

SEXY SADIE

Kaden Brown

Introduction – The Approach

Driving south across Los Angeles the sun glared about me, dust swirled moving to unknown destinations, apprehension weirdly rendered my lungs tight, my heart strong, few cars travelled either in my direction and none passed at all on this lonely, tragic road to the California Institution for Women, Chino.

Being given my big break I had got given the dream job, which I had always been begging for. Pestering my supervisor, Alan, on and off for two years, my twenty three year old figure and lithe body finally scored in a way I was to get rewarded.

‘Hey man, I’m on my way there now. You said they expect me right? Yeah, sure. I know you keep telling me. “Do what they tell me...” I know. Do you reckon they will let me in? There ain’t no way I’m gonna strip down for some god damn search! Right. Funny man.’

He had given me the job of meeting and interviewing what looked to me like a little old lady who, by all accounts I’d been given, had never done anything worse than stabbing some rich guy in the leg. That was some time ago and now she was still in the same place they put her. They put her there, in Chino in 1969, more than forty years ago.

So when I was five she did something. I only vaguely remember it happening when I was five years old, squeezed in my infant brain, along with the Nixon, Vietnam and the man on the moon. Watching those old news recordings from the archive brought it all back. Crazy groups of kids, singing, running, smiling, holding hands, and sitting down, not a care in the world. Those same childhood images became real. Like a memory of an image suddenly being given their real meaning. Snatches of past moments, rendered real and reasoned, now, with their full and actual meanings only this last week known. I almost remember the day...but maybe that was a few weeks later.

Passing through the brown fields I found myself slowing down as the guard tower loomed on the nearest of CIW’s nearest approaching corner on the north western corner. Looking to the right rows of brick, two storey buildings receded behind the car and a vista opened beyond the fence line. Some trees, an admin block way off in the distant. Fences and towers were everywhere.

I was looking for the turnoff Alan had mentioned, somewhere coming up on the right. There it was, just past the next guard tower, with its darkened windows menacing in their anonymous threat over the buildings and any loitering passerby who would dare to even stop their car, take a walk and cling to the chain links of the fence. Something not to be tried, I told myself.

Swinging the Mazda into the right-hand turn and turning the volume down on the old CD player, I leaned forward to nervously gather my wits, chewing my bottom lip. Something indeed was gnawing away at me. A bus was turning up ahead in the distance as I approached the entrance to CIW, marked by a low rock wall with ‘California Institution for Women’ emblazoned on it. If I didn’t know better I would have thought it was a school camp with that name! Just like the Camps America thing they have now.

Prequel – California Institute for Women, Chino, CA

‘Hello’
‘Hi. You’re Deborah?’
‘Yes. It’s nice to meet you Susan. It’s alright if I call you Susan?’
‘Yes, of course it is. That is my name.’
‘I thought you may like to called Mrs Atkins...or Mrs Atkins-Waterhouse.’
‘Susan is fine.’
‘Um, we can’t touch can we? I mean, like to shake hands, or something.’
‘No. No. And I’m not sure I want them to let people touch me.’
‘What do you mean?’
‘They protect me as much as you from me.’
‘You mean they want to stop people getting at you?’
‘Yes. I got used to it. Physical contact with outsiders isn’t really what we’re here for, is it?’
‘I have to say thank you for taking the time to see me. It really is a great help.’
‘When I heard that you were asking to see me, it seemed pointless. People get a thrill from stuff, you know.’
‘You mean from back then?’
‘Yes.’
‘Hmmm’
‘They really have no idea. I tried to write it all down, but it doesn’t seem to just flow out of me when I do it.’
‘You mean when you try to write it all down?’
‘You know what it is like? Never a thought I can write down, when I need to.’
‘Maybe that can change’
‘No, I’ll never be able to write down my story. I don’t think I have the ability to do it. Maybe not the patience.’
‘They say “everyone has a book inside them, waiting to be told”.’
‘My story seems like a one page joke the devil has played just for a laugh.’
‘No, I don’t think so. From what I hear you pretty much have the devil on the run anyway. You’re spiritual and a believer. Probably end up in a better place than most of us.’
‘Just not at the moment.’
‘Like Jesus in his tomb.’
‘Don’t compare me to the saviour, please.’
‘Of course, Susan. Sorry. Why did you agree then to see me?’
‘I thought about it. I was firmly going to say ‘no’, and then changed my mind. Maybe I’m curious.’
‘Makes two of us then.’
‘A couple of things before we start? You are going to record this on tape?’
‘If that is okay with you.’
‘I would rather you not tape it –’
‘That will make my note taking more difficult.’
‘No tapes. That is definite, right? And this is going to be our only session. We have all day. I won’t meet with you again.’
‘Well, it’s 9.30 now, shall we make a start?’
‘In a moment. I want to think for a while. I want to know more about you.’
‘Sure. What?’
‘Oh how nice to be so open. A life full of such hidden secrets, and not one ounce of fear to tell them.’
‘I would say that I have no rear. Right now I’m a wreck on the cliff of indecision. So, ask away. Nothing really secret here. Just a little girl in a big wide world.’

