

# Opening Extract from

# Perdition's Daughter: A Dan Temple Adventure

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#### ONE

"Brute force, no matter how strongly applied, can never subdue the basic human desire for freedom." Dalai Lama.

It was the usual weekday morning; chaotic. Jennifer Mead dashed from bathroom to bedroom to kitchen, a whirlwind of youthful activity. It was the first day back at college following the autumn half-term break and her A-level mocks beckoned. Hurriedly, she crunched a mouthful of butter smothered toast and gulped down her tea. Pulled her striped, brightly coloured sweater on over her T-shirt, wrapped her scarf around her neck, threw her books in her bag and bounced out of the door.

'Bye, Mum,' she shouted as the door slammed behind her.

Briskly, she walked down the broad suburban avenue, as she had done every term day for the last year. The weather was bright and cool and the northerly breeze felt distinctly chilled as it blew across her face and small expanse of exposed midriff.

Switching on her iPod, she flicked through to her latest favourite album and turned up the volume. Cocooned in her thoughts and music, the chill of the autumn morning dissolved around her.

The men watched her go.

The van cruised anonymously along the avenue, the neatly stencilled lettering on its white side panels proclaiming the skills, trustworthiness and contact details of the local building and house maintenance services on offer. The two men looked at each other, smirking as they watched the girl. Her firm, rounded bottom swayed provocatively in her tight, sprayed-on jeans as she walked quickly along the pavement, oblivious to her surroundings.

The van slowed and pulled in close behind.

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The man at the bus stop looked up, his interest and imagination captivated by the young girl's attractive face and curvy figure, accentuated by her low-cut hipster jeans and tight, colourful sweater. Her wavy long blond hair flowed behind her on the fresh morning breeze and her cheeks glowed pink in the crisp autumn air. He watched appreciatively as she drew level with him, kicking her way through the autumnal carpet of brown and gold leaves on the opposite side of the road. Her perfectly formed

teenage body made a warming, welcome distraction to his otherwise cold and uneventful wait. The girl glanced over as she always did, smiling self-consciously, seemingly appreciative of his admiring looks, then slightly, almost teasingly, accentuated the sway of her hips.

The van crawled slowly by, momentarily blocking his view.

The girl walked on.

He waited, eager to catch one last glimpse of the girl before she turned out of the avenue and out of his view for another day.

Suddenly, the van accelerated.

The man's eyes and brain disconnected, momentarily unable to comprehend the visual deception.

The girl was there.

The van passed slowly.

Then she was gone, vanishing like a beautiful apparition.

He stared at the empty pavement. He looked left, to the rear of the van, then back to the void where the girl should have been. The space now filled by swirling leaves which hung in the air, then floated gently, innocently to the ground.

His eyes knew what they had witnessed, but his mind delayed the connection. He stood paralysed, temporarily frozen, locked in a cold, still and silent vacuum, waiting for the world to restart.

A girl's scream jarred his senses. His mind reconnected with full sound and vision. Comprehension returned. He reached into his pocket, grabbed his mobile phone and dialled 999.

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The music ended abruptly as Jennifer Mead's feet involuntarily left the pavement and her legs walked briefly in the air, leaving a flurry of scattered leaves dancing on the breeze.

She kicked and struggled, scratched and bit as rough hands gripped her, firmly pinning her to the cold, harsh metal floor of the van.

She saw the needle, stared wide-eyed, then screamed an ear-piercing, panic-stricken scream. Icy terror and adrenalin raged through her body and she fought with all the strength and courage she could find.

The needle scratched painfully into her arm.

Her head swirled and her vision blurred as the drugs rushed her to dark unconsciousness.

The van drove on, turned out of the avenue and melted innocuously into the rush-hour traffic.

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The young couple made love slowly, their bodies intertwined, each totally absorbed in the other. Every look, every touch, every caress, responded to with increasing desire as their passion grew and their body heat warmed the chill of the morning.

The girl spread her legs wide, then lifted them, wrapping them around her lover. Her pelvis moved in rhythm with his increasingly urgent thrusts and she moaned softly, her orgasm building. The young man pushed himself up on his arms, staring lovingly in to her glistening, soft brown eyes. Unable to hold his rapidly approaching climax, he threw back his head, thrusting deeper and harder until they climaxed together in strong pulsating waves of all-consuming passion. They lay wrapped together, still and silent, hearing nothing but the sound of their breathing, enveloped in the warm afterglow of their love.

