

The Google Questions

By A. N. Pearce

This is a work of fiction. All characters and events are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to real events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

“Coincidence is the word we use when we can't see the levers and pulleys.”
- Emma Bull

“None are more enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.”
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Web: www.alanpearce.com & www.thegooglequestions.com
Email: mail@alanpearce.com

There is something very wrong with the official explanation of 9/11, 7/7, the War on Terror, the war in Afghanistan, and the invasion of Iraq.

There is something even stranger happening with the economy.

But if you type the right questions into Google you get the right answers.

These are The Google Questions

Hello, Mr Smith

‘Any chance of a cup of tea?’

The clatter of a tray hitting the floor caused Wynton’s heart to miss a beat. From the corner of his eye, he could just see a small figure in white hopping from foot to foot.

‘Oh, my God!’ said the small figure in white. ‘You’re awake!’

‘Tea?’ croaked Wynton. ‘Please.’

Then she was gone. The door opened and closed and swung on its hinges, and Wynton began a slow exploration of his mouth with a tongue resembling leather. He was marvelling at the unfamiliar smoothness of his palate when the door swung open again and a man in a white coat suddenly entered his field of vision.

‘He’s currently on benzodiazepines?’ asked the man.

‘Thirty megs of zolpidem every six hours, doctor.’

‘Really?’ He leant closer, and then he pulled back each of Wynton’s eyelids and shone a bright light from a very small torch. It took some while for Wynton to regain his sight.

‘Okay,’ said the doctor. ‘You’d better page Mrs Torrance, and rush him down for a PET scan. I want to take a squint at his frontal lobes as quick as you can.’

Wynton, sure of very little beyond his obvious existence, opened and closed his mouth in a bid to demonstrate his thirst. And then he tried to move his hands and found that he couldn’t. He then tried to move his feet and found them similarly restrained.

‘Nothing to worry about,’ smiled the doctor. ‘We don’t want you pulling your tubes out. That’s all.’

The doctor stood back and cupped his chin with his hand. He examined Wynton with seeming wonder. ‘Hello, Mr Smith.’ He smiled broadly. ‘Welcome back.’

‘Any chance of a cup of tea?’

What happened to July...?

'Hello, Mr Smith. My name is Torrance. Pamela Torrance. May I sit down?'

'Please.' Wynton suddenly noticed the chair beside his bed.

'How do you feel?' she asked.

'Pretty weird, actually.' Wynton gave a wan smile. 'No one's told me anything. I've got the most appalling headache, my throat is incredibly sore...'

'That will be from the tracheotomy.'

'...and my mouth! I can't stop drinking. And I've got a beard!'

'And do you know where you are?'

'I could hazard a guess: hospital?'

'Not precisely,' smiled Pamela. 'You are at the Thomas Westbrook Clinic.'

'Really?' asked Wynton. 'Who's paying for this?'

Pamela gave a short laugh. 'We're a private research clinic. Sleep disorders, hyper-sleep, comas, that sort of thing.'

'What?' he asked. 'I've been in a coma?'

'Yes, you have.'

Wynton chewed his lip. A rush of questions came tumbling from his frontal lobes.

Pamela held up her hand. 'I know,' she said. 'There's a lot to take in. You've been in an accident. Do you remember?'

'No.'

'What is the last thing you do remember?'

'Waking up.'

'Do you know the date?'

Wynton struggled. 'I'm supposed to be at a job interview. I think.'

'Well, you don't need worry about that.'

'What is the date, then?' Wynton's skin began to tingle. 'Have I been here long?'

'Wynton,' Pamela lowered her voice. 'You don't mind if I call you Wynton, do you?'

'No.'

'Wynton. Today is Wednesday the fifth of November.'

'Oh, yeah?' A hint of hysteria entered his voice. 'What happened to July...August...September...?'

'Wynton, today is Wednesday the fifth of November, two-thousand-and-eight.'

'Two-thousand-and-eight?' Wynton visibly stiffened. He lay back and stared at the ceiling. 'You are fucking kidding me!'

'I'm sorry!' Pamela suddenly scraped back her chair. 'I would ask that you moderate your language. Please.' She paused and took a deep breath. 'Now, do you know why you are here?'

'I've been in an accident.'

'Yes, you have. You've been very lucky.'

'What sort of accident?'

'Do you not remember any of it?'

Wynton shook his head.

'Nothing at all?'

'I had a job interview.'

‘You were in an explosion.’
‘Was I?’ Wynton curled his lip.
‘Lots of people died.’
‘And I survived?’
‘You survived.’
‘Well, fuck me!’

No friends or family

'Hello, Mr Smith. What, no smile this afternoon?'

'I'm bored,' admitted Wynton. 'Is there any chance I could have a TV or radio in here? I don't think I could look at another old newspaper or magazine.'

'We can't have them,' explained the nurse. 'It's the same with mobiles. The signals interfere with the equipment.'

'How about a book?' Wynton looked hopeful. 'You'd think they'd have a library here.' He shook his head.

'When we've only got one conscious patient?' she laughed. 'What do you like? What do you like to read?'

'Steinbeck, Cormac McCarthy, Murakami, Clarkson...'

'Okay. I'll find you something.'

'Nurse?' asked Wynton. 'I've seen you every day now, for what? Two weeks? I don't even know your name.'

'Juwairiyah.'

'Ju-wairi-yah?'

The nurse laughed.

'It's my shrivelled tongue,' Wynton tried to explain. 'It doesn't just trip off it.'

'You and everybody else.' She bent and tugged Wynton's bed sheets tightly back beneath the mattress. 'Julia.'

'Julia.' Wynton smiled. 'Julia. How do I look to you?'

'How d'you mean?'

'I look sort of old. Like I've aged a decade, or something.'

'How would I know? I didn't know you before, did I?'

'But how old would you say I was?'

'But I know how old you are. You're twenty-nine.'

'But I look forty?'

Julia shook her head. 'Thirty-eight. Thirty-seven at a push.' And then she sat down, resting a small buttock on the bed. 'Burns are like that,' she told him. 'It'll take a while.'

'They said twelve percent of my body received second-degree burns. So I guess I'm lucky I don't look like Simon Weston.'

'Who's Simon Weston?'

'The burns bloke from the Falklands.'

'Before my time. I wasn't even born then.'

'So will I always look like I'm some kind of Botox nut?'

Julia moved her head from side to side in a fluid motion. She sucked in a little air. 'Just wait.'

Wynton sighed.

Julia stood and began to take readings off Wynton's monitors. She noted them down on a clipboard. 'Did they tell you much about the bombing?' she asked.

'They gave me all the papers and magazines.' He indicated the pile beside the bed. 'The cops helped me remember most of it; over and over, the same stuff endlessly. Frankly, I've had it up to here. I just want to get out now and get my life back.'

‘You’ve not had any visitors,’ she told him. ‘No friends or family. Who’s going to look after you when you get out?’

‘I haven’t thought about it really.’ Wynton creased his tight brow. ‘It’s enough just trying to walk about on two spindly little legs. I can’t believe how much weight I’ve lost.’

‘One woman came to see you, just after they moved you here.’

‘Who? What’d she look like?’

‘Blonde, bit chubby.’ Julia turned aside and busied herself with her trolley.

‘Lauren,’ he told her. ‘She only came the once?’

‘Just the once. Who’s she?’

‘Lauren’s my girlfriend.’

‘Not much of a girlfriend, just coming the once.’

‘I guess not.’

‘What about your parents?’ she asked.

Wynton let out a deep breath. ‘My mum died three years ago.’ He stopped and corrected himself. ‘Six years ago.’

‘And your dad?’ asked Julia.

‘We don’t really get on,’ Wynton told her. ‘I was adopted.’

‘I’m sorry.’

‘Nothing to be sorry about.’ Wynton smiled. ‘They were wonderful, really. But dad went a bit weird when mum died. We’ve not spoken since.’

‘Oh.’

‘Anyway,’ said Wynton. ‘He went back to New Zealand. He married again. That’s it.’

‘Friends?’ she asked.

‘Yeah,’ Wynton looked to the ceiling. ‘Friends from work, and stuff. I only moved down to London...’ He stopped to do the sum. ‘...four years ago.’

‘So what,’ Julia asked. ‘You’ve got your own place?’

‘I’ve got a flat in Paddington.’

‘You own it, right?’ she asked, suddenly concerned. ‘It’s not rented?’

‘No, it’s mine.’

‘Good,’ she smiled. ‘You’ll get back on your feet. And you’re bound to get compensation.’ She paused. ‘Okay, it’s not in the news anymore – you’d have trouble selling your story – but you’re bound to get compensation, disability benefits, Stannah Stair-Lift, a cleaner. You’ll be all right.’

‘Stair lift?’ asked Wynton.

‘Take these.’ Julia handed Wynton two cups off her trolley. One cup contained five different coloured tablets and the other contained a small quantity of water.

‘You had lots of other visitors,’ she told him.

‘Like who?’

‘Police and other official types. They swabbed you for DNA half-a-dozen times, took your fingerprints ten times, photographed you, prodded and poked you. You were our star patient for months.’

Blitz Spirit

‘Wynton, you have visitors.’ Julia held back the door and allowed two men to enter.

‘Hello, Mr Smith. They said it was all right to come in and see you now.’

‘That’s fine,’ said Wynton. ‘You won’t mind if I don’t get up. I’ve just spent the whole morning in physio.’

‘We won’t keep you long, promise. I’m DS Crosby and this is DC Heath. We haven’t met before, not when you were conscious, anyway.’ He laughed.

‘There’s just the one chair.’ Wynton looked apologetically to the side of his bed.

‘Not a problem.’ The detective sergeant made himself comfortable and then unclasped his briefcase. ‘How are you getting on, anyway?’

‘Yeah, not so bad.’

‘We just thought we’d see how you are.’

‘Thanks.’

‘How are they treating you, then?’

‘Great,’ said Wynton. ‘They’re feeding me up; getting my strength back. I’ll be going home soon.’

‘Oh, that’s excellent,’ said the DS.

‘Excellent,’ echoed the DC.

‘Well,’ continued the sergeant. ‘You look pretty good for someone who’s been in a coma for three years.’ He shook his head sympathetically. ‘What’s it like then, being in a coma? Are you aware of anything?’

‘Oh, yeah.’ Wynton huffed. ‘You get flashes of things. Just the other day I got a flashback of being prodded and poked around, being fingerprinted and having my photo taken.’ Wynton laughed. ‘And all while lying helpless in bed. That’s a bit odd, isn’t it?’

‘Oh, fairly routine. Funny you should remember that, though.’ The DS began to pull papers from the briefcase. ‘So you’ll be going home soon?’

‘That’s right.’

‘Everything sorted for you?’

Wynton sighed. ‘I’ve got to start getting my life back. I don’t suppose it’ll be easy.’

‘Do you have any more questions?’ asked the sergeant.

‘About the bombing, and stuff?’

‘Yes, the bombing.’

‘Not really,’ confirmed Wynton. ‘I can’t say I remember much of it. But your colleagues helped fill me in. I had no idea at first I’d even been on a bus. Apparently,’ added Wynton, ‘you can trace people’s steps with their mobiles and Oyster Cards.’

‘So you didn’t even remember being on that bus?’

‘Not at first. Bit by bit, what with the photos and all, it came back to me.’

‘Do you remember even getting on a bus?’

‘Well, I do now,’ Wynton laughed. ‘Yes.’

‘You were on your way to a job interview, I understand?’ asked the DS.

‘That’s right. On the other side of Waterloo Bridge.’

‘But the number thirty goes nowhere near Waterloo Bridge, does it?’

Wynton sighed. 'Are we going through this again? I really don't think I can cope with any more.'

'And you caught the number thirty bus in Euston Square? Why would you catch that bus?'

Wynton drew a deep breath. 'As I've told your colleagues several times already, it didn't matter which bus. Any bus would have done. I just wanted to get out of there. It was chaos. No one knew what was going on. They kicked us all off the Tube and herded us onto buses.'

'And you got on the number thirty bus?'

'Yes.'

'And you sat upstairs, you said?'

'I always sit upstairs. I never sit downstairs if I can help it.'

'Why is that?'

'I prefer upstairs, I suppose. You can see more.'

'And when you made your way to your seat at the back, did you notice the other passengers?'

'No,' Wynton shook his head. 'Who does?'

The policeman gave a patient nod. 'Now,' he said. 'I know you've been asked all these questions before but there's always the chance that you might remember more; that, in time, you'll develop a clearer picture. We want to make sure we know about it if and when you do.'

'All right.'

'So, do you not remember this man?' The sergeant held up a photograph.

'Hasib Hussain,' Wynton told him. 'No, I didn't see him.'

'But you've seen this man before?' asked the detective.

'The photo, yes. Not less than a million times.'

'And my colleagues have shown it to you?'

'Not less than a thousand times,' Wynton told him. 'Do you not share information?'

The detective pulled out more photographs. 'And do you recognise these people?'

Wynton laughed. 'Well, I've seen them so many times now, they're like family. This bloke here with the glasses: that's Giles Hart. He sat next to me.'

'And you remember that, do you?'

'Sitting next to him?'

'Yes.'

'I do now. And talking to him.'

'What about?'

'Well, as I've said, we all spoke, really. You know, it was chaos. The bus was barely moving. There were sirens everywhere. Of course, everyone was going on and on about it. It was all very British; very Blitz Spirit.'

'And what was going through your mind at the time?'

'I was having kittens about missing my interview.'

'Can you show me on this diagram where you sat?'

'Here at the back, on the right.'

'In the very back row?'

'That's right.' Wynton paused. 'Are those my things?' he asked suddenly.

‘Funny you should ask.’ The DS turned to the DC, who stood near the door clutching a Tesco carrier bag.

‘Yeah.’ The DC dumped the contents onto Wynton’s bed.

Wynton pulled himself upright and looked down on the small collection of clear plastic bags. ‘I know my clothes were shredded but I was hoping to get my shoes back.’

‘I can check,’ said the DC.

‘Please,’ said Wynton. ‘Well, here’s my Zippo. What about my flat keys?’

‘Dunno. I’ll have to check.’

‘What about my watch?’

‘It’s not there?’

‘No,’ said Wynton. ‘And my mobile? A BlackBerry Smartphone! My whole life’s in there!’

‘I’ll have to check.’

‘Well,’ huffed Wynton. ‘At least I’ve got my wallet back.’ He looked up at the DC. ‘Any money still in it?’

‘You’ll have to check,’ said the DS.

Why is everybody Polish?

‘Wynton, we should go down now and wait for your taxi.’ Julia stood in the doorway.

‘Are you sure you don’t want anyone to come with you?’

‘Hey, it’s no problem,’ said Wynton. ‘I’ve got my keys. All I’ve got to do is let myself in.’

‘You want to hope the door isn’t jammed with junk mail,’ she told him.

‘It’s a communal entrance.’

‘Look,’ she said. ‘Here’s my mobile. I get off at five. If you’ve any problems, call me. Okay?’

‘Thanks.’ Wynton folded the paper and dropped it into his pocket. He jangled his keys. ‘I’ll let you have these clothes back as soon as I can.’

‘Keep them,’ she smiled. ‘I’m sorry they’re not a perfect fit.’

Wynton looked down at his borrowed trousers. They ended several inches above his yellow flip-flops.

‘Watch you don’t slip,’ Julia laughed. ‘It’s been raining.’

Wynton experienced a delicious sensation of relief as the key turned in the lock. The communal hallway was shabbier and the carpet a little more threadbare. When he reached his front door he was surprised to see that it was no longer a deep green but now a glossy white. He was also surprised to find that his Yale key did not slip into the Ingersoll lock. Wynton stood back and scratched his head. And then the door opened and Wynton had a further shock.

‘What you doin’ - tryin’ to get in my flat with those keys?’

‘Your flat?’ Wynton froze. He looked around the hallway.

‘My flat. Yes. What d’you want? What you doin’ with them keys?’

Wynton felt horribly faint. He caught the woman eyeing his half-mast trousers and exposed feet.

‘What flat d’you want?’ she asked.

‘Flat D,’ Wynton told her.

‘But this is flat D. What’s your business?’

Wynton composed himself. ‘Have you lived here long?’ he asked.

‘Long? Yes,’ she answered.

‘Less than three years?’

‘What is this?’

‘This is my flat,’ said Wynton.

‘Your flat? I don’t think so.’ She folded her arms and moved her foot nearer the door. ‘Hold on,’ she told him. ‘Is your name Smith? W. T. Smith?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then I have a lot of mail for you. You’ve caused me lots of problems. You must have plenty of bad debts. There’s been no end of bailiffs and debt collectors coming here! Demanding this and demanding that! Hold on. Stay put.’

The woman pushed the door back towards Wynton. He could just see her opening the hall cupboard. She came back with a large carrier bag stuffed with papers.

‘This is all for you. I didn’t know to keep it or not. Here. Take it.’

And then she slammed the door in Wynton’s face. He felt sick.

Wynton's first thought was to find a hotel. His second thought was to check his bank balance. He slipped his card into the machine.

Please consult your branch

The card did not come back out.

Wynton felt his legs beginning to give way. He felt strangely exposed in his beachwear on the cold, wet pavements. 'Drink,' he told himself. 'Collect your wits. Think this through.'

Wynton thumbed through the notes in his wallet.

'I'm sorry but I'm going to have to ask you to leave.'

'Leave?' asked Wynton, looking up from his pint and chaser and a pile of papers.

'It ain't you that suffers, mate. It's us,' the man told him. 'Out you go.'

Wynton looked for somewhere to flick his ash.

'Out!'

'What about my drinks?'

'You should have thought of that first,' the man told him. He gripped Wynton by the upper arm and tugged him out of the chair.

Wynton stood outside in the rain and, for a brief moment, considered crying.

'I'm in a fix, Julia.'

'Where are you now?' she asked.

'Paddington.'

'Can you meet me in the Coach and Horses at Greenwich Market in two hours?'

'How do I get there?'

'You don't want to go by bus, right?' she asked.

'No, I don't.'

'Then take the Tube to Bank and get the Light Railway to Greenwich. Ask when you get there.'

'Julia, you can't smoke in pubs anymore.'

'I know.'

'Julia?'

'Yes?'

'Why is everybody Polish?'

Have you ever heard of Kidbrooke?

'It's only twenty minutes from London Bridge,' Julia told Wynton. 'It's no palace, but it's somewhere to stay.'

'Sounds great,' sighed Wynton. 'I can't fucking believe this!'

'Wynton, I'm so sorry.'

'And what am I going to do for cash?'

'Oh, Wynton,' sighed Julia. 'You've only got to tell the bank what's happened. They are going to bend over backwards to help you.'

'I hope so,' said Wynton. 'I knew I should have checked the flat out first. I had a really funny feeling but the cops never said anything. And you're sure your cousin won't mind?'

Julia shook her head. 'It's not like he actually lives there. It's more an investment thing with him.'

'And he's in Islamabad until when?'

'January, probably.'

'Well, I certainly won't be needing it that long. Maybe just a few days. I don't know.'

'Wynton,' Julia shook her head. 'I feel so sorry for you. No one came to see you. Your burns; your poor little legs. And now your flat. I'm so sorry.'

'Yeah,' he agreed.

'If you need help,' said Julia. 'I've got another cousin who's a solicitor.'

'I need legal bills?' asked Wynton.

'You need someone to sort things out. You're going to have to claim for everything going. He can deal with that and with your bank and find out what's happened.'

'I'm really tired,' announced Wynton. 'Would you mind if we finished up? I'd really like to see this flat.'

'Have you ever heard of Kidbrooke?' asked Julia.

'What kind of investment would this be?' Wynton wanted to know.

'They're going to pull the whole place down,' Julia told him. 'They want a whole new development here by 2018.'

'And he thinks that if he holds out he can screw them for loads of money?'

'Basically,' agreed Julia. 'I know it's not perfect but it's a roof over your head - for now.'

'For now.' Wynton sucked air through his teeth while Julia explained the hot water system.

The smell of damp

Wynton first became aware of the ants when he sipped his morning tea. Thinking perhaps that loose tea had floated to the surface, he swallowed several dozen before the penny dropped. He traced the ants back to the kettle. Several hundred lay contorted at the bottom. Wynton wondered why they would seek water from the kettle when the entire flat was running with damp.

Outside on the estate it was just as damp, cold and grey as it was inside the flat. Wynton shivered in his flimsy t-shirt and flip-flops. A dry and crispy towel discovered at the back of the airing cupboard covered his shoulders. With daylight now forcing its way through the over-large windows, Wynton began to explore the flat. The smell of damp was strongest from the master bedroom.

A grey fungus covered a large portion of the corner wall nearest the window. The main source of water dripped in a steady stream from the bare light fitting in the centre of the room. From there, it spread out to saturate the carpet to all four corners where it then curled and glistened with further evidence of the grey mouldy growth. Faintly, beyond the fungus-covered wall, Wynton could hear a man struggling to clear his throat with a wet, productive rasp. Wynton shut the door.

The second bedroom, barely large enough for a single bed, instead contained so many cans of Campbell's Cream of Tomato Soup that they reached to the ceiling. Towards the bottom of the pile, some of the labels had begun to peel away.

Wynton spent the rest of the day moving furniture away from the walls in the living room and in constructing a dry nest close to the electric bar fire. He felt his heart soar when the doorbell eventually rang.

'I couldn't find you any shoes, I'm afraid,' Julia told him. 'Size eleven is very big. But I got you loads of other stuff.'

'This must have cost you a fortune,' marvelled Wynton. He looked at the carrier bags on the floor.

Julia shook her head. 'No, it's all from the Cancer shop. Don't worry about it.'

'But most of this stuff is still in the wrapper,' he told her. 'What's Primark?'

'Just try it on,' she smiled.

Wynton felt reluctant to leave the comparative warmth of the living room.