'That sounds familiar from somewhere. Who said it?'

'No one to my knowledge. It's just a saying.'

'Just a little boy a big wide world'

'What?'

'John Lennon. Do you like Lennon?'

'He's okay.'

'I, um, have some waiver forms and other stuff you need to sign. Plus a copy of the contract done through Alan and my office. You've seen them? The copyright stuff?'

'Yes. They've signed off on them have they?'

'Yep. Right...you need to sign, here.'

'Thanks Susan. Where shall we start?'

'At the beginning is the only way to start I suppose.'

'Can I ask you some questions first?'

'Okay.'

'When was the last time you had contact with Charlie – directly or indirectly?'

'Ha. Straight to the point?'

'Gotta know.'

'I've never had contact with Charlie. He contacts me. Or rather he finds a way to get messages through the system, you know. I tell everyone I never want to even think about him. Ever! But he always comes through somehow.'

'How do you compare your life, day to day, in prison over the last forty years, compared with your pre-trial life?'

'Quite honestly, I've never had it better. I keep occupied, I can read books. I even got a degree in here. Before I met Charlie my life was empty and bored with no meaning.'

'Do you mean that what happened has improved your life?'

'Absolutely. It has opened my mind and given me faith.'

'Patricia and Lesley are in this institution. Do you see them very often? Do you -?'

'Sometimes. We laugh about those days. After all, there's not much point is there in getting upset over what we did. We can't change it, can we?'

'How does that fit with being Christian?'

'Forgiveness. They aren't spiritual like me, but they deserve forgiveness too.'

'So, nineteen sixty eight. What happened with him?'

'It was before then. Early sixty seven. No. It was late sixty six. The Beatles had played at Candlestick and I had just got a job in Haight-Ashbury at some club where I was a nude dancer. It was what the owner called a 'satanic' club. Really I was just a naked dancer-actress. I just saw it as a way to get money and free drinks. It wasn't a job in my mind. More like a paid hobby.'

'At the Hellfire Club? Run by Anton LeVey?'

'Yes, that's the one. Him and Dianne were nice, but always after more and more money. That's why they opened the Hellfire – just to get people to pay to get in, and drink. We saw the little notices for dancers in shop fronts in the area.'

'What did you feel about doing that?'

'I didn't know it was to be with no clothes on. I did get a bit of a shock when Dianne told me, but the money...you know. The hardest part there was getting on the altar and then keeping still. It was fun.'

'Some people say that actually, you first met Charlie there?'

'No. That was after then. Not after the club. I was given meaning before him.'

'What do you mean?'

'As I was saying the Beatles had played. It was Monday night; we were getting all ready and chatting when Dianne came out the back, in her High Priestess clothes, all excited. She said that some guests were going to come by. We were like, 'who, who, who?' She mentioned that

some manager guy was out front of the club waiting to let them in. We wanted to peep through the side door to catch a glimpse but she just shooed us away.'

'The club was open Mondays?'

'Yes it was. Sometimes we did a couple of performances. Usually it was just one though. Most customers were coming in from other bars and wanted some fun. So, anyway, Dianne told us to get ready and just do what we always did and to focus on our job. Which we did. I entered the stage on my cue. It was sort of a low wooden stage – about a foot above the floor. Keeping my face serious and eyes staring, I walked like we'd been taught toward the altar. Then I sort of realised who was in the audience, but it was darkened so not that clear. My mind was racing. I am sure that no-one realised that my heart was pounding as I turned and mounted the altar, dropping my robe behind me on the stage.'

