth eaten fabric.

Looking out over the gravel drive and the lawn beyond we could see a laser fence. No way out there, Lucy drew back from the window and descended into the basement. The hidden door leading to the lever room was wide open, down below was the old gardening book, half open sprawled up against the wall and tunnel floor. Lucy climbed down, picked up the book and climbed back up. She had a beaming smile across her face.

"We can't get out down there," I said.

"True little one, I think we should return to Sir Charles's room for tonight."

"What use is that book?"

"His son did not want to explicitly reveal the details of the discovery, but he may have coded the details into this book," she said, moving with caution back to the sumptuous bedroom.

"I best check ahead," I said, flying off her earring. We had no idea who was where, for all we knew the agents may have been monitoring the east wing.

We were both relieved to get back to the relative safety of Sir Charles attic room, where we slept that night. Lucy woke refreshed, but worried that Jim and Simon knew of the room, she was concerned that under interrogation they might reveal all the other tunnels. We were basically trapped and it was only a matter of time until the more professional and systematic Nasty used his people to find us.

"We can't get out using any of the tunnels we know of."

"True," I said, my little head whirring.

“If Sir Charles and his son were into engineering then where did they do it?”

“Victorian engineering was heavy stuff,” I said, thinking of giant flywheels on steam engines.

Lucy rifled through some of the desk draws. A rough sketch map caught her attention. She opened it up, spreading it out over the fine teak desk. To the north, beyond the lake and the trees that surrounded it the land dropped away sharply. To the west of the house was the ha-ha, from the front of the house a small track left the main drive, traversing the ha-ha and descending down a shallower incline. It stopped at Pennington Halt, where to the north of the platform the main single track railway line curved round towards the head of the valley. It entered a cutting and shortly after disappears into Wadleton Tunnel, a masterpiece of Victorian brickwork. The halt had a second track, used these days just as a passing place for trains travelling in the opposite direction. In Victorian times, the easterly spur off to the quarry was heavily used to transport the famous Wadleton Stone, from which Pennington House was constructed. To the north of the quarry was Wadleton Woods which screened both the valley head to the north and northern edge of the quarry to the east. The east and southern edges of the quarry were surrounded by the fields of Pennington Farm.

I could tell Lucy's mind was absorbing and processing the information within the map. Her head looked up, scanned the row of books on the shelf.

“You have an idea?” I asked, my wings flapping with excitement.

“Yes my little friend,” she said, her attention focused on the books, “If you were doing heavy engineering, and you wanted to keep it secret?” Lucy was very astute.

She grasps another small volume, it shows the accounts for the estate, and indicates that Sir Charles owned the farm and the woods, along with the quarry and Pennington Halt. With some more rummaging, Lucy finds evidence that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert visited Sir Charles, and that this was the main reason the Halt was constructed. A letter revealed that apart from the Royal train crew no one knew of the secret meetings.

“How does this information help us?” I asked curious to where Lucy's thinking was leading us. “How will it help us save Jim, Simon and Lord

Pennington?"

"If the meetings were secret, Sir Charles must have a way down to the railway line. If he and his son were doing engineering it may well be somewhere down there to," she reasoned.

"All the tunnels we know of just lead to parts of the house or the lever room."

"Exactly," she whispered. There was a noise, very faint but both of us had heard it.

There was an echoing voice, Spiky calling out that there was a vertical shaft. Unknown to us at the time, they had interrogated Jim and Simon, soon giving up as they knew little and would say nothing of use, both very annoyed and angry with those who had decimated their flies. Lord Pennington, without food was equally uncooperative, and credit where it's due this bookworm was made of stern stuff where those who wanted information from his mind were concerned. He played the blithering fop to a tee, going off at tangents with totally irrelevant facts, talk he did, so much that they got mightily confused and frustrated. Nasty had discussed the situation with Loudmouth and decided that Lucy was the one to get, even if she knew nothing, torturing her was bound to make the others sing. Spiky was now extra keen, the thought of getting his hands on my friend was turning him into a rabid dog.

Lucy quickly undid the top buttons on her day dress. I did wonder what she was up to until she picked up the gardening book, Solis Incitare, the accounts, and the neatly folded map. She then buttoned it back up whispering to me to check for another exit.

"But we have already looked?" I said.

She gestured to look again, her eyes scanning rapidly. I flew around the room, using my added spectral range to detect differences in panelling. The carpet was thick and solidly stuck down. Lucy was frantically checking the panels, nothing. I zoomed up above the desk, the ceiling was made up of square panels all seeming quite well secured, but there was a tiny chink in one, a human eye would not perceive the difference. Lucy spotted me, we could hear footsteps echoing as shoes made contact with the metal rungs of the shaft's ladder.

Lucy climbed on the chair, onto the desk and pushed up at the panel,

it moved, very slowly, opening, a rope ladder dropped down. She moved cautiously and carefully, keeping quiet, was important. We wanted them to find an empty room, and have no reason to suspect our presence. Ensnared in the roof space above Sir Charles's room, Lucy pulled up the ladder, and gently lowered the panel back in place. A tiny slit of light pierced the darkness, a special tile had a small circle of glass in it. We could see two bolts on the panel, Lucy very smoothly slid them across. It was just in the nick of time.

"Fuck, it's a secret room," shouted Spiky.

"Anything there?" shouted Loudmouth.

"Just a desk, chair and some crappy old books," he shouted back.

"What kind of books?" asked Loudmouth.

"Bloody romantic fiction crap," said Spiky.

"Fucking Penningtons bloody airy fairy book bloody worms," shouted a rather contemptuous Loudmouth. He continued, "Come back down, lets see where this other passage leads."

We knew they would find the sumptuous bedroom, so the east wing would now definitely be out of bounds.

23. Heavy Metal

We waited some considerable time before moving, Lucy wanted to be sure they were out of earshot. The wooden structure that made up the outside of Sir Charles's room was very substantial, from this side you could not even see the back of the panels. Huge thick oak beams, criss crossed and buttressed the sides and top of the small room below. From the roof Lucy climbed down a wooden ladder, her eyes now adjusted to the darkness. I was back on her earring expressing my concern at flying around an attic no doubt full of spiders. The wooden ladder ended on a wooden walkway covered in Hessian mats. It followed roughly parallel to the hidden loft passage, and we soon passed Elle's room. Every so often there was one of the special tiles, its tiny glass window no bigger than an old Victorian penny, gave just enough light. Lucy checked around Elle's room wondering if there was a similar hatch, but there was not. She carefully headed along the walkway, over the east wing it turned south, heading along parallel to the panelling of the hidden corridor, this was similarly very substantially buttressed and reinforced, no doubt to keep people from

entering the roof space.

We had to be very very quiet, we could hear Spiky and Loudmouth, they had discovered the fireplace entrance in the sumptuous bedroom. Both now realising how we had moved around without being detected. They were shouting a collection of expletives and words of amazement at the construction of the house. Even worse they were wondering how many more tunnels there might be, and that Lucy must be hiding in one that they had yet to discover. Loudmouth determining to go back to the attic room and check it for other exits.

Lucy waited for sounds of them leaving, then she looked for a way out. On the panel ahead it there was a sign. It had been place there by Sir Charles's son, it read;

End of simulated airship internal walkway. Dream for the sky, in memory of father, and to commemorated the 2nd of July 1900 and my friend Ferdinand and his great achievement.

Was this more distractions? Lucy explained that Count von Zeppelin had had a huge floating building anchored on lake Bodensee, so she was not surprised that Sir Charles's son would have tried to keep his own work secret. Ferdinand was a contemporary of Sir Charles's son, who had been born to Sir Charles when he was in his late forties, it had taken his wife Lady Rosalind de Barbold some time to give issue. Lucy had it seemed done more reading while I had been sleeping early this morning.

Unfortunately there seemed to be no obvious exits, Lucy wandered back along the walkway lifting up the mats without any success. "Perhaps this was just a simulation of the inside of an airship?" I said, feeling Lucy's despair. We both knew those two men would be making their way back through the tunnel, and to avoid them hearing us we had to find a way out quickly, especially as they might find the roof, hatch. It was bolted but these men would have no qualms about using brute force to check out the roof space.

I suggested that if there is an exit it must be over near the sign, as the wall below the sumptuous bedroom had a tunnel and we knew that there was no connection from it to the roof. She quickly walked back

and surveyed the area, moving off the walkway, taking care to stay on the beams she spotted a very well hidden hatch. The opening lever was disguised as a mousetrap, she opened it to reveal a dark vertical shaft. Lucy climbed in, and closed the hatch, it too had bolts on the inside and she put them in place. We were now in complete darkness, I can tell you I was glad to be ensconced in her earring. Lucy descended slowly one step at a time, she had no idea what state the ladder rungs were in.

Suddenly she froze. There was a massive banging sound, it increased in intensity, louder and louder. The thuds sounded like battering rams against a castle gate. This lasted for some time, then all went silent, we had no idea if they were through to the roof space. Lucy remained stationary for over half an hour, which is a long time in on a fly's time-scale. We then heard very muffled voices, we recognised them, the sounds were on the other side of the wall. Nasty had joined Loudmouth and Spiky in the east wing, they were explaining that there was no way out of the room in the loft, Spiky was extolling the solidly built carpentry, using some profanities to describe the old carpenters workmanship. He was comparing it with modern houses, today's paper thin walls.

If we could hear them there was a chance if Lucy moved that they might hear us. The voices went quiet, more banging ensued. They were testing the walls, it went on for a good five minutes, we heard them conclude that there was nothing in the room next to the sumptuous bedroom and so they moved on to the next.

Lucy whispered, "I wonder if it is possible to close the hatch behind the panel in the hidden loft passage?" We both knew that the panel on the west wing side of the servants quarters was locked solid, but this side was unsecured, if they found the passage they may well try to force a way through into the loft space. I understood what she was thinking, if we needed a way back into the house the loft was our only option, besides we had no idea where the shaft was going to lead us. Lucy reasoned that although there was no entrance into Elle's room Sir Charles may have had a way into the passage.

With great stealth Lucy went back up, opened the hatch and moved back across the beams to the walkway. Moving sideways off onto the

next set of beams she came to the back of the passage panelling and the solid timbers that backed it. At first all looked the same, no signs of an entrance, or way up on top. But there was, it was an ingenious piece of timber, it looked immovable, and had you not seen the wooden peg, you could not have budged it. Imagining a giant Chinese wooden puzzle. Lucy was by now very familiar with Sir Charles's concepts, and soon had the panelling flap down, stepping into the passage. She lost no time in fixing the latch on the east wing passage panel, and then lowering the heavy hinged door that swung down from the ceiling. With the loft space as secure as we could get it, she headed back. Lucy stopped suddenly as she was about to enter back into the loft space. You should understand that apart from the tiny pieces of glass in the tiles there was no other lighting. She carefully removed her shoes and walked softly down the passage into Elle's room, illuminated as it was by the small skylight. Collecting a candle, holder and matches, returned to the passage, closed the panel and went back to the open wall panel, re-entering the loft space. After closing the panel and putting the wooden peg back in place she edged her way across the beams to the shaft, re closed its hatch and stopped for a moment to listen.

We could hear faint sounds as the men were continuing to thump loudly on the walls, trying to find other passages. Lucy began her decent, slowly, imagine the movement of a praying mantis. Each rung of the ladder approached with a slow silent caution. Going down was painfully slow but entirely necessary. Our shaft was cunningly concealed, I neglected to mention its entrance was adjacent to the chimney stack. It followed the chimneys down, the rooms on each floor had a fireplace one above the other. Anyone checking the walls would have guessed it only to be one of the many chimney shafts, very cunning.

The shaft descended much lower than the other, and was far below the basement level. When we finally reached a horizontal surface, Lucy put the candle in the holder and lit it. We were in a tunnel, very grey and damp, the walls were not of brick and plaster, these were rock. The line was not straight, the walls were rough, rock jutting out, the floor at times uneven, and damp. On occasion Lucy had to steady her hand against the sides as her shoes slipped on the wet surface. The passage wound through the rock, on a very slight downward

incline. The flickering candlelight was rather eerie, and with water dripping from the ceiling, at times needed re-igniting. Lucy cursed wishing she had one of the oil lamps from the Lever room. As we went along she whispered to me, being very observant, she noticed that not all of the tunnel was man made. The first bit was, approximately one hundred metres in an easterly direction. It then broke through the side of a chamber and we were in a natural cave system. The small man made passage was almost comfortable, now we were into an open space, Lucy could not see much on either side, occasionally a lump of rock would leap out of the darkness as the light of the candle reached it.

Lucy's foot clanked as she made contact with a wrought iron walkway. She edged along, it took us through a gap in the rock, she had to bend low, following through a small round man made tunnel, it opened out again into another cavern. If you want a fly's opinion I would much rather have been in the dry warm earth tunnels made by Fn8's ant friends. Lucy was explaining to me how wonderful it was when she came upon some colourful mineral deposit, or a large stalagmite standing up like a giant ant hill. She got very excited at one point upon seeing a vast number of straw stalactites hanging like hundreds of butterfly proboscises probing for nectar.

After many tunnels and caverns later we came to a door. A locked door! Lucy ever optimistic, reasoned that as the panels were unbolted at the house side, someone must have come through this way. Upon examining the lock it was not like any others we had seen, so she looked around for a key. Much to my surprise she found one, hidden under a rock fragment amongst many scattered near what once was a human working. Her discovery was not before time, the damp and cold was not much to my liking even if I was sitting near a warm ear of a hot blooded human female.

When she opened the door we were both amazed, it was another cavern, but one filled with machinery. Lucy's attention to detail was comforting, she first locked the door behind us before proceeding to look around. There were a series of metal gratings covering the floor, in one corner a brick wall with a door. The door was open, we went in, finding a small office. It was like going back in time, slide rules, dividers, pencils, tools all left on desks and benches undisturbed for

decades. Lucy moved back into the cavern, she was looking for another exit.

At the far end of this big cave was a large metal door surrounded by some very solid stone walls. This door was locked, and Lucy again looked around for a key, this time she found one hidden in an old tool box, near the door.

“Oil,” I said, in an almost unintelligible wing vibration.

“Are you cold little friend?” she asked concerned for my well being.

“Yes,” I fluttered.

“Perhaps we can get into the sunlight. Did you say oil?” she asked.

I just buzzed my wings in reply. Inside caves the temperature remains very constant throughout the year. For humans this can be quite acceptable, but for us insects it sends us into a state of torpor.

I was with one smart woman, she realised that this big metal door might creak like hell, and with the echo chamber behind us could well act like a loud hailer, saying, “Come and get us.” There were no shortage of oil cans, and with a gentle pouring of oil over the large hinges, she waited. It took me a while to figure out why. Of course you will realise it was to let the oil seep down into the mechanism.

When the door finally opened it did so with barely a murmur. Beyond was another tunnel, large and with daylight at the far end. Lucy proceeded with caution, we had no idea if Nasty and his cronies knew of this facility. The entrance was bared by iron bars and within these and iron bar gate, beyond this were a large number of bushes. The whole area was overgrown, nature reclaiming the old quarry into which we were looking. Lucy could just see part of a dilapidated roof, it was the corner of the old Quarry Halt, where in times past the stone had been loaded onto the wagons.

“Are you going to look for a key and go into the quarry?” I asked feeling a bit warmer and hoping to get the sun's rays on my abdomen.

“I shall try the key, but we won't go out there just in case,” she said, sensing my need for a warm dry atmosphere. The key for the big door did indeed fit this lock, and after testing she headed back to the cavern.

“Are you going to oil it?” I asked.

“No, it would be too obvious,” she said, her mind was very on the ball. She locked the big metal door, went to the little office, found and oil

lamp and lit it. I flew down from the earring and sat basking in the light and warmth on the old wooden bench. She pulled up an old chair, sat in it and smiled. Again we both felt safe, if a bit hungry, outside was a mass of machinery, some very heavy metal!

This office was very curious, one wall was stone, like a partition across a recess. The desk was against the stone wall, as were all the shelves. On the other side of the door were some big cabinets, the rest of the walls were natural stone, partly excavated, mostly the work of water thousands of years before our time. It was very dry, no doubt chosen for this reason, rather odd because it had no windows. Lucy wondered if this was for safety, if they were testing some new piece of machinery.

Both of us now needed time to think, we had escaped the house, and for the time being were away from the villains, but our friends were captive, and the baddies had the upper hand. I did think Sir Charles and his son were rather clever, if they had any machinery delivered it could have come by train. Those delivering it would have assumed it was destined for quarrying purposes, unaware of the engineering experiments deep within the hillside. Anyone hearing the machines would have assumed it to be quarry work.

Have you have ever bought some new gadget, not bothered with the instructions and looked at the controls and wondered just how it all operates? Well that was us, we had taken an hour or so to rest and think, now I was back in Lucy's earring and we were wandering around the cavern examining the machines. The metal was mostly in good condition, castings painted and most other items well greased or oiled. Near the big metal door was a large steam engine, pipes venting through the stone wall, thus avoiding smoked engineers.

The other machines all seemed to draw their power via chain drives from this beast. Gantries overhead with cogs and levers used to activate the transmission to each of the devices. The question was, could any of these giant size gadgets help us? None the wiser we retired back to the office, Lucy searched the office, uncovering copious diagrams, blueprints, and various note books, many listing test results. Lucy looked through the lists of numbers, then at the various scribbled notes. There were a series of very neatly written books, it was Elle's

work. Documented instructions and notes on the use of the machines, Lucy armed with these and the oil lamp went back into the main cavern.

On the other side of the metal door was a huge store of coal, opposite was the steam engine's fire box. The whole affair was well thought out, behind the engine's boiler was a large reservoir of water, fed from a channelled stream that ran through the cave, the overflow trickling down and out through a grating low down in the stone wall that blocked the cave entrance. Above it was a metal hatch, bolted shut it was about one metre square, no doubt three feet as the men had worked in the days of imperial. The hatch was on pulleys and would slide vertically up, on our side was a conveyor belt that travelled behind the steam engine and fed its load to the next machine. A large affair with an open gaping mouth, metal plates surrounded it, various rods with knurled nuts for adjusting the mechanisms, protruded at intervals. Upon one surface was a brass plate which Lucy wiped with an oily cloth that lay on a tray, it read, Constructed C Pennington 1862. At the other end were two conveyors, one large, protruded from the side of the machine, adjacent to two rail tracks buried in the ground. A smaller conveyor went up high and over the path we had entered by. The small doorway beyond looked ghostly in the lamp light. This next machine had a similar brass plate C Pennington, 1864 – Stone Crusher. The conveyors load emptied high above into a metal funnel. Low down again near the rails, what looked like a wheel on its side about a metre from the rock floor. It was large and at regular intervals had a pair of hooks. Lucy reasoned that maybe sacks could be fitted and moved in through a slot, into the machine where they were filled and then extracted full of pulverised rock. There was a slot on the other side of the wheel where the full bags could exit, and a lever that may have opened a hatch that filled the bags.

The third machine along was much different, it read Harold Pennington 1883. Lucy checked the instruction book for this one, all that linked it was the chain power drive from the steam engine. It was Sir Charles's son's work, a fine construction, much red and green painted castings, towering arms and rods. A stone block would be placed inside and be of known dimensions, possibly the block may have been created by the 1862 machine. Then putting a small wooden sculpture into a repository, the machine would create a scaled up stone sculpture of

great quality and within a very short time frame, it was much faster than any mason could have achieved. Lucy explained that Sir Charles had supplied building stone but even with his mechanisation he had trouble competing with larger quarries and cheap imports. His son had come up with the notion of adding value by producing exquisite statues. In our time a pair of Pennington Lions would fetch a small fortune.

On the opposite side of the path along with the coal store and office are a few small machines, this was Harold's experimental area. The Penningtons, had income from the farm, the woods, and statue manufacturing. Sir Charles had come from a relatively modest background, his title obtained because of his great services to Victoria and Albert. It was they who bestowed upon him Wadleton Hall and its surrounding estates. This is a whole other story, for now we must concentrate on the problem at hand.

Lucy is looking bemused at the array of equipment wondering what it may do, Elle's notes do not cover these contraptions.

"I have no idea what these do little friend," she said, her head turning to look back at the steam engine. She wanders along the path, the machines illuminated by the flickering oil lamp. Placing the light on a ledge near the pool of water she announced, "I'm going to have a dip, I smell awful. You had better jump off little one."

"You smell wonderful," I exclaimed, revelling in the sweaty odour. I had to take care where I alighting, a blob of oil, or a spiders web and I was a goner. Sat on a piece of wood attached to the steam engine I could see the pool, the clear water shimmering in the glow of the lamp.

Lucy unbuttoned her top, removing the books and map, starting a pile of clothes stacked neatly on a slab of rock. Her hands danced over the corset laces, easing the back apart, she then unclipped the front hooks. Removing her undergarments, placing the big billowing bloomers and fine chemise on the pile. She was soon naked, so keen was she to take a dip. You humans are very strange, covering your bodies, and water, how can you enjoy water? Being so clean it's not natural. Humans are so strange, Lucy walked along the path and up some rough hewn steps to the side of the pool. She kneels down near the waters edge, leans over, those two large dangly things wobble around as one hand holds rock near the edge, the other reaching out

to touch the water. She makes a sound, indicating the water is cold. Now that is so silly any fly could tell a human that water will be cold. It's Britain, all unheated water is cold, how can the human mind be so amazing to create machines and understand the world yet at the same time seem so primitive?

Ok I know you want me to tell you what happens next, quite why I have no idea, bathing is such a disgusting habit. She is now sitting on her posterior, her legs on the dry side, putting her arms behind her back her hands in contact with the rock. She swings her legs around, lowering them down into the pool. I see her shiver, she stands up in the water, her feet touching the bottom. Now she is walking through the water, her body easing down into the water, her mouth vocalising a strange primitive almost babyish sound, as she contends with the cold. Cold and wet, how horrible. The water is not particularly deep but quite extensive, it's a large tear-drop shape extending some way behind the massive steam engine. Lucy swims quietly around, rolling onto her back, humans are so wobbly, those two large things on her chest are floating around to either side of her thorax.

While she swims my little fly brain drifts. Apart from making an army of Limestone Warriors it seems we are no further forward. I wonder about humans, how some of you like holes, caves, tunnels, secluded rooms, secret doors all that sort of stuff. Maybe it's your genes, that must be it, you are after all mammals descended from tiny mouse like creatures that survived by hiding in holes. Rabbits, voles, badgers, foxes, and many other mammals still do seek subterranean refuge. Oh for the Triassic period, mammals were much simpler then, no silly humans. I began thinking on our predicament, had this been some fictional situation we would have found some magic lure hidden in the cave, captured all the evil men and hey presto.

Some time later Lucy was refreshed from her aquatic spell and we proceeded to re-inspect the other machines. It was quite depressingly ordinary. Several lathes, a grinding wheel, powered saw, milling machine, a couple of pillar drills and assorted hand tools laying on two rather sturdy benches. In one corner we found a giant press, and a box of assorted rivets. There were a good collection of assorted cabinets, draws full of screws bolts, brackets and nuts, many had succumbed to a fine coating of rust. Most other tools were neatly

arranged, hanging on the outside wall of the office, many of these had also given in to the damp conditions, not helped by the weak carbonic acid that in places dripped from the ceiling.

Lucy retired to the small room, it was at least dry.

“Well little friend, we have one map of the estate, a book that told us where to find Harold's discovery, and another with a preamble about its function but no detail. We also know Elle was more than just Sir Charles's mistress,” she said, staring at the brick wall in the dim lamp light.

“S E Larch?” I buzzed in her ear.

“A real person, pseudonym, anagram or?” She offered in reply.

“A location?” I said, as my fly neurons searched for other alternatives. I think humans call this lateral thinking.

“Like a larch tree in the south east of the estate?”

“Maybe, maybe Sir Charles used it as a pseudonym when writing to Elle when away,” I said, thinking on Lucy's ideas.

“But it is also the author of the gardening book,” she said, continuing, “I wish your friends were still around, I wish we knew what was happening up at the house.”

“Yes, it is amazing how much difference information makes. Harold's contraption is just a piece of hot junk metal without information,” I said, hoping that humans reading this might get the point, but I doubt it, you seem to take so much for granted.

“The brawl.”

“What little friend?” said Lucy, puzzled by my last statement.

“Larch in Latin is Larix, La in French is The and Rix is brawl,” I reply having no idea why.

Lucy sat with a perplexed frown. “Unusually for a conifer they loose their needles in winter.”

“Do they? I must say I don't get out much in winter, too cold for us flies.”

She chuckled, then after a brief pause grabs the map.

“Wadleton Woods?”

“Might be a few Larch in there, but to what end?”

“It is near the quarry,” she said pointing out the obvious.

“Apart from trees what could you hide in a wood that would not be easily found? Assuming this is all of great importance and the quarry workings would be known to most people around these parts, making it less than ideal.”

“Also to get there would mean leaving this cavern, climbing up a hillside.”

“Leaving an opened gate as evidence, disturbing the bushes and exposing you to potential onlookers up at the house,” I said, understanding very well that this might be a very dangerous wild goose chase. Do you know I have never tasted their droppings, the thought has my proboscis all excited.

“Laboratory, little friend if Harold was into playing with materials?”

“He would need a laboratory,” I concluded, “This is no more than a mechanical workshop.”

“I could do with some food,” said Lucy, as her stomach grumbled. Such an involuntary sound could be most revealing should we be in hiding.

“I could go, do a reconnaissance mission, then if there is something you could take a look,” I said, feeling pleased with the suggestion, and secretly keen to be in dry air, basking in hot sunshine.

“No little friend, I don't want to loose you,” said Lucy, sadness in her voice. I was quite touched by her sentiment.

“I understand, believe me, but if we don't do something those agents will get us too and then they'll finish the job, we will go the way of the Central Fly Commands. We will be phased out completely.” I buzzed my wings firm and resolute.

“Couldn't we escape, disappear down the railway tunnel, get help?” she half asked.

“Yes, but do you think the authorities would take a woman with a fly in her ear seriously. Who is heading the investigation into Lord Pennington's disappearance. We could well end up being taken to Nasty or someone connected with his organisation,” I reasoned.

Lucy stared into space, she knew her little fly friend was right. The worst thing about someone leaving you to do something dangerous, is the wait. Not knowing when or if they will come back. The world for a fly is much more dangerous than for a human. In Britain the greatest threat to human life are humans. Flies have to face a gauntlet of predators and hazards.

I suggested leaving open the metal door, it is not visible from the outer gate. Keyholes, as large as the one in this door might seem ideal to fly through, but it's the kind of crevice one of those cunning spiders would occupy. Later Lucy would prepare a paper tube and place it between the lock faces, allowing a safe crawling passage for use on

my return.

24. Scary

The sun was high in the sky as I sat on one of the reinforcing horizontal flat slats that secured the bars around the quarry cave entrance. Because the entrance was well hidden and faced north there were no direct rays, but the air was warm and pleasant. Across the rubble strewn grey expanse of the quarry floor were shrubs and plants. Copious nettles and gorse, these also clung in patches to the steep quarry sides. Having gone through the preflight checks, we had been trained well, I buzzed my little wings and was off across the unknown territory. Fly too low and you became food for spiders and insects, too high and birds would swoop through the air swallowing any tasty morsel that flew in their path. The sun on my abdomen I was warming nicely, and it was needed. Full throttle and my wings were powering me up the quarry face, helped by a nice thermal updraught. This might seem like a bonus, but predators know of this too and so will be waiting for the insects such as myself to appear in abundance at the top of the ridge. As I saw the tops of the trees, I knew I was near the top, zigzagging and keeping in around the bushes I headed up into the forest. The scent of pine, warmed by the sun, hit my senses.

I was caught off guard by the powerful odour. On the approach to the tree line I was in panic, a wasp swooped down on me, no doubt it had been sitting in a tree above, waiting for such an opportunity. I banked left, the creature hurtled past, but it was not giving up, swirling around it came in from behind. I beat my wings furiously, ducking and diving, low over the forest floor. Not having eaten for a while my strength was failing, landing was no option, the wasp would get me for sure. Banking right, climbing, banking left, diving, skimming tree bark, the wasp was still closing. Now only centimetres away, I realised I was going to fail Lucy, the poor lady was now going to be on her own.

Suddenly something flew past me at a rate of knots, almost colliding, imagine the Red Arrows when the two planes fly towards each other.

From the corner of my compounds I could not believe my eyes. It was a great thrill and joy to see Firefly with Fn8 engaging the enemy. The

little ant was hanging on for dear life, as Firefly took evasive manoeuvres to avoid the wasp getting its big jaws into his carapace. Meanwhile Fn8 was squirting copious amounts of formic acid into the Wasp's face. It reeled back and flew off, rather erratically, no doubt disturbed by the accurate gunnery of my little friend. I flew back to greet them, "Wow guys, thanks, you saved my antenna. Great shooting Fn8, and what flying, Firefly."

My explosion of babbling thanks was at first greeted with happiness at the reunion of old friends. Firefly, whom I had know for a long time was the first to return to a very serious and concerned tone.

"It's Nadia, follow us quickly little friend," said Firefly, taking off at frantic pace with which I had difficulty maintaining. Nadia's name gave me an extra boost, and we were soon all huddled in a crevice high up in a nearby tree. She was hanging on but only just.

"She's been waiting for you," said Fn8 in a quiet whisper.

Nadia was on her last legs.

"Don't get to close, I don't know if the stuff that's in me will affect you," she said, her proboscis sullen and droopy. Her wings twitched, legs similarly.

"The others?" she asked, struggling.

"Simon, Jim and Lord Pennington are all held prisoner."

"Lucy?" she asked, struggling to communicate.

"I'm trying to help her find Sir Charles's son's laboratory."

"Good," said Nadia, her curves no longer sexy, she looked wretched.

"We'll get them, they won't get away with doing this to you," I said to Nadia, fury welling up inside my thorax.

"Perhaps we can find a cure," I continued, ever hopeful, unable to contemplate the unbearable thought of losing Nadia.

She reached a leg out to touch one of mine.

"My hero," was all she could manage her head dropped and her body limp. Firefly and Fn8 huddled around me providing well needed support, I was terribly sad and exhausted.

"If that lab is accessible via this woods we'll find it," said Fn8, with much encouragement.

"They won't beat us, friend," said Firefly, "You look hungry old chap, lets go get you some eats, then it's payback time."

We left poor Nadia's body, there was nothing else we could do. Flying down from the tree alert for danger we scouted out some suitable food. After seeing my beloved die I did not feel like eating, but the

others pressed home the fact that I must keep my strength up if we are to avenge her.

The woods are massive, well they are if you measure millimetres in length. I had suggested we fly around but Fn8 who was now fully conversant in Wood Ant linguistics, decided to ask. Some particularly amiable ants, after hearing my story of Nadia and the bad humans who had killed her were rather keen to oblige. They sent out scouts to all the colonies within the woods, most had been started by relatives of the queen and so proved cooperative. It took a while, but waiting gave us chance to rest and plan. The news that came back proved negative, the colonies all reported no unusual human constructions. In fact the woods were very natural, apart from an old rusting trailer down a track there were no other human artefacts.

“We need to find some food for Lucy,” I said, knowing she was our main hope for redressing the balance.

“I can carry a lot, but I think raiding a pub for a bun might be pushing it!” said Firefly in good humour.

“We ants keep aphids like humans keep Cows, they have such sweet nectar,” said Fn8, dreaming of his colony.

“Genius,” I said, making Fn8's antenna go all excited.

“Am I?” he asked.

“Honey, humans love honey and it's full of energy just what Lucy needs.”

“Bee's are a bit friendlier than wasps but do you think they will just hand over honey?” said a somewhat sceptical Firefly.

“We can ask,” said Fn8, happy that his idea might be useful. His Wood Ant friends indicated that there was a swarm of wild bees on a tree not far from our location, so off we flew.

It was a scary sight I can tell you, we made our initial contact with a worker leaving to find flowers. I explained again Nadia's demise, and how Lucy our human friend would try and help us fight back. Bee workers are all female, and this touched a chord, she flew back with us to see the queen. The buzz from the colony became a roar, we could not communicate. Had we not been so desperate I think we would have come up with another plan. Deep within the mass of bodies was the giant queen, she eyed us with suspicion. Seeing three insects working together was unheard of and intrigued her. Quietening the

others she pressed us for more and more detail. She was well aware that her tamer cousins had for human centuries helped feed mankind, but unaware of the role the black ants played checking food and even more stunned at the concept of flies monitoring humans to help other humans stop bad things happening. Surrounded as she was by uncountable numbers of bees she could imagine the terror of the mass extermination and was quite unable to comprehend why humans would be so evil. Some of her retinue were so incensed they volunteered to sting the bad humans. We were both impressed and thankful for the offer but explained that this was unlikely to kill the humans and may lead to them coming after the queen's colony. You see if a bee stings it can't retract the sting and leaves it in the victim, its body damaged it then dies.

