

'The Blackwood Case' by Michael Khan – 27/02/19

PART ONE

Chapter 1

A visit to the clinic and police station

10th July 2015

Mary was sitting in the Sommers Road clinic reception somewhat concerned about a young man sitting three metres away who was exhibiting a snivelling cold that she really didn't want to catch. It was Friday the 10th July and she was due to fly to Miami in three days' time to visit her uncle Jack who frequently suffered chest infections and wouldn't like his niece coming with 'the dreaded allergy'. Only a third of the waiting room seats were occupied but once settled she didn't like to move. She hoped he would be called soon.

'Mr Ryan Blackwood please go to consulting room three' this was repeated as the snivelling man got up and moved off in the direction of consulting room 3 or so she assumed. And one of the young female receptionists headed that way at the same time.

Mary continued surveying the newcomers booking in. She was interested in their demeanour and wondering how sick they might or might not be. Her appointment was 5.10 pm with Dr Roy, but it was now 5.30 pm and Mary felt anxious. The doctor was running late. Then at 5.50 pm the tannoy spoke, "Miss Mary Tucker, please go to consulting room 3." Mary got up quickly, relieved to be called but concerned to be following Mr Ryan whatever his name was with the cold. She found the door and knocked. There was no answer – she checked the number. Puzzled – 'should she wait or open the door?' She didn't want Dr Roy thinking she was a wimp nor rude – so she gently opened the door and peered in. The doctor was sitting slumped over his desk. She hesitated and then called out.

"Doctor?" - no reply. "Doctor are you alright?" She spoke again.

As she walked over to him her first aid training clicked in and she started checking his pulse. He looked very pale. She detected a weak pulse she put her ear near his mouth, but she felt no breath. There was an asthma inhaler on his desk near his hand and a lingering almond smell. It required immediate action.

She ran back to reception shouting, 'Help! Help! - Dr Roy is seriously ill - he needs resuscitation!'

Mary was kept at the clinic in a side room for an hour while her doctor had been attended to. A nurse brought her a cup of tea at one point and asked if she was alright.

"Is Dr Roy alright?"

"He's being attended to."

"I'd like to go home," Mary responded, "but I need some sleeping pills which was why I came to see Dr Roy."

"Oh," the nurse smiled, "but the police have arrived and they have asked that you stay. They'll be in to see you shortly. I'll see what I can do about getting you a prescription for tablets."

"What do the police want?" Mary asked rhetorically as the nurse left.

The nurse left swiftly closing the door quietly behind her. Ten minutes later two police officers came in, a police lady whom Mary judged to be in her late twenties and an older man. The policeman

introduced himself as Detective Sergeant (DS) Black and his assistant as Detective Constable (DC) Jones.

“Is Dr Roy alright?” Mary asked

“Not exactly,” the DS replied. “I understand you were the last to see him alive.”

“But,” stammered Mary, “Dr Roy was sick! He still had a pulse. When I felt no breath, I ran out to get help” Mary blurted out looking shocked.

DC Black fixed her in the eye, “Do you have first aid training?”

“Yes. I’m a QA level three at my work.”

“What industry is that in?”

“Oh. We supply chemicals to the farming industry,” Mary replied looking a little sheepish.

“Did you attempt to give Dr Roy immediate resuscitation yourself?” DS Black asked.

“Well no - well I panicked a bit. It was difficult being in the clinic. I thought a doctor would be best to help him!” Mary replied.

“Hmm.”

“How did he die? And why are the police interested anyway?” Mary asked not knowing what else to say.

“We would like you to come to the police station so that we can take your witness statement,” DS Black replied.

“I could come tomorrow. I’m not feeling well,” Mary said hopefully. She now felt sick and tired.

“It would be helpful if you came now while everything is still fresh in your mind.”

“So, you’re not arresting me?” Mary looked sheepish, but immediately regretted such a silly question.

“No, I would just like you to make a voluntary statement. Do you have a car?” DS Black enquired.