The sound of a slow, derisive hand clap from their uninvited audience tore through their warm, contented world.

Startled, Elizabeth Mead looked across to the open bedroom door, her eyes opening wide as uncomprehendingly she gasped with fear – she screamed.

Her boyfriend leapt naked from the bed. Fit, strong and agile, he moved quickly; no thought of asking questions, no concerns for his own safety.

Elizabeth looked on, transfixed and frightened. The two men seemed undaunted as her boyfriend sprang from the bed and launched himself across the small bedroom. Time and motion slowed as in unison the men raised their arms and silently fired.

Her boyfriend's forward momentum ended as abruptly as it began. Hit by the invisible, mid-air projectiles, his body violently recoiled back onto the bed with two ragged, bloody holes puncturing the centre of his chest.

Elizabeth's screams stuck in her throat; her initial fear savagely replaced by total, mind-numbing terror.

The two men approached the bed and tore the sheets from her naked body.

Instinctively, she fought, thrashing her arms and legs, kicking and punching in vain, but the strength in her small, slender frame was no match for the powerful hands and arms pinning her to the mattress.

A huge, rough paw of a hand clamped harshly over her mouth.

A needle stabbed sharply into her buttock.

The room span.

Her vision blurred.

Her eyes fluttered and closed.

Muted sounds rushed through her ears.

Her terror subsided and vanished, replaced by

silence and the cold hard blackness of complete unconsciousness.

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'It's done,' said the man sombrely, walking toward the desk in the small, dimly-lit room.

Zoran Durakovic momentarily looked up from his desk, then nodded once; his pale-grey eyes, as cold and hard as steel, conveyed no emotion.

'Are you certain, Jan?'

'Positive. They're on their way.'

'Any problems?'

'None.'

'Excellent,' Durakovic replied, reaching for the telephone.

## TWO

The telephone on Richard Mead's desk rang at exactly 9:00am. It was nothing unusual – he was a busy man; his services were always in demand. Since retiring from the SAS to start his security consultancy business, his telephone had been ringing constantly. He waited a few moments before he answered, then pressed the record button and lifted the receiver, ensuring, as always, that he had a pen and pad at the ready.

'Richard Mead,' he stated confidently.

He was greeted by a lengthy pause and listened intently to the static silence.

'Richard Mead,' he stated again.

'Good morning, Colonel Mead,' replied the heavily accented voice.

'Good morning,' Mead acknowledged in a polite, business-like fashion. 'How may I help you?'

'You know what it is I want, Colonel. You know there is only one way in which you can help me.'

'I'm sorry, I don't understand. Do you wish to discuss my business services?'

'In a manner of speaking. But first I want you to listen.' The words were delivered simply – the voice hard and edgy.

'I don't mean to be rude, but I do have a nine o'clock appointment. Perhaps I could take your details and get back to you?'

'You don't need my details, Colonel. Your appointment *is* with me.'

'I'm sorry, who is this?' Mead asked, already irritated with the unnecessarily cryptic conversation.

'Do you not recognise my voice, Colonel? Surely you haven't forgotten me already? After all, you put so much time and effort in to pursuing and capturing me –' the man paused for a moment. 'We never did finish our last conversation, Colonel. We still have many things to discuss, you and I,' the voice stated, firm and insistent.

Richard Mead slumped back in to his chair. The voice registered and alarm bells sounded like claxons in his head.

'Durakovic,' he responded quietly.

'Well done, Colonel. You see, you do remember.'

'What do you want?'

'I already have what I want, or should I say, who.'

It was a cold statement, laced with callous, malicious intent.

'You didn't honestly think I would let the matter rest – let our business go unresolved – did you, Colonel? It is time for you to pay. There is no get-out clause, Colonel Mead, not in this relationship.' Durakovic venomously spat down the phone.

'I cannot help you, if you will not help me, Colonel.'

Richard Mead switched off the voice recorder, gathered his senses and his composure and listened carefully, waiting for the punch line.

'What do you want?' he asked again.

'Insurance, or more accurately an incentive –' Durakovic paused again, leaving a long, drawn-out silence. 'Have you seen your daughters lately?' he asked icily.

The words ominously bore down in Richard Mead's mind; the reality and purpose of the question registered immediately.

'If you hurt them, I'm going to hunt you down and kill you with my bare hands.'

Durakovic laughed.

'Save your theatrical words, Colonel. You're a smart man – I am sure you have already switched off the voice recorder.'

