

**THE INDENTED**  
**III**

**Incident at Fen Hall**

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SCENE 1:

Roger Shorebough is watching out of his front room window. He sees Ralph Arcfield approach his bungalow down a long farm drive and waving back at him. Eventually Ralph reaches Roger's locked door and knocks on it.

Ralph: Hi ya Roger!

Roger: Who is it...?

Ralph: You know it's me.

Roger: Of course it's you Ralph; I'm just checking. You want me to get out of my chair...?

Ralph: Is the door locked?

Roger: Yes it's locked; I've got this shotgun sitting around in here haven't I...

Ralph: Then yes please.

Roger: What?

Ralph: Shall I come round the back?

Roger: Yes its open, come round that way... bring another glass through from the kitchen on your way my dear boy.

Ralph: Have I come at a bad time, Roger?

Roger: Bring another glass with you...

Ralph: Are you sure? OK...

Ralph heads to the back of the house and brings a glass through with him to the front room. He takes a seat close to Roger and reaches into his rucksack.

Ralph: I thought you might have been at your desk all day so I've brought you this...

Roger: Porto...! You know it's fine if you bring it round because you want it as well, Ralph; nothing goes any further than around these walls. Of course port is delicious anyway, and as it goes I hadn't lifted my head up from work until I intuited you arriving. You want a cigarette?

Ralph: Nah I'm fine for now.

Roger: I'm sorry for that business with the door, Ralph. Visitors can be a sudden phenomena for me; they break my bubbles, but I'm OK now. Look, you've even come through with your own glass as well. Let me get up to prove to you that it happens and I'll bring us the red left over from yesterday, before we move onto the more viscous stuff.

Roger stands up with a heave.

Roger: Tell me what you've been up to. Sorry that I haven't caught you on the bus during the week, this new biography has taken a dramatic turn in narrative because of new information. I'm trying to collate it all together in ways that might not make it bend towards manslaughter on the part of my client. It's a new challenge; I have to say it's keeping me amused. You need anything while I'm upright?

Ralph: No, please sit down and tell me more. I am glad these niche biographies are working out for you.

Roger sits back down.

Roger: I'm not sure they are Ralph, but biographies can be fucking intriguing so I'm already done, aren't I...

Ralph: Did this one come from someone connected to your landlady?

Roger: Aye, they all do; it's her farm I live on, and she knows other landowners, and they've all got stories they want to think are

important enough to document into posterity. Some of them are to be fair, like this current one. Except this one shouldn't be told at all, much less what I'm doing to it for money.

Ralph: What are you doing to it?

Roger: Trying to avoid scandal, sadly. It's a tricky one because obviously the scandal might help my writing career. I might even be thinking that this biography has a commercial life outside of the family who commissioned it. She'll probably just lock it away though.

Ralph: OK, OK... hang on; I need to wind this back. This is the same lady that you told me used to beat her husband?

Roger: That be the one; Lady Pullwick. She is a character I have to admit. I'm not sure she's not just leading me up the garden path with the manslaughter though. I fear already there may be no unravelling the truth of it; she could be just taking the piss knowing that I'll write it and take the money anyway.

Ralph: She doesn't respect you?

Roger: She respects the way that I can get through her wine; we can all be adept in taking the piss. I don't think she respects the form of what I do though, or the requirements of her participation in that.

Ralph: So she is taking the piss.

Roger: But she does have a look in her eye...

Ralph: The manslaughter look?

Roger: They're certainly eyes that have known how to enjoy themselves, you know what I mean?

Ralph: I'd like to but you still haven't told me about these new details.

Roger: Have a cigarette then, you're going to need to relax during this.

Ralph: I've got the wine. Can I write some of it down?

Roger: Christ no! What if it's true!? Christ Ralph... what if it is true?

Ralph: I think you should tell me what it is, Roger. It'll help you relax...

SCENE 2:

Ralph and Roger remain sat and Roger prepares some of his notes.

Roger: So what do you know so far, Ralph? That she used to beat her old man with her shoe horn?