'Don't be shy,' Julia giggled. 'D'you know how many bed baths I've given you?'

'How many?'

'Loads,' she told him. 'Try the hoody on.'

'You think I'm all right to go out like this?' asked Wynton a little later.

'You need to blend in,' she told him. 'Don't draw attention to yourself.'

'All I need now is a skateboard.'

'Good idea,' she laughed. 'You'll need to move fairly quick across the estate. You won't want to dawdle.'

'Really?'

'If they do stop you, just show them respect,' Julia applied the local dialect. 'Let 'em know you is well cool, man.'

'Do I have to speak like that as well?'

'It would help.'

‘Perhaps I’d be better off dribbling and clutching a live hand grenade,’ Wynton suggested.

‘I wouldn’t,’ she warned. ‘Show the faintest trace of vulnerability and they’ll have you.’

Wynton stepped out into the hall and examined himself in the mirror. He wondered how fast he could jog. ‘I couldn’t find a TV or radio,’ he called.

‘Yes, sorry about that,’ answered Julia. ‘My cousin Hammed said he’d drop by later.’

‘Hammed?’

‘The solicitor.’ Julia came out into the hall. ‘I’ve got to get back to work now. I’ll swing by later with some food.’

‘Oh, you don’t have to do that.’

‘Don’t worry about it. My cousin’s got a take-away in Trafalgar Road. D’you like it spicy? Oh, and I almost forgot. I got you these.’

She handed Wynton a paper bag. He looked inside.

‘Cashews,’ she told him. ‘Iranian. They’re the best.’

What the fuck is it?

‘So first off, we need to apply to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. I’ve got the form here. Just sign it here and here. I can fill the rest in for you and I thought it might be a good idea to use my office address.’ He looked around the room. ‘I assume this will just be a temporary address?’

‘I don’t want to feel I’m imposing here,’ began Wynton.

‘We’ll see if we can get you re-housed, we might even be able to get you put up in a hotel.’

Wynton gave a sigh of relief. ‘How much do you think I can get?’ he asked

Hammed gave a short laugh. ‘Anywhere between a grand and half a mil. You should also be able to claim for loss of earnings. What do you do, by the way? Have you spoken to your employers? Are you in a union? What salary were you on?’

‘Actually, I was between jobs.’

‘Oh, dear. Really?’ Hammed sucked in air sharply. ‘Were you sacked?’

‘No, I resigned. I’d had enough.’

‘Well, that complicates matters.’ Hammed sighed heavily. ‘You might be looking at minimum wage.’

‘Really?’

‘So we’ll definitely need to get you diagnosed for trauma. Go see your doctor and go for PTSD.’

‘PTSD?’ asked Wynton. ‘What are the symptoms?’

‘Oh, be nervous, jumpy, scared of loud bangs, you know the sort of thing. Cry if you get the chance. That can be worth up to twenty-seven grand alone.’

Wynton whistled.

‘I’m going to need a copy of your birth certificate.’

‘Ah,’ said Wynton. ‘How do I get a copy?’

‘Don’t you have one?’ asked Hammed.

‘At the flat.’

‘Right.’ Hammed scribbled more notes. ‘You’ll need to sign on, too. Bring the forms back to me and we can go through them together. Go for Incapacity Benefit while you can, Disability Living Allowance and Income Support.’

‘How long do you think this will take?’ asked Wynton.

‘Well, if we’re lucky we might squeeze out an interim payment from CICA. Signing on can take weeks, so best start tomorrow.’ Hammed looked down at the carrier bag of papers. ‘I’ll take those with me if you like. I’ll need to work out what’s happened.’

‘Any ideas, though?’

‘Yeah,’ Hammed laughed. ‘Your mortgage wasn’t paid because you went OD in your current account. All it takes is a few letters saying you’re a tenner in debt and before you know it you’ve run up a couple of hundred quid in bank charges. Then, as your debt grows, they seize your savings accounts to furnish the debts. By this time, of course, they’ve long stopped paying your DDs and standing orders. Your mortgage wasn’t getting serviced and they no doubt repossessed your flat.’

‘But that’s crazy,’ insisted Wynton. ‘Why didn’t the hospital say something? Why didn’t the cops tell my bank? They had all the details!’

‘Data Protection Act,’ said Hammed. ‘They’re not allowed to. On the plus side, however, it might be that they owe you some money, depending how much of your mortgage you paid off but, then again, you might have been in negative equity by then.’

‘Negative equity?’

Hammed chuffed. ‘Meaning your flat was worth less when they put it up for auction than it was when you paid for it.’

‘I put in a new bathroom and re-vamped the kitchen.’ Wynton was perplexed.

‘Why would it go down?’

‘Where have you been?’ Hammed laughed, and then he laughed a little louder.

‘Sorry. Haven’t you been reading the papers and watching TV?’

‘Sort of.’

Hammed looked at Wynton for signs of recognition. ‘Credit crunch?’

‘Okay,’ Wynton agreed. ‘I did read about that.’

‘The downturn?’

Wynton’s face was blank.

‘Recession?’

‘Yeah,’ agreed Wynton. ‘But I’m not sure how that would affect me.’

‘Right,’ agreed Hammed. He brightened. ‘I’ve never been busier.’

‘Great,’ said Wynton. ‘And what about all my stuff in the flat?’

Hammed sucked in air. ‘Probably sold off anything of value, your laptop, microwave, whatever. The rest probably went on a skip.’

‘On a skip? My passport, birth certificate...?’

‘Probably. That’s if the police don’t have them. You’d better check there.’

Hammed put the top back on his pen. ‘There is just one fly in the ointment,’ he told Wynton. ‘The deadline to apply for London bombing compensation ran out already.’

‘You are kidding?’

‘I wish I was.’ Hammed shook his head. ‘We’ll sort something out.’

‘How am I going to pay for this?’ asked Wynton.

‘Legal fees, you mean?’

Wynton nodded.

‘Don’t worry about that. No win no fee. And you get to keep one-hundred percent of any compensation.’

‘Really?’ Wynton looked dubious. ‘That seems too good to be true.’

‘Oh, no,’ smiled Hammed. ‘I’ll explain it all to you later.’ He bent down and grasped the Tesco carrier bag by the thin plastic handles. ‘What’s the matter with your feet?’ he asked.

‘You mean my flip-flops,’ Wynton laughed. ‘My feet are too big. The hospital lent me these.’

‘No, I didn’t mean that,’ said Hammed. ‘Why all the blood?’

Wynton looked down at his feet. Dried blood caked the majority of his toes.

‘They look all chewed,’ marvelled Hammed.

‘What the fuck is it?’ demanded Wynton.

‘God only knows,’ hissed Hammed. ‘You want to watch they don’t turn nasty.’

Small black ants

Wynton spent the rest of the afternoon in various attempts to fashion socks out of tea towels and in practicing his PTSD symptoms. The crying part came easily. As the light outside faded, Wynton discovered just how depressing a single bare light bulb in the centre of a ceiling can be. He relied now on the faint red glow of the electric wall heater.

He had also fashioned a much improved nest from the cushions on the sofa and the one armchair. And, on the far side of the living room wall, the neighbour hacked and coughed. He waited for Julia and fantasised about spicy food. And then he remembered the nuts.

Wynton lay down and pulled the thin duvet tightly around him. He placed the bag of cashews on his chest and, while he slowly began to savour each one, his mind drifted to the only pleasant prospect on his horizon. He would be sensible with his compensation. He imagined himself fully reclined in business class, nibbling cashews and sipping cocktails. He delighted in the thought of a Thai beach hut, hot and humid: an all-encompassing warmth that he could sink into. And soon he was asleep.

Wynton fell into such a deep and pleasant sleep that dreams came easily. He had no difficulty conjuring up the heat of a Thai beach and the smell of salt in the air. He could even feel the beads of sweat trickling along the length of his body. In time, as Wynton drifted in and out of consciousness, it occurred to him that sweat, which would certainly run the length of his body if he were standing, would not actually run horizontally if he were reclined.

'Oh, fuck!' screamed Wynton. He ran to the wall and switched on the dim overhead light. In his hand, he still held the bag of Iranian cashews. He also held in his hand an equal weight in small black ants. Other ants continued to run the course of his body. He was still struggling to clear his throat when Julia eventually arrived.

Why so much soup?

'I hope you like dal,' Julia looked a trifle concerned as she pulled a foil carton from the bag. 'I also got you some chapatis; too many probably, but you can have them for breakfast.'

'Julia, why is there so much soup in the spare bedroom?'

'Soup?' she asked.

'Campbell's Cream of Tomato Soup.'

'Oh,' Julia laughed aloud. 'Taqi read somewhere that they were going to discontinue it.'

'So he stocked up?'

'He loves cream of tomato. Have some if you want.'

'Thanks.'

'I got you a surprise.' Julia turned excitedly to her shoulder bag. 'Shut your eyes.'

'What is it?' Wynton heard a series of clicks.

'Keep them closed,' said Julia.

And then he heard the familiar sound of Windows XP starting up.

'You can open them now.'

Wynton stood opened mouthed. 'But there isn't even a phone line here!'

'Ha, ha,' insisted Julia. She bent and fiddled with the laptop for a minute or two.

'But there is a wi-fi network,' she smiled. 'Look! Six megs!'

'Whose?' he asked.

Julia shrugged. 'Who knows? But it works.'

'I can listen to the radio,' Wynton smiled.

'And you can surf the web. You can catch up on everything you've missed.'

'Oh, Julia. I can't thank you enough.'

'It belongs to a cousin,' she told him.

'It would.'

'He imports them. This is an old display model. Have fun.'

Cuz dey would

Although he had not seen a naked woman in over three years, Wynton soon became bored. After first finding a radio station he approved of, he opened Google Images and typed the word [babes](#) and, although he got 5,760,000 results, they amounted to little more than window dressing without a valid credit card. Wynton felt his teeth grinding.

‘Right,’ he declared. ‘Three years in a coma. What am I playing at?’ And then Wynton thought to look up his current address and then typed into Google ["Ferrier Estate" + SE3](#) but only made 421 results. First up was [theratandmouse.co.uk](#). He clicked through and read:

Here's a disturbing story about residents of Kidbrooke's condemned Ferrier Estate, many of whom are post-right-to-buy owners who have decided to stay put rather than accept derisory offers from Greenwich Council (£65,000 for a three-bedroom flat anyone?), while the council moves towards demolition and replacement in 2018. There are apparently 23 homeowners and three tenants left, living amongst derelict tower blocks, sheet metal, filth and darkness. It looks suspiciously like the council, who have promised to keep the estate inhabitable until it's finally replaced, is applying its own unorthodox methods to encourage the remaining residents to leave.

Wynton found himself nodding confirmation and then he scrolled down and read:

I know looadz of people who live and lived on the estate and they all basically say da same thing: it's shit. if i was to EVER, EVER live there..i'd rather kill myself or better yet-get someone on the estate to do it, cuz dey would. Posted by somebody who dnt live on Ferrier Estate at September 26, 2007 9:11 AM

Wynton read on in continued amazement. People lived like this, just twenty minutes from London Bridge? But then, of course, there were always others who had a more positive spin on life. Mert, opting for the poetic, summed up the estate thus:

bang bang ferrier gang well we will always be on dis estate coz dis is our endz we stay out to late in teleman square we are da hood rats of da estate fuk haters ferrier til i die

And then Wynton found Stuart:

RATS RATS RATS RATS RATS RATS RATS RATS EVERYWHERE!! MICE IN THE HOUSES THAT BITE THROUGH EVERYTHING.. WALLS.. CHRISTMAS PRESENTS.. FOODS. CLOTHES BITE THROUGH EVERYTHING AND SCRATCH THROUGH THINGS... EVEN BITE DEEEP HOLES THROUGH YOUR TOES AT NIGHT! YOU DONT FEEL THE PAIN TILL THE MORNING BECAUSE THEY DO SOME WEIRD STUFF SO YOU DONT FEEL IT... THEY LEAVE THE BLOOD LEAKING FROM YOUR TOE AND FLESH HANGS OUT OF THE SKIN...

‘Oh, fuck! No!’ screamed Wynton aloud. And then the lights chose to go out.

Wotzup?

Julia had mentioned something called a key meter. It took Wynton some time to find his Zippo in the dark and then a little longer to find the meter. Wynton withdrew the card that was called a key and then stood frozen to the spot. Wynton still did not have a watch but he knew that it was not yet ten. Did he really need electricity? How long would the laptop's battery last? What would it be like in a damp flat all night without an electric bar heater? Wynton found his wallet and then the door key and was soon standing outside, pulling the cords tight on his hoody in a darkened hallway.

The wind whipped up a storm of dust and flimsy shreds of plastic that flew along the length of the corridor. Wynton's flat was conveniently situated close to the stairwell and, with a certain degree of trepidation, Wynton made his way slowly down. It was not until he stepped into his first puddle, on the second floor, that he realised his flip-flops would be inadequate for the journey.

It was nearing eleven when Wynton found Telemans Square and the general store placed happily between the sexually transmitted diseases clinic and the twenty-four hour pharmacy.

'Yeah, well, you've used up your five-pound emergency credit, ain't yer, so you gotta gimme six quid before we can even start topping der fing up, innit?'

Wynton counted the remaining notes. 'If I give you ten, how long will four pounds last?' he wanted to know.

The man behind the steel cage laughed, although not pleasantly. 'What kinda question's that? How'd I know what you're fucking running?'

'Okay,' hissed Wynton. 'Here's twenty. I'll take the special offer six-pack of Tennents Extra and credit the key with what's left over. Oh, and forty Marlboros. No, the red ones.'

If Wynton's day had sought a way to sink to a new low, it could have done no better than steer him towards the Telemans Crew. As it happened, they found him first.

'Hey, Mister Skinny Man! You really from the endz?'

'Your creps are bare sick, man!' They pointed to his feet and laughed.

Wynton felt the world closing in around him. A horrible rush, rather like a mild electric charge, coursed through his veins. He felt sick and he felt faint. Options flashed to his mind. He could do a little name-dropping and mention Mert or he could feign death. Julia's words about vulnerability flashed through his mind. Wynton needed to be cool.

'Hi, Guys! Wotzup?'

And then they laughed, which Wynton hoped might be a good sign. The twenty or so young men and children, each clad in their own hoodies, closed in around him. The words that they all spoke at once meant virtually nothing to him. He was lucky to catch one word in ten. He tried to smile a lot and he even thought to wave his hands around like Ali G. Eventually, one of the click levelled the accusation that Wynton was dissin' der bredrin, and that was it.

'You wanna bring it on?' they asked.

'You dissin' m' blud?'

'Come on, come on, no lumping!'

First - and this wasn't too bad - a bottle of water was upended on Wynton's head.
'Hey, der Skinny Man need der water t'grow!'
And then they lashed out.

Somewhere in Wynton's mind he remembered a passage from *Bravo Two Zero* about never letting yourself fall to the ground. Wynton was able to roll and then he was up on his large and chewed but nimble feet and making a mad dash for Kidbrooke Park Road. Later, in the dark, the damp and the cold, with just the sound of the neighbour's hacking cough, he would think of the carrier bag with the Tennents Extra, the Marlboros and the electricity key.

You have mail

‘Well, don’t go out again, then,’ said Julia. ‘I’ll get you everything you need. And here’s a spare key for the electric.’

‘I’ve got to sign on.’

‘At least wait ‘til it stops raining.’ Julia stepped into the hall and opened the cupboard. There came a loud clunk and the electric bar heater slowly began to glow and the overhead bulb illuminated without any discernable effect.

‘And I got you these.’ She held out a rigid carrier bag.

‘What is it?’ Wynton asked.

Julia proffered the bag.

‘Cigarettes,’ he marvelled. ‘A whole carton.’

‘I know you like Marlboros,’ she told him.

‘Lights,’ he smiled. ‘Great. Thanks.’ He examined the safety warning. ‘It’s all in Dutch,’ he told her.

‘I have a cousin who gets them from Belgium,’ she smiled. ‘Cheapest fags in Europe.’

Wynton began the hunt for his Zippo.

‘We ought to set you up with a new email,’ she told him. She waited for the laptop to fire up and then she opened Google Mail. ‘Do you want to use your real name?’ she asked.

‘I don’t see why not.’

‘WyntonSmith has gone,’ she told him. ‘How about [wyntonsmith67237](#)?’

‘There’s that many Wynton Smiths?’ he asked.

‘Apparently. Shall we go for that?’

‘Whatever.’

‘Choose a password,’ said Julia.

‘Pharaoh.’

‘Too short,’ she told him.

‘Pharaoh *ant*, one word.’

‘Now they want a security question,’ she told him. ‘Pet’s name? Favourite colour?’

‘Can I choose my own question?’ he asked.

‘Yep.’

‘Then my question is “what’s chewing my feet?”’

‘That’s your question?’ asked Julia.

‘Yes.’

‘And what’s the answer?’

‘Fucking mice,’ he told her.

‘You want me to set that up as your security question, and answer?’

‘I do.’

Julia typed for a moment longer and then declared: ‘Now you have email. I’ll send you one to see if it’s working.’

‘Thanks.’

‘Do you want to play a game?’ she asked suddenly.

‘Not really,’ said Wynton.

‘Oh, Mister Grumpy Man,’ she told him. ‘Let’s play a game.’

‘What kind of game?’

‘I’ll give you some quotations, or parts of quotations, and you have to look them up on Google. Okay?’

‘Sounds fascinating.’

Julia called up another page and was soon typing Wynton his first email.

‘I’m off to work now. I’ll pop by this evening and bring you something to eat.’

She tightened her scarf and stepped out onto the rain-swept landing. ‘Good luck signing on.’

Benefits

Wynton stared at the page where Julia had set up his email and looked for the Inbox. He had two emails already: the first from the Google Mail Team and the second from Juwairiyah Abbas.

Hiya Wynton! I'm going to send you a few easy questions – just to get you going. Cut and paste them into Google but only source your answers from “reliable” sites. Here are the first three now. I'll send you more when I get to work.

[Benjamin + "The world is governed"](#)
["the days of Andrew Jackson" + Roosevelt](#)
["institutions are more dangerous"](#)

Jx

Wynton sighed heavily. He looked up at the rivulets of rain chasing each other horizontally across the window. He breathed on his fingers to bring a little life back into them and then he cut and paste: [Benjamin + "The world is governed"](#).

Over 10,000 results popped up. The first was from a site calling itself [brainyquote.com](#). Wynton clicked and then read, *The world is governed by very different personages from what is imaged by those who are not behind the scenes. Benjamin Disraeli, 1844.*

‘Okay,’ he agreed. ‘Big deal.’ Then he tried ["the days of Andrew Jackson" + Roosevelt](#).

Wynton picked the third one down, [Andrew Jackson Quotes & Quotations](#), and read, *The real truth of the matter is that a financial element in the large centers has owned the government since the days of Andrew Jackson. Franklin D Roosevelt, 1933.*

["institutions are more dangerous"](#) produced over 17,000 pages. He opted for [brainyquote.com](#) again and read: *I believe that banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies. If the American people ever allow private banks to control the issue of their currency, first by inflation, then by deflation, the banks and corporations... will deprive the people of all property until their children wake-up homeless on the continent their fathers conquered. Thomas Jefferson.*

By the time Wynton returned with a well-strained cup of black coffee, he found another email from Juwairiyah Abbas and eight further questions. He wondered why they were so obscure. First up, ["What is a Central Bank?"](#)

The principal monetary authority of a nation, which performs several key functions, including issuing currency and regulating the supply of credit.

Wynton may have been bored and perplexed in equal measure but the oddness of the next line sparked his interest: ["Mr. Lewis was injured by a Federal Reserve vehicle"](#).

This time there were only three entries, none of which looked too “reliable”. Wynton clicked them all and eventually [read](#), *Although Article 1, Section 8, of the Constitution makes Congress responsible for coining money, it is the Federal Reserve that has total monetary control. However, the Federal Reserve is not a Federal agency and has no reserves, it is a privately-owned banking system, as proven in court: A Mr. Lewis was injured by a Federal Reserve vehicle and sued the U.S. government for damages. The court ruled, “...that since the Federal Reserve System and its twelve branch banks are private corporations, the federal government could not be held responsible.” - Lewis v. U.S., 608F 2d 1239.*

‘Okay,’ said Wynton to himself. ‘Now that does surprise me.’

The next question pre-empted his own, ["who owns the US Federal Reserve?"](#)

With only a slim eight sites containing that exact sentence, Wynton quickly scanned them all. Again, none could actually be termed “reliable”, but some of their sourcing seemed sound. At [save-a-patriot.org](#), Wynton stumbled on an interesting chart published by the House of Representatives in 1976 which clearly linked the Federal Reserve with Brown Brothers Harriman, Sun Life Assurance, Standard Oil of Indiana, General Motors, Allied Chemical Corporation (Eugene Meyer family), the Rockefeller Foundation, N.M. Rothschild and Sons, and Equitable Life (JP Morgan).

Wynton quickly dropped in the next line from Julia’s email: ["I have unwittingly ruined my country"](#) and sought to answer who said it and why.

There were 783 results. Wynton wasn’t even sure if [Wikipedia](#) was “reliable” but he clicked anyway. The answer was Woodrow Wilson.

I am the most unhappy man. I have unwittingly ruined my country. A great industrial nation is now controlled by its system of credit. We are no longer a government by free opinion, no longer a government by conviction and the vote of the majority, but a government by the opinion and duress of a small group of dominant men. President Wilson, it seemed, said this in 1919 after signing the Federal Reserve into existence over the Christmas holiday.

Wynton swiftly pasted ["The Fed has usurped the government"](#) and soon discovered, *When the [Federal Reserve Act](#) was passed, the people of the United States did not perceive that a world banking system was being set up here. A superstate controlled by international bankers and industrialists acting together to enslave the world for their own pleasure. Every effort has been made to conceal its powers but the truth is - the Fed has usurped the government. Louis B. McFadden, Chairman, House Banking Committee, 1933.*

‘Okay,’ said Wynton again. ‘That would make him a very dangerous person to chair a banking committee.’ He diverted for a moment and typed in ["Louis B. McFadden"](#) and soon discovered that [McFadden](#) survived two assassination attempts but not a third.

