**Chapter 1**

Robin Hood lived in Nottingham.

Many people believe this and it’s easy to understand why. According to Hollywood – possibly not the most reliable font of historical accuracy – Robin camped outside the town in Sherwood Forest and constantly visited Nottingham Castle to take part in archery tournaments, to courageously rescue Marian, and to generally piss off the Sheriff. Countless movies and television shows have perpetuated the geographical mistake, but the ancient legends place this famous outlaw in green tights farther north. If indeed he actually existed, Robin Hood was most definitely a native of Yorkshire, with Wakefield, Loxley, Kirklees, Barnsdale and Bawtry all featuring prominently in his folk tales.

One of the more outlandish stories tells of Robin’s favourite holiday retreat. Whenever he grew weary of fighting the wicked Sheriff and that guy from over Gisbourne way, he’d treat the Merry Men and himself to invigorating breaks on the Yorkshire coast, where they’d feast upon medieval ice cream cones, hot dogs and fish and chips. However dubious – and frankly preposterous – this legend may sound, the brigand’s seaside hangout now bears his name, Robin Hood’s Bay, and it remains one of the most beautiful and spectacular villages in Northern England.

The modern half of this small community stands isolated above the ocean just south of Ness Point, but the older part, the area that the tourists flock to marvel at, lies hidden below. The headland cracks open here, allowing a river to cascade down to the beach, and scores of quaint cottages, art galleries and inns fill the jagged cleft. Originally the homes of fishermen, crabbers and smugglers, the picturesque jumble of sandstone buildings are clustered around a maze of tight passageways and a twisting “main” street that resembles a lethal bobsleigh run.

The Wisteria Lodge Care Home overlooked this hotchpotch of orange rooftops from its hilltop vantage point at the end of Victoria Drive. Once a striking example of thirties Art Deco, the building had been renovated in the 1970s and the frontage fitted with aluminium picture windows to take in the panorama. The day lounge, with its semi-circle of high-backed chairs and Zimmer frames, faced the sweeping bay and the distant Ravenscar village. Unfortunately, a combination of dementia, narcolepsy and eye cataracts meant that most of the residents failed to appreciate the breathtaking view.

The sun had sunk below the moorland to the west, Sunday dinner had ended and Dylan Taylor had taken up his usual position with his wheelchair parked by the television. Seventy-four wasn’t particularly old, but a stroke had collaborated with his years to turn the disabled man into a grumpy creature of habit. Like many such homes, the television sound was constantly set to a volume consistent with a heavy metal concert, and Taylor had to virtually shout to make himself heard.

“Well it’s a lovely afternoon,” he scoffed, sarcastically. “We should all grab a towel and get ourselves down to the beach for a swim.”

No one responded.

Bored and bitterly craving an after-dinner cigarette, Taylor noticed his geriatric neighbour was engrossed in the Bible. “Your novel there…” He gestured to the woman with a shaky hand and grinned mischievously. “Is it any good? I think I’ve read something by the same author. Is that their latest one?”

Stone deaf, she ignored the poor joke.

Taylor tutted with contempt and began to brood about a cigarette. He could absolutely murder one, but Wisteria Lodge had strict rules about smoke break times and he’d have to wait another hour. The rules had little to do with health concerns and everything to do with the lack of staff. The owner wouldn’t pay for sufficient carers, so there was rarely anyone free to take the smokers outside to indulge their habit.

Taylor turned to watch Becca Hughes as she hurried around with a squeaky trolley dispensing cheap biscuits and plastic beakers of lukewarm tea.

“Hey,” he called out. “I hear the White Rose Party are holding a meeting near here tomorrow. Where are the newspapers? Were you too idle to bring them in from your staffroom?”

Becca glanced at him and rolled her eyes. The teenager could never be bothered to remember the resident’s names, but she certainly knew this rude and mouthy one. Dylan Taylor reminded her of the television wildlife documentaries she’d seen. With his bald head and scrawny neck, he looked as if he should be jostling and squawking with a bunch of large birds as they rummaged inside the fly-covered carcass of a zebra.