“No. I walked from the station. I only came for sleeping tablets. I’m very tired.”

“We will take you shortly, then take you home once the statement is done,” he said. “DC Jones will stay with you while I have a short word with the forensics team.” He left the room.

Mary sat there dazed. DC Jones watched her for a while and then asked, “Where do you work?”

“I work in London and I go by train. I came from work and walked here from the station. I just needed some sleeping pills.”

“What do you do?”

“I’m a store manager.”

When they arrived at the police station it was nearly 7:10pm and Mary would have been missed by her mother. On arrival she was conducted to an interview room and DC Jones was assigned to sit with her. Mary tried to remain calm and sent a message to her mum that she would be late back. She began dreaming about visiting her uncle Jack. She’d last seen him years ago on a visit he had made to the UK. He was a strange man – claimed he was researching a detective novel. He stayed with them

for a month and was quite pleasant. He'd even taken her to watch The Lion King at the Lyceum, which she'd been quite excited about.

DS Black entered the room and gave the constable a nod as he sat next to her and switched on the tape recorder. Mary tried to focus on what he was asking her.

"Reigate Police Station. Friday 10th July 2015. Voluntary witness statement from Miss Mary Tucker."

"We just like to ask you a few questions to help us in our enquiries into the death of doctor Roy – that would be helpful to us."

Mary asked, "What did he die of?"

"That's in the hands of forensics," DS Black replied.

"But you don't suspect foul play, do you?" Mary responded.

DC Jones who had been silent up to then interjected, "Nothing is ruled out and murder is a distinct possibility." This drew a slight scowl from DS Black; clearly Jones had stepped out of line and she muttered, 'Sargent' on her lips. "Tell me what you remember."

Mary recounted, "There was a man who was called to Dr Roy just before me called Ryan someone I think it began with a 'B' –and he seemed to be accompanied by one of the receptionists."

DS Black relaxed a little as he spoke gently to Mary: "Tell me slowly exactly what you did from the moment you were called to go to see the doctor."

Mary went over the details as best as she could, but she was distressed and kept having blank moments and at one point started to cry.

DS Black spoke gently, "We checked with the clinic reception and there was a gentleman before you but we have no record of him being accompanied."

Mary was flustered – "Maybe the woman was just going to the toilet then."

"I understand you are a store manager?"

"Yes. I'm not feeling well please can I go home now."

"You're clearly still upset and lacking sleep. I'll let you go home now but you'll need to come back here tomorrow morning at 9 am. Constable Jones will drive you home via a chemist so you can collect your prescription."

The sergeant decided that maybe she would do better after a night's sleep. He closed his notebook and lent forward, "Witness statement postponed." He stopped the recorder.

The nurse she'd seen at the clinic had handed her a prescription for three sleeping tablets as she had left the clinic accompanied by the two police officers, explaining that Mary would need to return to see a doctor as soon as possible for her condition to be properly assessed.

Mary dutifully nodded to Sergeant Black, and the constable took her to the chemist and then home.

11th July 2018

Mary had a fitful night but had managed six hours sleep with the help of two tablets. She discussed the whole incident with her mother again before breakfast and concluded she would have to go to the police station as directed. It was Saturday morning – she would have to miss going to the tennis club.

Mary arrived a few minutes early and was asked to wait in reception until the police were ready. At 9:05 am DC Jones came out smiled and asked Mary to follow her.

They sat in the same room as the previous evening. Sergeant Black commenced the interview, “I trust you are feeling better this morning, Ms Tucker. Thank you for coming to help us with our enquiries. Please would you start be recounting again what you told us last night about your visit to the doctor. Give all the details you can. Take your time.” Mary slowly recounted her experience of the previous day, and then smiled at DS Black.

“Doesn’t the doctor ask each patient to leave the door open as they leave? He asked.

“Why - yes,” Mary replied.

“But you found the doctor’s door shut and you had to open the door when you received no answer?”