The queen asked if we knew a good place for her colony, I wondered if the old building at the end of the quarry railway might do the job, the old platform was very sunny and the area surrounded by gorse bushes. She shuffled around for a while, taking advice from those close to her, then she announce her intentions. It was absolutely amazing, no wasp was going to bother us, Firefly and I flew alongside the queen with her retinue, we were enclosed by the swarm. I thought of old Wing Co, and our tiny six fly squadrons, this was overwhelming, and the noise. We swooped down into the quarry, making a bee line for the building. The well built Victorian construction was still in good condition, the red bricks weathered, and the wooden window frames rotten, some of the glass broken, but the roof was secure. In the end high up was a small loft window, the area had been used for storage and this provided light for humans. This window had a crack and where the putty had fallen away a triangle of glass was missing. The bee's ventured in and her majesty alighted on a suitable roof timber.

She was pleased, usually they avoided human habitation, unused, this was ideal. We told her of the formal gardens surrounding the house to the south, full of flowers, describing Lord Pennington and his love of horticulture. This delighted her further, and she promised to do two things. The bees would only cover outdoors, but where they spotted agents, the information would be kept, so we only had to come to the colony for updates. She would also send a large number of bees with us, loaded with honey.

When I flew back through the paper tube in the metal door's lock the darkness hit me. I had to hover for a moment, adjusting my compounds to the dim light that flickered from Lucy's oil lamp. The door of the office was open and the light bathed the desk on which it sat. In the cavern all else was grey, black and shadows, the giant machines no more than ghosts. Lucy was sleeping, I buzzed in her ear and sat back in the earring.

"Is that you?" she asked, her voice filled with hope.

"Yes," I said, and I have brought some friends, hold out your hands, and don't be afraid.

Firefly his tail glowing had followed me in. He had to wait a while for all the workers to assemble behind his tail light, as they came one by one through the paper tube. Then leading the bees he brought them into the office. One by one they dropped onto Lucy's hands. She was staring in amazement, as each left a tiny globule of honey, then alighted on the desk. In no time a big pile of sticky gooey honey had risen, like a golden pyramid. Fn8 jumped off Firefly and onto the desk, his eyes transfixed by the bees activity. When the last had finished, Firefly hovered, and they rose as one. It was a magnificent sight, hundreds maybe thousands of bees just lifting off in a massive formation. Lucy thanked them, I translated and they all did a honour flight around her head, then disappeared behind Firefly. While he took them back to the door, Lucy put the honey in one hand, and with her delicate fingers, put a blob on the desk for Fn8, Firefly and myself.

Fn8 was like a drunk in a barrel of beer. When Firefly returned, tired he was a little aggravated by Fn8's gusto at consumption. He need not have been, there was far more than any of us could eat. Lucy was tucking in to her sticky hand full, heaping praise on us for thinking of her, and extolling the virtues of pure wild honey.

You can imagine three little insects tired with full tummies and Lucy all buzzing with honey. We slept and she waited. Some time later we woke from our slumber. Lucy was pleased that we were back together and curious about the events down in the Lever room.

"Where is Nadia and the others?" asked Lucy.

"We were quite taken by surprise," said Fn8, "Firefly was down in the sluice room providing extra illumination for flies arriving with messages from Jim in the Lever room. Nadia was with us, as was Simon. Well Brewster the youngster comes flying down the tunnel very erratically,

with a chemical tailwind. "Get out, get out," he shouts, and drops to the ground, feet in the air. I jump up onto Firefly and with Nadia following his tail light we go down into the drainage tunnel. They must have pumped huge quantities of fly spray into the complex because we could sense it behind us. We entered the 'Well that isn't' and began our ascent, Firefly noticed Nadia below struggling. He was so brave, flew back down, grabbed her in his feet and powered up to the surface. It was a struggle for him, what with me on top and her below. I offered to get off, but he said if we were attacked he would need his gunner. There was a strong breeze, caught us and blew us out over the lake at first, then over fields, across the quarry, and into the woods."

"Wow," said Lucy, "Firefly you did do well," She paused for thought, "So why did the chemicals not affect Firefly and Fn8?"

"Maybe it's some very specific agent?" I said, knowing many of the nasty chemicals, you have to, it's part of the basic fly training.

25. Air Offensive

All those days ago when the swallows had attacked, poor old Wing Co had struggled to survive, with no base or Blue Bottle rescue teams he was stuck in hostile territory. Wing Co was not one to give in easily, over many days flying recovery sorties he had located three of the squadron members. Without Fn8 to parley with the ants they had taken to the air, flying short hops during times of the day less prone to bird and insect predation.

Pennington Farm situated behind a hill out of sight of the house was now deserted. The only road in was via Pennington House, with Lord Pennington missing the whole area had been sealed off by the police. The farm tenants were moved to temporary accommodation much to their dismay. Wing Co had arrived to an empty farm, ideal as a base for operations. It had all a fly could need, including flies. Wing Co was in no mood to let his Fly Command Squadrons die and upon arrival, immediately began recruiting. Leaving the three other flies to drill the new intake, Wing Co flew a dangerous lone sortie to the house.

When he arrived he found Simon, Jim and Lord Pennington looking rather dishevelled, bound and beaten, laying in the confines of the

wine cellar. It was just after the gas attack, Jim and Lord Pennington were in no state to talk. Simon was little better, with a guard outside the door, he was only able to whisper the bare facts to Wing Co. "Look old chap, I'm rebuilding my Squadrons but, we have only just arrived, it will be days before we are operational and can attempt a rescue," said Wing Co, determined to avenge the destruction of Simon's Squadrons.

Simon was a little surprised by these words. Flies were trained to listen, he knew they were resourceful and had great respect for them, but "Rescue?" he thought, how? Even with a full complement of twenty-four flies, up against twenty humans!

Wing Co escaped the house via gaps under doors, noting all the sticky fly papers and blue lamps, thinking what kind of evil humans would put up such lures. An untrained fly would have given in to temptation, but not Wing Co, with each human carrying fly spray he determined to attack them in the open. A war of attrition, but how? Wing Co could not think about this until arrival back at base, he needed all his wits to negotiate the many hazards along his flight path.

When the buzz got around about the massacre he thought it would frighten the recruits away, but far from it, he had to open up a second training camp. Wing Co still had a problem, it's true flies can spread diseases, but with all the traps in the house there was no way of getting to the food. He also considered that any disease might finish off Jim and Lord Pennington, both of whom appeared drained by their ordeal. At the end of a days training he called a meeting, outlining his plan to pick off any agent in the grounds one by one. The problem was how?

"So lads, any insects out there who can help us?"

One little fellow spoke up. "There is a very stagnant pool with some hungry mosquitoes in it, they are upset because the farmers gone and all the livestock."

"Good fly," said Wing Co, full of praise "So if we could guide them in and provide a distraction while the ladies drink some blood."

"Damn, dangerous," said one of Wing Co's old crew. He was right, human hands flapping around, they can also slap down hard. The flies and their allies would be risking their lives.

With some voting on it, all the flies agreed that if the mosquitoes were willing then they should give it a go.

While the three other flies continued training, Wing Co and five volunteers flew a sortie to the stagnant pool. They did well, with Wing Co's experience and the local knowledge of the others, they made it. The fly who had suggested the idea, found the ladies who were looking rather upset, wild animals were not such an easy feed. When the flies put the idea to them they were most eager, humans were hazardous, but no more so than the hind leg of a rabbit in full swipe.

Wing Co, first flew back with his extra mosquito squadron to the farm house. In the relative safety he was able to go through all the fine detail. They flew practice runs around the kitchen, using the upright vacuum cleaner as a suitable substitute for a human target. Late afternoon, and he was happy with their state of readiness, the ladies keen for blood learnt fast. Wing Co's squadron took off first, flying over the kitchen table, listening to the distinctive high pitched buzz of those lovely mosquitoes. With both Squadrons airborne they left via the old extractor fan vent in the kitchen wall, several broken flaps making for easy passage. They arrived in the grounds of Pennington House near evening, the summer air warm, Wing Co flying high above the mosquitoes spotted a lone agent patrolling near the formal gardens.

He took his flies down low, and signalled to the mosquito squadron to follow. Using the hedges for cover they came in around behind the man when he was looking east, the setting sun behind them in the west. Wing Co peeled off with the flies, buzzing around the man's head. The agent began waving his arms around, this was the signal for the ladies to begin their runs. The mosquito formation formed a line, each lady following the next, slamming into the man's neck, extracting blood, and before he could hit, leaving, Wing Co's flies still taking the brunt of the man's fury. His head spun around, eyes blinded by the low sun, the ladies continued, one coming in too near his arm was smashed out of the air. She plummeted, wings crumpled, crashing down onto a stone paving slab. The others kept coming, one of the flies exhausted by the furious activity did not pull up in time, the man's hands clapped together squashing him. Two ladies sensing the flies were taking a beating, went in together, the man grimaced in pain as the bites found their mark. Wing Co was getting worried and signalled he was returning to base, all the mosquitoes had drunk so, they were not unhappy to do so. At a safe distance, Wing Co for a

moment, hovered, five flies and nine mosquitoes looked back, one fly lost and two mosquitoes. The man was scratching himself something silly, red welts bulging on his neck. He turned and almost ran back to the house, his hands still tending his neck.

On arrival back at the farm house Wing Co and his squadrons were given a hero's welcome. The ladies full of blood, did not linger they wanted to get back to the pool, but suggested they and their relatives would be up for more runs. Wing Co knew this was no more than an irritation for the humans, but it was a massive boost to the morale of his flies.

Wing Co now planned to fly two squadrons of flies and two of mosquitoes the following evening. He knew it would not be long before the humans instigated countermeasures. The afternoon when Lucy was receiving her honey, Wing Co was giving in to pressure. His reputation had spread, and no fly wanted to stay behind, mosquitoes were arriving en-mass. Wing Co split the experienced fliers into the green squadrons, making them leaders.

It was a magnificent sight, six squadrons of flies, and six massive mosquito squadrons, each paired with flies. Nasty intent on finding Lucy had sent men to the west down the track to Pennington Halt, and others to the area around the lake. Leaving four squadron pairs to tackle the men at the lake, Wing Co and one of his old crew now also leading a squadron guided two mosquito squadrons to attack the two men walking down to the old railway platform. Wing Co went in first, changing the initial target to the men's hands, both carrying sinister cans. The mosquitoes caught on fast, a section breaking for the veins in the back of the hands, two insect spray cans went rolling down the track, wobbling around and disappearing into the undergrowth.

The men were now frantic, arms flaying, the mosquitoes came in in waves, hands, necks. The flies were buzzing low over the faces, stumbling, Wing Co's agent, with flies around his eyes, tripped and fell. The other man turned to look at his colleague, both were at screaming pitch, swearing like troupers. When Wing Co withdrew, he was surprised at how light their losses were. The sheer weight of mosquito numbers and his careful initial target selection had overwhelmed the men.

As the sun began setting it was now a race for base. His two fly and two mosquito squadrons were the first back which surprised him, as they had been operating furthest from base. The next squadron back was mostly intact, it was led by the youngster who had suggested the mosquitoes, he had tried to think like his hero, Wing Co, and rather successfully pulled off an attack, unfortunately he was not very adept at navigation. His chums had rather pulled his legs about this. Some time later, another squadron pair arrived, the mosquitoes, did not stop apart from thanking Wing Co. The leader having successfully attacked one man, had gone in for a second, he had lost two flies but caused the agents significant distress.

It was a considerable time later when the remnants of the last two squadron pairs flew in, leaderless, and exhausted. They had misjudged the attack, and got caught in the crossfire as each man sprayed the other. The mosquitoes had had quiet a feast, as the men, eyes stinging from the spray stood smarting. The flies however had struggled back, many as the effects of the insecticide took effect, either ditched in the lake, crashed into trees or crash landed in fields on the way back. Of the twelve that had flown out, only three made it back. Wing Co, realised the effects on the seven men would be short lived and that he needed to think up another strategy. He knew that Nasty was smart enough to work out this was no ordinary mosquito frenzy. In two nights eight men had suffered attacks, this was a good start.

26. Knowledge is Power

In a cave there is no day or night, Lucy was rested and refreshed by the honey. So we all climbed aboard the earring while she looked around for clues. We were making a big assumption, Harold had a lab! We knew the house and all its hidden places, the tunnels and caves that connected the house to the cavern had revealed no other exits, so we were basically stuck for ideas. Lucy, used to working with papers, was going through every scrap of information she could find.

Lucy opened up the heavy cabinet next to the desk, it was hand crafted, melded into the rock face behind. Her hands feeling around on

the inside, click, then the whole assembly moved, upward, held on an intricate counterbalanced metal frame. We wondered why it did not sit on rails and pull forward. Lucy pointed out the four solid fixing lugs in the rock below. If a human had tried to move it they were faced with a heavy immovable object. Lifting with the counterweight inactive would be impossible. Behind was a very small tunnel entrance, cramped by the two metal arms that supported the cabinet, and further behind the rest of the mechanism. Lucy crawled in, hampered somewhat by the day dress. Why keep it on, I hear you ask? Well take it from a fly it was cold down in those caverns. She carefully closed the entrance and proceeded down a short length of dug tunnel. Meanwhile unknown to us, the enemy was about to be engaged.

Wing Co's next plan was simple, he did not like the idea of entering the house, but he knew that in the summer heat the agents would leave windows open. The Tick Commando raid, or Operation Big Bite was taking shape in his head. He needed ticks and ideally a few fireflies as this was going to be a night operation. Each fly would carry a tick to its designated target. The first mission was to fly low through the surrounding grasslands. Without the constant munching of Pennington Farm's herds the fields were becoming very overgrown. Hanging on blades of grass awaiting unsuspecting animals were *Ixodes ricinus*. At the suggestion of the flies they jumped at the chance. Wing Co had felt uneasy about employing them, some carry *Borrelia burgdorferi*. This is a particularly nasty bacteria which if left untreated can cause arthritis, heart and nerve diseases. Wearing shorts? Bare flesh may seem cool, but beware, you may not even know you've been bitten, Lyme Disease is not that common but best avoided.

One by one each fly returned to base carrying a tiny tick, no bigger than a human freckle. By lunchtime Wing Co was concerned, of the thirty flies who left, only twenty three returned. He realised sorties in the countryside were more hazardous than town missions. There was no time to loose, carrying the ticks would be tiring, his flies would need to make an early start. The flight to the house was difficult, Wing Co making several stops to rest, his fliers concerned that with the ticks they were less manoeuvrable. Two had been taken by predators, leaving Wing Co with only twenty-one files. Near the house hidden on garden furniture, he left his flies and took a look in the fading light. Not all the bedroom windows were open, so Wing Co decided to attack

only those that were. With only four squadrons he split his own to cover the five windows. They waited many hours to be sure the men were sleeping.

Flying in moonlight, Wing Co and his two friends came in hard on the window ledge, with a tick between two legs the undercarriage operability was hampered. A nice gap under the sash window allowed the three flies to clamber over the frame and into the room. A man slept, snoring, Wing Co left his tick, this is probably where the saying "Wait a tick" comes from. He flew low over the man, checking that it was none of our people, Wing Co paid keen attention to detail like this. You may rest assured he had described the three captives to our squadrons, ensuring they did not succumb to friendly fire!

Wing Co, senses alert for nocturnal spiders, zoomed back to the window sill. He picks up his tick and the three flies lift off, landing the ticks on areas of exposed shoulder. These little fellows loved moist areas such as armpits and the scrotum. The flies returned to the window, it was the safest location, and easy to find in the dark. Three ticks crawled over the sleeping giant, negotiating hairs as a boat might push through a reed bed. Hot sweaty armpit located they began their surgical strike. They were startled by an anguished scream followed by swearing from the room next door. Wing Co sensing the attack was rumbled, moved fast, flying in across the thin sheet that covered their man, he landed signalling to the ticks to pull out. They were not keen, gluttonously gorging, he and the other flies reinforced the need, mentioning chemicals. The ticks with abdomens gigantically expanded many times greater than their bodies struggled back to Wing Co, who did not have their skill at walking undetected on human skin. Each fly grasped a tick, this is where the saying, "Hang on a tick" comes from. It was a struggle to get airborne, the flies had to almost crash land on the window ledge, resting for several moments. Wing Co watched in the moonlight, his forces were heading back, flies struggling, almost nose diving from the windows. When he took off with his team it was no different, the weight of the blood filled ticks was incredible. Wing Co, launched out from the ledge in formation but the loads were pulling them down. He and the others began diving at a speed they had never experienced before, trying to pull up Wing Co was buffeted by the night air, his little wings frantically trying to stabilize. His head wobbling around as the air tore past, the strain on his body was

immense, he felt every joint almost pulled from its socket. He saw, in a blurred haze one of his two pals pull up regaining control, to his left the other tried to let go of the tick, but it was having non of it, the two piled into a garden statue. The ticks abdomen rupturing splattering blood over Venus's heart, as though someone had just shot her. Wing Co banked right pulling up just missing an ornamental wall, joined by his colleague and quite a number of other flies they landed on an old wooden seat. With half the flies present, Wing Co called an urgent meeting. The ticks were demanding to be taken back to the fields where they lived, his flies were not going to make it that far back with such an unaerodynamic heavy load. Imagine a single engined light aircraft trying to take off with petrol tanker slung underneath!

They needed some heavy lifting gear, Wing Co sent out some of his flies, partly to find stragglers and also to look for big moths. His forces were well trained, heading towards lights they found both resting flies and large moths going around in circles. The flies explained the lights were artificial and that if they wanted a good time in the dark they might follow. One of Wing Co's lieutenants was the first back with some mighty big moths and some of the missing flies.

With the flies agreeing to provide covering distraction from bats, the moths began lifting the ticks. Wing Co was off, taking his squadron ahead leading the formation of heavy moths. Above and to the sides the other fly squadrons, their wings glinting in the moonlight. In the centre the heavy drone of the moth wings, quite a sight. Coming in low over the ticks' field, they landed on a rabbit chewed bank, its short grass hiding less danger. The ticks happy with their bloated state crawled off, the moths and flies loosing no time to take to the relative safety of the air. Wing Co leading his formations back to the farmhouse.

A small party of raw recruits watched as Wing Co's flies circled above the kitchen table. Wing Co, leading the moths down. When they were all landed he posted sentries, not all spiders wait for flies to fall into their nets.

During the night attacks we had gone down the tunnel. The first section opening into a natural cave, unlike the main cavern and those leading to the house, it had not been mined. The natural forms were

very spooky in the flicker of the old oil lamp. Shadows jumping out of nowhere, as the light reached calcite formations, and illuminated the grey rock behind them. Lucy stumbled as she trod over the uneven surface, there was no walkway. She squeezed through a gap in the rocks into the next chamber, in seconds the lamp had crashed to the floor as she slipped, one foot disappearing down a cavernous crack. Her hands clasping around a convenient stalagmite, pulling herself back into the cavern. She was shaken and a little bruised, we could sense her heart beat increase.

The lamp was still burning, designed for mining this Mueseler type was made in Manchester by Edward Teale. Apart from providing a safe light, changes in colour and shape of the flame could tell humans if there were dangerous gases such as methane. Having regained her composure, Lucy picked up the lamp and continued. She now proceeded at a much slower and more cautious pace. Her eyes no longer admiring the delicate speleothems, the curtains no doubt clashing with her dress. I suggested she did take note of them, not for their beauty, but as a means of ensuring we knew where we were. This became more important when we reached a junction, the cavern split in two directions. Fn8 was having trouble comprehending the scale of these tunnels. Telling him there were no giant ants and that it was the result of water over thousands of years, made no difference to the little fellow. He was convinced that we were in the land of some ant god, how could water make such big holes in stone? He was sure that Firefly and myself had both gone daft in the head, he blamed it on the effects of altitude sickness, we were always flying much too high.

Lucy decided to go right first, just as you might upon entering a shop. She bent low, her earring wobbling rather violently, especially when she had to crawl through a small natural tunnel into yet another chamber. We had gone quite a way in, nothing, the next tunnel looked awkward so she decided to retrace our steps and check the left hand passage. This was far more winding, having few large chambers, the tunnels were long, going gradually upward, in one place a stream trickled down from a crack in the roof, following the fissure downward, possibly to more caves below. In the next chamber we were confronted by three options. It was quite large, the ceiling way above her head, the sides had buttresses of sculpted rock jutting into the space. Near the entrance to the right was a very narrow passage, with

many constrictions. Further around was a larger passage that appeared to descend, and almost opposite it a similar sized ascending passage. Lucy decided to try the right-hand, ascending passage first. She had not gone far, the tunnel opened out into a smaller cavern, our way blocked by a pool of water.

We heard a stone drop, ripples heading across the water, Lucy instinctively backed off into the tunnel hiding the light.

"It's just a well," shouted one of the agents.

"You sure?" said another voice.

"Yep, no ladders up the side of this one," came the firm reply.

There was a pause of several minutes.

"See I told you," said the same voice.

"Oh yea, well you know how mad the boss is if we miss something," came the echoing sigh.

"Fancy getting us up at this time of the morning," said a less than enthusiastic male.

"It's bloody inhuman, but we have to find the bitch."

"This early in the morning?" said the grumbler.

"With the others sick we have to put in more hours."

"Yea, whatever," came grumblers, dejected response, "Smoking is bad for you."

"Fuck I'm taking five, besides the smoke keeps the bloody mosquitoes away." We recognised the voice, it was Spiky.

"How did those bloody ticks get in the beds?" asked grumbler.

"My boss reckons it's those damn flies," said Spiky, drawing on his cigarette.

"I know mine thinks the bitch has a load of trap doors into the bedrooms."

"Bloody idiot, all the men who got bitten had their windows open. It's bloody obvious, ever since your boss discovered that fireplace entrance in the bedroom he's been obsessed with tunnels," said a very self assured Spiky.

"So this bitch, you were saying?" Grumbler was curious to hear more.

Spiky began speaking, "Slim and stacked mate."

"Yea, all the bumps in the right places?"

"Fuck, she is one tasty tart," adds Spiky, "See I found her in." His voice faded as the two men moved away from the well head.

Lucy, whispered, "Ticks?"

"It's only a guess but it sounds like the cavalry have arrived," I said, not wanting to get my hopes up.

"Could it be?" said Firefly, reading my mind.

"Let's hope so," I replied.

Fn8 and Lucy were both lost.

"Who?" asked Lucy. Firefly and I looked at each other, like two people the day after the lottery result, scared to predict the numbers.

"We're not sure but it might be survivors."

"Oh," she said, Fn8 joining her look of hope, twitching his little antenna with joy.

"If there is a well above then we must be near habitation," she continued. "Harold may have discovered this part of the cave system when they sunk the well?"

We went quiet again, the sound of footsteps echoed down the shaft.

"Well?" shouted Nasty.

"Yea, boss, it's a well," said Grumbler.

"Don't fuck with me, dick head," said Nasty, clearly angry at the insolent remark.

"Nothin, farm's empty and that's just a well," said Spiky.

"I know this is a bloody well, what about the farm."

"Empty," Came a more timid response from grumbler.

"You sure?" said Nasty, sounding very on edge, "I've just had an ear full. Our glorious leader is asking why twenty men, sent to get one item, are being thwarted by three old codgers, a bitch and a load of bloody flies?"

"Yea, but there's only sixteen of us active," said grumbler.

"Only because those dumb bastards got bit by a load a bloody ticks."

"Made a mess when Nigel tried pulling them off," laughed Spiky.

"Stupid idiot, doing that the insect regurgitated its guts into him, now he's not just down with Lyme disease," said Nasty, loosing patients, "There are people in high places who think we are looking for Lord Pennington. We can't stall them much longer."

"Kill the bastard, he knows to much," said Spiky.

"If he turns up dead then we have no reason to be here? No gizmo, get it?"

"We don't even know what this gizmo is?" said Grumbler.

"Exactly which is why we need the bitch," said Nasty, "If Pennington's top three agents had not been poisoned we wouldn't be in such a mess."

"My boss did his best?" said Spiky, defending Loudmouth.

“If we had not arrived when we did, you lot would still be rotting below the walled garden. Your boss is a loud mouthed idiot,” said Nasty, “Right you two go and check Wadleton Woods, if you need me I'll be down in the quarry.”

“What's down there?” asked Grumbler.

“If I knew that I wouldn't need to go look,” said Nasty. We heard his feet grate on gravel as he turned.

“Suppose we'd better wander across those fields, looks the quickest route,” said Spiky.

It was like being in the ear end of a giant ear trumpet. The human sounds faded, the two men chatting as they wandered off. We could hear birdsong, and the swish from a sea of grass blown by the wind.

Lucy picked up the lamp and we went back down to the descending tunnel. We envisaged that it was only a matter of time until they found the cavern with the machines and the tunnel back to the house.

Hopefully they might miss our office tunnel. Imagine we started in the mouth, you have a way up, into the nasal cavity and a way down, through the oesophagus. We were heading down into the stomach.

The current tunnel was like going down into the gut of a cow, sometimes humans are born with two stomachs. We had passed through one, into the second. From this one we entered the small intestine, a long narrow, but quite high passage. It was getting lighter,

then Lucy brought us into a third chamber, high up there was a long narrow crack in the rock face. Imagine an arrow slit in a castle wall.

She turned off the lamp, looking around, at first it looked just like any other cave, a few rocks strewn around, a grey mound in one corner. A quick glance and you would have left, but Lucy was eyeing up the rock mound, it felt like rock, looked like rock. She tapped it and it was even hollow just like rock!

Plaster had been shaped over a wire frame, and covered in rock dust, all very convincing. Upon lifting it up, we got a nice surprise, a rough wooden construction that supported the cover, also doubled as an experimenters bench. Boxes of all sizes hidden beneath it revealed a multitude of apparatus and raw materials. Lucy looked around, there was no other exit from this cave. Firefly and Fn8 volunteered to go back to the office door and listen out.

“No,” I said, “Wait.”

Flying up to the shaft of light, hovering, I could see down into the

quarry, I returned. "We can see them from here."

"Only if they are out in the open," said Fn8, his brain in subterranean mode.

"Yes but the damp, cold and those drips of water," I said, concerned for my friends.

"We are all staying here," said Lucy, "I might need your advice."

We insects looked at each other, shrugged our antenna and sat quietly in the earring. This fine woman began a very methodical search of each item, taking great care to be very quiet.

Most items were those used in a laboratory, microscopes, various glass vessels, all sorts of powders and bottles of strange liquids. Lucys' eyes lit up when she clasped in her hands a similar object to that hidden in the corset, which incidentally was now stuffed somewhere deep inside the dress. She held the small metallic bar up to the rays of light, it got warm but not unbearably so.

"A prototype, my little friends."

We had all been so engrossed in the pile of objects that the noises from the passage took us by surprise.

A head poked through, clad in a very solid helmet and an oversuit much more colourful than the old boiler suit, discarded in Elle's east wing bedroom. A head light beamed around the cave, alighting on Lucy, clad in her now somewhat grubby Victorian day dress. The woman, technically known in her team as the ferret, stood in silent amazement. She was shortly followed by a colleague, the man looked at Lucy then at his friend, then they both stared back at the scene before them. The man, was gesticulating, like a silent mimmer, then he broke the ice.

"Sorry, we're from the twenty-first century!"

Lucy smiled back, putting a finger to her lips. Then she beckoned them closer.

"Who are you?" she whispered in the man's ear.

"Why are you whispering?" asked the ferret.

"Be very quiet, take a look through the crack up there," said Lucy indicating the source of light.

The woman, clambered up over some rocks and pulled herself up to look through. Down in the quarry she saw Nasty barking orders, and several armed men, one shooting at the lock on the quarry cave entrance gate. The ferret slipped back down and whispered to her

colleague, "Do as she says."

"Why?" he asked, his face puzzled.

"Because, there are some very dangerous men out there," said Lucy.

"They've just got guns, nothing to worry about," said the ferret.

"Ah!" said the man taken aback, "We are the Wadle Caving Club. We have been trying to map the cave system, there was a particularly tight bit."

"Enters into a big cave with four passages?" asked Lucy, thinking back to cavern near the well.

"That's the one, so what's going on, why are you hiding in here, dressed in Victorian costume?" asked the man.

"Those men have Lord Pennington and a couple of assistants, they want to get their hands on a Pennington invention," she said, keeping things simple and brief.

"Why don't you go to the police?" asked the woman.

"I've only just escaped from the house, they have a laser fence around the perimeter," said Lucy, continuing, "What did you see?"

We had all heard the shots.

"They are trying to shot the lock on the gate to the quarry," said the ferret.

"So, why not just call the police?" enquired the man.

"At the end of the last ice age they were very remiss and seemed to have missed the cave phone market!" said Lucy with a hint of sarcasm.

"Ah!" said the man, "Use my phone." He reached into a pocket, but Lucy stopped him.

"Why do you think they still have not found Lord Pennington?"

The two of them looked at her, shaking their heads.

"Those men out there are part of the security services, there is a lot up for grabs. Not everyone paid to protect the public understands the concept. If I went to the police they would pass me over to those men.

They arrange that Lord Pennington has an accident, and stitch me up." The woman was looking very suspicious. "Surely someone must know that they are up to no good."

"Yes people in high places are asking questions. As far as they know those men are on the case."

"Who watches the watchers?" said the man.

"There was a secret organisation, they were infiltrated and the section that stayed loyal eliminated," said Lucy, elucidating, "If you see any insects don't kill them," she said in a very stern, order.

“Why?” asked the woman.

“You would not believe me if I told you,” said Lucy, still very serious.

“They're on our side, right?” said the man with a grin, turning to his ferret woman friend. You could see they were thinking mad woman, chased by gun totting men equals highly dangerous escaped lunatic woman, chased by armed response team!

The man whispered into the woman's ear.

“Lucy ask Firefly to fly above your nose and flash his tail on your command. They may think your a psychotic nut that killed his Lordship.”

“Excuse me, you think I might be lying?”

The two of them looked at her.

“Firefly, if you please hover over my nose,” she said, and my good friend dutifully obeyed, he like Fn8 and myself realised this situation was crucial.

The cavers at first, pulled expressions, that said “Mad woman talking to herself.”

When Firefly did as ordered they stared almost going cross eyed.

“Little friend, on my command of flash, flash your tail,” Lucy said giving a nice long pause, “Flash.”

He did as instructed, followed by several more. The she asked him to take Fn8 for a flypast, ordering the two humans to put their hands down by their sides. Firefly picked up his top gunner, and flew around in front of each persons face. When they arrived back at the earring she asked me to go talk to the woman first then the man.

“You will feel a tickling on your ear, that will be the fly heading towards you. Listen carefully to what he says, harm him and I will kill you, that is not a threat it's a promise.”

I can tell you this was a very scary moment for me, these people were untrained to handle flies, and I feared the natural instinctive human reactions. I settled on the woman's ear, and began telling her that this was highly confidential. After a lengthy explanation about the CFCs I went on to repeat the information to the man. It was with much joy that I returned to the safety of Lucy's earring.

The two cavers, were looking like two lost souls, questioning their own sanity. While they paused in thought, I explained what I had told them.

“He told you briefly about the roll of the CFCs right?” said Lucy.

The two of them nodded, the woman hearing a bang, went back up to the shaft of light, peering down on the men below.

“They've blown the lock with explosives.”

“Shit, there is another door but with explosives they'll get through in no time,” said Lucy, instinctively closing the cover over the lab bench, re-dusting the edges.

“How did you get mixed up in this asked the woman?”

“The fly that spoke to you had me looking up hospital records. I was a clerk, those men tracked me down and would have killed us all had we not escaped.”

“Come on Jenny,” said the man, “This might seem unreal, but there is a lot that the public never get to hear about.”

“Sure, Nat, sure, come on we best get back to our side of the passages.”

The three humans went scurrying back through the passages into the big cavern. At the entrance to the very narrow exit, the one we had not tried, she removed her skirt, and some undergarments, wrapping them up, she followed the ferret, the man, bringing up the rear. A loud bang echoed through the caves, Nasty and his agents were into the workshop. Would they find the entrance to the cave system?

We went some way before stopping in a large cavern not far from the entrance the cavers used.

“How far are we from Pennington House?” asked Lucy, concerned that agents were in the grounds.

“Well up to the narrow passage we measured four point six kilometres,” said the man, seeing Lucy was worried.

“Even if we get you to safety, how are you going to free Lord Pennington?” said the woman. During the long crawl and subsequent journey through the other side of the cave system she had been wondering this.

“Good question,” said Lucy, shaking her head, and shrugging her shoulders.

“Why, are you wearing that costume?” asked the man.

“Because, one of the agents ripped my clothes off,” she said remembering the event vividly.

The three humans eased out of a small hole in the side of a gully, it was hidden in the undergrowth on a piece of private farmland. Their club did have permission to access the site and parked on a rough patch of ground near an unmetalled farm track, was an old van. With Lucy hidden in the back, and the couple back in civilian clothing we

were ready to leave. The engine grunted, an old diesel, it struggled along the bumpy lane.

27. Allies

Eventually we reached the cavers home, Nat backed the van down their driveway, Jenny had Lucy inside within seconds. At the mention of food, we all got excited. You could see Jenny felt very silly asking what Lucy's insect friends would like to eat. Imagine a square table, clockwise, Jenny, Nat, Lucy and on the fourth side, the thing that finally convinced the two sceptical cavers. Fn8, Firefly and myself, with veritable banquet, honey being Fn8's choice, you would think the fellow was trying to create his own cave system, his head buried in the stuff.

