

'Now and Then' – The Trials and Tribulations of a Smuggler in Sussex.

CHAPTER 1

Mary Smethurst was an ordinary young housewife who lived with her husband in a rented cottage in Bexhill Old Town. She was sitting alone, one evening, in front of the television but she was not really watching it. She was quite agitated and kept looking at her watch, and then at the clock on the wall above the fireplace. She stood up, paced up and down and looked out of the window but could see very little as it was quite dark outside. She sat down again and took another look at her watch. She picked up the phone and keyed in a number.

"Hello Janice" she said, "It's Mary, Mary Smethurst, I don't suppose Eddie's there, is he? ...Yes I know, I suppose they could have missed the boat but surely one of them would have phoned. Eddie hasn't phoned you, has he?"

Mary listened to what Janice had to say and then continued, "I really don't know; I expect they'll turn up. I hope nothing's gone wrong, I don't like what they're doing, he knows I don't like it, I keep telling him. I know, Okay, Speak to you soon."

She said good-bye, put the phone down and paced up and down again. She looked out of the window again. There was still no sign of anybody outside; she sat down but couldn't settle. A few minutes, later she heard the front door opening and she jumped up to greet her husband.

"Hello love," she called out, as he entered the room, "You're late!"

"Shut up," he replied, angrily.

Mary answered, timidly and rather carefully, "What's the matter, love?" She could see that he was in a foul mood; something had certainly gone wrong.

John was livid, "Don't ask," he snarled.

"Eh?" she questioned.

"Bloody Customs and blasted Excise," he whined.

"What?" Mary didn't understand.

"What nothing, Customs and bloody Excise; they've confiscated the bloody van, that's what.

Mary could not quite grasp what he was saying and asked, "What, the van? Your van?"

"Of course my van, whose van did you think I was talking about?"

Mary was getting quite upset and said, "Sorry, I wasn't thinking."

John retorted, angrily, "That's your bloody trouble, you never do think, do you, you stupid old cow?"

This remark upset Mary even more and she blurted out, between sobs, "There's no need to have a go at me, you know I didn't like what you were doing, I've warned you often enough. What are you going to do now?"

John was in a rage and shouted out, "Nothing. I'm going to bed.

"But what about the van?" Mary asked.

"What about it?" he snarled.

She cautiously enquired, "When will you get it back?"

"CONFISCATED, you stupid cow," he growled, " it's been CONFISBLOODYCATED, I won't be getting it back; or, at least, not before a court case and a bloody great fine; and even then I doubt it."

"But you haven't finished paying for it yet" Mary said, "Oh John, what are you going to do? And what about the cigarettes? You'll have to give up smoking."

"Good grief woman, you really don't understand, do you," he replied, "We got caught, they didn't believe us when I told them they were for our own use, they reckoned that we were regulars, doing it for a living; bloody Customs and Excise, they ought to be out catching criminals or illegal bloody immigrants."

Mary answered, " But that's their job, love, catching smugglers; just because your ancestors got away with it, doesn't mean that you would. And what about Eddie?"

"What about him?" John snarled.

Mary asked, gingerly, "Did he get caught, as well?"

John replied, again angrily, "No he bloody didn't, he told them he was a hitch hiker, cadging a lift

"And they believed him?" Mary asked.

"Yes, they did, the crafty sod;" John fumed, "his passport had his old address in it, he put on his scouse accent and said he was trying to get home to Liverpool."

Mary, perhaps unwisely, said, "That's not fair, what are you going to do about it; why should he get away with it?"

John was at the end of his tether, " Oh, for heaven's sake woman, leave me alone; I've had enough of your bloody nagging, nag, nag, nag."

Mary tried to be sympathetic and said to him, "Oh John, I'm not nagging, honest I'm not." She moved towards him but he pushed her away

"You are." He retorted, "I'm fed up with you, you're always on at me," he continued, mockingly, " get a proper job, .. give up smoking, don't do this, don't do that; your father warned you that I was not good enough for you, well perhaps he was right. I'm going to bed," he shouted, "you can sleep in the spare room."

Mary became quite distressed and flopped back onto the settee, weeping profusely. John stormed out of the room and went, noisily up the stairs to his bedroom.

John was soon asleep but it wasn't a real deep sleep, he was tossing and turning beneath the covers, exhausted and angry; this had probably been one of the worst days of his life. He drifted in and out of sleep and, sometime in the night, he became aware of a voice calling to him, "John, ... John, ... waken up. Come on John, we've got work to do."

The voice was not very loud and it took John quite a while to realise, first that it was calling to him and then what it was actually saying. When John finally realised what it was all about, he wakened up fully and leaped out of bed. He pulled on his trousers and tied a length of rope round his waist to hold them up. He sat on the side of the bed and pulled on a pair of boots. He was not aware that the trousers were old and baggy and made from a course material, as was the shirt he hurriedly put on. He stood up and grabbed his overcoat as he rushed out of the room, down the stairs and quickly out on to

the dark street. As he slammed the door behind him he saw Tom, one of his mates, urging him to get a move on, "Come on man," he said, "hurry up, we are late; what took you so long?"

John struggled into his overcoat as they hurried off into the night and then pulled a cap from his pocket, "Sorry, mate, I must have been fast asleep, where are the others?"

Tom replied in a loud whisper and with some urgency, "Keep your voice down. They're down on the beach, where we should be, now, come on."

They headed for the beach, not quite running but sort of jogging, and soon joined three other men, crouching, out of sight, behind a groin. John and Tom began to speak but one of the other men, Bill, told them to be quite and get down quickly. Tom whispered, "What's going on?"

Bill answered, "There's someone coming, look," he said pointing, "over there, over there."

Tom asked, "Revenue men, do you think?"

"Probably," Bill said, but they would normally have a lantern, but not this lot; I think they could be on to us."

Tom was worried, "What do we do, scarper for a while?"

Bill didn't agree, "Nah," he said, "just keep absolutely quiet. They won't see us here behind this groin. I just hope that the boat doesn't turn up 'till they've gone."

John was beginning to get quite confused; he was aware that he was not wearing his usual clothes, he held his trousers up with a piece of rope and didn't think it strange, he had never seen these men before but he knew their names, what were they doing on the beach in the middle of the night, what were Revenue men and why were they waiting for a boat?

As the people got nearer it seemed unlikely that they were going to cause a problem; one of the men, Robert, said, "They're not revenue men, one's dressed as a woman, .. and they're both carrying bags."

John realised that one of the people he was with was also a woman, when she said, "Sh, keep down."

The one called Bill whispered, "All right, Lizzie, it's okay; now, what are they up to?"

As the mystery couple got much nearer, the men saw that the one dressed as a woman was, indeed, a young woman and she was dragging her heavy bag along the shingle behind her. When they got to the groin adjacent to where the gang were hiding, the woman let go of her bag and sat, unceremoniously, on the timber structure and said, plaintively, "Oh Derek, how much further, I'm exhausted, I can't go on much longer?" Derek replied, sympathetically "Not far my dearest Martha; to the east of the Signalling Station at Galley Hill a couple of Furlongs before the wreck of the Amsterdam. Not too far now, but we must get on; I'll carry your bag."

Martha refused his suggestion, "No Derek, I cannot let you do that, I don't want to be a burden to you."

Derek replied, "Oh, Martha, dearest, sweetest Martha, please don't say that, you will never be a burden to me. We'll be well on our way to France by daybreak and there we will live, happily ever after."

Martha cheered up a little and said, coyly, "Oh Derek, this is like a fairy story, whisked away in the dead of night by a handsome prince. *'And they all lived happily ever after'*

Derek answered firmly but with humour, "If we don't get whisking away soon, my love, we'll not get away at all, and then, if the soldiers don't get us, George and the dragon will."

Martha replied, "My mother's not a dragon, ... well, .. not really."

Derek encouraged, "Come along my sweet, we must get on, not much further now."

Derek helped Martha to her feet and picked up both bags; she tried, without much enthusiasm, to stop him taking her bag. As they started walking, they saw a light twinkle out to sea.

Derek pointed to the light and said, "There's the boat, we must hurry. They are earlier than I expected, come on my love, we've got no time to lose."

As the young couple moved away, along the beach, the gang relaxed a little and Bill was the first to speak, again in a whisper, he remarked, "Phew, that was close; and this isn't their boat, I think it's ours but they will be too far along the beach to cause us any problems. Right, Lizzie," he continued, "light the lamp but keep it covered, you others, crowd around to hide the light."

The others surrounded Lizzie as she lit the lamp and kept close as she prepared to send a signal to the boat. Bill called out, "Okay, three clear flashes, Lizzie." She uncovered and covered the lamp three times. Three flashes could be seen out at sea. "Good. Now, leave it pointing out to sea, but for heaven's sake keep the back and sides covered, we don't want to be seen from anywhere except out at sea. We don't want Derek and his wench turning round and coming back."

John sat quietly on the beach, he couldn't get his head around his predicament, he didn't feel out of place but he knew that something odd was happening to him. He watched as the big sailing ship got ever nearer to the beach and as the sails were taken down. He saw a couple of big rowing boats lowered from the main boat and loaded with boxes and small barrels. He saw the sailors rowing the heavily laden boats towards them and, as they got close, went with the others, to the point where the water began lapping round their boots. When the boats were almost in place, there was a lot of activity, men began rushing about in the shallow water, unloading and stacking the cargo on the shingle, a little way from the water's edge.

Bill greeted one of the sailors with the 'two-sided kiss' that the French are so fond of,

"Ca va, mon ami, bon soir," the Frenchman said, "nous sommes ici. Je m'appelle Pierre.

Bill felt ill at ease and replied, hesitatingly, "Bon jouer, mon aymee, je suis Bill, you will 'av to parlay lee onglay, silver plate, please".

Pierre smiled and said, "C'est bon," and continued in English, with a strong French accent, "Good morning, gentlemen, oh, pardon me, Good morning, LADY and gentlemen.

Lizzie was flattered and slightly embarrassed, "Thank you, kind sir, welcome to England, welcome to Bexhill."

Bill was conscious of the time and tried to hurry the business along, "No time for that," he said, "let's get your unloading finished, it is far too dangerous, out here in the open."

Pierre replied, "You forget, ... le munay?"

Bill was ready, "Non Monsewer, "I 'ave eet ere." He said in a pseudo French accent, as he took out a bundle of notes and handed it to Pierre who said, as he moved over to the lantern to count it, "Votre Francais, Monsieur Bill, est formidable, tres formidable."

Antoine and the others continued unloading and, when the first boat was finished, it headed back out to sea and to the main boat; work continued on the second vessel.

Pierre seemed to take charge, "Extinguish the light, Lizzie; we don't need it anymore," he said, "we'll do this in the dark."

Lizzie giggled and whispered, "Ooh, yes please!"

Bill heard her and shouted, "unloading, Lizzie; unloading."

Lizzie giggled again and replied, cheekily, "Spoilsport."

Bill began to organise the beach side of the unloading,; speed was of the essence. He barked out his orders, "Right," he said, "we load it all on to the carts, as quickly as we can and get them off the beach and into hiding, except twenty cases of that Brandy, they're for our locals, the rest is off to London."

When the cases and the remaining barrels were unloaded, the second boat was swung round and pointed back out to sea. Antoine was already aboard and Pierre joined him; the Englishmen gave them a good push off to get them on their way. Pierre stood in the stern and called out, "Au revoir, mes amis Anglais, au revoir et bon chance."

Lizzie stood dreamily gazing at the boat, "Ah, Pierre." She sighed.