“Yes.”

“And you closed it behind you as you went in?”

“Yes.”

DS Black changed tack. “It is quite fortunate to us that you have some experience of supplying chemicals to the farming industry. Do you mind if I ask you one or two questions about the sort of chemicals your firm supplies?”

“Well if you like,” Mary responded not knowing how this might be helpful to the police.

“Good! Does your firm stock Hydrogen Cyanide?”

“I believe we do - it’s used for fumigating mushrooms I think.”

“How is that supplied?”

“As a gas pressurised in small canisters.”

“And you have access to the supply?”

“Yes, I have controlled access and can sign stocks in and out.”

“Your training presumably will cover its toxicity levels?”

“Yes, it does.”

“The gas in the canisters would be at concentrations in excess of 300 mg/m³ - Is that right?”

“I imagine so,” Mary answered, “I can’t remember off hand. Why do you want to know?”

“Can gas of that concentration kill an adult within a few minutes?”

“Yes, but it is used in farming at concentrations of about 50 mg/m³ which is not dangerous to the handlers. They follow strict ventilation procedures. High concentrations will stop a person breathing

in a few seconds and the heart will stop after a few minutes –the gas is diluted with air to safe concentrations before use in the field.”

“Thanks. I gather you have visited Dr Roy several times in the last six months.”

“Yes.”

Did you ever notice an inhaler on his desk?”

“Yes, I think I have.”

“Did you know he suffered from chronic asthma?”

“No. How would I know what Dr Roy suffered from?” Mary sounded indignant.

“Well Ms Tucker, you have been very helpful. We’ll leave your statement at that for now and get back to you if we need any more information. Thank you for coming in.”

Mary felt relieved. DC Jones offered to take her home, but she declined. “The air will do me good.” She smiled and left.

Chapter 2

*Ryan falls for Susan Cromer***15th May 2015**

Nearly two months earlier on Friday 15th May 2015 at 7:30 pm, Ryan Blackwood was sitting in the Garland Pub near Redhill town centre. Ryan came here regularly and on the odd occasion chatted to the barman. There was usually a brisk pace. The bar staff were friendly enough as were most of the clientele. He lived at home still in Merstham and on a Friday his single mum was used to him coming home in the early hours of Saturday. He was a bit of a loner. After the Garland he might find company in the Mishiko nightclub in Reigate where they would let him in if he was sufficiently sober and he would sit in a comfortable corner watching others crooning the dance floor.

He was slowly sipping his pint of Harvey's Old perched on a bar stool near the darts board. He sat watching a darts match. He didn't know the contestants though he recognised three of the players. Each had exchanged a brief nod with Ryan and he had given them a friendly 'Hi', which gave him the excuse to watch the match and feel as if he might belong. There was a happy buzz of conversation in the pub. But the truth was that although Ryan felt a small degree of security being rooted to the bar stool, deep down he was experiencing the numbing sense of loneliness he always felt even when surrounded by people. The few friends he had were on an early summer holiday and at least two others had succumbed to a local dose of D&S. He wondered if other people felt as lonely as he did even when they were laughing and joking with their friends.

Ryan felt a brief freshening of the hubbub fug as the door opened and a young lady walked in and drifted over to the darts players, exchanging a few words with one of the contestants before finding a bar stool next to Ryan. "Is this taken?" the lady addressed a glance at Ryan.

"No... No" Ryan replied, "Help yourself."

She stepped up and wiggled her shapely legs onto the stool until she was comfortable giving Ryan a sly smile as she did so. He couldn't help notice her short skirt and felt her sensual attraction. He tried to focus on the darts, until the girl asked him what the beer was like. Ryan had assumed she was with the darts player she had spoken with and that she was waiting for the player to buy her a drink when the game finished. But now he was less sure.

