

## *Chapter 1*

### Sunday 6th December 1992

The blue Rover 820 saloon turned down the short driveway before passing through a set of tall metal gates which fronted a private estate. A prominent sign, affixed to one of the brick pillars, read; ‘Pelham Hall. No public access. Strictly private.’ Mixed amongst the lofty poplars lining the drive were smaller trees, various tall bushes, and shrubs. The purpose of the well-planned planting was to mask the grounds from prying eyes. After a distance of just over half a mile the avenue of greenery fanned out on both sides and encircled the rear of the main house. The back of its three stories looked down upon a spacious parking area, in the middle of which sat a circular pond. The Rover drew into a vacant spot next to several other cars, including a mixture of off-road vehicles and a luxurious black BMW saloon. The driver locked the car and made his way along the hedge bordered path to the front of the house.

Sited north of Harrogate, Pelham Hall had forty rooms ranged over three floors and extensive cellars. Originally set in over five hundred acres of private grounds, it had been built in Victorian times for a wealthy Leeds mill owner and looked out over an impressive vista. The neatly kept gardens fell away to lawns, and eventually trees, before rising up into the low distant hills. Elements of the landscape were hidden by further groupings of tall trees, but behind them, further towards the horizon, sat the majestic Yorkshire Dales.

Anthony Scott-Wade stopped briefly at the foot of the steps leading up to the main entrance doors. He gazed at the view as the first hint of low cloud from the Pennines brought splashes of rain on a typically cold winter’s afternoon. Out of formal uniform, the

Chief Constable of the North Yorkshire police force felt more at ease in a casual suit and tie. For such a high ranking officer he was short, a little over five feet six, and several pounds overweight. Only in his late forties, his hair had greyed prematurely; giving the air of an older man, and this impression was added to by a neatly-trimmed beard. As he took in the splendours of the estate he noticed, on the lower lawn, a Bell Jet Ranger helicopter.

‘Yes,’ he thought to himself, as he surveyed the house and its associated trappings. ‘Storn certainly does alright for himself.’ This seemed to be the case whether events went in his favour or not. But, then again, his underlings always saw to it he was kept happy. Again he looked out towards the Dales, rapidly being cloaked by the misty fall of approaching rain. It was just after three-thirty. He was not late, he knew better than to even think of being that, but was the last to arrive. Knowing the gloom of evening would soon settle he was glad at least to be staying the night.

The doors at the top of the steps were open and he entered the well lit reception area. An orderly row of lamps on the walls of the cavernous entrance hall illuminated the way and cast light upon the various landscape paintings and portraits adorning them. At the end of the carpeted hallway stood a highly polished staircase leading up to a gallery landing and the first floor. Just inside, standing next to a displayed suit of armour, a dark suited man closed the door behind Scott-Wade. The muscular built man was one of Storn’s personal guards, Payne. There were only two trusted men, both ex-military, trained killers, whom Storn let chauffeur him and stay in his presence. Payne said nothing as Scott-Wade entered the house, only replying in kind to the curt nod of the head he had received from him. Hardly pausing he handed the guard the keys to his Rover.

“There’s a case in the boot. See to it that it reaches my room.”

Payne nodded. “It’ll be done.”

Scott-Wade adjusted his tie and ran his fingers back through his hair. He occupied a privileged position in the organisation and knew the value of appearing to be in control of every aspect of his affairs. Neatness was a rule which he judged everyone he met by, it meant they were in control. Untidy people were not to be trusted.

The dining room occupied most of the east side of the ground floor and the centrepiece of it, a long, exquisitely-polished table, had been set for thirteen diners. A thick pile carpet made the floor feel luxurious underfoot while an ornate Louis XIV crystal chandelier cast delicate light all around. There were eleven people inside, gathered in small groups, and all turned to look when Scott-Wade entered. A smartly-dressed young woman sprang to his side offering him a drink from a silver tray. He readily accepted and made his way over to the closest group of four. The nearest was a woman, five feet ten tall, in a tight black dress which ended at her knees, with black nylons and matching high-heeled strapped sandals. She was slender in build, in her late thirties, and had long raven coloured hair brushed loosely down her back. The dress showed a well-proportioned figure and Scott-Wade had more than a passing fancy for her. Myra Stanford rolled a sherry glass between her palms, displaying the scarlet painted nails adorning her fingertips. Along with her now deceased husband, Richard, she had been deeply involved with Storn's failed venture at Kirkham, but had survived his wrath. Instead she had strengthened her relatively high ranking in the organisation. Despite her husband's failure a few weeks earlier, a price he had paid for with his own life at Storn's hands, she had become Storn's closest advisor. Intelligent, but equally as cold and calculating, Myra was exceptional at what she did.