Pierre looked at her, smiled and said, "Au revoir, Lizzie, mon petit choe," and then blew her a kiss.

Lizzie was mesmerized, she sighed again and said, "Mon petit choe, Oh, Pierre, ... mon petit choe."

Bill was not amused, "Mon pettit shoe, be buggered," he grunted, "more like an old boot I'd say. Now let's get this stuff shifted; the Revenue men could be here at any minute."

John had got on with his work quite happily' doing what was required of him and he thought, several times, that he must be dreaming. He had dismissed this idea, however, when he crushed his finger between two barrels and thought that he wouldn't have felt the pain had he been dreaming.

It took very little time to get all the contraband away; the gang were very experienced and knew exactly what to do. The carts were dispatched on their long journey to London, where contacts were awaiting their arrival. There were several secret stopping places along the route and scouts and spotters were in place to keep the precious cargo safe and undetected. This was a well practiced operation and, as always, was completed satisfactorily. The twenty cases of Brandy were quickly stowed in a secure hiding place just off the beach and the gang dispersed and disappeared into the night.

The usual arrangement for dealing with the 'local' material was quite simple; it would remain in the hiding place for as long as necessary and be moved, surreptitiously, a few cases at a time, throughout the night, to a carefully contrived hiding place in Bill's big and imposing house.

The Revenue men tended to keep to a regular routine each night and their movements were carefully watched while the precious contraband was being moved. The normal plan was to carry the cases, perhaps two at a time, from the sea-front to the house; there were safe houses along the way for emergencies but they were seldom needed.

The gang worked either individually, or in pairs and, with great diligence, they got the first crates to the house; Bill was there as were John and Tom, followed by two others. Bill put his crates beside a stone wall quite near to the front door and walked, nonchalantly along the path. He moved quite slowly, looking for any movement or signs of activity, particularly any suspicions of Revenue men. He opened the front door, turned round to take another thorough look and, when he was sure that the coast was clear, he signalled the first smuggler to cross quickly to the house. Tom went first, deposited his crates and returned to collect the cases that Bill had secreted beside the wall. John crossed, again quickly, but carefully, with Tom close behind him.

The last two were soon in place waiting for the signal to cross over to the house and, as the signal was given, they responded. Tom left at this time; he was going home but, on the way, he would stand-down the scouts and other helpers. He checked that the remaining crates were safely hidden and would be until the following day when they too would be transferred to Bill's house.

Meanwhile, back at Bill's house, there was a lot of activity; the small kitchen was a bit crowded because there were so many people there. Bill took charge, "Right, so far, so good," he said, "now let's get this stuff stashed away, down in the cellar, it will soon be light, you all need to be away from here and tucked up in your beds before people start moving about."

They opened up the camouflaged trapdoor and began lowering the contraband into the cellar.

"Sh!" said Dick, "what's that?" Harry replied and said that it sounded like a dog barking.

Bill was cautious, "Quick, blow out the lights," he whispered, "bolt the door and keep absolutely quiet, all of you."

Harry wanted to know why.

Bill continued, still in a whisper, "Something has disturbed that dog, could be the Revenue men."

Sure enough, a few minutes later, lantern lights were flickering on the walls. The windows were covered but the lights were able to get through the gaps in the badly fitted shutters. The house was as silent as the grave and nothing was moving; the men were getting tense, they were all tired and could so easily have done something foolish; one tiny sound, even a stifled sneeze, could so easily have raised the suspicions of the men outside; there was little doubt that they were Revenue men, probably two of them.

The two men stopped outside the house; Bill decided to go upstairs to see what they were doing. He was extremely careful as he went to a window and looked out. There was no doubt whatsoever that they were Revenue Men and one of them was sitting on the wall where he had left his cases while he checked that the coast was clear. Bill realised that they had had a lucky escape, it would have been somewhat difficult if the Revenue men had been there a bit earlier. Bill saw that the second man was standing quite close to the house and, as he watched, the first man walked over towards him, saying, "It all seems very quiet."

His colleague replied, "Too quiet, if you ask me."

"Yes, are we missing something?"

After a brief pause, the second man answered, "I don't know, I can't imagine that the smugglers have stopped their illegal activities, but we haven't caught any lately. Perhaps they've got a bit cleverer; we've got our signaling station at Galley Hill, maybe they've got something like it too, something we don't know about."

The first man said, "I doubt that, but wouldn't our life be a lot easier if we had a way of talking to people a long way off. Waving flags in daylight and signaling with a lantern at night is okay but, can you imagine, having a little box thing that you hold to your ear and a voice says, 'hello Bert, smugglers at Deadman's Cove, heading your way', or that sort of thing?"

His colleague replied, "That's a bit farfetched, isn't it, the next thing you will be telling me is 'Smugglers are using giant flying machines to cross from France'. How stupid can you get? Anyway, where's Deadman's Cove?"

The first man was a bit exasperated and answered, "Oh, never mind. Come on, let's go and have another look down the High Street, there's nothing going on round here."

Once they had gone, Bill went back downstairs and told the others what he had seen and heard. They talked for a moment and then Bill suggested that they get all the remaining contraband into the cellar. It didn't take very long and it was soon time to go. Bill spoke to Lizzie, "Right Lizzie, that's all done, go and see if the coast is clear. Okay, you lot, back tomorrow at midnight, we need to get the brandy away to our customers."

Lizzie slipped quietly out of the door to check that there is no one about; she returned almost immediately and announced, "All clear, Bill."

Bill said, "Okay you lot, away you go, now be careful, we've had a good night, don't let anyone see you and spoil it. Now take care, and be back here tomorrow."

John walked part of the way with Tom and, when they parted company it was agreed that they would see each other the next evening. John walked alone for the last bit of the journey and made his way home; he went up to his bedroom, took off his cap, overcoat, boots and then his trousers and got back into his bed. He was soon fast asleep again.

CHAPTER 2

John was still asleep when the door bell rang; he ignored it and buried his head in his pillow. A few minutes later Mary came into the bedroom, she wasn't sure whether he was really asleep, she thought he was probably pretending. She was rather apprehensive, her husband had been in a foul mood the previous evening and she was not looking forward to another bout of his bad temper. She called out, "John, John, are you awake?"

John didn't respond so she tried again; this time he did answer and growled, "What."

Mary replied, very cautiously, "That was a policeman."

John pulled the sheet up over his head and replied, "What was a policeman?"

Mary replied, "At the door, didn't you hear the bell?"

John snapped, "No, I bloody didn't, now leave me alone."

Mary was getting exasperated and said, rather bravely, "I wish you wouldn't swear so much, I don't like it, it's not nice. Anyway, I've got to go to work now, I'll be late if I don't and you have to go to the police station."

John seemed to take notice and asked, "What the bloody hell for?"

Mary replied, crossly, "There you go again, you can't speak without swearing, can you? Something about your MOT, I don't know; but he said he wants you there by ten o'clock; ask for PC Plankton, I think that's what he said his name was."

John was not impressed, "He can get lost," he said, "I'm not going."

Mary was getting cross, she answered curtly, "You'd better go, apparently it's serious, something about a forgery; what did he mean?"

John was quite indignant and said, cockily, "How should I know?"

Mary seemed to have taken the upper hand for a change and continued, "Where did you get the MOT from, not that slimeball Alistair Ponsonby whatsit, with a hyphen?"

John became a bit evasive and stated categorically, "There's nothing wrong with my MOT."

Mary was not particularly concerned, "Well you won't mind going to the police station then, will you? Just see that you do, you're in enough trouble as it is."

John was indifferent, "Nag, nag, bloody nag." He muttered

Mary was now in full swing, "Nag, nag, as much as you like; you can say what you like, but someone needs to sort you out and if it isn't you, it will have to be me; now, pull yourself together, I'm going to work, make sure you sort it out, and while you're there, you'd better start looking for a job."

John was showing signs of getting angry again, "but I've got a job already!" he shouted.

Mary ridiculed him, she said, mockingly, "what, professional smuggler, FAILED professional smuggler, don't make me laugh." With that she stormed out of the room, down the stairs, out of the house, slamming the door behind her.

John was now fully awake and, as he was getting out of his bed, he had strange memories of carrying cases of brandy on the beach and hiding in a dark old house. He thought that he must have been dreaming but he was not convinced; though he quite often had a dream, he seldom remembered them when he was fully awake. He put on his

jeans, sniffed the armpits of his jumper then put it on; he looked under the bed for his trainers and put them on. He picked up his mobile and keyed in a number as he walked in to the kitchen.

John had a 'phone conversation, "Eddie, .. John, .. Hello mate. No it's worse, the bastards have checked my MOT, ... they know it was fiddled, ... I don't know, but I've got to go down the nick; I'll see you at the café in What d'you mean? Thank you very much, it's at times like this when you find out who your real friends are."

John was livid; Eddie had told him that he was going to lie low for a while, "I can do without the fuzz snooping at the moment" There was nothing that John could do about it and, as he thought it might be a bit chilly outdoors, he put on his coat and walked into town. As he was passing a bookshop, he noticed a book being promoted in the window, it was a photographic history of Bexhill and some of the supporting photographs were old pictures of smugglers. There was also an old lantern, looking a bit like the one he had seen the previous night there was a card with it, saying that it was 'George Gillham's Lanthorn'. He felt odd again and asked himself what he had really been doing in the night.

John thought that the book might be interesting and, though he never did any reading, he wondered whether he should buy a copy. He decided to go to the police station first as it was nearly ten minutes to ten and Mary had said that he should be there before ten o'clock.

He went into the building and up to the enquiry counter; there was nobody there so he pressed the bell-push. The bell sounded but the button seemed to get stuck and the bell continued ringing after he had taken his hand away. John was annoyed by this and fiddled with the button, it became unstuck just as a burly policeman came into the room. "That is not necessary, Sir," he said, "we have other things to do, we are not here purely to attend to people like you. Now what do you want, what can I do for you?"

John blurted out, "the button got stuck, it wasn't my fault."

"Of course not, Sir," the policeman replied, sarcastically, "now what was it you were wanting, Sir?"

"I need to see PC Plankton," he announced, "he wants to see me before ten o'clock."

"Oh we are a clever one, aren't we Sir," the policeman continued, "I suppose you mean PC Pilkington. We've not got off to a particularly good start this morning, have we Sir?"

"But that's what he said his name was!" John whined.

"I don't think so, Sir. Did he say it to you directly, Sir?"

"Well not exactly," John replied, "he left a message with my wife."

The policeman replied, condescendingly, "I see Sir; and the name?"

"Mary," John answered, without thinking.

"Oh, very nice Sir," the officer continued, "I'm sure that she loves you dearly and that she knows what your name is; I do not, perhaps you would be kind enough to tell me, particularly your surname; Plankton indeed."

"Smethurst, John Smethurst; and I'm sorry, Sir." John answered.

"Don't apologise for your name, mister Smethurst, I'm sure that somebody in your family is proud of it. You're not the bloke, sorry, the man with the van-load of booze and

fags are you? Dover have been on to us this morning; proper little mess we are in, aren't we, Sir."

John was not enjoying this conversation one little bit but he had to be careful not to lose his temper. "Could I please see Constable Pilkington, please?"

"He's off duty at ten, Sir, you seem to have left it a bit late." The constable said.

"But I've been here ages," John complained.

"Of course you have sir, but it is still just about ten o'clock," he said, pointing to the clock, "we can tell the time, can't we, sir?"

