KEW GARDENS

CHAPTER ONE

ROGER WILCOX should have been able to guess when he saw the sender's name, but it simply didn't register. Of course, once he'd read the short and irresistible message he knew: "Fun and games at the Old Bailey tomorrow. You should come. Love, Q." Christ, how long had it been?

Roger wracked his brain, trying to identify what, if anything, that unreliable organ had stored about cases currently slated for the Old Bailey. The answer: nothing. Five minutes on the internet corrected this.

Regina v the world's most famous environmental group. A stunt that had staggered the nation: two inflatables racing up to huge American warship anchored at Portsmouth and hosting visiting dignitaries including the Minister of Defence. One nuclear radiation warning symbol spray painted on the side of the vessel before everyone was arrested at gunpoint, television cameras running throughout. The Government's determination to see the perpetrators prosecuted under anti-terrorism laws should have been laughed out of court before ever arriving there, but somehow the prosecution was proceeding. Clearly the Yanks weren't amused and someone was going to have to pay. Yes, there probably would be fun and games at the Old Bailey, but why should he be particularly interested? Roger skimmed through the list of defendants. Ah.

Roger thought the show trial was kicking off at 10am, but when he arrived at 9:30 it was already underway. The press box was chockablock – not that Roger still had any accreditation sufficient to claim a space. A combination of wheedling and brute force allowed him to squeeze his not inconsiderable girth into a space in the public gallery in the row behind. The manoeuvre unintentionally connected his elbow with the head of one of the members of the press. The resulting protest turned into a greeting from the victim: Chas Peterson, an old pal from Roger's Fleet Street days.

The fact that they really had worked in Fleet Street was an indication of how long it had been since Roger's days as a crusading journalist. It was decades now since Chas and his paper had gone to the Dogs. Roger, after a lengthy hiatus spent mostly in the company of Johnny Walker and Jack Daniels, was crusading again, although in quite what capacity he still wasn't sure. Chas, who, at a minimum should have been a deputy editor now, was his paper's crime reporter, a job which should have been well beneath him. Unfortunately, in these days of shrinking newsrooms and circulation, the choice was usually take what was offered or swallow the increasingly ungenerous redundancy on offer.

After offering Chas an apologetic shrug, Roger craned his head around to view the defendants in the dock. There were a baker's dozen in all, ranging in age, he guessed, from their twenties to their sixties. He knew for a fact that the stockily-built man with the mane of Heseltine-like snow white hair had turned sixty-five on the day of his arrest – going out in a blaze of glory before collecting his bus pass.

Not that multi-millionaire Sir Harry Otterly was ever likely to need a bus pass.

Sir Harry, who had for fifteen years served as the UK director of the world's biggest environmental group, was an old hand at this. He was also a consummate actor, his expression exactly the right combination of contempt for the charges and respect for his surroundings. Roger could tell the judge had taken against Sir Harry already, but that didn't matter. Attempts to try him separately had failed. Attempts to avoid a jury trial had failed. It was all for one and one for all, and, despite the extraordinary seriousness of the charges, Roger was confident that Oliver Macintyre would prevail. Quick-witted, silver-tongued Mac had been defending the group's cases for years and no one had ever been sentenced to gaol.

Of course, Mac had never been up against the full weight of the US military and the UK government, both brimming over with outrage at what they were desperately and unsuccessfully attempting to portray as a terrorist threat. Even the most rabidly right wing press was having a hard time swallowing the idea that a dozen people armed with tins of spray paint had ever posed a serious threat to world security, but this hadn't prevented the trial taking place. As far as the military and security services were concerned, dissent was now an act of terrorism and would carry with it the stiffest penalty possible.

This fact did not seem to have escaped the majority of Sir Harry's co-defendants, earnest individuals trying very hard not to look worried. Some of them looked like students, others like thirty-something professionals. Only two of the accused managed to look as calm as Sir Harry: the weather-beaten middle-aged Royal Navy veteran, more recently captain of the group's flagship, and the pre-Raphaelite redhead whose gaze was darting from the judge to the jury to the public gallery, no doubt assessing the best angle for the photo she'd love to be taking. As if sensing his eyes on her, she turned her head and spotted him. Even from across the courtroom he could see how astonishingly blue her eyes were, the same blue his had been long ago before the booze turned them bloodshot red. She knew enough not to wave, but she did grin at him and, checking quickly to make sure the judge wasn't watching, gave him a quick thumb's up and a wink. Roger grinned back at her, surprised by quite how wonderful it was to see her.