'I mean it, Durakovic; I'm going to find you and I'm going to kill you.'

'If only it were that easy, Colonel. You know what you need to do. Your daughters are my insurance. Their only hope of redemption rests with you. Fail and your life, and theirs, will be over. You will suffer the never-ending pain and torment that I have suffered, and your children will suffer with you. However, we are both business men, despite what has happened between us – so, please, Colonel, do we have agreement?'

'I've told you, I can't do it.'

'Maybe not, Colonel, but I am sure you know someone – can arrange for someone who can. You can do that, can't you, Colonel?'

Richard Mead closed his eyes.

'Yes,' he replied, his voice no more than a harsh whisper.

'Good, then we have an agreement?'

The pressure of another protracted silence felt long and heavy. Thoughts and options span through Mead's mind; there was no choice. He cleared his throat.

'Yes,' he confirmed, reluctantly forcing out the solitary word through gritted teeth.

'Excellent. Switch on the voice recorder, Colonel; let me help you get started.'

Richard Mead sat forward.

'Go on,' he said, pressing the button.

Durakovic continued. 'I'm going to bring you

into my world now, Colonel. There are matters you and I need to conclude. Until that is done, you're going to live in hell. I just wanted you to know what was going to happen to your precious girls. You know what I do, don't you, Colonel? What goes on here? I am the door to the white slave trade; you understand what will be done, what their lives will be like, don't you? I am going to make a gift of your daughters. They will be forced into sexual slavery, into a world of abuse, torment and degradation, and I will revel in every agonising moment. Who knows, I might even take some pleasure with them myself. More satisfying, though, will be the knowledge that there is nothing in your power or control that you can do about it. If you come for them, they will be killed. If you contact the police or any other law enforcement agency, they will be killed. Your daughters will be in your nightmares. You will be together in hell. They will be perdition's daughters.'

The phone went dead and Richard Mead's life plunged into purgatory.

## **THREE**

The call came at 2:00am; the sound of the telephone was loud and harsh in the cold silence of the night. By 2:30am, Daniel Temple was racing through narrow country roads, his battered green Land Rover power sliding through bends and galloping down straights. The big V8 engine roared as it accelerated, sending rain and mud spitting from the tyres as Daniel expertly pushed the vehicle to its limits, careering at breakneck speed down the country lanes, then pushing hard and fast along the near empty motorway.

Daniel skidded to a stop outside Richard Mead's house in the leafy avenues of Royal Tunbridge Wells. It was 5:00am.

Daniel's philosophy was as straightforward and honest as the man himself. If someone you consider a friend calls for help, you respond, no questions asked. Richard Mead's call had been one of desperation. Daniel didn't need to ask – it was simple deduction. Anyone who calls at 2:00am is usually one of three things – mad, drunk or desperate. Daniel knew Richard very well. He was Daniel's friend, business partner and ex-Commanding Officer. SAS trained, shrewd, experienced and as good as they came. The call could mean only one thing: trouble, desperate trouble.

Daniel rang the doorbell and waited in the cool dark of the autumnal morning. Richard Mead answered the door. A usually tall, strong and athletic figure, he looked stooped, tired and shaken. Worse – he looked afraid. Daniel didn't waste time with small talk; he wasn't the type.

'What's wrong, Richard, what's happened?' he asked with genuine concern.

Richard looked at him through bloodshot eyes.

'Thanks for coming, Daniel. There was no one else I could turn to. No one else I would want to turn to,' he said, stepping aside to allow Daniel's huge frame through the door.

They walked across the hallway and stepped into the lounge. Daniel could see Jane Mead sat on the sofa. She was crying; she looked as if she'd been crying forever.

'Hello, Jane,' he said softly as he glanced around the room.

It was a warm and welcoming lounge. Two large armchairs sat facing a long, comfortable looking sofa, either side of a rectangular coffee table. Ornaments, keepsakes, pictures and memories adorned shelves and bookcases. It was a real family room, just as he remembered it. Daniel looked at the display cabinet standing against the wall behind the sofa. Numerous photographs sat behind the glassfronted doors. He saw himself in one or two. uniformed and otherwise; all seemingly happy occasions. His gaze fell on the central picture - a family portrait, taken recently by the look of it. Richard and Jane sat, slightly angled toward each other. Their two daughters, Elizabeth and Jennifer stood behind, smiling, each resting a hand on their parent's shoulder. It was a cheerful picture. A happy family, just as Daniel knew them.

