

Road To Nowhere

by

R.J. Aylward

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PROLOGUE

Some time in the future

CLICK! Not for the first time had this minor irritation occurred in Professor Harding's rambles through the dense, tree packed forest. Not that it could be described as inconvenient. It is not an inconvenience to be inexplicably confronted with a sharp metallic click, not to the unobservant or to anyone experiencing it for the first time, not perhaps to somebody with less hearing ability. But in a highly-trained and acutely observant person such as Professor Harding, it was an annoyance, an unexpected phenomena, and having been repeated on several occasions, at various points of the compass, during his much loved rambles through these enchanting glades and rugged trails, he became more and more curious each time it happened.

He was a balding man, thin to a point of emaciation, not weak or ill or undernourished. Indeed, Professor Harding was more the wiry unbending type. He loved nothing more, outside his work at the Hall, than to walk many miles through the forest. On some occasions when Blakey was busy, he would borrow his cycle and ride gently for many hours, hardly noticing the time flying by, as his thoughts covered the many problems of his current teachings and lectures of which anthropology was foremost. On occasion the 'click' appeared to be coincidental with his stumbling over the root of a gnarled, giant oak tree. He was not unreasonably distressed or hurt, but curious, even dumbfounded, and as of late, slightly awe-struck. It did not interfere with his favourite occupation, or therapy as he once described it. He loved his solitude, his appreciation of many botanical species, his loneliness, and self-imposed isolation. A furry little creature disturbed in its daily duties elicited a squeak of fright or anger, in no way intruding on the introspection of Professor Harding. The squeak, the rustle of tiny creatures, the snap of a twig or a bird hovering, all these things were explicable, natural innocuous parts of the forest, to disturb a living creature would elicit response. To snap a twig, to stumble or to bump into branches may cause slight exasperation, a mild expletive.

In such dense undergrowth it was normal, and all part of his enjoyment in doing what he loved best. It caused little distraction and was part and parcel of his nature loving excursions.

And so it was, as he was approaching the last point of his ramble, once more to resume his present post as Deputy Science Master at Longrove Hall, that he lit his old Briar, puffed contentedly, and leaned resignedly against the giant oak, that he heard the distinct CLICK.

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Professor Albert Fieldhouse stomped aggressively into the portico of Longrove. He passed through the entrance hall into the lecture room and beyond. There was plush wood and dark leather furniture in every room and hallway and heavy brass ashtrays and cuspidors left over from past ancient residents era. The smell of furniture polish was everywhere, waxy and overbearing. There were also some very official and impressive fresh cut flowers but they made the atmosphere cold and funeral. The passageways were deserted and contained oil portraits of past occupants and thick carpeted stairways. Fieldhouse could never resist cocking a snook at these portraits and today was no exception. Two fingers were discreetly raised in the direction of each in turn as he marched past them.

Fieldhouse was one of those plodding, innocent looking and strangely quizzical people. He was big boned, an ex-rugby Blue, failed, ex-cricket captain, failed, an introverted world heavy weight champion, four minute miler, adventurer, and a romantic. He was a carefully concealed man of destiny, a dreamer, and a sceptic and in his own very private world - a failure. All these faults to which he privately conceded, did nothing whatsoever to hide from his friends and colleagues and his many admirers, that he was academically brilliant, brilliant, self-effacing and somehow unfulfilled.

At forty-one he felt that his full potential had not been fulfilled, he felt inadequate, his approach to his students was, with one or two exceptions, both impatient and intolerant. A spirit of adventure invaded him. What he considered his commitment to the mundane unsettled him and a feeling of waste was constantly invading his privacy. Heroes of boyhood, Drake, Raleigh, Scott, men of action from some forgotten corner of his mind were ever nudging him. His mind would run riot, imagination abounded, he became a man of daring, a man of honour, a national hero.

These frustrations captured in a brilliant mind led him to periods of

aggression, which he worked off by furiously running, running through the forest, the same forest that charmed his friend and colleague, Professor Alan Harding. Now as he charged past those damn portraits, his mind was fully occupied, not only with the waiting students, but more with the desire to investigate that damn CLICK!

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“Well Alan, I think with patience and persistence young Weston may well make it,” said Fieldhouse.

“He’s a joker and not a very serious student,” answered Harding, “but as you say, a little application and... well one cannot tell.”