Sir Clive Wallingford QC, the prosecuting barrister, was winding up his opening remarks. Roger leaned towards Chas and whispered, "This is bollocks, isn't it?"

Chas turned to look at Roger, rolled his eyes and then gestured towards the jury. Out of the corner of his mouth he muttered, "They're not buying it."

One look at the seven men and five women confirmed this assessment. Four of them looked bored to tears – hardly surprising given Sir Clive's soporific attempts at oratory. The body language of a further four – arms folded stiffly across their chests, bodies slouched slightly into their seats – and the clearly suspicious looks they were shooting in Sir Clive's direction made it obvious they'd already decided they were being conned. Two of the women were sneaking admiring looks at the defendants, as if wishing they had the nerve or even the opportunity to race up to a huge US naval ship in inflatables to spray-paint nuclear warnings on its sides. The remaining man and woman were leaning forward eagerly, eyes on Mac, waiting for

him to give them the goods.

A quick glance at Sir Clive confirmed the man's understanding that winning the hearts and minds of this jury was going to be an uphill battle. The only faces in the courtroom more stony than Sir Clive's were those of the uniformed US military officers sitting at the other end of the front row of the public gallery.

Roger smiled as Mac stood up, adjusted his robe and his half-moon spectacles, and turned to face the jury.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, his deep baritone filling the chamber, "I would like to congratulate you. It took considerable self-restraint on your part not to burst out laughing as my learned friend attempted to convince you that my clients represent a threat to global security." A number of the jurors did smile, one even tittered. The judge shot Mac a warning look and Mac nodded his head respectfully towards the bench.

"Since 2001," he continued, "draconian laws have been passed in the name of protecting us from some largely invisible terrorist threat." The judge cleared his throat noisily and Mac responded with another nod in his direction, before continuing. "My clients believe that everyone has a right to know if some practice or activity is placing their lives and the wellbeing of their loved ones at risk. I will later bring forward witnesses to detail for you the long and noble tradition of non-violent direct action, of bearing witness to moral, ethical and legal crimes.

"For now, all I will say is that, on the day in question, it was the true belief of my clients that the presence in Portsmouth of a US warship, powered by a nuclear engine and in all probability carrying a large arsenal of nuclear weapons, posed a threat to the safety not just of the citizens of Portsmouth, but also to the population of much of southern England, including yourselves, the good citizens of London."

"Well, was it or wasn't it?" interrupted the judge.

All eyes turned to him. Mac blinked several times before replying. "Was it what, My Lord?"

"Was the ship carrying a large arsenal of nuclear weapons?" the judge asked impatiently.

"I do not know, my lord," Mac answered. "Neither the prosecution nor any of the government agencies supporting this sham of a trial have been willing to provide this information."

The judge then turned to Sir Clive, repeating his question, "Was it or wasn't it?" When Sir Clive confessed he did not know, the judge, his voice dripping with sarcasm, said, "Then I suggest you call as your first witness a representative of the US military who can answer the question."

"Yes, My Lord," Sir Clive said, before whispering some instruction to an assistant, who quickly scurried out of the courtroom.

As the judge instructed Mac to continue, Roger could see the defence barrister was struggling not to smile. In the dock, Sir Harry, the captain and the redhead weren't even trying.

The first witness sworn in for the prosecution was a fresh-faced captain whose role in the US military was not explained. Clearly far from happy about posing the

question, Sir Clive asked, “Captain, as you may be aware, the defence claims that the presence on board your warship in Portsmouth harbour of nuclear weapons represented a potential threat to the local population. The court would like to know if such a threat did indeed exist.”

The captain stood ramrod straight as he replied, “It is the policy of the US government to neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons on board any of its vessels.”

A lengthy silence was finally broken by the judge. “I beg your pardon?” he asked incredulously.