‘Now this is getting creepy,’ thought Wynton, keener suddenly to discover who said ["Under the Federal Reserve Act panics are scientifically created"](#).

Wynton had just 89 sites to choose from. He chose the first, and read, *Under the Federal Reserve Act panics are scientifically created; the present is the first scientifically created one, worked out as we figure a mathematical problem. Congressman Charles Lindberg, 1929.*

Wynton turned back to Julia’s email and was sorry to see just two questions remaining. ["periods of inflation and depression originate"](#) led him to a quote by another assassination victim, President James A. Garfield.

Whoever controls the volume of money in our country is absolute master of all industry and commerce. And when you realise that the entire system is very easily controlled, one way or another, by a few powerful men at the top, you will not have to be told how periods of inflation and depression originate.

Wynton looked at his last question and wondered who said: ["Give me control of a nation's money supply and I care not who makes its laws"](#).

Just five sites popped up and every one of them sourced the quotation back to Mayer Amschel Rothschild, founder of the Rothschild banking dynasty.

Wynton noticed another email in his Inbox. He did not recognise the name Asko Chickowski. He opened the email: *hello pal wyntonsmith67237, you can turn the sex switch on everytime with an enlarged cock.*

Shortfall

Wynton's feet were frozen by the time he walked the three miles to Woolwich Jobcentre Plus. He took his number and looked for somewhere safe to sit. Each chair came with a risk. He chose his reading matter at random from a rack and then buried himself in [*The Use and Development of Alternative Service Delivery Channels in Jobcentre Plus: A Review of Recent Evidence*](#).

The time would have dragged more were it not for the interesting characters that came and went during the course of the afternoon. The danger lay in catching them by the eye. He had been particularly keen to avoid the most vocal woman in the room who marched back and forth between the chairs with the single refrain: *'I ain't got no fucking milk for my baby you cunts!'*

'Is anybody sitting here?'

Wynton looked up and then he looked at the two empty plastic chairs beside him. He shook his head.

'You sit here,' a woman indicated the seat next to Wynton and ushered an elderly man into place. 'I'll go get a ticket,' she told them both.

Wynton buried himself in the report on his lap. *The level of control an organisation has over service delivery mainly depends on the proximity to channel members and the performance standards and procedures.*

Wynton found his brain slowly numbing. He eventually stopped reading when he sensed the woman looking at him. She lent across the elderly man and gave a series of jerks with her head to gain Wynton's attention.

'Have you been waiting long?' she asked.

'A couple of hours.'

She tutted. 'What number are you? We're number 206.'

Wynton looked at the ticket in his hand. '199', he told her.

She tutted again. 'We were lucky to get a seat,' she told him. 'We've just been down the housing office and it was bonkers there.'

'Really?'

The woman began to rummage in her handbag. Wynton watched out of the corner of his eye while she unwrapped a Polo mint. She popped one in her mouth and handed another to the old man.

'Would you like a mint?' She lent across and offered Wynton one.

'No thanks.' He smiled.

'Budge up, dad.' The woman suddenly stood up. 'You sit here.' She indicated her seat and then she came and sat beside Wynton.

'What a palaver, eh?'

'Yeah.' Wynton smiled again. He turned a page of the report.

'I've got to get him re-housed.' The woman shook her head and crunched down hard on the mint. 'You signing on?'

'Yeah.'

'We're here about the Social Fund,' she told him. Wynton smelt the mint on her breath. 'You can't get through on the phone, can you?'

'No.'

'I've been trying to sort out some help with his heating.'

‘Really.’

‘But I’ve got to get him re-housed, that’s the thing.’ She lent closer to Wynton. ‘It’s terrible but nobody seems to care. The police certainly don’t.’

‘What have the police got to do with it?’

‘They won’t do a thing,’ she told him. She lowered her voice and jerked her head back to indicate the old man. ‘They’re robbing him blind but they say there’s nothing they can do.’

‘The police are robbing him?’ Wynton wanted to know.

‘No. A local lad. One of them chavs all done out in that Burberry check. He started coming round asking if he could do any shopping for him, run errands, that sort of thing. Next thing you know, there ain’t no change. Then he’s coming in the house, helping himself to anything he fancies. Now it’s got to the point when he don’t even bother to come in no more. He just stands there on the step and makes my dad turn out his pockets. “Give us what you’ve got”. That’s what he says.’

‘And the police won’t help?’ asked Wynton.

The woman scoffed. ‘Useless. They said if my dad invites him in the house, then it’s his business. Don’t matter that he’s terrified. And what can you do? You can’t do anything yourself, can you? It’s you that gets in trouble not them.’

‘That’s awful!’

She scoffed again. ‘If you try, if you have someone go round and have a word with him, its them that gets in trouble. My brother-in-law went round. He just wanted a quiet word, put the kid straight so to speak. Well, they called the police on him. They called it...’ she paused to crease her brow. ‘Causing harassment, alarm and distress. *Him?*’ She scoffed again.

And then, luckily, they called Wynton’s number.

‘Well, you’ve got to fill it all in, haven’t you? It’s no good leaving blanks.’

‘Well, I don’t know my National Insurance Number. Who does?’

‘And this is your address, is it?’

‘Leclair House, The Ferrier Estate, yes.’

She entered the details into the system. ‘Can I see your bills and utilities?’

‘They’re not in my name.’

‘Not in your name?’ She searched the papers in front of her. ‘And I don’t see any identification?’

‘I have explained.’

‘And what about your bank details? How do you expect us to pay you if you haven’t got a bank account?’

‘I thought I got a Giro,’ said Wynton. ‘That I can cash at the Post Office?’

The woman laughed.

‘What should I do?’ he asked.

‘You’ve lost all your papers, you say?’

‘Yes.’

‘Were they stolen?’

‘Not as such.’

‘Would you care to elaborate?’ she asked.

‘They were taken and destroyed,’ he explained.

‘Destroyed?’

Wynton nodded.

‘Have you reported this to the police?’

Wynton felt his shoulders sag.

‘I really would like to help you,’ she explained. ‘But I need more to go on.’

‘Thanks,’ said Wynton.

‘And there’s a considerable shortfall in your National Insurance contributions which, I’m sorry to say, you are going to have to make up.’

‘*Christ!*’ hissed Wynton. ‘I’ve been in a coma for...’

The woman suddenly recoiled back in her chair and raised her hands, palm out in a bid to ward him off.

Wynton was puzzled. ‘What the...?’

‘*No! Don’t!* Don’t you dare say that again!’ She lent forward and felt frantically for the panic button beneath the counter. Concerned colleagues rushed quickly to her aid. They glared at Wynton from behind the glass.

‘*Christ!* What did I say?’ he wanted to know.

‘*There!* He said it again!’ she exclaimed.

By then Wynton was already in the clutches of the two security guards and being dragged backwards - past the woman screaming ‘*I ain’t got no fucking milk for my baby you cunts!*’ - and out into the street.

‘Give us those papers,’ one of the guards demanded.

Wynton held up the half-completed forms and then watched as they were quickly screwed into a ball.

‘Now, fuck off!’ they told him.

Do you get out much?

Wynton was busy in Google Images, absorbed in all the fun of the full moon party on Thailand's Koh Pha Ngan island, when the doorbell rang.

'Wynton Smith?'

'Yes.'

Two men flashed IDs that Wynton failed to read and then asked, 'May we come in?'

'Nice place,' said the second man. He stepped gingerly down the corridor, careful not to brush against the damp walls.

'How did you get my address?' asked Wynton.

'Your address?' They looked at each other. 'I'm not sure. It was in the system.'

'I'd offer you a cup of tea,' said Wynton. 'But there aren't enough cups.'

'Anywhere to sit?' The first man looked around the living room. Wynton quickly gathered up the kitchen stool and a folding chair.

'So how are you getting on, then?' the first man asked.

'Well,' Wynton huffed. 'I could give you a litany of mishaps but let's just say I'm fine.'

'Excellent,' he smiled.

'Are you planning to stay here long?' asked the second man.

'Not if I can help it,' smiled Wynton, and then added: 'There's a fat woman in my flat.'

'Oh, yes. Do you have legal representation?'

'I do.'

'Do you have plans to leave the country?' The second man cocked an eye at the laptop.

Wynton laughed. 'As soon as I can. Why?'

'We shouldn't want to lose touch.' They both smiled.

'Ah, yes,' said Wynton. 'While you're here, I've got to get my passport back.'

'Passport?'

'It was at the flat. I wondered if you had it?'

They both shook their heads. 'No. Why would we have it?'

'And my BlackBerry?'

'You'll need to pop along to Paddington Green,' the second man told him. 'Ask there.'

'Do you mind if we ask you a couple of questions?' The first man tilted his head at Wynton.

'I thought it was coming to this,' said Wynton. 'Not just a social visit, then?'

'A few things for the file.' The man smiled thinly. 'We have a few blanks that we hoped you might fill in.'

'Such as?'

The man opened a buff folder and then produced a photograph.

'Have you ever owned a bag like this?' he asked.

Wynton looked at the photo. He shook his head.

'Are you sure?'

'Positive,' said Wynton.

‘You never finished your studies?’ asked the man.
Wynton sat back surprised. ‘What’s that got to do with anything?’
‘After such a promising start...’ He let the sentence trail off. ‘How did you find Bristol?’
‘I don’t get it,’ said Wynton. ‘Where’s this going?’
‘Why would anybody want to study palaeontology and evolution?’ asked the other man. ‘Did you plan to work in that field?’
‘I thought about it.’
‘But you decided against it,’ put in the first man. ‘And then you switched to ancient history and archaeology.’
‘Yes,’ said Wynton.
‘And what sort of work did you think that would prepare you for?’ asked the second man again.
‘Archaeological work,’ suggested Wynton.
‘Bit of a loner.’ The first man consulted his file. ‘Do you not make friends easily?’
‘I have friends,’ said Wynton.
‘But not the sort of friends who would come and visit you in hospital?’
Wynton scoffed. ‘I wouldn’t have been very good company.’
‘Did you have some trouble at your school?’ asked the first man.
‘Some difficulty?’ asked the second.
‘Aside from being expelled, you mean?’ Wynton tried to laugh but his mouth was too dry.
‘You were expelled?’ asked the second man.
‘Isn’t that why you’re asking?’
‘You had a penchant for sign-writing, I understand.’ The first man tilted his head again.
‘If you have a point, please make it,’ asked Wynton.
‘And you liked chemistry?’ asked the other man.
‘And geography and history, yes.’
‘History,’ mused the first man. ‘Do you have a favourite period?’
‘Aside from ancient history, you mean?’ asked Wynton.
‘Are you not interested in modern history?’ asked the man with the file.
‘I’m interested in all history,’ he told them.
‘I liked history,’ smiled the second man. ‘First War, Second World War. Do they interest you?’
‘Sure,’ said Wynton.
‘I wonder,’ he mused. ‘Would you have protested against the war on Hitler had you been alive then?’
‘I only went on those anti-war demos because of my girlfriend,’ insisted Wynton.
‘Ah, yes,’ said the first man. ‘And the petitions? To please your girlfriend?’
‘Pretty much,’ agreed Wynton.
‘Lauren Williams, née Davis,’ said the first man.
‘Pardon?’ Wynton was shocked.
‘Your girlfriend,’ the first man told him.
‘What d’you mean *née Davis*?’

‘Oh, don’t you know? Your Lauren Davis got married.’ The man stopped to think. ‘It must be coming up to a year now.’ He smiled. ‘She’s expecting a baby next month – a boy, apparently.’

Both men continued to smile at Wynton. Suddenly, the first man spoke: ‘Some people see you as the missing piece of a jigsaw.’

‘What are you talking about?’ Wynton looked at them both.

‘Your memory,’ the second man told him. ‘A bang to the head. A three-year-coma. Things might be a bit vague at first.’

‘Only understandable,’ echoed the first man.

‘Well, if I do remember anything of importance, I’ll be sure to let you know.’ Wynton felt sick again. He wanted them to leave.

‘You sat at the back of the bus?’ asked the first man.

Wynton just exhaled deeply. He let his head droop to his chest.

‘Do you ever wonder why your back was so burned?’

‘What?’ Wynton looked back up.

‘People’s memories come back, don’t they?’ the first man turned to the second.

‘But there are memories and there are false memories,’ warned the second man.

‘And I have a blank memory,’ Wynton told them.

‘Do you get out much?’ asked the first man. He looked around the dim room.

Wynton curled a lip.

‘You really should.’

People would ask questions

'I got you a mutton karahi and some parathas.' Julia pulled a carton from the brown paper bag.

'Mutton?' asked Wynton.

'Actually,' admitted Julia. 'It's goat. They call it mutton but if you want that authentic taste of the North-West Frontier you've got to go for goat.'

'I've never had goat,' admitted Wynton.

'It's an acquired taste,' she told him. 'Come and eat by the fire and tell me about your day. It's freezing out here.'

'I don't know who lives next door,' said Wynton, nodding towards the far wall. 'But they've either got TB or pleurisy.'

'Probably.' Julia didn't seem too interested. 'So, what have you been up to all day?' she asked.

'Oh, you know. Looking stuff up on the net.'

Julia smiled. 'Like what?'

'Thailand, mostly,' he told her.

She shook her head.

'I went out there in my gap year.' Wynton settled himself beside the fire and pulled the foil carton onto his lap. 'Actually, I spent most of my time on some poxy Unesco project in Cambodia. You don't ever want to go there for a holiday.'

'I wasn't planning on it,' smiled Julia. 'What were you doing?'

'Have you ever heard of Angkor Thom?' he asked.

'Is that like Angkor Wat?'

'Yeah, same sort of thing. Except it's covered in jungle, or it was until Unesco starting clearing the place.' He scoffed. 'They ruined it.' And then he smiled. 'But Thailand...' and then he let his sentence trail off.

'So what sort of things were you looking up?'

Wynton laughed. 'Annual rainfall, gross national product. I started looking up flights but it's all a bit pointless right now. I just got bored.'

'If you're bored,' she said, 'I could give you some more Google questions if you like.'

'Sure. Why not?'

'And did you do the ones I gave you this morning?'

'Yeah,' Wynton smiled. 'I thought they were intriguing,' he told her. 'Only, I couldn't see the point.'

'I thought you liked history,' said Julia. 'Try the karahi.'

Wynton peered into the dry brown sauce.

'So I bet you didn't know the US Federal Reserve was no more federal than FedEx,' she grinned.

'No, I didn't and I looked up McFadden. He was bumped off.'

'Poisoned at a banquet,' she told him. 'And Lindberg's baby disappeared, presumed murdered. They blackened his name and labelled him a Nazi - the 1930s equivalent of calling someone a paedophile.'

'That taught him, then,' smiled Wynton. He prodded at a piece of contorted fat that lay on the surface.

‘You’ve heard the expression, cents on the dollar?’ Julia asked.

‘Of course.’

‘The Wall Street Crash, 1929,’ she told him. ‘Previously thriving businesses were bought up for cents on the dollar.’

‘What of it?’

‘But did you know that over 15,000 private banks went under?’

‘I can’t say I did.’

‘And that they were sucked up by the big boys: JP Morgan, the Warburgs, the Rockefellers, the Rothschilds?’

‘For what, though?’ asked Wynton. The gristle began to annoy him. ‘I mean, really! You’re suggesting they sparked the Wall Street Crash, like a mathematical formula, just to make a profit?’

‘Yes,’ she told him.

‘So, how much money do these people need?’ sneered Wynton. ‘Did they have to wreck so many lives to achieve their ends? I don’t think so.’

‘You don’t?’ Julia looked surprised.

‘What, and bugger their own economy?’ Wynton shook his head. ‘And cause a world-wide depression.’ He snorted.

‘And get to pick up the pieces for peanuts?’ Julia smiled.

‘So what’s your point?’ Wynton wanted to know.

Julia’s grin turned playful. ‘So, how was the goat?’

‘Musty,’ he told her. ‘But not unpleasant.’ He smiled and showed Julia the clean foil dish and the remaining piece of gristle. ‘See, I finished, apart from the gristle.’

‘So, do you want any more Google questions?’ she asked.

‘More banking questions?’

Julia smiled. ‘You like history.’ She thought for a moment. ‘Then answer these tomorrow: [Why did the US enter the First World War?](#) [Why did the US enter the Second World War?](#) And [Why did the US enter the Vietnam War?](#)’

Now Wynton scoffed. ‘I don’t need the Internet to answer those.’

‘Okay, what are the answers?’

Wynton stared at the ceiling. ‘Well, the sinking of the [Lusitania](#) prompted the Americans to enter the first war.’

‘Okay.’

‘[Pearl Harbour](#) is the answer to the second question.’

‘Okay.’

‘And Vietnam was sparked by the [Gulf of Tonkin Incident](#).’

‘Correct,’ smiled Julia. ‘And here’s another one: how did Hitler seize power?’

‘Well, that’s not so straightforward.’

‘Try.’

‘I guess the [burning of the Reichstag](#).’

‘So he did,’ smiled Julia. ‘But did you ever wonder why the sinking of just one ship would prompt the US to enter the First World War?’

‘Not really,’ huffed Wynton. ‘If you sink an American ship, you have to expect reprisals.’

‘So would it surprise you to know that the *Lusitania* wasn’t an American ship? That she was British, partly funded by the Admiralty and on the reserve list, and probably carrying arms?’

Wynton looked doubtful.

‘And that the Germans even went so far as to warn American citizens not to travel on her?’

‘How?’s

‘By placing an ad in the [New York Times](#).’

‘I’ll have to look that up,’ said Wynton.

‘Do,’ said Julia. ‘And, as for Pearl Harbour, the Americans had already broken the Japanese codes and the Australians even warned them that a task force was coming their way. Why else did they send their best capital ships away? How come all the American aircraft carriers were safely at sea?’

‘But what’s your point?’

‘My point,’ smiled Julia. ‘Is that prior to Pearl Harbour, 83 percent of the American population wanted nothing to do with the war but next day, miraculously, more than one million men joined up. Do you know what’s meant by false flag?’ she asked.

Wynton shook his head.

‘Then type it into Google,’ said Julia. She opened the laptop and dropped it onto Wynton’s lap.

‘["false flag"](#),’ said Wynton. Up popped 752,000 entries. The first was [Wikipedia](#).

False flag operations are covert operations conducted by governments, corporations, or other organizations, which are designed to appear as if they are being carried out by other entities. The name is derived from the military concept of flying false colors; that is, flying the flag of a country other than one's own. False flag operations are not limited to war and counter-insurgency operations, and have been used in peace-time...

‘Ring any bells?’ asked Julia.

Wynton shrugged. ‘Should it?’

‘Now type [Reichstag + "false flag"](#),’ she told him.

‘I know where this is going,’ said Wynton. He looked up. ‘It’s going to say Hitler started the fire and blamed it on his enemies so he could grab dictatorial powers.’

‘That’s right,’ she agreed. ‘And you know Hitler staged a border incident as a pretext for invading Poland?’

‘I did do history at school, you know.’

‘So now type [Tonkin + "false flag"](#).’

‘I don’t think I need to.’ Wynton smiled. ‘Most people know it was a pretext to enter the war. They admitted as much.’

‘All right,’ smiled Julia. ‘Then let’s look at something else that perhaps you don’t know. Tomorrow, look up ["Operation Northwoods"](#).’

Wynton nodded and began to pick at a paratha. ‘Julia? Why do you think those cops today were so posh?’

‘Perhaps they weren’t really cops.’

Wynton gave Julia an askance look. ‘Then what were they?’

‘Take your pick,’ she told him. ‘SIS, MI5, MI6, SRS...’

‘Why do they have to keep bothering me?’ asked Wynton. ‘Don’t they share information?’

Julia just laughed.

‘So, how do they think I’m going to advance the enquiry?’

‘Perhaps they don’t,’ she told him. ‘Perhaps they’re worried you might retard it.’

That shit from my office

Facebook is a social utility that connects you with the people around you. ... Register from your computer at www.facebook.com

Wynton registered with only the briefest of personal details and then sat frozen, his fingers poised reluctantly above the keyboard, and his heart beating a little too fast. He typed Lauren Williams.

There were a lot of Lauren Williams's to choose from. There was a sultry-looking Lauren Williams posing with her mother, an obese Lauren Williams perched on a stool, and a tender Lauren Williams in her nightie, clutching a balloon. And then, on the fifth page, Wynton's heart missed a beat. There was his Lauren Williams, née Davis.

'Well, you've put on a bit of weight,' he said aloud. He studied her tight grey t-shirt with the word *Cheeky*, and he felt sick. He pressed both of his cold hands together and squeezed down hard on the knuckles. 'Jesus!' he hissed. 'Did you marry a feeder or what?' Wynton felt deeply uncomfortable. Lauren had a life.

Lauren belonged to the group *First Time Mums - For ladies who are pregnant or have had their first child*. She belonged to *We love chocolate appreciation society! For all those of us who can't get enough of the stuff*. And she was a member of *Addicted to Hollyoaks*.

Her music tastes had remained largely static over the past three years. Wynton cringed at the thought of the Kaiser Chiefs and the Sugababes and at the nights re-watching *Titanic* and *Dirty Dancing*.

And then he felt really sick when he scrolled down to the foot of the page.

I've been married to the loveliest man in the world – Daren – for nearly a whole year now.

'Daren?' hissed Wynton. 'That shit from my office?'

We met through a mutual friend and I have never been happier.

'Mutual friend? Oh, that's bloody great.'