Ralph: Yeah I definitely remember you telling me that bit.

Roger: Well it got worse for the old man.

Ralph: She started abusing him with a serving spoon?

Roger: No, but I did get wind that she'd once tripped him over on purpose with the garden hose. That was in... sometime about 1955 I think.

Ralph: Perhaps that was how it all started; the beatings...

Roger: Perhaps he enjoyed it; that's what I'm trying to underpin the subtext around, whether or not that be the actual case. Otherwise it's all pretty brutal and persistent on the thrashing front.

Ralph: Perhaps she wants it coming across that way? Could I go with you next time you go there?

Roger: She'll set fire to your note book, Ralph. I had to buy some new audio recording equipment last month.

Ralph: Is that better than taking notes?

Roger: Less flammable I suppose. It's always nice to hold your quill though isn't it? I'm writing the recordings up at the moment; I prefer it all scribbled down.

Ralph: Could I hear some of her recordings?

Roger: Hmm; it might reduce you to the level of a pervert... but that's fine.

Ralph: Which of the sessions can I hear? What's the most juicy?

Roger: She's a pretty juicy Lady, Ralph.

Ralph: Can you play me her main confessional then?

Roger: *I* haven't even gotten around to telling you about that yet. It's a pretty deep rabbit hole I'm going down here, and I'm not certain that all that's waiting for me at the bottom isn't going to be further... warrens.

Ralph: Ah go on Roger, I'm trying to learn from you...

Roger: You're naturally nosey, Ralph, the rest just falls into place.

Ralph: But what about technique? How do you go about extracting the marrow from the whole affair?

Roger: Persistence... bluntness. That's why you need the wine; not for enjoyment, it's for greasing the mechanisms. But even then its fine judgements... increments of hand holding or cajoling, depends on the situation, the time of day... all that stuff. Now for instance, you've been trying to get a story out of me without success so far, despite my foretelling you that this story is the cause of some excitement on my part. How are you going to resolve this, bearing in mind it is still too early for the port?

Ralph: Can I ask you again?

Roger: Yes you can.

Ralph: Then please go on with the confessional.

Roger: No. You see now I know I'm holding all the power cards, and I'm enjoying them... why give those up?

Ralph: Because I'll get indifferent with the whole affair and talk about something else.

Roger: And there you have it... you need some indifference when you deal with people, Ralph, with their power cards. But that means patience; if you sense something juicy don't pounce for it... turn circles around it and you usually get it by the time you go to leave and the client worries the moment is going to pass.

Ralph: So when did this Lady start getting rough on her old man with the shoe horn?

Roger: Better, much better Ralph... now you're bringing me back in to the perimeter, without trying to wrangle the pie from me.

Ralph: I thought it was cards?

Roger: OK we'll go back to those. No; we'll give you some background on the shoe horn, you've earned that one.

Ralph: Thank you.

Roger: The horn just sort of came out of nowhere in her interviews, like it was something that she used to do a lot of but was forgetting. She told me, 'You don't remember every time that you brush your teeth do you...'

Ralph: Fuck me... now I'm really going to have to meet her.

Roger: Honestly, Ralph... no. I'm keeping in mind that I might still be looking for a way out. That is if I haven't already found the only reasonable way in to begin with. Maybe I should go out for a walk sometime.

Ralph: You in that much of a pickle?

Roger: Probably not, I'm just enjoying the drama of recent events.

Ralph: Want to tell me about it?

Roger: Ooh! You almost had me...! Patience, Ralph, hold your beans. How's your leg by the way?

Ralph: Holding on, enjoying the wine. Can I have a cigarette and I'll give you the rundown.

Roger passes over a cigarette.

Roger: There you are. Want a top up to go with that?

Ralph: If you're determined to take the long way around your story then yes please.

Roger: You'll thank me in the end. Here, take a lighter. Wanna shoot some Magpies...? I'll put you a stool by the front door; they're always hanging around the drive out there...

Ralph: What's your aim like with them?