John was getting extremely wound up, he wanted to tell the arrogant copper what he thought of him. He had never had much time for the police and would have gladly told the obnoxious officer a few home truths; John doubted his parentage, among other things but had to hold his tongue. The officer went back into the office and a minute or two later, Constable Pilkington appeared,

"Mister Smethurst?" he enquired,

John acknowledged him.

"You've left this rather late, Sir;" he continued, "I told your wife I was off duty at ten."

John decided to answer, "I have been here for about ten minutes, I didn't realise that it would take so long to get to you. I'm very sorry."

"Don't worry mister Smethurst," the constable replied, "it's my colleague, he loves winding people up; I sometimes think he goes too far. He's been in the force for years, too long really, he will be retiring soon; he never did get promotion, he says he's an old style copper, likes to think he's a bit of a Dixon of Dock Green. Now, this MOT of yours?"

The Constable listened to what John had to say and took notes. John told him that his friend Eddie had borrowed the van and was using it when the MOT ran out. He said that Eddie had had it tested and had paid for it as a way of thanking him for lending the van to him. It seemed to be quite a plausible story and, the more he said, the more confident he was with it; he didn't feel guilty about involving Eddie, after all he had deserted him 'in his hour of need'. Before long, the policeman said that he had finished the questioning and that he would have to check the information before deciding what, if anything to do. He asked for Eddie's full name and address.

John had to be very careful, he didn't want this to get out of hand and thought he gave a good answer. He said that Eddie was a bloke he had worked with on a building site, "He came from up North," he said, "Liverpool I think. I haven't seen him for a while but I believe his name was Gillam," the first name that came into his head, "he was in a bed-sit, or a flat in Dorset Road, the top part, the other side of the bye-pass. He had a girlfriend called Susan, I think he was living with her, it might have been her flat; but I think he had his own bed-sit at one time."

PC Pilkington thanked John for his help and saw him off the premises. John couldn't get away quickly enough and, on his way home, he went into the bookshop to buy a copy of *'Bexhill on Sea, a History'*, by Julian Porter.

He took the book home and began to look at it; he studied the index and then turned to page 29 to *Chapter four, Coal Mining, Soldiers and Smugglers*. He was

engrossed in the book but his night-time activities began to catch up with him and, after several minutes, he was asleep, slumped on his kitchen table. The next thing he was aware of was that it was dark and he knew that it was time he was out. He thought nothing of the fact that he was in his old smugglers clothes as he made his way to Bill's house.

As he neared the house he became very cautious and took his time, trying to ensure that nobody saw him. He did see someone coming towards him and slipped quietly into a doorway. As the person passed, John realized that it was Tom and, though he said nothing at the time, he thought that he should mention his careless behavior. John completed his journey and took all the precautions necessary to get into the house without being seen.

Once inside, he told Bill that he had seen Tom walking without any apparent care; Bill was not perturbed and said, "I know we must all take extreme care, when we are dealing with contraband, but Tom wasn't carrying anything; he was out there perfectly legitimately and quite entitled to be there. You are right to be cautious, and concerned, but it was okay, Tom was about his normal business; he was, as it happens, going to the hiding place to collect more stuff but that's beside the point. Of course, it will be a different matter when he gets near to the hiding place and, even more so when he is on his way back."

John then was given his delivery instructions and the bottles he had to take and, having checked that the coast was clear, he hurried away, carefully into the night. He was gone for some time and, when he returned, he saw that there were two men standing in front of the house. He was startled and suspected that they were Revenue Men though he still didn't really know what Revenue Men were; he assumed that they were something to do with his old enemies, the Customs and Excise or the Inland Revenue. John retreated into the shadows, out of sight and without making a sound.

It was very, very quiet and, listening carefully, John could hear what the two men were saying. He heard the first man say, "there IS something going on, Albert, I'm quite sure there is."

Albert replied, "you could well be right, but what, there was no sign of anything on the beach and everything seems quiet up here but, and I do I agree with you Will, there is something a bit wrong."

Will responded, "We've always suspected old Bill Westcourt of being no good, why don't we knock him up and see what he has to say for himself."

Albert did not agree, "I'm not too sure about that;" he said, "remember, he's the magistrate, he's William Westcourt, and last time we questioned him, there was all hell to pay."

Will was not too sure and asked, "so, what do we do, there's no point standing around here being seen by everyone if we aren't going to do anything; what do you think?"

Albert thought for a moment and then replied, "I think we should wait, keep an eye on the place. But you are right, perhaps we should keep out of sight, anyone coming here would see us and that would defeat the object."

John remained in hiding for quite some time and, after a little while, another of the gang returned. John signaled to Mike to join him and then explained that the two

Revenue Men were hiding behind the wall on the other side of the road. Mike said that Tom was the only other member of the gang still out, "Lizzie and the others didn't go" he said, "so that only leaves Tom. John," he continued, "you might as well get off home, I'll wait for Tom and then go round the other way to warn Bill that they are outside. They are both still over there, aren't they John?"

John told him that he was pretty sure that neither had moved; he said Mike should go and that he would stay. He then wondered, "Why didn't Lizzie go?" he asked.

Mike replied, "apparently her mother took a turn, it looks as if she's on her last legs."

John was surprised and said, "I don't know about that, I saw her with old Alf Bailey at about seven o'clock, she was alright then".

Mike questioned, "Who, Liz, or her mother?"

John responded, "no not Lizzie, I reckon SHE'S with that bloke from Ninfield, what's his name?"

Mike answered, "you mean the wheelwright, Dave, Dave What'sit, Dave, Dave somebody, oh, what's his name."

John agreed, "yes, that's the one, that's him."

Mike was rather surprised and said, "no! You're kidding Does he know about the Frenchman?"

John chuckled, "I doubt it, but he would be none too pleased if someone told him."

Mike was amused, "you wouldn't, would you?" he asked.

John was still confused, he was out in the middle of the night, wearing grubby old clothes with a rope holding his trousers up and talking to people he didn't know as if he had known them for ages about other people he had never heard of but knew all about. He answered, "no, not me, good luck to 'em, I say. Anyhow, I think it's time you were on your way."

Mike did get away and John stayed, looking for signs of movement from behind the wall. Nothing seemed to be happening and then Tom turned up; John explained the situation and, when they had checked that the coast was clear, Tom went off and John, who was beginning to feel tired, decided that it was time get on and move round to the other side of the house so that he could warn Bill about the Revenue men. He was just about to move when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

Meanwhile, back in his kitchen, John was sitting. slumped over the table, again fast asleep, the open book lying beside him. Mary came into the room and put her hand on his shoulder to waken him. He wakened with a start, the first thought that came into his head was Revenue men; he was petrified but then he saw Mary. He shouted at her, "You silly cow, why did you do that?"

Mary was taken aback, "Do what?" she said.

John was confused again, he wondered where he was for a moment and then came to his senses and said, "sorry love, I must have been dreaming.

Mary picked up the book and said, "what's this."

John was back on form and sneered, "what does it look like?"

Mary answered, "It looks like a book, perhaps I should re-phrase the question so that you might understand, what are you doing with a book, you never read anything

except the racing pages and girly magazines, but they are nearly all pictures. 'Bexhill on Sea, a History', what brought this on, reading AND history, I said get a job, not go back to school. Is that all you've done today? Did you go to the police station?

John WAS feeling under pressure again, "There you go, nag, nag, nag. I'm sick of you, do you hear; sick, sick, sick.

Mary became emotional and said, "John, love, please don't be so awful, and before you start, I love you, I've loved you since I was sixteen, I deserve better than this."

John got up from the table and started walking towards the door, Mary took hold of his arm and tried to get him to sit down again. "Come and sit down, love," she urged, "we've got to talk about this, we need to sort it out."

John did stop and went back to the table and, also emotionally, said, "It's not your fault, love; it's me, I've messed it all up."

Mary flung her arms around him and said, "don't say that, you haven't."

John was adamant, "Yes I have, you don't know the half of it," he insisted.

Mary felt quite strong, seeing John like that gave her the courage to take charge, "We'll have to pay the fine, they won't send you to prison, we'll pay the fine and then get on with our lives. Our holiday can wait, we'll use the holiday money to sort this mess out. I promise you, it will be all right".

John said, quite meekly, "It won't."

Mary couldn't agree, "Why not?" she asked.

John was still very upset and blurted out, "How do you think I paid for the bloody cigarettes?"

Mary was horrified and asked, incredulously, "Not our holiday money, John, don't tell me you used the holiday money. Oh John, how could you?"

John became defensive and answered, "I did it for you, love, for us. A few hundred quid, that's all I needed, we could have had a real holiday on the profit, not a bloody coach trip to Paris.

Mary burst into tears, she sobbed uncontrollably, "But that's all I wanted, a few days in Paris, with you. I was so looking forward to it, you know I was, how could you?"

Mary was distraught and stormed out of the room, she was certainly at the end of her tether.

John felt pretty awful, he picked up his book and went to bed. He couldn't concentrate on the book so he put it down, turned out his bedside light and went to sleep. He slept soundly and, when he woke up, quite early next morning and saw that Mary was not there beside him, he assumed that she had slept in the spare room again. As he went downstairs, he could see that Mary was not there and was quite surprised that she was not in the kitchen either. He then saw a written note on the table; he picked it up and read, '*John, I do love you, but I need to get things sorted out. I have gone to Mother's for the time being, call me when you have got a real job. Love, Mary.*'

John was furious, but he was also terribly upset, "Oh, you stupid cow," he said, mockingly, "*When you have got a real job. Love Mary.* I bet Martha and Derek didn't end up like this, I wonder what did happen to them?"

CHAPTER 3

John was angry, he boiled the kettle and made a mug of tea; there was no milk in the fridge so he had to have his tea without. He threw the teabag into the bin but he missed and it landed on the floor. He then took his first sip; the tea was too hot, too strong and it tasted awful. It was undrinkable so he tipped it in the sink, picked up his 'phone and went out.

John walked into town, he had an unusual urge to go to the library, he hadn't been there since he was about twelve when he went with a friend from school. He didn't know what to expect and he didn't really know what he would be able to do; he had a feeling that he would like to know more about smuggling and the men that were involved in the past and he would like to know what happened to Martha and Derek. He went into the library and saw a girl at the desk, he went up to her and said, quite loudly, "Where do I find history, love?"

The assistant put her hand to her mouth and said, "Sh! History is upstairs, Sir."

He went upstairs, went to the desk and repeated his question, "Where do I find History, love?"

John then realised that the assistant with shoulder-length hair was, in fact, a man. He was a bit embarrassed and apologised.

"Is it local history, Sir?" the assistant enquired.

John, again loudly, replied, "Yes, smuggling, smugglers and that sort of thing.

The assistant was very polite and said, "Would you keep your voice down, Sir, please?"

John responded, more quietly, "Sorry. Smuggling and local families, that sort of thing."

The assistant asked him if he had any particular families in mind and suggested that, if so, he might have better luck at the Museum.

John said that he didn't really know, "There was a girl," he said, "a daughter, I presume, called Martha; ran off to France with a bloke called Derek."

The assistant became quite helpful and asked, "Do you know when this happened?"

John's reply didn't help, "No, not really, it was during the smuggling era, whenever that was, when they used small boats to bring in brandy and stuff.

The assistant pointed out that that wasn't much to go on and asked, "Is there anything else?"

John thought for a moment and said, "The local magistrate was Bill, I suppose William, Westcourt.

The assistant replied, "That could help, we should be able to find him."