"This is Harvey's Old. I like it: - given the choice I prefer Goblin, but this is a Harvey's pub," he replied. "Another good one they have is Harvey's Best – that's a bit lighter. Then around Valentine's Day they do a Harvey's Kiss, but they'll have finished that one for this year." He paused and looked at her. "Aren't you having anything to drink?" he enquired tamely.

"Is that an offer?" she teased him.

Ryan hesitated. "I thought you were with red shirt there," Ryan gave her a quizzical look.

She smiled, "I've started to help with a local darts ladder. We meet in different pubs in the area. I'm Sue. Declan there in the red shirt is due to play Alan Turner in this year's semi-final next week and I've come along just to see him play this evening in preparation for next week. She flashed him a tender look.

Ryan melted and found the courage to ask. "Can I buy you a beer?"

She smiled, "Thanks that would be nice. I'll try a half of the Best, since they don't have any Goblin or Kiss - thanks," she smiled.

Ryan got the barman's attention while he pondered her reply, and ordered two half pints of Best. "Do you come here regularly?" Sue asked.

"Pretty much," Ryan said guardedly, "usually on a Friday".

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

She was direct, but seemed quite innocent. Ryan judged she was about 27 some 5 years younger than he: nevertheless, he felt a little embarrassed to admit he hadn't a girlfriend for whatever reason. "No one steady," he replied, adding, "Are you a darts player?"

"No," she responded, "I get involved with the ladder to meet people and make friends – its lonely hanging out on your own."

Ryan admitted it was – either he'd struck lucky this evening or what. Sue had come and spoken with him and he felt she already understood him and liked him. He felt he should sail with the rising tide as he dimly recalled Shakespeare classically saying. "I'm going on to the night club in Reigate later – would you care to join me? I could get you a taxi home after," he added.

Susan smiled at him, "Well that would be nice. I'll need to stay here till about nine pm when these guys have finished. But I have my own car so I won't need a taxi – maybe I could give you a lift," she added.

Ryan looked at her and then at the darts players in amazement. How come one of them hadn't asked this dish of a girl out. He couldn't understand it. "That would be great," he said somewhat excitedly.

30th May 2015.

Mary opened the post eagerly. There was letter from USA with a Miami postmark. It was a week since she had written to her uncle hinting that she could come to the States on holiday in July, hoping he would be able to accommodate her. She excitedly read the letter and then re-read it to her mother.

"That's great – Jack will give you a good holiday in Miami, if that's what you want," her mum told her. "Why not book your ticket now." As it was Saturday, Mary spent the next two hours researching and then booking the most economical return flight to Miami. By lunchtime, she was booked to fly on Tuesday the 14th July and return on the 1st August.

5th June 2015.

Susan Cromer had left work at 4 pm, got to her flat and changed into something more suitable to rendezvous with her brother Peter at the Reigate wine bar for 6pm. After the usual pleasantries, Sue and Peter got into serious conversation over a glass of Chianti. They didn't have long as Sue was due to meet her boyfriend Ryan for dinner at 7 pm at Wagamama. She would walk over and meet him there at 6:50 pm. They had been going out each Friday since they first met in May. She had met his mother one Sunday and he had stayed over at her flat last Friday where they had made love and slept in late on Saturday morning. He had been a virgin and had been quite clumsy, but as she was experienced in love making, she had gently taught him how to make love to a woman. She had confessed to him that she'd been married for six months before her husband had left her for another

woman and she subsequently divorced him and been single ever since. He appreciated her being so open with him.

Ryan was looking forward to meeting Sue at Wagamama this evening. Since that first Friday he had grown to believe she really loved him and over the next few dates he had responded by falling in love with her. He couldn't wait to see her tonight. And last Friday – well he had been re-living that night over and over – he just wanted her next to him to hold her close and lay with her so they could explore each other's bodies all over again and fulfil each other to a climax. But this time he wanted it to be more special. He had bought her a pretty ring. It was quite expensive and he hoped she would like it. He would ask her to marry him at Wagamama and then they would open a bottle of Champagne and the manager would take a photo of them.

