

The Death of Dalziel

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Extract

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*What, old acquaintance? Could not all this flesh
Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell . . .
Death hath not struck so fat a deer today.*

Shakespeare *Henry IV Part 1*, Act V scene iv

*A Knight of the Temple who kills an evil man
should not be condemned for killing the man
but praised for killing the evil.*

St Bernard of Clairvaux, *Liber ad milites Templi*

Part One

*Some talk of ALEXANDER
And some of HERCULES;
Of HECTOR . . .*

Anon, 'The British Grenadiers'

1

mill street

never much of a street

*west – the old wool mill a prison block in dry blood brick its staring windows
now blinded by boards its clatter and chatter a distant echo through white
haired heads*

*east – six narrow houses under one weary roof huddling against the high
embankment that arrows southern trains into the city's northern heart*

few passengers ever notice Mill Street

never much of a street

*in winter's depth a cold crevasse
spring and autumn much the same*

*but occasionally
on a still summer day
with sun soaring high in a cloudless sky
Mill Street becomes
desert canyon overbrimming with heat*

2

two mutton pasties and an almond slice

At least it gives me an excuse for sweating, thought Peter Pascoe as he scuttled towards the shelter of the first of the two cars parked across the road from Number 3.

'You hurt your back?' asked Detective Superintendent Andy Dalziel as his DCI slumped to the pavement beside him.

'Sorry?' panted Pascoe.

'You were moving funny.'

'I was taking precautions.'

'Oh aye? I'd stick to the tablets. What the hell are you doing here anyway? Bank Holiday's been cancelled, has it? Or are you just bunking off from weeding the garden?'

'In fact I was sunbathing in it. Then Paddy Ireland rang and said there was a siege situation and you were a bit short on specialist manpower so could I help.'

'Specialist? Didn't know you were a marksman.'

Pascoe took a deep breath and wondered what kind of grinning God defied His own laws by allowing Dalziel's fleshy folds, swaddled in a three-piece suit, to look so cool, while his own spare frame, clad in cotton jeans and a Leeds United T-shirt, was generating more heat than PM's Question Time.

'I've been on a Negotiator's Course, remember?' he said.

'Thought that were to help you talk to Ellie. What did yon fusspot really say?'

The Fat Man was no great fan of Inspector Ireland, who he averred

put the three effs in officious. If you took your cue and pointed out that the word only contained two, he'd tell you what the third one stood for.

If you didn't take your cue, he usually told you anyway.

Pascoe on the other hand was a master of diplomatic reticence.

'Not a lot,' he said.

What Ireland had actually said was, 'Sorry to interrupt your day off, Pete, but I thought you should know. Report of an armed man on premises in Mill Street. Number 3.'

Then a pause as if anticipating a response.

The only response Pascoe felt like giving was, Why the hell have I been dragged off my hammock for this?

He said, 'Paddy, I don't know if you've noticed, but I'm off duty today. Bank Holiday, remember? And Andy drew the short straw. Not his idea you rang, is it?'

'Definitely not. It's just that Number 3's a video rental, Oroc Video, Asian and Arab stuff mainly . . .'

A faint bell began to ring in Pascoe's mind.

'Hang on. Isn't it CAT flagged?'

'Hooray. There is someone in CID who actually reads directives,' said Ireland with heavy sarcasm.

CAT was the Combined Anti-Terrorism unit in which Special Branch officers worked alongside MI5 operatives. They flagged people and places on a sliding scale, the lowest level being premises not meriting formal surveillance but around which any unusual activity should be noted and notified.

Number 3 Mill Street was at this bottom level.

Pascoe, not liking to feel reproved, said, 'Are you trying to tell me there's some kind of Intifada brewing in Mill Street?'

'Well, no,' said Ireland. 'It's just that when I passed on the report to Andy . . .'

'Oh good. You have told him. So, apart from not feeling it necessary to bother me, what action has he taken?'

He tried to keep the irritation out of his voice, but not very hard.