The captain turned to face the judge, cleared his throat. “Your Honour,” he said, then quickly corrected himself as he’d no doubt been instructed, “My Lord, it is the policy of the US government to neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons on board any of its vessels.”

“Yes, yes,” said the judge. “I understand that. However, this court requires an unambiguous answer to a straight forward question. Were there or were there not nuclear weapons on board the ship in Portsmouth on the day in question?”

The captain glanced nervously back and forth several times between the judge and the Army brass sitting in the front row of the public gallery, before beginning once again, “My Lord, it is the policy of the US government – ”

That was as far as he got before the judge interrupted. “Captain,” he said, I am as sadly unacquainted with the intricacies of the American judicial system as you clearly are with the British judicial system. So let me explain something to you. Refusing to answer my question places you in contempt of court and liable for incarceration. Do you understand me?”

Journos were scribbling furiously, members of the public were murmuring and Mac was having increasing difficulty suppressing a grin, while the hapless captain looked once more to the brass for guidance. As he opened his mouth, no doubt bent on parroting the same statement, Sir Clive intervened, requesting a short adjournment to allow the captain to consult with his superior officers. The judge scowled, first at Sir Clive, then at the uniformed officers in the public gallery, but he agreed to the request.

Sir Clive and the captain were followed out of court by two of the officers. Five minutes turned into ten and then into fifteen. Sir Clive returned alone, his expression both furious and defeated.

“My Lord,” he said, his eyes fixed firmly on the judge, “the Crown wishes to withdraw this prosecution.”

CHAPTER TWO

Roger made his way outside the Old Bailey and lit a fag. The first of the defendants to emerge was Sir Harry Otterly, who made his way straight to the waiting television cameras. Roger stood watching the enviro titan's moment of glory, wondering whether any of the other defendants were going to get their fifteen minutes of fame. As he stamped out his cigarette, someone tapped on his shoulder. He turned around and there she was.

For several weeks after her birth, the clash of wills between Katherine Emma Wilcox's parents continued. Her father wanted her to be called Kate, after his favourite Shakespearean heroine. Her mother, who adored Jane Austen, was adamant that their daughter would be called Emma. The situation was eventually resolved by her uncle, who, unlike her parents, noticed immediately that her initials spelled something. Roger immediately began calling her Kew Gardens, later abbreviated to Kew. This she shortened herself at the age of eight when she became enamoured of Jean Luc Picard's arch nemesis. Q she remained throughout her childhood. It was still how she signed herself, as Roger had discovered yesterday. He still couldn't remember how long it had been since he'd last heard from her.

And now here she was, blue eyes sparkling with the same mischief he remembered from her childhood, grinning at him. He grinned back. "Kew," he said.

"Pub?" she replied.

Oh, Christ, thought Roger. Pub. Right.

He turned to lead the way to the Viaduct Tavern – certainly not the worst boozer in the area and unquestionably the closest.

"You've just had a lucky escape," he said as they walked to Newgate Street.

Kew burst out laughing. "You think?" she said, slipping her arm through his. Roger told her he did indeed think so. Kew was still grinning. "Harry wasn't going to go out in anything other than a blaze of glory. There were *lengthy* consults with Mac long before the action. He *knew* that's where the prosecution would fall apart." Her grin widened. "Of course, he had no way of knowing it would be over *that* fast. It's a good thing you got here this morning."

Roger's turn to laugh out loud, which he did. Canny buggers. Mac understood British judges. It didn't matter which one they'd been assigned, no judge in the land, no matter how political the trial was being played in the outside world, would put up with a witness refusing to answer a question from the bench.

"Some of your co-defendants didn't look quite as serene as you," he said.

Kew shrugged. "Some of them got a bit twitchy after the security forces smashed in their front doors and tore their flats apart." She gave Roger a wink. "Well, you would, wouldn't you?"

Kew let go of his arm as they crossed Newgate Road. At 11am, most London pubs would just be opening their doors, but the Viaduct operated on court hours, opening at 8:30am, offering soon-to-be-condemned men their last drink and the journos covering their trials – as Roger had once been – a quick belt to help them get through the tedium of most court proceedings. So, at 11am the Viaduct was already doing a reasonably brisk trade, the soon-to-be-condemned as easily spotted as the

tourists, hoping for a tour of the cellars rumoured, erroneously, to be the site of the old Newgate Prison debtors' cells.

