

Prologue

Bruno awoke to the sight of a young, semi-naked, muscular man climbing down from the bunk bed above him, before Afrim carelessly urinated in the filthy stainless-steel toilet situated less than five feet from Bruno's thin pillow. He had tried to reason with the man the previous night as another stream of pee missed its target adding to the already gathering smell of ammonia clinging to every surface of the cell. This time he would need to be more forceful in his complaint. A stinging slap around Bruno's head from a heavy-handed Afrim quickly persuaded him that silence was the only way to survive this ordeal.

Bruno rolled over to face the solid wall, the residual smell of the cannabis the man had smoked the night before still hanging thick in the stagnant air, almost impregnating the cheap magnolia paint used to try cover the years of graffiti and toothpaste stains once holding photos of loved ones in place and in view. The entire concoction of differing odours added to the unique stench that two men living in close proximity could make.

Trying not to look in the direction of the six-foot-two Albanian prisoner who was now cleaning his teeth in an equally stained metal sink, Bruno pondered for a moment. How had a sixty-three-year-old career council employee with no previous criminal convictions ended up in the festering hell hole of a Victorian cell in HMP Lewes in the middle of a shit storm?

Afrim finished his ablutions before pushing out his morning routine of five hundred press ups. He looked at Bruno as he finished and jumped back onto his feet.

'By the time I get back from my visit this morning, I want all your stuff moved up to the top bunk. I'm sleeping on the bottom. You understand me old man?'

Bruno nodded helplessly. He had never found himself in this position before. For his entire life people had liked him and valued his contribution to life. But living in the jungle of a prison the rule books were rewritten, and he was fast learning that kindness equalled weakness. It was only day five for him and he was already unsure if he could survive.

Chapter One

As always during the Monday to Friday working week, the alarm on Bruno's radio played a melody of some of his favourite Mozart tunes at 06.30. He lay motionless for a second, pondering the day's farm and animal safety visits to the farmers lying within his Rother Council area before kicking his pyjama clad legs over the side of the bed and shuffling his feet into his waiting Marks and Spenser brown faux-leather slippers. He looked down on his blue brushed cotton pyjamas, remembering his mother and how she loved to buy his Christmas presents, which always included a pair of pyjamas, a pair of slippers and a six pack of socks, and wrap them up before carefully placing them neatly under the beautifully decorated tree. It was always just the two of them, and that's how Mum insisted it must always remain.

It had always been the same way since his father had died, fifty-two years ago while Bruno was still a ten-year-old boy. His dad had always claimed that his terminal cancer had been caused by standing watching the first atomic bomb being detonated as a young sailor from the deck of a Naval warship, but the government denied it throughout, an issue that they had long since stopped fighting about. Life, however, was never the same for the family, and after all, what boy could possibly leave his mother alone after all that they had faced together? So, there he remained, right up until her death last year, living at home and never having a girlfriend. He had promised her as a teenager that he would never leave her, and she held him to that on a daily basis, driving any possible love interest out of the door at the first opportunity. And that was the life of a sixty-three-year-old virgin council worker from Bexhill-on-Sea in East Sussex.

But her death had led to some degree of freedom and independence, or to put it bluntly, the cash he made from the sale of her house paid for his apartment and still left four hundred thousand pounds in his bank account after tax. Maybe it wasn't too late to enjoy a first foreign holiday after all these years of watching them on TV.

He felt tired this morning, feeling that life was catching up on him. The noise from the February rain bouncing against his top floor apartment bedroom window had woken him at 03.37 and not allowed him to fall back to sleep until shortly after 04.00. Yawning loudly, he walked into his newly fitted bathroom and completed his routine, the same routine as he did every single workday morning.

His two-bedroom flat in the Collington Wood area of Bexhill was comfortable enough for him as a single man and he had no intention of ever sharing that second bedroom with any guests. Plus, as he had reached the age of sixty-three, he considered the quiet location ideal, the occasional chat with one of his neighbours sufficed, and aside from that, he received all the company he could ever need through his golf club, supporting the local rugby team, followed by a few pints on a Saturday afternoon, sometimes stretching into the evening, and not forgetting his church group who met for the regular Sunday service in the drafty old sixteen century St Mark's church. He had visited St Mark's as a child while attending the Little Common junior school, never once thinking that he would go on to become a church helper later in life. At the age of seven, all he dreamt about was following in his dad's footsteps and heading off to sea with the Royal Navy - those dreams still three years away from being sunk with his father's death.