Ireland said in a hurt tone, 'He said he'd go along and take a look soon as he finished his meat pie. I reminded him that 3 Mill Street was flagged,

in case he'd missed it. He yawned, not a pretty sight when he's eating a meat pie. But when I told him I'd already followed procedure and called it in, he got abusive. So I left him to it.'

'Very wise,' said Pascoe, also yawning audibly. 'So what's the problem?'

'The problem is that he's just passed my office, yelling that he's on his way to Mill Street so maybe I'll be satisfied now that I've ruined his day.'

'But you're not?'

A deep intake of breath; then in a quietly controlled voice, 'What I'm not satisfied is that the super is taking what could be a serious situation seriously. But of course I'm happy to leave it in the expert hands of CID. Sorry to have bothered you.'

The phone went down hard.

Pompous prat, thought Pascoe, setting off back to the garden to share his irritation with his wife. To his surprise she'd said thoughtfully, 'Last time I saw Andy, he was going on about how bored he's getting with the useless bastards running things. He sounded ripe for a bit of mischief. Maybe you ought to check this out, love, before he starts the next Gulf War single-handed. Half an hour wouldn't harm.'

None of this did he care to reveal to Dalziel.

'Not a lot,' he repeated. 'So perhaps you'd like to fill me in.'

'Why not? Then you can shog off home. Being a clever bugger, you'll likely know Number 3's CAT flagged? Or did Ireland have to tell you too?'

'No, but he did give me a shove,' admitted Pascoe.

'There you go,' said Dalziel triumphantly. 'Since the London bombings, them silly sods have put out more flags than we did on Coronation Day. Faintest sniff of a Middle East connection and they're cocking their legs to lay down a marker.'

'Yes, I did hear they wanted to flag the old Mecca Ballroom at Mirely!'

A reminiscent smile lit up Dalziel's face, like moonlight on a mountain.

'The Mirely Mecca,' he said dreamily. 'Had some good times there in the old days. There were this lass from Donny. Tottie Truman. Her tango could get you done for indecent behaviour –'

'Yes, yes,' interrupted Pascoe. 'I'm sure she was a charming girl vertically or horizontally –'

‘Nay, ho’d on!’ interrupted the Fat Man in his turn. ‘You shouldn’t be so quick to put folk in boxes. It’s a bad habit of yours, that. Tottie weren’t just a bit of squashy flesh, tha knows. She had muscle too. By God, if they’d let women throw the hammer she’d have been a gold medallist! I once saw her chuck a wellie from halfway at a rugby club barbecue and it were still rising as it went over the posts. I thought of wedding her, but she got religion. Just think of the front row we could have bred!’

It was time to stop this trip down memory lane.

Pascoe said, ‘Very interesting. But perhaps we should concentrate on the situation in hand. Which is . . . ?’

‘That’s the trouble with you youngsters,’ said Dalziel sadly. ‘No time to smell the flowers along the way. All right. Sit rep. Foot-patrol officer reported seeing a man in Number 3 with a gun. Passed on the info to a patrol car who called in for instructions. So here we are. What do you make of it so far?’

The Fat Man had moved into playful mode. It’s guessing-game time, thought Pascoe. Robbery in process? Hardly worth it in Mill Street, unless you were a particularly thick villain. This wasn’t the commercial hub of the city, just the far end of a very rusty spoke. The mill itself had a preservation order on it and there’d been talk of refurbishing it as an industrial Heritage Centre, but not even the Victorian Society had objected to the proposed demolition of the jerry-built terrace to make space for a car park.

The mill project, however, had run into difficulties over Lottery funding.

Right wingers said this was because it didn’t advantage handicapped lesbian asylum seekers; left wingers because it failed to subsidize the Treasury.

Whatever, plans to demolish the terrace had gone on hold.

The remaining residents had long been rehoused and, rather than have a decaying slum on their hands, the council encouraged small businesses in search of an address and office space to move in and give the buildings an occupied look. Most of these businesses proved as short-lived as the rathe primrose that forsaken dies, and the only survivors at present were Crofts & Wills, patent agents, at Number 6 and Oroc Video at Number 3.