In the comfort of their home Lucy went into a lot more detail. The more she talked the more they concentrated, these were two very curious people. I can tell you, you'd have to be to go down those damp dark caves. Nat suggesting, to take on the unscrupulous Nasty and Loudmouth they would need help, extolling the skills of the cavers. "Can we trust them?" asked Lucy, worried about involving others. "We trust them with our lives," said Jenny.

"Don't worry Lucy, the club members are all old friends."

Loosing no time Jenny began a series of phone calls, precipitating a trickle of arrivals. Nat had setup a microphone on the table for me to buzz my wings into so that all could hear. With all those who could make the evening meeting present, Jenny introduced Lucy. Nat took over when it came to explaining the major role we insects were playing in Britain's security. You should have seen their faces, at first disbelief, followed by lots of stunned shaking of heads. Where they awake? Was this a dream? Some time later when Lucy and we insects had explained in considerable detail, there was an eerie silence. The cavers had almost turned to stone, motionless, while their brains tried to comprehend the situation. Each questioning if they should get involved, but they were a great team, going down into the unknown bowels of the earth, apparently had a great bonding effect. The conversation drifting to how eight people would take on at least sixteen armed agents.

"Eleven of us," said Jenny.

“Eleven?” Frank, a big boned, sturdy fellow pulled his head back with this question, staring into her eyes.

“We have a fly, ant and firefly,” said his wife, with a wry smile.

The group burst into laughter, leaving us three twitching our antennas.

Nat's face went serious as he held up a newspaper. The indications were that pressure was being brought to bear on the security services to wrap up the investigations in the house and get a move on with locating Lord Pennington. This immediately worried Lucy and us, as we were well aware of the possible consequences.

“Ok Nat, take your point but how do we take them on when they are armed and I still don't get why we can't call the police?” said Will, always looking at the safety of any expedition.

It was Lucy who spoke the answer. “The agents have the police on their side and would request I'm handed over to them for questioning. They would get what they want, probably do away with his Lordship, myself and the others and “Solve” the case.”

“These are trained killers Lucy,” said a very wary Mike, “Do you realise, we are cavers not Ninja assassins.”

A jovial response was forthcoming from the ever jovial Bob, “Sure, so we are the experts underground, we know most of that cave system like the back of our hands. We use Lucy as bait, lure them down, set a few traps.”

“You watch far to many movies Bob,” said the worried Mike.

“Whatever,” said Bob, grinning, “Operation Oztoteotl?”

“Minotaur,” said Mike.

“Here they go!” said Jenny, “Mr Optimist and Mr Pessimist will now compete with a list of ancient mythical deities.”

After they all stared at the two men for a while it was Frank who finally called a halt to the recal of ancient Gods, “Excuse me, but I think if we don't do a bit of planning we could end up joining those legends!”

The group now focused on the task at hand, we insects merely looking on, making the odd suggestion, but capturing humans was not our forte.

Operation Labyrinth as it was finally decided, began in the small hours of the following morning. Nat cleared out a lot of those carbon dioxide filled packaging bags, old boxes, bits of foam and filled up the van, Jenny and Lucy, with us in her earring piled into the van, with Lucy hidden in the back floating around on wobbly bags of packaging. The

ride became more like that of a small ship in a force nine gale when the van trundled up the farm track to the cavers' entrance.

Frank had already arrived in a second van, with his wife Ann, Will who we learnt is their son and the chalk and cheese pair still arguing about the ancients, only this time they were deciding which period was best for sex. Bob was clearly influenced by the Cleopatras, while Mike was playing safe with opulent Rome, making lurid references to various wall paintings to back up his case.

“Hmm,” said Nat clearing his throat, “When you two have quiet finished chasing ancient totty.” Once they established some order this became a very well organised team, we were amazed, Fn8 remarked that with their coordination and bonding they would make a good ant colony. Lucy waited outside with Frank and Jenny while the others went deep underground. This couple helped by Lucy, appeared to us like adult birds flying to a hedge, in this case Nat's van, then beaks full, well hands, they would pop their heads into the nest and deliver more food to the babies inside. Then the babies would squawk back for more and they would repeat the cycle. The first part of the humans strategy was going well, after lots of rope, packaging, black paper and other strange items had been fed into the cave system, the traps were set. That was the easy bit, non of us had any idea what was going on up at the house, or much idea of how to tempt all of the men down into the caves.

Much to my surprise Lucy rejected some more suitable garb, preferring to stay in her Victorian dress. Of course she is quiet a genius and had realised that should she go in wearing caving gear they would rumble outside influences were at work. So with the scene set, it was now Lucy's turn, as Frank pointed out, to be the fly in the trap. She just had to work out which silk thread to pull to get them down to the others. Once we reached the cave with the four portals, we went down to the cave that overlooked the quarry, where we had first met Nat and Jenny. I flew up taking a look out of the crack, all was quiet down below.

“Nothing, Lucy. They must all be elsewhere,” I said, upon returning.

“Yes, but where?” she sighed, “If only we knew.”

“The bees, Lucy, the bees, the Queen said she would keep track of the agents outdoors, well that would be a start, we could probably

deduce the rest," I said in an excited buzz of my wings.

"Yes, yes, brilliant, but you must go with Firefly and Fn8, the Queen knows you as a group of three, I'll wait here."

With that we lost no time and was I glad to have a fighter escort. A wasp came a tad too close for comfort. Firefly holding steady position, kept tight formation, Fn8 with his steady platform let loose a few sprays of formic acid. The wasp got it full in the antenna, pulling back, startled at meeting stiff resistance. Just when you think things can't get any worse we were terrified. Even Fn8 who's courage was without doubt was shaking on Firefly's back. We had no idea what to do, if we split the beast that was hovering up ahead was sure to get us.

Anisoptera are fearsome predators, I might be able to reach twenty four miles an hour, some of these beasts can do thirty tops, poor old firefly with Fn8 on his back stood no chance. We just hovered keeping station, hoping that when it made a move we could take evasive action, Fn8 told us if he got a chance to get onto its back he would bite it's wings off. What a brave little fellow, but as the hovering beast edged nearer, we felt a wave of air. Bees, lots of lovely bees, were swarming around the giant beast, one of them came to us and said to follow which we did gladly, leaving the bees to distract the enemy.

The swarm had settled in well and the Queen who spent her time sitting laying eggs was eager to hear our stories. Suitably delighted she told us vital information as her workers came in with regular updates. With an escort back to Lucy's position, I was beginning to like cold damp inhospitable caves.

"Apparently the last report indicates that they are having some kind of discussion, the bee that flew past the window does not understand human speak, but she said there were at least twelve men in a big room in the main house. There are another two guarding the main entrance to the grounds. Two more last seen heading back down to the quarry, possibly a patrol as the bees have seen them wandering all over the estate."

"So little friend if we could attract them first, they may get the others down here," she said, her mind racing to find a suitable location from which they could see her, but she would have time to retreat? She scurried back down through the system, treading more warily as she approached the tunnel leading to the back of the office in the machinery cavern. With the small torch provided by Nat, she checked behind the hidden door in the office. Very quiet we listened, nothing,

no sound of humans, she eased open the cabinet concealing the entrance. After lowering it back in place, we moved from the office to the area with the machines. The cavern was eerily silent, Lucy began to look around. There was a rough scrape on the gravel floor.

“Who a ye?” came a gruff, voice.

Lucy was startled, we could see from behind her a light flashing around. I buzzed in her ear that whoever it was was behind her.

“What?”

“You eared me,” he said, quietly but firm and snappy.

“Are you a friend of Lord Pennington?” asked Lucy trying to gauge the situation.

“What's it to you, what you done with ee?”

“I'm trying to save him?”

“You and who's army?” he scoffed.

With a moment, we heard a struggle, “I'll take that.” It was Nat and he now had hold of the fellow's shotgun.

“You ok Lucy?” asked Jenny, “We were worried.”

“Fine, thanks.” We now all looked at the old fellow that Nat had in an arm lock.

“Who's this fellow?” asked Jenny.

“I have no idea but he doesn't look like an agent or the police.” Lucy moved closer, looking him in the eye. “Who are you and what are you doing in this cavern?”

“What's it to you, were you got im?” said the struggling man.

“We are trying to foil a plot against his Lordship and you are hindering our progress, plus two agents are heading into the quarry, so too much noise and we're done for,” she said, giving him a stern reproach.

“I farm his Lordships land, didn't seem right, something fishy going on I thought so, I came back. Saw the buggers were going to get into the caves, used a loada rubble and dust on t'other side of the main door to hide this cavern, same on the one up to the house.”

Nat, let go and asked, “So how did you get in here?”

“This place is like Swiss bloody cheese. Part of the baseplate of that machine over there, he said pointing, “Leads to a passage into Wadleton Railway tunnel. Came in via t'other side a hill.”

“Look, we've set traps in the caves we have to get them down here,” said Nat.

“Can't let you do that. Ave to find another way,” he said very seriously.

“Why not?” questioned Lucy, shaking her head.

“I'm no engineer, but I do know that my father and is father before im,

swore to keep this secret, see we was told there was something down here which if combined with something in another part of the estate,” The old man paused for breath, “Well miss, if it should fall into the wrong hands.”

“Yes but as far as we know two of our friends and Lord Pennington are being held captive up at the house,” said Lucy, now like us puzzled as to what to do next.

“Traps, you say?” said the old fellow scratching the beard on his chin.

“Traps,” He muttered, mulling things over. “Gota catch em all, need a bloody big trap.”

“We have lots of small traps,” said Nat.

“That won't do, see,” said the farmer.

“Why not, there are too many to catch at once,” said Jenny, then turning to Nat.

“Just one gets word out, you'll ave more down ear, n we ain't got much time, them police ll be back in day or two,” said the farmer, still scratching.

“Well, what do you suggest?” asks Lucy, throwing her hands up, much to uncontrolled for our insect liking.

“Can't use the walled garden, mores the pity, someone's bugged the power drive, chains broke,” he said shaking his head.

“How do you know, how did you get in there without being seen?” asked Lucy, with a most perplexed expression.

“Like Swiss cheese this place Miss, like Swiss bloody cheese,” laughed the farmer.

“Please, they'll hear us, Lucy says there are agents in the quarry,” said Jenny very anxiously. The farmer quieted, sitting down on an old wooden create, the wooden panels creaking under his weight. We were thinking the same as the rest of our friends, can this chap do nothing without making a noise. I know this from the number of raised eyebrows and disdainful looks.

“There's an old air raid shelter under the barn. Corse the barn went up after the war, just put a bit more concrete down, made a lovely firm base. If we could lure them down in there then slide the metal cover over the steps down in.”

“They would be trapped?”

“Shall I go and get the others?” asked Nat.

“You stay here darling, I'll go,” said Jenny, Nat being a wise man stayed to listen to the farmer.

“Ok,” said Nat, staring at the farmer in the gloom of the cavern, “But how do we convince them to go down into what could obviously be a trap?”

The three humans were puzzling for some time over the conundrum when, there was a sound, footsteps echoed around their ears. At first we assumed it was Jenny back with the others. Then Lucy heard a familiar voice shouting, “No sign of anybody in here, rocks and shit still blocking the rest of the tunnel, I ain't goin no fucking furver.” It was Spiky loud and eloquent as usual.

His voice faded, then it came again, “Rocks and shit.”

Lucy and the farmer stared at Nat. “What did you say Nat?” asked Lucy.

“Rocks and shit,” repeated Nat, as he had before.

“Blow me down lad you sound just like im,” said the farmer.

“If we could get those two.”

“Ey missy, we could get Nat here to call up on them there communication devices and ave the others over for a party.”

“We'd best move quick, or they'll be back on the track upto the house,” said Lucy, her beautiful mind working things through.

“Down me tunnel to the railway tunnel, they don't know me, I'll holla to ask if they's lost somint. Some a you're mates can knock em on the ead,” said the farmer rising from the create. He headed for the hidden passage under the machine, pulled it open.

“We must wait for the others,” said Lucy.

“I'm getin old, can't move sa fast, Nat ye come with me, Lucy dear you wait for tuthers and bring them along fast as ye can.”

Spiky and his friend were almost at Pennington Halt when the farmer dropped a chunk of iron near the entrance to Wadleton Tunnel. We were in luck the two agents gave chase without thinking to call for backup. Lucy had arrived with the rest of the cavers, who with eyes adjusted to the darkness were ready for the agents who came blundering in after the old man.

That's not to say it was easy, the cavers were like lots of little spiders trying to wrap a victim up in silk. Except their silk was climbing rope and with hoods and tape over the mouths these men were off on a mystery tour. Every so often, for good measure the wise cavers would twist the men around taking them back a way then turning them like

tops making them dizzy, taking them back on route to the farm, via yet another subterranean passage. The more tunnels Fn8 saw and the more teamwork he observed between the humans the greater was his conviction that humans were in some way related to ants.

Down in the old air raid shelter the agents were bundled into a wooden crate. Sealed but suitably ventilated we all retired to hiding places above ground and the subterfuge began.

“We've got the bitch boss, shut in a create.”

“Where?”

“Back of the barn, over at the fucking farm. There's some steps, they were hidden under hay bails, bitch was hiding down there.”

“Bring her here,” said Nasty.

“You ain't seen what else we've found and we ain't fucking carrying that over there.”

“You've found the device,” it was Loudmouth, “You clever son of a bitch.”

“Bring the fucking champaign, lets party on the bitch boss.”

“You bet we will,” said Nasty, “We're all comin right over.”

The radio went quiet and so did we, all hiding, waiting and it did not take long. The men almost fell over themselves charging down into the shelter. One man was ordered to stay and guard the top steps. We had to act fast before the deception was rumbled.

Bob was quick, enthusiastic but his aim was poor. The fence post hit the back of the barn and tumbled down the stairs. The agent was startled, looking over towards Bob, the distraction was all Frank needed. The big man was both powerful and accurate, the agent tripped falling down the stairs, following the second post. There was alarm from below, but too late, Jenny and Lucy had moved quickly, pulling the metal door out from its horizontal recess, sliding it across into place. They both jumped back, Lucy had just put a peg in to jam the door shut, when a bullet slammed into the metal, almost rupturing it. There was now a huge upward bulge. The plate and the peg would not hold for long, luckily the farmer was quick on his tractor.

The old machine chugged under the load as he came round the corner with a huge concrete block. Lowering it gently so its length was parallel to the back of the barn it almost covered the hole. More shots

rang out this time piercing the metal and zinging into the concrete. The farmer lost no time in placing a second butted up to the first, so like two dominoes flat on the table they covered the access hatch completely.

“That ort to stop the bastards, lucky I had a few spare,” he said pausing, “We did ave a bugger of a time with fly tippers and off-roaders. Put a few of these down the lane, that put a stop to it.” “How many?” said Nat. The farmer looked at Nat, not sure what needed quantifying, blocks, fly tippers or off-roaders.

“I counted twelve plus the two in the box,” said Lucy, understanding the true meaning. Poor little Fn8, who had heard tales of adventurous ants in restaurants, knew waiters got tips, but enquired why humans would tip flies?

“So two left at the entrance most likely,” said the old farmer.

“Assuming the others are still ill. There were to our knowledge twenty after Nasty came with his lot,” said Lucy.

Ann, Will and Mike all drifted in from their observation positions, I should mention what a clever lot they were. Bob, Frank, Jenny and Lucy had all been hidden close to the shelter entrance, but to avoid being seen were unable to see who was where. The other three hidden further out could see and give signals without being seen.

The farmer now sat scratching his chin, the others were also pondering what to do about the men on the gate. It was even suggested to leave them in place so any passing police patrols would consider status unchanged.

“If I came back in my Land Rover, approaching the main gates. Then when they's distracted,” he paused.

“We pounce on them?” asked Nat.

“That's it me lad,” said the Farmer with a smile.

“Then what do we do with them?” asked Mike, “We can hardly open up the shelter and bung a few more in.”

“We can tie em up and put them in er?” The farmer paused for a long while, shaking his head. “Have to be some place what they could not escape even if they got loose.”

“Like a big hole,” said Mike, which set Bob off again in competition.

It was Lucy who again came up with a good solution. “Why don't we put them into one of the chambers under the walled garden? We might

need to repair the mechanism though!"

"You're a fine woman," said the Farmer, with a wink in his eye. He knew all about the walled garden, having accepted the honorary post as Engineer to the current Lord Pennington who's grasp of a spanner was purely theoretical.

It was Will ever alert for danger who heard the sound of an approaching vehicle. Lucy immediately took charge ordering everyone back to their previous positions. A large Chelsea tractor was travelling at some speed towards the farm leaving billowing clouds of dust in its wake. Screeching to an abrupt halt in the yard. Two men alighted in the potholed square to their right the old house, to the left a higgledy piggledy row of dilapidated out buildings, roofs, sagging like old horses back. Ahead the old barn, both men glancing around, their eyes shifty, scanning every detail. Both had by now pulled pistols from beneath the smart suits.

Lucy hidden behind the barn glanced at Nat who was making a hand signal, hidden from the agent with Frank and Bob behind an old shed near the entrance.

Lucy whispered, "Fly over and tell him to imitate Spiky." There was no need, the men trapped below, had started banging again on the metal cover. We heard a cheer, then the sound of it being pulled back. Nasty and Loudmouth heading the chorus which although muffled by the concrete blocks were clearly audible to their two comrades. Distracted by the din, the two agents above ground moved cautiously to its source. With guns waving around we felt helpless, that was until the men started waving their hands around.

It was Wing Co and the remainder of his squadrons, what brave chaps. Then as if on queue, Frank and Bob let loose with the fence posts, Nat and the Farmer joining in the fray. The men and their guns went crashing to the ground. One of the pistols went spinning across the concrete, Lucy grabbed it, letting loose a shot as the other agent tried to grab his gun that had fallen nearby. The old farmer, wily to their skills had a pitchfork, which he used to get the gun out of the agents grasp, telling the others to stay back. Passing the gun to Nat, he then retrieved his own shot gun, the men lay staring at two men and a woman. We all knew these men were better trained than

Loudmouth's men, most likely dangerous even without weapons.

Lucy also realised the longer we waited the more they would recover and plan a counter attack. Even with us armed they had the edge, we were no killers and they knew it. The one that had tried for his gun, sprung like lightening, so fast he caught Nat, who responded almost in slow motion. The other agent, flung himself towards Lucy but the old farmer, filled his bum with shot, emptying the second barrel almost point blank at the other agent who had hold of the gun and was laying into Nat. Frank and Bob were heading to help but, no need. The second agent, let go of Nat and clutching his rear end collapsed in pain on the ground.

At the sound of the shots the men below in the bunker started shouting again. The farmer now disappeared, while Frank, Bob, Mike and Nat pinned the agents to the ground, Will, Ann, Jenny and Lucy, like spiders tying up their prey. As Lucy stood back to admire the handy work, she was adorned by a black mass, we were chuckling with joy as Wing Co and his survivors flew onto her, like she was a giant aircraft carrier. The reunion was very emotional, but short as the next event occurred.

We heard the chugging of the tractor, "Mind yer selves," said the farmer as he came around with a big tank on the back. Finding a crack down between the concrete blocks, he put a pipe in it from the tank and opened the valve. What a lovely smell, organic fertilizer, hmmm, that shut them up. Having provided the main course to the party goers, he then trundled off, returning some minutes later with an old box on the back of the tractor.

The agents, "Gently," ouch! loaded, Nat hid the four by four in the barn and then we all followed a strange procession behind the tractor. "What you lot daft or sumint?" said the Farmer, not yet clear of the farm buildings. He stopped, the old tractor ticking over. Turning to look at us like a bunch of chicks following the hen. "Them police got the area cordoned off, if they see e?" "Won't they see you? If you are going where we think you are going?" said Lucy, thinking as we were that he was heading to the walled garden.

"Nop, I just thought of another nice location for these two, shot a

couple a birds you gotta hang em!" he grinned.
"Hang them?" asked Ann, a bit disturbed at the thought.
"Don't ye worry me dear, not like ye thinks." He gestured, and we waited while he dumped his load. The tractor coming around again with yet another concrete block.

Some while later he wanders back into the yard with a big smile, his missing teeth almost comical. "Dropped em, in the hole."

"What hole?" asked Bob, keen to get in with the question.

"Round tuther side."

"The other side?" asks Mike not to be outdone.

"Of the barn?" says Bob, now competitive.

"That's it me lad, the other way into the shelter, escape route, ceptin it ain't got a ladder no more!"

"It does have one of those nice concrete doors though?" enquired Bob, rushing to get in with the question.

"Yep," said the farmer, grinning. "You lot best follow me."

We all did, but this time back into his house and down the passage back toward the railway tunnel. Reaching the fork we did not continue to the railway line but back up the other branch to the plate in the machine cave. You are probably wondering how the railway tunnel entrance has gone undetected over years of railway inspections. Well so were we, upon questioning by Lucy, the farmer revealed how the "drainage tunnel" never needed attention, generations of his family had kept the system clear, so they inspectors never needed to go further than the first grating, the second, more secure never reached and with a clever hatch just before the fork, no one was any the wiser.

In the machine cave the farmer made us all promise on oath not to reveal the tunnels, Lucy pointed out that perhaps he had not noticed, we were on his side, but he insisted. The cavers then helped him clear the rubble from in front of the door of the tunnel to the house. Once done we all followed him into the loft space, where he took us through the hidden attic passage into the west wing.

28. Reunion. Who is the man?

Worse for wear but pleased to see us were his Lordship, Jim and Simon. The ordeal was putting Lord Pennington off the wine cellar and

he resolved to loose some weight.

Sitting in the lounge our group were refreshed and rested. However we could still not go to the authorities. As Lucy pointed out, we had no idea who the head man was, if Lord Pennington surfaced, the villain would no doubt fade into the background.

“Shit,” said Nat, staring at Jenny. Nat was into electronics, his thought turned our joy into worry, “How did those two agents know to come to the farm house?”

“Their radios?”

“Yes and they will probably have mobile phones,” said Nat piling on more thoughts.

“Lad if them there radios worked so well why did they not go straight to the bunker?” said the farmer, getting some nods from those who wanted to believe we were safe.

“They were just being cautious,” said Lucy.

“Maybe, but we ain't got good reception round these parts, a me Lordship?” said the farmer.

Lord Pennington shook his head, “Terrible, the best place is on the top floor and then it's still weak.”

“How would we stop a signal?” asked Bob.

“You could build a metal screen around the bunker, Faraday cage,” said Mike, in physics mode.

“Nat, Frank, Bob, Will, you lads come with me.” The old farmer gestured.

“Wing Co can you put some of your chaps on watch asked Lucy?” You can guess his response.

Lord Pennington spoke next, “I'm sure none of you will mind, if I suggest a very smart lady heads up our next challenge, to find the rotter who has caused all this,” With nods all round, he continued, “Me dear.”

“Nasty and Loudmouth weren't expecting to be trapped, they had the upper hand. Would they have left some evidence laying around?” said Lucy, her document oriented mind flipping through possible things to look for. “We must look for phone numbers, they will probably not have a name or if there is a name it might be a bit odd.”

“Look for an address or note book?” said Mike, who was a great theoretician. From conversations I overheard between him and Bob,

Mike was an applied mathematician, who had tentacles in many fields of science, he was particularly interested in the ancients. Jenny and Ann were both keen to get started and so Lucy set them to look through the bedrooms on the second floor. Lord Pennington the least agile was literally to crawl through the ground floor, assisted by Jim and Simon who would do most of the rooms. Lucy ably assisted by her earring of insects, took the first floor with Mike, sending him to the drawing room, she first went around checking that we were secure. Very wise, you see we had no idea if the agents had got a message out. The farmer and our other friends could get in, because he was using the tunnels. When she was sure all the windows were shut and the doors securely locked and bolted, we joined Mike.

Lucy was at first surprised, he was sitting with a notebook, writing in it. "Have you found something?" she said, but he was in another world. "What have you found?" she continued. "Found?" His head bobbed up. "Oh just making a list of the items I would write a number down in if I could not remember it. I have another list containing places I might put such a piece of paper where I could easily find it, but not too obvious. I shall then rank them and do a statistical analysis of the probability of finding each then begin searching."

Lucy did not seem impressed, she was used to diving into filing cabinets and working out other peoples odd idea of alphabetical. Her approach was more heuristic, although one must praise her logical methodology. She huffed and left him back in his notebook. She went to work with us making suggestions, usually getting a "I had already thought of that answer." We guessed she was not in a good mood, perhaps Mikes seated searching method was getting to her.

Many hours later, with the other back from their Faraday cage construction, we were making no more progress. Even with more eyes, and checks in the basement it seemed quite fruitless. All of us except Mike had eventually returned back to the lounge. Nat pointed out that Nasty and Loudmouth would most likely keep that sort of thing about their person. Bob in his jovial manner asked, "New job vacancy, cloakroom attendant needed at air raid shelter party."

"You daft lad?" The farmer grinned.

"Where's Mike?" enquired Will who's father Frank had known Mike for

many years. Mike had assisted the lad with mathematics, so this was a natural concern for his mentor.

"Oh, he's still searching," responded Lucy in a rather sarcastic tone.

"With a notebook and pen?" asked Bob, the grin on his face priceless. It set the other cavers off in fits of laughter.

"I don't know what you lot are giggling about," said a rather serious face at the door of the lounge. It was Mike notebook in one hand and something in the other.

"This any use?" He handed Lucy the wad of paper.

"Where did you find this?" she said, somewhat perplexed and amazed.

"It seems strange how much time the human race wastes because they are too lazy to use their minds. People just can't seem to spend a bit of extra effort at the start and get it right first time, they would rather spend lots of time, and in many cases money doing it wrong over and over and over again. I remember when I used to work for Gorocroth, they ..." Mike was interrupted.

"Cheers Mike," said Nat, causing a wry smile on Mike's face.

"I found it in a pile of mail," he said, very chuffed, "May not be of any use, but his Lordship did say the signal around these parts was pretty crap."

Lucy was losing no time, it was the latest itemized phone bill sent regular as clock work. She went and sat by Lord Pennington.

"Any of these seem unusual?"

You had to hand it to this Mike fellow he was a brilliant lateral thinker.

His Lordship scanned through the list. "Me dear, it would help me think if you could rustle up a delicate morsel."

"Where's the kitchen?" asked Ann.

With some excellent directions from Lucy, Ann with Jenny left to produce food for the troops who were all suddenly hungry, their minds diverted by Lord Pennington's suggestion.

"Why not annotate each of those you recognise," suggested Mike, offering a pen to his Lordship, who's mind was geared more to memorising information than to analysing data, especially a list of numbers.

"There are a few calls to Lord Ravensbury?" said Lucy, thinking aloud.

"He's my friend," said Lord Pennington, puzzled to the significance.

"Yes, but did you call him two weeks ago?" asked Mike.

Lucy looked at Lord Pennington then at Mike, "He could not have, he was tied up like a chicken ready for the oven."

"That's when they said he went missing in the papers," said Frank, an avid reader.

"My dear I have known Lord Ravensbury for rather a long time. He's my oldest, dearest friend I simply can't believe he has anything to do with it."

"Would a press five register the number?" asked Bob.

"What are you on about?" said Mike, a little over zealous at his achievements.

"Well if you call someone and they don't answer you can press five and it will ring your phone when they are free."

"Yes but that's still your call," said Nat, confident in his understanding of electronic communication.

"Did you phone him before you were kidnapped?" asked Bob.

"You're thinking someone might have done a last number redial?" said Mike, now on the same wavelength.

"Yes," said Bob, rather more serious than usual.

"No, sad to say the last person I phoned was the wine merchant," said his Lordship, face rather sullen.

"This one," said Lucy, pointing to the number preceding Lord Ravensbury's.

"Yes, yes, now I remember, yes that is the wine merchants, it's programmed into the phone, I never dial it, that explains why I had no recollection."

"There's another call to him at the end after these two in the middle."

"They're the local police," said the farmer, leaning over the back of the seat. "Know the bloody number off be 'art, fly tippers!" He grunted.

Lucy sat, wiggling her fingers, "That would tie up with the time they did a search of the grounds."

"Very clumsy," remarked Mike.

"Who, lad? Them police?" asked the farmer.

"No, whoever called Lord Ravensbury from the phone here," replied Mike.

"Unless it was the police when they visited, calling him to let him know the situation, he is Lord Pennington's friend," said Lucy, which seemed the most plausible explanation, and one that Lord Pennington eagerly endorsed.

"We can hardly call him and ask," said Frank, who looked towards the door, "You are wonderful darling."

His wife smiled back at him, following close behind was Jenny with an equally well loaded tray.

“Nat could, can't ye lad,” said the old farmer.

“And say what?” asked Nat. Copying a voice was one thing, holding a conversation in the style of a person you did not know but the other person did, was quite another.

“Nasty or Loudmouth, which one would have made the call?” asked Jim.

“It was Loudmouth's lot who captured us, and they were the ones around when the police searched the grounds,” said Lord Pennington.

“If you were sure your plan was going to work and the police were on your side would you worry about a few phone calls, that could be explained away as we have, a police call to let you know the situation,” asked Lucy.

“Well we have to do something,” said Bob, “Some of us have homes to go to.”

“And Jobs!” Offered Mike.

“They're right,” said Nat, “We will have to bail out for the moment, with the men in the hole will you be able to manage without us?”

“We could come again next weekend,” Offered Frank.

“If you have any more puzzles, you can always call me,” said Mike, still pleased with his efforts.

Lucy looked around the room.

“We'll be fine for the moment, this looks like it's more brain power than brawn that is needed. With his Lordship's vast knowledge, the farmer's ingenuity, and Jim and Simon and their flies, I think we should manage.” The others looked very relieved.

“Er, Lucy dear, why don't I take em back to the cave, then when all them doors is closed behind me, I'll come back er,” grinned the jolly farmer. His ruddy complexion, the result of years of hard work in the fields.

“Excellent,” said Lucy. The others got up from their seats and after the usual human rituals of shaking hands, and a few hugs and kisses on the female side, they trailed off behind the farmer. Why you humans do this is a bit of a puzzle, and you complain about us flies spreading diseases, really?

“So my dear, quite what are we to do?” said his Lordship, turning to Lucy. “I do think we will need a bit of haste it won't be long before someone on the bad side realises those rogues are no longer functioning.”

“Quite right,” said Jim, his mind pondering an operation for the flies.

“You have an idea?” asked Simon, keen to learn from his elder mentor

and fellow Fly Master.

“An operation for the flies, to Lord Ravensbury?” offered Lucy.

“It might answer some questions, it is the obvious place to start,” said Jim, holding a thoughtful gaze.

“How far to his home?” said Lucy, turning to look at Lord Pennington.

“Well, geography was never my strong point, to many squiggly lines on those damn maps. However I do have his address, now where did I put it?” His Lordship picked up some more food from one of the trays.

“Cellar, tunnels,” said Lucy, as he took a mouthful.

“No not there.”

“I was thinking of you getting through them again and your poor doctors patience.” She smiled.

“Ah, yes.” His Lordship gave her the wink, then as if by magic, “Top draw cabinet next to my bed, brown address book, would you mind getting it my dear?”

Lucy leapt up catching Fn8 off guard, as he was dozing after a good feed, Firefly, more attentive, grabbed hold as he was nearly thrown from the earring with the force of her rising.

Lucy was by now well accustomed to the Victorian costume and moved with some grace and no little speed, positively racing along the corridors. In no time she had located the address book and was scurrying back down to the others.

We realised that the home of Lord Ravensbury was not far from our location, but too far to risk a squadron. Someone, a human would have to take a squadron in an improvised small carrier, much closer. Who? His Lordship was obviously not mobile enough and too higher profile. Lucy, Jim and Simon were all plastered over the newspapers as missing persons, wanted for questioning. After some deliberation, the farmer appeared through the door, this was our man. The poor fellow already looking tired from his recent mission was not over enthused with the thought of more running around. He was however very understanding, realising that he was the only one free to move without suspicion.

With a strong matchbox from the kitchen, suitably modified the farmer set off with six flies including Wing Co. The farmer knew the countryside well and would be able to get them very near to Ravensbury's house. We, that is Fn8, Firefly and myself wanted to go, but Wing Co gave orders that we were special advisor's and support

for Lucy. Well any leader needs a good supporting staff, and we apparently had the experience, Lucy was also pleased, I think she values our input and abilities. Wing Co is great at feeding information back to the troops, he thinks you can learn from the experience of others. Quite a smart, fly pity some humans don't do the same, still must not grumble.

29. Raven Ridge

The farmer stopped his Land Rover at the end of an old farm track, it was an unmetaled road. From behind a hedge, he could see down into a valley and the grounds of Blackhollow House, the home of Lord Ravensbury. He moved along Raven Ridge at a good pace, keeping an eye on the big house below. A small overgrown footpath, tailed off down into the valley. It was an old double hedged path, now comparatively rare, providing significant cover. As it cut a diagonal route to the other side of the valley, it passed near the entrance to the estate grounds. Further down the valley the estate road passed through fields until it reached Ravensbury Village. This was the nearest public access, and the best the farmer could do without attracting unwanted attention.