They embraced in the lobby.

"The table's booked for 7pm. I think we can go straight in." A waiter showed them their seats.

"Can I take your coat?"

"Thanks" Ryan helped Susan out of her coat and put it on the back of her chair.

"Is this table OK?" he enquired.

"Sure, it's fine Ryan."

Sue sat reading the menu. She seemed to anticipate Ryan's mood and tried to let him down gently.

"Have you had a good week?" she enquired.

"Work was stressful but I'm here to enjoy your company. Did you have a good week?" Ryan felt unsure how to respond.

"Well my period has started and I'm not feeling that great this evening," She lied.

"Oh. Would you rather we just had a quiet evening at your place then - if you're not well enough? He enquired gently.

"No, I'd rather just enjoy the meal."

"Good," he said, "I want this to be a very special evening."

"Ryan - I love you lots – but - but I'm not ready yet to commit to anything deeper for the time being!" She had pre-empted Ryan's move. "And I'd like an early night on my own – sorry. But we could meet up tomorrow at Reigate Heath for a walk if you like?"

Ryan felt deflated, but accepted the situation and put a brave face on it. He would wait his time. He resolved to work harder to win her over.

"That's OK. Let's enjoy each other's company here then - and meet up tomorrow."

12th June 2015

They met for a walk on the Saturday morning as agreed. Ryan had promised to take his mum out to dinner that day, and so they agreed to meet again the following Friday. Sue suggested that they took fish and chips to her flat and enjoy the evening together.

"Come ready for me.," Sue had shot him a promising parting remark, as she dropped him off outside his mother's house. Sue enjoyed the fact that Ryan had fallen for her to the extent that he

was possibly thinking of marriage. As a normal woman she wanted to feel secure in her intimate relationships. It was good to be respected and loved. But she wasn't thinking of marriage at the moment: she had bigger plans or so she thought. She did want children one day but she was not ready to have them yet, besides she was not sure that she wanted Ryan as the father of her babies anyway.

Working at the Sommer's road clinic, Susan Cromer had noted Ryan was one of Dr Roy's patients and it was fairly easy to find that he lived with his mother, a certain Lady Blackwood.

"Is your mother Lady Blackwood?" Sue asked Ryan as they sat eating a pizza in her flat.

"Yes, but I don't like to bring that up with people. How did you find out?"

"Oh, a friend told me. How come she has that honour?"

"It was hereditary, but it won't pass to me. Her uncle was a baronet and he died childless so the title passed to his younger brother and then temporarily to her, but it won't go any further as mother had no brothers and I'm a Blackwood."

"Sounds complicated and very male centric."

"It was in those days. Anyway, I don't believe in all that stuff." Ryan replied.

Sue decided that for the time being she needed to keep her relationship with Ryan simmering without bringing it to the boil. She had been on the pill for a number of years since her divorce. So, her strategy for now was to restrain Ryan's male domineering or romantic instincts and teach him how to please her. How to genuinely think about her as a person. It was strange how some men still seemed to think that women should be submissive even in intercourse. While respecting his limitations, she would continue to teach him how to make love to her. She had noticed Ryan tended to get a bit breathless at times and had asked him about it. "I do suffer from asthma a bit, but not enough to bother the doctor about," he told her.

"My employer suffers badly from asthma, she replied. "He swears by Terbutaline turbo Inhalers. Why not try one? I can get you some free samples we have at the clinic?"

3rd July 2015

They met each Friday at 5pm for the next three weeks with more or less a similar pattern of romance and intimacy. However, she also had another man in her life at the time; one who was a potential problem for her.

Sue had been enjoying an affair with her employer Dr Roy at the clinic for the previous twelve months and for some time before she had met Ryan. He would come to her place once a week on Tuesdays when he had no afternoon surgery. She would leave the clinic at 1pm and go home and prepare a late lunch for them both. She worked part time and it had been easy to arrange her shifts to suit his routine. He would finish up around 2pm and head to her flat where they would enjoy the afternoon together. However recently he had made excuses for not coming.

