

The events in this story take place after the end of Undermined, and before the beginning of Dark Water

Ethan Maddocks was tired and sad. The tiredness and the sadness went all the way through. There was no part of Ethan that was separate from the tiredness and sadness, that thought “I, Ethan Maddocks, am tired and sad,” because that would suggest that part of him was not tired and sad, or that he could imagine being any other way.

To the tiredness and sadness, the last few days had added pain. Pain wasn't new, and it could get better, but Ethan had lost interest in getting better. The big policeman had been kind, but he was as indifferent to kindness as he had become to pain.

He looked at the river as it flowed under the animal bridge. When he had decided that it was time for it to end, he had thought to climb over here, among the carved animals, but he knew it was too much. Bits of him had been broken, and he didn't have the strength. But he could look at the bridge, and the castle, where he'd come years ago, on a day out with his classmates, teachers anxiously counting and re-counting as the children ran and rolled and yelled.

Mal Kent couldn't remember ever being this angry. His jaw was clenched so hard he thought that all his teeth would break. His fingernails were going to draw blood from his palms unless he somehow managed to prise open his fists. If he didn't get out of the room someone was going to get badly hurt. He spoke two words, then another three, but that was all he could manage.

“Wait here. You are suspended.”

He heard Protheroe's weaselly voice again in his head: “You said we had no reason to keep him. Sir.”

Well, this is it. It's up ahead. The hill I'm ready to die on.

“We had a duty of care to him and he's dead. He was nineteen.”

“That may be true Kent, but the boy was obviously unstable...”

“So we should have taken extra care. Suicide watch. Not watching while he commits suicide. As in not raping him in his cell.”

“We don’t have any evidence...”

“Sir, we have an unequivocal autopsy report. He was raped. In our cells. CCTV footage shows the officers going into the cell, and it shows them coming out, and then pushing a teenager out on a freezing morning, knowing he had nowhere to go. I have several copies of both the statement and the camera footage. I was called in from home sir, because the Custody Officer was too frightened to intervene. I took her statement.”

“They will be disciplined, Kent, you can be sure of that.”

“Not good enough.”

He knew they would come for him, he just didn’t know when. He’d had his car tyres slashed and dog shit left in his office. He went to work every morning knowing that no one would speak to him all day. He spent his days writing bullshit reports and his evenings at the gym and watching mindless TV. He broke up with the man he was starting to care for because there was no room in his life for anything but Ethan.

He spoke to the Coroner and he met several times with his MP. He asked for and was refused an appointment with the Police Commissioner. One day he found himself talking to a woman from Stonewall whose righteous anger made him cry, but she did find him other people to talk to, and slowly the pressure built. She reminded him that he was a detective, so he went out and found Ethan’s friends, and learned about about his life as well as his death. He bought drinks for the pathologist and had him go through the autopsy report again. He investigated the men who had driven Ethan to his death, and he spoke to every officer in the custody suite the night Ethan was assaulted.

So when he walked over to his car after the gym one evening he wasn’t surprised to be met by four men with pick axe handles. He’d been waiting and they hadn’t let him down. He reached into his pocket and flipped the recording switch on his

phone and the tiny camera on his jacket. All the men were wearing balaclavas and baseball caps, but he recognised two of them easily.

“Protheroe and Jones...I didn’t know you had so many friends. That’s one each. Boyfriends?”

“Fuck you Kent.”

“No thanks, I’ll pass.” Kent knew that the longer he could keep them talking, the harder it would be for them to hit him. He was past caring about the probability of injury, even death, but he wasn’t going to make it easy for them.

“So boys, you killed Ethan Maddocks and now you’re upping the stakes?”

“The rent boy killed himself and you know it.”

“I think you helped him though Protheroe didn’t you? Gave him that last little push? You do know we’ve got CCTV of you going into the cell? If you wanted to fuck another man, there are plenty of clubs you can go to.”