All of which interesting historical analysis brought Pascoe no nearer to understanding what they were doing here.

Losing patience, he said, 'OK, so there might be a man with a gun in there. I presume you've some strategy planned. Or are you going to rush him single-handed?'

'Not now there's two of us. But you always were a bugger for the subtle approach, so let's start with that.'

So saying, the Fat Man rose to his feet, picked up a bullhorn from the bonnet of his car, put it to his lips and bellowed, 'All right, we know you're in there. We've got you surrounded. Come out with your hands up and no one will get hurt.'

He scratched himself under the armpit, then sat down again.

After a moment's silence Pascoe said, 'I can't really believe you said that, sir.'

'Why not? Used to say it all the time way back before all this negotiation crap.'

'Did anyone ever come out?'

'Not as I recall.'

Pascoe digested this then said, 'You forgot the bit about throwing his gun out before he comes out with his hands up.'

'No I didn't,' said Dalziel. 'He might not have a gun and if he hasn't, I don't want him thinking we think he has, do I?'

'I thought the foot patrol reported seeing a weapon? What was it? Shotgun? Handgun? And what was this putative gunman actually doing? Come on, Andy. I left a jug of home-made lemonade and a hammock to come here. What's the sodding problem?'

Even diplomatic reticence had its limits.

'The sodding problem?' said the Fat Man. 'Yon's the sodding problem.'

He pointed toward the police patrol car parked a little way along from his own vehicle. Pascoe followed the finger.

And all became clear.

Almost out of sight, coiled around the rear wheel with all the latent menace of a piece of bacon rind, lay a familiar lanky figure.

'Oh God. You don't mean . . . ?'

'That's right. Only contact with this gunman so far has been Constable Hector.'

* * *

Police Constable Hector is the albatross round Mid-Yorkshire Constabulary's neck, the long-legged fly in its soup, the Wollemi pine in its outback, the coelacanth in its ocean depths. But his saving lack of grace is he never plumbs bottom. Beneath the lowest deep there's always a lower deep, and he survives because, in that perverse way in which True Brits often manage to find triumph in disaster, Mid-Yorkshire Police Force have become proud of him. If ever talk flags in the Black Bull, someone just has to say, 'Remember when Hector . . .' and a couple of hours of happy reminiscence are guaranteed.

So, when Dalziel said, 'Yon's the sodding problem', much was explained. But not all. Not by a long chalk.

'So,' continued Dalziel. 'Question is, how to find out if Hector really saw a gun or not.'

'Well,' mused Pascoe. 'I suppose we could expose him and see if he got shot.'

'Brilliant!' said Dalziel. 'Makes me glad I paid for your education. HECTOR!'

'For God's sake, I was joking!' exclaimed Pascoe as the lanky constable disentangled himself from the car wheel and began to crawl towards them.

'I could do with a laugh,' said Dalziel, smiling like a rusty radiator grill. 'Hector, lad, what fettle? I've got a job for you if you feel up to it.'

'Sir?' said Hector hesitantly.

Pascoe wished he could feel that the hesitation demonstrated suspicion of the Fat Man's intent, but he knew from experience it was the constable's natural response to most forms of address from 'Hello' to 'Help! I'm drowning!' Prime it as much as you liked, the mighty engine of Hector's mind always started cold, even when as now his hatless head was clearly very hot. A few weeks ago, he'd appeared with his skull cropped so close he made Bruce Willis look like Esau, prompting Dalziel to say, 'I always thought tha'd be the death of me, Hec, but there's no need to go around looking like the bugger!'

Now he looked at the smooth white skull, polished with sweat beneath the sun's bright duster, shook his head sadly, and said, 'Here's what I want you to do, lad. All this hanging around's fair clemmed me. You know Pat's Pantry in Station Square? Never closes, doesn't

Pat. Pop round there and get me two mutton pasties and an almond slice. And a custard tart for Mr Pascoe. It's his favourite. Can you remember all that?'

'Yes, sir,' said Hector, but showed no sign of moving off.