On talking to Ryan, she had discovered that his mother attended a clinic nearer to their home so she wondered why Ryan was registered at a different clinic. She decided to ask Ryan to move his registration to his mother's clinic which was closer to where he lived. It would need Dr Roy to send a letter to facilitate the move.

"Ryan darling, I need you to do something for me. Would you mind moving to another clinic. There is one nearer to you."

"Why do I need to do that Sue?" Ryan was perplexed.

"Well part of my job is to process each doctor's clinical notes and check that abnormal test results have been actioned. I will inevitably read any private data that you share with Dr Roy."

"Well I don't mind Sue. I want us to have no secrets." Ryan responded.

"Well I don't feel comfortable," Susan replied. "I want my work to be uncompromised by personal interest of that kind. Please just do it for me. It will be quite easy - you'll just need to tell Dr Roy that you want to move to a clinic closer to your mother's home where you live"

She was being particularly seductive this evening so he acquiesced quickly.

"I've booked an appointment for you to see Dr Roy on Friday the 10th two days after my birthday next week," She replied as she drew him closer to him unbuttoning his shirt. Later as they lay resting in each other's arms Ryan asked "How do you know I'm free next Friday."

"Well silly: that's when we go to the Garland and you said you could always leave work at 4pm on Fridays so I fixed you an appointment for you at 4.50pm to save you the trouble."

"But you didn't ask me "

"Yes, and I know you love me and would do that little thing for me so I was just helping. Do you want me to change it?"

"No that's alright." Ryan felt reassured that Sue actually might love him - he had been unsure of late. He asked her, "Would you like to go out on Wednesday to celebrate your birthday?"

"Well I do like birthday surprises," Sue answered. "However, I've a long-standing date with a couple of girl friends from work – a girls only night I'm afraid. You could always leave me a card on the day and then maybe we could go out on the Friday instead - before coming back here?" Sue ventured. That evening Sue gave him a spare key to her flat.

Wednesday 8th July 2015

Ryan now had a key to his girlfriend's flat and he believed they were going steady. She hadn't yet asked him to move in with her, but since she finished work an hour later than him, she said he could come to her flat whenever they were going out for a meal if he didn't want to go home first. This evening it was Sue's birthday, and he decided that he would surprise her by decorating her flat with several vases of her favourite freesias. He had taken a long lunch hour, bought the flowers and gone to her flat and arranged them. She had obviously left in a hurry that morning since her bed was unmade and one or two personal items were laying on the floor. He decided to make no attempt to tidy up. If she minded him seeing her flat untidy, she wouldn't have given him a key.

But then he noticed a letter also lying on the floor. He picked it up and couldn't help himself from reading it. It was from Dr Roy.

Looking very shocked and worried, he left in a hurry.

That night he didn't sleep. He couldn't believe what he had read. He felt filled with rage and then sorrow. What was going on. He couldn't believe Sue had been two-timing him. He felt stupid and then

told himself to calm down. Maybe this explained why Sue seemed to play hot one moment and cold the next. He would have nothing more to do with her: and yet he couldn't do without her. Was that why Sue wanted him to change his clinic away from Dr Roy? On his way to work, he decided he would phone her that evening and confront her about the letter. Maybe there was another explanation. Either way he hated Dr Roy.

However, Sue phoned him first at lunch time and thanked him for the lovely surprise. "The Freesias were such a special surprise," she said. He didn't answer he felt so confused. "What's the matter?" Sue asked.

He just started to cry, "That letter, "Ryan stammered ... how could you. I don't want to see you. I hate you"

"Ryan, I love you - I was in a relationship with Dr Roy before I met you. It was tricky – him being my employer. I was trying to break it off diplomatically after I met you. I was going to tell you."

Ryan switched his phone off.