“White Rose? Yeah, I’ve heard something about that,” she said, absent-mindedly chewing gum. She pressed a cup into the trembling fingers of an aged lady and hoped it remained vertical. Quite often they didn’t. “It’s tomorrow in Scarborough, I think.”

“Why don’t you go and bring me the newspaper, you lazy slag?”

“Whoa, that’s enough,” snapped Becca, glaring at him. “Now there’s really no need for that, is there?”

“Hündin,” muttered Taylor under his breath. It was no secret that he didn’t like the girl and he certainly wasn’t afraid to let her know. Still, he mused, at least the bitch wasn’t some ethnic immigrant. He had a special loathing for those creatures and the nursing homes were employing more and more of them. It was disgusting.

Like many elderly folk, Taylor loudly spoke his mind and didn’t care who he upset. Such behaviour is rightly viewed as borderline sociopathic, but once past a certain age, the advanced years are viewed as a reasonable excuse and the recipients seldom took offence. No matter how racist, sexist or downright abusive the comment, people rarely punched a geriatric.

Popping her gum bubble, Becca felt a cool draught and glanced around to see a bald man standing silently in the doorway to the reception hall. “Ah, are you the new guy?” she asked. “Er, it’s Tonga, isn’t it?”

The young man stared blankly for a moment and then slowly nodded. Just over five feet tall, broad and muscular, Tonga’s smooth skin was a reddish coffee colour, suggesting a possible Middle Eastern origin. Like Becca, he wore a compulsory blue plastic apron over a green nursing tunic and trousers.

“Tonga?” she grinned. “So what kind of name is that? Is it a nickname or something? Short for Tony, maybe?”

He continued to stare silently.

Becca shrugged. “Do you know you’re supposed to be here at five for the night shift?” She ran an appreciative eye over his bulky biceps, then frowned to see his naked feet. “Eh? Where are your shoes?”

Tonga looked down, but didn’t answer.

“I don’t believe it. Your first night here as a carer and you turn up late.” Becca pushed past with the rattling trolley and gave him a cheeky smirk. “Andrea the owner won’t like that, so it’s best if we don’t let her know.”

Tonga nodded.

“Everything is a big rush here,” said Becca. “We don’t really have time to chat right now. Can you take the other trolley, clear away everything in the dining room and load up the dishwasher?” Waving in the direction of the kitchen, she headed for the hallway lift. “I need to make a start on the bedrooms while most of them are sitting down here sleeping off their dinner.” She glanced again at his feet. “And for God’s sake get your shoes on. If Andrea sees you like that, you’ll get one of her famous health and safety bollockings.”

“Taylor,” said Tonga. “Which is Dylan Taylor?”

“Oh, do you know him?” Looking again at Tonga’s muscles, Becca smiled sexily before gesturing past him to the elderly man in the wheelchair. “He’s over there next to the television. Listen, we’ll grab a cup of tea together later and I’ll explain all about how this place works.”

Tonga watched her enter the lift and then walked slowly across the lounge. “Dylan Taylor?” he asked.

“That’s me,” said Taylor, noticing the man’s reddish brown skin.

He felt a surge of hatred. Could this new carer be part Indian, or worse still, a Muslim? He’d never seen a North American Indian, but they used to be known as “redskins”. Surely Wisteria Lodge weren’t employing Apaches here now? Fortunately his features looked European which suggested otherwise, but the weird name he’d overheard definitely sounded foreign.

“I’ll tell you what,” said the old man, “Becca might be a little tramp and a bit of a dim bitch, but she’s right in what she says. Believe me, Andrea Spedding the owner of this shithole is a real nasty cow. You don’t want to cross her. Maybe if she employed enough staff, you lot wouldn’t be constantly rushed off your feet, eh?”

Tonga stared quietly down at him.

Taylor glanced around furtively and gave a yellow grin, reminiscent of the sickly crescent that’s often seen in student flats where the bathroom carpet abuts the base of the toilet.