We have a lovely terraced house in Carshalton which we share with our kittens, Nobby, Plonk, Mister Muscle, and BeepyBoo. And soon we shall be joined by our new baby Tyler. Just can't wait!

Wynton clicked next on Lauren's photo collection and saw the smug-faced Daren in his red tracksuit and toothy grin. He looked at the rest of the photos: the poky little terraced house, the fluffy cats. The depressing sound of the man next door coughing his guts up was enough to tip Wynton over the edge.

'Shut the fuck up!' he screamed at the wall. 'Just fuck off and die!'

Trading with the Enemy

Wynton needed a distraction. "[Operation Northwoods](#)" produced a neat 120,000 results from Google. Once again, [Wikipedia](#) topped the list. Wynton read what they had to say: *Operation Northwoods was a 1962 plan by the US Department of Defense to cause acts of simulated or real terrorism and violence on US soil or against US interests, blamed on Cuba, in order to generate US public support for military action against the Cuban government of Fidel Castro.*

‘Oh, really?’ thought Wynton. He looked for another source and settled on the fifth entry down, [ABC News](#). In a story by-lined New York, May 1, 2001, David Ruppe reported: *In the early 1960s, America's top military leaders reportedly drafted plans to kill innocent people and commit acts of terrorism in US cities to create public support for a war against Cuba.*

Wynton felt the hairs beginning to rise at the back of his neck. He was also beginning to feel hungry. He quickly scanned the rest of the article. *Ironically, the documents came to light... in part because of the 1992 Oliver Stone film JFK, which examined the possibility of a conspiracy behind the assassination of President Kennedy.*

In the kitchen, the pharaoh ants were busy dismantling the previous night's paratha bread and carrying it piecemeal across the counter. The procession disappeared into a crack in the wall. Wynton opened another can of soup and listened to the neighbour's racking cough while he waited for the microwave to ping.

He sipped the soup from a mug in front of the bar fire. He now had two more emails. Emmanuel L. Norton wrote to inform wyntonsmith67237 of an offer to *turn your trouser mouse into a one-eyed giant with this brand new medicine.* And Julia emailed to say she had made him a doctor's appointment for four that afternoon. Wynton looked at the address: 27 Teleman Square. He cringed.

He was glad of the distraction offered in Julia's email and a link to the [Turner Classic Movies](#) website.

"Council of the Gods" - 1950 German Drama Based on Nuremberg Trial Testimony - the defining example of the Eastern bloc propaganda films denied exhibition in the West. A scathing indictment of collusion between American and German industrialists before and during WW2. Synopsis: When Hitler comes to power the I.G. Farben Company invests in the Nazi cause and reaps tremendous profits from Germany's military build-up. Standard Oil and Farben trade essential materials and patents to their mutual benefit; when war comes they maintain full cooperation with one another. Their exchanges are routed through Brazil and Switzerland. Both companies profit from the war to the tune of billions.

‘I might not be renting that,’ said Wynton aloud. He clicked Julia's next link and found himself reading “*A People's History of the United States*”. *After the Rockefellers, the next largest stockholder in Standard Oil was I.G. Farben, the giant German chemical company. This investment was part of a pattern of reciprocal investments between the US and Germany during the Nazi years. During the Great Depression, Germany was viewed as a hot area in which to invest.*

Julia had embedded an old black and white [photograph](#) of what looked like a well-groomed and late middle-aged 1950s film star. Wynton clicked and found himself at

[*The Guardian*](#) back in 2004. The man's name was Prescott Bush. "*How Bush's grandfather helped Hitler's rise to power.*"

Rumours of a link between the US first family and the Nazi war machine have circulated for decades. Now the Guardian can reveal how repercussions of events that culminated in action under the Trading with the Enemy Act are still being felt by today's president. It has also been suggested that the money he made from these dealings helped to establish the Bush family fortune and set up its political dynasty.

A few rotten eggs

'How did you get on at the doctor's?' Julia brushed ants off the kitchen counter and put a brown paper bag down.

'Eighteen weeks at the earliest for an appointment,' Wynton scowled.

'For the PTSD clinic?' she asked.

'At the earliest,' he told her. 'What would happen if I'd got *current* traumatic stress disorder?'

'You'd have to wait 'til it became post,' she smiled. 'I got you a bhangare baingan and some kutluma.'

'Yum,' smiled Wynton.

'Spicy and sour eggplant,' she told him. 'Come on, let's get in the warm.'

'What do you know about Facebook?' he asked.

'Facebook is for losers,' she told him.

'Really? I thought it was very popular.'

'If you haven't got a life,' she smiled. 'Have you been looking your Lauren up?'

'Maybe.'

Julia let out a long breath of air. 'D'you think that's wise? If she wanted to stay in touch, she knew where to find you.'

'I just wanted to see what she's up to.'

'And what is she up to?'

'Don't ask.'

'No, tell me.'

'She lives in a dingy terrace in Carshalton with some bastard I used to work with and three cats, and she's expecting a baby.'

'Ah, bless,' Julia smiled. 'And are you planning to get in touch with her?'

Wynton sighed. 'What would I tell her?' He gave a sour laugh. 'That I lost my flat? That I haven't got a penny to my name? That I live next door to a TB victim and mice are chewing my feet?'

Julia laughed. 'You can tell her anything you like. Make up a perfect life. You're always going on about Thailand. Live there.' Julia curled a lip. 'In your virtual world.'

'It's a bit sad,' he told her.

'Okay,' said Julia. 'Tell her the truth. Perhaps she'll take pity on you and you can go stay in their spare bedroom.'

'They're expecting a baby,' he told her.

'Then she might let you doss on the sofa.'

'So, those questions today,' said Wynton, changing the subject. 'You're saying the Americans have a history not only of planning attacks on their own people but of trading with the enemy?'

'Basically.'

'A few rotten eggs?' suggested Wynton. 'We're not talking government policy here.'

'No, not government policy,' she agreed. 'Of course not. Although, obviously, it's well documented that George W and his dad are financially intertwined with the [Bin Ladens](#), much in the same way Standard Oil and I.G. Farben were.'

Wynton laughed. 'No way!'

Julia did not deign to reply.
‘Okay?’ asked Wynton. ‘So how does Osama fit into this?’
‘Like a glove.’
‘Meaning?’
‘Try the bhaghare baingan,’ Julia told him. ‘And that’s my Uncle Esmail’s kutluma recipe.’

Guinea pig

Wynton had two emails in his Inbox. Debora X. Cormier wrote to tell wyntonsmith67237 that he could *Beat her womb with a new big rod so that she knew who wears the pants!* And Julia had sent more questions.

Wynton pulled away at the kutluma bread where the mice had nibbled and he dunked what was left straight into the warm tin of cream of tomato. And then he tried to answer the question of who said: "Naturally the common people don't want war".

He found over 36,000 pages to choose from and settled for Google Answers who placed the quote with Hermann Goring, Nazi Party Executive Officer of the Third Reich.

Naturally the common people don't want war; neither in Russia, nor in England, nor in America, nor in Germany. That is understood. But, after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine policy, and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. ...Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country.

The next question, "cowed by patriotic fever" only produced 582 results. Wynton settled for the first answer and clicked his way onto The Guardian website.

Dan Rather, the star news anchor for the US television network CBS, said last night that "patriotism run amok" was in danger of trampling the freedom of American journalists to ask tough questions. And he admitted that he had shrunk from taking on the Bush administration over the war on terrorism. "Now it is that fear that keeps journalists from asking the toughest of the tough questions."

Wynton jumped at the sound of the doorbell. He walked down the hall and peered through the spy hole.

'So, how'd you get on?' asked Hammed, shaking the rain from his coat.

'How d'you mean?' Wynton wondered.

'At the doctor's?'

'Oh, yes,' said Wynton. 'Eighteen weeks at the earliest for a trauma appointment,' he scowled.

'Before anyone will even think of assessing you?'

'Basically, yes,' explained Wynton. They made themselves comfortable as best they could in the living room.

'Well, that is a shame,' admitted Hammed. 'But you managed to sign on?'

'Not entirely.'

Hammed shook his head. 'How d'you mean?'

'Hard to say, really.'

'Try.'

'Well,' said Wynton. 'Is it a crime now to use the word Christ?'

'Aah,' hissed Hammed. 'That depends. How did you use it?'

'As a simple exclamation.'

'Was the person you were talking to wearing a crucifix?' asked Hammed.

'I didn't really notice.'

'Iffy,' Hammed informed him. 'Everyone's ultra sensitive about religion these days. What happened?'

'They kicked me out.'

'But did you bring me the forms I asked for?'

'They were screwed into a ball.'

'Right.'

'So, any news?' asked Wynton. 'How about my bank?'

'Yes,' hissed Hammed. 'If we are to progress any further, you're going to have to give me power of attorney.'

'That's a bit dramatic, isn't it?'

Hammed laughed. 'It's not as if you've anything to lose. In a nutshell, I can't talk to the banks without your say-so.'

'Where do I sign?'

'Right here.' Hammed passed over the paperwork. 'And here.'

'Anything else to cheer me up?'

'Not as such,' said Hammed. 'You have a number of CCJs against you.'

'County Court Judgements?' asked Wynton.

'Correct. For non-payment of utilities: gas, electric, water, phone, broadband, Council Tax, and a few store cards.'

'Is that all?'

'Do you know about facturing?' asked Hammed.

Wynton shook his head. 'Tell me.'

'It's where someone sells your debt to a third party.'

'Like a debt collections agency?'

'In one.' Hammed smiled.

'Should I worry?'

'Does anyone know you're here?' asked Hammed.

'Yes,' said Wynton stretching out the word.

'Then don't answer the door,' suggested the solicitor. 'Debt collectors these days are tenacious, and you certainly don't want to get the bailiffs involved. It's just about the only boom industry.'

Wynton began to feel queasy. 'Should I worry?'

'You would have to join the queue,' laughed Hammed. 'Have you any idea what the personal debt is these day?'

'Meaning how much we all owe collectively?'

'One-and-a-half trillion pounds!'

'I can't even get my head around that,' Wynton exclaimed. 'How much is a trillion for heaven's sake?'

Hammed grinned. 'Imagine you have a stack of thousand-pound notes, if there were such a thing. If you had a stack about four inches high that would be about a million pounds. How high do you think a trillion-pound stack would be?'

'As tall as a ten-year-old boy,' guessed Wynton.

'Nearly 68 miles high.' Hammed chuckled. 'It's too mental for words. That works out at £30,440 of debt for every adult in Britain. Talk about slaves to the banks!'

Wynton's head sank a little further into his chest. 'What kind of world have I woken up to? What a mess!'

‘Yes,’ said Hammed.

‘And it’s all money.’

‘Money makes the world go round,’ Hammed reminded him.

‘And what kind of caring society is this?’ wondered Wynton. ‘I’ve got to hide now?’ he asked. ‘In case some meaty debt collector comes to break my legs?’

Hammed continued nodding.

‘If it wasn’t for the clinic, I’d say there wasn’t a spark of human kindness left in the world.’

‘What clinic?’

‘The Thomas Westbrook Clinic,’ Wynton told him. ‘Where Julia works?’

‘Who?’

‘Ju-wairi-yah.’

‘Right,’ agreed Hammed. He busied himself amongst his papers.

‘Is there something I should know?’ Wynton knitted his brows.

‘No, no,’ smiled Hammed. ‘I mean, you know about all the research that goes on there, right?’

‘Research?’

‘Yeah, testing new drugs, stuff like that...’

‘Hold on,’ said Wynton. ‘Are you suggesting I was some kind of guinea pig?’

‘Actually,’ said Hammed. ‘It would make an interesting case. It might be your best hope.’

‘What kind of guinea pig?’ asked Wynton.

An evil exists

Wynton looked at the screen. *I moved out to Thailand not long after my accident. I now have a lovely little beach house on Koh Ngai, Krabi. I don't have a care in the world and I make new friends every day. I am so happy!*

'I wish!' Wynton pressed a button and began to upload the photos he had collected. There was Moo, Mui, Nong, Kung, Sai Eew and Lah. He wasn't even sure if Sai Eew and Lah were Thai girls' names but they seemed to fit the bill. They were all ridiculously good looking but just the right side of believable. He added a few beach party shots for good measure and one of a friendly barman that he named Vitchet. The rest of his album was made up of exquisitely beautiful beach scenes, tuk-tuks, various new friends, elephants, and cans of Singha Beer.

Wynton came down to earth with a bump. The man next door began a lengthy expulsion from his lungs and the rain ran down the window. Wynton blew on his fingers and then looked in his inbox. He passed up the offer of a *Perfect love stick in just few weeks!*

Julia's latest question promised a welcome escape, even if it seemed a little obvious. He highlighted the entire quote and pasted it straight into Google.

"An evil exists that threatens every man, woman and child of this great nation. We must take steps to ensure our domestic security and protect our homeland."

Surprisingly, it only turned up 288 results but the biggest surprise was that the quote did not come out of George W. Bush's mouth. It came from Adolf Hitler. And it was said in praise of the formation of the Gestapo. Wynton clicked a page at random and found himself reading more quotations from [Adolf Hitler](#).

The great masses of the people will more easily fall victims to a big lie than to a small one.

How fortunate for governments that the people they administer don't think.

The art of leadership... consists in consolidating the attention of the people against a single adversary and taking care that nothing will split up that attention.

Great liars are also great magicians.

You won't thank me

'Hammed suggested you sue the clinic?' Julia's jaw hung open.

'He said it might be my best hope.'

'What an arsehole!'

'Hang on, hang on,' insisted Wynton. 'What goes on there? What kind of weird experiments have they been doing on me?'

'It's not weird,' insisted Julia.

'But what?'

Julia hesitated. 'Lots of good work. Just look at you.'

'And look at the state of me?' Wynton looked down at his spindly legs. 'I look like an old man.'

'And who brought you back round?' she asked. 'And who built up your strength and put you back on your feet?'

'Julia, was I some kind of guinea pig?' he asked.

'That depends what you mean by guinea pig.'

'The sort of guinea pig that tests new and unproven drugs?'

Julia shrugged and tried to laugh. 'You came to no harm. And think how you may have helped mankind.'

'I'm trying.'

'You're all right now, aren't you?'

'But I didn't sign anything, did I?' Wynton told her. 'It was all done without my say-so.'

'So now you're going to sue them?' she asked. 'For millions?'

'Got any better ideas?'

'After they saved your life?'

Wynton sat back. 'What d'you mean?'

'Do you have any idea what happens to no-hope coma cases in the NHS?' Julia asked. 'You won't thank me for telling you.'

'How was the shabdeg?' she asked.

'Surprisingly pleasant,' Wynton told her.

'So, what would you like to do now?' she asked. 'Would you like some more?'

'Turnips?'

'I was actually thinking of a few follow-up questions. I think it's time we put things in perspective.'

'One thing did occur to me,' said Wynton. 'Is there any chance you could get me some earphones?'

'Sure. Why?'

'I may have mentioned the TB victim next door,' smiled Wynton.

'You have mentioned it,' she agreed. 'Not that I've ever heard him.'

'Well,' continued Wynton. 'If I had some earphones, I could pump up the music and block out the sound of his hacking lungs. It really is quite sickening.'

'The thing is,' said Julia. 'You might not hear me ringing the bell. You might starve to death.'

'Good point,' agreed Wynton.

‘Give me your keys.’ Julia held out her hand. ‘I’ll have a spare set cut. You’re not planning on going out just yet, are you?’

Wynton shook his head as he handed over the keys.

‘So,’ said Julia. ‘Do you want any more questions?’

‘Yeah, I don’t mind.’ Wynton pulled the laptop back onto his lap and opened his *iGoogle* home page. ‘Where next?’

‘Type [Afghan + pipeline](#).’

‘Nearly two million pages,’ he told her. ‘[Wikipedia](#)?’

‘Why not?’

The Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline is a proposed natural gas pipeline being developed by the Asian Development Bank. The pipeline will transport Caspian Sea natural gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan into Pakistan and then to India.

In August 1996, the Central Asia Gas Pipeline, Ltd. (CentGas) consortium for construction of pipeline, led by Unocal was formed. Since the United States military overthrew the Taliban government the project has essentially stalled; construction of the Turkmen part was supposed to start in 2006, but the overall feasibility is questionable since the southern part of the Afghan section runs through territory which continues to be under de facto Taliban control.

‘Helmand Province ring any bells?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ he agreed.

‘Just as a side-bar here,’ suggested Julia. ‘Try ["Hamid Karzai" + Unocal](#).’

‘Karzai being the current Afghan president?’ asked Wynton.

Julia nodded and Wynton typed.

‘Not so many hits,’ said Wynton. ‘But they are all on the same theme.’

France’s Le Monde newspaper wrote in a Dec. 5 profile of [Hamid Karzai](#) that the Afghan interim president “has a wide knowledge of the western world. After studying law in Kabul and India, he completed his training in the United States where he was for a time a consultant for the American oil company Unocal, when it was studying the construction of a pipeline in Afghanistan.”

‘And whilst we’re on the subject of Unocal,’ said Julia. ‘Why not have a look at Washington’s ambassador to the UN?’

‘Who?’ asked Wynton.

‘Try ["Zalmay Khalilzad" + BBC](#).’

‘Okay,’ said Wynton. *Having served as America’s man in post-invasion Iraq and Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad brings to the UN strong negotiating skills and regional knowledge.*

‘Sounds good.’ Wynton looked to Julia.

‘And what about his background?’ she asked.

The ambassador once worked as an adviser to oil giant Unocal and his detractors linked his oil industry ties to his appointment to Iraq. They also noted that at the same time that he was working for Unocal, the company was touting for business in Taliban-run Afghanistan.

‘So that’s Afghanistan,’ she smiled.

‘But hold on,’ said Wynton. ‘What went wrong? Why are our troops in Afghanistan fighting the Taliban?’

["US policy on Taliban" + oil](#).

‘Here’s the [Asia Times](#),’ he said. ‘And a book review.’

‘What book?’

‘[Bin Laden, the forbidden truth](#),’ he told her.

The authors claim that the US government's main objective in Afghanistan was to consolidate the position of the Taliban regime to obtain access to the oil and gas reserves in Central Asia.

The US government saw the Taliban regime "as a source of stability in Central Asia that would enable the construction of an oil pipeline across Central Asia". Until now, says the book, "the oil and gas reserves of Central Asia have been controlled by Russia. The Bush government wanted to change all that."

But, confronted with Taliban's refusal to accept US conditions, "this rationale of energy security changed into a military one", the authors claim.

"At one moment during the negotiations, the US representatives told the Taliban, 'either you accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs.'"

‘And when were these talks said to have taken place?’ she asked.

‘One month before 9/11,’ said Wynton.

Aiding and abetting

Wynton idly tapped open the tabs on his Internet Explorer until he was staring again at Lauren's Facebook page. *Send Message* bid the site. *Poke her*. *View Friends*. *Add to Friends*. Wynton finally decided to *Poke her*. He sat back and wondered if he had done the right thing. Through the walls, the TB man was choking on his own phlegm. Wynton felt dirty.

The bathroom, which Wynton until now had only visited in fleeting bursts, had a deep, savoury smell more commonly associated with French public toilets. He had delayed bathing long enough. In the bathroom cabinet, Wynton found an old and dusty bottle of Head & Shoulders. While he waited for the water to run clean, Wynton poured a little of the shampoo into the palm of his hand. It was a pale blue and surprisingly runny. He gave the bottle a shake.

By the time the water began to run clear of the deep brown rust, the temperature was little more than tepid. Wynton had been obliged to undress in the living room for fear of placing his clothes on the permanently damp and curling linoleum. He wiped the soles of each foot with a flannel and stepped into the bath.

The Head & Shoulders failed to produce any suds. He worked the slippery fluid into his hair and then he lay back in the chilly water and tried to work it free with his fingers. It was then that the door bell rang.

'Sorry,' said Hammed. 'Did I get you out of the shower?'

'There isn't a shower,' Wynton told him.

'What's that in your hair?' Hammed asked. 'Gel?'

'Yes, it's gel,' said Wynton. He turned aside and stepped into his trousers.

'I am the bearer of glad tidings,' smiled Hammed.

'Tell me.'

'Well, going through all your papers, I found a statement from Abbey National. You have the grand sum of £13.36.'

'That's the good news?' Wynton asked.

'It gets better,' said Hammed. 'I found this in your papers.' He held up a Tesco Clubcard. 'And here on your statement you have nearly £400 in Clubcard vouchers.'

'Result!' declared Wynton.

'Would you like me to cash them in for you?' asked Hammed.

'You can do that?'

'You can do that.' Hammed popped open the clasp on his briefcase and pulled out a small white envelope. 'I've taken the liberty of writing to Tesco in your name, using my office address. All you have to do is sign where I've indicated and, *inshallah*, you shall have cash.'

'And the world's my oyster,' said Wynton flatly. '*Enchilada*.'

Hammed smiled. 'I also got you all the right forms from the Jobcentre. Just sign them where I've marked.'

'Can I offer you a tin of soup?' asked Wynton.

Hammed sucked in a little air through his teeth. 'No thanks. I think I'll pass. What is that disgusting noise?' He turned his head to the far wall.

'Oh, you can hear it, too, can you?' Wynton smiled. 'That's my next door neighbour. He has a bit of a chesty cough.'

‘Cough!’ marvelled Hammed. ‘That’s no cough.’

‘It’s not?’

‘No,’ said Hammed. ‘That’s a death rattle.’

‘You’re kidding?’

‘I’m a qualified solicitor,’ Hammed told him. ‘You hear ‘em all the time in my line.’

‘Shouldn’t we call an ambulance?’ asked Wynton.

‘Oh, no.’ Hammed shook his head. ‘You don’t want to do that.’

‘I don’t?’

‘Well,’ Hammed explained. ‘You can’t just call up the London Ambulance Service and give them somebody else’s address. That’s a direct contravention of the Data Protection Act. D’you want to get me struck off?’