He remembered he was due to see Dr Roy the next day at 4:50pm. Should he just not turn up? He tossed it about in his mind all day as he brooded at work that afternoon, before coming to a decision. He would go and see the doctor and confront him. He would deal with him alright. He felt very depressed and was using one of the asthma inhalers Sue had given him.

July 21st 2015

It was a week since Lady Blackwood had reported her son as missing to the police. Ryan had called in on Friday 10th July and told her he would be away for the weekend. He was eating out. He collected a few things from his room, kissed her goodbye, saying he loved her, and left. She had waited till the Tuesday morning before phoning the police as she supposed Ryan may have gone straight to work on the Monday. But when he hadn't returned home by that evening she had been very worried. The police had been round to her home collecting information that would help to identify him. They emphasized it was very important that she phone them immediately she had any news from him and they gave her a mobile number to phone them directly. They would post a missing person report, but didn't seem willing to do much more.

She told the police she had phoned Ryan's boss on the Tuesday morning. "He sounded very annoyed. He said Ryan hadn't phoned in and asked me if Ryan was sick. When I told him, Ryan hadn't been home since Friday the 10th July, he was quite concerned and asked me to keep him posted. Isn't there anything else you can do?"

"Budget constraints," they had ventured.

"Can't you offer a reward for anyone giving helpful information – I am very willing to pay."

"Yes, we could do that – if you want to, I suggest we start at a £1000 reward," the constable had suggested.

Now a week later Lady Blackwood had heard nothing, although she had noted that a picture of Ryan and mention of the £1000 reward had been posted at the police station and in the local paper.

The doorbell rang. Lady Blackwood opened the door of her five-bed detached house and recognised Ryan's girlfriend. She flung her arms round Susan and burst into tears.

“Do you know where Ryan is?”

“No, I came to talk with about him being missing.”

“Please come in and sit down. Would you like a cup of tea?” Lady Blackwood enquired, and promptly went to make one in the kitchen. Susan followed behind her, and commented on the neat display of African art in the hallway. “Most of it comes from my aunt who lived in Zambia. I visited her once or twice with my father in the summer holidays when I was a child –I collected some bits myself,” Lady Blackwood explained.

“When did you last see Ryan?”

Sitting with a cup of Earl grey, Susan explained she had heard that Ryan was missing and added that she hadn’t seen Ryan since he had phoned her on the 10th July.

“That’s when I Ryan went missing,” Lady Blackwood interjected. “How did he sound to you?”

“Well it was a difficult conversation,” Susan paused. “He thought I was being unfaithful to him.”

“Oh, I see. So, he was angry with you?”

“Well not so much angry with me as with the man whom I had a steady relationship before I met Ryan. He said he would deal with him. I did explain that that was in the past. ... It is complicated.”

“I told Ryan I loved him and reminded him none of us are perfect,” Susan added. “But he put the phone down on me. I have sent him several text messages since telling him that I love him and imploring him to contact me. But I haven’t heard from him.”

“I’m sorry – thank you for telling me.,” They both fell silent for a while, before Lady Blackwood began to weep softly into her hankie. Lady Blackwood was not a judgemental type, but the Susan’s frank admission of being unfaithful to her son came as a shock which she couldn’t think about at that moment.

“Thank you for coming to tell me what you know,” she said as Susan left, “The police are still looking for Ryan.”

Susan Fisher said goodbye and left.

Chapter 3

Mary's trip to Miami in July and return in August 2015

Jack was Mary's mother's half-brother and although her mother had come with her in the past to Miami, in recent years Mary more often than not went on her own. Now he had retired, her uncle seemed to visit the UK more frequently and he spent at least one holiday a year with his half-sister Grace and his niece. Mary's father had died young when she was in her late teens. Mary found she got on well with her uncle, and over the years they had developed a close relationship. Jack had suggested she didn't need to call him uncle but Mary liked using the handle, she felt it showed affection as well as respect for their age difference. So, she tended to alternate between addressing him as 'Uncle' or 'Jack' rather than as 'Uncle Jack.'