This was too good an opportunity to miss, he decided. Andrea was away at some council meeting in Whitby, the no-nonsense Deputy Manager wouldn’t be around for another hour and that thick tart Becca was now upstairs and out of the way. This kid had only just started and he wouldn’t be conversant with the rules. Especially the ludicrous smoke break rule.

“Listen,” he said, “before you go get your shoes and start washing up, I have a little job for you. Do you smoke?”

Tonga shook his head.

“Well, it’s smoke break time, son. What’s your name again?”

“He has called me Tonga.”

“Er, right.” Taylor looked puzzled at the odd answer, then grinned again. “Well I’m Dylan and I could bloody well kill for a cigarette. How about pushing me outside and I can have a quick one, eh? Rules are usually a load of old crap, but they have one particular rule here that I’m all for. Because I’m a nicotine addict, it’s my human right to smoke. Janice takes me out whenever I want, but she isn’t here until later and I need one right now. Come on, son. We’ll only be gone for five minutes or so.”

Nodding, Tonga pulled at the wheelchair, but it didn’t move.

“There’s a brake down there.” Taylor wagged an impatient finger at it. “You need to knock it off to move me.” He was a carer, for God’s sake. How come the idiot didn’t know that?

Clicking the lever with his naked toe, Tonga backed the old man’s chair out of the lounge.

Taylor chuckled triumphantly. The dickhead would probably get fired if Andrea got to know about this, but she was out. Anyway, looking at his brown skin, he was probably half black or Asian, so what did it matter? There were plenty more unemployed foreigners out there and Wisteria Lodge would soon find another to take his place.

Tonga pushed him through the kitchen passage and into the darkening garden. A flagged patio area of plastic seating and tables ran along the rear of the building with a disabled ramp leading down to a neat lawn and shrubbery. The constant staff shortage ensured that the outdoor seats were usually empty. With a never-ending cycle of work and not enough carers, wheeling residents out here to enjoy the sunshine and fresh air ranked low on the Wisteria Lodge priority list.

“You want to be through there.” Taylor waved to the latch gate that led down the side of the house. “I know it’s getting dark, but we don’t want Becca or anyone looking out from the bedroom windows and seeing me smoking. Janice normally takes me through...”

“No,” said Tonga, trundling the chair down the ramp and onto the grass.

Flanked by high hawthorn hedges and sloping gently towards a rhododendron thicket, the lawn terminated at a white picket boundary fence with the land falling precipitously away beyond. The lights of the Robin Hood’s Bay cottages twinkled below, the coastline swept around to the south and the soft indigo twilight reflected on the Ravenscar Hotel windows in the distance.

“So what kind of name is Tonga?” Taylor turned awkwardly as he took out his cigarettes and lighter. “Is it foreign or something?”

“No.” The carer wheeled him out of sight of the building behind the rhododendrons and kicked on the chair brake.

“You don’t talk much, do you?”

“No.”

Taylor looked around approvingly. “Hey, this is a nice spot you’ve chosen. The guards can’t see us from the prison camp back there and, I’ve got to admit, the view is better than the shit alleyway down the side of the house.” Lighting a cigarette with difficulty, he inhaled deeply, coughed a couple of times and spoke around it. “I’ve had a stroke and I can only use my right arm. Believe me, it’s a real bastard, especially when…” The old man paused, his eyes narrowing curiously at a sudden thought. He’d forgotten to ask earlier. His concern and disgust at the carer’s skin colour had taken priority. “I’ve just remembered something – didn’t you ask for me by name when you spoke to Becca? It was as if you knew me, but I certainly don’t know…”

Taylor caught his breath and shuddered to feel the temperature plummet. The evening air was still, but it had suddenly turned icy. He heard the harsh sound of tearing cloth behind him and twisted around to see the carer’s trousers, tunic and apron lying in tatters around his feet. The old man’s eyes widened and the cigarette fell from his gaping mouth.

This couldn’t be happening, it was impossible.