'What are you waiting for?' asked Dalziel. 'Money up front, is that it? What happened to trust? All right, Mr Pascoe'll pay you. I can't be standing tret every time.'

Every tenth time would be nice, thought Pascoe as he put two one-pound coins on to Hector's sweaty palms, where they lay like a dead man's eyes.

'If it's more, Mr Dalziel will settle up,' he said.

'Yes, sir . . . but what about . . . *him*?' muttered Hector, his gaze flicking to Number 3.

Poor sod's terrified of being shot at, thought Pascoe.

'Him?' said Dalziel. 'That's what I like about you, Hector. Always thinking about other people.'

He stood up once more with the bullhorn.

'You in the house. We're just sending off to Pat's Pantry for some grub and my lad wants to know if there's owt you'd fancy. Pasty, mebbe? Or they do grand Eccles cakes.'

He paused, listened, then sat down again.

'Don't think he wants owt. But a nice thought. Does you credit. It'll be noted.'

'No sir,' said Hector, fear making him bold. 'What I meant was, if he sees me moving and thinks I'm a danger . . .'

'Eh? Oh, I get you. He might take a shot at you. If he thinks you're a danger.'

Dalziel scratched his nose thoughtfully. Pascoe avoided catching his eye.

'Best thing,' said the Fat Man finally, 'is not to look dangerous. Stand up straight, chest out, shoulders back, and walk nice and slow, like you've got somewhere definite to go. That way, even if the bugger does shoot, chances are the bullet will pass clean through you without doing much harm. Off you go then.'

Up to this point, Pascoe had been convinced that the blind obedience to lunatic orders which had made the dreadful slaughter of the Great War possible had died with those millions. Now, watching Hector

move slowly down the street like a man wading through water, he had his doubts.

Once Hector was out of sight, he relaxed against the side of the car and said, 'OK, sir. Now either you tell me exactly what's going on or I'm off back to my hammock.'

'You mean you'd like to hear Hector's tale? Why not? Once upon a time . . .'

Hector is that rarity in a modern police force, a permanent foot patrol, providing a useful statistic when anxious community groups press for the return of the old beat bobby. The truth is, whether behind the wheel or driving the driver to distraction from the passenger seat, a motorized Hector is lethal. On a bike he never reaches a speed to be dangerous, but his resemblance to a drunken giraffe, though contributing much to the mirth of Mid-Yorkshire, does little for the constabulary image.

So Hector plods; and, plodding along Mill Street that day, he'd heard a sound as he passed Number 3. 'Like a cough,' he said. 'Or a rotten stick breaking. Or a tennis ball bouncing off a wall. Or a shot.'

The nearest Hector ever comes to precision is multiple-choice answers.

He tried the door. It opened. He stepped into the cool shade of the video shop. Behind the counter he saw two men. Asked for a description, he thought a while then said it was hard to see things clearly, coming as he had from bright sunlight into shadow, but it was his fairly firm opinion that one of them was 'a sort of darkie'.

To the politically correct, this might have resonated as racist and been educed as evidence of Hector's unsuitability for the job. To those who'd heard him describe a Christmas shoplifter wearing a Santa Claus outfit as 'a little bloke, I think he had a moustache', 'a sort of darkie' came close to being eidetic.

The second man ('looked funny but probably not a darkie' was Hector's best shot here) seemed to be holding something in his right hand which might have been a gun, but it was hard to be sure because he was standing in the deepest shadow and the man lowered his hands out of sight behind the counter when he saw Hector.

Feeling the situation needed to be clarified, Hector said, 'All right then?'

There had been a pause during which the two inmates looked at each other.

Then the sort-of-darkie replied, 'Yes. We are all right.'

And Hector brought this illuminating exchange to a close by saying with an economy and symmetry that were almost beautiful, 'All right then,' and leaving.

Now he had a philosophical problem. Had there been an incident and should he report it? It didn't take eternity to tease Hector out of thought; the space between now and tea-time could do the trick. So he was more than usually oblivious to his surroundings as he crossed to the opposite pavement with the result that he was almost knocked over by a passing patrol car. The driver, PC Joker Jennison, did an emergency stop then leaned out of his open window to express his doubts about Hector's sanity.