He was discussing with Albert Fieldhouse their student, John Weston. He was probably the least qualified student in their faculty and by no means the least extroverted. He irreverently referred to Alan’s work as ‘hardy annuals’. His lack of respect for any academic of the stature of Harding or Fieldhouse belied his own potential, and often made him unpopular with the pseudo-sophisticates who became the butt of his often hilarious observations of their shortcomings. He was always untidy, but pleasantly so, and he had a clean, fresh-looking face. He had passed the pimply stage of extreme youth but his sense of the ridiculous had not caught up. At 5' 9" in height and slightly built, he had neither the build nor the desire for physical violence, as a result of which he had developed an inbred sense of self-preservation and could talk his way out of all but the most serious situations. But his humour had no bounds!

Generally competent in all subjects, he made no secret of his admiration of Harding and Fieldhouse, almost to the point of hero worship. And so it was that conversely his best practical and intellectual jokes were saved for them. His most prized possession was his wit, and though often shot down in flames by his peers, both Harding and Fieldhouse were fully aware of their positions with this twenty-year-old comic and even enjoyed the interplay, often indulging him to the point where his escapades bounced back to make a fool of himself. Many hilarious episodes resulted from these personality clashes and it was about this wayward student that their discussion had taken a turn.

“Do you know, Albert, he often follows me on my rambles,” said Alan.

“Oh?” Replied Albert, “he’s had a go at me once or twice, but I’m a bit too fast for him when I’m working Longrove out of my system.”

Unknown to both of them was the fact that John Weston had become inextricably involved with them. He was, the previous day, within ten yards of Alan Harding when the Professor lit his pipe and wandered off towards the Hall. He had observed the puzzled expression on Harding's face as he sauntered away, and John Weston had also heard a distinct metallic CLICK.

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"I am at no age to gallop frivolously into such escapades," grunted William H. Morgan, Dean of Longrove Hall. He was a severe, church going man, honest and upright. He was an evocative, no-nonsense, self-made man. He was not naturally gifted and not given to humour, but not averse to wry, caustic comment. He was ploddingly studious, and not an easy conversationalist.

He continued, "So, what you propose will be accomplished in easy stages and will in no way interfere with the administration of your various duties?"

Previously he had been involved with this character Weston. Furiously concealing his anger, he had listened to this lad expounding a theory of hidden treasure of sinister happenings and mysterious noises in the forest surrounding Longrove Hall. He had indulged him and finally, no longer able to contain his patience, he had pointed his long bony finger at Weston and roared:

"Weston is your name, isn't it?"

"Yes sir," John had replied. "John W. Weston, sir. The W is for Wallace, sir. John Wallace Weston, sir!"

"Mr. Weston is all I need," purred the Dean. "The John, the Wallace, and any other damn silly title you may possess is completely irrelevant to me. You are Weston, the one and only Weston, the damn silly, incompetent Weston. The Weston who now stands before me on this fourth occasion, accused of silly, boyish immature activities worthy only of a demented hyena. And now you talk to me about a damn CLICK!"

John allowed himself a slight blush, but little else in the way of self-effacement.

Dean Morgan was a little less severe with Alan Harding, but the subject matter had been curiously similar to that of Weston.

"I have a very sincere regard for you, Alan. I have worked, studied and discussed many controversial subjects with you. You are an eminent colleague and my probable successor. At a recent interview

with a scholar of whom you appear to regard with some attachment...” (Alan permitted himself a wry grin at this).

“...I formed the opinion,” the Dean went on, “that an alliance of some dubiousness had begun to develop surrounding an element to which I confess I am completely at a loss to understand. With anyone but yourself I would dismiss the whole affair but just recently this apparent phenomena has been reinforced by another equally eminent and responsible member of this college of so called advanced learning - one no less than Professor Fieldhouse. In view of this development, I shall reluctantly associate myself with this mystery until some reasonable explanation has been affected. So in your own time and with the assistance of whom you wish, including myself, you will fully investigate this mysterious, sinister CLICK!”

CHAPTER ONE

Present Day

Longrove Hall was an architecturally ugly sixteenth century building consisting of the main four-sided house with a turret at each corner. It has 116 rooms in all and for the past twenty odd years it has been deserted and run down. Situated in the centre of the forest, overhanging with vines, its unattended gardens scattered with broken and chipped statues of stone in various poses, the entrance guarded by pathetic-looking stone lions on either side of the portico. They did not resemble the kings of the jungle in anything but vague outline of that beast. Hidden from view by the vast forest, its once imposing grace was disintegrating as time and weather beat continuously at its grandeur, wearing and eroding it. It was forgotten by all, except its occupants, which consisted mainly of the forest creatures who had taken up residence when the last of the fast disappearing aristocrats deserted it with no regret. It was a relic of the past that some obscure philanthropist had wished upon the government of the day, who showed little interest in granting it any historic status.