After letting Wing Co and the others out of the carrier, he pulled back around a bend and proceeded to appear to be picking wild fruit, as you do!

Wing Co flew in low along the grey estate road, it being the shortest and least hazardous route to the house which loomed in the distance. The big Gothic mansion seemed almost overbearing as he got closer, sending a chill down his thorax. The other flies had an air of foreboding, as though the big grey stone building was sucking the energy from the air. You must remember flies like most insects appreciate the warmth of the sun, and in the shadow of this great edifice it was a tad chilly.

Setting down on a stone statue to one side, the squadron caught a bit of sun, pre-mission flight warming. Wing Co, used the time wisely, scanning the building for entrance and exit points. His team ready, they flew into the unknown. A top floor window was wide open, this

was the best way in as it was less likely to have a spiders web in place. When you humans open a window wide you tend to disturb webs to the point of destruction, nice.

The house had a lovely musty atmosphere, Wing Co pressing further in using the cover of tables, pictures and cabinets that lined the corridors. It was on the top of one picture that one of the team bought it, he sat too far back. Wing Co, caught sight out of one compound eye, a big black sinister, eight legged monster rearing up from behind the frame. In a moment it had the poor fellow's abdomen in its clutches. There was nothing the others could do, by the time they realised what was happening, the spider already had its poison pouring into the unfortunate fly.

This event did nothing for morale, Wing Co knew he needed to act with speed and get out as quick as possible. To loose a fly on the way in was not a good omen. I should explain that on the way in you can usually take care, it's upon exit when you may have to split formation, and it becomes every fly for its self, that then, one might expect heavy losses.

Wing Co homed in on voices, they were coming from a back room on the first floor. From the description Lord Pennington had given him, he knew one of the speakers was Lord Ravensbury. Scrabbling below a closed door the flies, like commandos on a raid, kept low and headed for cover.

"I can't understand why we have not heard from them since the discovery?" said a very posh voice.

"I can," chuckled, a more common speaker.

"And why is that?"

"Got ta celebrate ain't they? Your Lordship."

"Yes, but I don't want any drunken foul ups, it must look right. We're the good guys remember." He laughed, and the other man joined in.

"So how you going to explain how you come by that device?"

"Lord Pennington, left his place to me in his will remember."

"You're very clever sir," said the man, "But what if they have decided to sell it to someone else? You said yourself it's worth millions, possibly even billions."

"My dear fellow, pass me the brandy."

There was a chink as the bottle met the glass.

“Only I know what it does, and what it can be used for, and of course you. You did not tell them did you?”

“No, sir, surprised you should even ask considering how long I've worked for you.”

“You're a fine fellow Higgins, a fine fellow.”

Some footsteps were getting louder, the two men, sat silent. There was a knock at the door, “Come.”

“Hello darling, I was wondering if you'd heard any more about your poor friend, old Podgy?”

The man shook his head, “Sorry my dear, I was just chatting, to Higgins. Damn, poor show old Podgy going missing like that, makes you wonder what the police are up to.”

The woman, looked sad, “Would you mind awfully if I went with Clara to the shops, there is a sale on at Mavis and Gerkins.”

“You go off and enjoy yourself, no sense in all of us sitting hear moping about the place.”

“What time would you like dinner Madam?”

“Oh, you are so thoughtful Higgins, I should say about seven tonight, is that alright with you dear?”

“Of course dear.”

The woman vacated the room, Wing Co sent two of his flies to follow her to the point of her leaving the house. It turned out this was the wife of the target.

“Got to make some money now hey, Higgins?”

“Your fine lady does shop in the sales, that must save a bob or two?”

“It just means she buys twice as much dear fellow.”

“With your connections sir.”

“Yes, we should be even richer, a Higgins.” The man had a slanted grin, a wedge of teeth visible.

“Not, like you need the money sir.”

“Higgins, why do you think our family keep getting richer? If you stop accumulating, it dwindles to nothing in no time. You just don't understand economics. No offence old chap, but what with women, inflation and the damn chancellor.”

Higgins, burst out laughing, “And my salary sir.”

“Oh, yes and we must not forget the lackeys.”

“Can we trust them sir?”

“I should hope we can trust our chaps, we have too much on them,

hey?"

"It was those three agents."

"Yes, Mr bloody Loudmouth and his two idiot friends."

"Accident sir?"

"We have had a lot of bodies to dispose of lately."

"The roses could do with some bonemeal and blood sir."

"We do have plenty of roses to feed."

"Indeed we do sir."

"Has my dear wife left yet?"

"Believe I heard her car, I will just go and check sir."

Higgins, rose up from his seat, leaving the door ajar, he wandered into the corridor. Moments later he returned, "Yes, sir, her yellow peril is hurtling down the road."

"She, has no concept of slow my man."

"I'm glad they killed off all those flies."

"You and me both, damned inconvenient having to swat every bloody fly before you can have a decent conversation."

There was a pause as the two men sat, opposite each other.

"Thinking of flies, I will have to speak to the vicar about arrangements for Podgy's funeral, what a chore."

"Not until, the idiot is found?"

"Of course not, gads man, but we must be seen to give the fat lump a good send off. Me being his friend." There was a chilling laugh.

"They did get them all sir?"

"You loosing your faculties in your old age?" said Ravensbury, "That's what Graham said, and he's bloody good."

"I know sir, helps that he's in the force."

"It's not what you know, but who you know," said Lord Ravensbury, "Look at that idiot bookworm, there's more words in his head than in the British Library, and just look at the prates he hired."

"You're very smart sir, you let all the others do the learning and put their brains to work for your ends."

"Why learn a load of bollocks when you can pay some daft twat, and let them take the risks, you excepted old man."

"Plenty of poor university graduates sir."

"Don't you just love the loans system, makes them even more keen to be beholden to you." He paused to sup on his brandy, "Come on old chap, lets get our togs on and go over to Pennington 's place." The two men rose from their seats and slowly left the room. The other two flies had returned from monitoring the wife leaving. Wing Co, was now

extremely anxious to get back. The five flies, left by the top window, taking a shallow dive towards the estate road, lined on either side with copper beeches.

It was a nightmare, a flock of house martins perched on electricity cables decided to take a snack. Wing Co and one other fly barely escaped, as these birds with wide mouths gaping open swept through the air, scooping all before them. Only a sharp dive down to the grass verge saved the two flies. When Wing Co was sure that the birds had returned to their perch he set off with his comrade.

My friends were now in a desperate struggle to get back to the farmer. This country surveillance was proving very hazardous. The flies headed down one side of the road, along the verge, sweeping around the corner into the path. As they followed up the trail the old farmer was nowhere to be seen, they had reached the point where they left him to pick fruit.

Then Wing Co picked up some vibrations, he knew not what they were but the two flies went back towards the estate road to investigate. As they flew nearer the vibrations increased, low throbbing sound, joined by an increasing higher pitch vibration which first increased then decreased to a lower pulse. The flies settled on top of a fence post near the style into the path. Ahead parked on the road they saw a stationary car, the source of the higher frequency sound. Two men sat in it, one in a fine black suit with a peak cap, the other in the rear, wearing a sports jacket. This man was leaning out of a window, talking to a rather shabby looking figure.

“Beggin your pardon sir, meant to catch you earlier.”

“Oh, oh, what is it, Mr Brown?”

“We'll me wife's sisters been taken ill. All sudden like, and I was wondering if I might have tomorrow off?” said the man, his baggy rough old shirt torn around one sleeve.

“Yes, of course old chap, no problem. Hope it's nothing to serious.”

“Well I don't rightly know myself, but any ways thank e. You're a very kind gent, sir. Me wife was sayin just the other day what a big donation you made to the church steeple fund. She said, 'Roger, e is a wonderful man that Lord Ravensbury,' so she did sir. You eard any more of your friend the Lord Peniton?”

“Pennington, no no, dreadful business, I tell you if I could catch the

bastards.”

“Quite right your Lordship, they is too soft these days. Bring back hanging that's what I say.”

“Indeed, Mr Brown, indeed.”

“My Mrs reckons, that woman and them two blokes what's gone missing as ad im away. She reckons they as robbed im and done im in. Oh, sorry, did not mean to alarm you.”

“That's alright my friend, one has to expect the worst, I fear your wife might be right.”

“She usually is your Lordship.”

“Arn't all women?”

The man laughed, “You are so right.”

“Sorry old fellow must be off, business.”

“Oh sorry sir, didn't mean to delay e.”

The man dobbed his cap and walked away from the car, as it moved off. The shabby fellow walking across to his tractor parked at the side of the road.

“Well,” said Wing Co, to his remaining chum, “I think our farmer must have moved back up the path to avoid being spotted by that chap on the tractor.”

“Yes, sir, I think you may be right,” said the other fly, twiggling Wing Co's impeccable logic.

The two of them flew off along the path taking great care. It was much to their relief when they saw the farmer coming down the track towards them. Landing on his right ear, the said, “Quick, we must get back, warn the others, Lord Ravensbury is on his way to the house.”

“Where's the rest of ye?” asked the farmer.

“Rather a hazardous mission, lost a lot of brave flies.”

“Sorry to hear that, sorry I was not there to greet thee, but I had to move or that bloke on the tractor would have seen me. Came back as soon as I heard him leave. E could see right over the hedge on that modern tractor of is, darn great thing,” Replied the farmer as he struggled back up to the top of the ridge as fast as he could. Catching his breath every so often.

Once in the old Land Rover the farmer, turned in a gateway, and rumbled off along the rough surface.

“I'm worried we won't get there in time,” said Wing Co, already concerned that the farmer had take a while to walk up the slope.

“He has to go around the roads, I know quite a few tracks we can use to get there before him.”

“What if farmers have blocked them?” asked a worried Wing Co.

“We might block bridle ways to stop vehicles but if it is an unmade road or green lane then it's open to all and we nor nobody can block it.” With that the farmer, kept his eye on the road, old he might have been, but he was a skilled driver and had a great knowledge of the local countryside.

We were quite startled, by his entrance. The farmer gasped then blurted, “Wing Co will explain, I must hide the Land Rover, be back later.” With a few huffs, he was gone like a shot. “Keep them doors, locked and the windows closed,” he shouted.

When Wing Co explained that within minutes we might have two visitors we knew to listen carefully.

“But, but, he's such a nice fellow, are you sure, I just find it hard to believe, such a nice fellow, always helped me.” Lord Pennington was having great trouble getting his head around what Wing Co had told us. While he muttered and mumbled, shaking his head in disbelief, Lucy was working on a plan.

“Lord Ravensbury does not know that we know it's him.”

“So,” remarked Simon.

“Well, if Lord Pennington reappears, then Ravensbury has to pull back from his plan.”

Lucy's logic was it seemed sensible, he could not move against us if the world knew his Lordship was alive and well.

“And the men in the hole?” asked Jim, with a worried look, “Besides we then have no evidence on Ravensbury and he will get away with it.”

One of the flies, interrupted landing upon Lucy's other ear, and after a brief moment she announces, “Gentlemen one of our flies reports a car heading down the drive to the house.”

“Lucy, if he is coming to the house then he may not know where his men are, so if we can send him away as Lord Pennington's friend. They won't hurt down the hole for a bit longer. He will still want the device but we can prepare for him, without his knowing,” I said in her ear.

“Yes little one, and if he thinks the bad men have legged it with

something of Lord Pennington's, then he may consider he has been double crossed."

Lucy rushed over to Lord Pennington, "OK gentlemen how about this, Lord Pennington and ourselves narrowly escaped from some bad men, we have no idea who they were. They have taken something precious but Lord Pennington can't reveal to anyone exactly what. We call the press, then let Ravensbury in as a friend, if he makes a move then the press will hopefully arrive in the nick of time, if not then it gives us time to go after him later."

"Yes my dear, yes, if the public knows I'm back in residence then it will be hard for anyone to try again, at least for a while. He goes on a goose chase after the men."

"Perhaps we could call on Nat to phone him with some deal," said Jim.

"Hand over the item for some money?" asked Simon.

"Yes yes, that would implicate him," said Jim.

"Isn't that entrapment?" asked Lucy.

"Perhaps we should think about that later," said Simon, glancing out of the window.

"I'd better call my contacts in the press, tell them I'm safe with my friends. Invite a few over."

"Start calling, we will let them in and they will hear you on the phone."

As Lucy spoke we heard a car draw up outside. First one door and some steps on the gravel, then another and more feet. In a matter of moments there was a knock at the main entrance. Simon and Jim volunteered to go and greet our guests.

The door creaked open. "Yes," said Jim, "May we help you?"

"Who the devil are you man?" asked a rather, curious Lord. You could see him trying to ascertain the situation.

"Why a friend of his Lordship, would you like to see him? He's just phoning a few members of the press at the moment," continued Jim, his butler technique in fine form.

"You're one of the missing people, and so is he," said Lord Ravensbury.

"Yes, that's right, we had a narrow escape from some bad men, Lord Pennington is quite well though."

I could see from the window that Lord Ravensbury was getting a little tense.

"What have you done with him?" he asked, rather loudly.

With a nudge from Lucy, his Lordship between calls, wandered over to

the window, opened it and shouted down, "My dear Smudgy, thought I heard your voice. Do come up dear fellow."

"Of course dear boy." With that Lord Ravensbury entered, followed by his man, Jim and Simon bringing up the rear.

"Hello Podgy, you still eating?" grinned Smudgy.

"To hell with doctors orders, me and my chums here have had a bit of a time with a bunch of ruffians."

"How dreadful for you, are you alright?"

"Shaken not stirred!"

"You old rascal, I'm so glad."

"So my old Smudgy, what are you doing here?"

"Well, got heartily feed up with those damn police doing bugger all to find you, thought I would drop by and see if I could get some clues."

"You are a fine friend, I have heard you were making loud noises in the house."

"Yes, well someone has look after you, and the government get enough out of us a?" The Lord paused, "I would like to stay and find out more, but my wife's gone shopping and Higgins here is sorting dinner, you know what she's like old fruit."

"Likes things done on time, well give her my regards."

"Will do, very pleased that you are well, dreadful business hope they catch the blighter's." With that he and his man made a swift exit. What we did not see was one of the new recruits tailing this chap.

When the car was trundling back down the drive Lucy turned to his Lordship. "Smudgy?"

"Well he wasn't very bright academically, used to smudge things so they could not mark him down on his spelling when he handed in essays."

"How do you know that?" asked Simon.

"I used to help him a lot. He provided extra rations in payment for cribbing off me."

"He did not say much or stop long," said Jim, with a frown.

"Prefers to get you on your own, even then he doesn't say much, has this uncanny knack of getting you to do the talking. In fact thinking back he tends to find your soft spot, with me it's food, and use that to get you to help him. Always comes over as a nice chap, seems thoughtful because he remembers what you like best." His Lordship paused to sup a drink, "Remember one time, he apologised for not bringing me a bar of chocolate, proceeded to offer up a slice of

chocolate cake asking if I'd mind helping him with a bit of history. Well what could I say!"

Lucy opened the flood gates when she asked Lord Pennington to tell us more about his former friend. You could see where she was coming from, know your enemy and all that. He did not want to appear dim, especially in the schooling environment in which he grew up, so providing Lord Pennington, or Podgy as he was know with food, and an element of protection from those less kind, won him both a friend and much better marks than he would otherwise have achieved. In many respects he became a bit of a hero for sticking up for Podgy and going against the crowd. This had stood him in great stead as a thoroughly decent and honourable fellow, wining him other friends who proved in later years to be very useful in furthering his business interests, which were many.

30. How does a fly catch a spider?

As the evening wore on we had various journalists arriving, Lord Pennington, was very careful to keep a lid on the flies and kept low key when it came to what Lucy, Jim and Simon did. This was not hard as being a Lord his press chums were far more interested in his story, Lucy disappeared for long periods below stairs, especially when she noted a wandering eye or two!

The following day, Lord Pennington, asked the media, that he might be left in peace for a while to recover from the ordeal, our farmer friend made sure that all the perimeter fences were secure, leaving us to hatch a plan.

Meanwhile down in Blackhollow House there was a heated debate going on, how do we know this? One lone fly, one of Wing Co's lieutenants, had gone back with Lord Ravensbury and was sitting in on his discussion with Higgins.

"Look man, I did not ask what happened to the bad men because I did not. Besides someone like Podgy being all intellectual might have wondered why? You can't expect me to think of everything."

"No sir, sorry sir," said Higgins, with his face a bit down.

"He won't know anyway, and those two men and that daft woman. Did you see her? Bloody hell, dressed like a Victorian, must be a

re-enactment nutter.”

“Yes sir, they all looked a bit hopeless.”

“You know what I think,” Ravensbury paused to gather his thoughts, “I think those bastards have been stringing me along, I think they have been away from that place for days, those bastards were having a party because they have duped me. I know what it is, it's that bloody Loudmouth bastard and his idiots, they were the ones who wanted to sell out in the first place, yes, and they have worked out what they have is valuable.”

“Turned our chaps,” expressed Higgins.

“Yes Higgins, yes, Podgy hired a right lot of dodgy agents, stupid fool and it has back fired on us. Damn, I should have got Graham and his men to kill those three, why the hell did I think they might be of use to us?”

“Hindsight is a wonderful thing sir.”

“Yes Higgins, but what do we do now? We have no idea where the device is or where those bastards have got to.” There was a silence as the two men sat thinking, then the sound of a car approaching.

“Lord Higgins, it's the wife.”

“Best go and see how cook is getting on?”

“Good man, good man.” Lord Ravensbury, was looking very worried. Some time later after much clattering and the sound of footsteps, his overladen wife entered his emporium.

“Hello dear, wonderful news, I simply must tell you Lord Pennington has escaped from some dreadful rascals, saw him up at Pennington House.”

“Oh that is good news darling.”

“Did you have a good shopping trip?” He asked with a quizzical grin.

“Lots of lovely bargains, I saved a fortune, you should see what I got. I found this beautiful dress, reduced from fifteen hundred down to six can you believe it, I simply had to have it, I'll show you after dinner.”

“Well done dear you are good waiting until the sales, you certainly have an eye for a bargain.” Lord Ravensbury, was giving his wife a broad smile and she was lapping it up.

Nothing much more happened of note until the evening, Lady Ravensbury, after giving him a gander at the dress, retired to bed. The shopping trip had so tired the poor woman, she simply had to rest. He once again retired with Higgins to their male den.

"Yes, yes," said Lord Ravensbury, holding the phone close to his ear. "Speak up man damn you, I can hardly hear." He put his hand over the mouthpiece and whispered to Higgins, "Loudmouth bastard wants to negotiate."

"Just as you thought a sir."

"Indeed," he paused, "Sorry could you repeat that, did not catch what you said."

There was some further listening with the occasional "hmm" or "yes" or "get on with it man" until the receiver was slammed back down on the body of the phone.

"He has it Higgins, wants to do a deal, the nerve of the fellow. When I asked about Graham he did not want to know."

"Maybe those three aren't as dumb as they seem, maybe they are ruthless and have done away with Graham and our lads."

"Just the three of them?" Raged the angry Lord.

"How else would Pennington and those two old men and a woman have escaped, they'd never have got away from Graham."

"Higgins, I bet you're onto something there, yes man, yes, but there is still a lot that is damn confusing."

"Like what sir?" Asked Higgins, attempting to help his masters thoughts.

"Well, Pennington called the press but why weren't the police there?"

"Perhaps you should check things with your contacts."

"Yes but that might stir things up more than we need." The man had a very worried and disturbed look. His eyes closed, his hands raised to support his head.

"You alright sir?"

"Higgins!" The man's head bobbed up, his eyes glaring at his butler come chauffeur. "Of course I'm not, the plan has gone pear shaped."

"Perhaps you should let this one go sir, back off, after all there is nothing to connect you to Graham, we were very careful."

"As always Higgins, as always. But no, I want that device, I want the money it will bring, when I want something I always get it, you should know that Higgins."

Higgins was showing signs of tiredness, but his master was just getting started, Ravensbury was a slow ponderer, he would get there in the end, especially with his man to prompt and tease ideas out.

"Do you think they fell for it Nat?" Asked Lucy, as she sat listening to the phone.

“Well, I think so, let me know if you need Loudmouth again, good night.” With that their caving friend rang off.

“He might not be very academic but he is no fool,” expressed Lord Pennington.

“Nat is very convincing,” said Simon, trying to add reassurance.

A short time later we all retired for the night, the flies taking turns on watch.

“Going somewhere your Lordship?” asked the Inspector eyeing up the bags in the entrance hall. He had arrived early next morning, and worried Lucy because she recognised him from the time he and his officers searched the grounds. She wondered if he too was in Ravensbury's pocket.

“Might try a health farm officer, my weight you see, really ought to do something about it, and here well.” Lord Pennington, waved his hands around in a very silly way.

“The cookie jar too tempting is it sir?”

“Yes, mind good of you to come, very decent of you. No other officers?”

“I hardly think you are going to give me any trouble?” The Inspector paused, his eyes scanning the room, Simon and Jim were still raising themselves from the nights slumber. Only Lucy was present with his Lordship who had risen very early on account of his being hungry. It was Lucy who felt the need to get things ready for our mission, hence the bags.

“No, just wanted to know if you or your friends had any idea who your abductors might have been.”

“Well we did discuss that, did we not my dear?” His Lordship looked to Lucy, who shrugged her shoulders.

“We were blindfolded virtually the whole time, and when we got away it slipped our minds to stop and ask them.” Her cheeky grin, Victorian costume and fluttering eyelids diffused the sarcasm.

“Yes, miss I quite understand, and whereabouts did you make your escape.”

“Somewhere in the countryside, was it not my dear?” said his Lordship, again looking to his able assistant.

“Yes, as his Lordship says, it was somewhere in the countryside, slipped out the back of a van, down some lane.”

“Indeed, yes indeed we did.”

“Not much to go on then?” said the Inspector, almost looking relieved.

"You never got a look at any faces?"

"Sorry old chap, afraid not, do hope you run the rascals down, can't let them get away with this."

"Well, we don't exactly have much evidence, and now with you being back in the public arena I doubt they will try anything again soon."

"Oh!" His Lordship was quite the surprised actor.

"I best leave you in peace, plenty of paperwork to do. If you do think of anything you will let me know first?" His stare at both Lucy and Lord Pennington was incredible, scary like a spider with its fangs drawn ready to bite but not quite in range.

"Yes, yes indeed, first to know, we will ring you, indeed we will."

"Of course, thank you for coming," said Lucy, less phased by the Inspector, her office job had put her in contact with many officials and she was hardened to their jumped up authoritarian stances. He asked a few more questions, mostly to Lucy as she showed him to the door. It was not long before he was back in his vehicle heading towards the gates.

"Hello, your Lordship."

"Yes, anything Stan?"

"No, they escaped from the back of a van, bloody clueless lot, never even got the numberplate, let alone a look at any faces. Apparently they were blindfolded most of the time."

"Yes, yes, if it ain't in a book Pennington's brain don't really register, but where did they escape man?" Lord Ravensbury was clearly agitated and growing impatient.

"In the countryside, but they have no idea where, apparently it was getting dark at the time."

"Shit, shit, well you did your best, besides looks better you asking questions like that." He went quite for a moment, "What I got you was OK?"

"Excellent, thanks again, couldn't live without it, you're a good man sir."

"So are you, so are you," he said and after a few more trivial human words he finished the call. There were many minutes of silence, then came a loud shout, "Higgins, Higgins, we have to be off for that business trip."

Higgins came rushing in, breathing heavily where he had just run up the stairs.

"You're getting old man, puffing like a steam train."

“Came as quick as I could sir.” The man gasped, looking at the clock then at his boss.

There was a barely audible whisper, “Get the guns man.”

“Just us is it sir?”

“Think so, if you want something done properly, a Higgins?”

“Indeed sir, but I just wondered about the numbers, odds and all that.”

“Three of them against two of us?” Ravensbury baulked at the statement.

“What if Graham and some or all of his chaps have switched sides?”

“Ten to one, not good, see what you mean.” The Lord looked concerned, his man was right. “No, no, I think that he has been on too many assignments to switch, maybe a few of his operatives. I think those three have done the rest in. Graham is resourceful, he would have let us know somehow, and if he was with them he would have been calling the shots.”

“Yes, I do believe you are right there sir, he is rather professional, and a born leader. Best get on then.” With that his servant then rushed back out of the room. As the two men made preparations to leave, so did a brave little insect. This fly set off on a very dangerous and long journey, dodging birds, other insects, car windscreens, and other hazards.

In Pennington House, Lucy was now fretting, her eyes frequently looking at the clock. “Where have they got to?”

“They’ll be back soon my dear.”

“With all due respect your Lordship we are wasting valuable time.” Her concern was quite valid, although Simon and Jim did have a good reason to go to the nearest town. Her Victorian costume was not quite the thing for what they were about to do. It was a good hour and a half when they arrived back at the house. Yes, and nearly another hour while dear Lucy changed. As she came down the stairs, Simon came rushing up. “We have news, Lucy this is important.”

Sitting in a group again we listened to Simon repeat what the fly said to him. It was the one who Wing Co thought had gone AWOL, but was now something of a hero. Wing Co was not amused by the heroics, being a stickler for discipline and orders. However our little friend now told us of what he had heard, so we knew what to expect.

“Guns!” exclaimed Jim, who was running short of enthusiasm as he realised the ruthless men we were up against. This was not helped by

his Lordship, confirming that both Smudgy and Higgins were crack shots, keen sports shooters.

“Oh yes, Smudgy might not have been very academic, but where any sports were concerned he excelled.”

“Great,” said Simon, more accustomed to handling flies.

Even Lucy, who was now very quiet seemed to be re-evaluating the plan. “They won't want Loudmouth and his men to live.”

“Yes and we are their stunt doubles,” said Simon, looking depressed.

“Do you think we should have got that Inspector involved my dear?” asked his Lordship, rather naively.

“The head of police in this area?” she replied with a hint of cynicism.

Lord Pennington's expression revealed he understood the implication.

“What about the cavers?” asked Jim, thinking about big Frank and the others.

“No, not this time, besides they are expecting three,” said Lucy with a huff. “We can't go.”

“What? Why?” said Simon with some incredulity.

“What evidence will we have on Ravensbury?” asked Lucy.

“Well he has gone to Scotland, and we have that recording of him speaking to Loudmouth about Lord Pennington's device.” Simon was trying hard to evaluate the situation.

“My dear Lucy, of course he will play the hero, he will say he was just trying to get whatever it was back for me.”

“And if we don't go?” asked Jim.

“He's a sportsman just having a few days off shooting.”

“What about the men?” asked Jim, “We have them, they surely must confess his part in this.”

“He's a crafty fellow, won't have many of them knowing who he is.”

“We've seen them working with the police, they are most likely secret police, so it will undoubtedly be explained away as a miss understanding.” Lucy was now pacing up and down.

“But they had Lord Pennington tied up,” said Jim, making a good point.

“We only have our word against theirs, what real proof do we have?” said Simon, now looking very depressed.

“Ravensbury is very well connected, and they would not want the secret services in a scandal,” said his Lordship, “No Lucy is right, if you three go he won't have any money and you aren't Mr Loudmouth with said device so at best all you will have is a coincidence that you were all in the same location at the same time. Such things do happen, I remember when we had a trip to Switzerland. There we

were, mother, nanny and I in a tiny village miles from anywhere, who should we meet coming down the road towards us, but old Nutty Firkin and his parents.”

“Nutty Firkin?” said Jim, with a wry smile.

“Another fellow from my youth,” said his Lordship with a smile. “I’d say we will have to be a tad more clever to catch the rascal.”

“If we let him go and don’t turn up though?” said Simon.

“He will be out of the way for a few days, which might give us time to prepare,” said Lucy her mind now more focused.

“Won’t he be annoyed?” asked Jim, thinking how he would feel.

“Indeed, indeed he will, not a very patient fellow, think that’s why he was not very academic, reading books would take too long for him. Not that that stopped him buying them. I do believe he thought if he bought a book on a subject he would suddenly know all about it. Strange the way people think.” His Lordship was right there, you humans do seem to buy things then never use them. We flies have seen plenty of new bicycles deposited in sheds never to be ridden, then replaced when rusty. The only cycle they take part in is the metal recycling.

“Yes, then lets allow him his folly to Scotland while we decide what to do,” said Lucy, resolved that it was better to spend a bit more time preparing, and get it right first time. At this moment, Fn8, Firefly and myself were having a debate as to how a fly would catch a spider. It was the nearest equivalent we could think of, and Fn8 made a novel suggestion. “Why not persuade another spider to catch your spider?” his little antenna twitched, “I’ve seen a spider eat another spider, but never a fly eat another fly.”

Firefly looked puzzled, “What’s in it for the other spider? Surely it would be easier for him to eat the fly?”

“Maybe the fly is too tiny to be worth his bother, but the big fat juicy spider,” said Fn8.

“Yes but our spider is surrounded by many friendly spiders who will help him.” There is always a downside.

“Yes, but suppose they became unfriendly,” said Fn8, rolling his little head.

“How would that be?” asked a curious Firefly.

“If they thought he was turning against them?”

“You are brilliant Fn8, absolutely brilliant, genius.” I paused to get my wings buzzing in Lucy’s ear. “Lucy, you are trying to work out how you,

Simon, Jim and his Lordship can tackle this fellow.”

“Yes little one.”

“Don't tackle him, he is a big spider you will never succeed, but he would not be so big if it were not for the help of lots of little spiders around him, now Fn8 thought if you could poison them against him then maybe they would succeed where you like mere flies would fail.”

“Yes, yes, Fn8 is rather a genius,” said Lucy, which made Fn8 go all mushy, he was quite taken with the compliment.

“Gentleman,” announced Lucy, “A change of plan, little Fn8 has come up with a great idea. We are no match for Lord Ravensbury and his man, but he uses other people, without them on his side.”

“Yes, yes,” interjected his Lordship, “Of course, during our days as students I was away once, off sick. He knew he could not ask others for fear of being found out, drove him nuts, his marks were awful.” Lord Pennington had rather a gloating smile on his face. “Might take some time to achieve.”

“Does that matter?” asked Jim, “We can feed and water the men in the hole.”

“Indeed we can, and I'm sure Lucy with her knowledge of documentation systems can dig up some interesting information,” added his Lordship, still smiling, “If you wouldn't mind, my dear?”

“It would be a pleasure,” she grinned, keen to see justice. “We could keep him going off on quite a few wild goose chases.”

“Yes, yes, he'd like that being a hunter,” Lord Pennington was wobbling with laughter.

Lucy now started to make a list, at the top was the Inspector, he was also at the bottom as we had no idea who else was a Ravensbury lackey.

“Simon, Jim, how would you two feel if I appointed young Lucy here as the Fly Master General?”

“Excellent choice your Lordship,” said Simon, “Needs someone with energy and youth on their side.”

“Here here,” said Jim with whole hearted approval.

“Lucy?”

“I'd be delighted your Lordship,” said Lucy, breaking from her thoughts.

“Well what's the first move?” said his Lordship, rather in chess mode.

“We have lost quite a few pieces, so I think if it's ok with Jim and Simon their fly squadrons need rebuilding, we will need to gather rather a lot of information and they will be vital.”

This was music to Wing Co's feet, he of course would be the grand old fly at the head of the training program. The two humans and a contingent of flies headed by Wing Co set off to an upstairs room that would serve as a new HQ and operations base. The rest of the flies were to stay and keep watch around the house, just in case we had any unwanted visitors. Lucy helped by his Lordship were to try and delve more deeply into Ravensbury's operations, hoping to uncover his hidden supports.

We knew that it would be a good opportunity if we could get some information from the Blackhollow House while Ravensbury was out of the way. To avoid interruption to the training program two flies from from the house watching team were selected to come with us, the rest keeping an eye out for Lord Pennington and the others upstairs. Lucy decided it would be better to start in the morning, just in case our foe, had returned for some reason. You know how you humans get ten miles down the road then realise you have forgotten a vital item, especially when you leave hastily.

Next day at dawn our farmer friend was called upon to get us in as close as possible. He drew up more or less in the same spot down the lane as before, this time with more cartons in which to put his fruit. Lucy looked quite different, far more human. Kitted out in hiking gear, those funny trousers with a million pockets, rucksack and funny hat, her hair tied back and a set of shades, complete with local map, but not the most detailed version. We set off, the two flies were hidden in a makeshift carrier, Fn8 and Firefly also as with Lucy's new hair style more than one insect and her earring struggled to conceal us.

Looking quite the part, with her map in hand she strolls down the path, missing the second part on the opposite side of the road, well it did go diagonal, and she is a woman so navigational errors are highly likely. I jest of course, Lucy knew exactly where she was going, but the former was the impression she liked to give on this occasion. Approaching the big house she stood puzzling at the map, a dog ran across the lawn barking.

“Gut hund? Ja ja, ich bin Freundin,” she said to the dog as it drew nearer.

A rather decorated woman approached, “Can I help you?”

“Ja, I so sorry, I lost, not path, no?”

“You are foreign?” said the lady slowly.