Hector listened politely – he had after all heard it all before – then, when Jennison paused for breath, off-loaded his problem on to the constable's very broad shoulders.

Jennison's first reaction was that such a story from such a source was almost certainly a load of crap. Also there were only five minutes till the end of his shift, which was why he was speeding down Mill Street in the first place.

'Best call it in,' he said. 'But wait till we're out of sight, eh?'

'I think me battery's flat,' said Hector.

'What's new?' said Jennison, and restarted the car.

Unfortunately his partner, PC Alan Maycock, came from Hebden Bridge which is close enough to the Lancastrian border for its natives to be by Mid-Yorkshire standards a bit soft in every sense of the term, and he was moved by Hector's plight.

'I'll get you through on the car radio,' he said.

And when Jennison dug him viciously in his belly, he murmured, 'Nay, it'll not take but a minute, and when they hear it's Hec, they'll likely just have a laugh.'

As a policeman, he should have known that the rewards of virtue are sparse and long delayed. If you're looking for quick profit, opt for vice.

Instead of the expected fellow constable responding from Control, it was duty inspector Paddy Ireland who took the call. As soon as he heard Number 3 Mill Street mentioned, he gave commands for the car to remain in place and await instructions.

'And then the bugger bursts in on me like he's just heard the first bombs dropping on Pearl Harbour,' concluded Dalziel. 'Got me excited,

till he mentioned Hector. That took the edge off! And when he said he'd already called it in, I could have wrung his neck!

'And then . . . ?' enquired Pascoe.

'I finished me pie. Few minutes later the phone rang. It were some motor-mouth from CAT. I tried to explain it were likely all a mistake, but he said mebbe I should let the experts decide that. I said would this be the same experts who'd spent so much public money breaking up the Carradice gang?'

Pascoe, the diplomat, groaned.

Six months ago CAT had claimed a huge success when they arrested fifteen terrorist suspects in Nottingham on suspicion of plotting to poison the local water supply with ricin. Since then, however, the CPS had been forced to drop the case against first one then another of the group till finally the trial got under way with only the alleged ringleader, Michael Carradice, in the dock. Pascoe had his own private reasons for hoping the case against him failed too – a hope nourished by Home Office statements made on CAT's behalf which were sounding increasingly irritated and defensive.

'What's up with thee? Wind, is it?' said Dalziel in response to Pascoe's groan. 'Any road, the prat finished by saying the important thing was to keep a low profile, not risk alerting anyone inside, set up blocks out of sight at the street end, maintain observation till their man turned up to assess the situation. Why're you grinding your teeth like that?'

'Maybe because I don't see any sign of any road-blocks, just Maycock smoking a fag at one end of the street and Jennison scratching his balls at the other. Also I'm crouched down behind your car with the patrol car next to it, right opposite Number 3.'

'Who need road-blocks when you've got a pair of fatties like Maycock and Jennison? And why move the cars when anyone in there knows we're on to them already? Any road, you and me know this is likely just another load of Hector bollocks.'

He shook his head in mock despair.

'In that case,' said Pascoe, tiring of the game, 'all you need do is stroll over there, check everything's OK, then leave a note for the CAT man on the shop door saying you've got it sorted and would he like a cup of tea back at the Station? Meanwhile . . .'

It was his intention to follow his heavy irony by taking his leave and heading for home and hammock, but the Fat Man was struggling to his feet.

‘You’re dead right,’ he said. ‘You tend to fumble around a bit, but in the end you put your white stick right on it, as the actress said to the short-sighted cabinet minister. Time for action. We’ll be a laughing stock if it gets out we spent the holiday hiding behind a car because of Hector. Where’s yon bugger got with my mutton pasties, by the way? We were mad to trust him with our money.’

‘My money,’ corrected Pascoe. ‘And you misunderstand me, I’m not actually suggesting we do *anything* . . .’

‘Nay, lad. Don’t be modest,’ said Dalziel, upright now. ‘When you’ve got a good idea, flaunt it.’