Beside her, involved in some seemingly deep conversation, was Philip Carter. Scott-Wade knew the man was a detective constable and considered to be a shining light in the organisation. Carter stood six feet tall, but was not heavily built; the light blue suit he wore fitted him well, making it plain to see he took time over his appearance to make the right impression. His face was thin and clean shaven, passing for a man in his twenties rather than his true age of thirty-two. His dark brown hair was tightly trimmed in a military fashion, due to Storn's influence. Most of the younger men within the organisation worshipped Storn and it showed in their copying of his choice of hairstyle. Carter was animatedly explaining something to both Myra and the other man in the group. The second man stood slightly back from them and Scott-Wade knew him only by

his first name, Harry. If he had a surname nobody knew it and that was the way it had always been. He was short, with large hands, a wide girth, and wore an ill-fitting grey suit. Despite his appearance Harry was perhaps the most important man in the room, because he was the accountant. As such he was solely responsible for laundering the entire monetary input of the organisation. This included keeping records of all the illegal as well as legal dealings they undertook. Also he was the only one amongst them who had a complete overview of every strata of Storn's empire. Scott-Wade knew some of it and was privileged to be in the top echelon. It brought with it certain perks as well as the opportunity to work with Storn on his far reaching projects. Below their level sat several layers of organised crime including fraud, drugs, prostitution, and arms dealing. Those below knew nothing of those above, for good reason, and had to earn the right to move up. The layer beneath though was important as it carried its weight of professional people who made Storn's schemes function. Their evil was controlled and fed by him, purely to keep them loyal and subservient.

The last person in the small group Scott-Wade thought looked oddly out of place. But then again he believed she always had. The girl was Persephone, Myra's daughter, and she had just turned sixteen. It had been her seeming closeness of spirit to the man who had wreaked havoc at Kirkham that had seen her placed under Storn's personal care. Scott-Wade felt that she existed among them in the form of an unpredictable danger. She was a follower who did not belong and someone he vowed to keep a watchful eye on. If there was ever to be a traitor in the camp he knew exactly where to go to first.

Persephone stared blankly at the floor whilst nursing a tall glass of orange juice, appearing to take little notice of the conversation next to her. Like her mother she wore black, a tight-fitting mini-dress that accentuated her youthful curves and trim figure. A pair of stiletto-heeled shoes took her height to almost six feet, but she kept her legs bare. Her ash-blonde hair had been severely cut back in a style almost as short as the men's and it showed off her childlike, attractive face. She wore little makeup and did not need to as her jade-green eyes were the first thing most men spotted.

“Hello Tony,” Myra greeted, cutting Carter off in mid-conversation as Scott-Wade joined them. “Looking forward to a late lunch?”

“My dear Myra,” he replied, pecking her on the cheek. “You look well. Call this a late lunch? Surely it’s early dinner?”

“Take this meal as you find it. Storn’ll eat when it pleases him.”

Beside her Carter held out his hand, which Scott-Wade shook firmly.

“Philip, it’s good to see you again.”

“And you too, Sir.”

He waved dismissively. “No ‘Sir’, Tony will suffice. It’s good to see you’ve earned a place here with us.”

“I only hope my input will please our Master and serve us well.”

Scott-Wade then turned to Harry and shook his hand, briefly. As always it was limp and felt clammy.

“My dear Chief Constable,” Harry began, in an effeminate tone. “How pleasing it was to see your much publicised promotion coming through at last.”

“It was pleasing for me too.”

“So it should be, my dear fellow, it didn’t come cheap.”

He smiled, knowing exactly what was meant. “I’m sure you’ll get value for money.”

“I do hope so,” Harry quickly countered.

Further conversation was interrupted by a member of the staff ringing a small bell.

“If you’d kindly take your seats, we’re about to serve,”

With an unspoken understanding of their various positions of seniority, they took places at the lavishly set dining table. The honour of being on the right of Storn went to Scott-Wade, with Myra opposite. Beside him sat Harry, while Persephone had been elevated from never being present before to a position next to her mother. The other eight, including Carter, were ranged either side towards the bottom. The burble of chatter soon began to rise again as Scott-Wade cast an eye down the table. At the very end sat a middle aged, dark skinned woman. She was not tall, but had a build

which showed she took care of her fitness. Always immaculately dressed, he had seen her before at such gatherings, but, like the others, he had never been introduced. No one seemed to know her first name, not even Harry. When spoken to she said little, or nothing, preferring instead to listen to their conversations. When she did speak it was in a low voice which had led to the others labelling her 'mumbles.' She was Storn's trouble-shooter, but off-limits. Whenever he had posed questions to him about her they had been dismissed without an answer. His sideways study of her, and the chatter at the table, was ended when the main door opened. As one the dozen arose from their seats as a mark of respect, and in many of them also a measure of fear, for the daunting individual who strode casually into the room.