'Who was there?'

'You haven't guessed? Well, my suspicions were right. Lying there, directly facing at the ceiling, my eyes did their best to gather the light in the gloom of the audience. In one moment that will stay burned in my mind until the day I day, I realised who.'

'Yeah?'

'It was the first act of the show and my role was to play the sacrificial maiden. A young virgin who was to be slaughtered on the altar. Of course nothing was real. But the show did use blood and real knives. The lighting and music just made the performance seem real and exciting. When my eyes met those of him I couldn't help but betray the excitement. I smiled – still keeping my head perfectly still, if you know what I mean. In that instant he knew that I knew that we connected.'

'You were taking about the Beatles. Were they at the Hellfire that night?'

'Deborah, you aren't really that slow are you? Yes. They were. I saw John Lennon. He was enthralled, mouth agape, and looking at me!'

'You are trying to tell me that the Beatles actually watched you at the Hellfire? That has never been mentioned before. Never.'

'Of course it hasn't. Where do you think they got the ideas they got after their visit? So as was saying, during the show I saw who was watching. Afterwards, we all had drinks – as usual - with the customers. We were relieved when Anton told Dianne that the doors were closed and there was to be no later show. Dianne didn't have to tell us, she knew we had overheard him tell her as we had just gotten off stage and were cleaning-up in the dressing room. She just said 'Go out and mix with the customers which we always did, even if there was another show to do later.'

'You went out and ... what? You met the Beatles?'

'Hehe. Yes. Yes I did. We chatted and I tried to mingle with the other guests, I think their manager guy Brian, some roadies and a couple of other musicians – I'm not sure who they were – they were there too. I couldn't keep myself from stealing glimpses at them though. And eventually gave-up trying to keep away from them. But it wasn't John who really caught my attention at that point. George had been pretty quiet, keeping in the background approached me and we started talking about the show and what it was about. Dianne was running around at Anton's side all night, offering drinks and hash to everyone. We like drifted toward a quieter corner of the club and just talked. It was beautiful. Really.'

'What did you and George talk about?'

'I was full of questions too. I remember asking him if he was old enough to be there. You know, with his previous problems with being underage in bars.'

'No, I didn't know that.'

'John and Paul came over and the three of us – I didn't see Ringo at all - soon headed out of the Hellfire and I went back to the hotel. Can't remember where but we basically got it on, smoked, had sex, and chilled-out listening to music. If I recall, something from the *Lovin' Spoonful* was played. I don't know for sure though. That night my whole life changed. It is strange

how one night could alter one's entire existence. I think it did the same for them too. They never played again, and their music changed. It was as if we opened up a slice of time that we should never have opened. Nothing. Absolutely nothing in my life was ever the same again.'

'So that night, were there any other girls with you?'

'No, just me. They were wonderful. After we had smoked and got sexed-out we just lay around on the floor, on the settees. I think Paul crashed under the table. John thought it funny and I just laughed along with him when prodding with his foot elicited a muffled grunt from the curled-up Paul. Towards morning John was getting talkative, really loquacious you know. I like that word, "loquacious". So John was talking about how crazy things were at the concert and in every city they visited he seemed to think that a civil war was breaking out. Riots and killing everywhere. He told me that even on stage they had had to have the police seated right there next to them for protection. He was getting sick of it – well the words he used were "sick of the shit" – and didn't really care about touring anymore. It was quite a lot to spring on a teenage smitten girl. I just felt that here was a man emptying his heart, not just about the Beatles but about his wife and kid too. He loved them. But to John, they were like his guitar – to be played when he needed them. We connected. Me naked on the floor, unashamed, happy. I was not on this planet that night. We began to, like, get dressed. George was trying to find a number to order me a cab. Which I didn't really need, seeing as I lived in the Haight. He had a pen and scrap of paper. I took them and wrote my name on it. Not actually my name but a pretend, fun name, I had always liked but never used: *Sexy Sadie Mae Glutz*. I was just fooling around. I giggled as George looked at it. I was still pretty high you know. And totally at ease.'

'This is very strange Susan. I thought Charlie gave you the name Sexy Sadie or Sadie Mae Glutz?'

'It was the name I used from that night onwards. When Charlie asked me my name that is what I told him. He did know my real name later though.'