Jane looked up, her eyes bloodshot and tearstained

'Please help us, Daniel,' she pleaded, collapsing back into the sofa and sobbing uncontrollably.

Richard sat down next to her, awkwardly but gently stroking her hair.

Daniel sat and waited, calm and patient. They would talk when they were ready. It was a full ten minutes before Jane sat up, wiping the tears from her eyes.

'I'm sorry,' she said, a little more composed.

Daniel looked at her sympathetically.

'It's OK,' he replied gently. 'Perhaps we could have some tea? I think it best Richard and I speak alone, at least for the moment, Jane.'

She nodded. She understood, as Daniel knew she would.

Daniel waited for the lounge door to close, then refocused his thoughts. He looked across the coffee table to Richard.

'Why don't you tell me what's wrong and how I can help?'

Richard nodded, took a deep breath and launched straight into his explanation.

'Please don't interrupt whilst I tell you this. I need to get it all out. Then we'll talk it through again and I'll answer any questions you have, OK?'

'Fine. It's OK, Richard, there's no rush, just tell me everything you can.'

'Back in the nineties I served in Bosnia. I was still a Major at the time. Whilst I was there, I witnessed some absolutely horrendous atrocities; genocide and other war crimes. One of the main perpetrators was a local Serbian Commander named Zoran Durakovic. Toward the end of the war I was tasked, along with others, to track him down and bring him to justice. As the war came to a close and the official conflict ended, he managed to disappear. We continued to hunt him, eventually catching up with him towards the end of the

summer of 1997. My SAS unit was ordered to take him. He was hiding out in a remote country house in the Carpathian Mountains and still had a small band of loyal men with him. We knew he wasn't going to come without a fight, so we went in with a full assault team. There was a brief, but intense firefight. We took the house but Durakovic wasn't there. I don't know how he got out, but he did. When we searched the house, we found seven men. We also found his wife and young son; both had been shot once through the back of the head - assassinated. I knew none of my team killed them, but I couldn't explain it - I still can't although I have my theories. When Durakovic found out, he surrendered – just came in of his own volition. He went to trial for a number of war crimes, but it went disastrously wrong. The witnesses disappeared one by one - most of them without a trace. In the end, we were down to two key witnesses. We moved them to a safe house, under Bosnian protection. Then, the day before the trial was due to start, the witnesses and their guards were found dead - executed. The case collapsed. Added to this, all throughout the trial, Durakovic blamed the British for persecuting him - wrongly accusing him - pursuing him for crimes he didn't commit and murdering his family. He blamed me and swore his revenge. I ignored it naturally - you have to. Shortly after, I was ordered out and that was the last I saw or heard of him'

'Until now,' Daniel perceptively stated.

Richard nodded slowly, almost hesitantly.

'Yes, until now. Until 9:00am yesterday morning, in fact. He called me at the office,' Richard explained, struggling to maintain his composure.

Richard stopped talking, fighting his emotions, unable to say the words; his left hand shook slightly as he gripped it in his right and his eyes wandered around the room.

Daniel's eyes narrowed. The words were fine; the manner in which they were delivered, less than convincing.

'You're certain about that, Richard?' Daniel asked, looking directly into Richard's face.

Richard looked away, then down to the floor.

'Yes, I'm certain.'

Daniel let it ride. It wasn't the time to doubt what he was being told. He looked past the haunted shell of the man sat on the sofa, up to the family portrait, then back to Richard.

'He's taken Elizabeth and Jennifer hasn't he?'

Richard nodded again but didn't speak.

Daniel relaxed back into his chair, letting the silence work; letting Richard recompose himself and prepare to continue.

'Yes, he's taken them.'

Daniel sat passively, discretely assessing Richard as he assimilated the information. The man was

upset, that was obvious, but there was something else, something in his body language – it wasn't right. He seemed angry and agitated, somehow preoccupied, as if he were fighting some inner torment. Daniel registered his uncomfortable demeanour; his posture, the movement of his hands when he spoke and the rapid, constant movement of his eyes. Then he set it aside, accepting it was probably the shock, undoubted tiredness and emotional stress.

Jane Mead returned with two mugs of tea and set them down on the table.

'I'll leave you both to talk for a little while longer, but please don't leave without saying goodbye, Daniel,' she said.

Daniel smiled. 'Thanks, Jane, I won't,' he replied warmly. 'There's more, isn't there?' Daniel asked as soon as Jane left the room.