‘What?’ Wynton was perplexed. ‘Well, give me your phone and I’ll do it.’

Hammed shook his head again. ‘In your position, you should be a little more careful. If they check on you here, you’re not paying Council Tax. You have no passport and no NI number that you know of. If they start looking into you, you might well find yourself on a deportation flight to Kosovo or the Democratic Republic of Congo.’

‘That’s bonkers! Give me your phone.’

Hammed sucked air back through his teeth. ‘I can’t do that. I’m a member of The Law Society. That would be aiding and abetting a flagrant criminal act.’

How fortunate for governments that the people they administer don't think

Wynton wondered if it were dangerous to plug the laptop into an electrical socket while thousands of ants were pouring out. He took his chances and forced the plug into the wall.

As usual, there were two emails in his Inbox, but no word from Lauren. *People judge your dick size by your shoes size*, Troy Moseley wrote to inform him. *With XtraSize+ you don't have to wear bigger shoes to make women think you have a huge dick.*

'There won't be any mistake there, then,' thought Wynton. He wiggled his chewed toes and imagined they were buried in a fine powdery white sand. And then he opened Julia's email and dived straight into her first question of the day, ["Big Brother" + "European election"](#). First up the [BBC News](#) site.

More people voted for the TV show Big Brother than bothered to turn out for the last European election, Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy has said.

Wynton wondered if he should feel surprised. He shrugged and moved on to ["terrestrial top 30"](#). Julia wanted him to find the documentary slot - any documentary slot. He entered the [Broadcasters' Audience Research Board](#) website and looked first at BBC1.

The long-running soap *Eastenders* occupied the top four slots. Then came two entries for *Strictly Come Dancing*, then *Casualty*, *The National Lottery*, and *Holby City*. Wynton looked down the list. There was no documentary.

BBC2 led with *Top Gear* and then repeats of *Strictly Come Dancing* from BBC1 and then five straight showings of *The Weakest Link*. No documentaries.

ITV1 held few surprises with soaps in the top ten - *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*, and then *The X Factor*, and *The Funniest You've Been Framed Ever!* No documentaries.

Channel Four led with the celebrity chef Gordon Ramsey, *The Property Ladder*, *The Simpsons*, and *Deal Or No Deal*. *Dispatches* failed to get a look-in.

[Guardian + "dumbing down"](#) led Wynton to a [Guardian/ICM](#) survey revealing startling gaps in the cultural knowledge of young British adults.

Young 18- to 24-year-old adults are measurably "dumber" than older age groups, evidence in a special ICM survey for the Guardian indicates today.

Young adults do score highly on pop culture questions. Some 93% spot the missing word in the question "Fatboy _ ?", with a 92% score for "Posh and _ ?" But memory decay seems to set in rapidly.

Many results appear to point to a progressive breakdown in the transmission of historical and cultural facts between the six generations questioned for the survey. This breakdown - over a period when educational qualifications have greatly improved on paper - was acute if the events were more than half a century old.

Wynton was particularly struck with one explanation given by [Stefan Collini](#) of Cambridge University.

Not so long ago, it is claimed, there were intellectual figures of real eminence who acted as guides to the perplexing business of living, sages who would be listened to with respect. But now it has become impossible to command that kind of cultural authority: not only will people no longer listen, but intellectual specialisation means that

no single figure can possess the necessary range to address a broad audience. There may be experts, but there are no longer any sages.

[media + trust](#) led Wynton back to the [BBC](#) and a story from May 2006.

Overall levels of trust in the media have risen in the past four years, a poll suggests. Only in three countries did governments score higher than the media. In the US, 67% said they trusted the government compared with 59% prepared to put their trust in the media.

In the UK 51% trusted their government (media 47%) and in Germany 48% trusted officials (media 43%).

I just wanted to say hello

Wynton looked at his inbox. *Be the talk of the town with your new huge schl0ng* wrote Bozoo Armado. There was nothing new from Julia and still no word from Lauren. He wondered if she had seen his “poke” or whether, for reasons unknown, she was avoiding him.

Wynton felt flat, sad and increasingly alone. The coughing man next door, his only contact with the living world, still had enough strength left to rack his lungs. Wynton shuddered and pushed his warm soup aside. He steeled himself to send Lauren a proper message.

Hello, I thought it time to get in touch. Wynton.

He sat back and listened to the tortured lungs on the other side of the wall.

‘Okay,’ he said aloud. He pulled himself up from the cushions. *‘Enough, already.’*

Wynton wedged open his front door and stepped out onto the exposed landing. He listened at the neighbour’s door. There was no sound. He pressed the bell and waited. After a second and third press of the bell, Wynton bent down and peered through the letterbox. The flat was the mirror image of his own.

‘Hello,’ he called. ‘Are you all right? Do you want me to get a doctor?’

Wynton stood back up and looked along the corridor. He shivered in the cold.

Back in his nest, Wynton engrossed himself in a search for Thai webcams when he happened to glance down at his Inbox.

Lauren Williams sent you a message on Facebook...

He quickly tapped on the link. For the second time that morning, a shiver ran down his spine.

Who is this? How can you be so cruel? Leave me alone.

‘Oh, that’s nice,’ thought Wynton. ‘In what way am I being cruel?’ he wondered. And then he stopped to wonder what Lauren meant by *Who is this?*

It’s me. Wynton. I’m sorry I haven’t been in touch before now. I heard you were married, and then I found you on Facebook. I just wanted to say hello. Wynton.

Memories

‘Are they too tight?’ asked Julia.

‘These are size tens. I can barely get my foot inside!’

‘Oh, Wynton. I’m so sorry. I could have sworn you said tens.’ Julia helped Wynton pull the shoe off his foot. ‘I’ll tell you what, let’s slit the backs and you can wear them around the flat as slippers.’

‘Sure.’

‘Oh, your poor feet! They’re not getting any better, are they?’ Julia examined Wynton’s toes. ‘Are they sore?’

‘Do they look sore?’ asked Wynton.

‘They do, yes.’ Julia rummaged in her bag. ‘Let’s put some more Germaline on them. I could have sworn you were size ten.’

‘Elevens’ huffed Wynton.

‘Your skin’s very dry,’ Julia told him. ‘I’ve got some D-Probosc cream here. Take your trousers off; I’ll massage your legs.’

‘Do you think I’ll ever be able to wear shorts or trunks again?’ he asked as he lay stretched out before the bar fire. His legs felt cold and clammy in the miserably damp living room.

Julia laughed. ‘Of course! You’ll have some scarring but I don’t think anyone will notice.’

Wynton let out a deep sigh. ‘When this is all over, I want to get away. I want to get in the warm.’

Julia ran her hands the length of Wynton’s thighs. ‘What will you do?’ she asked.

‘I have a plan,’ he told her. He paused for a while. ‘God knows what compensation I’ll get but Hammed seems to think I could do quite well. I thought I’d go to Thailand and maybe start a little business.’

‘Like what?’

‘Books on the beach,’ he told her. ‘Second-hand books. It’s perfect. I’ve got to find the stock, obviously, but all I need is a little beach hut, some shelves, and not much else.’

‘Good idea.’ Julia worked the cream into Wynton’s ankles. ‘I have a cousin in import-export. He could help you. If you filled half a ship’s container you’d have more than enough.’

‘And then, of course, I could buy books off the tourists and buy back at half price the one’s I’ve already sold.’ Wynton turned his head and watched Julia as she applied pressure to his wasted calf muscles. ‘I can’t see myself working in an office any more, and I’m buggered if I’m ever going to commute again.’

‘All done,’ smiled Julia. She sat upright and began to rub the cream into her own hands.

Wynton slipped his trousers back on and smiled at her. ‘Julia?’

‘What?’

‘I really can’t thank you enough. I had no idea things were going to go like this. If it weren’t for you...’ he let his sentence trail off.

‘I worry about you, Wynton.’ Julia tilted her head and studied him. ‘You’ve been through hell. You deserve a break.’

'I don't know that I deserve anything.'

'But you're right,' she told him. 'You need to put this all behind you now. Forget about London and terrorists and bombs. Move on.'

Wynton stretched forward and took Julia's moist hand in his. 'You've been so kind. I really...' Wynton found his eyes beginning to water and he squeezed hard on Julia's hand. He rubbed his thumb tenderly across her knuckles. 'Julia?'

'You're not trying it on, are you?' she asked.

'No, no.' Wynton quickly let go. 'It's just the human contact. I'm not used to it. I didn't mean anything.'

'I think we should get back to the subject of trust,' she told him. 'And memory.' Julia smiled. 'It's worth bearing in mind when we see a news headline or watch a report on TV.'

'How d'you mean?'

'I mean, when we read or hear that the police have raided another terrorist cell, and the headline writers say things like "Got the Bastards", we only remember the arrests. We assume the police are doing their job, that the new laws are working, and then we put it out of our minds.'

'So?'

'So, what happens after?' asked Julia. 'The fact that so many are actually released without charge doesn't really register. We're left with the impression that terrorists are active and we don't consider that only a very small number actually wind up in court; let alone sentenced. I'll show you.'

Wynton reached for the laptop.

'Let's look at ["UK police terrorism arrest statistics"](#).

'Here they are,' said Wynton. 'From September 11, 2001, up to the end of March '07. The source is the [Home Office](#).'

'So, how many terrorism arrests?' asked Julia.

'1,228.'

'That's a lot, isn't it?'

'I guess.'

'How many released without charge?'

'669,' he told her. 'About half.'

'And how many actual convictions under the Terrorism Act?'

Wynton opened the calculator and did the sums. 'Forty-one,' he told her. 'In six years.'

Julia smiled. 'You see? So what about the 1,187 who were charged under other offences or simply let go?'

'We don't think about them?' Wynton offered.

'No, we don't and, with the current war on terror, you'd imagine that some of those must surely be al Qaeda operatives.'

'I guess.'

'So try [UK + "al Qaeda arrest statistics"](#).'

'Nothing,' announced Wynton.

'Nothing?' she asked. 'And of those forty-one convicted under the new terrorism laws, we assume they must have been guilty, but you've only got to look back a few years and see that the police have made some appalling mistakes. And that's being kind.'

You could argue that the police, certainly in the past, had a propensity for fitting people up. Remember ["Judith Ward"](#)?

'Who?'

'Precisely,' she smiled. 'Type it in.'

'Loads,' said Wynton. 'Here's the [BBC](#). *M62 bomber jailed for life.*'

'And?'

Judith Ward is convicted of an army coach bombing in which 12 people died. Her conviction was quashed 18 years later.

'Remember the ["Birmingham Six"](#)?'

'Vaguely.'

'So type it in.'

'The [BBC](#) again.'

After 17 years in prison, the Birmingham Six may soon be released after government law officers say their convictions cannot be considered safe.

["Guildford Four"](#).'

The [Guildford Four](#) have had their convictions quashed by the Court of Appeal following an extensive inquiry into the original police investigation.

'And what were they supposed to have done?'

'They were jailed for life in '75 for bombing pubs in Guildford. Five dead, over one hundred injured.'

'And the Birmingham Six?'

'21 killed, over 180 injured in two pub bombs.' Wynton looked back at the screen. 'There's just one thing that bothers me,' he said. 'We are talking a long time ago. I wasn't even born when the Birmingham Six were arrested.'

'So you'd like a recent example?' asked Julia.

Wynton nodded.

'Then type ["Sean Hoey"](#),' she told him. 'You'll certainly remember the Omagh Bombing in '98 - the worst atrocity of the Troubles, 29 dead, more than 300 injured.'

'Okay, here's [The Belfast Telegraph](#),' Wynton read aloud.

The judge in the Omagh bombing trial launched a scathing attack on the police investigation into Northern Ireland's worst terrorist atrocity as he acquitted Sean Hoey on all 56 charges.

For almost 90 minutes Judge Weir tore each strand of the prosecution case apart, saying that it had failed to satisfy him to any acceptable standard.

The judge was highly critical of police evidence, saying they were guilty of a "deliberate and calculated deception".

Before delivering his verdict the judge also raised concern over the reliance in the case of LCN DNA - a relatively new scientific technique.

'DNA,' smiled Julia. 'Have you noticed how many people are convicted these days on DNA evidence alone?'

'It is frightening,' admitted Wynton.

'Yes, it is. And, while you mention it, have you noticed how fear is everywhere these days – fear of global warming and melting icecaps, fear of cancer and HIV, hospital super bugs, mad cow disease, foot and mouth, bird flu, flu pandemics, paedophiles in every playground, gang violence, gun crime and knife crime, illegal immigrants, data

theft, mortgages, pensions, unemployment, debt, bankruptcy, repossession, and so on and so on and so on?’ Julia slumped back, out of breath.

‘But it’s always been like that.’

‘I don’t think it has,’ said Julia. ‘It’s a modern phenomenon, a phenomenon of our times. In a society which believes in nothing, fear is now the only agenda. There are no clear ideologies any more. In the post-war period, politicians could promise to better our lot. “You’ve never had it so good” and “the pound in your pocket”. Today, what can the politicians offer us?’

Wynton shrugged.

‘They can promise to protect us,’ she told him. ‘And they can knock the opposition by saying they are soft on terror or soft on the environment.’

‘And this war on terror is perfect, I guess,’ said Wynton. ‘We have a mysterious and evil enemy whose tentacles stretch around the globe and we haven’t got a clue what they really stand for. I certainly couldn’t clearly state their aims.’

‘They hate freedom,’ Julia told him. ‘Which must be a bit like hating pandas.’

‘Oh, yes,’ chuffed Wynton. ‘I can just see their recruiting sergeants: “Hello Abdul, you’ve always said how much you hate freedom. Come join al Qaeda”.’

Julia laughed. ‘And we now have what they call the *paradigm of prevention*,’ she said. ‘You don’t have to bother with that hard-to-gather evidence any more. They call it *pre-crime* and now people are locked away, not for what they’ve done, but for what they might just do in the future.’

‘Hold on,’ said Wynton. ‘You’re describing the plot of *Minority Report*?’

‘And another case of real life imitating of art.’ Julia looked warmly at Wynton. ‘And it works just as well for states as it does for individuals; Iraq and Iran, with their weapons of mass destruction, being the prime examples.’

‘So you don’t need evidence,’ added Wynton. ‘You can make all sorts of claims for invading other countries or clamping down on civil liberties?’

Julia nodded and tipped her head towards the laptop. ‘Type [terror + trampled + Amnesty](#).’

‘Here’s a story from [The Guardian](#) in May 03.’

The "war on terror" has left people around the world feeling more scared than at any time since the cold war ended, Amnesty International claimed today.

The organisation's annual report also said that the fight against terrorism was being used by countries including the US and Britain as an excuse to trample on human rights.

"In the name of security, politics and profit, human rights were trampled the world over by governments, armed groups and corporate activity."

‘I would also suggest,’ said Julia. ‘That you type [self-fulfilling prophecy](#) but we’d be here all night, given the British and Americans have a quite a history in that department.’

Wynton looked sceptical.

‘Put it this way,’ she said. ‘If you poke a stick into an ant’s nest, you must expect to get bitten. Right?’

‘I guess.’

‘So, now type [Bari + unease](#).’

‘Here’s the [BBC](#) again,’ said Wynton.

The government's approach to terrorism is creating an atmosphere of suspicion and unease, the head of the Muslim Council of Britain has said.

Muhammad Abdul Bari cited Nazi Germany in the 1930s as an example of how people's minds could be poisoned against a community.

Dr Bari's remarks follow recent comments from MI5 chief Jonathan Evans that there are 2,000 people living in the UK who pose a terrorism-related danger, and that youngsters aged 15 are being groomed to be suicide bombers.

"There is a disproportionate amount of discussion surrounding us. The air is thick with suspicion and unease. It is not good for the Muslim community, it is not good for society."

Julia lent across Wynton's shoulder and looked at the screen. There was a hint of cardamoms in her hair. 'Click here,' she said, pointing to a related story on the page.

Anti-terrorism laws have been broadened in the wake of 9/11 after Parliament accepted the police and security services needed more powers to do their job. The Home Office stresses there is oversight in the system. There is an independent reviewer of some parts of terrorism legislation, Lord Carlisle, who produces an annual report. The Home Office has itself repeatedly stressed that legislation is there to protect all communities from a common threat.

'Here's another related story,' said Julia. 'Click that.'

'[Restrictions that UK suspects may face](#),' read Wynton. 'From three years ago.'

Mr Clarke has proposed the introduction of "control orders" to curb the activities of suspected terrorists who cannot be prosecuted. Under the new orders, people suspected of terrorism could be subject to house arrest or other restrictions on movement, such as electronic tagging or curfews. It is proposed that the orders would be imposed by the home secretary, rather than the courts.

'One more,' said Julia. 'And then I'll let you get to bed. Type [Muslim + unrest + raids](#).'

'Here's [The Telegraph](#),' said Wynton.

Yesterday, Dr Mohammed Naseem, the chairman of Birmingham Central mosque and one of the city's most senior Muslims, said members of his faith were being persecuted by the government and compared the current political climate to Nazi Germany.

"They have invented this perception of a threat. To justify that, they have to maintain incidents to prove something is going on. There is dismay and people feel they are being persecuted unjustly.

He said Muslims were being used to set up a "police state" and "dictatorship", adding: "They need some excuse to seize that control and they are using Muslims for that. Just look what happened in Germany — Hitler was an elected leader. He started to persecute Jews and the same is happening to Muslims today."

Wynton chuffed a little and turned to Julia. 'I see what you're saying. I take your point. But I think it's a bit rich.'

'Meaning?' she asked.

'Meaning, people weren't queuing up to get into Nazi Germany, were they? They were trying to get out!'

'Then I have another game you can play,' suggested Julia. 'Now substitute *Jew* for *Muslim* in everything you read. Try [Muslim police stops](#).'

‘All right,’ smiled Wynton. ‘Here’s the [BBC](#) again from the same period.’

Jews should accept that people of Jewish appearance are more likely to be stopped and searched by police, a Home Office minister has said.

Hazel Blears said innocent Jews would be targeted because of the search for Jewish extremists. It means that some of our counter-terrorism powers will be disproportionately experienced by the Jewish community." It was a reality that should be recognised, she said.

Jewish groups have repeatedly claimed that their communities are being victimised under terror laws. Last July, the police were accused of anti-Semitism by Jewish groups after stop and search figures showed the numbers of Jews targeted had risen by 300% since the introduction of anti-terror laws.

‘Did anyone say short memory?’ asked Julia.

Wyntons Dead

I don't know who you are or what you think your doing but you are obviously sick. My Wyntons dead. If you write to me again I will report you to the police.

'Dead?' Wynton went cold. 'What the fuck does she mean?'

He clicked the reply button: *I'm not dead! I'm very much alive. Take a look at my Facebook page.* And then Wynton remembered that there were no photos of him on the site. *I'm sitting in a cyber-café in Krabi, Thailand, he lied. Ask me a specific question – something only I would know.*

He sat back and watched the screen and periodically reloaded his Google Mail page. And then Lauren replied.

I'm not sure I like this. So where did we meet? What was I wearing and what was my opening line?

Wynton laughed, and then he typed: *We met at Mark's Halloween fancy dress party. You came as Ginger Spice in a Union Jack mini-dress. And you walked up to me and said "I hope you didn't come here on the bus dressed like that".*

Wynton? Is that really you? This doesn't make any sense. But what happened? How come your contacting me now? I came to see you at the clinic that last time and they said I should prepare myself because you were brain dead and only the machine was keeping you alive. They said they had no choice but to switch you off!!! I was in total shock! I am now!!!!

Wynton clamped shut his jaw and took a very deep breath. *They never switched me off. No one mentioned brain-dead to me! I was in a coma and I was actually aware of what was going on around me much of the time. If you thought I was dead, what about the funeral?*

Wynton, there wasn't going to be a funeral. They said you donated your body to medical science but I did try to go to the memorial service. Both Daren and I tried to go but they said we weren't family so we couldn't come. We had a little service for you of our own. Oh, Winnie!!! I feel sick. I've gone all wobbly. You know I'm married now? I'm with Daren and I'm expecting. Daren's been so kind and loving. When I left the clinic I didn't know what to do or who to turn to. So I called your office and spoke to Daren. We met in a pub and he was so kind. If only you weren't in Thailand now! We could meet up. Do you have a webcam? I so want to see you!!!

Lauren, I have to go now. They're closing this café up and I have to catch the last ferry. I'll email you later.

The Axis of Democracy

Wynton began his day with his morning email, the remains of a stuffed paratha, a tin of warm tomato soup, and a quotation from Benjamin Franklin.

Those who desire to give up freedom in order to gain security will not have, nor do they deserve, either one.

He cut and paste Julia's next question, [Blair + "National Identity Register"](#) which led him to [The Observer](#) and a story headlined, *This pernicious mix of big business and busybodies - The National Identity Register, when linked to other databases, will give the state unlimited powers to spy on us* by Henry Porter from May 28, 2006.

One cannot help feeling that the threat to British privacy and rights is being mounted by people inside the corporate loop who, with their fanatical admiration for business systems, have little concern for individual privacy.

Why should we worry about this if, as is the case, each one of us may already appear on as many as 700 separate databases? How does a joined-up, centralised database threaten us more? One answer ... shows that the security of databases ranging from health records, to the driver and vehicle licensing authority and the police national computer, which has 10,000 entry points, is regularly breached.

We are going ahead with this thing despite ministerial admissions that the scheme will do nothing to stop illegal immigration or terrorism, and is unlikely to deter criminal gangs which have already compromised the chip and pin security.

Julia's next question, ["DNA database should include all"](#) led Wynton to [The Daily Telegraph](#) on October 24, 2006.

Tony Blair called yesterday for the national DNA database to be expanded to include every citizen.

He said there should be no limit on the development of the database because it was vital for catching serious criminals. He said the public backed the database because it was "helping us track down murderers, rapists".