They went over to a section of shelves and the assistant took down a book and thumbed through it; he put it back and took down another. After thumbing through the pages for a moment, he stopped, smiled and said, "Good, here we are: William Westcourt,

magistrate 1784 to 1803. That's your man. Now, that period, ... my colleague David Pownell knows a lot about it, he is researching for a book on this area at that time; there's quite a lot of interest in smuggling at the moment. I'll see if he is free, I'm sure he would like to help you. Can you tell me what your interest is?

John did not know what to say, "Well, he said, ... I don't really know, I just feel, I know it sounds stupid but I do feel that I have met the girl, she was so young and innocent, so much in love with her Derek, handsome bugger, he was, I would like to know what happened to them.

The assistant was rather bemused, this sort of interest usually came from elderly people, not young, but said, "Right, I'll go and see if David can spare a few minutes."

John started looking through the several books on Smuggling while he waited and, after a while, the assistant returned with an elderly, grey haired man. John put the book back on the shelf as the men approached and then shook hands as the older man who said, "Good morning. David Pownell."

John said, "Good morning, Mr. Pownell, I'm John Smethurst." David Pownell continued, "Mister Smethurst, nice to meet you."

John replied, "Me too, John, please."

David continued, "Oh, very well; John, the end of the eighteenth century, fascinating times, smuggling was getting to be a tremendous problem, they even brought in the King's German Legion, in eighteen o four to try to put an end to it. They were stationed in the Old Town; of course it wasn't the Old Town then."

John felt quite comfortable and suggested, "Barrack Road?"

David replied, "Yes, the barracks are long gone, of course, but Barrack Hall is still there, used to be the officers' mess. The smugglers were, mainly, the poor folk, they needed to find money to feed their families. The only alternatives were farming and fishing, unless one had a trade. Smuggling wasn't the glamorous occupation we think of these days, it was extremely dangerous, quite exciting at times; and, as long as they didn't get caught, quite rewarding, particularly to the main players, the gang masters who organised the peasants. Now, you were asking about William Westcourt?"

John replied, confidently, "Yes, known as Bill to his gang."

David continued, "Quite so, absolutely. Interesting chap, we are told, pillar of the community but he used his position to protect his men, in fact one of them was a woman, a good looking girl by all accounts.

John interjected, "That must be Lizzie, Lizzie Buckland."

David seemed interested, "That's most interesting. I have records of a Lizzie Carter, wife of a wheelwright in Ninfield, I suppose she could have been a Buckland before she married him. Where does your information come from, have you any documents to substantiate your information?"

John was a bit flustered, he knew that explanations could be difficult but he answered as best he could, "I don't know," he said, "not for certain, that is; I remember my grandmother telling me stories, she probably made them up, you know what grandmas are like, and, just lately, I've started remembering little things.

"And this Martha?" David asked.

John had to be very careful, "Yes," he said, "she's the one I'm really interested in. And Derek, of course."

David seemed to be satisfied with the answer and explained, "The only Martha we have any record of, is Martha Kent, daughter of a wealthy landowner, George Kent, in Catsfield at the time she disappeared in seventeen ninety nine, never to be seen again. You mentioned Derek, Derek who?"

John couldn't answer, "I don't know," he said, "all I know, or remember my grandmother telling me, was that she went to France with a man called Derek."

David became quite excited, "This is fascinating," he said. "I've been researching this for such a long time and there are so many loose ends. The only Derek I have found was a smuggler who got caught in 1798, apparently he escaped from the jail in Battle and, like your Martha, was never seen again. Rumour had it that he perished at sea, trying to get to France; perhaps they both perished. But that's all I know, sorry I can't be of more help."

John replied, thoughtfully, "No, that's fine, you've been very helpful indeed, thank you very much. If I remember anything else, I'll come and tell you. Just one last thing;

David was intrigued, "Of course," he enquired.

John asked, "Do we know anything about the Kent family?"

"Not a great deal," David answered, "big farm, very prosperous; there was another daughter, not just the one, but no son, I think that the farm is still in the same family but the name died with the old man.

John was very pleased with his morning's research, thanked David for his help, said goodbye and left the Library. As he got onto the street, he remembered his troubles and decided to go to the pub to drown his sorrows. John walked into the bar and saw a group of mates sitting in the corner, he didn't say anything and, as he approached, Philip said, "Whey, John; what's up with you?"

John gave a grunt, "Eh!"

Mark was not impressed, "You look like you could do with a drink." He called to the Landlord, "Dave, give him a pint, poor old sod looks knackered."

John wasn't paying much attention, "What?" he said.

Mark said, "I've got you a pint, now cheer up you old bastard; what's wrong?"

John said nothing, he grunted, took the pint and drank it in one draught.

Colin watched him in silence and then said, "I suppose I'd better buy you another one of those. I've been waiting for you John, I need a fag, I've not had one since yesterday, I ran out last night," he said, "have you got two hundred Rothmans?"

John wasn't listening, he was miles away and grunted, "what?"

Colin bought him another pint, sat it in front of him and tried again, "Two hundred Rothmans, you deaf old git," he shouted, "Here's your pint, now can I have my fags."

John was short and sharp, "No", he said

Colin was not happy, "No? What do you mean, no?"

John, reluctantly replied, "I haven't got two hundred Rothmans, I haven't got two hundred anythings."

"Eh, why not?" Colin said, disbelievingly, "I thought you were going to France yesterday? That's why I didn't buy any, they're too damned expensive in the shops."

John was getting angry again, "I was going to France, I did go to France, and the bloody customs got me on the way back, confiscated the effing van, the fags, the booze the lot. I ain't got nothing, sod all, so you will have to do without your bloody fags."

Mark was listening, in fact everyone could hear what was going on, he said, "what?"

John was getting annoyed, he tried again to explain, "They confiscated the bleeding lot, .. and they've charged me, and I'm in trouble for a dodgy MOT."

Mark couldn't believe what he was hearing and repeated, "what?"

John exploded and shouted, "For f***** sake, stop saying 'what'. Are you deaf, or just plain stupid. There ARE no fags, there IS no booze, I have got NO transport, I have lost all my money and bloody Mary has gone home to her bleeding mother. Who's going to take care of me, cook my food and look after me, I need someone to sort me out."

Vanessa, the barmaid had listened to this conversation, she often flirted with John, and some of the others, but she was particularly keen on John. and, hearing that Mary had 'gone home to her mother's', she thought she might stand a chance of a 'date' with him. She adjusted her ample cleavage and wiggled her hips while fiddling with her skimpy short skirt; she liked to make the most of her figure. She said, to the landlord, "I'll collect some glasses, Dave," as she lifted the flap and came through from behind bar carrying a tray.

Vanessa collected a few empty glasses as she moved among the tables and then, when she got to where John was sitting, she put the tray down on the table and whispered in his ear, "I finish at three, for a couple of hours, John, I'll come round and sort you out."

John wasn't really listening and said, "What?"

Vanessa repeated her offer, "I'll come round and cook you some dinner, John, just because your wife's gone off, we can't let you starve, can we?"

John replied, quite firmly, "I don't think so."

Vanessa didn't quite understand his reply, "Don't think what?" she asked.

John said, "I don't think you should come round."

Vanessa was indignant, "Why not?" she asked.

John answered with a single word, "Mary."

Vanessa was angry and said, "That never stopped you before,"

John replied, "But that was different."

Vanessa took umbrage and huffed, "Suit yourself, there's plenty more sad bastards in this world to choose from.

Mark laughed, "That told you, John, 'sad bastard', she said, what do you reckon?"

John was too annoyed to care, "Ah, shut up" he said, "leave me alone."

Colin was not very bright and he did not fully understand what was being said. He tried again, "What about my cigarettes?" he whined, "I need a smoke."

Mark didn't try to explain, he just said, slowly and deliberately, "He hasn't got any cigarettes."

Colin still did not understand and said, "But he promised!"

Mark was exasperated, "Oh for God's sake, Colin," he said, "give it a rest." He then turned to John and asked, "What happened, John? And where's Eddie, we haven't seen him today?"

John calmed down a bit and explained, "He got away with it, the lucky sod, he said he was a hitch hiker, scrounging a bloody lift."

Mark enquired, "And they believed him?"

"Yes," he answered, "they bloody did, his passport had his Liverpool address in it."

Mark said that Eddie hadn't lived in Liverpool for ages and John agreed with him. He said that when Eddie moved south, he didn't get round to changing his passport and, as his mother still lived at the same old address it was very unlikely that he would have a problem, particularly as he was living in rented accommodation; he didn't really have a fixed address, except, of course, the one in Liverpool.

Mark said, "Jamie sod."

John said, morosely, "Tell me about it. My glass is empty."

The other people in the bar who had been listening quickly turned away and became engrossed in conversations with each other. Mark agreed that John's glass was indeed empty.

John demanded, "Lager, a pint."

Mark replied, "Really."

John pushed his empty glass across the table, quite aggressively and said, "Yes, a pint of lager."

Mark did not budge, "You surprise me," he said, "I would have thought that a professional smuggler like you wouldn't have been drinking Lager; I would have expected you to be drinking real ale, a pint of good old Fullers, perhaps?"

John jumped at what he interpreted as an offer, "A pint of Fuller's will be fine, thanks."

Mark couldn't be bothered arguing with him, caught the Landlord's eye and said, "A pint of Fullers for John, please, Dave, and one for me."

Vanessa carried the two pints over to the table; she scowled at John while she put his on the table in front of him. She smiled at Mark as she was putting his glass in front of him, she was bending over the table and gave him a revealing little wiggle; he gave her a five pound note and told her to keep the change. She winked at him and said, "thank you, kind sir, it's nice to know there are still some gentlemen around."

John finished his drink very quickly, banged his glass on the table and then looked around, people averted their eyes again. He got up clumsily, went to the bar. Vanessa saw him coming and turned away. The landlord moved over to serve him.

John said, curtly, "Pint of Fullers."

Dave replied, "Please, Landlord."

John took no notice and said, "just pour it."

Dave chose not to make an issue of it and put the fresh pint on the bar, saying, "Certainly, sir, that will be two pounds twenty, please."

John replied, picking up the glass, "put it on my slate."

The Landlord pointed out that he hadn't got a slate and asked him for cash. John grumbled, put the glass back on the bar and fished in his pockets; he pulled out a handful

of loose change and, laboriously, counted out the necessary amount. He took the pint back to where he was sitting and didn't seem to notice that Mark and Colin had gone. John drank the beer almost immediately and, as he put his empty glass down, Neil and Fiona come into the room; seeing the empty glass, Neil said, "John, there you are mate, Drink?"

John was getting to be a bit worse for wear and asked for a pint of Fullers. Neil asked Fiona if she wanted her usual white wine and went to the bar. While Dave was serving him, Neil said that John seemed to be in a bad mood and asked if something was wrong. Dave said that he had had some bad luck and that he seemed to be drowning his sorrows at everyone else's expense. "No doubt he will tell you all about it, he's told pretty much everyone already."

Meanwhile, Fiona had taken a chair beside John but he ignored her. She asked him, "aren't you going to say 'Hello Fiona, nice to see you'?"

John said "no".

Neil arrived with the drinks and Fiona told him the John was not happy to see her. Neil asked him what the problem was but John became a bit offensive and told him that it wasn't anything to do with him. Fiona felt quite uncomfortable and stood up saying that they should sit somewhere else.

John actually took notice and apologised, he said that he had had a terrible twenty-four hours and begged them not to move.

Neil enquired, "so, what's wrong, then"; he said, "trouble at home?"