Uncle Jack was pleased to welcome his niece at Miami airport. He planned to take time off his normal retirement routine to give her the best holiday ever. They had spent two wonderful days exploring the Everglades on foot and by air-boat: He had driven her to Key West at the Southern tip of continental USA crossing the seven-mile bridge. They toured Miami by open-top bus, and went to some fabulous back street restaurants. Uncle Jack took her on a 'Sip, Savor & Salsa' evening where she had learnt Bachata dancing and they had stayed till the early hours. There were a few rainy days with some high winds – on these Mary read her book while Uncle Jack busied himself with his writing. They also spent several days at the sea side enjoying the sun and sea, and on one memorable day they took a high-speed ferry trip to Bimini seaside resort in the Bahamas, returning tired and exhilarated in the late evening.

Mary was interested in Jack's hobby of writing and liked discussing it with him. One evening she asked, "Uncle, how do you go about writing a detective novel?"

Jack was pleased to discuss the subject. "Well there's the factual side of writing a detective novel and for that I guess you need to be a bit of a detective, and then there's the reader interest side to the novel. Readership has developed since the consumption of the early detective stories or murder mysteries such as those written by well know authors such as Agatha Christie. I like to write what I would term a detective novel. The point being I think characters need to be based somehow on real people. Whether you're just writing a romantic novel or a murder mystery I think they read better if they reflect people you know or have met."

"But," Mary interjected, "that would surely make the story very mundane. Real people don't often have very exciting lives. Don't readers like a bit of thrill and out of the ordinary, especially when it comes to crime?"

"Well yes you are right Mary, the reader needs to feel that she or he is amateur detective, so you need to play fair with your reader - give them sufficient clues so that it might be possible for them to guess who the real criminal could be even if you are stringing them along to the end. The author has all the cards and needs to make the story worth reading. But what I meant was, even a crime story can widen the reader's interests in the lives of real people. Maybe the strict crime novel can keep a reader's attention without character studies, but I like to occasionally mix in a bit of real life and politics if I can. Its horses for courses - some readers like one author's style, whereas others like a different style."

"What did you mean about the 'factual side' of a crime novel, Jack?" Mary asked.

“By that I mean the realistic facts of a case. I’ll take your drama with the death of your doctor to illustrate. Dr Roy was it?”

“Yes,” Mary replied.

“Well the facts of his crime story - which I am going to write about by the way - will include the police investigation, the inquest, his funeral and most important of all, the motive of his killer. That is always the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question. Why did someone kill him? And being serious now, I intend to follow this story and come to the UK to do some research. This real-life story will be the basis for my next novel. Of course, in the real world finding the motive and proving the case is what the police, the prosecution and the defence are trying to establish. But the novelist has a big advantage over all of them, in that he or she can speculate all sorts of realistic motives and write the outcome to suit.”

Mary laughed and confidently concluded, “So, then Jack, you’re not really writing about the real case just speculating and developing a conspiracy theory to satisfy your reader!”

“Well, you’ll just have to wait and see, won’t you!” Jack ambiguously replied with a smile. Mary thought that maybe her uncle was a bit presumptuous – did he somehow think he could solve crime better than the police? He might write a gripping story, but... any way she bit her tongue and changed the subject. She promised to keep him abreast of the facts relating to Dr Roy as they developed.

One item of news that had appeared in the Surrey Mirror while Mary was in Florida, but hadn’t escaped her mother’s notice, was that a Lady Blackwood had reported to the police that her son Ryan had been missing for a week and she was terribly worried for his safety. The police had asked the paper to publicise his photograph and appeal to the public for any information leading to his whereabouts and were offering £1000 reward for a successful outcome. Since Mary asked her mother to forward any news, Grace had emailed this item of news to Jack while Mary was still with him. It seemed to her to be relevant to Mary’s case with the police.