The national DNA database has expanded by about a third to 3.6 million profiles since the Criminal Justice Act 2003, which allowed police to take and keep DNA samples from everyone arrested for any imprisonable offence - regardless of whether they were eventually convicted.

The fourth question in Julia's morning email really made Wynton sit back, ["Abolition of Parliament Bill"](#). There were only 506 results. He clicked on the first and found himself at www.saveparliament.org.uk.

Do you like living in a democracy? they asked.

Well, enjoy it while you can. In early 2006, the UK government started trying to pass a law that would have let them do away with Parliamentary democracy altogether.

Unnoticed by the majority, the government quietly tried to slip through legislation that got dubbed the "Abolition of Parliament Bill", the "Totalitarianism Bill", and other equally scary names.

Its real name is the "Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill", and in its original form, it threatened to bypass normal Parliamentary controls, and make it almost impossible to stop government ministers from enacting any law they like.

'No way,' said Wynton to himself. 'That's too much.'

And then he noticed three external links. He clicked the first and found himself at [The Times](#) in February 2006.

Now I know what I am about to tell you is difficult to believe, wrote Daniel Finkelstein. (Why isn't this on the front pages? Where's the big political row?) but I promise you that it is true. The extraordinary Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill, currently before the House, gives ministers power to amend, repeal or replace any legislation simply by making an order and without having to bring a Bill before Parliament."

The next link led Wynton to the [Daily Mail's](#) Comment page from February 23, 2006. The Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill, said the paper, *hands almost unfettered power to Ministers. Without any recourse to Parliament they will, for example, be able to create new powers of arrest and sack judges.*

Ken Clark warned that in theory it would allow the Government to override the five-year limit on a Parliamentary term.

For nearly nine years New Labour has behaved with autocratic arrogance, treated Parliament with contempt, politicised the civil service and emasculated the Second Chamber.

It chills the blood that this legislation gives them power to change laws at the stroke of a pen.

Wynton, who had been exhaling so deeply that he now found himself light-headed, clicked again to [The Guardian](#) and another article by Henry Porter.

The really frightening thing about last week's proceedings is that there were just two journalists watching as the minister piloting the legislation, Jim Murphy, refused to debate constitutional implications. Instead, he intoned replies drafted in advance by himself and, presumably, his civil servants.

Watching, I reflected that this was truly how democracy is extinguished. Not with guns and bombs, but from the inside by officials and politicians who deceive with guile and who no longer pretend to countenance the higher interests of the constitution.

Juicy prawns

‘Hiya,’ smiled Julia. ‘I’ve got you some chicken pakoras, kalmi baray, murgh kaali mirch and some masala king prawns. I hope you like prawns.’ She placed the bags down on the kitchen counter and shooed away the ants with the back of her hand.

‘Julia? Was I ever brain dead?’

‘You mean you’re not?’ she laughed.

‘No,’ said Wynton. ‘At the clinic. Was I ever technically brain dead and was there a time when they were going to pull my plug?’

Julia laughed. ‘Where’d you get that idea from? You were never brain dead. Just the opposite, in fact. You registered loads of activity. That’s why the clinic was so keen to help you. It was the NHS that were going to switch you off.’

‘Did you ever meet Lauren?’ he asked. ‘You said you saw her.’

Julia shook her head. ‘No, we never really met. She came to see you. I left the two of you alone together.’

‘And you never said they were going to switch me off?’

‘No,’ she laughed. ‘Did she say that?’

‘And did I ever donate my body to science?’ Wynton asked.

‘How could you? You were in a coma. She’s probably just trying to cover herself.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘Well,’ Julia hesitated. ‘She’s got a new life and a baby on the way, right? She probably feels like crap for dumping you.’

‘I don’t think that’s a very plausible explanation,’ he told her. Wynton pulled himself fully upright and watched Julia spoon out the glutinous food onto a plate. ‘She said she thought I was dead.’

Julia laughed again. ‘Well, that just proves my point, then. She’s obviously deeply embarrassed and that’s the best she can come up with.’

Wynton let out a deep sigh.

‘She sounds like a right cow, anyway,’ Julia told him. ‘You want to tell her you’re HIV positive. That’ll give her a nasty shock. Best tell her to get the baby checked out, too. These are lovely juicy prawns.’

Token gesture

Wynton steadied himself with a strained cup of black coffee before he typed "[Maya Evans](#)" into Google and then clicked the first of 10,500 results.

"Acts of defiance against war turned ordinary people into criminals," reported [The Independent](#) on December 8, 2005.

In three different British courtrooms yesterday, three ordinary people stood accused of three very different crimes, but all based simply on their opposition to the war in Iraq.

In the first case of its kind, a woman received a criminal conviction for standing outside Downing Street and reading aloud the names of the 97 British soldiers who have died in the Iraq conflict.

At the same time as Maya Evans, 25, appeared in court yesterday to become the first person to be found guilty under the legislation designed to create an exclusion zone around Parliament Square, Douglas Barker, 72, a retired businessman from Wiltshire, was told by a magistrate that he faces jail for withholding part of his income tax on his investments, also in protest over Iraq.

In a third courtroom in Aldershot, a military judge heard that Flight Lieutenant Malcolm Kendall-Smith, 37, an RAF medical officer based in Scotland, faced a court martial for refusing to serve in Iraq on the basis that the war was illegal.

The next question seemed a little out of place to Wynton, "[With her year-round tan](#)". He clicked on and found himself at [The Times](#) in October 2005 reading a report by David Lister.

With her year-round tan, long blonde hair and designer clothes, Sally Cameron does not look like a threat to national security.

But the 34-year-old property developer has joined the ranks of Britain's most unlikely terrorist suspects after being held for four hours for trespassing on a cycle path.

Ms Cameron was being hailed yesterday as Scotland's answer to Walter Wolfgang, the 82-year-old heckler manhandled out of the Labour Party conference last month. She was arrested under the Terrorism Act for walking along a cycle path in the harbour area of Dundee.

And what has "[Isabelle Ellis-Cockcroft](#)" done, wondered Wynton? He found out at the [BBC](#) in a story from July 2003.

A group of peace protesters has launched legal proceedings against Gloucestershire police, claiming they used anti-terrorism laws to prevent demonstrations against the war in Iraq.

One of the people ... stopped under the Terrorism act was 11-year-old Isabelle Ellis-Cockcroft, whose father David Cockcroft is taking legal action claiming a breach of human rights.

Isabelle told the BBC: "They asked what was in our pockets, wrote down our descriptions and checked a backpack and a bike we had with us.

"They said they were stopping us under the Terrorism Act, but I'm not a terrorist."

The intriguing "[Mr Catt](#)" + [T-shirt](#) pulled up 50 results, the first of which was [The Independent](#) and "*Blair's Britain 2005 - where peaceful protest can be costly*".

John Catt, an 80-year-old peace campaigner, was stopped by police officers as a terrorist suspect in Brighton in September – for wearing a T-shirt with anti-Blair and

Bush slogans. Mr Catt, who served in the RAF during the Second World War, was stopped, searched by police and made to sign a form confirming he had been interviewed under the 2000 Terrorism Act. The official record of the encounter confirms that the “purpose” of the search was “terrorism” and the “grounds for intervention” were “carrying placard and T-shirt with anti-Blair info”.

Wynton stopped in his tracks at the sound of the doorbell.

‘It’s not entirely good news, I’m afraid,’ sighed Hammed.

‘Do I get a choice here?’ asked Wynton. ‘Of which I’d like first – the good news or the bad news?’

‘I think we’ll just stick with the not such good news for now.’ Hammed accepted the folding chair and Wynton collapsed onto his pile of cushions beside the fire.

‘I see your neighbour’s still holding out, then.’ Hammed cocked an ear towards the wall.

‘He’s still going strong.’

The solicitor sucked in a little air in prelude. ‘It’s such a shame no one put in a claim earlier on your behalf.’ He showed his teeth. ‘The problem, as CICA sees it, is one of precedent.’

‘How do you mean?’ asked Wynton.

‘In that they don’t want to set one,’ explained Hammed.

Wynton scoffed. ‘What, in case some other coma bomb victim’s a little tardy getting his forms in?’

‘Basically, yes,’ nodded Hammed. ‘You missed the deadline.’

‘So what do we do?’

Hammed shrugged. ‘I’ll try lodging an appeal but don’t hold your breath. This could drag on for years.’ He lent forward. ‘And I should warn you, compensation payouts have been less than anticipated.’

‘How much less?’ Wynton wanted to know. ‘Give me a ballpark.’

Hammed sighed. ‘The authority, obviously, are trying to pay victims as little as possible.’

‘How little?’

‘Well, one woman who’s husband was blown up on the Tube was offered five-and-a-half grand in compensation.’

‘Great.’

‘And if you reject the offer, it has to be reviewed and a decision there could take several months - and that in turn could be followed by an appeal process that might last another four or more months. And then you can keep repeating the process indefinitely.’

‘I’m glad that isn’t the good news.’

‘Well, actually,’ smiled Hammed. ‘There is a bit of good news. I assume you weren’t insured in any way, against accidents, or whatever?’

‘No,’ said Wynton slowly.

‘Well, that’s good,’ said Hammed. ‘If you were, they’d be obliged to reduce any compensation.’

‘How lucky am I, then?’ Wynton smiled.

‘Luckier than many families,’ Hammed told him. ‘Bereavement pay-outs to date are only a fraction of the maximum compensation levels.’

‘How do they justify that?’ asked Wynton.

‘Because they say these smaller sums should be regarded only as a “token of public sympathy”.’

‘Ah,’ smiled Wynton. ‘That’s nice.’

‘They apply the same rules as a death or injury following criminal violence.’

‘Even though we’re in the midst of a world-wide war on terror?’

‘Yes.’

It was probably a coincidence

Wynton had little heart for Julia's next list of questions. But he opened her email anyway. There was just one question. 'Do I really care?' he asked himself. 'Who is Rachel? What public enquiry? And why just the one question?' Wynton huffed in despair and typed [Rachel + "public enquiry"](#) into Google.

[Rachel from north London](#) has been canvassing opinion amongst fellow survivors of the 7/7 bombings, to see what they feel about the government's [refusal to hold a public enquiry](#). This is what they had to say:

KIRSTY: - 'It seems to me that there is a huge case of double standards going on.....if the threat of terrorism is so great that they are prepared to try & introduce laws that seriously threaten our civil liberties.....then surely it is important enough to have a public enquiry...deep down I think there is a political agenda here, not a public one.....there is too much that would come out that they want to hide.

'Too much that would come out?' asked Julia. She laughed. 'Aren't you concerned?'

Wynton shrugged his shoulders.

'Come on,' Julia smiled warmly. Let's go to [youtube.com](#) for a change. ["Peter Power" + BBC](#).

The screen went black and then the BBC logo appeared.

Peter Power, Visor Consultants: ...at half-past nine this morning we were actually running an exercise for, er, over, a company of over a thousand people in London based on simultaneous bombs going off precisely at the railway stations where it happened this morning, so I still have the hairs on the back of my neck standing upright!

Peter Allen: To get this quite straight, you were running an exercise to see how you would cope with this and it happened while you were running the exercise?

Peter Power: Precisely, and it was, er, about half-past nine this morning, we planned this for a company and for obvious reasons I don't want to reveal their name but they're listening and they'll know it.

'You are fucking kidding me!' Wynton turned quickly to look at Julia. 'What are you trying to tell me?'

'What?' Julia laughed again. 'Do you think there's something odd, then?'

'Odd?' Wynton was aghast. 'Yeah, it's pretty fucking odd. Running an exercise and the exact same thing starts to happen in real life? Course it's fucking odd!'

'Really?' she asked. 'Most people don't seem to think so.'

'The probability of that happening must be beyond calculation!'

'Oh, it happens all the time. Take the case of New York's Mayor Giuliani.

Luckily for him, he already had a spare nerve centre to command when he evacuated World Trade Centre Building Seven before it collapsed.'

'What?' said Wynton. 'Hold on. What do you mean Seven? I thought it was just World Trade Centre One and Two that came down.'

'Oh, no,' Julia kept up her broad smile. 'Building Seven fell down too, just like that.' She demonstrated the pancake effect with her hand. 'But I guess it didn't seem strange at all. The [9/11 Commission](#) didn't bother to mention it. But you can always check for yourself.'

‘Wait, wait! What happened? It didn’t just fall down? You mean a plane hit it?’ he asked sceptically.

‘Oh, no. A huge forty-seven storey building just fell down. And, luckily, as I say, Mayor Giuliani had a major civil defence exercise - [Tripod II](#) - planned the next day so he could go straight to their HQ on the river where everything was in place. He got a lot of kudos, I seem to remember; and an honorary knighthood.’

‘But that could all be a coincidence?’ suggested Wynton.

‘Of course. It very likely was. And it was probably a coincidence that Mayor Giuliani was in London on your fateful day.’

‘In London?’

‘Oh, yes. He must have been a big help to them, I’m sure.’

‘All right,’ Wynton held up his hand. ‘London’s a big place. To say he’s in London, he could have been miles away.’

‘No, just yards from Liverpool Street station,’ Julia nodded. ‘He was Johnny-on-the-spot again when the bomb went off. Lucky for us all, I guess.’

‘Bollocks!’

‘[Giuliani + 7/7](#),’ smiled Julia. ‘Go to [youtube.com](#) and you’ll find a live interview with him on CNN. He’s in the Westminster studios. But you needn’t bother to watch it all now. It’s over six minutes long. He prattles on and says stuff like, “It seems to me that the emergency services here in London were prepared for this. I don’t mean prepared for the exact day, but prepared for something like this happening.”’

Julia smiled. ‘So that was handy, too. And while we’re on the subject of TV, go back to Google and try ["Andy Trotter" + CCTV-rich](#).’

‘[The New York Times](#),’ said Wynton. ‘July 9, ‘05.’

British and American officials said they were hopeful they would soon get a big break in the case, which would probably come from the forensic analysis at the scenes or the images captured by the closed-circuit television cameras, known as CCTV, installed throughout the London subway system.

Andy Trotter, deputy chief constable of British Transport Police, said a large-scale operation was under way to search the camera tapes for images of the suspects.

‘Fancy a little game?’ asked Julia. ‘A kind of hide and seek?’

Wynton took a deep breath.

‘Go back to [YouTube](#),’ she told him ‘We’re talking about a CCTV-rich environment here and we live in an open and democratic society, so you shouldn’t have any trouble. Now go seek those four men the police told you so much about.’

How many bedrooms?

Wynton rubbed his eyes. He had long abandoned his search for the London bombers on YouTube and Google Videos. Even Scotland Yard's own [website](#) had failed to offer a single moving image of the alleged culprits on the day. He sat instead listening to the final croaking of a dying man and idly re-reading Lauren's last email.

Its great when you know what sex your babys going to be because Darens done a great job on Tylers bedroom with a sky blue ceiling and Man Unt wallpaper. But how about this Wynton? Daren and I were planning to go to Orlando after Tylers born because my Mum said she'd look after him for three weeks and I can get a proper rest but what if we were to come out and see you? Daren would love to see you too. We've never been to Thailand although as you know I hate the food. Thai basil, whats that all about? Yuk!!! But we could come out and stay with you. Your beach house looks lovely. How many bedrooms has it got?

Wynton sat upright and cocked an ear. People were moving quickly along the outside corridor. He crept to the front door and peered through the spy hole just in time to see two figures flash past. And then somebody started beating on the coughing man's door.

'Shut der fuck up!' they screamed. *'Wannus to make yer?'*

Bang, Bang went fists and feet against the door. Wynton listened carefully. The coughing was now subdued and muffled.

'Get me?' screamed the voice again. *'Howz der mansdem gonna chill wid all yer wack? Shut der fuck up!'*

I thought that stuff was unstable

'I've been up all night!' insisted Wynton. He rubbed at his eyes.

'And what did you find?' Julia asked.

'Bugger all!' He snarled. 'There isn't any moving CCTV footage!'

'Well, there must be some,' said Julia. 'Tax-payers spend over £200 million on them each year.' She smiled. 'You just have to cast your mind back to the Bulger case. Those kids were followed for miles by CCTV. And what about Jean Charles de Menezes?' she asked. 'They showed hours of footage in court.'

'None,' insisted Wynton. 'Although they've got plenty of the apparent failed bomb [attack](#) two weeks later and they've loads, too, of my lot on their [recce](#) a few weeks before.'

'Did you notice a common factor in all those videos?' she asked.

'Like what?'

'Well, the funny thing I noticed,' said Julia. 'Was how there's always one guy wearing a white baseball cap in every frame.'

'And what do you conclude from that?' Wynton asked.

'Nothing.' She shook her head. 'Just the coincidence of it.'

Julia came and sat down on the cushions beside him. 'But you found nothing from July 7?'

'Just three still images taken from CCTV.'

'And did any of them feature a white baseball cap?'

Wynton thought for a moment. 'Yes, one bloke did.' He scratched his head.

'That's pretty dumb because it makes them stand out on the video.'

'Well, I guess they didn't think about that,' she laughed. 'They're probably very fashionable, or it's just another one of those coincidences.' She gave him a gentle nudge in the side. 'Tell me more about those three images.'

'One [group shot](#) at Luton and two of Hasib Hussain, the bus bomber. One tightly cropped shot shows him wearing a backpack at [Luton](#) station and the other has him standing outside [Boots](#) on King's Cross station.'

'And what of the three guys on the Underground?' she asked.

'Nothing at all.'

'Nothing? So when were the stills taken?' she asked. 'There's a time-stamp in the corner.'

'Actually, they've been edited out of two of the three official photos,' he told her.

'Really?' Julia scoffed. 'But how did they explain them?' she asked. 'The police must have given a time and date at a press conference.'

'Well,' said Wynton. 'The one outside Boots was taken at nine in the morning of July 7.'

'And what does it show?'

'You can see Hussain leaning up against the doorway.'

'Just him?'

'No, there's people coming in and out of the shop.'

'But that can't be right,' said Julia. 'You say nine?'

'So?'

‘When the bombs went off at eight-fifty, simultaneously?’ She sneered.
‘Presumably the people in the picture are all panicking?’

‘No,’ said Wynton. ‘You can see people wandering around as normal while Hussain is staring off into space.’

‘Perhaps they just got the times wrong,’ said Julia. ‘Strange, when the ["Official Narrative"](#) says there’s six thousand hours of CCTV footage, all with time-stamps.’

‘Official Narrative?’ asked Wynton.

‘Oh, yes. Perhaps you haven’t heard. As you know, there was no public inquiry. The government didn’t want to get into one – they said it would be too expensive and time-consuming and that it would hamper future investigations - so they had an unnamed civil servant write a report, the Official Narrative.’

‘Really?’ asked Wynton. ‘The cops told me that this was the largest criminal inquiry in English history!’

‘It wasn’t necessary, apparently. Blair said it would divert police and security service resources, given that they already knew what happened.’ Julia lent close. ‘But tell me about the third photo.’

‘Oh, yes. It was taken outside Luton station and you can actually see the time-stamp on this one. It says 07:21 and 54 seconds.’

‘Yes, I know the photo,’ said Julia. ‘Why don’t we see what the Official Narrative says about it? Let’s look online.’

07.21: The 4 are caught on CCTV together heading to the platform for the King’s Cross Thameslink train.

07.40: The London King’s Cross train leaves Luton station. There are conflicting accounts of their behaviour on the train. Some witnesses report noisy conversations, another believes he saw 2 of them standing silently by a set of train doors. The 4 stood out a bit from usual commuters due to their luggage and casual clothes, but not enough to cause suspicion. This was the beginning of the summer tourist period and Luton Station serves Luton Airport.

08.23: The train arrives at King’s Cross, slightly late due to a delay further up the line. The 4 are captured on CCTV at 08.26am on the concourse close to the Thameslink platform and heading in the direction of the London Underground system.

Wynton turned to look at Julia.

‘There’s something odd here.’ She looked perplexed. ‘I remember reading that the 7:40 Thameslink train was cancelled that day.’

‘What?’

‘Yes.’ Julia scratched her head. ‘Let me see. Try ["Data on train departures 7/7"](#).

‘Just three results,’ Wynton told her.

‘Then open them all. What have you got?’

‘They’ve all got a copy of the same [email](#), complete with all the delivery codes at the top.’

Julia looked over Wynton’s shoulder.

Dear Nick

The information you require is as follows:

Booked departure time	Actual departure time	Arrival time at King's Cross Thameslink
07.16	07.21	08.19
07.20	On time	08.15
07.24	07.25	08.23
07.30	07.42	08.39
07.40	Cancelled	n/a
07.48	07.56	08.42

Kind regards
Chris Hudson
Communications Manager
Thameslink Rail Limited

‘So, they must have got the train times a bit mixed up,’ Wynton felt himself shudder involuntarily. ‘They probably caught the next one, at 07:48.’

‘Which would have got them into King’s Cross at 08:42; too late to catch the Tube trains that blew up. They’d already left by then.’

‘Okay.’ Wynton narrowed his brows and looked at Julia.

‘But the Official Narrative says they were captured on CCTV at 08:26 on the concourse close to the Thameslink platform.’ Julia tilted her head. ‘Did you find images of them on the concourse?’

‘No, I didn’t. Maybe they caught the earlier train – the 07:30.’

‘But that didn’t arrive until 08:39 – too late to be caught on camera on the concourse.’

‘So, they must have caught the 07:24,’ put in Wynton.

‘Well, they’d have to run pretty fast,’ she said. ‘They had less than two minutes to catch that train. And we know they stopped to buy tickets on a crowded station and then they had to get through the barriers, with all those extra people for the summer season, and then run up the stairs. They would certainly have to get a move on!’ She laughed. ‘But would you, really, with backpacks stuffed with explosives made in the bath? I thought that stuff was unstable?’