John replied, "that's part of it," he explained, "Mary's gone back to her mother, I got caught by the Customs in Dover, they stopped us, didn't believe the stuff was for our own personal use; I ask you, a few lousy cigarettes. They charged me, confiscated the lot, including my van, which, incidentally, isn't paid for yet.....and that's not all, ... they found that my MOT was fiddled, charged me with that, and they reckon my insurance won't be valid 'cos I had no MOT.

Neil sympathised, "Oh dear," he said.

Fiona tried not to smile, she had to hide her amusement, "Gone back to her mother," she said, "was she really that upset?"

John seemed to be oblivious to them and carried on, " I've really screwed it up this time. Every other time, I didn't bring back much, I was only just making a living. This time I decided to bring back more, a lot more, so I borrowed her holiday savings money to pay for the stuff".

Neil was flabbergasted and told John what he really thought of him and then Fiona, who had heard enough, reminded Neil that they had to be somewhere else, she really had heard more than enough of the trials and tribulations of this international, self-proclaimed master smuggler. They made their excuses and left but, on the way out, Neil bought John another pint. As they emerged in the car park, Fiona couldn't help saying, "he makes me sick, he's always so full of himself; serves him right, he's arrogant, an arrogant jumped up little squirt, it couldn't have happened to a nicer man. I don't blame Mary for going back to her mother, if I were her, I would have done it years ago."

Meanwhile, Vanessa had taken the pint to John. He looked at her through bleary eyes and slurred, "Cheers, mate. Oh, it's you, Vanessa, I'm sorry, I'm very sorry, very very sorry, d'you still want to come round?"

Vanessa was still annoyed with him, "I don't think so," she said, haughtily, "look at the state of you, drunk as a skunk, and you smell like one; when was that jumper last washed?" Go home, John, have a bath and sleep it off, I'll see you later. Do you really want this pint, haven't you had enough?"

John insisted but Vanessa convinced him that he should go home straight away, "I'll just have this one, and then I'll go home." He said, "You remind me of Lizzie, Lizzie Buckland."

"Forget the pint, John," she said, "go home now and who on earth is Lizzie Buckland?"

John stood up, swaying gently, "It wasn't Lizzie Buckland," he said, "it was Lizzie Carter, from Ninfield. I need to go to the loo, I'll go this way."

Vanessa was getting cross, "You've not been seeing her as well, have you? Who would believe it, you and Elizabeth Carter, I can't imagine her liking to be called Lizzie though, she's far too classy for you, you must have been dreaming."

John said "Yeh!", as he went across the room unsteadily and through the door leading to the toilets.

CHAPTER 4

When John came back into the bar, the pub interior was different; though the main structure was much the same, the modern fittings were no longer there. The furniture, the tables and benches were all old and quite crudely made, the rough boarded floor had a covering of sawdust and the electric lights had been replaced by oil lamps and candles. John walked into the bar; he was sober and dressed in his smuggler's gear. He approached the bar where the landlord and a serving wench called Beth were standing talking. He was asking for a pint of ale when two other smugglers, Tom and Albert came in. Tom suggested that John should stop his single pint and that they should get a jug of ale and five mugs.

John questioned, "Five?"

Tom replied, "Yes, five, Bill and Lizzie should be here."

Bill arrived almost immediately and said, "Good, I see you've got the beer in, and there's no sign of Revenue men; now, where's that Lizzie?"

Tom said that he had no idea where Lizzie was but he had seen some soldiers over the other side about an hour previously, he said that it looked as if they were going back to their camp.

"Talking of soldiers," Bill said, "I hear that they are thinking of sending a regiment here, and that's what the work on the Downs is all about, they are building a barracks there. Lizzie had come in and, hearing the remarks about soldiers, said, "I like the sound of that, or should I say, I like the sound of them?."

Bill replied, solemnly, "You might like the idea of a lot of lonely young men in the village, but if they are coming here to sort out the smugglers, you might not live long enough to enjoy them."

Lizzie realised the implications and said, "Oh, I see what you mean."

Bill continued, "Anyway, down to business, we'll worry about the soldiers nearer the time. ... So, the lads got back safely from London, another satisfactory delivery; but we still need to get more of the local stuff out."

Tom had had an idea and suggested that deliveries in the night were very dangerous; "If we went about our business," he said, "when other people are around, we wouldn't be noticed."

Albert didn't agree, "But we are not noticed at night as it is, and we can hide in the darkness, just slip behind a wall or into a doorway."

Horace answered, "I agree, to a point, but if we were out during the day, there would be no need to hide. People have good reason to be out in the daytime, everybody is and there is nothing wrong with that; but at night-time, it's different, people might wonder where you are going."

Tom thought that it was nothing to do with anyone else, "It's none of their business," he said.

Bill added, "Horace has got a point; the revenue men expect us to be out in the dead of night. They expect boats to slip in, in the dark, but there is no good reason for us to skulk around at night, we could do a lot of our deliveries openly in the daytime. The bulk of the revenue men start work at eight o'clock and work through the night; they think that that will be the best time to catch us. It's seven o'clock now, nearly dark and there are still people about, but NO revenue men; could be a much safer time. What do you all think?"

Bill then asked them, one by one, for their opinion; the men all agreed, Albert saying that he didn't like working into the night, particularly in the winter and he liked the idea. Lizzie was not so sure and she explained why. "Well, I suppose it might be okay but I'm usually occupied in the evenings and late starts we've been having suit me fine, but, I suppose, I could change my arrangements, it's not every night, after all, is it?"

Horace suggested, perhaps disapprovingly, "Your assignments could be useful, you could become a spy for us, young soldiers could be persuaded to divulge their plans to an attractive young lady.

Lizzie saw this as a compliment and smiled, "Attractive young lady, eh? I didn't know you felt that way."

Horace replied, gruffly, "I don't."

Bill tapped the table, "Enough of that," he said, "now back to business. If you get off now, most of you will have finished by eight o'clock. Albert, Horace, you both know where you are going, Lizzie, you need to go to Ninfield."

Lizzie said that that suited her as she was going there anyway. Bill said that he needed John to go to Catsfield, to George Kent, the farmer

John said, "I know the place, but we haven't served him before, have we? Do we know he's safe, it's not a trap, is it?"

Bill assured him that George was all right, he said he could vouch for him and then asked John if his horse was all right."

John assured him that it was; "It's been a bit lame, problem is, he's getting old, not as fit as he used to be. He'll be all right."

Bill answered, with a smile, "A bit like some of us; right, we'll leave one at a time. Lizzie, you walk me home, we'll get you off first. You others, a few minutes between, and keep a lookout, we don't want anyone to get caught."

Bill and Lizzie left together and walked along the road to Bill's house, the men followed a few minutes later and took a slightly different route.

A couple of hours later, Bill and Albert were back at the pub waiting for the others to return. Horace then joined them and asked where the others were. Bill said that they weren't expecting Lizzie as she had her 'work' to see to. He was a bit concerned about John, "I would have thought that he should have been here by now," he said.

Albert agreed, "I would have thought so too," he said, "Catsfield's not that far, mind you, if his horse is playing up" Horace interrupted, "But he said it was all right." he said "I know," Albert replied, "but you know what horses are!"

The pub was busy, the atmosphere was quite smokey and there was a steady hubbub of activity and conversation. Suddenly there was silence, John had staggered through the door holding a blood-soaked rag to a gash on his forehead. Albert rushed over to him and said, "Good heavens, man, whatever has happened to you?"

John said, as he was being helped to a chair, "It's not as bad as it looks, honestly, it's just a gash, it's all right."

Bill asked if there had been some trouble and John replied, "Well, yes, and no".

Bill encouraged him, "Go on." He said

John continued, "I got there all right. Master Kent was there but he was in a bit of a state. He said that he had lost his daughter. But, anyhow, he took the stuff, gave me the money", John then handed a brown paper packet to Bill, "Here's the cash. And then asked if I had seen his daughter.

Horace was quite excited and asked, "So, what did you do, did you tell him about the girl on the beach, Martha?"

"I told him nothing", John replied, "I said I hadn't seen his precious daughter, I said I didn't know his daughter so I wouldn't have recognised her if I had seen her. Kent then said that she had gone, she went to bed, as usual, quite early the previous night, but wasn't in her room this morning, and .. some of her clothes had gone. He reckoned that she had run away.

Albert said, "Go on,".

John said, "Well, I said, 'oh dear, I'm so sorry', something like that, what else could I say? And then he said that she had been seeing a scoundrel, he said he was the scum

of the earth, A GOOD FOR NOTHING SMUGGLER, would you believe, I tell you, I wanted to hit him; good for nothing indeed."

Bill looked at his gashed head and said, "Oh my God, you didn't, did you?"

John continued, "No, no; I wanted to, but I didn't."

Bill was relieved, "Thank God for that," he said, "so, what happened to your head?"

"Well" John continued, "as I was leaving, he told me, well asked me to keep an eye out for his daughter, and he said that her name was Martha."

Albert asked, again excitedly, "The girl on the beach?"

John carried on, "That's what I thought," he said, "

Bill interrupted, "Good," he said, " now what about your head, and the trouble?"

"Well," John went on, "I wasn't far away, I was the other side of Pankhurst's Mill, the horse was hobbling a bit and I was paying more attention to him than the road. I looked up and saw a couple of men, in the distance so I decided to get off the track as quickly as I could. I turned the horse, quite sharply and that must have twisted his fetlock, the bad one. He reared up and threw me off, I hit my head on a big branch overhanging the road and fell to the ground. The two men started running towards me so I scarpered into the woods and made my way back here."

Horace asked what had happened to the horse and John told him that he believed that the Revenue Men had probably got him. Bill looked concerned and said that he thought that they, particularly John really did have a problem. He explained that John's saddle was the stumbling block; he said to John, "That saddle of yours is a bit special, isn't it, it's designed to carry contraband; and if they were customs men, they will realise that the horse belonged to a smuggler.

Horace wasn't very bright and said, "Oh! I see. But you'll get it back, won't you?"

John answered rather sarcastically, " Oh yes," he said, "Can you imagine going to them and saying, '*Excuse me Mister Revenue Man, Sir, can I have my horse back, please? Are you a smuggler, sir? Good heavens no, I'm a respected gentleman. Well here is your horse with its most unusual saddle. Thank you. Get real, I've lost it. And very likely lost an awful lot more.*'"

Bill interrupted, "All right boys," he said, "that's enough; you'd better get cleaned up, John, get out to the pump in the yard, you look a mess. We'll make some enquiries tomorrow, about the horse, leave that to me."

John went out through the back door into the yard. As Bill stood up and left by the front door, he passed two revenue men coming in as he went out. Bill raised his hat to them and said, "Good evening, to you, a quiet night, I trust?"

The first revenue man said, politely, "Good evening to you magistrate, pretty quiet but we are hot on the trail of a villain."

Bill sounded shocked and replied, "Really! I doubt you'll find one here, these are all respectable, law abiding folk."

The Revenue Man answered, "Be that as it may, the man lost his horse not many miles from here and is injured, we think that we are hot on his trail, now we must get on, let us bid you a good night."

Bill raised his hat again and told them to keep up the good work, he bade them goodnight and went on his way; he cautiously went round to the back of the building and whispered to John to lie low as there were Revenue Men in the bar.

Meanwhile, the Revenue men had gone to the bar and told the Landlord that they were looking for an injured villain who, they believed, could be bleeding, perhaps heavily. They needed to find him and speak to him urgently.