Lucy nodded, “Ja, sorry yes, I foreigner.”

“Where are you going?”

“Pfad durch Tal, excuse one moment please.” Lucy stopped to think, and ponder.

“Parlez vous français?” The woman stared at Lucy, who stared blankly, “French, speak French?”

“Deutsch,” said Lucy, “I valley path go.”

“Pitty my husband is not here, he speaks German, can read those things as well.” The woman looked at the map, putting her hands up in a clueless gesture, then pointing to the map.

“You not knowing?”

The woman smiled back, “Tea, you like?”

“Nice,” Nodded Lucy.

“Come, I make one, walking make you thirsty?”

Lucy gave a very silly smile back, and followed the woman into the house. The two of them sat down in the big kitchen, the woman after making tea disappeared. Lucy supped slowly at the hot liquid, constantly blowing on it to cool it. Now that is a strange thing to do, make liquids hot so you can't consume them then cool them down again, why do humans do that?

The woman reappeared with a clutch of what looked like letters. “You no tell my husband, he not like me looking at his things, very secretive. These from Germany you tell me what they about. Understand?” The woman put the letters right next to Lucy's cup and saucer, “Good job, he not here today.”

“He?” said a perplexed Lucy.

“Husband no here today,” she pointed to her wedding ring, then gestured making a walking man with a little thing between her finger legs, and indicating a waving with her other hand, this set Lucy laughing.

“Your man, he go?”

“Yes.”

“We look,” she pointed to the letters with a grin, and giggle.

“No servants today, luck you came.” This sentence did not get a lot of reaction from Lucy, another blank face.

“No matter dear, what in letters?” the woman pointed.

“I no understand much.” She fumbled through the letters, taking much

more in than the woman knew, her apparent struggle to translate was an opportunity to read them in detail. Lucy was very used to processing data, the fact that it was all in German did not seem to phase her.

“He ask man, Germany, help mit special thing he get soon. He nicht, sorry. He not say fat.”

“Fat?”

“F, vhat.”

“Oh, he does not say what?” the woman looked pleased.

“He promise man many monies.” What she also did not mention was that he promised the man something else, his usual treat, this particular letter being one from the man thanking him in advance.

“Writing not very,” she shrugged.

“Neither of them write well, my husband smudges terribly.” The woman's hand gestures were very good, making Lucy giggle as she understood them well, this lady also made some funny facial expressions to enhance the animation.

“Men.” Lucy grinned, making the woman laugh.

“Thank you, I worried it might be love letters,” said the woman, making more signs.

“Die Liebesaffäre, excuse. Die Liason, no, he love another you thinking.”

“Yes, yes, but he not.”

“No, I think not. Well not German man!”

The woman burst out laughing, although you could see Lucy had planted a seed of doubt because she only excluded the German letters from possible infidelity.

The woman disappeared again, taking the letters, she returned some minutes later with some other correspondence and an address book.

“I have friend but I not ask her, she talk too much.”

With some more gestures Lucy nodded, “I understand, you friend is radio mouth.”

“Yes, you look tell me what you think.” The woman handed Lucy the address book and pointed to specific names and addresses that had a little star by them and a number.

“Geburtstag, day born?”

The woman shook her head pointing to the birthday line lower down below the post code. We did notice the German chap was 05 and the Inspector 02, the highest number was 09. These people were

unquestionably his fixers. The woman handed the correspondence, it was a hotch potch of documents bound together, nine sheets of paper, each relating to one of the addresses.

“What's hubby upto?”

“Upto?”

“My man,” the woman paused to think, “What secrets hides?”

“Secret, he keeping.”

“Yes, you think so too?”

“Maybe just business?”

The woman pulled the Inspectors page and pointed at it, “He police.”

“Police, not business.”

“No,” the woman said pulling at 01, the name Graham Wicks, “Look nothing against him, except this very short letter, supplier of temporary staff. I happen to know he gets his employees through another agency.”

Lucy looked blankly, but after some hand motions, “You think vomens he getting?”

The next three seemed quite standard, a lawyer 04, car dealer 06, stockbroker 07. You could imagine a man moving in high circles needing their services.

“Patent Lawyer,” the woman took hold of Lucy's arm in a friendly hold, “He hasn't had an original idea in his life!” She found this quite amusing, “I bet he steals other peoples ideas, finds some poor soul pays him a pittance for some gadget and makes a fortune.”

Lucy looked puzzled.

“Oh it does not matter,” the woman then pointed to 09, “What about her?”

The paper for her was a smudged note with some odd numbers barely discernible.

“Tea, has worked through, need a pee.”

Lucy gave her confused look.

“Tea, me toilet.”

“Ja you toilet go,” Lucy nodded. With the sound of the downstairs loo door closing, Lucy whipped out a very small digital camera, originally bought for the Scottish mission. While we listened to a stream of pee, Lucy quickly photographed each page, then the corresponding address book entry, the flush of the loo was the alarm bell, and Lucy only just pocketed the camera as the click of the loo door opening was heard.

When the woman came back into the room, Lucy was innocently looking puzzled at 09. "Buchhalter," said Lucy making hand movements as though counting money.

"Oh, accountant," the woman looked for a moment, thinking, "No, no, he has a big firm of accountants."

"Not?"

"Not." The woman sat down, her expression sullen, "She lover, she secret."

"He write love," Lucy stumbled for the right word, pointing to the papers, "Letter, she lover?"

"He go to Scotland for a couple of day, he say to hunt, not hunting season."

Lucy paused again as though trying to work out the words, "He see woman?"

"Yes woman, Scotland."

"Bad man," Lucy leaned forward, "You has proving?"

"No proof, but I will dear, he has been acting very secretively lately, always off with Higgins somewhere."

"Higsin, woman?"

"Higgins, drive car."

"Oh, sorry, I having valking."

"Of course dear, you enjoy your holiday." The woman was most kind in seeing Lucy to the door. Our two extra flies had not been needed, this was magic, a jealous, suspicious, possessive wife.

When Lucy arrived back with the farmer, she almost burst out laughing, a whisper from myself cautioning her that sound travels well especially around valleys, and she hit the mute. At first the farmer must have thought she'd lost the plot then gone dumb. Some miles down the lanes she could hold it no longer and burst out laughing.

"That good ay?" said the farmer taking a glance at his passenger.

"His wife was either a bloody good actress and setting us up which I don't think so, although we must consider it, or," Lucy paused for breath.

"Or?"

"Or she has just given us exactly what we need, she is getting suspicious that her dear husband is having a covert liaison."

"Cos, e be going off doing is shady deals and messin with my Lord Pennington."

“Yes, and it gets better, at the moment she has no evidence but there is a woman in the frame.”

“Er we might be able to use that.”

“Exactly,” said Lucy with some glee.

“Well done Miss, or should I call e boss?” he grinned, slowing as he neared a road junction, “Best keep your head down, wouldn’t do for e to be seen in my Land Rover, might blow your cover, never know is wife might be out for a drive. Folks do when they wants to think things over.”

Back at the house Lucy explained her findings the only downside was that Ravensbury's wife had told someone, so we had to be very careful when we started our undermining. If the two sides we played off against each other got together they should not realise a third party was involved. Lucy described it like planting a seed that each would try to pick when it grew to a plant, but it would be obvious to one of them that they planted it. Rather like when your boss has a great idea at work. You know, similar to the one you suggested months ago, well you thought you did but it could not have been, remember it's your boss who has all the ideas, doesn't he or she?

31. Spa to Spa

“Lord Pennington you are going away for your health.”

“I am?” said a rather surprised Lord, “But my dear, that was a joke, just for the Inspector's benefit, wasn't it?”

“Simon and Jim need to stay here to rebuild the squadrons, hold on I'll get them.” With that she rushes up to the new training rooms.

“Hello, can you two come downstairs, I have an idea.” As they both nodded she rushed back down to the lounge where his Lordship was tucking into a few biscuits.

“Tut tut,” she said staring at him

“Oh, hmm, well,” he said, with a rather sheepish expression, it was as though Lucy was his new nanny.

Some little while later footsteps were heard, and Simon followed by a slower and older Jim, entered the room.

“Great,” said Lucy, as she gave them time to sit.

“Here's the plan, we need to rebuild the squadrons, right?”

“Yes yes,” said Jim, not understanding why she was stating the

obvious and interrupting said training.

“So you two stay here, use Pennington House as a place to train flies to monitor humans, we will need to know what Ravensbury is up to. Meanwhile I as his Lordship's new PA.”

“PA,” said Jim

“Personal Assistant,” she said, “I have worked in an office so it would be natural that his Lordship might assign me such a position.”

“But you are the new Fly Master,” said Simon with a quizzical look.

“Yes but that is my secret role,” she replied.

“Ah, got you, for the rest of the world you are just a glorified typist.”

“Exactly, well as I was saying, his Lordship and myself go to Germany to visit a few spas, for his health you understand.”

“He would need a relax after such an ordeal,” said Jim, now following the plot.

“Yes, we can take my little friend, Firefly and Fn8 with us,” said Lucy.

“Might be an idea to take fearless Sid,” said Jim.

“Fearless Sid?” Lucy looked puzzled as to who he was refering.

“The hero, he's quite popular, but I know Wing Co, is none to keen on the trainees coming into contact with him, worried about discipline in the ranks. Can't say I blame him,” said Jim, with a wry smile.

“Why Germany?” asked a curious Simon.

“I have been examining all the people on the list. 01 Graham Wicks, the man who provides people, I think he might be the one we call Nasty. 02 the Inspector, we know where he fits in. 03 is a mystery. 04 Lawyer, deals with patents amongst other things. 05 our German industrialist friend, now suppose he has the engineering muscle to get the secret device into production.”

“Well Ravensbury would not have much luck looking for manufacturing in this country,” said a cynical Jim

“Jim, we have plenty of manufacturing, what are you on about, it's admittedly concentrated in Chinashire,” said a sarcastic Simon.

“Yes gentlemen,” said Lucy with a grin, “If I might be permitted?”

“Indeed my dear,” said a courteous Lord Pennington.

“06 is a car dealer,” she said, trying to continue.

“Loves his cars, does Smudgy,” said his Lordship.

“Yes,” said Lucy, visibly loosing patience, “07 stockbroker, no surprises why he needs one. 08 another mystery. 09 is interesting, lots of numbers and a mysterious woman, possibly also abroad.”

“German is spoken in Switzerland and you did mention numbers, did you not my dear?” said his Lordship. “The way his wife spends I

should not wonder that he needs a secret Swiss bank account.” Lord Pennington laughed a hearty laugh followed by a bit of a choking cough.

“Exactly so if we can go to Germany, and maybe also find the woman?” said Lucy. You could see some doubt in the minds of the others, indeed finding a woman, any woman is difficult enough, just ask any man or a male fly, but one connected to a load of numbers.

“If you are taking our little friends along, it might be an idea to get some better earnings made. I have a friend makes some lovely stuff.”
“Thank you your Lordship, that is a good idea.”

A few days later, Simon and Jim, cover story as caretakers of the house, were with the farmers help infiltrating Blackhollow House. Meanwhile Firefly and Fn8 were riding in one earring, while Sid and I sat in the other. We were concealed most comfortably.

It was quite a long journey, Lucy had decided rail would be easier on his Lordship's delicate constitution than flying. Lucy had from the photos of the documents, deduced some post marks on certain envelopes, many of which seemed to be from Frankfurt, and using the details in Ravensbury's cryptic address book she was starting to make very good progress. Although all the entries had been written in German, no doubt Ravensbury did not want his wife eyeballing the details, the cypher was not exceptionally hard to break. Lord Pennington was not surprised, and made several comments which spurred Lucy on. By the time we were ensconced in a hotel some kilometres from the city, Lucy had a mine of information.

That evening we were all in Lord Pennington's room, Lucy had a convenient adjoining room. Speaking very quietly Lucy and his Lordship along with a few suggestions from ourselves made a plan for the next day.

The following day our two human friends took a slow walk around Frankfurt. Lord Pennington eyeing up all the restaurants, finally persuaded Lucy to stop for lunch. As we made our way across the road to a rather good looking eatery, we got a surprise.

“Podgy my old friend what are you doing in Germany?”

“Why, if it isn't my old pal Smudgy,” said his Lordship, “This young

lady, my new PA, thought I should be taking in a few Spas, relax a bit, get away from the hubbub. She thought Germany ideal, thought going south might be a bit hot for me, with all me insulation!" He laughed and his insulation wobbled to.

"Yes, Germany is very gut for you, many Spas," said the man with Lord Ravensbury.

"Pennington, let me introduce you to Helmut," said Ravensbury with a sickly grin, "Herr Grouber of Grouber & Gronan."

"How do you do sir, pleasure," said a cordial Lord Pennington.

"Helmut, this is my old friend Lord Pennington."

The two men shook hands, Lucy remained very business like, merely shaking the hands of both Helmut and Smudgy.

Ravensbury did not refuse Pennington's offer of lunch, so Lucy and her little earring ensconced friends had plenty of opportunity to size up the opposition. When Lord Pennington was not eating he was talking, so jovially that the other two were lulled into a very deep sense of friendliness, although he did not plan it, his Lordship's was getting their tongs wagging. Next time you get someone to start speaking, let them carry on, then just listen carefully, you will be surprised how much information you will get, even from a complete stranger. Most likely they won't even give it a second thought, and probably will not remember what they said, especially if you keep them chatting for a long period. Our rather rotund friend did just that, even if Lucy did get him eating the healthier items on the menu, he did not loose his charm.

Later that afternoon Lucy took his Lordship for a gentle stroll in a very nice park, oh the smells, but I digress. Sitting for a rest on a park bench well out of earshot, Lucy recalled much of the data, concurring with us for verification.

Smudgy and Helmut were headed to Frankfurt International Airport, they had let slip that they were on their way to a business meeting in Zurich. Smudgy had let slip that they had to leave the restaurant as he did not want to keep a lady waiting. Sid being the hero he was had wanted to ride on one of them and then fly back and tell us all about it. He really did not have any concept of human distances, and I pointed out that he would probably not be able to buy a ticket back to Frankfurt if unaccompanied by a human. Lucy pointed out that we could hardly follow them anyway, it would look rather suspicious.

However that was not our mission, our aim was to put a fly in Helmut's ointment. You are probably thinking like I did, wondering why? If Lord Ravensbury did not have access to Herr Grouber's facilities, would it not make his pursuit of the Pennington invention a waste of time. His Lordship pointed out it would not deter him, but it might make him seek another partner and that could open up a vulnerability. Just as when Podgy was not around to help Smudgy with his school work.

With the rest over and a count down to Lord Pennington's dinner underway, we headed back into town. Lucy did some very discrete data gathering, Herr Gronan the other partner in Grouber & Gronan was head of the other division of the company. One part headed by Grouber did the manufacturing of machine parts, Gronan looked after a separate facility manufacturing machine tools. This obviously gave Smudgy's friend some leeway in his operations.

Lucy stopped, Lord Pennington looked at her.

"Something on your mind?"

"Yes," she said quietly, "If we first check the flights, see if any to Zurich were delayed, I have an idea about calling Gronan."

Unfortunately, all the flights had left on time, not unexpected though.

"How would the delay have helped?" I asked

"Little friend, if the flight was delayed the woman might have called to speak to Grouber, if she got the wrong number and Gronan was suspicious of his partner's trip."

Unfortunately the word restaurant in Germany is easily discernible, his Lordship's taste buds had picked up another word, Wurst.

"I smell sausage my dear."

Lucy looked worried.

"Are you alright?"

"Did I speak any German when we were with those two in the restaurant?"

"No, no, Helmut translated for us, you hardly said a word, why?"

"When I went to Ravensbury's home, I pretended to be German, if his wife mentioned it?"

"Oh yes I see," he said, and so did we. Lucy looked at him, he was now looking across the road at a rather buxom lady carrying some rather large glasses of beer.

"Hmm, hmm," said Lucy.

"Oh, oh, sorry, yes, hmm," his Lordship scratched his double chin. "We could ask old Jim, see if Wing Co has any news from the front?"

Lucy pulled out a phone and gave him a call, we were subjected to a rather familiar if somewhat loud voice. After a short burst of conversation, Lucy updated his Lordship.

"Nothing, his wife did not even mention a stray walker."

"Good, why would she, she did get you to do a sneaky for her?"

I reminded Lucy that Ravensbury rewarded his helpers with whatever was their particular weakness.

"Yes, little friend," she said turning to our rotund friend who was now looking at the shelves of a rather well stocked Konditorei, his Lordship's eyes were locked onto some chocolate cakes oozing with cream.

"Hmm, hmm, oh just one would not hurt my dear," he said with a child like expression.

"Do you have an heir?"

"No," he said, shaking his head.

"So you have to survive, or do you want Ravensbury to beat you?"

Lucy, gave him a look that we had not seen before, he was also no longer the jovial bookworm. It was as though he had had a revelation.

"He knew my weakness, kept me overfed at school, it suited him."

It was as though a tough sporty lad had realised he had been trapped for years. There was such an air of determination about him, as though his ancestor Sir Charles had given him a nudge.

"Salad, I shall have salad and plenty of exercise my dear, you make sure I do," he said.

Lucy just nodded her head, "I was going to ask what you think Helmut's weakness might be?"

"It ain't food my dear. Knowing Ravensbury if he really wants a hold on someone he'll find out a secret passion they have."

"Carrot if you're good, stick of embarrassment if you're bad?"

"Yes my dear, he did that to one poor chap at school."

"That did not turn you against him?"

"No, not at the time, Ravensbury was very clever at making any victim of his seem like a thoroughly bad apple."

That evening Lucy rustled up a salad for them both with a treat or two for us insects. We still had no idea how to get at Ravensbury's German friend.

“Perhaps it's time for us insects to do a bit of information gathering?” I said to Lucy.

“My little friends where do you suggest we start this gathering?”

I looked at Sid he looked at me, Firefly and Fn8 were equally puzzled as they munched away.

“Why don't I see if I can get some information from the local ants?” asked Fn8.

“What a good idea, yes they might have seen Helmut with his weakness.”

Lucy and his Lordship both thought this worth a try, her plan to find out as near as possible where Helmut lived then Fn8 would enquire with the local colonies.

It was a bright early morning start, Lucy with her skill at sifting through information had discovered a rather select area where a lot of the more well to do people resided. Behind part of the residential neighbourhood was a small forest, where it would be quite natural for his Lordship to be seen taking the air. A convenient log provided a suitable resting place not far from some of the extensive gardens associated with the houses. Fn8 flying his top gun position on Firefly flew off. This was dangerous territory, we had no idea what hazards we would encounter, but Lucy did recommend they keep a wary eye out for hornets. We flies stayed put in her earring.

Firefly flew quite low, Fn8 had picked up the scent of some wood ants. With a mound in sight Firefly did a circling manoeuvre while Fn8 checked below.

“Ok to land my friend?”

“Yes,” replied the little black ant.

A few wood ants had spotted this fly past and came over to check out Firefly and his passenger. We are friendly shouted Fn8, he was worried that German wood ants might not understand a British black ant.

“You are not from around these parts are you?” said a curious wood ant.

“No we are from a land far from here, there are some bad people who have killed lots of ants, and flies and other insects, we are helping some good humans to stop them.”

“Humans, oh the big monsters that walk on two legs?”

“Yes,” said Fn8.

“There are good ones?” asked another wood ant twitching his antenna.

“Yes,” said Fn8, “There is one very bad one, he is like a big spider, we can't tackle him, so we are trying to find ways of getting at those who help him. We need to know where he lives.”

“What does this human look like?” asked the first wood ant.

Fn8 described Helmut in lurid detail, the wood ants had not seen him but they said to wait. Over the ant version of the grape vine, messages radiated out to all the surrounding colonies, one black ant colony sent a very hopeful message back.

Lucy was very pleased when Fn8 returned with the good news. Now it was Sid and myself who had to fly off. Luckily for us it was not far, Lucy and his Lordship did a few more laps of the forest track.

Our journey was very scary, not long into the flight and we encountered a hornet. It probably came from a nest high up near the roof of an adjacent house to our target. Sid and I both did a dive, the hornet was very very fast. Sid had spotted the glint of a web moving in the breeze between the small twigs radiating from an apple tree. At the very last moment Sid peeled left and I to the right, the heavier hornet travelling much faster slammed straight into the web. This was one time we were glad of a spider.

Regrouping we both sat on a fence post, bathing in warm sunlight.

“Glad you spotted that web Sid,” I said with some relief.

“If you had not seen it coming the web would not have been much help, wow, did that hornet move fast, I thought wasps were scary.”

Suitably recovered we took to the air, after scanning various windows we got a look at Grouber, he was talking to a woman.

“Is it his wife?” asked Sid, less experienced with humans than myself.

“Might be,” I said, looking at her, “She looks a similar age to him.”

Ravensbury and Grouber must be back from their meeting in Zurich, but what was Grouber shouting, the triple glazed windows blocked out the vibrations, the woman was now shouting and waving at him.

“Can we get in?” asked Sid.

“I doubt it this house is probably air conditioned.”

“What?”

“Humans seal the house then have a way of taking air in and out, but you would not want to go there,” I said shaking my head. We stayed a long time, but it was next to useless, all we saw was what appeared to be an argument. What it was about was anyone's guess. “Lets get back, at least we can confirm where he lives.” Sid agreed, so we took a very cautious flight back. Our two human friends were once again sitting on the log.

The forest free of tempting food shops was an ideal place for a healthy picnic, strangely his Lordship was taking a liking to Lucy's servings. Lucy was contemplating what we knew.

“Your Lordship, do you ever feel that at times you travel through life and whatever you do, however clever and knowledgeable you are, you seem to get nowhere?” She sighed.

“While some rather dim rascals make great strides and do rather well?”

“Yes,” she said looking up at the tree canopy, “We know where Grouber lives, but we can't even get a fly inside, we know where he works, and that he has been to Zurich, but what good is that?”

“Indeed it is hopeless, so much for getting at all those little spiders.”

“We must return home,” said Lucy.

“Why, my dear, I'm enjoying these nature strolls.”

“You can stroll back at Pennington House,” she replied.

“Pennington House!” He was a tad indignant at this suggestion.

“Well Wadleton Woods,” she said, shaking her head.

“Why, we have only just arrived, I haven't even seen a spa?”

“Ravensbury knows you are here.”

“So?” His Lordship was noticeably upset.

“If you were Ravensbury what would you do?”

“Ah, hmm,” said Lord Pennington, looking up at the trees, to the sky beyond. “Oh, I might go to Pennington House to look in and make sure all was well, knowing that Lord Pennington was away. It would be most considerate of me.”

“That's exactly what I think, while the cats way the mice.”

“My word, you are a sharp little thing, yes, yes, he'll want to have a snoop around, we must return immediately.”

“We must pretend we are moving on to visit another town Germany.”

“Just in case old Grouber has a word with the local hotelier?”

Plans were laid and it was not long before we arrived back at the Pennington residence.

Jim opened the door with some surprise, the old farmer was unloading the luggage.

“Don't e stand there gauping, we gota get is Lordship inside quick like.”

“Oh, yes,” said Jim, who proceeded to struggle with a case.

Lucy and Lord Pennington, made a very swift move from the Land Rover into the house, his Lordship was however rather out of breath at the attempt to keep up with his young assistant.

With the farmer gone, and the door locked, Jim, Lucy and Lord Pennington all collapsed in heaps on the sumptuous, if a little musty, lounge furniture.

“Why are you back?” asked a very puzzled Jim.

Lucy filled him in on our reasoning. It was early morning and both her and his Lordship were yawning, tired from the overnight trip back.

Ravensbury was not an early bird, so his Lordship thought it wise to arrive back at dawn.

The three humans were beginning to drop off. Jim tired from the exertion and the watches. It turned out Simon was asleep he had taken the night watch. The two of them had taken shifts in keeping an eye out for intruders. There was still the tiny issue of Ravensbury's men, held captive at the farm. One fly came buzzing into the lounge so fast we wondered if it would stop, landing upon one of Lucy's ear's it rested for a moment then divulged it's message.

“Wood ant colony north side of Wadleton Woods, two men, one Ravensbury, the other with guns, heading round edge of quarry towards farm.”

Lucy half dozing, asked our friend to repeat the message. He finished, with a further announcement. “Wing Co, launched with squadron to intercept.”

“Jim, your Lordship, WAKE UP,” she shouted, startling both of them. When they learnt of the news, Pennington's face when white.

“I don't like the sound of that, Smudgy has lost patience, when he does I've seen people get hurt, the bounder get's away with it too.”

Simon, woken by Lucy's shout had come down to the lounge and was just entering the doorway.

“We must ring the old farmer,” Simon said, looking very worried.

“My word, yes, if the cad gets his tractor he'll have those men out and we'll really be in for it.”

“Could he know about the men?” asked Lucy. “The farmer said you can't get a mobile phone signal down their, the vet had tried when he isolated a few sheep in the bunker.”

While we were wondering what to do, Simon phoned the farmer who was sitting chatting to his wife.

“Oh, heck, I don't fancy me chances agin them two rascals, think I best fix the tractor and get me and the misses over to e.”

Meanwhile out above the quarry, six flies were formed in loose formation. Wing Co, had spotted the targets moving along the edge of the field where it bounded the quarry below.

Hovering in the sun they tracked the men's progress. The flies moved north keeping pace, as they did so they saw another six insects. Second squadron were airborne and had taken up a strategic position, five minutes walk from the farm.

“Look chaps those two are headed for the farm,” he paused, Wing Co was feeling his age. “Second squadron, fly to the farm make sure the farmer leaves, then fly back to base, tell them, enemy location.”

The younger second squadron leader, gave Wing Co the nod and lost no time in racing to the farm. Down below the farmer was helping his wife into the Land Rover. Number two squadron kept watch making sure that the vehicle left. When they were sure, they headed back to base, this is how I know what happened up to this point.

The villains were by this time at the farm, Wing Co could see Ravensbury on his mobile phone, and another phone just poked through a crack in between two of the concrete blocks which secured the main entrance. It was not long before Ravensbury had found his missing men, and had Higgins trying to get the tractor going. Wing Co and half the squadron flew low, leaving the others on station over head to report should his section be lost.

When the three flies were within hearing distance they heard a rather gruff Ravensbury admonishing his wayward lackeys.

Back in the house we were ushering in the farmer and his very

distraught wife. Lucy, echoed an unlady like expletive, she had been looking at an article in one of the on-line newspapers.

"What's e problem miss?" The farmer enquired, in his usual rustic fashion.

"I've lost the connection, but I still have the article in the cache."

"Cash, don't think we should be worryin about cash me dear."

"No, cache is a store on the computer, this article indicates Ravensbury might be over stretching his finances, it's and investment warning."

"Oh, so e may be a getin a bit desperate?"

"The way his wife spends t'aint no wonder," said the farmer's wife.

"How does e know dear?"

"Cos, my friend Mavis, er daughter works in that posh shop down town."

"Oh, r, I sees."

"The phone is dead," said Simon, listening at the receiver. Another fly came buzzing into the room, he was one of the watch team around the house.

"Three men seen heading this way towards the main entrance."

We looked out, to see three rather purposeful men striding towards the house.

"Who are they?" asked the farmer.

"They look like the three Wing Co put out of action with the tick attack," said Lucy, her brain trying to assimilate all the information that was coming our way. We knew what was happening but had no idea what to do.

"Keep back from the windows, let the flies watch," said Lucy.

The men found the farmers vehicle, it took a bit of doing but eventually they got into the old Land Rover, and had it speeding down the drive and onto the track to the farm.

There was a plume of dust as the vehicle speed down the track, stopping short of the concrete blocks.

"Back it up, get that winch on and pull these away," commanded Ravensbury.

"Sir, these men have seen you, so will the others is that wise, why not leave these, five of us can get into the house." Higgins's words of caution were not headed by his Lord.

The Land Rover was well built, solid and sturdy but even it was having trouble trying to pull on the blocks. Lifting them off with the tractor would have been much easier, no friction to deal with.

With the first block almost clear of the entrance, there was an almighty twang. The Land Rover lurched forward, the steel cable slamming into the back of it as the cable and hook, parted company, the hook with no tension on it flying in the opposite direction slamming into the base of the barn wall.

“DAMN,” shouted Ravensbury, “DAMN.”

Spiky was the first of the men to try and clamber out, he almost got stuck between the steps and the concrete block still above the entrance.

“You daft idiot, you dunderhead, fool,” barked Ravensbury.

“Oh, yea, what d you call me?” Spiky was more than a little fed up, having been cooped up below.

“Had you got stuck, how the hell would we have moved that block?”

“Yea well I didn't so,” said Spiky, none to pleased with the rescuers attitude, “Tried usin the tractor, a ?”

“The farmer has nobbled it,” replied Higgins, now clearly worried about the rats that his boss was letting out of the ground.

Spiky wandered over to the tractor, took a look at it.

“It's no good,” shouted Higgins.

Higgins was a chauffeur and butler come right hand man, Spiky however had come from humbler stock, and with a dubious miss spent youth, knew a thing or two. The tractor burst into life, Spiky no expert at driving one, lurched dangerously towards Lord Ravensbury, nearly solving our problem. Unfortunately Ravensbury was the sporty type and nimble enough to move, just in the nick of time.

“WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING MAN?” shouted the Lord.

“Gettin my mates out, see,” replied Spiky, needing to prove himself. At this point Wing Co few back up to the other section still hovering above the ensuing commotion. It did not take long to remove the other concrete block. A stream of rather pale and pasty men came up to take some fresh air. The smell from the old shelter was apparently rather nice, if you are a fly that is. The men also had a pleasant odour, although not to his Lordship's liking.

Wing Co immediately gave orders, "You three get back to the house, warn the others, twenty five men now out for revenge will soon be heading their way." The section leader gave the customary nod and headed back. His alert, sent all the humans into a state of panic, they went very white.

Wing Co meanwhile returned to ground level with his two accompanying flies. They needed to know what Ravensbury was planning. In the house, Lucy was the only one still thinking. "It's hopeless," cried his Lordship, "What was the point of me eating salads, and all that exercise." "They'll get us for sure now," said Jim. "Can't we leave the house?" asked Simon. "In what?" Jim stared at Simon. "On foot," replied Simon. "His, Lordship might be a bit fitter than he was but," said Jim. Simon cut him short with an acknowledging expression. "We are right back to square one, and we don't have those cavers to help us," said a despondent Jim.

"Shut up," said Lucy, "Let me think." "Thinking won't stop twenty-five angry men." His Lordship's tone was very droll. Lucy gave him the most savage stare, he froze. "You, you might though," he said with a stutter, whispering to silence.

With the exception of Ravensbury and Higgins, the men who opposed us were all relatively young. The men in our team were erring towards old, they were not particularly agile or trained in combat.

"Are there any tunnels they don't know about?" said Lucy looking at his Lordship, "It won't take them long to get into the house. I don't think they know about the one from the loft down to the cave system."

"No, hmm," said his Lordship, trying to think. However some people are not good at this when put under pressure. "They do know about the machine cave at least," said Jim. "If we could get into those there caves before they got into the machine cave?" said the farmer. His wife not quite as rotund as Lord Pennington looked a little aghast at the thought.

We were interrupted by Wing Co's return, his flight was haphazard and he was alone. Some of the flies in the house came over to where he had landed on the coffee table.

I flew to him, "Wing Co, what happened?"

"Message for Lucy, men split, Higgins and four men, down into quarry, secure cave. Ravensbury and rest," Wing Co, looked at his damaged left wing, "Ravensbury going to search house, top to bottom, kill you all." Wing Co, went limp, I and some of the other flies tried to wake him, it was no good our leader had gone. Command now passed to the only remaining fly who had come from the original CFC with Wing Co. He had a similar temperament, and was given charge of taking the squadron away to safety. We did not want another massacre. Jim decided that Sid, Firefly, Fn8 and myself would be enough.

As the flies left their watch positions, we had news that the men were not far from the house. Lucy ordered all the humans to head for the roof. By the time we were all hidden in the roof passage the men had entered the house, Sid flew back to Lucy with the news, as we barred the hidden panel. The side panel into the loft space was still open, so all were bid enter.

As the farmer began lifting the hatch that covered the shaft leading to the caves below he stopped. Beckoning Lucy, now clutching a torch, as were most of our member. Simon had on a trip to town had the foresight to buy some more fly friendly illumination. Lucy went over to him, as we approached the distinct echo of voices bounced up the shaft walls. The farmer lowered the hatch shaking his head. Lucy whispered, Sir Charles's room, carefully our group walked along the boards, she was the first to clamber up onto the roof of the hidden room. As she lifted the hatch a faint, and rather upsetting sound came her way. It was Spiky laughing as he spoke to Unknown, they were climbing up to the hidden room, very quiet, we could hardly hear them, but they had entered the shaft. She replaced the hatch and secured it.

Whispering to the farmer, the only one of the men who was not a bag of nerves. "We can't go that way, my friend Spiky has it covered, Ravensbury's butler is sure to serve us from the other hatch, any idea what now?"

"Miss, we best get round the corner into the west wing roof, though I

don't rate our chances mind," he said, with some despondency. She tugged his arm with a firm reassuring grip, "We're not done yet, I need you."

