

No Solution

Chapter 1

A stunned silence, broken only by the ripples pulsing gently against the side of the swimming pool.

The child lay motionless in the inflatable ring, head at an angle oh so unnatural, adults exploding into action both in and outside the pool.

Life crawling through slow motion, the man put his hands over his face; say it was not so, how had it happened? What twist of fate had life just taken? How could everything change completely in a matter of seconds?

Memories took him on a journey back to his childhood, seeing himself as a young child, dropping a favoured plastic tractor, seeing cracks stress and open, the plastic twisted and shattered, wishing and screaming to be able to wind back time, no more than he wished he could take back the last five minutes.

One of the adults carried out his daughter, body flopping listlessly, he turned slowly; his wife being restrained, screaming, her face exhibited a venom and hatred that their first fifteen years of marriage had never before seen.

Their child was dead; he had killed their child.

The sun beat down, what had been a gentle warming of his bones now transformed to an oppressive glare, throwing the setting into stark relief.

His vision slowed, refresh rate stuttering, eyes taking a final fixed snap, the image impregnated onto his memory, colour flowed from the scene, replaced by emotion; a metallic taste, faint odour of chlorine, slowly his vision returned. The fixed image floating to the left of his peripheral vision, one of five slots taken, there was to be more?

Sirens pervaded the air, a deep breath, mind and body going into automatic; he slowly walked out of the shallow end of the pool, reaching for a towel.

‘I, er, think the local constabulary will want to have a word.’ A stranger, who were you? Their English accent familiar but out of place in this setting.

A curt nod, ‘I am sure they will.’ How could he be so calm? Slowly drying himself off, carefully and deliberately sitting on a chair randomly placed around the pool, the plastic melded to his skin, waiting.

Ignoring the screaming from his wife, being held back by others, a slow motion collapse, tears and sobbing, alternating of breath and snuffles, an emotional response seemingly so out of place in this scene of building tension.

He turned back to the pool, a faint mist evaporated, shimmer of colours flowed through the swirl of droplets as they danced and played over the surface of the water. A chaotic dance, some being caught by the ripples, others carried away by the wind, twirling upwards, convection currents took the gaseous liquid away, dreaming of a bid for freedom, aspiring to join the clouds that lay beyond their reach far away. Doppler effect of sirens diminished, the sound of people running, doors thrown open, men and women in uniform clustered around his, their child, the impetus left the air as the tension reached an inevitable conclusion.

‘Sir, first can I see some form of identification, then I will need to take a statement from you.’ A stern face, eyes gave a clear message; child killer. Bald, shaved head, wide shoulders, crisp cotton uniform worn on the officer, a forced formality, his mouth squeezed out the words with a slow, drawling accent.

He acquiesced with a shrug, the pockets of the swimming shorts turned out, shaking out the striped cotton towel once upon his shoulders. ‘No I.D. on me I’m sorry, my name is David Westle.’ His bottom lip wrapped around his top teeth. ‘Aurelie and I.’ A slow look taken across to his wife, lying listlessly, having been sedated by the medical team. ‘We are on our annual summer break holiday. Family time, my job does not allow much of that, playing with my daughter in the pool. A freak accident, throwing her around in the water with a rubber ring.’ He gestured with his hands.

‘An accident or not, sir, the first indications are that your child is dead.’ The serious face turned down, scribbling in a note pad, graphite made its smear, details of the scene being laid to text, an analogue scene moved to a black and white perception as the pencil marks grew on the page.

A long, slow sigh. ‘So it would appear, so it would appear.’ He looked around, adults and children being led away by teams of individuals in different attires. Men, women and children; why were they crying, exclaiming and pointing? He wondered, eyes narrowing, all strangers, the only commonality that they were present in or around the pool this morning. They had not lost their daughter. He took one long, last glance at Aurelie, his wife, as she was taken away on a stretcher,

unconscious, how would she take this? Tracey had been her star at the centre of their solar system; did every mother promise that their child would not come between them? Their lives had been very different over the last eleven years, not that he would change anything, only the last ten minutes.

Flickers around his vision, his heart rate slowed, must be shock finally catching up, how could he be so composed and unruffled while his life was systematically dismantled in a matter of moments?

What options were there, become hysterical? Scream and shout? Break down and curl up in a ball?

Is that what the authorities and onlookers expected? He would not give them that satisfaction.