The younger Revenue man had his eyes on the barmaid, Beth, who was adjusting her cleavage and attending to her skirt, just as Vanessa had done. She smiled at him and said, "Wouldn't you rather talk to me?"

The first Revenue Man told him to leave the trollope alone and start questioning the other men. Albert and Horace tried to slip away without being noticed but the older Revenue Man saw them and commanded them to stand fast; he noticed a rag wrapped around Albert's hand and demanded to know what it was and from whence it came. Albert said nothing as the younger man grabbed his arm and pulled the grubby rag off his hand. The older man repeated his request for an explanation, "How did you sustain this injury?" He demanded.

Horace spoke, "My friend and I, Sir," he said, "were cutting willow, some days ago; a clumsy slip with his billhook resulted in the gash, it bled profusely for some time, but is now mending well, as you can see."

It was pretty obvious that it was an old wound which had all but healed and the Revenue men were not pleased but, a moment later the younger one cried out, "Look boss," he said, "Fresh blood, here on the table; this is not from an old wound, this is new, it's from a new wound. Perhaps one of you will be kind enough to explain."

Horace thrust his left hand towards the Revenue men and showed them a blood stained rag wrapped round his thumb. He uncovered the wound and explained, "I, Sir, also have a wound, my wife is away with her sister and her newborn child; I am left alone; this cut, I inflicted on myself, barely an hour ago, cutting vegetables for my meal."

The Revenue men could not associate this cut with the injuries they were expecting to see and had to accept that Horace was not the villain they were looking for; they allowed them to leave and continued their fruitless search. The older man said, "Smith, you take the back door, I will go out the front and meet up with you in the yard."

Later on that day, probably at about half past six, Dave, the Landlord and Vanessa were busying about, tidying up and cleaning the bar ready for the evening's business. Dave got his stepladders and opened them in the corner of the room; he wanted to change a couple of blown light-bulbs. John came into the bar from the back door that used to lead outside; he walked, unsteadily towards where Vanessa was polishing a table top, holding some paper hand-towels to a gash on his head. There was nobody else in the room and Vanessa was very surprised to see him.

John was quite groggy and confused and said, "Where's everyone gone, Beth, they were here a minute ago?"

Vanessa was exasperated, "Oh, for heaven's sake, first it was Liz Carter and now Beth; what are you playing at, and where've you been. I thought you went home ages ago."

John did not understand, "What?" he mumbled.

Vanessa got cross, "What ARE you playing at, I can see you are drunk .. and what's wrong with your head?"

John told her that he had fallen off his horse and, to, Vanessa' that was the final straw. She said to him, "You make me sick. I know you've had a rough time, but calling me Beth, and saying I look like Liz Carter Well, it's not good enough. I've tried to be nice to you but you can take a running jump for all I care. You'd better leave, or I'll ask Dave to throw you out. And, though I don't really care, where HAVE you been since half past three?"

John was in a state, all he could say again was, "What?"

Dave, in the meantime, had finished changing his bulbs and walked over to John and said, "Come along John, I think it's time you went home, mate." As he moved him through the door, he continued, "Now, there's a good chap, off you go. By the way, what DID happen to your head?"

John really did not know where he was, how he got there, what he was supposed to be doing, and, more worryingly, he was beginning to wonder who he really was.

"Which head," he said, "what are you talking about?" He then realised what Dave was saying and replied, "Oh, that. I don't know. I think I banged it on a tree, a low branch, or something .

Dave replied, "But there are no trees in the gents, are you sure you're all right?"

John answered, "Why shouldn't I be? I must have fallen over, all I can remember, was waking up on the floor in the gents."

Dave had a look at the gash and said that it wasn't too bad. He noticed than John smelled pretty awful and told him so and then told him to go home, put his clothes in the washing machine and have a good hot bath. Dave returned to the bar and told Vanessa what he had said to John. "Poor old bugger's in a bit of a state," he said, "must have fallen over and banged his head."

Vanessa suggested that she might go round later to see that he was all right. Dave told her to suit herself but strongly advised her not to get too close to him if he hadn't had a bath.

CHAPTER 5

Some time later, John was fast asleep and snoring softly; the only other sound to be heard was that of the washing machine, somewhere downstairs. There was a loud banging on the outside door but John didn't hear it. The banging continued for a while and eventually it stopped and, a moment later, Beth came into the room. It was quite dark and she was calling out to try to find him. John became aware that there was somebody in the room and sat up and, seeing a woman in the dim light, he said, "Oh, Vanessa, I knew you'd come."

Beth replied, "It's me, Beth," she said, "I'm not Vanessa, now get up quickly, and who's Vanessa, I'm Beth, remember me, the barmaid. The Revenue men are coming, you must be quick.Sh!, .. what's that noise?"

John asked her, "What noise, I can't hear anything."

Beth answered, "That 'geung, geung, click, geung, geung, click'

John told her that it would be the buckle on his belt.

Beth didn't understand and was beginning to worry about John, "You confuse me," she said, "I don't understand what you are talking about, you must have really banged your head, but there is no time for that now, the Revenue men will be here any minute, now, get dressed quickly, we must get you away."

John was really confused and asked why they needed to get away and Beth tried to explain to him that the Customs men were after him. John couldn't understand why and said that he had already been charged about his dodgy MOT and the customs in Dover had confiscated his van and all his stuff, "What more can they possibly want? He whined.

Beth didn't understand a word he was saying but, as there was no time to try to sort it out, she said, "You're delirious, John; just trust me, get dressed and hurry up."

John was in a sort of daze and couldn't focus on things; he was putting on his 'modern' clothes in his normal bedroom and he could hear his washing machine clunking away in the kitchen and yet he was rushing as quickly as he could to get dressed to go with a woman he thought was somebody else 'on the run' from the Customs and Excise who, he thought, had dealt with him and he knew that running away would not serve any useful purpose. He didn't know what else he could do so he asked Beth who she was and where they were going and why it was necessary to do it so quickly. He asked why they needed to get away from the customs men, "I haven't got a problem with them," he said, "They've already charged me, I don't know when, but I'll be in court soon."

Beth was getting quite agitated, she kept urging John to hurry up. She asked him about his gashed head and he told her that he had fallen in the loo. She was cross again and said, "Oh, for heaven's sake, don't mess me about; you really aren't taking this seriously, are you. I wish you'd talk properly, what's a 'loo'? Oh, never mind, come on, hurry up."

Beth and John hurried along to Bill's house, they didn't go on the main road, they took the back way to avoid, as much as possible, being seen. They approached the house very cautiously and only when they were sure that the coast was clear, did they go up to the door which was opened immediately as Bill was waiting for them. Bill thanked Beth for her help and told her to get back to the Inn. He then said to John, "Come and sit down John, where DID you get those clothes from? I've never seen anything like them before."

John was still confused and said that they were his normal clothes and said, "What's going on, what's wrong?"

Bill could see that John was in a bit of a state so he tried to explain, "John," he said, "they're on to you, you were seen on the road to Pilbeam's Corner."

John interrupted, "What, near the Viking Fish Bar?"

Bill was concerned, "What ARE you talking about?" he asked.

John's reply did not help matters, "I don't know." He said, "and what am I doing here?"

Bill tried again to explain, "You have been identified as a smuggler," he said, "I've had to sign a warrant for your arrest, you are in trouble and we need to get you away from here as quickly as we can. We have a boat coming in tonight; I want you to leave on it, when it returns to France. France is better than being shot or transported to Australia."

John said that he quite fancied Australia, and asked Bill if he watched Neighbours?

Bill misunderstood what John was saying and told him that, being a magistrate meant that he had to be aware of what was going on, but he did not consciously watch his neighbours. He then asked John, " Why do you ask?"

John shook his head and muttered, "Oh, never mind."

Bill then told John that he would be safe where he was until it was time to go but insisted that he kept out of sight, "Keep away from the windows," he said, "these are dangerous times."

By the time it was dark, John was asleep in the corner of the room and Bill had to waken him. Bill shook him gently and said that it was time to go. John was obviously still confused so Bill tried again. He spoke slowly and very carefully and said that it was time for them to get down to the beach to get the boat that would take him to France. John wanted to know why and Bill shouted, in exasperation, "We've been through all that, several times, now come on, where's your coat."

John asked, "Which coat?"

Bill ignored him and took a coat from a hook on the back of the door; he told him to put it on because it would be cold on the boat. John was getting more and more confused and said that they normally sat in one of the bars on the ferry and it was always warm, quite often it was very warm and that he certainly wouldn't need a heavy coat. Bill became cross and told John, quite firmly, to put it on so that they could get on their way.

John buttoned up the heavy coat; Bill gave him a lantern to carry and they left by the back door.

John and Bill arrived at the beach where there was a great deal of activity. All the gang were there unloading the boat, as they had done only a couple of days previously. John noticed that Lizzie wasn't there and there was no sign of Pierre. John was disappointed that Lizzie wasn't there and asked Tom where she was. Tom told him that she had 'gone to the woods with the Frenchman' but, as he spoke, they returned to the boat. Pierre saw that the cargo was all out of the boat and said, "Bon, c'est complet?"

Bill was decidedly unhappy when he was told that they had been away for quite a while, "Where have you two been?" he demanded.

Pierre answered, in French and with a wicked twinkle, "L'amour, mon brave, toujours l'amour, how you say," he asked, "'Love is all' Love is all with Lizzie, l'amour, l'amour."

The rest of the gang were listening but did not understand French. Horace heard the words and said, "Is he calling our Lizzie a whore?"

Bill said, "Not quite, Horace, or not in so many words; but never mind, let's not bother about that for now, the job is done; let's get this boat turned round and away. Come on John, time to get on board."

John couldn't understand what was going on and asked, "Where's the ferry?"

No one replied but Bill said to Horace, "A knock on the head, funny clothes and now he wants to know where the fairies are. He's lost it, poor sod."

CHAPTER 6

The boat arrived at a landing stage in Northern France in the early hours of the following morning and was tied up while John was being helped to go ashore. Pierre spoke English with quite a strong accent but John understood what he was saying. John asked if there might be a problem with the Customs men. Pierre replied that there would not, "We live in a civilised country," he said. There was quite a lot of rushing about and people speaking in French but John didn't seem to care, he was tired and hungry and was hoping that he might get something to eat and somewhere to sleep for a while.

Pierre walked John to his home, it was only a short distance from the quay side, and as they got to the door he said, "Come in, mon ami, welcome to la belle France, welcome to my home.

John mumbled, "Thank you." And Pierre said, " I will find us some food, you must be hungry, fromage et du pain, and a jug of wine, perchance." he suggested and then called out, "Antoinette, ou etes tu?"

An attractive young woman came rushing in and flung herself excitedly at Pierre; John didn't know what she was saying but he felt that he was intruding on the Frenchman's homecoming. John was a bit embarrassed. The woman noticed John and stopped hugging her husband and spoke to John in French

"Pierre, oh Pierre, Mon cherie, je suis ..."

Pierre replied, "Anglais, ma petite, nous avons le visiteur. Ici John, from England."

Antoinette replied, "Pardon monsieur, enchante, excusez-moi, I so miss Pierre, when he is away."

John looked at her; he was very confused, "Vanessa?" he said.

Antoinette replied, "Non, monsieur, je m'appelle Antoinette, I am Antoinette, the wife of Pierre. You must be hungry, let me prepare some food. Pierre open some wine for your guest.

Pierre spoke to her, "Notre invite, cherie; John will be avec nous for a few days, while we find a place for him to stay. He is wanted by the customs officers in his country, we must keep him safe. Asseyez vous, my friend, I will get us some wine."