‘I don’t know. It doesn’t make much sense, does it?’ Wynton curled a lip. ‘And what about all the witnesses on the 07:40? Did they not know their train was cancelled?’

Julia shrugged. ‘But you must have found some CCTV of your bus?’ she asked. ‘All London buses have CCTV. The Metropolitan Police pay the bus companies.’

‘There’s none,’ insisted Wynton. ‘Not even a shot from the street or congestion charge camera!’

‘That’s amazing, isn’t it?’ she smiled. ‘Especially when Britain has over four million CCTV cameras - one for every fourteen people in the country who can all be clocked about three hundred times a day.’

Wynton let out his breath. ‘But why haven’t they released the CCTV images?’ he asked.

‘Perhaps they think it might aid and assist terrorism,’ she told him.

‘How would that work, then?’ he laughed. ‘Surely, it’s in the government’s interest to show the terrorists at work, especially when they need to justify clamping

down on civil liberties. After all, the politicians are the ones who really gained out of this. They've gained far more power than anyone would imagine possible in a democracy.'

'Yes,' said Julia. 'I don't think anyone's provided a satisfactory explanation for withholding the images.' She shrugged her shoulders again. 'So we'd better have a good look at the only group image we can see. Let's look at that photo outside Luton station.'

Wynton opened the Official Narrative and scrolled down to page four.

'Is there anything odd about this [photo](#)?' asked Julia.

'Aside from not really being able to identify anyone in it?'

'Have you noticed the pavements?' she asked. 'Can you see how half the pavement is dry and the other half is wet?'

'Perhaps it was raining,' Wynton suggested. 'And there's an awning.'

'But there isn't an awning at Luton station.' She brushed close up against him. He could smell cardamoms again. 'And when you look at the kerbstones, isn't it funny how they don't line up?' She laughed. 'They look like they've been laid by an idiot.'

Wynton peered closely at the screen.

'Go to [Google Images](#) and put in [lutonmix](#).'

Wynton did as he was told. He entered the website of the [July 7th Truth Campaign](#) and found himself examining an [animated gif](#).

'This shows two officially-released stills from the CCTV camera outside Luton Station,' she told him. 'One seamlessly overlaid on top of the other. The first image is the one in the Official Narrative and the other is from June twenty-eight when the four were said to have carried out a recce.'

Wynton peered closer.

'And there are the white caps again.'

'Weird, that,' said Wynton.

'And, oh look!' declared Julia. 'Isn't it funny how the kerbstones keep moving as it flicks from one image to the other!'

'They join up in one photo but not in the other,' marvelled Wynton. 'And there're other things that aren't right! It looks more like an idiot on Photoshop.'

'Yes,' laughed Julia. 'It's just like a game of spot the difference.'

'Wow!' marvelled Wynton. 'Where would we be without the Internet?'

Julia smiled. 'You'll find out soon enough.'

'What does that mean?' he asked.

'["invisible and opaque censorship"](#),' she told him.

'[The Guardian](#)?' suggested Wynton. 'Here a piece by Frank Fisher.'

When asked to name countries that impose extensive internet censorship, you might think of China, Iran, or North Korea; I doubt you'd think of the UK, but, after the home secretary Jacqui Smith's [speech](#) to the International Centre for Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence today, you really should.

Smith's headline-grabbing proposal, to use the same tools against "extremist" websites as are currently used against child pornography, should worry us all.

You're now viewing a state-mandated subset of the internet. How do you feel about that? Like to vote against it? You can't. Like your MP to sit on a committee to oversee implementation? He can't. Like to know if the Google results you're seeing are a full representation of Google's actual results? You can't. Censorship at this level - above

even ISPs, is all but invisible to the end user. It's a secret that they're keeping these secrets from you.

'But that's appalling,' gasped Wynton. 'Surely someone will just take Britain to the European Court of Justice?' He tried to laugh. 'That must fly in the face of all our freedoms.'

'Justice?' asked Julia. 'I don't think that's very likely, not when the European states are at the forefront of Net censorship.'

'What do you mean?'

'If you think the European Union is on the side of personal freedoms, think again. They use the Napoleonic Code: guilty until proven innocent. It flies in the face of all our laws and yet they write, and we accept, all their new laws.'

'But if anyone were to try now and clamp down on information like this, it's too late. The Genie is already out of the bottle. They may block news feeds or whatever but there's still all those blog sites and don't forget email. You can't clamp down to that extent. We'd all get to know about it and we'd do something about it.'

'Really?' asked Julia. 'You don't mind a bit of censorship because you can still read the blogs and send some emails?'

'The information would still get through,' he insisted.

'Do you know about the ["Levi-Prodi law"](#)?' she asked.

Wynton typed. '700 results,' he told her.

'So few? What have you got?'

'Almost entirely blog sites, you see? The information will always get through. But, just to please you, here's the Italian daily [Corriere della Sera](#).'

'Do you read Italian?' she asked.

'I'll translate it,' he told her. Wynton clicked the translate button and then hissed quietly to himself. 'I see what you mean. This is not easy to read. *This bill is a macroscopic error, fruit of obstinate ignorance. But nobody Glielo will contest.*'

'Go on,' she told him. 'Try a blog site - while you can.'

'[Beppe Grillo's Blog](#),' smiled Wynton. 'A popular Italian comedian, apparently.'

Ricardo Franco Levi, Prodi's right hand man, undersecretary to the President of the Council, has written the text to put a stopper in the mouth of the Internet.

The [Levi-Prodi law](#) lays out that anyone with a blog or a website has to register it with the ROC, a register of the Communications Authority, produce certificates, pay a tax, even if they provide information without any intention to make money.

The Levi-Prodi law obliges anyone who has a website or a blog to [form] a publishing company and to have a journalist who is on the register of professionals as the responsible director. 99% would close down.

Julia looked at Wynton. 'So I'd make the most of it while you can.'

'So how come there's no uproar?' he asked. 'Something like that should be on the front page of every European newspaper.'

'Oh, you are so naive,' Julia told him. 'Put yourself in the position of the editor of Britain's best-selling paper, *The Sun*. You are choosing tomorrow's front page. Do you lead with (A) the Italians are going to ban blog sites, or (B) new clue in hunt for missing Madeleine? Which do you think will sell more papers?'

‘Email,’ stated Wynton. ‘People would know when information’s being denied them. If you can see it in one country, but not another, word would get around. People would email other people. Like I say, the Genie’s out of the bottle.’

‘And the Home Secretary is now demanding access to all our internet records and phone and mobile calls. Full Facebook access, too. Don’t you think it’s a simple matter to block the emails you don’t want to get through, all in the name of national security? Who’s going to complain, Wynton? All the people who are soft on terrorism?’ Julia had lost all patience. ‘Wynton, you are so sad.’

Anyone home?

Wynton sat bolt upright. People were moving along the corridor again. He listened for the sound of coughing. It came now as a prolonged gurgle and staccato crackle.

Smash went something heavy again the neighbour's door.

Wynton quickly scrambled back into his clothes. He felt reluctant to press his ear up against the damp wall. He stood frozen, listening intently.

Smash went the door again. The coughing picked up in tempo. *Smash*. And then the door gave way and Wynton could hear the pounding of feet through the thin wall.

He could hear furniture being thrown around and lots of unintelligible shouting.

'Hello,' called Wynton. 'Anyone home?'

He looked along the length of the darkened corridor and shivered as the wind whipped up around his ears.

'Hello?' Wynton stepped inside the flat. He tried the light switch in the hall but only the pale glow from the orange lamps of the estate seeped through. Wynton had the distinct feeling that he was stepping through the bowels of a sinking ship. His feet lay hidden beneath an oily black film that coated the water on the floor. A small plate with a single slice of toast bobbed by and brushed gently against his ankle.

'Hello?' he called. Wynton peered first into the front room. Thousands of books lay scattered across the wet floor. An ancient green armchair lay upended, exposing the frayed canvas straps and the grey straw.

'Hello?' called Wynton again.

'Hello?' said Julia. 'What are you doing out here?'

'I got locked out,' Wynton told her. 'Let me in quick. I'm freezing.'

'What were you doing out there?' she asked. 'Come in the living room and get warm.' Julia rummaged on the sofa for dry clothes and quickly draped another hoody around his shoulders.

'The Crew, or whoever they fucking are; they came back for the coughing man. They smashed his door down!'

'Oh, my God!' exclaimed Julia. 'Is he all right?' She shook her head. 'What happened?'

'There's no one there. Not a soul or the sign of one.'

'What?' she asked. 'Are you saying they took him away?'

'Fuck knows,' he hissed. 'We'd better call the police.'

'But why did you get involved?' she asked. 'Were you asking for trouble?'

'What could I do?' Wynton wanted to know. 'I couldn't just sit here, could I? Listening to that was like torture.'

'You didn't confront them?'

'No, I didn't. I waited until it went quiet and then I went to look. I couldn't get back in when the door slammed because you've got the only bloody set of keys.'

'Oh, I'm so sorry, Wynton. I had meant to get them cut but then they put me on a double shift and it went clean out of my head.'

'Could you call the police?' he asked.

'Sure, sure,' said Julia. 'But let's get you sorted first. You look grey.'

‘I’m fucking freezing,’ he announced. ‘I need a coffee or some hot soup or something.’

‘I’ll make you a nice hot bowl of soup,’ smiled Julia. ‘Look, get yourself warm. Turn up that fire. Tomato soup okay?’

‘What are the symptoms of hyperthermia?’ asked Wynton.

‘I don’t think you need worry about that,’ she told him. ‘Oh, my God,’ Julia called from the kitchen. ‘You should see the sheer number of ants in the microwave. You’d think the microwave would kill them!’

‘It does,’ said Wynton.

‘Just give me ten minutes to clear this mess up.’

‘[Hyperthermia](#),’ typed Wynton. He opted for [Wikipedia](#).

Hyperthermia in its advanced state referred to as heat stroke or sunstroke, is an acute condition which occurs when the body produces or absorbs more heat than it can dissipate.

‘Well, that’s bollocks,’ hissed Wynton. He called out to Julia. ‘I thought hyperthermia was when you were freezing to death.’

‘You mean hypothermia,’ she told him. ‘These ants have clogged up the turntable thing. It’s so yuk!’

Wynton looked back at the screen. He had a new email.

Hiya Winnie, I don’t know why I didn’t mention it before but Daren said I ought to tell you in case it was important. I was interviewed by the police several times after you were blown up. They asked some very odd questions, like how observant are you? And how good was your eyesight?

Then some other lot came to see me and they asked about the anti-war demos you took me on and that petition you had me sign. They said you had watched terrorist videos on Youtube and said you’d been very critical of the war on terror on some bulletin board. They said you had some strange contacts on your mobile. They said you’d set your mobile for news alerts on Iraq and Afghanistan. They asked if you had any Muslim friends so I told them about that bloke from your gym who has a halal butchers on Westbourne Grove where we used to get the lamb chops. They said he’d spent a lot of time in Pakistan. They showed me a picture of a bag very much like your man-bag. I said it was probably yours but it was hard to say. Then I thought they were trying to pin the bus bomb on you.

The first cops were the strangest. They didn’t seem like normal police they were very public school, probably on some fast-track scheme and they took away all my photos of you including that one at Mark’s fancy dress with you all got up as a Arab terrorist suicide bomber. Just thought I’d mention it. Loadzaluv, Lolli x x x.

Isn't private enterprise marvellous?

'Are you up for some more Google questions?' asked Julia. 'You've got your colour back now.'

'What now? After the day I've had?' Wynton was aghast. 'No. I just want to sleep.'

'Then let me tell you a bed-time story,' she smiled.

Wynton shuffled his pillow and wiggled to get comfortable.

'Once upon a time,' began Julia. 'In a far away country called the Germany Democratic Republic, the Stasi secret police held files on the entire population of 16.4 million people. The files contained everything you would ever want to know about anybody. And the Stasis had special little child informers who...'

'This is not very cheerful,' interrupted Wynton.

Julia took a deep breath. 'Did you ever have a Tesco Clubcard?' she asked.

'What's that got to do with anything?'

'It's got to do with Tesco holding more files on people than the Stasis,' she nodded.

'I have nearly £400 in vouchers.'

'This is *The New Statesman*,' declared Julia. She flipped open the laptop and placed it between them. 'It says with a Tesco Clubcard they know everything there is to know about you, including if you like *Marmite* or not.'

'Are you on a commission?' he asked.

Julia read on. *If you also have a Tesco mobile phone and bank account, think of the potential for an unparalleled convergence of data.*

'I had a Tesco mobile phone and bank account,' admitted Wynton. 'And broadband.'

Julia tutted. *There will be a record of all your movements: every conversation you have with friends, every company and service you call, and when, where and for how long; plus everything you buy with a bank card and every service you pay for.*

She smiled to Wynton beside her. 'It's so they can analyse your *life stage*.'

'Oh, good.'

An even darker twist to all this surveillance emerged when the UK government let it be known that it planned to link proposed compulsory biometric identity cards, designed to help control immigration, to the data contained on supermarket loyalty cards.

'Are you trying to give me nightmares?' he asked. 'That's scandalous. You can't mix the private sector and our biometric data?'

'Are you serious?' asked Julia. She gave him a sad look. 'If you think that's bad, think about the DNA database. The whole thing is run by a private company.'

'No way.'

'Way,' she smiled. '[Forensic Science Service](#). All the shares are held by the Home Office, but it's still a private company.'

Wynton exhaled and flopped back down on the pillow.

'And they let pharmaceutical companies and biotech industries carry out all sorts of weird research.'

'Like the Thomas Westbrook Clinic?'

She laughed. 'But we aren't doing ethnic profiling...'

'Whoa! Hold on.' Wynton sat upright. 'What *ethnic profiling*?'

'You mean the Race Prediction System,' she told him. 'That's where if they pick up some DNA at a crime scene they can see what race the person is. They're even working on a way of determining someone's appearance from the DNA sample.'

'Jesus Christ.'

'It's clever isn't it?'

'I don't know about clever. *Sinister*.' He studied her. 'Why are you telling me all this? It's hardly conducive to a good night's sleep.'

'Oh, I'm so sorry,' she sighed. 'Now, come on. Lie back down and get yourself nice and comfortable. You just relax and don't you worry about a thing.'

Julia nestled closer to Wynton and tucked the duvet tightly beneath his chin. 'No bogymen is going to come and get you. You're safe in the care and protection of the private sector.'

Wynton opened one eye. The red glow of the electric bar fire glowed back off Julia's face. 'What does that mean?' he asked.

'Well,' she began. 'You are obviously much safer these days than you were before your coma. The state now has thousands of concerned citizens who are watching out for your safety at all times.'

Wynton closed the eye.

'All sorts of people are watching over you, Wynton. They call them the extended police family.'

'Ah,' Wynton sighed. 'That's comforting.' He kept his eyes closed.

'Some councils pay children to keep out a watchful eye. They have the same powers as MI5 and the tax authorities. They can ensure you never come to harm. And then you have all the other people that can keep a watch over you, from the neighbourhood enforcement officers, social services, the environmental wardens or the health and safety people. And don't forget all the traffic wardens that now have police powers along with the park keepers, housing officers and subcontractors. And if they catch any naughty people they can fine them on the spot. And now the courts aren't so busy. You're so much safer now, Wynton.'

'I feel so relieved I might just go straight to sleep now,' he said. His nose disappeared beneath the duvet.

'And we have the private sector to thank for much of that, Wynton. Perhaps you should mention them in your prayers.'

'Yes, isn't private enterprise marvellous?' he declared.

'Yes, it is Wynton. Sometimes I lie in bed at night marvelling at it all.' Then she gently shook his shoulder. 'Are you asleep?'

'Do I seem asleep?'

'Wake up, Wynton. Wake up. I want to show you something.' She hooked her elbow through his and swiftly hoisted him upright. She pumped up his pillows.

'A little film before you go to sleep. I bet you think Britain had the second largest military contingent in Iraq after the Americans, didn't you?'

Wynton felt dazed and confused. 'Do you mean at the peak?' he asked.

'At the peak, yes, but you' be wrong,' she told him.

'Hold on. I haven't given my answer,' Wynton pointed out. 'But okay who did?'

‘The private sector. Companies like Blackwater and Aegis. Taxpayers give them billions each year. They’re better equipped than most armies.’

‘And are they looking after me, too?’

‘Yes, they are Wynton.’ She pulled herself close up beside him and positioned the screen for a better view. ‘I just love YouTube. This is one of my favourites [Aegis Defence Services](#).

While he waited for the video to load Wynton read this, *British security firm - Aegis Defence Services – employees...filming themselves in this video. It's presumably I in a series of 4 videos they made. The contractors were cleared through an internal "investigation" by the security firm itself. And later by a US Army led "investigation". But no matter what their acts in Iraq, they cannot be prosecuted in Iraqi courts.*

The screen was no longer frozen. Wynton looked down a long Iraqi road from the back of an enclosed pick-up while Elvis Presley sang *Mystery Train*.

*Train I ride, coming down the track
Train I ride, coming down the track
It took my baby, and it's never comin' back*

*Train I ride, fifteen coaches long
Train I ride, fifteen coaches long
Took my baby, you know it ain't never coming back*

‘I’m going to be sick.’ Wynton pushed the laptop away. ‘Or I might just cry.’

Whatyergot?

Wynton found himself shocked into consciousness. Before his eyes were even open his heart was beating fit to bust. The red glow of the fire sent stark shadows across the room. He sat up frozen, his knuckles clenched. *Bang* went the front door. *Bang!*

Wynton grabbed his trousers off the back of the kitchen stool and made his way quickly down the hall.

Bang went the door. *'Police! Come on. Open up.'*

Wynton peered through the spy hole. *Bang* went the door again.

He took a step back. 'I would like to see some ID, first.' His voice came as a disappointing croak.

'Are you going to open this door or what?' came a shrill voice from the other side.

Wynton fumbled with the chain and peered out onto the darkened landing.

'You Wynton Smith?' asked the WPC.

'Who wants to know?'

'What do you mean who wants to know? Are you Wynton Smith?'

'I am.'

'Let's see some ID. *Whatyergot?*' The woman thrust her hand towards the door.

'Can you open the door properly please sir.' Wynton saw a large gloved hand come into view. It pushed hard against the door. Wynton fumbled again with the chain.

'This your abode is it sir?' asked the policeman.

Wynton noted the body armour and the utility belt.

'No,' he explained.

'Got this as your address sir,' said the officer.

'You saying this ain't your place?' snapped the WPC.

'What time is it?' asked Wynton. 'I don't have a watch.' He looked down and found that he was still clutching his trousers in his hand. His feet began to feel cold.

'You reported a disturbance,' said the woman. She kept her hands firmly in her pockets. 'Where is it then?'

'Well, hold on a second. I didn't actually report anything. I don't have a phone. I did ask a friend of mine if she could report something.'

'What thing?' she demanded.

'Someone broke in next door.' Wynton stepped forward fully into the doorway and gestured to his left. 'I heard the door being bashed in. I could hear them all running around. I went in when they'd gone and...'

'You did what?' she wanted to know. 'Come here.' The WPC beckoned Wynton out onto the hall. The wind wiped up around his legs. 'Did you step there? On that glass?'

'Well, yes...'

'That's an offence,' she told him.

'What gives you the right to go stepping into other people's houses then sir?' asked the man.

'That's ridiculous,' scoffed Wynton. 'I was worried about the bloke that lives there. He's not well...'

'Are you saying somebody lives in this here flat are you sir?'

'Yes.'

The WPC stepped away. She kept her back to Wynton and spoke rapidly into a hand-held device.

The policeman moved forward and edged Wynton back against the door frame. 'What makes you think there's anybody living there then sir?'

'Because I hear him all the time. I hear him coughing his guts up from morning to night.'

'You hear him do you sir?'

'Coughing his guts up, yes.'

'Anything else? Did the person play music of any kind? Did they have the television on?'

'No,' considered Wynton. 'I think he had limited interests. Just the coughing.'

The policeman stepped sideways and peered closer into the flat, shining a light across the waterlogged floor. 'I don't think you're find anybody's been living here for some time. This whole lot's condemned.'

'I don't think it's actually condemned,' began Wynton. 'I think you'll find that it's earmarked for demolition sometime around 2018. Some people consider these flats to be investments.'

'You being funny or what?' The woman stepped back towards Wynton. 'It's an offence.'

'What is?'

'Causing harassment, alarm or distress. That's what.'

'What? Are you saying I am?'

'Where's your ID? *Whatyergot?*'

'I have my Tesco Clubcard.' Wynton rummaged in a trouser pocket.

'Are you being funny?' The woman pressed her pale blotchy face close to Wynton's.

'Don't tell me it's no good,' Wynton looked downcast. 'They told me it was as good as an ID card because Tesco holds more personal information than the Stasis. And I do like *Marmite*.'

The two officers exchanged a glance and the WPC turned again and spoke quickly into her hand. She looked over at Wynton. 'Yeah he's flagged up sarg. Should I?'

She stepped back towards Wynton and returned her hands to the trouser pockets. And then she nodded to her colleague.

'Under section 44,' he announced. 'I am obliged to ask you to turn out your pocket sir.'

'Pockets?' asked Wynton. 'What pockets? I'm virtually naked!'

'Are you resisting sir?'

Wynton took a deep breath to garner his strength. He looked down at the trousers in his hand and then he tossed them towards the officer. He was barely aware of what happened next, except that his head slammed hard against the wall, his feet were kicked away and an overwhelming bulk pinned him to the ground. Somewhere in the background his rights were being read aloud in a shrill voice.

It's lovely

'I can't leave you alone for five minutes, can I?' Julia brushed aside the ants and put down a brown paper bag. 'I'm going to run you nice hot bath. I want you to relax. I'm starting to worry about you, Wynton.' She tilted her head to examine him.

'They pulled a great divot out of my scalp!' Wynton had his own head tilted towards the mirror. Hundreds of bloody pinpricks occupied a clearing in his thick hair.