Two figures stood before its once imposing entrance. The taller of the two held a sheaf of papers in his left hand, glancing first one way then the other, then to his papers. Little conversation was taking place, both wore concerned expressions, the smaller man was leaning heavily on an old, twisted walking stick, his briefcase lying at his feet unopened. He peered myopically at the papers in the other's hand. From time to time a large arthritic duck waddled across their path, looking at these strange figures, moments later continuing on its way, disinterested and aloof.

The tall man took a large briar from his pocket, tamped it down, lit up and blew a cloud of dense smoke into the fetid air.

"Well," he spoke with a marked Scottish accent, "If it's what the others agree to, and it stands up to our assessment, then I suppose it's viable. What say yee, bonny lad?"

The small man nodded perfunctorily.

“What we need more than anything else is decision. Fast conclusive decision, and since ours is the final assessment, it is our responsibility. If we agree, I feel that all systems are go. We are making the last observation. I do in fact have reservations, but not irrevocable ones. I do think this is possible.”

“I agree,” responded the tall man. “A huge project, as I understand it.”

There was a slight pause and a feeling of commitment between the two.

“Then it’s agreed,” said the Scotsman.

“Agreed!” riposted his colleague.

They picked up their belongings and made their way carefully back out through the forest.

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“...The effect we need is helpless confusion, a feeling like a light being turned on and off, darkness and light at our own will, things being dangerous that weren’t supposed to be dangerous. More important there has to be no way to chart any of its known patterns. We must not have moral reactions anymore. I do feel sometimes a grand icy compassion, but just on isolated occasions...”

The speaker looked down to his notes on the walnut desk behind which he stood. There were no comments as yet. His audience was a motley collection of about thirty people all of differing sizes, shapes and types. They were attentive and absorbed by his enthusiasm.

“The planning,” he continued, having scanned his listeners for any reaction, “is usually quite interesting. Getting close to the final time is interesting but the climax is often anti-climax and not as fulfilling as some of us might envisage.”

He paused to allow his words to sink in - still no reaction. The odd cough, the throat clearing, a murmur here, a whisper there. The smoke-filled air seemed tense and expectant, the feeling that something was to follow this preamble.

“At the termination of this meeting of our full organisation we will no longer meet at this place.”

He paused for effect, got none, and continued:

“Longrove Hall is now nearly completed, and our next full meeting will be held at that location. As you all know, we are shortly to embark upon our greatest undertaking - probably our last - because as a project, this is vast in the extreme. I have briefly outlined a few moral problems

and intimated at the great task that lies before us. We have been in existence for many years. Our resources are unlimited. Our mutual regard has never been in question. We have achieved many goals, unannounced and in strict privacy. Of course, some have benefited from our activities. We all hold high rank in our society and are virtually untouchable...”

His pause at this point was rather longer. There was a fidget and a mumble, a shuffling of feet, a repositioning of attitude.

“Gentlemen, for this project we must, we require, we...” he emphasised with a long glare, “...have to increase our number.”

The expected uproar did not materialise. Great, he thought. They understand, they are all on the same wavelength. There was a time when he had doubts about one or two of them but the recent events seemed to have removed many of their doubts.

“I’d like a show of hands from those who disagree.”

One hand wavered, then settled.

“Motion carried!” said the speaker.

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Longrove Hall from the outside seemed to have change little. A broad driveway had appeared, a clearing had been made around the perimeter of the building. Fresh concrete had been added to some of the sagging stonework. The great oaken doors had been re-hung and the steps up to the portico had been taken away completely and replaced with some plasticised material. There was a presence of telephone wires and cables. Apart from that, and an absence of animal life, it was the only obvious change outside. But inside, a full years work was justified by the transformation. Carpenters, decorators, cabinetmakers, joiners, painters, all trades represented on staggered hours, piecework with overtime and bonuses, had produced results. Some of the rooms had been knocked down altogether to make way for larger spaces such as lecture halls and dining rooms. A gymnasium had appeared. It all had the air of newness. The smell of fresh paint and varnish lingered. Portraits of past occupants had been cleaned and hung. New leather armchairs, lounge suites, thick carpets, study rooms, committee rooms and even a projector room had been installed. The whole now looked more like a private school than a useless old relic of past glories and was destined to become a useful acquisition of future glories.