Her look was enough, the farmer looked at his wife, then back at Lucy, "They won't get e if I ave any thing to do with it," he said bravely.

While the others huddled down, Lucy and the farmer were busy studding the roof over this side of the building.

"Little friend I can't believe Sir Charles would not have another way out."

"There are three ways in, so he had two, why would he have another?"

"We have the that metal strip, but nothing into which it fits."

Now this set my little fly brain thinking. She was right, we had found what was probably a prototype in the caves, and we had the two books, but Sir Charles's son, Harold, must have done more than get his hands warm.

Lucy was distracted by the frantic waving of the farmers torch. He pushed down a very well concealed panel, had there not been a piece of wool caught in between the panel and a rafter we may never have found it. Lucy went down first, the rest were told in no uncertain terms to follow her, the farmer to bring up the rear. It was a very narrow set of steps, possibly leading down inside an internal wall.

The farmer's wife was stalling, her fear of confined spaces obvious, Lord Pennington, was doing his best, both to squeeze down the passage and encourage her, taking her hand. The old farmer was becoming exasperated, there were some very loud noises. It was Higgins and two of his four men, they were clambering into the loft space. Spiky and Unknown were not helping, they had entered Sir Charles's hidden room in the roof and were doing it rather noisily.

"Have you two nothing better to do?" shouted Higgins, "You in that room over in the corner."

"Ow's askin," said Spiky.

The farmer's wife slid down to the steps below rather rapidly pursued by the farmer. As he descended below his eyes, saw and ever brighter, ever larger light beaming across the roof space to the secret room in the corner of the west wing. It was with some relief that he closed the panel and secured it. Lucy stopped, she looked back, her

torch dazzling the others as she peered at the farmer. He gave her the thumbs up signal.

She indicated to all, to sit down on the steps, gave the shush signal with her finger and turned her torch off, making a sign that the rest should do likewise. With Higgins, a hunter in the roof she could not risk the huffing and puffing of Lord Pennington, or the sounds of feet on the stone steps.

Lord Pennington had rallied, his chivalrous side seeing the poor farmer's wife's need, her husband took her other hand in a firm reassuring grip. Lucy was clearly worried, the farmer's wife would not be able to stay long in this place, her claustrophobia worsening as the minutes ticked by. Above Higgins was arguing through the wall of the hidden room with Spiky. Unknown was also joining in backing up his colleague.

From what we heard Higgins was sure there must be a way into the hidden room, Spiky was adamant that there was not. The other men with Higgins assured him that there were no other exits in any of the other panels.

It was some time before and exuberant Higgins triumphantly announcement he had found a panel in the roof of the hidden room. You could tell he was pleased, having been out smarted earlier by Spiky and the tractor.

“What's behind the panelling up here then?” Shouted one of the others.

“Servant's quarters,” said Unknown.

“Come on you two there is nothing up here except cobwebs, and I need to see Ravensbury,” barked Higgins.

Lucy waited, we heard some shuffling, groans, and a few comments then all went quiet. Lucy was very cautious, what was said above may have been for our benefit, they may well know we are up here somewhere, just needing to hear us.

Someone was starting to take deep breaths, Lucy switched on her torch. It was the farmer's wife, Lucy signalled to move, but quietly. As

the other lights went on we slowly made our way down the steps. They seemed to keep going down, Lucy whispered to us she thought it might be through the front wall of the house, the bit between the two wings. This seemed plausible as every so often there would be a level section, possibly under and over windows. These were convenient places to rest, the farmer's wife, Jim and his Lordship were easily tired by the exertion.

It was at the next level section that Lucy froze. Her hand signals telling all to be totally quiet. The guess was we were somewhere near the lounge.

"So none of you have found any sign of that farmer?"

"No sir."

"Higgins?"

"Nothing, I still have two men guarding the entrance to that cave with the machinery, don't see how anyone could escape."

"Pennington and bit are doing a tour of the spas, bloody fat idiot what good's that going to do? Is someone keeping an eye out for Podgy and that daft woman, his PA. Ha have you met her, dumb, nice looking though."

"Yea," said the unmistakable voice of Spiky.

"They might come back, we don't want that now do we? Farmer dies in confrontation with robbers, we can handle, Podgy would be more difficult to explain away."

"What about us?"

"You are going to work your butts off until we have that device."

"We still don't know exactly what it is, that book you gave us was a crap gardening manual." Nasty was very peeved at their ordeal, we could tell his stamina for this operation was running low.

"That book told you to look in red and green corset, part of the device therefore must be some kind of strip."

"Like to see that bird stripped naked," said Spiky.

"Shut up, you are looking for thin strip about eight inches long, and maybe half an inch wide ok, plus some device that it goes in."

"How do you know about this strip?"

"That's for me to know, let's just say a few foreign friends and a photocopy," said a rather cocky Smudgy.

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because a friend of mine in Germany is a keen gardener, said some

of the book made no sense, asked me to ask Pennington because the book was printed by a press owned by the original owner of this house Sir Charles Pennington, from that I worked out that it was coded, ok.”

Lord Pennington, and Lucy looked at each other, each had a grin, you could tell his Lordship's had difficulty believing this story. However it might explain the visit to Zurich.

“So why didn't you tell us this in the first place? There's a bloody great wardrobe in the east wing,” shouted Nasty.

“Bloody right there is,” boomed Loudmouth.

“Because I was not sure, not when I set you lot on the case, and I could hardly waltz round and tell you, what with all the media attention.” Ravensbury was getting stressed, he was used to people giving him respect because of his position.

“Ok, go check for a red and green corset, if you find it bring it here, meanwhile the rest of you better help me find that farmer and those two fly masters, they must not escape. We know that farmer came here, so they must be hidden somewhere, find them.”

We listened, there was very little to be heard, a bit of scuffling, a few murmurs. Lucy indicated that we should move, but very slowly and quietly, Ravensbury was quite possibly the other side of the wall.

The passage continued it's decent, there were no longer, any level stretches. The air was beginning to feel very damp, and decidedly chilly, not nice if you are a fly. Sid and Firefly shared my opinion, only little Fn8 marvelled at the extent of the subterranean passage.

Just when the poor farmer's wife was starting to think we were never going to get out, and his Lordship's knees were giving him some discomfort, the steps ended and a long almost level passage lay ahead. Curving to the right and descending very gently it to seemed endless. Further on the red brick lining gave way to solid rock, in places water dripped from the ceiling.

At one point where the curve gave way to a distinct bend in the passage, Lucy stopped. Shining her torch upon the bare rock, gouge marks were clearly visible.

“This has been done by machine, and a very powerful one at that,” she

whispered. The farmer's wife was not interested in such technical details, whispering back, "Get a move on." The strain in her voice very noticeable.

After the bend, the tunnel again took a gentle downward descent. His Lordship sounded like a steam train going up hill through a tunnel. The length of the passage was tiring him as much as it was frightening the farmer's wife. She was starting to panic, while his Lordship wanted to rest, she worried that we were going to be trapped and never see daylight again.

"We're never goin t get out a here, oh, oh," she said, the anxiety in her voice gave it a quivering tremble.

"We are going to see sunlight," said Lucy very reassuringly.

"Do you think the machine that made this tunnel was powered by that solar strip?" I asked, using some fly logic.

"Yes, my clever little friend, yes," she whispered back.

Not far ahead her torch beam caught the sheen of a solid metal door. It had a big lock just like the other tunnel doors we had encountered on previous occasions. Yet the door would not yield to any of the keys.

"Maybe it's not locked have you tried pushing it?" said Simon.

Lucy pushed but it did not budge.

"I knew it I knew it."

"Calm down me dear, Lucy ll ave us in there," said the farmer, comforting his near hysterical wife.

32 Secrets

After an extensive search Lucy could find no hidden key, or levers that might open the portal.

"I'll have to go back to the house, maybe a key is hidden in the loft," she said.

"Go back," said the farmer's wife.

"Close your eyes, and let your husband hold you, you'll be alright," Lucy said this as she was trying to squeeze past the others. Eventually crawling on all fours past their legs as they moved to one side of the tunnel.

"I'll come back with you," said Simon.

"No you will stay here, the more of us that go the more chance that they will hear us." She was very wise, where the passage passed through the walls of the house they may well hear feet on the bare stone steps. When we reached the level of the house Lucy slowed her pace, two things worried her, sound from her movements and that the men had discovered this tunnel.

As we approached the level of the loft, a heated argument was ensuing.

"I told you they have gone, that farmer, his wife and those other two have scarpered, that's why they left the Land Rover outside the house," said Loudmouth, his voice echoing down the tunnel.

"He's right how many more times do we have to tell you they ain't here?" said Spiky.

"Look while you two have been sitting drinking sherry we have had to deal with this lot, they're smart, slippery as eels," said Nasty.

"I tell you they can't have gotten away so quickly, how would they know we were coming?" Ravensbury was trying to assert his position.

"The bloody farmer saw you," said Spiky, his temper flaring.

"This is Lord Ravensbury you are talking to," said Higgins.

"Don't care if e's bloody God im self," snarled Spiky.

"Look Graham's theory that they could have gone down the track to Pennington Halt is a good one." Loudmouth was clearly frustrated with Ravensbury.

"But Higgins has two men in the quarry," shouted Ravensbury.

"Yea, by the bloody cave, and you can't see the Halt from the cave, besides they probably went the other way through the cutting," Nasty screamed back. "While we are wasting time arguing they are most likely contacting Pennington and that woman. With his connections he'll have the army down here."

"He won't have the army," said Ravensbury, "His family are not so well connected as they used to be, the buffoon is a bookworm, he doesn't mix in high circles like his ancestors."

"May I remind your Lordship that after all the publicity, he may get a lot of sympathy from many of your noble lords colleagues," said Higgins, his calm and respectful manner drawing a cringe from Spiky.

"I'm his friend he would contact me first, remember," said Ravensbury.

"Not if e can't get hold of you," said Loudmouth.

“Exactly,” said Nasty, “Mobile signals are crap around here.”
“So, what do you think we should do then?” Ravensbury, skilfully manoeuvred the problem to his lackies.

“Couldn't the Inspector put a chopper up?”

“No, we don't want him involved, besides what pretext would justify this?”

“Let's get some men to go along the cutting, your man Higgins is a hunter, let him go. The rest of us will spread out, take some rides checkout the area, the farmer's wife will slow them down,” said Nasty.

“Ok, Ok,” said Ravensbury.

We listened, there was a lot of clambering, the men must have been in the loft area on the walkway. Now they were scurrying up onto the roof of Sir Charles's secret room, and like rats down a drainpipe would soon descend the shaft down to the tunnel leading to the drawing room.

“Little one, I think they have gone, I'll open the hatch, you fly up and check the coast is clear,” said Lucy. This made me wonder, did the coast is clear, come from smuggling? Well no time for a fly to ponder such things. With a gap above visible, I flew up into the loft. It was eerie in the faint light from the small glass fragments that were hidden in the tiles. Like tiny spotlights, they shone circles of sun onto the rafters. With a quick spin, wary of spiders webs, I returned to Lucy.

“All clear,” I said hopping back into the earring.

Lucy slowly made her way into the loft space, pulling the hatch closed behind her. Smart, if they found her they may not find the others. The beam of her torch scanned the area around the hatch, the most obvious place to hide a key. She had already given the walls of the passage a good deal of attention so we were pretty sure the key had to be in the house, but where?

“What about Sir Charles's room?”

Lucy shook her head, giving us quite a ride in the earrings. Firefly, Sid and myself did not mind, us flies were used to such movements, but little Fn8 was not so keen, to him it was your equivalent of being at sea.

Lucy wandered along the walkway, back toward the east wing. She

was surprised, they had not found the panel into the loft passage. She went in closing it firmly behind her. Her previous visits to both Elle's room and the secret room of Sir Charles, gave her reason to doubt that there were any hidden keys in either.

"Why don't you look?" Sid did not understand.

"Little Sid this room and the other had nothing to do with Harold."

"Harold?"

"The son of Sir Charles, the man who had Pennington House built."

"Oh, so he might have his own secret place?" Was Sid onto something with this thought.

Lucy went first to check that the west wing entrance to the passage was still firmly secured. It was, she popped her head in Elle's room on the way back, it was undisturbed. Moving swiftly to the east wing, she pulled the strong wooden panel up securing it back into its ceiling location. Thus leaving the much feebler panel into the servants quarters exposed. She eased it open gently, all was silent, sure that all was well she closed up behind her. Then moved on, to where we had no idea, Fn8 and Firefly were deep in debate, Sid and I could just hear old Firefly getting a bit buzzy.

It was not long before Lucy was back in Elle's room in the east wing, which had obvious connections. Elle had most likely helped Harold as she had his father. It was a complete mess, dresses and other female attire that had once been so neatly and carefully stored, now spilled out from cupboards and draws as though some mad carpeteer had come up with a new design.

Suddenly Lucy froze, we heard a load bang. It was a heavy door, the main door into the east wing.

"Someone leaving or coming?" she whispered.

"I'll go," said Sid, rather recklessly he set off.

We could hear footsteps coming up the main staircase. This was a man in a hurry, we very soon heard panting as the same man got nearer.

"How did he get up here so quickly?" I asked Lucy.

"Maybe he was already inside and the wind caught the open door," she replied, wondering where to hide. The wardrobe was almost empty of clothes. Lucy dived under the bed as Sid came racing back.

“They,” there was a taking of some deep breaths, “They're here, I know it, somewhere, I know they must be here. Those fools, Graham Wicks you and your idiot men, well do a job yourself. Higgins will keep them occupied, yes, how to dispose of them, so many. Damn. Damn you Pennington, I'll get it, I will.”

The door burst open, “What have we here?” Lucy's eyes followed a pair of feet and ankles as Ravensbury wandered around. With the vast piles of flouncy dresses, and underwear, the gap between the edge of the bed and the floor was much reduced.

“Bloody room full of dresses, bloody women, worse than my bloody bitch of a wife.” He was one angry man. “Gone to her mothers, oh, yes. Gone off with some, some, toy boy, first Pennington's contraption, then terminate Graham and his chums, end of their contract, then a few words with Higgins, then arrange a little accident for my dear darling wife.” He sniggered, “Well they ain't in here, I bet there's some other secret hidy hole, four of them, you can't hide four people in a room like this, but I'll find them, get them, get the thing.”

The feet shuffled away out of the door. “Sodding dresses,” shouted Ravensbury as he almost tripped, just catching himself. “I hate this room, I hate you Pennington.”

With that we heard him walking down the corridor to the next room. All the time he talked to himself cursing about this and that. Lucy stayed very still, only her eyes moved, watching Sid as he checked out a smell from beneath the bed. As he wandered around under the framework, Lucy noted the craftsmanship. The bed was very old, it's timber frame full of intricacy. Various metal plates bolted to the woodwork, fixing a series of springs, caught her eye. A couple matched but seemed slightly out of alignment. To the casual observer, one might consider it a quaint quirk of a one off hand crafted bed. Lucy reached up, and touched one, it seemed solid. She rolled and stretching with her other arm pulled on the other, it moved, pulling right out it dropped on the floor. There was a faint thud, I could feel Lucy's heart race, Sid who had rejoined me wondered what the regular pounding noise was.

Lucy picked up the metal plate by the bolt that protruded from it,

placing it back in the hole. Very smart, if Ravensbury found her she did not want him getting the key that was on the other side of the plate. We listened, Ravensbury was still cursing loudly, making a terrible din as he went through the room next door.

I could imagine by now the farmer's wife would be urging someone to go look for Lucy. We had to hope that they ignored her. We had no idea where Ravensbury would go next.

"Ain't in there, no way they can be in the loft, still better check, servants go to servants quarters," he said with scorn. "Pennington's peasants, I'll find you." We heard him stomping up the servants staircase. It seemed like an eternity, all this waiting.

Eventually foot falls were heard lumbering back down to our floor.

"Not, there, no bloody peasants, I need a brandy."

We heard him walking down the corridor. "Aha," said Ravensbury, his voice echoing from the sumptuous bedroom. "Well that's a damn good start."

Lucy pulled the key out of the bed.

I whispered, "You're not going now?"

Lucy was, she crawled out from under the bed, pulling the key from it's hiding place. She moved to the door. Sid flew off, and in a few moments flew back.

"He's drinking," said Sid, "Has a big bottle in one hand and a glass in the other. Sitting on the end of a rather large bed."

This was her queue to move. With shoes removed, she tiptoed out of the half open door, slipping through the open stairwell door. Her feet gliding lightly up the stairs to the servants quarters.

"Oh, oh, I saw you."

Lucy went like the wind, no sooner was the panel secured in the attic passage, and we heard a rather violent Ravensbury.

"You the farmers daughter?"

He paused, we heard the clink of the bottle as it touched his glass.

"Can't hide from me." There was a thud, the bottle slammed into the panel. With the heavy panel lowered down from the roof, it met with a solid reply. "Well, you ain't behind that one."

Next we heard glass breaking as a wine glass hit one of the other panels. "You must be a ghost."

We heard him moving around. "Must be strong liqueur, it's had a long time to mature, must be seeing things. Maybe it was a cat, looked like a foot, but maybe it was a cat."

It went quiet, "Bloody windows open, must have been a bloody cat, white bloody cat, damn, I'm wasting time." Ravensbury had no doubt caught a glimpse of one of Lucy's dainty feet, clad in white stockings. Whatever it was he had been drinking it was certainly strong stuff, his speech was more slurred.

Lucy put her shoes back on and went into the loft space, re-securing the hidden panel. Then she used the walkway, returning to our tunnel entrance, once inside and the hatch shut and bolted she hurried down to our friends.

"What, kept you?" said Simon, clearly exasperated. The farmer's wife had been quiet a lot to handle even with his Lordship and the farmer providing comfort and support. Poor old Jim was slumped on the floor having forty winks, his eyelids flickered as Lucy squeezed past.

"Did you find a key?" Jim, mumbled.

She nodded, the grin on her face growing wider as the key turned the lock mechanism.

"We're in, my word, you clever thing," said his Lordship.

Once we were all safely locked in on the other side of this door, Lucy explained.

"It's all thanks to Ravensbury."

"Ravensbury? Thought Smudgy would have gone off with the others?"

"No Lord Pennington, he was sure they are wrong, he thinks we are hiding somewhere in the house, he has a plan."

"A plan!" His Lordship grinned.

"I don't wish to bother e, but I would like to see daylight." The farmer's wife was not satisfied with the small room we were now in. It was almost like a little office. Shelves abounded the walls, a small desk sat in one corner, lanterns, tools, and assorted oddments were neatly placed in various locations against the walls. We moved on through another door, one which had no lock. The next room was much bigger and bathed in sunlight. We could hear the sound of running water. Sid flew off again, flying through the large crack in the rock. It was much like a large arrow slit you might find in a castle wall.

In moments he reported back. There is a waterfall. Lucy relayed the message to the others.

“Ah I know it, stream comes from the lake,” said Lord Pennington.

“Ey me Lord that’ll be it,” said the old farmer.

“Very good, but I’d like to be out there not in ere,” said his wife.

Her demand was lost on deaf ears. Lucy had gone over to a machine that sat against the wall, an arm protruded. She moved it, noticing a lever that moved to one side following the arm. Walking around to the side of the machine she took hold of the lever. Moving the lever gave remote control of the arm’s position. The arm itself appeared to serve no purpose, however when the shaft of sunlight hit it, it cast a shadow with a narrow slot.

Lucy lost no time, moving the arm from the light. She put the strip of metal from the corset into the slot. Swinging the arm back into sun, we heard a strange buzz, the alloy glowed. Suddenly a sound that would wake the dead occurred. Behind the wall against which this machinery was placed was clearly some other contraption.

“So that’s why Smudgy wanted it.”

“I don’t follow e,” said the farmer.

“Well with all this fuss about global warming, alternative energy sources are the thing. Just imagine a large lump of that alloy.”

“Why my Lord, you’d be sitin on a small fortune.”

The farmer pointed, “So miss what does thee think is behind that there door?”

“Shall we look?” Lucy moved forward.

“Hmm,” said Simon.

“Yes?” She looked back at him.

“The noise!”

“Won’t the waterfall cover the noise?” Jim offered.

“It is not Niagara,” said Simon, his voice elevated as the noise grew louder. Lucy had opened the door, and was staring at a masterpiece of Victorian engineering.

“So that’s why it’s below the waterfall. It’s not to hide the sound, but provide a source of water. The heat from the device is being used to boil water that runs through the pipes in the arm, the steam is then used to turn that small generator.”

“Can I pull it out of the sun now?” Simon was getting anxious.

“Yes, yes ok,” said Lucy, fascinated with the ingeniously simple

system. "Imagine the uproar this would have caused back in Victorian times."

"Why?" asked a puzzled farmer's wife.

"Coal dear Lady," said Lucy.

"She's a right clever lass, them miners b none to appy," said the old farmer.

"Mine owners would have it in for my ancestors for sure," said his Lordship.

"They would that," said the farmer.

"That explains why he cancelled the lecture and never finished the notes." Lucy continued to stare at the machine, "So what is it made of? How did Harold discover it?"

"Well one thing be for certain, that'll only work in the afternoon." The old farmer had observed the crack in the rock faced west.

"If it's just a test machine, what more would you need?" said Simon.

Lucy was by now engrossed in examining the detail of the system. A bundle of cables snaked from the generator into some old accumulators. Giant glass vessels, with lead electrodes, bound together by a mass of smaller cables.

With everyone quiet, all observing the machine, even the farmer's wife distracted from here claustrophobia. Sid nudged me, "I'm going back outside."

He was off, his wings carrying him out into the other room and through the crack in the rock. He flew back rather suddenly.

"Men down below," he buzzed in Lucy's ear.

Her startled look puzzled the others, but the signal to keep quiet did not. She moved swiftly to the sunlit room. Cautiously she listened by the crack.

"Up there," said Higgins.

"I can't see a thing," said Nasty.

"Didn't you hear it man?"

"All I can hear is that waterfall," said Nasty. He laughed, "You country bumkins."

"Sounded like a machine."

"Might have been a helicopter?"

"That was no helicopter."

"We are looking for four people, not a bloody machine. Could have been anything, sounds echo around this cutting, farm equipment, who knows."

"Definitely a machine," said an adamant Higgins.

"You'll be part of a machine if we don't clear this cutting, the fifteen o'five is due through here shortly." Nasty's footsteps and those of his men could be heard scurrying off to Pennington Halt.

"Come on man do you want a whole load of train passengers wondering what the bloody hell a bloke with a shotgun and plus fours is doing in a railway cutting." It was Nasty losing patience with Ravensbury's man.

"We're like rabbits in a burrow," said the old farmer.

"Higgins is like his master, damn tenacious once he gets an idea in his head." His Lordship's face was rather grim.

"Well, the only way in is the way we came," said Simon, looking around the rooms.

"Oh, dear, oh my," said the farmer's wife, her anxiety back to full strength.

"I could follow them," said Sid, "Listen in."

"You'd get eaten, one fly on your own, even two of us would not stand much chance," I said, Lucy clearly listening.

"Could all four of you go," she replied.

"Go where? There's six of us case you can't count," said the farmer's wife.

"She's talking to them flies," said the farmer. His wife giving him a rather strange look.

"Oh."

33 Follow the rascals

So off we went. With Ravensbury in the house and the men heading back that way, Lucy and the other humans were arguably as safe in the subterranean rooms as anywhere. As long as Higgins did not follow up his hunch.

We flew a loose formation, less for birds and other predators to see. Keeping within audible distance of the men we could keep tabs on their conversations.

At the main entrance Ravensbury greeted the men. Gentlemen you must be thirsty, please, the cellar is now open for wine and refreshments.

“You found them sir?”

“Yes, Higgins, I do, so you run back to the car, get me my cigars there's a good fellow.” Higgins, lost no time at all, rushing off to do his masters bidding.

The men all keen to rest and drink, needed no persuasion to bundle into the wine cellar. Ravensbury had raided the kitchen, Lord Pennington's ample stocks of food were laid out on a table at the far end of the cellar. While they headed towards it, he closed the heavy door, locking it firmly. It was several minutes before they realised, they had been duped.

“See you later gentlemen.”

Higgins rushed in.

“Not, now Higgins, put them over there, there's a good fellow. We've some hunting to do.”

“Sir?”

“You left two men at the quarry.”

“Yes sir.” Higgins understood.

“Shit, you bastard,” shouted Nasty. His banging on the door did no good, his shots at the lock only caused bullets to ricochet off the thick metal plate that surrounded it. These then flew at the stone wall, chipping great chunks of masonry from the edges, the men all hit the floor, food and wine doing an aerial ballet, then crashing to the floor. One glass traversing the path of a stray bullet, shattered into a million fragments.

We followed Ravensbury and Higgins. The two lost no time in getting down to the quarry.

“Higgins, any trains due?”

“No, sir the fifteen o'five will have passed through by now.”

The two men were seated on a lump of quarried stone outside the entrance to the machine cave. One was having a smoke.

Two shots rang out, the head of one man began to turn towards the sound. His head opened up, blood spurting from the back of his skull. The other man slumped forward falling onto the ground, a pool of

blood spilled out on either side of his body.

“Well done Higgins,” said Ravensbury.

“Fine shot sir,” replied Higgins.

“Have to hide those bodies.”

“In the cave sir?”

“No, find a ditch, cover them up, deal with them tonight.”

“Very well sir.”

The two men worked quickly, Higgins, found a drainage ditch near the cave entrance into which he dragged the bodies, while Ravensbury gathered brush to cover them. They then headed back up the track from Pennington Halt, making for the house.

“What about the others?”

“Higgins?”

“They have guns sir, we can't take them by surprise.”

“No, and I don't suppose that door will hold forever.”

The two men strode purposefully onward.

“Gas Higgins?”

“No, none at the house, heating is oil, cooking electric.”

“Car exhaust?”

“Need a very long pipe sir.”

“Damn. If we poke our guns through the gratings in that door they'll blow our brains out.” Ravensbury had a look of desperation. “Ideas man?”

“Water.”

“Flood the basement?” Ravensbury had a huge grin, “Brilliant Higgins, brilliant.”

The two men rushed into the house, heading downstairs they could hear furious attempts at battering the door. The men had commandeered the wine tasting table. Ravensbury was very alarmed as the door moved. The lock and hinges were beginning to lose a grip on the surrounding masonry.

Taking his gun, he threw caution to the wind and fired shots through the grating at anyone in his sights. With just a few shots, he took several men down. They had been lined up holding the table, now they fell to the sides, the table slamming down onto the stone floor. Some

of the men still alive felt it's crushing weight come down on their bodies.

The other men who were resting from their previous attempts now let fly with bullets at the grating. Ravensbury pulled swiftly back, sweat running from his forehead.

"Bastard," shouted Nasty.

"Your turn will come Graham," said Ravensbury, "You let me down, I don't like people who let me down."

Higgins came over to him.

"If this door goes could they get out of the basement?"

Higgins nodded, "No way to secure it sir."

"Damn."

"Smoke sir?"

"Not now Higgins."

"No, use smoke sir," said Higgins, "Like bees in a hive sir."

"What a splendid fellow you are Higgins, but what to use?"

"Leave it to me sir."

At this point you can imagine that us insects were not too keen to stick around so we flew off. From an ornamental wall we sat and watched the house. It was a little while before Fn8 picked up a strange scent, then Sid spotted smoke seeping out around the side door at the bottom of the steps leading to the basement. This entrance was long ago used by tradesmen delivering goods.

Some moments later Ravensbury quickly followed by Higgins came from the house, taking deep breaths.

"That should sort them sir," said Higgins, coughing.

"Won't it alert people? Look man smoke," said Ravensbury, now concerned at the thick acrid smoke drifting upward from the tradesmen's entrance.

"Don't worry sir, most of the smoke will stay in the cellar. Difficult to prevent some escaping, but it's only one tyre, and a bit of heating oil, won't burn for long sir."

"Don't fancy going down there for a while," said Ravensbury, his eyes still fixed on the steady stream of smoke that drifted on the wind.

“Why don't I show you where I heard that machine sir,” Higgins said, looking at Ravensbury.

“What if this get's out of hand?”

“Don't worry sir, it will be fine,” said a very reassuring Higgins.

The two men set off towards the track that leads down to Pennington Halt. This was our signal to move, I took to the air, the others followed. When we arrived back in the subterranean rooms, all was quiet. Most of the humans were sleeping, only Lucy sat awake near the crack in the rock.

“Hello little friends,” she said, pleased that we were back.

We were relieved to have survived the journey and be back in her earrings.

“Higgins, and Ravensbury killed the two men in the quarry, trapped the rest in the wine cellar, shot some of those and are smoking the rest. Now they are on their way to check out the noise Higgins heard.” I said, then slumped down for a rest.

Lucy told the others.

“What a thoroughly nasty piece of work,” said his Lordship.

Lucy made the signal to hush. Above the noise from the waterfall, Higgins distinctive voice was clearly audible.

“Up there sir,” said Higgins, no doubt pointing in our direction.

“I can't see anything,” said Ravensbury, probably more concerned about the smoking house.

“Behind those bushes sir,” shouted Higgins.

“Which bushes?”

“Hide sir, behind here,” said Higgins.

A few seconds later the four twenty six chuntered through the tunnel and into the cutting. The diesel electric giving off it's steady drone, varying with the Doppler effect as it past our position and faded into the distance.

“That was close, look Higgins lets get those men dealt with first, too many loose ends, it's getting very messy.”

“Sir,” said Higgins.

I flew outside, hovering to see them leaving back towards the Pennington Halt. Sid had followed with Firefly trailing behind, Fn8 riding his top gun position.

The men strode purposefully, Ravensbury leading the charge up the hill. We waited again on the wall by the house. There was only a small amount of smoke escaping the tradesman's entrance to the basement.

We watched as various windows were thrown open on the ground floor. We listened to some coughing as Ravensbury and his man progressed through the house. Some considerable time later, the two men were pulling bodies out. Higgins fetched the farmers Land Rover, filling it up with corpses.

Ravensbury appeared, "That all man?"

"Yes sir," said Higgins, "Graham Wicks and those other two are not amongst them, I checked."

"You locked that cellar door again?"

"Yes sir," said Higgins.

"If they are hiding, it won't do them much good, best get rid of these."

"Quarry sir?"

"For now Higgins, for now," said Ravensbury, he joined Higgins in the front of the Land Rover.

We flew back and reported the situation to the others.

"Killed them, all of them?" His Lordship was aghast.

"Except three," said Lucy, "And we know one of those is Nasty."

"They're all nasty my dear."

With further instructions from Lucy, Sid and I flew back, Firefly carrying Fn8 on his back was feeling rather tired, so remained in one earring. We caught sight of Ravensbury and Higgins, they were taking the bodies from the Land Rover and concealing them large crevice in the rock face. When they had finished, they covered it with some brush and headed back to the house. The Land Rover almost skidded to a halt on the gravel drive as shots rang out.

Nasty, Spiky and Loudmouth were hidden behind one of the low garden walls. Ravensbury, and Higgins slipped out of one side of the vehicle. There was a loud hissing, several of the tyres were sinking fast under the weight of the chassis. The two men were some distance from the door into the house, Nasty had picked a good spot.

Nasty stayed put, Loudmouth and Spiky fanned out on each side using

the wall as cover. Spiky stopped, he caught sight of Higgins crawling away from the vehicle. A shot rang out, Spiky grinned, Higgins squealed, another shot rang out. This time Spiky hit the ground, clutching his shoulder. Loudmouth got a glimpse of Ravensbury, a view Nasty did not have. Loudmouth began taking pot shots, Ravensbury swung his gun around, one shot and Loudmouth's head exploded.

"Bastard," shouted Spiky, huddled behind the wall. He could see his fallen comrade sprawled out on the garden path. The flower bed now full of blood roses, they were once white. Nasty moved position, hunched low he made his way towards Spiky.

"How bad?"

"Skimmed the top of my shoulder," said Spiky.

"He was aiming for your head, I've seen him hunt," said Nasty.

"So how d e miss?"

"You moved upward to get a look at Higgins," said Nasty, "Good job too. Won't fancy tackling that bastard on my own."

Spiky frowned, they did not notice, Ravensbury and Higgins dashing to the house. Sid and I followed Ravensbury, the two men sat in the hallway. Higgins was hit in his posterior.

"You hit bad Higgins?"

"Skimmed my bum sir, not too bad, painful though," he laughed. "Top floor sir, I'll stay here make sure they can't get in."

Ravensbury took to the stairs, in a very short space of time he was up at a bedroom window. Looking down he could see Spiky's feet.

The sun was beginning to dip in the sky, nothing had happened for over half an hour. There was a scream from below, Ravensbury turned away from the window. His movement was much more cautious, slowly he exited the bedroom. Stopping to listen, faint sounds echoed up the stairwell.

"Higgins?"

"Sir."

Ravensbury relaxed, "You ok, man?"

The lord went down the stairs as Higgins came up. He met Higgins grinning.

"Left the other fellow to distract us, tried to sneak up. Must have used one of those damn tunnels."

“Graham Wicks ready for the quarry?”