'You should have let them swab you for DNA like everybody else,' Julia huffed.

'They ripped a whole bloody handful out!'

'They need to get to the roots,' she explained.

'What's in the bag?' he asked.

'A Morgon Côte de Py Trenal 05.' Julia smiled.

'Wine?'

'Only the finest.'

'I didn't think you would drink.'

'Who says it's for me?' Julia stepped out into the hall and brushed against him. 'I'm going to run you a nice hot bath. I'm going to put something in it to make you relax.'

'Thanks.' Wynton quickly had the laptop open. He waited and listened to the sound of running water. Julia's voice came muffled from the bathroom.

'Tonight I promise you a really good night's sleep.'

'Great.'

Up came his Google Mail page and he scrolled down looking to hear from Lauren. *Take advantage of the rate cut, remortgage today and save cash* bid The Trading Floor.

Watcher Winnie! I just had a really good thought. Why don't you sign up with Skype and then we can talk face to face. Go find somewhere with a cam. I so want to see you Winnie!! I've uploaded loads of new pix to Flickr. You wouldn't believe how huge I am!!!

Wynton hit the Reply button. *I was thinking of coming home soon, just for a visit. I'm going to see if I can fly back tomorrow. Perhaps we could meet somewhere?*

'It's ready when you are.' Julia stepped over to Wynton. 'Shouldn't you get undressed?'

'Sure,' he smiled. He clicked send and then cold killed the machine. The tiny fan whirled and was silent.

'I poured you a glass of wine.' She handed Wynton a glass.

'Where'd you get the glass from?' he asked.

'I didn't want you drinking a Morgon from out of a chipped mug.' She pressed the glass into his hand. 'Come on. Take a big sip. And then come and hop into your bath while it's still hot. Come up, drink up.'

Wynton held the glass in his hand as he looked down into the bath. Sediment of a dark brown lay in a line the length of the bath. Above, an oily film shimmered on the rose-toned water. Wynton lowered the lid and sat down on the toilet. He lent across and splashed his hand back and forth through the tepid water.

'It's lovely,' he called to the door. Wynton sniffed the wine.

‘Your hair dried quick,’ said Julia, looking up.

‘Yes, it’s good like that,’ he told her. He ran his fingers across his scalp and flinched at the clearing. ‘Nice wine.’

She laughed softly. ‘Come and sit down, Wynton.’ She patted the cushion beside her. ‘I’m so glad you thought to email me. That was so smart.’ She smiled as he sat down.

‘I’d still be there, I guess.’

Julia topped up his glass and their eyes met. Wynton was surprised to see that Julia had no pupils. The eyes were a uniform black.

‘I thought it was cold in here,’ he smiled, sitting back and sipping at his glass. ‘My cell was freezing.’

‘And they’ll write to you by post, will they, to let you know?’

‘About the court date?’

Julia nodded. ‘I managed to call Hammed,’ she told him. ‘He thinks you’ll be best pleading guilty to conduct likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress and that they’ll drop the assaulting a police officer charge. Apparently, that’s just a formality.’

‘Really?’

‘Sure,’ she gave a reassuring smile. ‘What’s the worst they can do? Give you an Asbo?’

‘I guess.’ Wynton emptied his glass and looked towards the bottle.

‘Wynton?’ Julia tried to catch him in the eyes again. ‘You’re not happy here, are you?’

‘Depends what you mean by happy.’

‘I was wondering. I could move you. I mean there’s a place in the country. It’s a bit remote but it’s nice and snug. It’s really cosy and there are some lovely views.’

‘Where is it?’ asked Wynton. ‘The Brecon Beacons?’

‘No, it’s in Wales, I think.’

‘You think?’

‘I’ve only been there the once,’ she told him. She filled his glass. ‘Do you like the wine?’

‘Yes. Of course. It’s lovely.’ Wynton laughed. ‘It’s going to my head a bit. This is heady stuff.’

‘Come and lie down, Wynton. I worry about you.’

Wynton took a big sip and let Julia take the glass as he lowered himself down onto the cushions with a sigh. He shut his eyes and felt the warm glow of the wine. He felt Julia slide in beside him. Wynton took a deep breath and savoured the enticing scent of cardamoms.

Why

'Finish your coffee.' Julia dropped her smile. 'I have to leave soon.' Suddenly she was serious. 'It's time we asked the big question now.'

'And what is the big question?' he asked. He pushed the duvet aside and fumbled for the tepid cup.

'The big question,' she told him, 'is why?'

'Why what?'

'Just look around you, Wynton. You've woken up to a very different world. These are what the Chinese would call interesting times.'

'Dangerous times,' Wynton pointed out. 'I think I can vouch for that.'

'And the government is doing all it can to protect us,' she told him.

'Well,' he hesitated.

'And you believe we still live in a relatively free and secular country?'

'Pretty much,' he told her.

'Then type it into Google.'

"relatively free and secular country"

'Just one result,' he told her. 'Phil Hall in [*The Guardian*](#).'

Yes, we do live in a relatively free and secular country - just ask any young Afghani woman studying at a college here for her opinion. But there is also evidence around us that the British government is engaging in repression. And not just in Iraq or Afghanistan, but here in Britain. Perhaps those of us who have lived for a time under dictatorships can spot some of the warning signs:

- *Inconvenient elections are avoided in the name of getting on with the job.*
- *Leaders of the opposition are character-assassinated by the state media.*
- *Institutions like the legislature begin to lose their independence and traditional role.*
- *Citizens are increasingly afraid to speak openly on certain issues.*
- *Citizens are observed and monitored on cameras and the government can tap into their conversations at will.*
- *Governments can snatch anyone from their homes or off the street and detain them without trial on charges of treason or terrorism.*
- *Ethnic and religious minorities are persecuted and are made into scapegoats.*
- *The state increasingly intervenes in family and community life in an attempt to control citizens' behaviour.*
- *The focus of discussion moves away from the issues and into a narrative of political rivalries and gossip spreads.*
- *Governments use bread and circuses to shut people up and distract attention away from their increasing political impotence.*
- *Public spaces for demonstrations are closed down and restricted.*
- *Large and ridiculous monuments are built to impress the citizens.*
- *Individuals have to carry ID with them at all times and the government holds large amounts of information on every citizen.*

'I guess we can tick every one of those boxes,' said Wynton. 'But that still doesn't explain *why* any government would want this much control over its citizens.'

Julia nodded. 'Because of what's happening now, Wynton. And because of what's coming.'

Wynton went inexplicably cold. He watched as Julia tightened her lips 'Let's start with "[Malthusian catastrophe](#)",' she said.

'[Wikipedia](#).' Wynton dragged the laptop over. *A Malthusian catastrophe is a return to subsistence-level conditions as a result of population growth outpacing agricultural production.*

'I can get my head around that,' said Wynton, scrolling down the page. 'But is it very likely? It starts to lose me with pie-charts and graphs.'

'Okay,' explained Julia. 'In essence, the world population will have doubled from 1980 up to about 2030. There are more people alive today than in all of history put together because food is cheap thanks to mechanisation. But as oil prices rise, so too will the price of food, until food eventually becomes too expensive for a lot of people.' Julia looked at Wynton. 'Are you with me?'

Wynton nodded.

'Click where it says [Food Security](#).'

Increased farming for use in biofuels, world oil prices at more than \$100 a barrel, global population growth, climate change, loss of agricultural land to residential and industrial development, and growing consumer demand in China and India have pushed up the price of grain. Food riots have recently taken place in many countries across the world.

'Okay,' pointed out Wynton. 'But let's remember that famines happen all the time – Biafra, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Zimbabwe... I don't see anything new here.'

'Really?' Julia sat back. 'And how many Americans do you think are going to bed hungry tonight?'

'Not that many,' he shrugged.

'How about 36 million, and then some?'

'Bollocks!' said Wynton.

Julia lent forward and typed into the laptop. She showed Wynton the results.

CHICAGO, Nov. 17 ([UPI](#)) -- More than 36 million Americans, including 12.4 million children, are food insecure, officials of a U.S. non-profit group said.

"It is important to note that the U.S. Department of Agriculture numbers released today are 2007 figures and do not take into account the unprecedented economic crisis that our country is currently facing," Vicki Escarra, president of Feeding America said in a statement.

'Food insecure? What does that mean?' Wynton huffed. 'Are they starving?'

'Some are.' Julia nodded. 'It means a huge chunk of the US population have empty stomachs and don't know where their next meal is coming from; in the land of plenty, Wynton.'

'Well, this is all news to me.' He retained a dubious expression.

Julia let out a short laugh. 'Despite what we might think, politicians are not all dumb,' she smiled. 'They've seen this food problem coming for a long time. It's been a long-running international problem and now it's a growing domestic one.'

'And what are they doing about it?' he asked.

'Well, that's the rub, Wynton. And, unfortunately, that isn't the whole story. They also have money problems.'

‘Don’t we all?’

Julia laughed. ‘But in this case the problem is the money.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘It doesn’t really exist. I’ll explain. Back in 1929, the entire financial system wasn’t based on credit. All paper money was backed by gold. It said so on a dollar bill.’

‘What does it say now?’ Wynton asked.

‘In God we trust.’

‘It doesn’t inspire much confidence.’

‘There isn’t a government in the world that pegs its currency to gold any more. We all have what they call [fiat](#) currencies; *fiat* being the Latin for *let it be done* and meaning it’s only worth something because the market says so.’

Wynton scoffed and narrowed his brows.

Julia brought her hands into play. ‘Money exists in binary code and now it’s literally disappearing into thin air.’ She waved her fingers skyward like an Apsara dancer.

‘Would you like to explain that?’ Wynton asked.

‘Put it this way: if governments are borrowing money to bail out the banks, who is lending the money?’

Wynton shrugged.

‘Is it the banks?’ she asked.

‘I can’t see how.’

‘Just wind the clock back a little. Banks began lending out far more money than they held on deposit. This money was debt that the banks owed themselves knowing that by charging interest the money would come back along with profit. The money is digitally created when the bank pays a loan into your account. You then buy something with your digital cash and suddenly money - backed by absolutely nothing - is now in the system. This is known as fractional reserve banking and it only works if nobody defaults on their loan.’

‘And if they do default?’ asked Wynton.

‘You get another Wall Street Crash and people lose their homes.’

Wynton swallowed hard. ‘So are you saying there’s more money around than there really should be?’

‘Precisely.’

‘And was all this extra money loaned into existence?’

‘Yes.’

‘So pumping more money into the system isn’t going to help, is it?’

‘How could it?’ Julia asked.

‘So where is the government bank bail-out money coming from?’ asked Wynton.

‘It can only come from the same place. It’s digitally created and, to a lesser extent, printed. They call it “quantitative easing”. But gold doesn’t come into it.’

‘You’ll excuse me if I have a little trouble taking this in,’ said Wynton. ‘Or even believing what you’re saying.’

‘Don’t worry,’ she told him. ‘Everyone has the same trouble at first. As a concept it’s mind-blowing but there’s an easy way to understand it. Type "[money as debt](#)".’

Debt: government, corporate and household has reached astronomical proportions. Where does all this money come from? How could there be that much money to lend? The answer is...there isn’t. Today, money is debt. If there were no debt there

would be no money. If this is puzzling you, you are not alone. Very few people understand, even though all of us are affected.

'They're plugging a [film](#).' Wynton sat back disappointed.

'And you don't want to pay for the download?' Julia asked.

'I haven't got a credit card.'

'Don't worry. Watch it for free on [Youtube](#). But let's just assume for now that money isn't backed by gold and that it's just a digital act of faith.'

'Sure.'

'Did you ever hear of John Maynard Keynes?' Julia asked.

Wynton shrugged.

'Type in the words ["Lenin was certainly right"](#). What have you got?'

Lenin was certainly right. There is no subtler, no surer means of overturning the existing basis of society than to debauch the currency. The process engages all the hidden forces of economic law on the side of destruction, and does it in a manner which not one man in a million is able to diagnose.

Julia turned to look at Wynton. 'I think you would be hard pushed to find a better explanation of what's happening today. And that was in 1919 when paper money was backed by gold and silver and not digitally debauched.'

'You'll have to bear with me here,' said Wynton. 'How could Gordon Brown not know the banks were digitally conjuring up money?'

She laughed. 'Of course he knew. He was Chancellor of the Exchequer for ten years.'

'So he must have seen this coming.'

'Yes, Wynton. It was just a question of when.' Julia moved a little closer. Her tone was now soft. 'There's a basic law of Nature at play here. There is no perpetual motion machine that can power an economy. When you're trading in debt, you're trading in negatives. It's all an illusion.'

Wynton turned back to the screen and shook his head. 'Do you think Gordon Brown ever heard of Keynes?'

'Essential reading,' smiled Julia.

'Then he must have read this:' *As the inflation proceeds and the real value of the currency fluctuates wildly from month to month, all permanent relations between debtors and creditors, which form the ultimate foundation of capitalism, become so utterly disordered as to be almost meaningless; and the process of wealth-getting degenerates into a gamble and a lottery.*

'Prophetic stuff,' marvelled Wynton. 'And it gets better. Tell me this man didn't have a crystal ball.'

By a continuing process of inflation, government can confiscate, secretly and unobserved, an important part of the wealth of their citizens. By this method they not only confiscate, but they confiscate arbitrarily; and while the process impoverishes many, it actually enriches some.

'And I wonder who?' asked Wynton.

'The usual suspects, of course: the powers behind the throne. Did JP Morgan buy up banks for cents-on-the dollar in 1930? Did they just snap up Bear Stearns and Washington Mutual for cents-on-the dollar today? And is this the same JP Morgan that has Tony Blair on the payroll, paying him £208,000 a month as a consultant?'

Wynton sat looking puzzled. 'This is some credit crunch!'

'That's one way of putting it.' Julia smiled patiently. 'You could also say we're coming to the end of a brief financial experiment where money is no longer backed by anything substantial. The system only worked because the economy kept expanding and because people had faith in the system. And, rather like the Roman Empire, collapse is inevitable once you stop expanding.'

'So are we looking at an economic collapse?' he asked.

Julia simply shrugged.

'But it's never explained that way.'

'How is it explained?' she asked.

'I don't know. I don't think it is.' Wynton scratched the side of his head and flinched. 'You hear more about global warming.'

'A convenient distraction,' Julia chuffed. 'People can actually be made to feel they're doing something to help.'

'While in reality they're powerless to solve the big problem.'

'I haven't mentioned the Big One yet.'

'Oh, really? I'm all ears...'

'Do you know what else they've seen coming, Wynton?'

'What?'

'**"Peak oil"** Type it in.'

'Let's stick with [Wikipedia](#).' *Peak oil is the point in time when the maximum rate of global petroleum production is reached, after which the rate of production enters terminal decline. If global consumption is not mitigated before the peak, a world energy crisis may develop because the availability of conventional oil will drop and prices will rise, perhaps dramatically.*

Pessimistic predictions of future oil production operate on the thesis that the peak has already occurred or will occur shortly and, predict a global depression, perhaps even initiating a chain reaction of the various feedback mechanisms in the global market which might stimulate a collapse of global industrial civilisation.

'Well, that's pretty heavy,' marvelled Wynton. 'The end of civilisation! Has anyone given a date?'

'2013.' Julia lent forward and called up a story from [The Guardian](#) on October 29, 2008.

Eight British companies are warning of a ruinous oil crunch five years from now. We warn that the global peak of oil production will arrive unexpectedly early, resulting in not just a global energy crisis, but potentially the withholding of exports by oil producers and energy famine in oil-importing countries.

Previously unimaginable policy interventions in financial markets have suddenly become imperative, and similar interventions in energy markets today may be worth their weight in gold tomorrow.

'And it's all happening before your very eyes,' smiled Julia. 'Iraq, Afghanistan – oil and gas - good-bye freedoms and Parliamentary democracy, hello government intervention in financial markets.'

'I knew oil had to be at the bottom of it,' Wynton sighed. 'But I've never heard of peak oil and yet up pop nearly 30 million results.' He smiled sheepishly. 'I have been away.'

Julia grinned. 'It's not on the public agenda. Do you think any politician is going to raise peak oil when he doesn't have any answers? Of course not. It would be like saying we're running out of oil – that's a given – so life as we know it will certainly end. And we have absolutely no answers. We left it too late. Wynton, there is no Plan B. If they admitted that, imagine the chaos and panic!'

'Hence the draconian laws I've woken up to? The surveillance, the ID cards, the fear, the control.'

'It was just a question of which would break first, and it was the economy that broke. Anyone of these – the population/food thing, the collapse of capitalism or the end of the one single product that the entire human race is dependant upon – on their own or all three together, the result will be the same.'

Wynton stared back with a glassy look.

'Food riots, famine, mass migration, wars. The EU and Britain are clamping down the borders right now. It's happening as we speak. And imagine this: if you're not already in the system. If you don't have a biometric photo ID card, you Wynton Smith, may find yourself a *non-person*.'

'And seriously fucked.'

'Especially if they use it as the ultimate sanction and take your ID card away. You wouldn't survive a week. Once the oil supply has peaked a whole new order will need to be applied, and much of it will be in place. The status quo must be maintained at all costs.'

'There may be an upside,' he suggested lamely. 'Higher oil prices will force us all to go even greener and demand will eventually fall.'

'And is wind power going to deliver the crops from the field and into the shops?'

'Unlikely,' Wynton agreed. 'Not at first.'

'And before we ever enter your bright eco-friendly world, there will be crippling strikes and then riots in the streets when the supermarket shelves are stripped bare. Starving hoards will wash up on these shores. It will be the haves and the have-nots, some with private armies. Commodities will become the new currency. It will be them or us.'

'It's just like *Risk*,' marvelled Wynton. 'Control the masses, keep out the non-people and use the military to control the remaining oil from Central Asia to the Middle East. Good plan.'

Julia sat back with a smile on her face. 'And they can do all that without ever having to answer any awkward questions about the end of oil. All they needed was a catalytic event, such as 9/11 and the London bombing.'

'And I just thought they were a bunch of incompetent wankers.' Wynton looked at Julia.

Oh, Wynton

‘Wynton, I have to get back to work now.’ Julia came and sat beside him on the cushions. ‘Why not come and get a breath of fresh air? You still look so grey.’

‘I don’t want to go out.’ Wynton pulled himself deeper into the makeshift nest, satisfying his desire to hibernate.

‘Oh, Wynton,’ said Julia. ‘I’m so sorry for everything: all you’ve been through; that terrible incident with the police; what you’re going through now.’

‘And the miserable future?’

‘That, too, in a way.’ She stood up to leave. She looked very sad. ‘I’ll be back later.’ And then, for the first time, Julia blew Wynton a kiss.

‘Wynton! Wynton?’ Julia rushed back to the nest. ‘Are you all right? You look terrible.’ She felt for his pulse. ‘You’re not having a heart attack or something are you?’

‘Oh, weird!’ hissed Wynton. ‘I just had the most awesome déjà vu. I was flying back through space.’ He shuddered violently, and then he sat back and placed his hands over his eyes. ‘I know what it is now,’ he told her.

‘You know what what is?’

‘A kiss! Blowing me a kiss! I’ve got it now.’

Wynton pulled his hands away and looked at Julia. ‘When I was on that bus, and stuck in traffic, I was looking down on a white van beside us, and I caught the driver’s eye. And you know what?’

‘What?’

‘He blew me a kiss,’ Wynton told her.

‘Blew you a kiss?’

‘Either that or he was mouthing the word *Boom!* or *Bang!*’

‘Wynton, what are you saying?’

‘He blows me a kiss and I fly backwards through space.’

Julia tried to laugh.

‘White van,’ repeated Wynton. He stretched forward and opened the laptop.

‘Google Images,’ he told her. ‘["Tavistock square"](#).’

He shook his head from side to side. ‘There we are,’ said Wynton. ‘There’s the white van, right beside the remains of the bus.’

‘I see.’

‘But what’s it say on the side?’ Wynton tried for several pages to find a clear shot of the van and the name of the company that owned it. And then he decided on ‘["Tavistock square" + van](#)’. He found what he was looking for on the second page.

‘Kingstar,’ read Julia. ‘What’s that, bread?’

‘You’re thinking of Kingmill,’ he told her.

[Kingstar](#) typed Wynton. And then he sat back gobstruck. ‘*That is too fucking much for words!*’

Controlled demolition service from Kingstar Contracts in the United Kingdom. Demolition in areas where minimal disruption and minimal noise requirements are paramount.

‘Wynton, don’t be ridiculous!’ Julia struggled to hold him down.

‘What are the mathematical odds on that?’ Wynton pulled at his hair.

‘That really has got to be a coincidence,’ she told him.

'*Coincidence?* What?' he wanted to know. 'Like Giuliani being at Liverpool Street just as the bomb goes off, and the terrorists always wearing white caps? Or some unnamed group running an exercise and suddenly it's all real?'

'Wynton, come and sit down.'

'You said it yourself,' he told her. 'All they needed was a catalytic event!'

'*Wynton*. Be calm.'

'*Calm?* I've been in a coma for three years but I've only just woken up!' Wynton paced back and forth. 'That's it,' he declared. 'That is fucking it! I know precisely what I'm going to do?'

'What are you going to do Wynton?'

'I'm going to go public,' he stopped and smiled, but struggled to catch his breath.

'Here I am, a 7/7 victim. I'll blow the whistle. People will listen.'

'Oh, Wynton,' sighed Julia. 'You were so predictable. I just knew you were going to end up saying that.'

'I see it all,' laughed Wynton.

Julia laughed, too. 'Wynton. Do you really think they will let you?'

'How are they going to stop me?'

How are they going to stop me?

Go to YouTube and type **Wynton Smith Court Case**.

© A.N. PEARCE April 2009

Web: www.alanpearce.com & www.thegooglequestions.com
Email: mail@alanpearce.com