Roger: Pretty good at this time of day; she gets wayward later on.

Ralph: Fancy a little competition?

Roger: Would you really shoot a Magpie, Ralph?

Ralph: I will, or I'll try my best if you tell me what you're holding.

Roger: Well, well. Checkmate...

Ralph: It hasn't been chess at any point but, yes.

Roger: But you do have to try and hit a Magpie for this...

Ralph: Anything for the story, that's the code isn't it?

Roger: Christ no, that's not the rule. Get the story, get the money and then see what's left of you. That's not a rule either but is broadly speaking the case. Right... your prize, Ralph; Lady Pullwick's husband, the late Lord Pullwick, and the incident at Fen Hall, 1982...

SCENE 3:

Roger prepares some of his notes. The port remains unopened and they both light up another cigarette.

Roger: Where exactly to begin from...? Lord Pullwick I suppose. He had failing eyesight right through his sixties, and he didn't drive on the roads from his mid seventies onwards. That's an important detail because it meant he had to adjust to just driving around his own estate for his last years. So you need to picture a seventy-eight year old man busting around his land in an old four and a half litre Range Rover... that also had a broken headlight on the night in question, if my notes are correct.

Ralph: How did the headlight become smashed?

Roger: I hadn't said that it was smashed.

Ralph: But it might have been; Lady Pullwick my have... y'know...

Roger: It's possible... but then embellishment for embellishments sake isn't necessary for this biography.

Ralph: But you said that she liked hitting things...

Roger: No... just people I think, not objects. The vehicle had probably been in the family for years, she wouldn't do that,

not for kicks. She certainly made sure that the old man had been drinking plenty that night though.

Ralph: What time of year are we?

Roger: February, the fifteenth. She said that she followed him out to the car about eight in the evening. Here, listen to these notes of hers;  
'Nothing was much of the ordinary that last evening. He even complained as normal when I made sure the seat belt was tightly around him. Of course the headlight was broken by that point but I didn't want to discourage him. He set off towards the back of the stable yard so I knew he was going to cross the bridge over the river. I knew that I could surprise him there...'

Ralph: She seems eager. What happened then?

Roger: Alright... you can have some more of the notes I just don't think it'll do you any good to actually meet her.

Ralph: That's fair. What happened then?

Roger rifles through some notes.

Roger: Brace yourself, Ralph... I caught wind of something suspicious when she said about surprising him so I was trying to get my line of questioning together and then she interrupted me with it;  
'I saw him head off at speed and I thought better about myself for what I was about to do... now that the decision was settled. I had the large flashlight ready and went to collect it from the porch. I could hear the big engine roaring around in the background so I knew that he was enjoying himself. I was glad about that; however this comes across between us, Roger. He loved that big old V8 and I wanted him to be driving it when everything came to a close. Anyway I trudged across the front field in my wellingtons and got to the bridge a full minute before he did. I hunkered down low until I could see him coming and then tucked myself in tighter with the torch still off. He was getting

closer, I could see the last headlight blinking through the nearest trees and then he was coming down the track straight towards me. I went very calm then, I can remember the stillness, the way it embraced me until the moment was right and I was released. He was closing right in on the bridge and I jumped out while turning the torch on, flashing it about his windscreen. He panicked right away and rushed passed me off the track to my left, skidding and yelling blue murder. A second later he was through the reeds and the Range Rover went all over the water. There was more panicking then; I could here him struggling and guessed that he was wrestling with the seatbelt. I stayed still and turned off the flashlight. There were all sorts of sounds going on so I closed my eyes and listened until it was all over and the lake settled again. The emergency services told me the next morning that he never managed to release the seat belt. That's why I've never worn one, Roger, and you shouldn't either.'

Ralph: ... is that all of it?

Roger rifles through more sheets of paper.

Roger: There's quite a bit more but that should give you enough understanding of my predicament. Any questions?

Ralph: Can I write your biography?

Roger: Look out there, down the drive Ralph. Magpies...

THE END