‘Sir,’ said Pascoe. ‘Is this wise? I know Hector’s not entirely reliable, but surely he knows a gun when he sees one . . .’

As a plea for caution this proved counter-productive.

‘Don’t be daft,’ laughed Dalziel. ‘We’re talking about a man who can’t pick his nose unless someone paints a cross on it and gives him a mirror. If he heard owt, it were likely his own fart, and the bugger inside were probably holding a take-away kebab. Come on, Pete. Let’s get this sorted, then you can buy me a pint.’

He dusted down his suit, straightened his tie, and set off across the street with the confident step of a man who could walk with kings, talk with presidents, dispute with philosophers, portend with prophets, and never have the slightest doubt that he was right.

Interestingly, despite the fact that little in their long relationship had given Pascoe any real reason to question this presumption of rightness, the thought crossed his mind as he rose and set off in the footsteps of his great master that there had to be a first time for everything, and how ironic it would be if it were Ellie’s tender heart that caused him to be present on the occasion when the myth of Dalziel’s infallibility was exploded . . .

At this same moment, as if his mind had developed powers of telekinesis, Mill Street blew up.

3

intimations

Ellie Pascoe was asleep in the garden hammock so reluctantly vacated by her husband when the explosion occurred.

The Pascoe house in the northern suburbs was too far from Mill Street for anything but the faintest rumour of the bang to reach there. What woke Ellie was a prolonged volley of barking from her daughter's mongrel terrier.

'What's up with Tig?' Ellie asked yawning.

'Don't know,' said Rosie. 'We were playing ball and he just started.'

A sudden suspicion made Ellie examine the tall apple tree in next-door's garden. Puberty was working its rough changes on her neighbour's son and a couple of times recently when the summer heat had lured her outside in her bikini, she'd spotted him staring down at her out of the foliage. But there was no sign, and in any case Tig's nose pointed south towards the centre of town. As she followed his fixed gaze she saw a long way away a faint smudge of smoke soiling the perfect blue of the summer sky.

Who would light a fire on a day like this?

Tig was still barking.

'Can't you make him shut up?' snapped Ellie.

Her daughter looked at her in surprise, then took a biscuit off a plate and threw it across the lawn. Tig gave a farewell yap, then went in search of his reward with the complacent mien of one who has done his duty.

Ellie felt guilty at snapping. Her irritation wasn't with the dog, there was some other cause less definable.

She rolled out of the hammock and said, 'I'm too hot. Think I'll cool down in the shower. You OK by yourself?'

Rosie gave her a look which said without words that she hadn't been much company anyway, so what was going to be different?

Ellie went inside, turned on the shower and stepped under it.

The cool water washed away her sweat but did nothing for her sense of unease.

Still nothing definable. Or nothing that she wanted to define. Pointless thinking about it. Pointless because, if she did think about it, she might come up with the silly conclusion that the real reason she was taking this shower was that she didn't want to be wearing her bikini if bad news came . . .

Andy Dalziel's partner, Amanda Marvell, known to her friends as Cap, was even further away when Mill Street blew up.

With her man on duty, she had followed the crowds on the traditional migration to the coast, not, however, to join the mass bake-in on a crowded beach but to visit the sick.

The sick in this instance took the form of her old headmistress, Dame Kitty Bagnold who for nearly forty years had ruled the famous St Dorothy's Academy for Catholic Girls near Bakewell in Derbyshire. Cap Marvell had ultimately made life choices which ran counter to everything St Dot's stood for. In particular, she had abandoned her religion, divorced her husband, and got herself involved in various animal rights groups whose activities teetered on the edge of legality.

Yet throughout all this, she and Dame Kitty had remained in touch and eventually, rather to their surprise, realized they were friends. Not that the friendship made Cap feel able to address her old head by her St Dot's sobriquet of Kitbag, and Dame Kitty would rather have blasphemed than call her ex-pupil anything but Amanda.

A long and very active retirement had ground Dame Kitty down till ill health had finally obliged her to admit the inevitable, and two years earlier she had moved into a private nursing home that was part of the Avalon Clinic complex at Sandytown on the Yorkshire coast.