Kent realised he’d gone too far when Protheroe charged him, stick held high. He dodged that blow, and the next, but he wasn’t going to be able to dodge them all. The stab vest he’d been wearing for weeks under his leather jacket helped, and so did the hours he spent in the gym. They aimed their weapons at his body, obviously not caring if they broke his bones, but avoiding his head. A warning then, not murder. Though it could easily become murder if he wasn’t careful. He had thought that he didn’t care, but suddenly he did. He saw a movement in the far corner of the car park so he risked keeping still for long enough to put his hand in this pocket and press the button on the rape alarm.

In the underground car park, the noise was deafening. The four attackers froze, then turned to run. Kent lunged for the nearest figure and brought him crashing to the ground, winded.

“You’re nicked mate,” he said, reaching for the handcuffs he had in his jacket. Before his hand closed over them, all the lights went out.

He came to inside a kaleidoscope. A kaleidoscope with noise. He threw up as the colours swirled and the world shrieked around him. Then everything went dark again. And silent.

He came to for the second time and it was just white, and painful. A voice said, “you’re awake,” but he didn’t want to be awake when it hurt this much. A soft hand covered his and he thought “that’s nice” and also “go away”.

The third time he was glad to wake because his dreams had been full of terror. He heard his name being called, and the soft hand touched him again, pulling him into the world. This time he saw a face, a brown face with lovely brown eyes and a big smile. She said “Hi Maldwyn, how’re you doing?” He didn’t know, but she carried on anyway.

“I’m Amal, and I’m a nurse in the High Dependency Unit. You’ve got a nasty concussion and a broken wrist. We’ve been a bit worried about you, but your scans are fine and now you’ve woken up, I’m going to get the doctor to have a look.”

He looked at her and the word hospital floated into his mind. I’m in hospital because those bastards beat me up.

“My things,” he said, but he didn’t think it came out right.

“Don’t worry about trying to talk, it’ll come back. Stay here and I’ll get the doctor.” He wanted to laugh, because where would he go?

In due course, a doctor came, shone a light into his eyes, tested his reflexes and asked who the Prime Minister was.

“You’ll be right mate,” he said, “I’ll let you stay with the lovely Amal today, and maybe tomorrow, and then it’s onto the wards for you.”

“You’re Australian,” Mal croaked.

“Be careful mate,” the doctor said, “show too much intelligence and I’ll have to let the police in.”

“I am the police,” he said.

“That’s what they said. But I don’t think you’re ready for them yet,” and he was gone.

Amal fussed around for a while, taking his blood pressure and adjusting his drip, then she cranked the bed up so that he could see around and rested her hip next to him.

“So Maldwyn, is there someone I can call for you? Family? Girlfriend?”

He shook his head. He thought longingly of Daniel Owen, but he’d burned that bridge months ago. “There’s no one.”

“There is a policewoman, a Superintendent Something-or-other. She’s very keen to see you.”

“Stamford-Wallis,” he said, “I don’t mind seeing her.”

“I’ll tell her she can come in the morning then. But before I’m letting her in you have to eat something, drink something and pee. Where do you want to start?”

“Tea,” he said, “strong with milk and lots of sugar.” And when she brought him the tea, he thought that if he ever fell in love with a woman, it would be Amal.

By the morning, he’d passed the three tests and allowed Amal to help him out of bed into an armchair. She told him that the police had taken his clothes, so he was still in hospital issued pyjamas.

“Chief Superintendent Stamford-Wallis is a big noise. I can’t see her in pyjamas.”

Amal took pity on him and disappeared with Mal’s wallet, returning with a packet of black T shirts, underwear, socks and sweatpants, a comb, disposable razors and a toothbrush. Without a blush, she helped him into the shower and then into the clothes.

“But the shaving is up to you.”

He held out his hand. “Thank you Amal, really, thank you.”

She waved him aside and said she'd bring tea when his visitor arrived.

Only his visitor wasn't the person he'd been expecting.

The woman was big breasted and a little plump, with grey hair and a wrinkled face, but her clothes were stylish and her make up flawless. Her eyes were the same dark brown as Mal's own and as she looked at him, they filled with tears.

She put an enormous handbag on the bed and dropped into the visitor's chair, pulling it so that she was in front of him.