While Pierre was sorting out a bottle, Antoinette spoke to John, "Monsieur John,, you look tired, my friend, and your clothing, to me it is, how you say, interesting; is this what you English are wearing now?"

John was not really interested and mumbled, "Um! I am so tired, What's wrong with my clothes, I feel that I must be in some sort of dream."

Antoinette answered, sympathetically, "Dreaming of your Vanessa perchance. I dream of Pierre when he is away, he is so wonderful, so loyal, so in love with me, and I with him, il est parfait, l'amour de ma vie."

Pierre said, "Enough of this, my sweet, now get us food, we must eat and then to bed.

Antoinette replied, coyly, "Oh, Pierre, forget the food, I am ready for the bed."

Pierre smiled and answered, "Food, ma petite, and then to bed, to SLEEP."

Antoinette looked at John and said. "Oh, Monsieur John, ma Pierre, he is, how you say, the spoiler of the sport." John corrected her, "Spoilsport," he repeated, "that's what Lizzie said."

Antoinette wanted to know who Lizzie was, "Lizzie, ou est elle, Pierre?" she asked.

Pierre was getting cross with this line of conversation, "Cherie, cherie, je t'aime. Qu'est-ce qui ne va pas? What is wrong? You know I love only you. Lizzie, she is l'amour de monsieur John, ne pas moi."

Antoinette became upset and said, " Oh Pierre, Je suis vraiment desole, c'etait de ma faute."

Pierre put his arms around her and said, "No, no, my sweet, no, you go up, I will join you dans un moment. John, you will sleep here."

Antoinette left the room saying, "A bientot, Monsieur John."

Pierre was not too pleased with John and said that he should be more careful. He said that Antoinette was a wonderful innocent girl and that she did not like him to be away, "She is concerned that I will not be faithful to her."

John replied, incredulously, "Really, I wonder why," he said, "Anyway, I'm absolutely knackered, I'll see you in the morning."

Pierre replied, as he left the room, "Oui, mon ami. A bientot."

Pierre left the room and shut the door behind him, John took off his trainers and curled up on a chair.

John slept soundly for quite some time but was woken by Antoinette and Pierre coming into the room; he rubbed his eyes and had a good scratch; he was very relieved to see Pierre and said that he thanked God that his nightmare was over but then realised that it wasn't. He said, almost in desperation, "Oh hell," he groaned, "I am still dreaming. .. Where am I?"

Pierre brought him back down to earth and told him that he was in France. John wanted to cry, he really did not understand what was happening to him; he looked around and did not recognise his surroundings, he thought that he knew the people he was with but they were not who he thought they were.

Pierre could see that John was distressed and tried to explain his predicament; he told him that he would have to stay in France and that it would be unwise to return to Bexhill, or anywhere in southern England, for quite some time. He told John that his good friend Antoine would be coming, and would help to find work and a place for him to live.

"But I don't speak the language," John said, "and I have no skills; what will I do, how will I manage?"

Pierre told him that it would not be a problem, "You will manage, very well, *mon ami*," he assured him, " *vraiment*." he said, " We, here en France, are not like you English. Most people in France speak English; you believe that, if someone wishes to speak to you, they will use your language; we French believe that it is courteous to communicate with our guests and friends in their own language; *en Anglais avec vous*, sorry, English with you and *en Allemand avec notre amis*, our German friends."

John was not feeling any better and, when Antoinette tried to talk to him he still thought that she was Vanessa, the barmaid, which further complicated things when there was a knock on the door and Antoinette went to open it and Antoine entered the room. John recognised the Frenchman as Dave and was really pleased to see him.

"Dave, you old bugger," he said, "am I glad to see you. You wouldn't believe all the troubles I've had; have you come to take me home?"

Antoine was amazed and said to John, "Pardon, *monsieur*; not Dave, Antoine; you must be our guest, *monsieur John*. You English are a race most strange," he said, and John thought he sounded like David Suchet playing Agatha Christie's Poirot, "I see you wear the clothing most odd, you send soldiers to shoot the men who supply the brandy, you make the demands, most unreasonable, and then you pay the taxes to feed the soldiers to stop the contraband. Crazy. Why, in the name of heaven, do you not remove the taxes from the brandy and send the soldiers home, I do not comprehend this madness."

John was dumbstruck and grunted, "Eh!"

Pierre interrupted, "Take no notice," he said, "my friend, Antoine, he is a politician, he sometimes talks too much, and what he says is usually unintelligible." He continued, light-heartedly, "He is a typical politician, my friend, he is an elected representative of the people who feels, indeed knows, like others, that he, or in some cases, she, is a most important, indeed a leader of the community. A man, or even a woman, who will take a hundred words to say a simple thing like no, or yes. A pompous person who struts about the town

Antoine was amused and told Pierre that, for a man who had no interest in politics, he was sounding very much like one. Pierre and Antoine laughed but John could not find any reason for him to even smile; he didn't want a new life, he didn't want to live in France and he most emphatically, didn't want a job. He said that there was no reason why he should not return to England, he was quite prepared to pay his fines and, if the worst came to the worst, he could get a job, he would even become a trolley boy at Tesco if necessary. "I'll apply for a job as soon as I get home, honestly; now, can I go, please." He begged.

Antoine was worried about John's attitude and suggested that he was deranged, "He is," he said, "how do the English say, a lunatic, affected by the moon. I cannot find work for him, nor a home, except a lunatic asylum."

Pierre made some reference to John demonstrating the qualities of a politician. Antoine was not amused and said, sternly, "Monsieur, this is not the matter humorous. I cannot help you, I will not help you. Perhaps he should go to Tesco, wherever, or whatever that is.

Pierre was surprised by Antoine's remark and replied, apologetically, "Of course. I'm sorry that we have troubled you. And .. I apologise for my remarks about politicians."

Antoine smiled and said, "Don't apologise for that, mon amis, you are absolutely right. You know, we are called politicians because we try to be polite to each other while we do all we can to stab our 'friends' in the back, or at least, talk them to death. Now, I must go, au revoir, et bon chance."

Pierre turned to Antoinette and asked, "Now what?"

She didn't have any answer and suggested that they should all go to the bar; she had heard that a new English couple had arrived and thought that John make take some comfort from meeting them, "And," she suggested, "they might have some connections that could be helpful. "

"I cannot see how," John replied, "but a drink, and some good company might be pleasurable. Come John, let us go out."

John wanted to know where they were; he said that he knew that they were in France and that they were not far from the Channel but he wanted to know where.

Pierre replied, "We are north of Cap Gris Nez, about ten kilometres from Calais."

John did not respond immediately, he was getting his thoughts sorted out, he felt that he needed to prepare an escape plan; he mumbled things about metrication, the Common Market, the Euro, "And all that rubbish. Do you know," he asked, " that Brussels is picking on England, making us change to silly metric things, do you also know, it is now a crime to sell apples, good English apples and things, by the pound; it's got to be killergerms. We want to keep the pound."

Pierre didn't take much notice of what John was saying and enquired, " What ARE you talking about, you're rambling again. We are not bothered about selling apples and why mention Brussels, what has a little Belgian country got to do with this?"

Antoinette whispered in Pierre's ear, "Leave him alone, Pierre, Antoine was right, he is a lunatic, he must be. What does he mean by Common Market and what's a Euro?"

John put his shoes on and he and Pierre left to go to the bar, Antoinette followed them a minute or so later and caught up with them as they got to the door. As they entered they could hear the sound of an accordion being played by a man in a beret sitting in the corner of the room. John called for wine, "Vin rouge, s'il vous plait," he said and, only a moment later a barmaid approached their table carrying a bottle and three glasses. John looked at her and said, "Hi, Vanessa, what're you doing here?"

The French girl didn't speak English but she understood what John was saying and told him that she was not Vanessa, she was Beth. John was getting confused again; the English barmaid was called Beth and this one looked the same and they both looked like Vanessa. Pierre tried to help by explaining that John was an Englishman who was 'on the

run' from the English Revenue men and that he was looking for a home and a job. Pierre also said that he would make a good Frenchman because he was very fond of 'les femmes': "There is Lizzie and Vanessa," he said, "and Beth in England; and he says that he has a wife called Mary and who knows how many others, girl friends, of course, not wives."

Antoinette was not impressed and made some derogatory remarks about ALL men and said how pleased she was that her Pierre was not like all the others; he then thought that John was about to add something to the conversation and quickly changed the subject. He asked the barmaid, in French, if she had met the two new English people and relayed her reply to John. "Apparently, John," he said, "they are an English couple, a man and a young woman; they have come to live with Yvette and Maurice for the time being and will be here in a few minutes."

John was pleased with that and said that he would be glad to talk to some English people again; though it wasn't very long, he felt that he had been away from home for ages. He thought for a moment and then asked if the woman was called Martha and her companion Derek; it had occurred to him that they could have been the people he and the English smugglers had seen walking on the Sussex beach at the beginning of his nightmare. He felt foolish when they told him that they were, indeed Martha and Derek and asked him what he knew about them. Beth also made some remarks about John's clothes but he didn't understand and nobody else gave her an explanation.

The English couple came in and went to the bar and, as they ordered their wine, John recognised them as Martha and Derek. He was, again, very confused; should he tell them that he had seen them on the beach; if not, how would he be able to explain how he knew their names? He decided to 'play it by ear' and see what happened.

The barmaid told Derek and Martha about the 'new' Englishman but warned them that he seemed to be a bit odd, "He's wearing funny clothes," she said, "and he seems to have some funny ideas," she said. The two picked up their drinks and walked over to where he was sitting; John greeted them and told them his name. Derek introduced himself and his 'companion', Martha. John said that he was delighted to meet them and told them that his being there was a serious mistake and that he was expecting, or at least hoping to be going back to England soon. John said that, if necessary, if he couldn't cadge a lift, he would walk to Calais and get on the first possible ferry.

Derek soon realised that Beth's warnings were well judged and wondered what to say; he decided to stick with what he hoped would be safe topics and asked John where he came from. When John replied, "Bexhill, a little town in Sussex," Derek was intrigued and replied that he and Martha were from Catsfield, "Well, Martha is," he said, "I'm not really from anywhere; her father and a lot of other people think that I am no good and would like to see me incarcerated, they've been after me for years. Her father hates me,..." John interrupted, "I know," he said.

Derek was alarmed and demanded to know how John knew that but, before he was able to answer, John continued, "but he will never get her back, Martha is mine, we are staying here in France, for ever."

Martha became upset and said, "We did not agree to 'for ever', Derek. We said we would stay until it was safe for you to return, ...I don't want to live in France forever". She then asked John if her father had sent him to take her home.

John answered, sympathetically, "No love," he said, "he doesn't know where you are, but he thinks you are with Derek and he is none too pleased; he doesn't think much of you, Derek, he called you a 'good for nothing smuggler'."

Derek was amused, "That's ripe," he said, "coming from him."

Martha was intrigued and asked, "What do you mean?"

Derek explained, "Your father, Martha," he said, "has made a fortune; how do you think he did it? Don't tell me that you think he has worked hard and managed his land well and all that rubbish; it's time you grew up and realised where you come from, your father is no better than me. He might not have actually unloaded the boats but he was certainly involved in organising things. He also has something to do with a crooked magistrate called Bill Westcourt who lives in Bexhill."

Martha became distressed and started screaming at Derek that she didn't believe a word he was saying and demanded to know why he was being so rotten to her. John felt that he might have, inadvertently, started this row and said, "Sorry, I didn't mean to start anything. It's just that I delivered some brandy to him at Catsfield, the day after you went missing and he told me all about it."