Walking back into his warm bedroom, Bruno took his neatly ironed trousers and white shirt from the hangers in his wardrobe before reaching out and selecting the blue tie he always wore on a Monday. He glanced briefly in the mirror to ensure that he was looking his normal tidy self, twirled the Volvo car keys around his finger before locking the front door and facing the cold wet February morning for his ten-minute commute into the Rother District office building in the square opposite Sainsbury's in the town centre. He was always first into the office, not because he particularly enjoyed the job, but he had learnt that if he left thirty minutes later, all the carpark spaces would be taken and Bruno enjoyed taking the spot closest to the front door. Somewhere in his subconscious, he had estimated that he could save five minutes every evening by getting

out of the carpark first, and his fixation with detail had even broken this down, estimating that it saved him one thousand one hundred minutes every year of his own time in the evening. He wondered why people called him an odd ball, not that he cared what anyone could say to him as since the age of ten he had heard it all.

The red and white barrier swung up as Bruno scanned his carpark pass over the sensor before carefully reversing neatly into his normal space as other early morning stragglers walked across the wet tarmac carpark area to the door, fresh from their train commute from Hastings or Eastbourne or whatever area they inhabited. Bruno seemed to know every detail of nearly all the workers, and despite his obsessive behaviour patterns, people liked him. They saw him for what he really was, a kind gentle guy who didn't gossip and would help anyone out. When new staff started working in the building, their first day tour always included a stop at Bruno's office - after all, there was nothing he didn't know about local government business after seeing it all over thirty-two years - and each visit started with very similar words; 'This is Bruno. If you need to know anything about Rother District Council just ask him. Everybody loves Bruno!'

He had grown to like the gravitas it bestowed upon his role in the organization but in truth he knew his place. He visited the local farms to ensure that they complied with all national and local procedures. He had done the same thing for decades and his job title had changed a myriad of times, but it was still the same job, seeing sons and daughters replacing parents in the family business and continuing on regardless. He never went out looking for a problem and always gave the poor farmers a good opportunity to put things right before he submitted his reports. They respected him for the way in which he conducted himself and this wasn't lost on him, every visit resulting in a steaming hot mug of tea on the cold days, or an ice-cold squash in the summer months. One of his oldest clients even arranged his yearly visit to coincide with lunch time and a large pot of something delicious was always bubbling away on the old Aga. All in all, Bruno had an easy life, disposable income, a solid friend's group and his religion. Yes, it was an easy life but one completely devoid of love.

The receptionist sitting behind a newly installed desk smiled at him as he walked past returning the smile and heading for the dark historic oak staircase leading up to the third floor in the roof space, before pushing open the wooden office fire door leading into an open-plan room containing four other desks. As usual he was the first to arrive as he walked through the room and into his own small windowless office, glancing up at the year planner spread across the wall facing his own small desk. It displayed a full list of every appointment written neatly in a fine black marker pen, complete with names, times and phone numbers. So many of the council HR staff had attempted to persuade him to use his computer to maintain the details, telling him that it was 1994 and insisting that he must log onto the new Email systems to keep updated with all council developments. Bruno laughed it all off, his reasoning simple - his own systems for managing the farm visits had remained unchanged for over thirty-two years, he had never missed an appointment or let the council down in any way. Why should he change now? Added to that, if there was any important news to impart, he was sure his manager would let him know.

And as normal there was no real answer that could convince him that these new developments were any better than the routines he had developed over the years. No one truly understood the nature of his job, and no one bothered to ask him what systems he used. This made him irreplaceable in a building that didn't have too much time to delve into an area that was working just fine. In fact, Bruno had created such a niche position that even when he did take his holiday allowance, there was no one who was able to step into his shoes, so as had happened for eternity, when Bruno was not in the building, his job had to wait for him to return.

A gentle tap on his door made him look up from the latest health and safety report lying on the desk in front of him. It was the new girl recently employed as the secretary to the department.

'Morning Diana. You're in early this morning, everything okay with you?'

The look on her face told the story that things were not going well for her. 'Not really Bruno,' she replied, her Liverpool accent seeming out of place in leafy East Sussex. 'That shit of a boyfriend

of mine didn't come home last night. Since he left the army and joined the fire brigade he has changed; he was a nice lad before we moved out of Liverpool and now, I feel as if I don't really know him. It's like he's a different guy; we just aren't getting on very well. I don't know what to do.'

Glancing up at the wall clock and estimating that he had around ten minutes before he had to leave for his first visit Bruno remained compassionate. 'Just chat with him, it's difficult for both of you. You are only eighteen Diana, and he's twenty-two. Things are bound to get strained with you both living hundreds of miles from home. Give it a chance to settle down.'