"Pint?" Kew asked over her shoulder, having arrived at the bar several steps ahead of him.

"Bit early in the day," he said. And thank God for that. Too early in their reunion for *that* conversation. "I'll have a tomato juice." Kew raised an eyebrow. Even though he hadn't seen her since her teens, she clearly remembered him as someone whose drinking had no time limits. Christ. But she ordered his tomato juice and an orange juice for herself.

They carried their drinks to an empty table. Six years since the ban and still the first thing Roger did after taking his seat was reach for his fags. He just couldn't get used to it. Pub = fags. Mind you, pub also equalled multiple pints and shorts to go with the fags. And those days, Roger reminded himself, as he did on a daily basis, were over.

"How are Julie and Sarah?" Kew asked.

Well, why shouldn't the first question she asked after all this time be about the cousins she hadn't seen in years? All those shared Christmases and summer holidays together in their childhood – Kew, the elder by a few years, happy to be followed around slavishly by her younger cousins, teaching them how to climb the tree in her garden, playing Mother at children's tea parties. God, the girls really had adored her.

"They're fine," he said. Kew just looked at him, waited for an elaboration. Well, what could he tell her? They lived in Australia with their mother and their stepfather, as far away from him as his ex-wife could get without setting up a base camp in Antarctica. Yes, he spoke to them on the phone regularly and, yes, things were better between them than they had been for years, but as to how they really were, Roger honestly had no idea. Nor did he feel he had the right to ask. "As far as I know," he added.

Again Kew just aimed those piercing blue eyes at him. Christ, it was like looking in an old, old mirror, back in the days when his own blue eyes were sharp enough to see through walls – and bullshit. Roger sighed, shrugged.

"They're their mother's daughters," he said, immediately regretting it. Why shouldn't the loyalty of his daughters be to their mother? Roger – the fast-talking, fornicating Roger of his Fleet Street days – was the one who'd corrupted and finally bankrupted the marriage, both emotionally *and* financially.

Kew leant towards him. "Can I ask you something, Roger?" When, he wondered, had he stopped being Uncle Roger? Hoping this might signify a change of subject, Roger nodded.

"What did you ever see in Auntie Margaret?" she asked.

Although the question probably should not have done so, it took him by surprise. Of course, Kew had only ever known Margaret (who, apparently, still merited an Auntie), frowning, frightened, disapproving Margaret. Kew couldn't remember Maggie, the free spirit, the wild child, barely turned twenty, who scattered her pixie dust and captured Roger's thirty-two-year-old heart. He'd only known her a

fortnight when the paper sent him to Las Vegas to cover – Christ, what had it been? To cover what? It didn't matter. Back in those days when fiddling expenses was an art form, he'd managed to get Maggie on the plane with him. He'd covered whatever the hell it was by day two, but didn't file for another two days, by which time he and Maggie had become Mr and Mrs Roger Wilcox in the Church of the Everlasting Elvis. (Roger had even managed to blag the cost of the service on his expenses.) What larks!

Of course, his brother Max, the rising civil servant, hadn't approved. Nor had his sister-in-law Jane. (Well, she wouldn't, would she?) But larks they had indeed had, right up to the day Maggie went to the hospital to give birth to Julie. No mobile phones then – not unless you were a merchant banker – so no way to contact Roger, who was out chasing some story. Maggie wasn't due for a fortnight, so no reason for Roger to worry about going for a pint before he went back to the office. By the time he did get to his desk and find the message from Maggie, his daughter had already been born.

A taxi to the hospital (with a quick stop to buy some flowers), a rush to the maternity ward. There was his new-born daughter, the sight of whom made him feel as if his heart was going to explode in his chest. And there, in the bed beside the cot, was a woman who until that morning had been his wife Maggie.

"It's called postpartum depression, Roger," Jane had informed him a month later when, against his better judgement, he'd rung her, asking for help. Maggie just wouldn't stop crying. "You need to get her some help."