Alf Steadman, electrician; John Alders, who surveyed the whole

operation; and a slightly mysterious character named Tony Jones who appeared to be just about everywhere during the conversion, were the only persons left. When the last spade, saw, concrete mixer and paintbrush had been removed, they took up residence at Longrove. They lived in comfort, cooked for themselves and slept, worked and generally kept house. There was always plenty to occupy Tony and Alf as the electric and water systems were having teething troubles. John Alders was generally found to be poring over drawings, blueprints, calculations and projected slides of the surrounding forest. On several occasions, people appeared with special passes and stopped for a few days. They were usually cleared and checked by Tony and they brought with them an array of instrumentation. They often wandered through the forest, making notes. Then as abruptly as they arrived, they would depart. Alf, Tony and John were becoming fast friends, as they lived in each other's pockets. Evening times would be spent watching one of the television sets or playing cards. There was a full-sized snooker room that took up much of their leisure hours, and draughts. Tony Jones loved draughts. He could play good games of chess and backgammon, but draughts - he loved playing draughts.

"Longrove Hall?" Alf Steadman said into the mouthpiece. The telephone had interrupted him just as he had finished measuring the kitchen for installation.

A disembodied voice asked: "Is that John Alders?"

"No, Steadman here. Would you like to speak to John?"

"No, no. I just thought it sounded like Alders. It's Rupert here."

"Oh, Rupert, yes. Anything I can do?" asked Alf.

"Yes, I want you to get it all together tonight. Big meeting. Boardroom set up, recorders on, tables and chairs for twenty-five or thirty. We should start arriving about 19.00 hours. Have you got that?"

"Yes sir," replied Alf.

"Put Tony on will you, please." Interrupted Rupert.

"Just a moment, sir."

Alf went in search of Tony, but after four or five minutes without result, he returned to the phone.

"Sorry sir," said Alf. "I think he may be out in the forest. Can I give him a message?"

"No, Steadman," replied Rupert. "Just find him and tell him to call me soonest."

Alf didn't reply because the phone went instantly dead. Surly bastard, thought Alf, and went in search of Tony. Funny, he thought, Rupert phones us sometimes, but when it comes to ringing back, Tony

seems to be the only one who knows the number. I couldn't ring him, thought Alf. I don't even know where he is!

It was over an hour before he finally ran into Tony out in the forest. Well, he didn't run into him, Tony just appeared from behind a huge oak tree.

"What is it, Alf?"

"Oh, there you are," replied Alf, "Rupert rang. There's a meeting on tonight. He wants you to buzz him, soonest he said."

"What time is the meeting?" Asked Tony, casually.

"Arriving about seven o'clock, he said."

"Okay Alf. I'll see to it. Coming?"

They sauntered back to Longrove. Tony seemed to be in no hurry. Cool customer, thought Alf. Bloody ice cold.

Entering the building, Tony said: "It's my turn to do the tea, isn't it?"

"Yes!" chorused Alf and John, who had just joined them.

"Okay. How's beef and two veg sound?"

"Lovely," they said. "Don't burn the potatoes though."

Tony grinned and pointed to the microwave oven, surrounded by a selection of twenty-three different dishes.

"It won't let me, will it?" He said laughing. "See you presently."

He went off in the direction of his room. Alf packed away his gear and accompanied John to the bathroom. They never discussed their private lives - why they were here - where they had been. It had become an unwritten law. Today was today, so no comment passed about Tony's phone call. They washed and dried themselves and came back to the kitchen. A few moments later Tony joined them.

"Those that are coming tonight maybe staying over, so I suppose we'd better check the bedrooms after tea. Then maybe a quick game of draughts, John?"

"Toss you, draughts or snooker?"

"Okay," said Tony, opening the microwave. "Tails."

"Tails," said John. "Damn."

It was well past 7.30 when the first of the guests arrived. A balding, little man appeared first, shabby and untidy. His car reflected him in that it was also unwashed. Elderly and shabby, he parked his shabby car shabbily, and emerged in a shabby overcoat and shuffled shabbily to the open door, where he was greeted by an impeccably dressed John Alders.

"Good evening sir. May I take your coat?" offered John.