She stepped forwards and took an empty cup that had sat on the desk since a similar chat the evening before. 'Yeah, you're right Bruno, you always seem to know what to do. I will try and chat with him after his shift today.' She turned to leave before adding; 'People are right about you Bruno, you're the kindest person that I have ever met'

He held up his hands in submission. 'We all need to help each other out, speaking of which, Diana, can you show me how to fill out these forms on this new bloody computer? I haven't got a clue, and the department has just told me that handwritten reports are no longer accepted. They are forcing me into this modern technology for heaven's sake, and I only have two years to go until retirement.'

Diana laughed. 'Sure, when you come back from Becketts Farm this morning I'll show you. It really is easy Bruno, I promise you.'

Chapter Two

The golf ball rattled into the cup on the 18th hole of The Highwoods golf course, the other three players laughing as Bruno had just taken seven shots at the relatively simple par four after hitting his tee shot into the oak trees to the left-hand side of the fairway. Bruno picked up the ball and wiped the head of his putter on his golf towel. 'Ninety-eight shots today, that's the worst I have played for years. Winter golf isn't for me. Come on, let's have a quick pint, I'm meeting up with the rugby crowd in two hours. Bexhill rugby club are playing Faversham, should be a decent game.'

His oldest golfing friend, Harold, led the way back into the clubhouse, sharing a joke with the others.

'As long as I can remember, Bruno has never changed his routine when that rugby team are playing at home. Golf, rugby and beer followed by your Sunday confessionals.' They all laughed again as Harold continued. 'Julie and I keep trying to get you over for lunch, but you're always busy.' He looked at Bruno questionably as though giving another unspoken invite.

Bruno gave him a confused look. 'I am always busy Harold, working all week and playing all weekend. I don't have the time to socialise like you lot, I'm not retired yet. You oldies just loaf around all day.'

What he didn't want to tell the rest of the guys was that golf and rugby were weekend distractions, not just a habit. He had no confidence in meeting others outside of his world, mainly because he had never had to do it. Mum looked after that side of things, it's just how it was, and the excuses he used flowed regularly, anything to avoid confronting his own social inadequacies.

The only interest that he contemplated carrying on into his own personal life was helping with the church group. For them he always had time to pop into a parishioner's home to help out with jobs or shopping if needed or arrange events around the church itself. The church had always been a big part of his and his mum's life and he had become part of the institution of St Marks, growing from the children's church group and choir to becoming a man and valued member. They had stood firmly beside him and his family through the death of his dad, and once more when his mum died, and in return he would never turn his back on them. The institution of church meant everything to him.

Four pints of chilled lager arrived at the table, along with the customary plate of sandwiches and crisps which formed the routine enjoyed by each of them every Saturday morning. Tee off at 08.30 and in the bar by midday, irrespective of weather.

Harold chinked the glasses together. 'Cheers everyone, good health and better luck next weekend Bruno.' Again, the others laughed before Bruno pointed out the wooden plaque on the wall behind the bar.

'I will just draw your attention to the fact that I won the club trophy in 1992 and 1993. I don't see your names up there boys.' He pointed out his name painted elegantly onto the magnificent board of club champions.

Harold shook his head before draining his glass in three huge gulps. 'If it hadn't been for my dodgy knee, my name would have been up there too, trust me, Bruno.' He smiled knowing that Bruno nearly always beat them all and Bruno knew it.

Another four pints arrived at the table as the banter carried on. Before much longer, Bruno drained his glass and stood up to leave. 'Okay you lot, see you next Saturday. Bring your A game as I will be back on form.' Shaking their hands, he picked up his golf bag from outside the club house before loading it into the boot of the car. Next stop, shower and Bexhill Rugby Club.

Almost before the weekend had commenced, it had ended, the golf and rugby ending in total annihilation, and only his visit to the church ending in some comfort with his Vicar, the Reverend Tilley, giving an uplifting sermon resulting in sizable donations towards the newly planned meeting room which would double as the Sunday school for the local children. The sum needed

was close to one hundred and fifty thousand pounds, much of it already saved in the church bank account.

Bruno's Monday tie blew across his shoulder in the stiff breeze as he walked the twenty-three paces into the council building and towards his office for another week's work. The receptionist's usual smile lit up the foyer area as he headed to the staircase, nodding back in Sue's direction.

'Morning Sue, did you have a lovely weekend?' He stood smiling for a second while she replied and exchanged Monday morning chat. 'Well, back to the grind Sue, have a good day.' Turning and running his hand up the wooden banister, he made his way up for the millionth time before sitting heavily in his chair looking at the week's work on his planner. Every day was taken up with inspections, and with each inspection came one of the new computer reports that he hadn't learnt how to do yet, despite Diana's patience and instruction the previous week.