'So the Beatles knew the name before the White Album then?'

'Of course they did. You think they just invented it? Listen to the lyrics. The song is that night. It's about that very night at the Hellfire club and what happened between us that night. Their parting words, Johns actually, as I turned from the door to go downstairs were "Lay it down for all to see". I laughed. Now, we had been talking about changing the world and making it better, you know, fantasizing about how things could develop and turn out. George had remarked that I, me, "could change the world, make something happen that would set-off a chain reaction of events that would end in harmony". John and George were real serious about it. I talked about nightmares and that they weren't bad nightmares - just like visions. John said that they were premonitions. We were so stoned that we didn't know what we were saying if truth be known. Yet I remember it all.

'I don't really know what to say Susan. Er, what exactly were they so serious about?'

'Ha. You want the details, Miss Deborah?'

'Yes.'

'Maybe you can't handle them.'

'I am sure. The world has a right to know the truth as to what happened.'

'The right to know?'

'Yes. People died, people's lives were destroyed. They still live with the pain of Helter Skelter.'

'Give me one reason why I should break the confidence of others. Maybe I would tell you.'

'I've given you the reasons, Susan.'

'You have. You have. Can you handle the truth, what was said and why? You know that there are still people alive, inside and out, who believe these things.'

'I want to know the truth, not convert.'

'Huh, yeah, so you say now. Do you have children, kids?'

'Yes, I have a boy and a girl. Four and seven.'

'Husband? Lover?'

'Yeah. Husband.'

'What do you think he feels about you being here with me? Does he know?'

'He does. Just said to be careful.'

'And you think learning the truth about Sadie, Tex, and Snake, and Charlie, Blue and Red and all the others equates to being 'careful?'

'It is just words, data. Information. It can't kill me.'

'Ideas do kill Deborah. Surely you know that. Words are more powerful than all the guns, all the weapons and bombs in the world. And you think it is simply information.'

'Yes, that is all whatever you say would amount to. Just information, words to be written down.'

'Then why do you want to know about such a topic as what I know? Why not do what others have done and just copy the information from others? Regurgitate the stuff out there. You could have a snappy headline and present it all from your own angle, and sell heaps of copies. Why not do that? Why do you want the real truth, from me, if not to satisfy your own interest, an intrigue that cannot be quantified, cannot be packaged?'

'What you know is... you are right Susan. I mean that all the stuff that has been written, everything that is out there does not explain what happened. It doesn't explain why there are groups today, that want to destroy all the advances civilization has made over the centuries.'

'You are talking about Air, Trees, Water, Animals?'

'Yes.'

'Charlie and Red. Their Californian pine trees or whatever they are. You know that Charlie gave each one of us a persona, don't you?'

'No. I had no idea. What do you mean?'

'Charlie allocated, well actually it was our own idea. He asked us about what we wanted, you know, the most beautiful thing we wanted to achieve in life. We talked about these things with him, like one on one, but everybody was there listening. No privacy – no need for that. Charlie encouraged Red and Blue to save the California trees, the Redwoods I think they were, from extinction. That's where ATWA came from.'

'Oh. And what about you? The others?'

'Me, well I wanted to explore the spiritual boundaries of the human being. You know, how people feel and react to evil. You know about karma – what goes around comes around don't you?'

'Hmm, yeah...'

'Huh, that's just part of it though. You know that every early death, every evil committed against a person results in equal goodness elsewhere?'

'What? What?'

'Yeah. Pain is goodness. It is natural then that pleasure is badness, evil. So there is a circle: the more pain the more pleasure, the more pleasure, the more pain.'

'Yeah, but you guys, you lived a life of pleasure, drugs and sex.'

'Yeah.'

'So, what pain was there in doing that? You were hardly balancing out the karma were you?'

'The pleasure we got from life, of living by our own rules – we had none – meant we had the power, inside each one of us, to continue the cycle of pain, spread it into society and help charge-up the karma cycle. The pain we caused meant more happiness.'

'Happiness is a warm gun?'

'Ha-ha, you have it!'

'It is utterly mad.'

'You see the power of what I'm saying. It scares you.'

'Of course it does. How can you warp logic so much that innocent people die? For such a dire and terrifying possibility, that death, that pain, are good things. That they cause happiness.'

'Yet you instinctively knew that a warm gun equals happiness?'