'Yes,' Richard confirmed. 'He said he wanted his revenge for what I had done to him. Said he was going to put the girls into white slavery – sexual slavery. If I tried to get them back, went to the police or told anyone, they would be killed. He said they would be perdition's daughters and that I would live the rest of my days in hell. I taped the call; I tape all of my calls, just in case. It's a prudent measure in our line of work.'

Richard set the tape player on the coffee table in front of Daniel and pressed play.

Daniel listened to the tape, frowning as he did so. The conversation seemed to be as Richard described, and then it wasn't. Daniel couldn't quite put his finger on it, but his instinct told him this wasn't the whole story – something was out of place; the voice, the words, the responses – something.

'Can I take this?' Daniel asked, ejecting the tape. 'It would help if I could listen to it again when we've finished.'

'Yes of course, that tape's a copy,' Richard confirmed before continuing. 'I need your help, Daniel. I can't go after them and I can't – won't – consider going to anyone else, especially the authorities – I just can't take the risk. Please find them, Daniel. Bring my girls home.'

For the first time ever, Daniel could see that Richard Mead was close to tears. His desperation echoed in every pleading word.

Daniel sat without a hint of emotion, but his thoughts were dark and disturbing. There was no need to think it through; Richard was his business partner, but above all, his friend, and the girls as close his own family. His response was strong and unequivocal.

'I'll find them, Richard, and I'll bring them home.' He left a short pause, then continued. 'Jane doesn't know the full story, does she?'

Richard shook his head.

'No. I thought it best to spare her the details. She just knows they have been abducted. I told her it was something to do with my work. That they would be fine as long as I co-operated. I can't tell her the rest.'

'Good, keep it that way; imagination can be a terrible thing,' Daniel added and continued. 'One last thing, Richard, before Jane returns, although I'm sure I know the answer. What do you want me to do with Durakovic?'

Richard looked at Daniel, the answer plain and clear as his expression hardened.

Daniel nodded his silent understanding and approval.

Jane returned, joining Richard on the sofa. They sat hand in hand, staring expectantly at Daniel.

'OK, we need to talk this through together. I will need the most recent details on the girls. What were their regular movements, friends, especially any new ones, college and work details? You know the sort of thing. I obviously don't need photographs; I know the girls well enough. After today, we don't speak or contact each other in any way. Do not tell anyone what has happened and do not tell anyone you have seen me – clear?' Daniel asked, his tone firm and business-like.

The Meads nodded.

'Clear,' they confirmed together.

Daniel thought again.

'Jane, I'm sorry, I don't mean to be rude or unsympathetic, but please leave. I need to talk to Richard alone, for just a while longer.'

Richard looked at his wife and half-smiled.

'Please, Jane. There are things you don't need to hear.'

Daniel waited and watched as Jane Mead left the room. He knew she understood; she had been a soldier's wife long enough. There were always secrets in Richard's line of work and she had known Daniel long enough not to take offence at his emotionless, direct style.

He turned back to Richard as the door closed.

'You said you had a theory?'

'About Durakovic's family? I do, but that was a long time ago. I can't see what it has to do with this.'

'Humour me. Tell me everything you can, however trivial or unconnected you think it is.'

'OK. As I said, my unit was ordered to take Durakovic after we had traced him to where he was hiding.'

'How did you trace him?'

Richard shook his head. 'I don't know. It may have been intelligence data, but most likely a tip-off, you know how it is. I didn't get told how we found him, I just got told to go and get him.'

'OK, carry on.'

'We moved in. It was rugged, mountainous

country, heavily forested, lots of cover. The house was in a level clearing, close to the banks of a river. There were three teams, twelve men in all. The information we had was that Durakovic was definitely there with his wife, son and eight other men, including his second in command, Jancic.'

'You said seven earlier?'

'I said we found seven. I can't be sure if there were any others. That's where my theory comes in.'

'Go on.'

'The team moved in, early morning – 4:00am. It was summer, just turning light. I thought at the time they weren't expecting us.'

'But now?'

'Now? Now I think different – they knew we were coming.'

'How?'

'Nothing concrete, nothing I can evidence – just gut feeling.'

'Good enough for me, your instincts were always good.'

'Anyway, we moved in and hit them hard, expecting to catch them totally cold. They were waiting. Not that well organised, but they were hardened men, completely loyal to Durakovic – they fought to the last.'

'I have to ask this, what were your orders, exactly?'

'To take Durakovic, that's it, plain and simple.'

'Come on, Richard, I know the score, I know how these things work. Were you told to leave no one alive?'