Derek pointed out that an honest man would not have been buying contraband spirits.

John then told her that he was frantic and worried sick about her and, as there were no signs of her on land, he was wondering if she had perished at sea.

Martha was distraught, "Oh my poor father," she said, "I must go to him, I must tell him I'm safe."

Derek told her that she could not go home, she had to stay in France and, despite all her pleading and begging, he would not change his mind. John tried to help and said that, as he was going home, and that no-one would stop him, he would go to Catsfield and take a message to her father.

Pierre stepped in and said that that would not be possible and told John, quite emphatically, that he would NOT be going home, well not for a long time. John would not agree, he said that ten kilometres was about six miles and that to walk to Calais would only take about two hours and that was precisely what he intended to do. He, again talked about catching the ferry and he also said that he was quite prepared to 'face the music'.

Pierre was more exasperated than ever and was getting worried about what John might do; he was also concerned about Martha's behaviour, she was appearing to be desperate to go home. Although her English was not very good, Antoinette tried to quieten her down, saying that she would soon get used to living there and would grow to love the place. She also told her that there were several young women, all of whom spoke some English, in the area and that she would soon make friends.

Martha didn't want to know, all she wanted was to go home. She ignored Antoinette and begged John to take her with him, "John," she implored, "take me with you, please, I want to go home."

Derek was getting cross and told Martha, very forcefully, that she was getting extremely tiresome and that she would stay where she was and, that if John chose to leave, he could do so but, under no circumstances would she be going with him. Pierre

joined in the conversation and told Martha that John was unlikely to get back to England, he told her that it was a dangerous journey and that she would be better off where she was, "here in France."

Martha became even more distressed and screamed, " I will not stay, I want to go home."

Derek became very angry and shouted at her, "Martha," he said, "you are becoming a bloody nuisance and a burden, now sit down; you WILL stay here, even if I have to tie you up, you cannot go home, you'll have to make the most of it. Now get a grip, woman."

Martha was shocked by his venomous outburst and whimpered, "but, ...but .."

Derek countered, "Shut up and sit down, you stupid wench, you WILL stay here; and you John, if you are going, go now."

Pierre tried to calm the situation and pointed out that John's plans were foolish and dangerous; he then said to John, " You must not go without careful planning; do not risk your life on such a treacherous voyage. If you insist on returning to your country, I will try to make the necessary arrangements but it will take some time. Do not be too hasty."

John would not listen, he was adamant, "There was nothing dangerous," he said, "or treacherous in crossing the channel on a ferry, I could even go on the train. I'm away, goodbye; I'm gone." With that, he stormed off.

Derek shook his head in frustration, "Away with the fairies." He muttered, " And what is this 'train'? The man's a lunatic, we won't see him again, he will vanish into the night and good riddance."

Martha had quietened down somewhat but was still very upset, "Oh Derek," she said, "I am so unhappy now, I see a different side of you, you are being so cruel to me, so unkind, this is not what you promised me, I want to go home. If you will not take me, please let me go with John."

Her pleadings fell on deaf ears

Pierre tried to explain, "Non, mademoiselle," he said, "cette homme est dangereuse, he is out of his mind, he is not one of us; there is something different about him. I do not understand him, he wears strange clothes, he has a little box in his pocket, the likes of which I have never seen before, he says it is a telephone, or something. Qu'est-ce que c'est , this word telephone, I do not understand, it sounds like French, but he did not get it ici, en France. He told me that it was for 'ringing his mates'. We put rings on the legs of chickens, and through the noses of les bulls, je ne comprends pas, I do not understand. I asked him to explain and all he could tell me was that it was a mobile telephone. I agree with monsieur Derek, he is a strange man, he could be dangerous, it is best we let him go.

CHAPTER 7

Meanwhile, in Liverpool, it was a bright crisp morning as Eddie wandered aimlessly around the Albert Dock; he answered his 'phone, "Hello". He recognised John's voice and answered, "I'm in Liverpool, mate, I'm walking round the Albert Dock." He then explained that he had gone home for a couple of days and that his mother had kept on at him to get a job so he had gone out for a bit, to get out of her way. He then asked John how things were and what he wanted.

John replied, saying that he was 'stuck in Dover and Eddie interrupted, sounding surprised, "I thought you would have had enough of that place and what do you mean 'stuck in Dover, what are you doing there?"

John told him that it was a long story; he said that the Revenue had confiscated his van and he wanted a lift home, "But," he added, "you're no good to me up there in Liverpool, I have to try someone else."

Eddie interrupted, "What about Mary, why can't she pick you up?"

She's gone back to her blasted mother, rotten cow, her not her mother, though she is as well."

"So, when does Vanessa move in, then?" Eddie chuckled.

She doesn't; I don't fancy her and, anyway, I'm going to get a job." Eddie laughed and remarked, "Pigs fly, do they; you've got to be joking, mate?"

"I'm serious, honest; I've had a dreadful couple of days, a bloody nightmare. I'm going to get a proper job and my 'phone's running out of battery so I must get on; I'll see you. Cheers."

John then phoned Dave; he seldom spoke to him so it took a few moments for Dave to realise who it was calling him. Dave made it quite clear that he was far too busy to be able to drive to Dover; he rang off very quickly.

John then called Neil's number and was a bit put out when a female voice answered, he said, "Hi, Fiona, is Neil there?" He told Fiona who he was and, in reply to her question, he replied, "Yes, John Smethurst". He then heard Fiona saying to Neil, as she passed the mobile to him, "It's that Smethurst moron, tell him you're busy."

Neil took the phone and said, "Hello John, what's up?" John said that everything was fine but he needed someone to give him a lift. "I've not got the van at the moment, will you give me a lift?"

Neil, without asking, said, "Of course I will, where are you?"

John answered, "By the roundabout."

Neil, still not realising that John was so far away, asked him which roundabout he was talking about. John then said, several times, how grateful he was and promised to return the favour one day; and then added, "The roundabout by the main entrance, on the A20"

Neil was confused, "Which entrance, where are you, John? The A20's miles away; what have you conned me into this time?"

"Don't be like that, mate," John pleaded and then went on to explain his predicament but, as he was talking, another 'beep' on his 'phone indicated that the battery had just about gone. He told Neil that his 'phone was just about dead but he was able to pass on the information that he was outside the Eastern Docks in Dover when it

finally died. John had no alternative, he would just have to wait and hope that Neil would turn up.

When Neil came off the 'phone, Fiona was glowering at him, he could see that she was very angry. He was quite uncomfortable; Fiona had never liked John, she didn't like Neil associating with him. She had gathered the gist of the conversation and was not happy, "No way, Neil;" she fumed, "you promised to take me to Eastbourne, I will not have you swanning off to Dover to pick up thatlay-about, ... that horrible little man; he's an obnoxious little creep."

"I know, I know, but I said I would." John replied, "I could take you to Eastbourne first, then go and get him and then come back for you. Three hours, I reckon, three and a half at the most, it usually takes you longer than that when you go shopping."

Fiona was still not happy but she, reluctantly agreed to his plan. She did point out, in no uncertain terms, that her credit card, on Neil's account, might help her to pass the time. She also said that she would give him some real grief if he ever had anything more to do with John, "This afternoon is going to cost you, love and, if you think of trying anything similar to this in the future, I would strongly advise you to think again."

Chapter 8

John did do as he said, he got a job as a 'Trolley Boy' at the Ravenside Tesco Supermarket; it wasn't really the job that he wanted but, as he had failed as a professional smuggler, it was better than nothing and, if he stuck at it, it would be enough to bring Mary home.

One morning, John, who still had a plaster on his head covering the evidence of his recent trouble, was collecting trolleys in the car-park when one of his mates, Alberto, his mother was Italian, appeared and said, incredulously, "That can't be you, Master Smuggler Smethurst, can it, what the hell are you doing here?"

John stopped and, leaning on the nearest trolley said, "After I last saw you, in the pub, I must have got completely plastered," he explained, "I finished up with a bang on my head," he pointed to the plaster, "and I found myself in France; don't ask me how, I have no idea; I was just there, asleep on the beach a few kilometres," he spoke with a very good French accent, "outside Calais. I have no idea how I got there, it was all like some terrible dream."

His friend wanted to know how he, suddenly, was speaking like a real Frenchman, "what happened to your killer meters?" he asked; John ignored the interruption and continued, "Anyhow, I had very little cash but I did have my wallet and my mobile. It's a good job I had my passport, that was in my pocket, and that's odd, .. I had changed my clothes, I wasn't wearing the things I had on when I was caught, I don't know why I had it with me."

His friend, Berto, who was quite like Albert from the past, suggested, "It's a good job you did, being around Calais without a passport could be a bit dodgy at the moment."

John continued, "I know. Anyway, I walked up to the road and found a white Transit with English plates in a filling station, I found the driver, a nice bloke from east London. I told him I was getting married on Saturday and that we had a day trip to France for a sort of stag night. I think he believed me when I told him that my mates had got me drunk and left me there."

"Good story, John," he said, "but not true; what did really happen?"

"No, you're right but, as I said, I don't know how I came to be there, I didn't know what day it was. I didn't even know the time; I must have lost my watch somewhere. Anyhow, he agreed to give me a lift. We got to the terminal, I bought a foot passenger ticket, one way, and then we got on the boat. I offered to buy him a meal .."

John continued and tried to explain what he had done; he said that he had his credit card with him so he was able to buy a single, one-way ticket and, as the driver didn't want to eat, he bought him a cup of tea and paid with cash. "I didn't realise then that the card was on its limit," he said, "so it would have been a bit embarrassing if it had been declined for a meal."

"That was a bit of luck!"

"I needed a bit of luck," John continued, "after all I'd been through. But that wasn't the end of it. He said, to save me walking through the docks, he'd give me a lift to the road. I couldn't believe it.

The friend wondered, "Why not, that seems to be perfectly reasonable?"

"No, you don't understand, it wasn't that;" he corrected, "We got pulled over by the bloody Revenue men."

"Who?" Berto asked.

John was angry, "Us," he said, "they pulled US over.

"I know that; but WHO pulled you over? And what do you mean, and who are the 'bloody revenue men'?"

John was getting rather exasperated, he explained, slowly, I'm telling you, we got pulled over. There I was, sitting in a van full of dodgy gear. I thought, 'here we go again, been here done that, read the book, seen the bloody film, even got the flaming tee shirt. Revenue Men, Customs and bloody Excise.

Oh!

"It's all very well you saying Oh, anyway," he went on, "I told them the same story about the wedding, the 'stag do', they looked at my passport, they took one look at him, the driver, and he was booked, but they believed me; they actually believed me but confiscated everything from him, poor sod, I know how he felt; they let me go, they even wished me good luck. That bit was all right but, I tell you, the rest was a nightmare. I went to get a train home, my credit card was full, the ferry ticket had taken it right to the limit, it was refused. The whole episode, has been a nightmare, it's been like a low budget movie or an amateur bloody dramatics production."

Alberto said that, if it was a play, perhaps it would have a happy ending?

John said that he really didn't care but a moment later, he added, "Actually, I think I probably do, and you wouldn't know this, but Mary and I aren't married; she took my name but we never did do the business." He went on, I've just finished my shift, I need to take these trolleys in and then get off home and tidy up, Mary's coming round tonight. Now that I've decided to follow the straight and narrow, I think I do care. I lied about the wedding at the docks but, you know, the idea is beginning to grow on me."