“Indeed sir, one still out there though to complete your collection.”

Ravensbury went over almost casually to a window, looking down at the wall.

“Can't see the fellow's feet?”

“Top floor sir,” said Higgins.

From the bedroom they still could not see Spiky. Ravensbury's elation was subdued, “Can't have him running loose.”

“No sir, that would not do,” said Higgins. “Shall we have a hunt sir?”

“Light will be gone soon,” said Ravensbury. “He won't go far, wants revenge, let him come to us, better odds.”

“Very wise sir, would you like a bite to eat?”

Sid and I debated Lucy's orders, these two seemed to be planing on waiting for Spiky. So I decided we should go back and report, Sid wanted to stay. Eventually I left Sid on watch, flying back on a rather risky solo flight.

Lucy was at first worried, when I told her Sid was ok she showed much relief. The humans were all getting very hungry, the thought of Higgins having the run of his Lordship's kitchen was most upsetting. Our human friends did have freshly boiled water which was some consolation. Several buckets were giving off a rather pleasant odour.

“We can't stay ere forever,” said the old farmer.

“Old chap, Ravensbury on his own is bad enough but with that fellow Higgins, well we would not stand an earthly.”

“Wiv do respect your Lordship, folks think you's avin a holiday, no one gona come round see you's alright, we could be ere months,” said the old farmer, his tone very serious.

“Oh, dear,” said his wife.

“Any food in the east wing Lucy my dear?”

“No, not that I know of your Lordship,” she said.

“With Higgins in the west wing kitchen we can't raid the pantry.”

Lord Pennington, was fine with salads, but his appetite for fasting had run-out.

“Are there any secret passages to your farmhouse?” said Lucy looking at the old farmer.

“Caves under that old well be the nearest, an ye won't clamber up through that well, no hidden ladder.”

“Could we go up through the loft then back down to the machine cave, then take the passage to the railway tunnel?”

“Ye could but ye'd av a long walk through the tunnel to get to Wadleton Village. If train twer to come!”

“Besides we don't know where that fellow Spiky is?” said his Lordship. Jim then offered a suggestion, “What about the cavers?”

“With three dangerous armed men around is it wise to involve them?” Lucy's concern was well founded, these men were ruthless, and Ravensbury was desperate.

“I do know the route, you are relatively safe here, I could go through the caves, then see if I can get some food, there is a farm near the entrance the cavers use,” said Lucy.

“Describe it to I?”

Lucy gave the old farmer good idea of the surrounding near the cave entrance.

“Oh, that be Phyllis and Stan over at Ridge Farm, you tell em I sent e,” said the old farmer, setting the wheels in motion. Simon was to keep watch for Sid. Jim was to keep watch at the door for Lucy's return, and was made keeper of the key.

Lucy made haste, and it was not long before she was in the loft. Here she exercised extreme caution, it was now dark so we had no lights from the tiny glass pieces in the tiles. However she was armed with three torches. Necessary to ensure safe passage through the cave system. Traversing the walkway, she descended the shaft in the east wing loft, taking us eventually to the machine cave. All was still, the air was cold and damp, the sound of dripping water echoed off the cave walls.

In the small office, there were things strewn everywhere, but the secret passage appeared to have been undiscovered. Lucy went through into the caves, closing up behind her. She now faced a long lonely journey, sometimes crawling on all fours. Going down any cave on your own is to be avoided, yet she had little choice. Had more of the humans ventured through the house, there was an increased chance that we might have given our hiding place away.

When she finally reached the cave entrance near Ridge Farm the sky was dark, no stars, the cloud cover was total. She picked a way along the rough stony track. There was still a light on at the farm, it was a

little after nine in the evening.

“Who the devil are you?” said a rather grumpy farmer.

“Are you Stan?”

“What's it to you young lady?”

“My friend over at Pennington Farm sends his greetings, said you and Phyllis would be glad to help. I'm Lucy, assistant to his Lordship.”

“Oh, well if old Ted sent you you better come in and tell us how we can be of service.”

The farmer explained to his lovely wife that Lucy was a friend of Ted and Marge.

“Oh, you look cold my dear, would you like a cup of tea?”

After the initial pleasantries Lucy began to explain the situation.

“We can't have Marge going short of food can we dear,” said Phyllis with a giggle, “She'd ave to ave new dresses!”

Marge our old farmer's wife was in competition with his Lordship for the most rotund local award.

Phyllis was a very efficient woman in the kitchen, used to providing for hungry farmers. It turned out she did a bit of catering on the side as extra income. Her skills soon had some supplies parcelled up. Stan and Phyllis took Lucy and the supplies back to the cave. Phyllis stayed up top while the farmer assisted Lucy with the parcels of food and drink. He travelled most of the way through the cave system, however his belly nearly got stuck at a particularly narrow stretch so, Lucy had to do a relay to the secret entrance into the machine cave office.

Then with a rucksack kindly provided by Phyllis, it had belonged to one of her lads. Lucy filled it with as much as possible, leaving the rest in another big bag. The cool temperature of the cave would keep these second helpings for later. The time was nearly eleven in the evening when Jim received a knock at the door followed by the magic word.

Lucy was exhausted, she ate then slept while the other famished humans indulged in a feast. We had a nibble then returned to Lucy's earrings for the night.

34. A shot at dawn

In the morning we were startled by the echo of a gunshot. Sid soon after returned with some interesting news. Ravensbury before the crack of dawn had sent Higgins back home to fetch a hound. The hound followed by Higgins and Ravensbury was now on the scent of Spiky.

“Ravensbury might not be an academic, but he is a renowned hunter, after he gets Spiky I fear he'll root us out.” Lord Pennington, was somewhat depressed. Marge, the old farmer's wife, sat near the crack in the rock, still none too keen on being cooped up.

Sid was up for another mission, so I decided to go with him and take a look at Ravensbury's progress. From our aerial vantage point we could see the two men and a dog following an invisible trail. In the distance, a tired man, sometimes crawling sometimes running was trying to evade them.

Spiky entered the walled garden, climbing up onto an old shed that lent against one of the walls, he peered over into the grounds. His zigzagging trail was leading Ravensbury away from his position, but he knew it would soon turn. Taking a chance he aimed at Ravensbury, fired. The bullet flew through the air, he ducked below the wall. He did not see Ravensbury move, but he heard the scream followed by a thud.

Ravensbury looked up toward the source of the gunshot. He saw nothing, the hound licked Higgins trying to help his master. Higgins was still alive, but blood was spewing from his chest. Ravensbury had been following behind Higgins, the shot Spiky aimed at Ravensbury's back had gone through Higgins right lung. The man coughed and spluttered, “Get him sir.”

“Don't worry I will,” said a very determined man. Commanding the hound to kill, it speed off into the walled garden with Ravensbury in pursuit. Spiky had by now moved on and was outside the garden via the western exit. The dog bounded through the open archway, lurching left it jumped up at Spiky knocking him to the ground. It's teeth biting into his right arm, the gun dropped from his hand. He grimaced, probably trying not to give his position away, the dog snarling and pulling at his flesh. His left hand caught hold of the pistol, aimed the muzzle at the hound's chest, fired.

The animal went quiet, its grip on him loosened, the creature dropped to the ground. Ravensbury alerted by the shot, moved in its direction, keeping low he kept behind cover. Spiky got to his feet, arm covered in blood he moved at a good pace down a path into the small wooded area near the lake. Stopping he ripped off a piece of shirt and bound it around the wound, stemming the trail of tell tale drops of blood that he had been leaving for Ravensbury to follow.

By the time Ravensbury reached the hound, Spiky was hidden behind a big old oak some considerable distance away. Ravensbury looked at the hound, picked it up and took it back through the garden to where Higgins lay.

"This is the hound that went mad, jumped up, caused me accidentally to shot you, ok?"

"Understand sir, hunting accident, did you get him?"

"No but by the look of the animal's jaw I'd say he's got a nasty bite."

Ravensbury looked toward the house, "I'll fetch the Range Rover."

Higgins was soon in the vehicle, and Ravensbury driving like fury down the drive.

We flew back via Spiky's position, he had slumped, back to the tree. Our human friends were eager for the news.

"Ravensbury don't like doing things without someone to support him. It does not surprise me that he gave up the chase. Higgins is very important to him, right hand man."

"Shall we go back to the house now he's gone?" asked Jim, getting a yes please look from Marge.

"No, no he'll be back for Spiky, and he'll want to clean up the mess."

"But your Lordship if we goes back we can call the police," said the old farmer, squeezing his wife's hand. She smiled back at him.

"What about the Inspector?"

Lucy had a good point.

"What about him, he can hardly cover up twenty or so dead bodies!"

Jim looked at Lucy, he yearned the comforts of the house.

"Ok, come on then," she said. Lucy turned and walked over to the arm, removing the special strip of material and putting it back into the corset. "Best not leave the two together."

"Good thinking my dear," said his Lordship.

The small group departed, Lucy leading. It took a while to reach the attic, his Lordship, Jim and Marge all needed frequent rests. It was all up hill and with a vast number of steps they tired easily. As Lucy poked her head into the loft space she could hear the faint sound of a vehicle approaching on the gravel drive.

“Wait here.”

“What is it?” said Simon.

“I’ll find out.” Lucy wandered across the loft walkway, she got into the loft passage and went through to the servants quarters in the east wing. She could see nothing, retracing her steps she went through this time more cautiously, into the west wing servants quarters. From a tiny window she could see across the parkland, beyond the ha-ha, and the fields a Range Rover with horse box attached was speeding down the track to Pennington Halt.

“Ravensbury?”

“Yes, little friend, it’s him.”

Back in the loft Lucy explained the situation.

“You said ee’d be back,” said the old farmer.

Lord Pennington looked at Ted, “He’ll be putting those bodies in the horse box they would be the hardest to explain, then he’ll be back to the house.”

“Ow can you be s sure?” said Madge.

“I’ve known him a long time dear lady.”

“Little Sid, you go with Simon, keep a watch for his return to the house. Simon, if you go into the first room in the servants quarters you can let Sid keep an eye out and you can listen for the vehicle. Jim, you take the others into Elle’s secret room and make Madge comfortable. If he comes back, secure the loft passage and go back to where we were. I’m going down to the caves to retrieve the remaining supplies.” Lucy gave no them no time to discuss this, she was off across the walkway and soon down the shaft to the machine cave.

As Lucy reached through the hatch in the machine cave office to take the food I asked, “Why can’t they go back into the house?”

“If Ravensbury finds them there, with all the mess and he has plenty of spare guns, he might come up with a idea or two.”

“Oh, Pennington and staff surprised thieves and were subsequently murdered.”

“Yes little friend your fly brain is smarter than many humans.”

I paused to think on, "The public would buy a story like that, what with it being known that his Lordship had gone away, just the time those villains might choose."

Lucy closed the hatch and left the small office, passing through the machine cave she was soon proceeding through the passages to the shaft. Eventually reaching the loft she paused, we thought there was a sound, Lucy put it down to our friends. So she proceeded, placing the bag of supplies down on the end of the walkway she checked the panel into the loft passage, it had been secured.

Now she was very cautious, moving back to the bag she picked it up moving slowly towards the west wing. As she passed Sir Charles's secret room she froze.

"Hello darlin, fancy meetin you ear," said Spiky, peering down from the hatch in the room's roof. He was not so bright, his voice sounded tired.

"Wot you got in that bag?"

"Just a few things," she said quietly.

"Wot things?" he said pointing the gun at her.

"Food, drink," she said, "Would you like some?"

"Yea, yea," he said nodding, "Were was you goin, wiv it?"

"Just behind the room your in, between the corner of the roof and the room."

"Right," he said, "Don't worry I ain't gona hurt you, that bastard Ravensbury, I'll kill him."

"Then you might be a bit quieter."

"Why?"

"He's in the house."

"How d you know?"

"Trust me," she whispered, "He's getting rid of the evidence. How did you get in here and how did you escape?"

"How did you know we escaped?"

"I saw the smoke from the basement then later I saw the three of you in the grounds." She was stretching a point here, but he did not need to know that.

"I got a few keys when that bastard Higgins tried to smoke us out, me and the others managed to get down the tunnel out of the cellar. He didn't know about that, don't know a lot of things, needs Higgins to wipe his bum for him." Spiky gave a chuckle at this remark.

Lucy put a finger to her lips, he went quiet.

Suddenly Lucy heard a buzzing in her ears. Sid was back, "Simon left me to warn you, Ravensbury is going around the house, every room, tidying it up, 'neat and tidy' he keeps saying to himself each time he finishes a room."

"Lucy can't reply Sid," I said to my fly friend.

"I know that's one of the bad men," he said.

Spiky looked at her, "Come in here, we'll eat." He dropped down below the roof hatch.

Lucy quickly removed some of the supplies stashing them under the walkway. She then clambered up onto the roof of the room.

"Lucy you could get away?" I said, frightened for her safety. She continued into Sir Charles's room.

"I have not forgotten what you were going to do to me," she whispered looking down at Spiky.

"Look, go if you want, I promise I ain't never goin to hurt you, but I will get that bastard."

She lowered the bag down he grabbed it with his left arm, the pistol lay on the desk. Lucy dropped down feet first into the room. With her feet on the floor she looked at him, "He knows about this room?"

"Yea, yea, look we'll eat, and please if you could sort these?" he said pointing to his wounds. "Then we'll move, right."

Lucy nodded. Phyllis had made some fine sandwiches, Spiky attacked the food with gusto. Guzzling down great gulps of tea from one of the flasks.

"Cheers," he said, he seemed sad, almost melancholy. "Guess I picked the wrong side!"

"Why?"

"Your catering is better than Higgins," he grinned.

"So why did you sell out the CFCs?"

"Weren't my idea, just when the three at the top of our section decided to sell out to Ravensbury, well when they pegged it, Laurence, or Loudmouth as we called im, he reckons we can make a load of money, so we go for it. Bloody wild goose chase, load of people dead for what?"

Lucy looked at him, "I don't have any dressings for those wounds."

She thought for a moment, "I could get some clean material from the dresses and some alcohol from the east wing."

"I could do with a swig."

"To sterilize the wound, a drunk man will be no match for Ravensbury."

He stared at her for quiet a while, "Whatever you say, cheers."

"Take some more food and drink and then I'm going to hide this bag."

He did, she then put the empty flask and rubbish in the bag and left him waiting. Back on the walkway she replaced the other supplies hidden under it. Watching the roof of Sir Charles's secret room, she moved over to the entrance to the tunnel as yet undiscovered by our enemies, dropping the bag down in she quickly closed the hatch and made hast back to the walkway.

"The others won't know it's there," I said.

"One of them might come to see what's happened to me, if they find the bag then they may guess I'm ok."

"I could tell them," said Sid.

"There's no light down there Sid."

"If Firefly and Fn8 came to."

Lucy thought for a moment and then instructed Sid to tell the others to stay put. She went back to the hatch opened it and the three insects flew into the dark passage, Firefly's tail flashing like a navigation beacon. She closed the hatch then traversed the walkway, round the corner into the east wing loft space. Proceeding into the loft passage, then to the servants quarters, and down first to the sumptuous bedroom. There was very little drink left, one unopened bottle of Whisky lay on it's side. Someone in their hast to get at the liquor cabinet had knocked the bottle on the floor and it had been kicked under the bed.

Lucy was mindful of repeating her stint under the bed with Ravensbury around. This time clearing up he would find her easily. In Elle's dressing room she gathered up some fine silks. Someone possibly Elle had once intended these to be made into beautiful garments. Having acquired the necessary items she flew up the stairs, securing the panels in the servants quarters, followed by the panel into the loft passage.

Spiky looked almost surprised to see her return. He sat in the small chair, she sat on the desk. Removing the bloodied shirt and from him, she started cleaning the wounds. He winced as the alcohol stung, Lucy wrapped the beautiful old silks around his arm, then she attended

to the shoulder wound. Her delicate touch, almost ballet like, tender fingers dancing gently. The scrap of material held like a lady sweeping the dance floor in a flouncy dress.

“You should go to hospital,” she said, wrapping the shoulder wound. Spiky looked at her and nodded, “Ravensbury might have other ideas!” “Perhaps he’s a frustrated closet undertaker.”

“I’d like to bury the bastard.”

She bundled his tattered shirt up in one of the carrier bags which once held Phyllis’s supplies. Then she put a finger to her mouth. Someone was making a lot of noise in the room directly below.

Spiky pointed downward, then made the finger across the throat sign. Lucy nodded. The sound was very muffled, as the secret room had been well sound proofed, so Ravensbury must have been going at his clean up full tilt for us to hear him.

All went quiet again.

“He’ll check this room,” said Spiky, “Tore the place apart looking for whatever he thinks is hidden in this house.”

“You’re not in the best state to tackle him, are you?”

“Nop,” said Spiky, “And he’ll be half expecting me, he knows I’m after him and he knows I’m wounded.”

“He’s cleaned up in the quarry,” said Lucy. “We could go there.”

“Yep, yep,” he nodded. “You’ll have to give me a hand getting out of this roof hatch.”

“You know the passage then?” said Lucy with a grin. She helped him up onto the roof of the secret room, then passed up all the remaining supplies and evidence of their picnic and nursing session.

It was slow going, Spiky took a while to climb down the ladder in the shaft leading to the caves. Moving his shoulder or gripping with the right hand gave him searing pain. Lucy exercising caution, she did not take him into the caves beyond the small office, or into the passage that went to the railway tunnel. Instead they huddled up in a gap between the cave wall and one of the machines.

None of us had any clue as to what Ravensbury was up to.

“Shall I go an look for him,” I said, “The door into the machine cave is open?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“You say some thin?” Spiky looked at Lucy.

“Sorry thinking out loud.”

I flew off, heading for the open door. Outside the bright light of the mid afternoon sun hit me, for a moment I adjusted. Then flew on, it was a dangerous mission, you imagine being my size. However finally I reached the house. Ravensbury was by now working his way through the east wing, I decided to fly down to the crack in the rock and let them know the situation.

“Oh no, Spiky has her?” His Lordship was clearly upset.

“It's ok your Lordship, our little friend says he's working with her.”

Simon, was having trouble coming to terms with this, and I had to assure him that Lucy was ok.

“What news of Smudgy?”

“Now in the east wing, working like fury.”

“Oh, he will, what he lacked in brains he more than made up for in brawn.” His Lordship was clearly thinking back to his school-days. He went on to tell us much about the man's physical prowess.

“Did you find the food?” I asked Simon.

“Food?”

Lord Pennington's eye's lit up.

“Lucy put the second instalment in a bag just under the hatch, might be a good idea to move it, Ravensbury might smell a sani.” Some of Phyllis's food was quiet rich. Sid had told them about Lucy and clean forgotten about the bag.

Simon moved swiftly, Jim again waited as guardian of the door. When Simon reached the bag of food we could hear noises. Ravensbury had gotten into Sir Charles's secret room and it sounded like he was trying to get the roof hatch open. It was well concealed in the ceiling panels, he knew it was there but was by the sound of it becoming very frustrated.

Simon grabbed the bag and scurried back down the stairs, and along the tunnel to the subterranean rooms. When we were safely back, he suggested Sid and myself go and keep an eye on Ravensbury, then report back to Lucy.

35. Lord Pennington officially arrives home.

After Ravensbury left everyone came out of hiding. A meeting was convened in the lounge in the main part of the house. His Lordship took the chair, opening the proceedings.

"Firstly I would like to deal with this rascal," he said pointing at Spiky, "Then I think Lucy should proceed with a plan of action."

"Very sorry your Lordship," Spiky said, "I er, well, hmm."

"You did some very bad things, let me down, I chose you to work on our team, you let me down."

"Yes, no excuse sir, yep, but I ave seen the error of my ways, realise well, sorry and you ave my loyalty sir, all of you."

"That hurt man?"

"Yep, try not to move it, forget though, easily done." Spiky grimaced, he was in some pain.

"Hospital for you then, and you do mean what you say?"

"Yea, course sorry, you're the boss, you're a good man sir, and well our section was set up to do what the CFCs could not, like tackle bad men like Ravensbury, so that's what I'll do sir, help you get him," Spiky paused, "Look a man like that, he's got lots of friends, if I go into hospital, well e might get t ear about it." Spiky had a good old east end accent, you could almost imagine him selling fruit and veg.

"Lucy will you be a dear, give Sir John Batton a call, tell him it's hush hush, tell him to bring his things, he'll understand."

With Sir John on his way over, the meeting continued. It was decided that his Lordship should let a few indiscreet friends know he was back in residence. The farmers friends were to be sent a rather nice thank you along with the return of their plastic boxes and flasks. Lucy and Simon were to check out the house and see if any evidence remained. Jim was to stay with his Lordship. The farmer and his wife were after visiting their friends to return home.

By the end of the meeting Sir John had arrived, complimenting Lucy on her first aid, "These are the prettiest bandages I've ever seen." He looked at her, "Seriously you would make a fine nurse. Would you help me deal with this fellow's wounds."

Lucy agreed, ably assisting the good doctor. Spiky had his wounds cleaned and stitched, with new dressings put on. He was given copious amounts of anti-biotics and pain killers and told to take it easy. "No bowling for England, well not for a few weeks my lad."

The rest of the evening was spent resting watching television. To us flies this seemed very strange, but the humans enjoyed it. We did take note though when the news came on.

"Lord Ravensbury, is it true you are selling large parts of your business interests?"

"Are you in financial difficulty sir?"

The reporters were bombarding him with questions outside the local hospital.

"How did your butler get shot sir?"

"Hound went mad, jumped up at me, gun went off, very bad accident."

"Will Mr Higgins be ok?"

"Mr Higgins is out of danger, he is receiving excellent care."

"Is your business in trouble sir?"

"I am streamlining the business to focus on certain core activities."

"Why now sir?"

"My wife complains about me never being at home, I have too many business trips!" He laughed, "I think she wants me to help her with the shopping."

"Well there we have it, Lord Ravensbury jovial as ever, one of Britain's most respected peers. Back to you in the studio John."

"Thank you Roger." The news reader paused, "Well from one of the countries most liked men to one of the most hated, coming up next a story about one of the most notorious...."

Lord Pennington flicked the remote, the screen went blank. He was shaking his head, "Did you see him." His Lordship shook his head, "The bounder and Higgins have just killed over twenty men, heaven knows what else he's done, and he just stands there calm as a cucumber."

Lucy got the giggles.

"It's not funny my dear."

"I was laughing at your phrase."

"Oh nanny used to say it, she made lots of cucumber sandwiches."

"Amazing sir, only a few ours ago e was ere," said Spiky.

“Jack, tis Jack isn't it? Only well we've been referring to you as Spiky.”

“Yea, hair, can't do a fing wiv it,” he sniggered.

“Jack I know you want to get him, but you do see what your up against, I think we have to out smart him.”

“Haven't people already tried that your Lordship?” said Jim.

“Yes, yes they have and come off worse for it. For the life of me I can't think how people with greater intellect are outwitted by the fellow.”

“Way e thinks ain't it.”

“Yes, yes, good point.”

“They can only understand him with reference to their own thoughts,” said Simon.

“And morals,” chipped in Jim.

The next day Lucy and Simon were busy checking the house and securing all the passages, including closing the door of the machine cave. Spiky was up on the top floor, taking the doctors advice, making the most of a fine four poster.

Late morning and we had a visitor.

“Hello my friend, wasn't sure if you were back yet, just thought I'd see if everything was alright for you.”

“Oh, Ravensbury you are a decent fellow, how kind of you.”

“Did you have a good time?”

“Well to tell the truth no, I'm not cut out for all this healthy living stuff. How's your man, saw the news last night, dreadfully sorry.”

“Higgins is built of stern stuff, he'll pull through.”

“You like to stay for tea?”

“Kind of you but, I have business to deal with. House ok?”

“Yes, yes fine, bit of a funny smell down in the wine cellar.”

“Barrel probably leaked, wood goes rotten, fungi, bit of ventilation that'll do the trick.”

“Jolly good, well I'll let you get on, thanks again for the visit, much appreciated.”

At this point I should let you know that the fly squadrons had returned with the new Wing Co, or WC2 as he was fondly known. WC2 had used the time very wisely, putting his squadrons through rigorous training and promoting several flies. One of whom was given the task of taking an elite squadron to monitor Ravensbury. Fly squadron one or FS1 as they were known were the crack unit. WC2 had taken

efficiency to new levels, his use of abbreviations just one example.

That evening Lucy called a meeting. Simon and her had found nothing of note, and certainly nothing that would connect to Ravensbury.

“We have no evidence, the smell in the basement would not stand up in court.”

“Stands up in my wine cellar dear.”

This set Lucy off giggling again.

“All the best wine cellars have Eau de tyre, my Lord,” said Jim joining in the good humour.

This only made Lucy giggle more. She took a while to compose herself.

“Look we have nothing on him ok, perhaps if we could get some forensics to check the house and grounds?”

“He's a regular visitor, they'd dismiss it my dear,” said Lord Pennington shaking his head.

“Traces of blood?”

“My dear Lucy after the last time when we had people scurrying around all over the grounds and house, that's what they'd say.”

She sat back thinking for a moment.

“So unless he tries again to get,” she paused, “Whatever it is.” She was being cautious, although Spiky was now on our side again, none of us trusted him totally.

“E's back where e started,” said our hair raising friend.

“Not quiet, he has more information about the house and grounds, and an idea of what he is looking for.”

There follows one of many snippets of information gleaned by FS1. The most superbly trained flies had infiltrated the hospital, no mean feat.

“Hello Higgins how are we today?”

“Chest hurts sir, can't breath so easy.”

“We'll get him.”

“Yes sir,” said Higgins, with a cough.

“Pennington's back.”

“Trouble sir?”

“No all he's interested in is his stomach, complaining about the smell in the wine cellar. Ha.”

“Some gone off had it sir?”

“Rotten barrel.”

"Of course sir, can't laugh hurts to much." Higgins looked out of the window, then at the door, his voice more subdued, "What shall we do sir you still don't have it?"

"Yes, quite Higgins, quite. We can hardly make another move, what with all the press attention."

"How's the club sir?"

"Lot of damn fool people asking damn fool questions."

"Sticking there noses in your business sir?"

"Yes Higgins, and some of them have rather big noses."

"Must be some good plastic surgeons here sir!" He grinned then held his chest as the humour had its side effect.

"Higgins it has to be there somewhere, and I need it fast."

"Sorry sir, I would love to help but, just laughing does me in at the moment."

There was a knock at the door. "Oops sorry, I'll come back later."

A few seconds later Ravensbury looked at Higgins.

"Do you think she heard anything?"

"No sir, just the cleaning lady, she's not very bright even if she did," he said with a nod and a wink.

"Brilliant Higgins, brilliant," said Ravensbury with a wide grin.

"Sir?"

"A not very bright cleaning lady, to help Pennington. Remember the smell."

"Oh, yes, but if she's not very bright."

"That's a rouse man, just a rouse, if she's a bit thick she can go most places, get lost that sort of thing and nobody will be any the wiser."

"Very devious sir, but you would need a very smart woman to pull it off."

"And very loyal Higgins."

"Sir?" Higgins looked blank for a brief period, "Ah, she might realise its value and ..."

"Exactly."

"Zurich?"

"No, no, she is too theoretical, besides I can't afford her tastes right now."

"Would Pennington even go for the idea, might be worth running it by him first sir. Say you have someone in mind if they're available, for a month or two to help him clean the place up."

"Yes, must go Higgins."

Ravensbury was off like a shot.

This information was debated the following morning.

“He'll be shrewd enough not to know that the cleaner was up to no good, should we rumble her.”

“Yea, but she might shop im,” said Spiky Jack.

“He'll deny it Jack, and who would you believe.”

“Yea, but if she ain't got no motive other than im tellin er,” said Spiky.

“No disrespect Lord Pennington, but you are all treating him as though he is some kinda invincible man.”

“That's because he does appear to be,” said Jim, scratching his grey hairs.

“You are the only one left Spiky, hmm sorry, Jack, you must admit based on the evidence,” Simon chipped in his thoughts.

“If this was some novel we would no doubt have some implausible idea and it would work.” Lucy looked at the men slouched around the room in various chairs. “Unfortunately we don't have any super hero or super sleuth to come to our rescue.”

“Yes, and the public love Ravensbury even and maybe more so if they think he's got a few problems.” Lord Pennington reached for the food, his hand picking a slice of raw carrot which he dips into humus and savours the taste. His teeth crunching away at the nibble.

It was nearing lunchtime, the committee in true committee style had finished with no real conclusion. There echoed down the fine marbled hallway a rather firm knock coming from the front door. His Lordship made his way to see who it was, although he had a shrewd idea.

“Hello Podgy, you remember you said you had a smell in your cellar.”

“Yes, still there old friend.”

“Well I have a cleaning lady, and very good she is too. She is a wonder, if you'd like her to drop by for a week or so?”

“How much does she charge?”

“Oh, don't be daft you're my friend Podgy, I'll pay her.”

“Thank you Smudgy, thank you old chap that is most kind of you. Do send her along, the smell quite puts me off the cellar, and it is my favourite place so the sooner.”

“Quite Podgy quite, well must dash.” Ravensbury was off like lightening.

Another fly from FS1 brought back the next report. Ravensbury had

sped back home in a tearing hurry. His wife was out, shopping as usual and this gave him just the opportunity he needed. A slightly plump friendly looking lady was working hard cleaning the kitchen surfaces when he burst in.

"Hello Molly, look this is a bit hush hush, can you help me?"

"Of course sir."

"My father dabbled a bit in metal sculpture."

"It was very fashionable at one time sir."

"Indeed, he tried it, it wasn't much good but amused him at the time."

"People try lots of things don't they sir?"

"Yes Molly," he paused, "Well Pennington, Lord Pennington has had some rather nasty people in his house, it could do with a clean."

"Right sir," said Molly.

"I don't have much of my fathers things, he did one for me and at the time I gave it to his Lordship. Now I feel a bit bad about asking for it back. However I doubt he even remembers it, he's very absent minded. So I wondered, if you found it and kind of borrowed it back. However if he does notice it's gone."

"Don't you worry sir, you've been very good to my family and I know how much sentimental things mean to people."

The following evening Molly arrived at Lord Ravensbury's house. His wife had gone out again, this time to see a show up in London with some friends. When Ravensbury opened the front door he saw a lady with a beaming smile.

"Found it sir, right under my nose it was."

"Well done Molly."

"It was in a pile of junk up in one of the servants rooms, strip of metal in a frame like you said sir."

"Won't they think you've stolen it?"

"Oh no sir, asked his Lordship if I should clear the clutter in the servant quarters. Splendid idea, e said."

The woman was bubbling with her success and Ravensbury could hardly contain his real feelings. After paying the housekeeper with rather a generous bonus, he took the item up to his private study. All evening and throughout the following day he puzzled with the contraption.

His frustration building he decided to consult with his butler. The man was pleased to see his boss. Laying in bed was proving rather

irritating to Higgins, a man of action, he always liked to be doing something. After an initial greeting Ravensbury got to the point.

"I can't make head nor tail of it Higgins."

"Germany sir?"

"Yes, I'll have a trip to see you know who."

"Right you are then sir."

This left a glum looking Higgins, no visits for some days to come, other than his wife, who's continual drone about the most trivial things drove him to distraction.

Before leaving for Germany Ravensbury decided to visit Lord Pennington one more time. We were prepared, Simon, Jim and Spiky made themselves scarce, Lucy hid within earshot, and his Lordship answered the door to his old "friend".

"Look Podgy, sorry to trouble you, house clean now?"

"Oh, jolly good that Molly, she has worked very hard. Most kind of you to lend her to me for a week or so."

"I have a question for you?"

"Most certainly, how can I help?"

"I have an investment opportunity in a solar energy system, supposed to be very good and all that, wondered what you think?"

Lord Pennington stopped to think, "Well I can't say that I know much about these new energy systems, of course my ancestors were into steam." He paused, then in his usual almost befuddled style dropped in a casual thought, "Probably a complete waste of time."

"Why do you say that?"

"Well I have an idea, might be wrong, but I do remember mummy saying something about all the time and energy wasted looking for more energy. Efficiency that's what you need. She used to say that."

"Oh," Ravensbury said, not getting the answer he was looking for.

"Think one of my ancestors tried some silly idea. Quite an embarrassment and spent a lot of money, probably why mummy was so negative about it."

"What was it can you remember?"

"Gosh, Smudgy that was years ago," he paused, "I think it was some contraption to produce steam from the sun's energy. Think, that's what mummy said when she was deriding it. Daft idea, especially in this country, a?"

"Well in a hotter climate," said Ravensbury, still hopeful.

"They tend not to have much water!" Chuckled Pennington, "Mummy

would have thought of that, she knew about boiling water.”

“So you are sure it never would have worked?”

“Not a chance, even with today's technology, solar is hardly widespread is it?”

“No, but,” said Ravensbury, looking decidedly dejected.

“Photovoltaics aren't very efficient, and the cost of most of these micro generation systems is totally uneconomic. I've read some fascinating stuff, it's neat technology, I was reading about...”

Ravensbury cut him short, “Should I invest?”