At her best, Dame Kitty was as bright and sharp as ever, but she tired easily and usually Cap was alert for the first signs of fatigue so that she could start ending her visit without making her friend's condition the cause.

This time it was the older woman who said, 'Is everything all right, Amanda?'

'What?'

'You seemed to drift off. Perhaps you should sit in this absurd wheelchair while I go inside and order some more tea.'

'No, no, I'm fine. Sorry. What were we saying . . .?'

'We were discussing the merits of the government's somewhat inchoate education policy, an argument I hoped your sudden silence indicated I had won. But I fear my victory owes more to your distraction than my reasoning. Are you sure all is well with you? No problems with this police officer of yours, whom I hope one day to meet?'

'No, things are fine there, really . . .'

Suddenly Cap Marvell took her mobile out.

'Sorry, do you mind?'

She was speed-dialling before Kitty could answer.

The phone rang twice then there was an invitation to leave a message.

She opened her mouth to speak, closed it, disconnected, and stood up.

'I'm sorry, Kitty, I've got to go. Before the mobs start moving off the beaches . . .'

This effort to offer a rational explanation produced the same sad sigh and slight upward roll of the eyes brought by feeble excuses for bad behaviour in their St Dot days.

'OK, that's not it. Sorry, I don't know why,' said Cap. 'But I've really got to go.'

'Then go, my dear. And God go with you.'

Normally this traditional valediction would have won from Cap her equivalent of the old headmistress's long-suffering expression, but today she just nodded, stooped to kiss her friend's cheek, then hurried away across the lawn towards the car park.

Dame Kitty watched her out of sight. There was trouble there. Despite the bright sun and the cloudless sky, she felt it in the air.

She stood up out of the wheelchair which the staff insisted she should use on her excursions into the gardens, gave it a whack with her stick, and began to make her slow way back to the house.

4

dust and ashes

Later Peter Pascoe worked out that Dalziel had probably saved his life twice.

The Fat Man's car which they'd been sheltering behind was flipped into the air then deposited upside down on the pavement.

If he hadn't obeyed the Fat Man's command to follow, he would have been underneath it.

And if he hadn't been walking in the lee of that corpulent frame when the explosion occurred . . .

As it was, when some slight degree of awareness began to seep back into his brain, he felt as if every part of his body had been subjected to a good kicking. He tried to stand up but found the best he could manage was all fours.

The air was full of dust and smoke. Like a retriever peering through the mist in search of its master's bird, he strained to penetrate the swirling veil of motes and vapour. An amorphous area of orangey red with some consistency of base gave him the beginnings of perspective. Against it, marked by its stillness in the moving air, he made out a vague heap of something, like a pile of earth thrown up alongside a grave.

He began to crawl forward and after a couple of yards managed to rise off his hands into a semi-upright crouch. The shifting coiling colour he realized now was fire. He could feel its heat, completely unlike the gentle warmth of the sun which only an hour ago he'd been enjoying in the green seclusion of his garden. That small part

of his mind still in touch with normality suggested that he ought to ring Ellie and tell her he was all right before some garbled version of events got on to local radio.

Not that he was sure how all right he was. But a lot all righter than this still heap of something which he was now close enough to formally identify as Andy Dalziel.

He had fallen on to his left side and his arms and legs were spread and bent like the kapok stuffed limbs of some huge teddy bear discarded by a spoilt child. His face had been shredded by shards of glass and brick, and the fine grey dust sticking to the seeping wounds made him look as if he were wearing a kabuki mask.

There was no sign of life. But not for a second did Pascoe admit the possibility of death. Dalziel was indestructible. Dalziel is, and was, and for ever shall be, world without end, amen. Everybody knew that. Therein lay half his power. Chief constables might come and chief constables might go, but Fat Andy went on for ever.