Years later, Jane would say to him, "If you hadn't been such a wanker, you could have sorted this out." She was being unfair. (Well, she would be, wouldn't she?) Roger may have had a Jack the lad image at work, but he'd loved his wife and he'd tried to get her help. He really had. (The being a wanker part came later.) But Maggie had refused. All she wanted, she'd told him, was to be with her daughter. And that really had been all she wanted. In the year following Julie's birthday they'd had sex a grand total of once – a special concession to Roger's birthday. Nine months later Sarah had arrived on the scene. By that time she'd snap his head off if he forgot and called her Maggie. "I'm a mother now," she'd tell him. "My name's Margaret." As if a woman named Maggie could never be a mother. As if the Maggie he'd married had never existed.

All Margaret wanted was her daughters. ("Her" daughters, please note, as if Roger's sperm had never existed, either.) No babysitter could be trusted, not even Maggie's own mother. She wouldn't leave the house without them, wouldn't even let Roger take one of them out for a stroll in the pram. There would be no dinners out, no films, no bands, none of the things they'd once had so much fun doing. Roger knew that having children changed your life. He'd simply failed to appreciate that having them actually *ended* your life.

So, yes, he'd started playing away, turned into the wanker Jane would later accuse him of being. He'd paid the mortgage on the house he would never have bought in Finchley. He'd fed and clothed them. And he'd taken his pleasures elsewhere. Had he been a bad husband? Yes. Had he been a bad father? Not as bad

as Margaret would have people believe, but, yes.

And here, sitting facing him in the George, was Kew, asking him what he'd ever seen in his ex-wife.

"Is that why you asked me to come to court today?" he asked.

Kew laughed, shook her head. "No," she said, "but I can't help wondering. I mean, Auntie Margaret, she's like, oh, I don't know, like someone who, if they ever had a sense of humour, had it surgically removed."

Kew was right, of course. That was exactly what it had been like, as if at some point during childbirth the doctors had removed Maggie's sense of humour. She had a lot to put up with, he nearly said, but didn't.

"So, why did you ask me to come?" he asked instead.

Kew glanced around the pub before suggesting they go for a walk. Christ, did she think they were being bugged? Roger did his own scan of the room. As far as he could tell absolutely no one was paying them the least bit of attention. Of course, that didn't mean there wasn't a microphone under every table. Smiling at the thought – and at his own, resisted, impulse to look under the table – he nodded at Kew, drained his tomato juice and stood up.

Outside the pub, Kew turned right, heading down Newgate Street towards St Paul's. Roger had a sudden flashback, a summer's day years ago, one of the all too rare occasions when he'd been a good dad, taking his daughters and his niece to St Paul's, touring the cathedral, climbing up to the whispering gallery, filling their heads with history and wonder. A good day. He was about to remind Kew, before himself remembering that St Paul's had been followed by a lemonade-infused (for the girls) tour of local hostelries: the Stab, the Cheese, the Bell and probably a few more. All right, not such a good day.

Roger stopped to stamp out his fag, then immediately lit another one. He looked at Kew. "Okay," he said. "Spill."

Kew nodded, although she seemed to need rather a long time to formulate her response. "Well, *Roger*," she said and he could not miss the emphasis on his name, "there are two things, actually. The first is that Mum told me." She didn't tell him what her mother had told her, nor did she need to do so. Oh, Christ, not *that.* They stared at one another for a moment. Roger could see that Kew knew that *he* knew exactly what she was talking about. She nodded again. "Oddly enough," she said, "the second thing is rather more pressing." Roger just stared at her. What could possibly be more pressing?

"I need to talk to your friend Tilly," Kew said.

And what, Roger wondered, was *that* about? If all Kew needed was a formerly fearless Fleet Street alumnus, what was wrong with him? Or was it the first thing Kew had mentioned? Roger decided not to ask. He didn't need to pose the question. Apparently Kew, in addition to her success as a photographer, was also a mind reader.

"No offence, Roger," she said, "but from what I can gather about the VACO saga, you're the sex stuff and she's the one who knows how companies like that operate."