Professor Hershey shrugged out of his shabby overcoat. "Thank you," he said, but clung desperately to his briefcase.

John directed him to the boardroom.

"If you'll help yourself sir, drinks are on the left hand cabinet. Your seat is marked."

Hershey did not avail himself of the drinks cabinet. He sought his name at the table, sat down heavily and opened his briefcase.

One by one they came to Longrove, some recognisable by their public acclaim, some distinguished in one field or another. All somehow furtive, none had the stance of open-handedness. They did not shrink or steal in covertly but there was an air of secrecy about each, as they entered the building. All drove themselves, and all came alone. One or two took drinks and seated themselves at their appointed places. Each seemed to be in a state of readiness and anticipation, in some one could see scepticism but twenty-eight highly respectable men arrived, including Rupert, and by 8.30 the boardroom was packed. As Rupert set himself up on the raised dais at the front of the boardroom, an expectant hush descended over the room.

"Gentlemen," he began, "First may I thank you all for your prompt response to my command for your attendance at this gathering. I promise not to waste your time, it is a commodity at present in very short supply. I must tell you; however, that you are as of this moment, confined to this building as befits the regulations laid down upon your acceptance into this community. Not all of you are personally known to each other but your individual accomplishments will be instantly recognisable and therefore will assist you in becoming acquainted over commitments, which will be demanded of you at the highest levels. Your names and titles, though very well known to each other, will not at any time be referred to, either in the minutes, conversations, orders, requests, discussions or any of the many controversies which will no doubt be pursued as soon as the product of our meeting is made fully conversant to you..."

Rupert paused to take a sip of something clear in a glass tumbler. No one spoke each deep in his own thoughts.

He continued: "In your various fields, you are all pre-eminent. When the opening debate is in progress you will no doubt be astonished and disbelieving but I must ask you for restraint, impartiality and objectivity. I must ask you to curb your natural curiosity and probable incredulity until the entire Project is clearly defined to you. When that initial object has been achieved we will deal separately with all the protests and manifestations of conscience. We will discuss, debate, argue. We will

offer alternatives, we will deal with all the pros and cons. We will become very controversial, hot-blooded, we may well lose temporary control of our emotions. Feelings will run high. Mental turmoil will prevail. Our senses will be mixed and varied and many strong feelings will be expressed.”

Once more he reached for his drink, carefully surveying all those present. As he did so he noted their expressions, searching for fear or faltering. All were engrossed and expressionless. He sipped from the glass, as did one or two of his audience from theirs, and continued.

“But gentlemen, let it be crystal clear at the outset that under the penalties of your clearly defined contracts, this building will be your very life until such time as we agree upon our course of action. We will not only agree, we will put our wholehearted enthusiasm into it. We will eventually, and to everyone’s agreement, make universal decisions. You will work with each other on all intellectual levels. You will assist, converse, adjust, alternate, study and query each other, but above all else, when this seminar is complete, you will be unequivocally committed to the course of action for which you have been brought together and one way or another this course of action, which is already half formed, will be resolved. When each one of you has satisfied each other of the plausibility of the eventual decision, a final meeting will be arranged and our operation takes shape. That, gentlemen, is what I had to say to you, and I wish us all the luck in the world. For it is the world for which we may well be planning.”

Rupert sat down amidst a deafening silence that lasted a full minute before one voice, then another, and another joined in. Soon the buzz of conversation became animated. Somebody, dressed in a casual jacket and slacks, sporting a shock of red hair, rose from his chair and addressing himself to no-one in particular, echoed the immediate concern of the entire company:

“So let’s have an agenda.” He said.

Darcy was obviously going to be the problem. Rupert was fully aware of his ambitions, which, outside the Organisation, appeared to be flourishing. Nonetheless, as a member, he must be consulted for he had a hell of a lot of political expertise and pull. However, it seemed that his allegiance was being overtaken by his meteoric rise to high office. This was taken into account, and it would develop at the special meeting, and his attitude would be noted.

At the end of the meeting an anonymous but recognisable courier delivered despatches, shrouded in secrecy, and deliberately enigmatic. There was no heading, no addresses. Rupert read each one aloud:

“SENSITIVE.

Received instructions. No problem at this stage. I would prefer to maintain my present status but will be guided by a full discussion at board level. Assuring you of my attendance as advised.

LT.

Karpov is on the rampage. Thought you may like to be advised before our meeting. I will put you in the picture upon arrival.

TT.