He rolled him over on to his back. It wasn't easy but he did it. He brushed the dust away from his mouth and nose. He definitely wasn't breathing. He checked the carotid pulse, thought he detected a flutter, but a combination of his dull fingers and Dalziel's monolithic neck left him in doubt. He opened the mouth and saw there was a lot of debris in there. Carefully he cleared it away, discovering in the process what he hadn't known before, that Dalziel had a dental plate. This he tucked carefully into his pocket. He checked that the tongue hadn't been swallowed. Then he cleared the nostrils, undid the shirt collar, and put his ear to the mighty chest.

There was no movement, no sound.

He placed his hands on top of each other on the chest and pressed down hard, five times, counting a second interval between.

Then he tilted the head back with his right hand under the chin so that the mouth opened wide. With the thumb and forefinger of his left hand, he pinched Dalziel's nose. Then he took a deep breath, thought, I'm never going to hear the end of this, pressed his mouth down on to those great lips and blew.

Five times he did this. Then he repeated the heart massage and went through the whole process again. And again.

Once more he tried the pulse. This time he was sure there was

something. And the next time he blew into the mouth, the chest began to rise and fall of its own volition.

Now he began to arrange Dalziel in the recovery position. This was a task to daunt a fit navvy with a block and tackle, but finally he managed it and sank back exhausted.

All this seemed to take hours but must have consumed only a few minutes. He was vaguely aware of figures moving through the miasma. Presumably there were sounds too, but at first they were simply absorbed by the white noise which the blast had filled his ears with. Another hour passed. Or a few seconds. He felt something touch his shoulder. It hurt. He looked up. PC Maycock was standing over him, mouthing nothings, like a fish in a glass tank. He tried to lip read and got, 'Are you all right?' which hardly seemed worth the effort. He pointed at Dalziel and said, 'Get help,' without any assurance that the words were coming out. Maycock tried to assist him to his feet but he shook his head and pointed again at the Fat Man. He stuck his little fingers in his ears and started to prise out the debris which seemed to have lodged there. This, or perhaps the simple passage of time, improved things a little, and he began to pick out a higher line of sound which he tentatively identified as approaching sirens.

Time was still doing a quickstep. Slow, slow, quick, quick, slow. In the slow periods he felt as if sitting here in the post-blast smog watching over Fat Andy was all he'd ever done and all he was ever likely to do. Then he closed his eyes for a fraction of a second and when he opened them the smog had thinned and paramedics were stooping over Dalziel's body and firemen were going about the business before the ruined terrace. Where Number 3 had been there was nothing but a flame-filled cavity, like hell-mouth in a morality play. The Victorian entrepreneurs' shoddy building materials had offered little resistance to the blast. This was perhaps one of those instances of a Bad Thing eventually turning out to be a Good Thing, which divines through the ages had educed as evidence of God's Mysterious Purpose. If the walls of Number 3 had shared any of the massive solidity of the viaduct wall against which the terrace rested, the blast would have been directed straight out. As it was, Numbers 2 and 4 were in a state of complete collapse, and the rest of the terrace looked seriously shell shocked.

They were attaching all kinds of bits and pieces to the Fat Man. But not, so far as Pascoe could see, a crane. They'd need a crane. And a sling. This was a beached whale they were dealing with and it would take more than the puny efforts of half a dozen men to bear him back to the life-supporting sea. He tried to say this but couldn't get the words out. Didn't matter. Somehow these supermen were proving him wrong and managing to get Dalziel on to a stretcher. Pascoe closed his eyes in relief. When he opened them again he found he was looking up at the sky and moving. For a second he thought he was back on his hammock in his garden. Then he realized he too was on a stretcher.

He raised his head to protest that this was unnecessary. The effort made him realize it probably was. Ahead he could see an ambulance. Beside it stood an all too familiar figure.

Hector, the author of all their woes, his face a cartoonist's dream of uncomprehending consternation.

As the medics slid the stretcher into the vehicle, he held out both his hands towards Pascoe. In them were two paper bags, partially open to reveal a pair of mutton pasties and an almond slice.

'Sir, I'm sorry, but they were out of custards . . .' he stuttered.

'Not my lucky day then,' whispered Peter Pascoe. 'Not my lucky day.'