'The family, you mean? No, absolutely not. Quite the opposite. The orders were to take Durakovic, alive if possible; certainly not to kill non-combatants. My men didn't kill his wife and son. You were in the regiment. Do you know anyone who would execute a woman or small boy like that? I don't.'

Daniel stared at Richard, clinically surveying his face. He reflected for a moment, but didn't answer the question.

'So what happened when you moved in?'

'As I said, they were waiting. There was a brief but bloody firefight. We lost two men taking the house. Once inside, we swept through, clearing it room by room. When it was over, we found seven bodies. Durakovic's wife and boy were in the cellar; both had been shot once through the back of the head.'

'Definitely executed?'

'No doubt about it.'

'And you never found Jancic?'

'Not to this day. He just vanished.'

'What's your theory?'

'Jancic rather than Durakovic was behind many of the atrocities attributed to Durakovic. Not that Durakovic was clean by any means – he wasn't. Equally, he may not have been as evil or as ruthless as we believed – at least he wasn't then. The truth would have come out at Durakovic's trial and Jancic knew that. I think someone tipped them off; someone senior in the Bosnian army, and either Jancic or Durakovic's men spirited him away. My theory is that Jancic offered to stay to protect the family – a show of absolute loyalty – a sham. I would say the first people to die that day were Durakovic's wife and son – I'm certain of it.'

'That leaves a hell of a lot of other questions, starting with why?'

'I know. I don't have the answers, just personal theories, which until now I've kept to myself. I'm sorry, Dan, I can't see what any of this has to do with my girls.'

'I need to know everything, Richard. Who and what I'm up against. What are their motives? Keep going, please.'

'Alright, we're coming to the crux of it. You asked why? During the war, mistakes were made – that's obvious – and some of these only became apparent very late on. One significant piece of information to come out was that Durakovic had ordered the destruction of a small village, right on the border between what is now Bosnia and Serbia, but in those days that distinction didn't exist. Jancic carried out that order.'

'So?'

'So, it was the village where Jancic had lived. He thought his family had left and were already away and safe. It may have been that Durakovic told him they were; either way, he was wrong. The village was heavily shelled and Jancic's family were killed. He found them himself when the army swept through to complete their "cleansing".

'So Jancic returned the favour?'

'I think so, but there is more. As the war came to an end, a number of senior army figures and government officials disappeared. Some were found dead – executed. Some did us a favour and committed suicide, whilst others just fled. One of the theories at the time was that the smart ones had already lined up powerful and very lucrative positions in the emerging mafia-related operations in the Balkan states. You know what it's like. War presents opportunities – peace presents even more.'

'You think that's what Durakovic and Jancic did?'

'I'm sure of it. I also think they now run rival organisations, but again I can't prove that. Jancic has never been found, as far as I'm aware.'

'OK, that might be a dead end, but it's good to know. What about the girls? Tell me about them – their schools, college, work, friends?'

Jane returned to the lounge, bringing fresh mugs of hot, strong tea. Daniel let her stay. She would know more about the girl's lives than Richard, it stood to reason; he was often away on business. They talked for another two hours as Daniel gleaned all the information he could. He asked questions, covered every aspect of their lives then covered it again, leaving no stone unturned and no subject unexplored. It was raw and distressing and they paused regularly, letting emotions run their course before picking up the painful threads of conversation again.

'One last thing, and I am sorry, but there is no easy way to say this. You have to be prepared for a few things. First, I may not get them back; you have to accept that. Second, you may not get the same people back.' Daniel looked at Richard before continuing. 'Whoever has abducted them may not treat them well. They may be traumatised by what happens to them – you also have to accept that. Lastly, this may not be quick and it certainly won't be easy. Don't expect them back in a few days, maybe not even a few weeks. As time passes, you will wonder what's happening. You will imagine all sorts of things and you will want to contact me. Whatever you do, don't do that,' he emphasised.

The Meads looked at each other, then nodded again.

'Right, I have what I need and you have my promise. I will do everything I can to bring them

home,' Daniel said without emotion.

He stood and firmly shook Richard's hand as their eyes locked; his friendship and promise absolute.

Jane stepped forward, hugged him then kissed him softly on the cheek.

'Thank you, Daniel,' she said quietly.

Daniel left the house and climbed back into his old green Land Rover. It was 9:00am on a cold, grey and dismal November morning. He knew the most critical element, time, was against him, but he was back, doing what he did best and on the hunt again.