No comment on infiltration at this moment but eastern bloc - karpov probably will have to be on the agenda. See you soon.

JS.

Forty five billion pounds is not an inconsiderable amount of money, if you will allow me to make an observation. Of course, apart from the city financiers and bankers, with whom I have many arrangements and on whom I can rely very heavily. It seems at this point that public funding is infinitely more preferable in the circumstances. Of course in the interest of our organisation and my commitments to it, it shall be done. In fact, I have already laid the groundwork to make such a sum justifiable in the public interest and some of our higher echelon members will ensure excellent cover for the transfer.

I would like to point out however, that although in its infancy, the general scenario does at this point seem to have a flaw which I feel would be well pointed out in advance of our next meeting. As I understand it an accident will occur on a large scale. Even given ‘nine day wonder’ syndrome it obviously would be historically recorded.

Subsequent events would inevitably be linked to this event, assuming that the master plan is as spectacular as I anticipate. Then, any party concerned or committed to its failure would not be unaware of the coincidence of the accident. The location would surely come under extremely strict surveillance from the curious, to the out and out enemy.

I make this point on the assumption that an alternative may be considered.

I am in accord with your present needs and intend to carry out your instructions forthwith. I also look forward to delivering into your hand the required funding, providing our next meeting takes

place before the coming eight days. I am sir, respectfully, BG.

Rupert was going to stop reading the letters out, but everyone seemed engrossed so he continued:

“In looking at the initial stages of what one can only describe as staggering in its concept, and in pursuing the unbelievable script to its penultimate conclusion, you will I hope, excuse me when I reject out of hand at least fifty per cent of its contents. In fact at this stage of fourth reading I cannot comprehend entirely that there exists any realism either in its content or its suggestion that possibilities of further discussion would be of any constructive use.

As a loyal and respected member of the organisation I shall be in attendance at our next meeting. I will provide your figures and drawings but I must state respectfully that at this stage I do not think that I will be of any constructive use in this mind boggling venture. Respectfully, BH.

What are you going to do, blow up the world? Seriously, I do not anticipate any difficulty, but may need a small donation somewhere in the region of twenty thousand pounds. If so I will pick it up at the usual place. Hope to see you soon. Bye for now, S.M..

After Rupert had finished reading them out, he scanned his audience for reaction. There was an immediate response from Darcy.

“Absolutely not,” reiterated Darcy. “You should never have involved a person such as myself in something as desperate and final as this. While I appreciate audacity and have involved myself on occasions, I could never agree to this.”

A nervous gesture of annoyance manifested itself in the manner in which he flipped invisible dust from his coat lapels. There was an embarrassing pause, then Darcy continued:

“The whole idea, both in concept and size is ludicrous. I agree,” he said in his most winning way, “with many of your ideas, and while I make no objections to the many challenges on our way of life and the necessity to preserve it, the whole idea of insulation on such a scale appals me, and is virtually impossible to achieve.” He paused, then went on, uninterrupted: “No secret establishment on this scale could succeed. It is doomed to failure even at the outset. In this country we

need fifty people to sign for a window box - anything approaching the size of this Project could not be covered up. Questions will be asked, for which I do not feel adequate to supply answers, even to a public as gullible as we have. One slip and my career would be in ruins. No gentlemen. I want you to leave my office out of this one. That is my last word on the subject!"

Emphatic thought Rupert, sitting two tables away.

Of the other occupants in the library one got up to go to the toilet, two lit cigarettes, the remainder, consisting of high-ranking iron-willed industrialists and economists, looked enquiringly to where Rupert sat. He looked calm, impassive, resigned.

"Very well, Darcy. We will have to make some changes," sighed Rupert. "If you would like to work on it privately and submit any alternatives we could examine them at our next meeting."

Darcy could never know that all opposition to the plan had been overcome, weak links never consulted. Only Darcy, in his high government position could undermine two years of planning, sweat, spending, building, acquiescence, debate, of secrecy. Only Darcy could be the instrument of failure. Ironically he was in any event, only useful for his high office.

As the group milled around the library floor, talking in hushed tones, making their farewells, Darcy continued to talk among them appeasingly, and was one of the last to leave.

"Sorry old boy," he said to Rupert. "I suppose you're disappointed?"

"A little," replied Rupert.

Kevin Darcy, Minister for Home Affairs, well respected and ambitious, was that night involved in a fatal accident on the motorway north of London.

He was dead on arrival at a Hammersmith hospital.

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