

I become increasingly aware that I'm snooping around someone else's property without either their agreement or a warrant, or really any way of explaining myself should they return. After another ten or fifteen minutes I decided, as there was obviously nothing here that was going to assist me in finding Aleysha, I should leave. As I was closing the door to the conservatory my phone buzzed. It was a text reminder from the court – 'Bournemouth Crown Court – Densleigh Road Bournemouth – 10:30 court-room 3 – Judge Kilburn – Crown/Hillingdon V Hunter - End message.'

I called the office, it seemed to ring forever, 'Hello - Jackie speaking ... Oh good morning, Greg, any joy with Aleysha?'

'No' I said probably a little too abruptly 'Can you put me through to the Super please' trying to moderate my tone.

'Sure.' Jackie's voice was replaced with some inane message about burglaries' in the Bournemouth area and how we all need to be more vigilant to protect our property, and almost as an afterthought, that we should keep a watchful eye out for the elderly as well.

'Any news Greg?' Chris comes on the line.

'No nothing - you?'

'Well only that John Graham the Crown's solicitor in the Hillingdon - Hunter case just e-mailed to say that the other three witnesses have decided that they no longer wish to appear for the Crown.'

'What? you're kidding me right, that's way too coincidental, what reason are they giving, and do they all give the same one?'

'We don't have that information right now but we're still digging. In the meantime, I think you should head to the courthouse and see what you can get out of Graham.'

'Okay Guv, I think we should look a little closer at Hunter.' John Hunter is the perpetrator of the hit and run and has been heavily shielded from us by his brief.

I walk past the shed, between it and the garage and realise that I hadn't checked inside. There was, what looked like an expensive combination lock through the rather simple hasp and staple, which seemed a massive overkill as I could flick the hasp off with a reasonable screwdriver. As it turns out that wasn't necessary as the lock was open. I slipped it out of the staple and pulled the shed door slightly. As I do so it catches on something, I glimpse through the opening and see inside what looks like a row of butane gas canisters. I hear a mechanical click as the door opens a little further, followed by that arcing sound you get when trying to ignite a gas cooker ring. My mind goes into overdrive as I hear the

unambiguous wumph of gas igniting and realise that what will follow is likely to be the canisters shredding into a million pieces as they explode from the inside. I dive backward heading for the outer back corner of the garage as the first heatwave and deafening blow hits me. The heavy padlock in my hand has been propelled upwards and smacks me in the chin. By now I'm on my backside kicking frantically to get around the back corner of the garage as the second and third canister rip through what was left of the shed and a good portion of the side and back wall of the garage, that being the only thing that was now protecting me from any further blasts. I'm aware of being surrounded by an immense heat ball which thankfully fades almost as fast as it emerged. Dazed, left flat on my back but very conscious of the overriding smell of butane gas, burning wood and brick dust. I try to get a hold on my senses and establish whether I'm damaged. Having rubbed myself down and verified that all limbs were working, I get up and look around at the carnage. I'm mindful of a gash on my chin and I'm visibly shaking and at this stage, I have no idea if all the canisters are exhausted, but my immediate thought was for the ensuing fire.

Tinged with a mix of fear, deafness, and adrenaline I'm torn between just getting the hell out of here and trying to dampen down the fire to protect the Tithe.