VACO. The chemical, pharmaceutical and biotech giant run by Victor, Arthur and Charles Ormond. Two dead, one left standing and now in charge. Sir Victor, Roger's nemesis, a suicide by cop. Charles, killed in self-defence by his niece Helen. Both undoubtedly completely off their rockers. Both killed on the same day, three months earlier. The shockwaves their deaths had sent around the industry were nothing compared to shocks that were coming when Roger and Tilly finished the book they'd been contracted to write.

Roger's section – the sick, secret world of Sir Victor Ormond – would, they knew, sell the book. Tilly's section – the sick, secret world of the chemical company itself – would shock the punters even more. Assuming the punters ever got past what Kew had just dubbed "the sex stuff". It was a chance they were both taking.

So what, Roger wondered, looking at his niece, was the "it" VACO was still up to?

CHAPTER THREE

Across London, Tilly Arbuthnot was sitting on a chintz-upholstered chair in a flat in South Kensington, smiling at Helen Ormond and her fiancé, Jamie Mortimer. Although she'd spoken with both of them on the phone, this was the first time she'd actually seen them since that dreadful night in Covent Garden. They both looked the picture of health, sitting together on the matching chintz sofa, but, as Tilly herself knew from years of covering wars and other disasters, the worst wounds were often the ones you could not see – not even on an x-ray.

Arthur Ormond, in another phone call and a follow-up email, had promised Tilly full disclosure, access to anything she needed in the companies files and archives. Arthur, the surviving and seemingly sane brother, had been the genius in the lab. He'd never, as he'd gone to pains to explain to Tilly, had anything to do with the sale and distribution (however illegal) of the company's inventory. The newly appointed chairman of VACO (replacing his dead brother Victor in the role) claimed to be horrified by the examples Tilly had already given him from the VACO dossier she had meticulously compiled over the years. Based on recent events (and the concerns he himself had voiced often voiced about the potential dangers of the science), Arthur had assured Tilly that VACO was already in the process of divesting itself of its biotech arm. He claimed to want her to shine her spotlight on that and every other dark and dirty corner of the company's empire. Tilly wanted to believe him, but…

Better, she'd decided, in the first instance to work with Jamie Mortimer, who, despite his youth, had been appointed to replace Arthur as VACO's head of research and development. She'd asked for a face-to-face meeting at the company's head office in Kent. It was Jamie who'd insisted they meet instead at Helen's mother's flat in South Kensington. "Helen will want to see you, too," he'd said.

And now, here was Helen saying, "But you must." She'd just invited Tilly to their wedding.

"I don't know," Tilly said, tidying up the pile of papers spread across the coffee table to avoid looking Helen in the eye. It was one thing using them as a resource for her research, but attending their wedding? No, not on. There was one basic rule journalists shared with the police: never get too close to a source. It clouded your judgement. Of course, it was a rule Tilly and most other foreign correspondents found it almost impossible to obey in the field. You can't talk to a woman who's been gang raped and mutilated by soldiers in front of her subsequently slaughtered husband and children without wanting justice. (Actually, what you wanted was *revenge*, but you were seldom in a position to deliver that. Exposing the truth was generally the best – and only – thing you could do.)

"No, really," said Jamie, "you must. If it weren't for you, I'd be dead."

Tilly looked up then. Ginger Jamie, freckle-faced, smiling earnestly at her.

"He's right, you know," Helen said, reaching for and squeezing her fiancé's hand. And Jamie was right. Tilly did indeed know that.

"All right," said Tilly. And, like the children these two twenty-somethings somehow seemed to her, Helen and Jamie clapped their hands together gleefully.

Tilly smiled and shook her head at them. Young love. My, my, that had been a while ago.

Preparing to leave, Tilly asked if she could use the phone to check the messages on her answering machine.

"You still don't have a mobile?" Helen asked, smiling.

Tilly shook her head. She knew she'd give in eventually – sooner, no doubt, rather than later – and she knew how useful they could be (not least because a borrowed mobile had helped her save Jamie's life), but she still hated the bloody things. For now she was sticking with her friend Jack's line. "They fry your brains," she said.

"Well, actually – " Jamie started to say, clearly intent on providing some lengthy scientific assessment of the real and imagined risks of mobile phones. Tilly waved him off.

There was only one message on her machine. It was from Roger, demanding to know when the hell she was going to get a mobile and insisting she ring him back immediately.