Pushing the on button on the large grey box recently installed on his desk, Bruno watched as the screen lit up demanding his password. The newly written message on the top of the year planner told him what it was. User ID: FQO75c. Password: BexhillRugby777. Typing the didgets in he mused about the point of having a password that he could only remember by writing it down on his chart of everything. Diana had told him not to tell anyone the secret password, but Bruno didn't care. It was all work stuff; there was nothing personal on the machine anyway.

She knocked on the door as if on cue and entered to find him on the dreaded computer.

'Bruno, tell me that you haven't written it down on the planner?'

He pointed to the wall. 'Course I have, otherwise I forget stuff. My planner lets me remember everything.' He looked at her face. 'Bad weekend?'

She shrugged. 'Yep, Darren went crazy when I chatted to him. He thought that I was accusing him of seeing someone else and he hasn't spoken to me since Friday night. He was out drinking nearly all Saturday and Sunday and he's a bloody mess. How he got to work today I don't know.'

Bruno was lost for words for a second. 'You'll just have to sort it out between yourselves. But if you don't talk all weekend and spend it apart, that can't be good, can it?'

Shaking her head she moved into the office and took a seat opposite Bruno's small desk. 'It's terrible, everything I say or do is wrong.' She gave a big sigh before jumping up out of the chair. 'I shouldn't be bothering you with this stuff, sorry Bruno.' She left his office and returned to her own desk, sitting back behind her computer and starting to type out a document. She seemed distracted as she worked, often blowing her nose on a pink tissue stuffed in her sleeve before sending another document. Bruno felt sorry for her, but what could he do? They needed to sort their stuff out, but the more she spoke about Darren, the less Bruno liked him. His office phone rang and distracted him away from watching her and back into the world of farms.

Monday soon melted away into Thursday, Bruno spending the entire week working from his car, visiting seven different farms in the area. It was a delight to get back out onto the land, away from the office politics and domestic disputes bubbling around, but the spectre of seven reports needing to be typed up hung over him. He phoned into the office, speaking to Diana's manager and his long-term friend, Sharon, a lovely lady of a similar age to Bruno, who too had worked in the same department for over fifteen years.

'Hey Bruno, what do you want? You only phone me lately when you have a problem.'

He laughed out loud. 'I'm using one of my client's phones Sharon, I need some reports putting onto that blasted computer system. Diana tried to help me, but I didn't get it. Any chance of helping me out if I bring the paperwork in? It looks like a few boxes need ticking and my reports typing in.'

She huffed for a few seconds, obviously busy with her normal workload. 'Bring it in moron, I'll put it on the system on Friday afternoon if you're quick.'

Fridays always seemed like the best day in the world for Bruno as he pulled into his car parking space the following day, but this time someone tapped on his driver's window making him jump as he slammed the brake on.

'Bloody hell Diana, you scared the life out of me,' he exclaimed as he wound down the window.

She hurried round the car and climbed into the passenger seat to get out of the drizzle. 'I'm homeless Bruno. Darren was caught shagging a woman firefighter in the station; he's been suspended and has gone home. He gave our flat back to the landlord when I was at work yesterday and took the deposit before heading back up to Liverpool. I'm on the street Bruno; that bastard deserted me and left me homeless because he couldn't keep it in his pants. I slept in a hotel last night, but I'm broke now, and I can't even go back to Liverpool. My mum borrowed a lot of cash from some bad people, and she has gone into hiding somewhere. She can't pay them back; they will kill her if they find where she's staying.' She looked at him, hoping for some kind of answer, tears flowing down her rosy cheeks.

Bruno's heart took charge before his brain had a chance to argue with it. 'I have a spare room; you can move in for a short while. Don't tell anyone though as they will gossip and I don't want that to happen.'

Throwing her arms around his neck, she hugged him tightly. 'Thank you so much Bruno, I was terrified about what was going to happen to me. The council couldn't even give me a bed sit for the night; I was in big trouble. You've saved me.'

Extracting himself from the tangle of arms he brought some normality back into the situation. 'Listen, this is short term, maybe a couple of weeks. You need to sort something out longer term, understand me?'

She nodded, getting out of the car. 'Sure, can you give me your address so that I can find you? I don't want to be sharing a lift with you as well, that will get the locals talking.'

It was this decision on a wet Friday morning on February 10th, 1995, that would haunt him for the rest of his days, break his life and have him thrown into the most depraved wing in Lewes Prison. Bruno's trusting nature was about to smash him into tiny pieces.