One of the officers had not taken her snake eyes from him, unblinking, right hand hovered over the pistol, fingers drummed on the release catch, as if daring him to give her an excuse. The stainless steel popper showed scratches, the leather strap holding the gun frayed, this was a weapon used to being drawn.

Tracey was gone; Aurelie was under sedation, what did this mean for him? Change, that much could be taken as a given.

Everything had changed and the momentum would only build, all in the space of a few minutes.

He took one last long, lingering look around the pool; holiday paradise, clean blue water, smooth shimmering granite slabs, reflections dancing as the sun crawled its way across the sky, a very different type of grave stone.

Should he simply run? Give snake eyes the excuse to gun him down?

No, that would be the actions of a coward, he shook his head, action and consequence; he had killed his daughter, he would take whatever punishment American law saw as appropriate, that raised a rueful smile.

Cold steel heavy against his wrists, pain arced through him as flesh was caught in the jaws of the handcuffs, he bit his lip trying to suppress the pain, allowing himself to be led away, one foot after the other, where would this lead?

A neatly laundered pin stripe suit, so matching the stereotype, the eyes had lost their previous dispassionate sheen, was his lawyer finally prepared to believe his story? Granted honesty among the accused was a rare commodity, maybe he should add the odd anomaly to put his legal team at rest. A smile caused a wince; at least they had

confirmed that his eye socket was not fractured, just heavily bruised, not that the same could be said for his ribs. It seemed American felons did not approve of those condemned for killing children, why had he bothered with that private dentist for all those years? He ran a tongue over the chipped and broken teeth, could it get any worse than this?

The temperature in the room plummeted, the realisation hit him, what information did his lawyer have?

The man cleared his voice. 'I, I am sorry Professor Westle, the first indications are that your wife took her own life last night.' The lawyer looked down, he could not hold the broken man's gaze, God he had been worked over. Whilst the system had been set up to physically break him, his spirit and will appeared to remain intact. Did he believe Westle's story? A straightforward accident? Strangely enough often the simplest answer was the correct one, not often evidenced in the courtroom though. He looked back up, what was Westle seeing? An absence of anything in the man's eyes, staring but not seeing. The lawyer composed himself, waiting, the benefit of being paid by the hour.

His vision closed down, black and white, the narrow blue and white stripes of the lawyers suit transposed to monochrome, others in the room speaking but no sound flowed from their mouths. He could feel the emotion, expectation flowing in one direction, money flowing to the other. Was this just another game? A get rich scheme founded on a desire for freedom while the state held the knife against the thread of hope?

He felt the image freeze, lawyers seen through the same icon; dollars spilling out from their shiny shoes, handmade suits and slicked back hair. The prisoners, well a drug dealer here, prostitute there; those without the political, financial or information resources needed to be placed in a better standard of facility.

A smile touched his lips; class had even spread to this country.

The picture before him shifted to join that of the swimming pool, two slots filled, three awaited, his peripheral vision shimmered gently.

'Tell me this, how was my wife allowed to take her own life? What were the safeguards in place? Were my words not listened to? Tracey was everything to her.' Westle slowly spoke, each word enunciated carefully.

'The details have not been released; I have been instructed to pass this information to you as her next of kin. I, I am sorry for your loss.' The lawyer

regained his poise, sweaty skin on his face radiated a red glow, flesh gently bulged over the top button on his shirt. ‘We are making progress in releasing you from this institute, our next bail hearing will be the day after tomorrow.’

Westle slowly shook his head, was he expected to be cheered by this news? They had their answer, the reason a child had passed away, and now her mother driven to take her own life? This solution to tick a box would be a challenge to pass over; did this man really believe what he was saying? No, of course not, play the game David, play the game. He turned his mind to more pressing concerns, what would tonight’s beating consist of? Eyes shifted upwards from his lawyer to the filament lamp covered by a rusting grill, a moth lazily flapped in the convection current, spiralling upwards, drawn up through the cone of rising air, others joined, occasionally colliding, the frequency increasing as the vortex drew them in. A spark from his brain latched onto the image, something and nothing, his eyes focused. The lawyer mistook the focus, discussing in increasingly complex legal terms the next steps in the professor’s case, the words slid off and around the man in front of him.

‘You have to be joking.’ Westle mouthed to himself. Deep in the American south, and he comes up with Physics, now? Should take his mind off tonight, his mind began to assemble the equations, vision not leaving the moth and its flight through the vortex, darting from one to another, tracking their motion and resultant collisions.