“Well I wouldn't,” said Pennington, “As I was saying I was reading about.”

“Nice talking Podgy but I really must be going.”

Higgins laying in his bed trying to look out of the window was very surprised when later that day Ravensbury reappeared.

“Any luck sir?”

“Higgins, it was a pile of junk. I checked with Pennington, apparently the whole thing according to mummy was a fiasco.”

“You told him?”

“No, Higgins, I wheedled it out of him on a pretext about investing in a solar system.”

“Very clever sir, very clever, but what now?” Higgins, was agitated,

“You know sir, I'm sure there is a fly in here.”

“In this hospital?” Ravensbury pulled back, looking quite hurt at such a suggestion.

“No, disrespect sir, I know you put me in the best hospital.”

“Costing me money I can't afford Higgins,” said Ravensbury, a worried frown showing on his normally unreadable face.

“Time of year, perhaps one stray one got in,” said Higgins, hardly placating his master.

“Yes yes, but what am I to do?” Ravensbury was unusually stressed.

“I have an idea sir,” said Higgins.

“Well, go on man spit it out,” said Ravensbury clearly impatient, “What are you pressing that for?”

Higgins was holding the buzzer for attention. It did not take long for a very smart nurse to arrive. With Ravensbury around staff were given instruction to be on their best performance.

“Yes?” enquired the nurse.

“Young lady there's a fly in here,” said Higgins.

“Can't have that,” added Ravensbury.

“Oh, very sorry sir, I'll get some fly spray,” she said, rushing from the room closely followed by one of the elite corp.

Further attempts by FS1 to listen through the double glazed window outside of Higgins room were somewhat thwarted by high levels of background noise. Ambulances and background traffic noise were sufficient to muffle the faint conversation, that could be seen occurring between the two men.

36. Kidnapped

Higgins spotting the fly had alerted Ravensbury to the possibility that he might be being monitored.

“I'm worried little one,” said Lucy to me, “Suppose he gets the idea that the junk metal was only a prototype.”

As she spoke one of FS1's flies arrived, “We were watching all the exits, he seems to have disappeared.”

Lucy was now worried and called an emergency meeting, downstairs in the lounge. His Lordship was already in place when we arrived, he was watching the news.

“Sir,” said Lucy, as the rest trailed in behind her.

“Oh, best turn the thing off my dear,” said Lord Pennington, with a smile.

Simon was just about to hit the remote, when we all froze.

The news reader looked very serious. He was interviewing Lady Ravensbury, who was clearly very distressed.

“Lady Ravensbury, we realise you can't say much, clearly you are very upset, thank you.”

The reporter turned to camera, Lady Ravensbury returned inside her home, Molly comforting her, police milling around the property in the background. Beside the reporter stood a familiar face, it was the Inspector.

“Inspector, do you have any idea what might have happened to Lord Ravensbury?”

“We are doing everything we can to find his Lordship, at this stage we have very little to go on, however from what we know it seems highly likely it is work of the same people who abducted Lord Pennington.”

“Can you tell us what happened here?”

“At this stage I cannot say further, his Lordship's life may well be in

jeopardy.” The Inspector gave a very serious glaring glance at the reporter.

“Yes, yes of course.” The reporter finished up, and handed back to the studio. We all watched intently as various experts were consulted about the possible motives for the abduction, always preceded by their sympathy with Lady Ravensbury and her family.

The interviewer dared to put forward the possibility that his disappearance coincided with a downturn in his Lordship's business interests. This was firmly rebuked by the man being interviewed.

“I can tell you now that Lord Ravensbury has sold off portions of his business before, he is very astute and well respected in the city. Shares in his companies are holding firm, some indeed have risen based on the restructuring, which many see as a wise move in the current climate.” The man paused, “We are all very worried, very worried for his safety, that is what you should be concentrating on.” The reporter was given no room for further questions.

The program rolled further on with various tributes and well wishes. Ravensbury was headline news.

Lucy turned and looked at Lord Pennington.

“Turn it off my dear, turn it off,” said his Lordship. “What is the rascal up to now?”

“Well, one fing is f sure it ain't like the inspector says, not unless ghosts av im?” Spiky, was on the ball.

“Yes, young fellow, he's up to something.” Lord Pennington, was in a pensive mood.

The next report to come from FS1 indicated the arrival of Ravensbury's accountant at Blackhollow House. The flies had observed him in Ravensbury's study. He did not say much, occasionally muttering to himself. He was looking through some interesting, creative figures, it seemed that on paper Lord Ravensbury had more money than he actually had. The accountant was coming up with a value in excess of this difference.

When the debriefing was finished, Simon read this information to the

rest of us while Jim, WC2 and the rest of the flies prepared for further missions. Lord Pennington was not surprised, he had clearly been thinking through the situation, this further confirmed his ideas.

“Typical Smudgy, the kidnapers, I use the term loosely will get away with the money, they don't exist so no one will find them. The money will cover the discrepancy in his accounts.”

“If we could find Ravensbury,” I said to Lucy, “Before the kidnapers release him!”

“Yes my little friend has a point, Ravensbury must be in this country, no ransom has yet been announced, so if we could disclose his whereabouts anonymously.”

“We would scupper his plans, although he might find other ways of losing the discrepancy,” said Lord Pennington, seemingly dejected at the thought of his slippery acquaintance's aptitude for survival.

“What about the fact that the amount is more than the difference?” said Simon.

“Oh, he'll no doubt, have someone spin a yarn that they can only raise so much ready cash, especially without him to authorise things. He'll appeal to peoples kindness.”

“So is misses will ave a bit of extra for er shopping,” said Spiky with a wry grin.

“Won't the Police reject giving ransom money, is it not their policy?” said Simon.

“Yes, yes dear chap, but I was reading the morning paper,” Lord Pennington paused to sup on a drink, “From what the police learned from my ordeal they have decided it is safer to comply with the ransom demand.”

“Oh!” said Simon, raising his eyebrows, his head nodding, and a telling grin on his lips.

“Wish I knew what hold Ravensbury had on the Inspector?” said his Lordship.

“Perhaps the flies could tell us?” said Simon.

“Yes,” said Lucy, quickly rising from her seat, “Excuse me one moment.”

She rushed off, climbing the stairs several at a time. We were soon in the Central Fly Command HQ, staring at a startled Jim.

“Sorry Jim, could you have words with WC2 and see if he can get some flies to keep tabs on the Inspector? We want to know what Ravensbury has on him.”

“Certainly Lucy, I shall,” replied Jim.

FS1 the elite fly squadron were fully engaged keeping tabs on the unfolding events at Blackhollow House. WC2 did not want to pull them off this mission, especially as the accountant was apt to frequent the property.

Wing Commander the second, had himself been training up a second elite squadron, FS2. Not up to the same level as FS1 they were however exceptionally bright flies. If these flies were able to manipulate materials in the way you humans do then you would have a run for your money. FS2 was headed by a very beautiful fly called Susan. She reminded me of poor Nadia, oh but no fly could be so lovely as Nadia. Sorry I digress, Susan was to lead her squadron to the Inspector's abode.

At this stage you may be wondering why Firefly, Fn8 and myself have not been flying around so much. You must understand that we insects don't live so long as you humans, so although we are not old we are certainly no spring flies, beetles or ants!

The rest of this chapter details FS2's operations in monitoring the Inspector. The old farmer assisted by getting the squadron as close as possible to the Inspector's home. It was a fine house, quite large but not imposing, the last house at the end of cul-de-sac in a quiet village.

Flying back from this location would be far too hazardous as it was a long way from Lord Pennington's estate. So Jim had constructed a very clever wooden structure. It was as spider proof as he could make it, and with the help of the farmer this was strategically placed, hidden near to the Inspector's house. FS2 would use it as a temporary base, taking turns they would fly reconnaissance missions in pairs.

Susan satisfied with the location prepared her first sortie. This was critical as she was flying into the unknown and needed to pass on information to the rest of the squadron so they would be aware of any potential dangers. She flew out of the little box accompanied by Albert, a very kind helpful fly who was very attentive.

Weaving a flight path across the Inspector's garden, they followed the well tended lawn to the back of the house. Albert was the first to react,

signalling to fly backwards, a wasp zoomed down in front of them, missing its meal. Worse was to come, as they took a flight around the house to observe through each window, they took note of the large array of anti-fly materials. Finding no way in, Susan signalled to Albert to peel off and head back to the field base.

“On every window sill was a can of fly spray, some rooms had those horrid purple lights, and some had sticky fly papers hanging in them,” Susan, explained to her squadron.

“Didn't know they still made them,” said Digger, a fly who had really taken to Jim and had learnt a lot about times gone by when old Jim recounted tales from his parents and grandparents days.

“Oh lad there's worse than that, those we can avoid,” said Albert, the oldest of the male flies.

“Worse?” said another.

“Yes, spiders,” said Albert, pausing, “They are every where.”

“We've never seen so many,” said Susan.

“What about his wife?” asked Digger.

“Well, maybe she's one of those strange humans who like spiders,” said Susan.

“Oh?” replied one of the team.

“So do you think they're onto us?” asked Albert.

Susan was a thinker, her reply was slow in coming but considered, “Either they are, my reasoning being that they did seem to have an excessive amount of anti-fly materials, or maybe they just don't like flies.”

“Perhaps that's it,” said Digger, “Jim got to liking flies because his Grandmother was so paranoid against us. It made him do some research on us, got him interested.”

“Yes digger,” said Susan.

“Or maybe he collected loads of stuff from Lord Pennington's when the agents were there, they had lots to kill the old squadrons.” Albert had a point.

“The house was empty,” Susan mused, “Perhaps he's at work?”

“So where is his wife?” said Albert.

“At work,” said Digger, enthusiastically.

“We'll go for an evening flight. Lets rest now,” said Susan.

The flies huddled together, taking some rations from the supplies Jim had placed in the box. Then they all slept, except one who stayed on watch.

It was a sunny evening, the air was warm, ideal for flying. Susan, decided to take half the squadron, Albert and Digger were to fly formation behind her. The three flies again circled the house. The only person present was the Inspector, he was on the phone. They could hear him, but not see him. He was standing in the hallway behind the front door, his loud voice clearly audible.

“Look, she's gone to her cousin's holiday cottage, she decided to have the holiday anyway, took the children, so I have the place to myself.”

There was a pause, the Inspector's voice quietened as he made various sounds of acknowledgement.

“Yes, I know you have to,” his sentence broken mid flow.

“I can get to you without anyone seeing me,” he paused, “Look I need my stuff, you promised me, I've risked a lot.”

There was a silent moment, “Well how else shall I contact you, besides as far as anyone knows I'm negotiating with the hostage takers.”

There was another pause, “No one's monitoring these phones, look I'm hidden from view and both these mobiles are anonymous, so stop panicking man.”

The flies listened to further mumbles.

“Yes, yes, I know I will be a hero when I find and release you, but it will seem strange if after taking months not finding Pennington, I find you in days.”

Further mumbles followed.

“Yes I know you need a quick resolution but it needs to be plausible,” he took a breath, “Sir I need my stuff. Ok ok, I'll visit in two days time.”

“Yes, yes, if any of the press followed and I found you, then I'll say I was working on a hunch, my stuff will have to go down to being owned by the kidnapers, it would explain why they needed the money.” He laughed, “No, there are no flies.”

“I am taking precautions, you'd think plague was about to break out, I've got spray in every room, those gadgets they have in the butchers, yes yes man, Sir ok ok bye.”

There was a long sigh, “He couldn't run a bath, so how come he's rich and comparatively I'm poor?” There was a laugh, “I like my stuff!”

The flies listened, he was walking down the hall.

“Round the back to the kitchen,” said Susan.

The three flies raced around, landing discreetly outside on the kitchen window.

“How would I get through each week without my stuff, how would I have gotten through my student days without my stuff.” The Inspector was making himself a meal, “Drink I suppose, mind you the number of drunk idiots I've had to deal with I doubt I'd have got promoted.”

“What's this stuff, he keeps on about?” said Digger, curious about human behaviour.

“Later,” said Susan, “We need to focus on our mission and potential predators.”

“Like that one coming towards us,” said Albert, as a big hairy spider eased it's way along the window ledge.

For a fly, sitting too long in any location was unwise. The three of them flew back to the field base, where Susan proceeded to talk with Digger.

“His stuff might be what he needs to keep his nerves under control,” said Susan.

“Yes, Jim's Grandmother was a right worrier, worried about everything, she would check the door ten times before leaving the house. He said it was her nerves, is that what you mean?”

“I can understand us flies being nervous, we have all sorts of things trying to kill or eat us, but humans, why are they so scared of everything?” Albert was very puzzled.

“They're scared of other humans, and some animals and strange objects as well,” said Digger.

“Why, they're so big?” Albert was very perplexed, “If they had to live like us how would they cope?”

“It's just the way they are, so lets get some rest, and wait for the old farmer to come.” Susan's command was obeyed, without question.

When the news got back to us, Fn8 was called into action. Firefly and myself accompanied him to the nearest ant colony. After much discussion with the queen, who was co-operative but very interested in the most minute detail, we set up a chain of communication from Lord Pennington's house to the Inspector's property.

Lord Pennington meanwhile called one of his chums over for a visit.

“Hello Soapy, how do you feel about Ravensbury?”

“I don't care if he has been kidnapped serves the rotter right,” Soapy

was very stern in his response, "I know he's your friend, and I know that Inspector was hopeless when it came to finding you, but if you want my help finding him then go ask someone else."

"You're not interested in helping us find him?"

"Podgy, you know what he did to those of us who would not do his bidding, he was a, well ladies present so." Soapy nodded at Lucy.

"So you are definitely not in his service then?" asked Simon with a grin.

"Hasn't Podgy told you, my, I wouldn't help Ravensbury, never ever, never."

"Would you help his Lordship and ourselves to find Ravensbury if it meant he got his comeuppance?" asked Lucy.

"Explain?"

Lucy did, very well, and Soapy understood.

"Look it sounds like a good plan, but firstly I'd have to take my forces on an unofficial sortie, secondly if this goes wrong, we will get a roasting and he'll slip away like the slime he is."

"Yes Soapy but don't you see my old chum, if you and your men find him, with me in tow then should it go wrong, if we can get Wilkins there then the press will simply report us as hero's for rescuing him." Lord Pennington's optimism did not impress his friend.

"I'll have a think and drop by tomorrow morning and let you know."

"Thank you Soapy, thank you, your the only one I trust, most of the other people I know are so enamoured by the rascal."

When our visitor had left, Lucy was curious, "How did he come by that name?"

"Oh he was never without his soap, always washing, amazing that he went into the army, infantry."

"So why does he hate Ravensbury so much?" asked Simon.

"Well Smudgy need some help, won't go into the detail but anyway Soapy declined. Smudgy didn't like it, so he took Soapy's soap, placed it strategically around the entrance to the masters office. Mr Langton went flying, the soap was very distinctive Soapy used a particular kind that his mother mailed to him. Soapy was very smart and earlier in the week had had some discourse with Mr Langton. Langton had lost face and being a spiteful fellow punished Soapy, so of course he naturally assumed this was Soapy's work and gave Soapy a terrible thrashing. Would not be allowed these day's but Soapy's hands smarted so much he could not use them and even stopped washing for a while."

“So Soapy might be cautious about helping us, because it might backfire and he could end up being punished again, through none of his own fault.” Lucy was sharp and thinking.

“Yes, if it goes wrong and he's taken his fellows somewhere without specific orders.”

“He'd get thrown out of the army.”

“Yes my dear he would and he loves the army.”

“Is there anyone else who might help?” asked Jim.

“Jim I wish there was, some of my friends are also Ravensbury's, although I think some may be like myself, friends with him in name only. None of them have any forces at their command, except financial or political ones.”

It was a long night, with the hours ticking away time was short, in two days the Inspector would go to Ravensbury's hiding place, but would we be able to catch him?

In the morning a very portly gentleman approaching his Lordship's stature sauntered up to the front door. His Jaguar, sat as though ready for a photo shoot on the driveway in front of the house.

“Wilkins, very pleased to see you, come in.”

“Podgy, I do declare you've lost weight!”

“You planning to stay my friend?”

“No, why?”

“Suitcases under your eyes?”

“Oh that's too many late nights getting the morning edition to print.”

His Lordship ushered Wilkins into the lounge, plying him with Brandy.

“Most kind, now what's this all about?”

“Do you like Ravensbury?”

“In public, yes,” he sighed, “In private, no I can't stand the man, you were with him at school, do you?”

“In public, yes,” said his Lordship with a wry grin, “With the help of my friends here we are planning, and I use the term loosely, to rescue him.”

Wilkins, gave a rather startled look, “You and who's army, if it is the same men as took you?”

“Ah well, look Wilkins there are very few people I trust and you are one of them,” said Lord Pennington with a serious face.

“Ravensbury,” said Wilkins, pausing for thought, “Was he somehow mixed up with your, your kidnap?”

The conversation was abruptly interrupted.

“Soapy, long time no see, how the devil are you old man?”

“Well Wilkins and you?”

“Too many late nights and one too many of these,” he said, holding up the brandy glass.

“I’ll do it, not with all the men, just a handful of volunteers. Is Wilkins in on this Podgy?”

“He is, he is, thank you, good man, good man.” Lord Pennington was very chuffed at the show of support.

“I am?”

“You’ll write a good story, anyone else and Ravensbury will put a twist in the print. We need someone to tell the truth, you are so well respected Wilkins.”

“Yes but there are a good many people who’s position is dependant upon Ravensbury’s, we are not going to have an easy ride.”

“Yes Wilkins and there are probably just as many who given the chance will kick him when he’s down, but they would not want to make a move with Ravensbury currently being so popular.” Lord Pennington, knew some of those he eluded to, people like Soapy who had borne the brunt of Ravensbury’s nasty side.

Nothing much happened the following day, Soapy had gathered his men in readiness and we waited.

It was early evening, the ant’s had relayed a message and a fly on station at our end of the signal chain flew up to Lucy.

“Gentlemen, the Inspector is getting ready to leave his house.”

“How do you know that?” said Wilkins.

“My dear fellow you can’t expect this young lady to reveal her sources, it’s just not ethical.” Pennington laughed at his own remark, his chins wobbling.

“But Ravensbury could be miles away,” said Soapy, his men nodding in agreement.

“He’ll be somewhere very very close by, because it will have to be within the Inspector’s patch,” Lucy explained, “It will have to be somewhere not on his own land, or someone might suspect a put up job, but somewhere where he can be sure he’s not disturbed.”

Another fly flew up and communicated that the Inspector was leaving by car.

“Gentlemen the Inspector will be in his car and we have the make model, and registration of said vehicle.”

“Wow,” said Wilkins, “I’m starting to envy you dear Lucy, you do have good sources.”

“Let’s go,” said Soapy.

“We wait, one we don’t yet know where he is going, two we will want them to get comfortable first.” Lucy was running this operation, with Lord Pennington’s blessing.

It was only half an hour later when a report came through from an ant colony near and old disused warehouse building. It had once been on a railway siding, and in the days before the dominance of motor transport it had thrived. Now it stood as a decaying ruin, out in the middle of nowhere, a rough track leading to it was very overgrown, to the south what remained of part of the railway line, to the north, some very mature overgrown hedgerows.

When we arrived the Inspector’s car was just visible, hidden off the road but not down the lane which was barely passable on foot. Soapy went first, his men very discretely fanning out around the remains of the buildings. He was to be the cavalry, ok I know they are infantry, but should our little surprise go wrong, he was the rescue party. If it went right he may not even be needed.

Spiky stayed with Soapy, it was better that Ravensbury did not know he had survived. Lucy had tried to persuade him to stay back at Pennington House, but he wanted to see us trap Ravensbury. Jim was back with our vehicles, keeping watch, Lord Pennington did not want Higgins turning up for some hunting. Though we doubted he would be capable, you never knew.

Simon, Lord Pennington, Wilkins and Lucy approached the old shed with caution. They could hear nothing, we waited. Fn8 caught the scent of some of his species. Firefly with Fn8 in top gunner mode flew off towards a small mound of earth. Fn8 dismounted, much to the amazement of the local ants and proceeded to talk to them. In minutes he was back on Firefly and heading towards Lucy at a fair rate of knots. Her earring went swinging wildly as Firefly landed, Fn8 tumbling off into the receptacle.

“They are in a small shed down near the railway siding, at the back of this building.”

Lucy told the others, and we move off very quietly. His Lordship steaming at the rear.

Simon and Lord Pennington stood looking towards the doorway. Wilkins and Lucy made the first move, there was an old boarded up window around the side, the two of them moved as though in slow motion, treading carefully to avoid any noise.

"Thank's for my stuff," came the distinctive sound of the Inspector's voice.

"Not so loud man." Ravensbury was clearly worried.

"No one's going to hear us out here, I doubt anyone even knows this place exists."

"Ok lets keep it that way, so three days from now you get Molly to drop off the money. Then the kidnappers release me."

"Yes but I'll not look good, I mean those kidnappers getting away with it!"

"In a few day's you'll find the empty money bag, it will be great, every time you need to go off some place you can use it as an excuse."

"Chasing a new lead?"

"Yes, yes, and I'm ok, everyone's happy."

I should tell you that both Lucy and Wilkins had voice recorders running and both were grinning like Cheshire cats.

"Well I'd best be off," said the Inspector, his next act was to peer out checking to see that the coast was clear, as the door edged open he caught a glimpse of the large unmistakable outline of Lord Pennington, silhouetted against the background of a setting sun.

"Pennington," he spluttered, "Wha."

"Pennington?" shouted Ravensbury.

"Come to rescue you old my old friend, looks like the Inspector has beat me too it." As he said this Lucy and Wilkins faded into the background, hiding in the shadows. Soapy had one of his men with night scopes filming the whole thing.

"Those scoundrels must have run off," said Lord Pennington.

The Inspector and Ravensbury both appeared in the doorway.

"Of course, you are so right my friend, the Inspector's men are as we speak chasing after them. Thank you for coming though, how?"

Ravensbury paused, "How did you come to find us?"

"Oh you know me always reading, looking at an old map, just a lucky hunch old fellow."

“Ah, not those damn flies then?” Ravensbury was curious.

“No, no my friend, those villains killed them all,” said his Lordship looking sad. Simon nodded in agreement.

Ravensbury sauntered over to Lord Pennington. “Do you mind,” he said to Simon, “I’d like a quiet word.”

Simon backed off a little way.

“Look my friend, very good of you to come here and you can see the Inspector has done fine work. However it would be best if he handles my release from the captives, you understand, we don’t want the media getting the wrong idea do we?”

“Oh no, Smudgy, well I’ll be off then,” said Lord Pennington, turning to Simon, “Come along my man.”

The two of them left Ravensbury and the Inspector staring, the Inspector was shaking his head.

“What’s the matter man?” Ravensbury looked at the Inspector, “Something wrong with your head.”

“They just went!”

“Podgy is a old pal of mine,” said Ravensbury with a big grin, “This is going just great.”

“Should we not go back inside?”

“Inspector who is going to see us at this time of evening? It’s nearly dark. You take those plants of yours, for medicinal purposes,” Ravensbury, chuckled.

“Of course, that’s right, for medicinal purposes,” said a concerned looking Inspector, “So three days from now you are released and I loose the empty money bag. Then find it again.”

“Yes, yes, we’ve been through all that. Go on man, if your wife phones and you are not there she might wonder and come running back, we don’t want that now, do we?”

The Inspector picked up a couple of pot plants, the nature of which we could not see but suspected it to be another kind of pot. When the Inspector had cleared the area, we withdrew all our forces.

The next day nothing much happened, FS2 had been left in place to keep tabs on Ravensbury. Meanwhile Wilkins was at work stirring things with an exclusive for the following days paper.

Day two and the headlines:

Ravensbury Found

Shock, Lord Ravensbury has been found hiding in a deserted railway warehouse. Kidnapped, we think not.... Inspector goes potty.

Wilkins had leaked the whereabouts to all and sundry, including the little detail of the Inspector's gardening habits. There were a lot of people suddenly taking an interest in the twist of events.

A Letter from the Fly Minister

When I first heard about the flies I thought it was a joke. However after meeting the Fly Masters and their highly professional flies I realised how vital they are to Britain. It is with great honour that I have accepted the new post of Fly Minister. Never again shall we allow ruthless men to eliminate CFCs from this country. Let us give thanks to all those brave flies and their allies who have helped to keep Britain safe.

Remember the fly next to you may be doing vital work for this country. Don't be a swat, use your newspaper for its intended purpose. Remain calm, even ordinary flies are doing a marvellous job recycling waste for us. Cover your food, but don't be rude. Every government needs a good Fly Minister and I hope to set a high standard that will be hard to follow.

This book is a glowing tribute to their tireless efforts, and I urge all good British Citizens to read it.

Kind regards,

Sir John Bluewood MP

Authors Note:

A large pale orange spider walked in front of me. She tried to use her feminine charm to get me to include her as the lead villain. Tactfully I explained that I can't go adding baddies for effect. This work is based on a true story and I must remain authentic to ensure a true and fair representation of the facts.

Titles by the author:

From the author of the following all available in the mature section on www.lulu.com :

Title	ISBN	Webpage Link
ICE	978-1-84728-845-5	http://www.lulu.com/content/270536
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For Woods	978-1-84728-723-6	http://www.lulu.com/content/247484
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Maps:

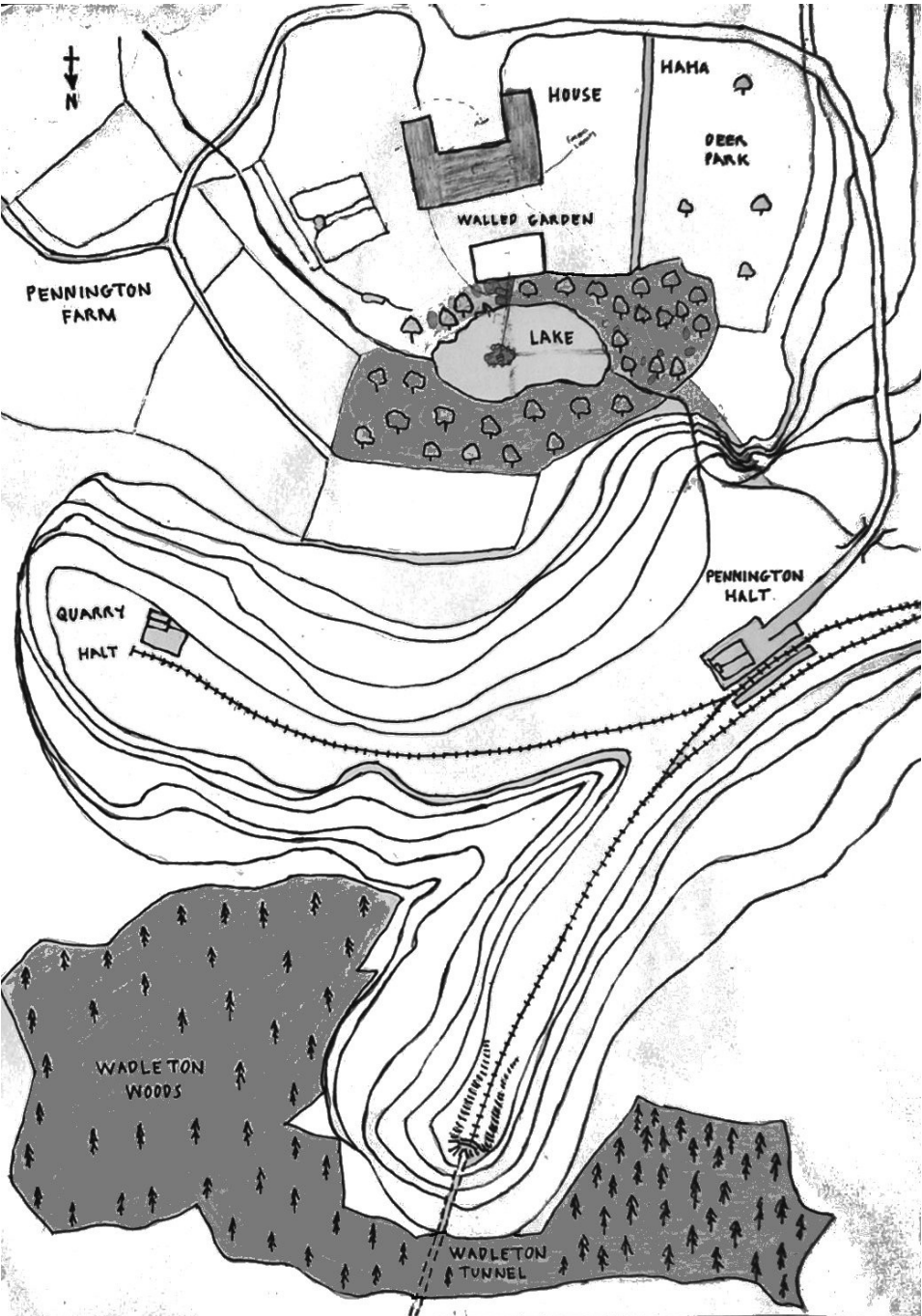
The house and grounds.

The cave system in the quarry.

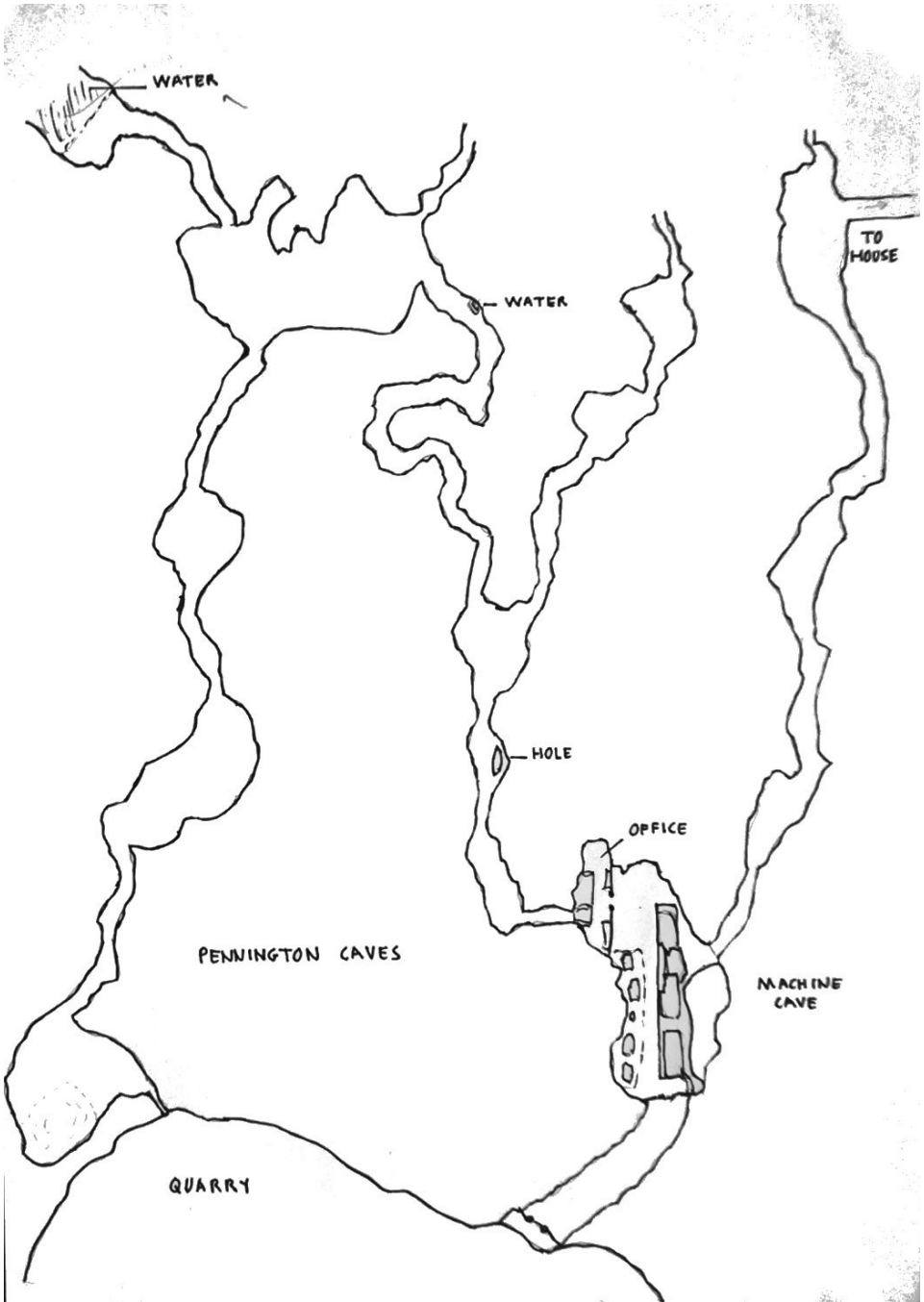
A schematic of the tunnels and hidden passages.

Please note: *Some of the maps are quite old. The collection of lines on the map of the house and grounds indicating contours.*

Pennington House and Grounds



The Cave System in the Quarry



Pennington House - Secret Tunnels, Passages and Caves