Tonga’s features had somehow changed and his naked brown body had grown slightly in height and bulk. It was as if another much larger person now stood in his place, yet this was no person. This was most definitely no person. Taylor gasped in terror at the sight, his right hand flailing about in a useless effort to keep the horror away from him.

Had he fallen asleep in the day lounge? This couldn’t be real. Reason and every rational law meant this couldn’t possibly be real. No, this had to be a nightmare.

His thrashing arm was grabbed tightly, twisted and effortlessly wrenched out of the shoulder socket.

“Mein Gott…” Shock nullified the pain and he watched, almost dreamily, as the torn limb was tossed onto the grass. Inches away from his bulging eyes, steaming gore pulsed in surreal red jets from the tattered shoulder. “Nein. Gott in Himmel, nein…”

No, this simply wasn’t possible. It WAS a nightmare. There was no pain so this could NOT be happening.

Taylor took a breath to scream, but Tonga’s huge fingers clamped over his mouth and the other hand closed firmly on the back of his head. Three seconds passed, allowing him time to stare into the blank face that peered down at him, then the hands came together, crushing his skull to a gruesome scarlet pulp. A spray of brain matter splattered the rhododendrons, adding vivid colour to the dull autumnal shrubbery.

Upstairs in one of the Wisteria Lodge bedrooms, Becca hummed to herself as she thought about the sexy new carer and how she’d ask him out for a drink later tonight. Those muscular arms were quite something, she decided, and if she played her cards right, she’d hopefully feel them tightly squeezing her.

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**Chapter 2**

Bernard Quist had always favoured the British coast in autumn and winter. The seas were wild and spectacular at this time of the year, with enormous waves exploding over rocks and booming thunderously as they slammed into cliffs. The towns, villages and shorelines were more picturesque, and cloud-scudded blustery skies replaced the monotonous pastel blue of summer.

Although the weather had been mild for late October in Yorkshire, Quist wore his calf-length overcoat, and a cool afternoon breeze tugged at the black leather, ruffling his shaggy dark hair as he walked along the harbour. Watching the turnstones and oystercatchers flying past the fishing boats, he took a deep breath and smiled.

Yes, thought Quist. Cold ocean air and northern winds whipping at the headlands were much better than stifling heat, flies buzzing around melting ice cream, and the sickly stench of overflowing litter bins.

Tourists and holidaymakers, or rather their noticeable absence, played a major part in his outlook. Towns were quieter, the roads were less congested, parking never presented a problem, and the empty beaches were striking in their scenic bleakness. Instead of plastic bottles, sizzling red flesh and screaming kids, flocks of wading birds and lounging seals filled the sandy panoramas. Quist knew his preferences were purely personal, of course, and his feelings certainly wouldn’t be shared by the hotel owners and other businesses here in the seaside town of Scarborough.

Pausing by a stack of lobster pots, he lit a cigarette, cupping his hands to shield the flame and almost singeing his large nose in the process. An attractive, lean man who appeared to be mid-forties, his aquiline nose rivalled the beaks of the yelping herring gulls that soared around him. He stood by the old lighthouse at the end of the harbour wall, drawing on the tobacco and peering over the bobbing boats at the panorama of Scarborough’s South Bay.

North Yorkshire’s premiere resort, Scarborough lies forty miles east of the city of York, where Quist lived and operated a small detective agency. The private investigator, or consultant detective, as he preferred to be known, puffed out a cloud of smoke and ran his eyes along the colourful seafront. Pubs, cafes and fast-food outlets lined the promenade, along with amusement arcades, entertainment facilities and those ubiquitous seaside shops that, for some unfathomable reason, sold nothing but cheap crap. The land rose steeply from the harbour and the detective looked upwards, past the streets and houses, to the breathtaking ruins of Scarborough Castle. A massive promontory of limestone rock thrust out into the North Sea, dividing the town into two wide bays, and the remains of the twelfth century fortress covered the summit, its stone walls running along the cliff edges and its great keep rising from the centre.