"Maldi," she said, "when Huw said you were in hospital I had to see you. To see that you were alright."

Really? You haven't needed to see that I was alright for the last twenty years. But it was complicated, and she was here, and he'd missed her so much.

"Mam," he said, and then he couldn't say any more.

Shirley Kent reached for her son's hand and touched the wrist in its plaster cast.

"What did they do to you?"

"It's nothing Mam. Broken wrist and a bit of concussion. How come you're here?"

"I'm not. I'm shopping, so I can't stop long."

"Dad doesn't know." Mal's voice was flat. This wasn't the opening move in a reconciliation with his family. Not that he'd expected that it would be. After all this time, it shouldn't hurt, but it did.

"No love, he doesn't know."

"And you aren't going to tell him."

Mal's mother sighed. She wasn't going to tell him. She wasn't going to risk the rows that would follow, or the gossip and speculation in the village. But she wanted to see her son so she'd lied, and if Mal would let her, she'd keep on lying.

“It’s been too long Maldi. It’s my fault and I’m sorry. I can’t make up for it and if you want me to go, then I will.”

Did he want her to go?

“Mam, it is what it is. You’re here now, and you look just the same as when I last saw you.”

“Liar. I’m an old woman. A granny.” But she laughed and so did he, and the tension eased, a little.

“I rang you. In London. Just rang the switchboard and asked for you. When you answered I was too much of a coward to speak. Then when you came back here...well I’m sorry to say that your mother was still a coward, but at least I knew you were OK, after you met Huw that time.

“It doesn’t matter.” It did matter, but he would worry about it later. “Mam, tell me about yourself, and...everyone. Because I don’t have long either. My boss is due in twenty minutes.”

Twenty minutes wasn’t long enough to share the news of twenty years apart, but it was long enough to make a start. Long enough to swap phone numbers and arrange to meet again.

Chief Superintendent Elizabeth Stamford-Wallis was not impressed with the bright orange milky tea that Mal loved, and she looked even more disapproving as he added sugar. Lots of sugar.

“Take me through it,” she said, “right from the beginning.”

She took notes in tiny writing, and then asked him to go through it all again, and again.

“Have we got enough Ma’am?” he asked.

“We have confessions, and they match what you’ve told me.”

“And will the CPS prosecute?”

“Protheroe yes, the others no,” she held up her hand before he could speak, “but they’ve all been suspended and will be sacked. Protheroe has admitted assaulting Ethan Maddocks, and the evidence is clear against him. All four have confessed to attacking you, but if they retract their confessions we may not be able to prove it. It was dark, they had their faces hidden, the voices are indistinct and the only reliable witness is you. Protheroe will go down though. As he should.”

Mal recognised that it was the best he could hope for. He didn’t want justice for himself, but he wanted it for Ethan. He’d ended his relationship with Daniel because getting justice for Ethan had taken over his life. Now it was over and he didn’t know what he was going to do to fill the space. Stamford-Wallis was still talking. He tuned back in.

“I’m sure you realise that you can’t continue in Cardiff, or anywhere in Glamorgan police. I don’t suppose you want to anyway.”

He thought about the sustained hate campaign against him for the past year, all to save a rapist from the consequences of his actions.

“Not really ma’am, no.”

“That’s what I thought. And I also thought you won’t want to think about job applications and so on for a while, so I did some calling round. There’s a DCI’s job in Clwyd, Melin Tywyll. The DI has been Acting DCI, but he can wait a bit longer. Low crime in the grand scheme of things, but plenty of drugs creeping out of the north west. You could make a difference. Take a month to get your health back, maybe a week in the sun somewhere and get started. What do you think?”

What he thought was that he wasn’t being offered a choice. Or rather the choice was take this job or resign. Except that he was being offered Daniel’s job, the job Daniel had been doing, and had wanted, and deserved. He had already hurt Daniel by pushing him away in favour of Ethan. Now he could hurt him even more or say goodbye to his career. But at the back of his mind a little voice whispered that if he took the job, he’d be working with Daniel again...seeing Daniel again...

“Thanks Ma’am, yes, that sounds perfect.”