'It's the name of a fucking song, not some metaphysical empiricism!'

'Yet you connected the idea and the song instantly.'

'It is not that difficult. You know, to make "happiness" you cause pain.'

'Right. Anyways, Blue and Red wanted to save the Redwoods, Tex wanted to explore the soul, find out how it works; make the world a better place.'

'So Charlie sent him to kill Sharon Tate?'

'No, he sent him to London, working for a church. You didn't know that did you?'

'And what did he tell you to do?'

'He doesn't tell people. You tell him and then Charlie like, encourages you to do it. He makes you do what you want to do.'

'Next you will be telling me that there is nothing that Charlie ever made you do.'

'He never did.'

'You are avoiding the question Susan. What did Charlie encourage you to do?'

'I wanted to kill people, overthrow the system, create pure equality and freedom for all people. *That* goodness could only ever come from pain and death. That is what I wanted, so that is what I did.'

'Charlie encouraged it?'

'Don't get ahead of yourself Deb. That night in San Francisco, we agreed on the basics. Happiness can only come from pain and death.'

'The Beatles again, right?'

'Don't mock. '

'You're talking bullshit.'

'Obviously you don't want to know the truth of what happened. Your hostility betrays your discomfort.'

'You expect me to be cool with what you're trying to say? That *they* were part of it?'

'Believe it or not – it's up to you. What did you come here for? A nice pleasant chat?'

'Um, er, I want the truth, not some statement of satanic desire.'

'It's too much. I knew you are not ready for the truth.'

'I really do need to know what happened and why.'

'Heck woman! You cannot even handle the bare truth, so far. How are you going to react to the stuff that even I don't talk about? Somehow, I doubt that you're here to write an article for the L.A. Times.'

'You really a Christian?'

'You a reporter?'

'Yes.'

'Only, not a reporter with a newspaper? Are you?'

'No, my boss, Alan – well he's my course supervisor actually – he let me come-in and talk to you. I've been pestering him for about two years trying to get permission. '

'I am Christian. If there is only one thing I can do to make-up for what I did and what I caused, it is to devote my life to doing good. Somehow, I doubt if God will think I have balanced things out.'

'How does being a Manson Girl sit with being a Christian?'

'A "Manson Girl"? They've been using that one ever since Bugliosi. He never knew the truth. I was no one's girl. If anything Charlie was my man, and we had everyone else. It was a very open and equal world that we were building.'

'A Christian?'

'Christianity proves what we are saying. Christ had to die for goodness to arise.'

'I'm not sure that is how Christians interpret the death of Christ.'

'It is exactly how they interpret it.'

'You really think that doing what you did, killing seven people, was the work of a Christian?'

'Why not? They have killed millions in the name of Christ.'

'Susan, you said that the others wanted to do other things, like save the California Redwoods, study about the soul.'

'Charlie wanted free love.'

'So the others wanted to do these other things and you wanted to?'

'To make people live life happier by making them value life more.'

'Hence you wanted to kill them.'

'Oh yes. The more the better. It was a weird idea Paul had that night. Well, at the time I didn't understand it, and had to like get my head around what he said. He was really intelligent, Paul was.'

'Uh?'

'We had been chatting for a while, I hadn't even gotten undressed. Just doing coke and cola. Still before midnight I think it was when we somehow got onto the topic of the race riots. Paul and George were pissed that they'd been following them – The Beatles – wherever they went. City to city, the riots followed them. "It's like wherever we touch a fuse is lit, lighting a fire that destroys everything, killing and consuming the past and everything it stands for" Paul was saying. It was a lot to take in. Even George smiled when Paul said it. Me? I was like wow! Cognition after cognition, it was like all the synapses in my head were firing.'

'Paul was the one who said it?'

'Yeah. He said it like poetry, which is why it was so powerful. I think we had been trying to be pretentious and what have you, you know, like being liberal and intellectual. Then Paul says that. Hell, even Paul stopped. Everything stopped for what must have been two or three seconds. John, Paul and George, they froze, as if they were thinking something. Realizing something for the first time. I think I did too.'

'What happened?'

'First, the silence. Then our eyes met, a silent communication. Agreement. I suppose that with me into the Hellfire club Church of Satan thing and sort of living a fictional life centred on death and blood, and them being music gods, for us to make the subconscious leap from stage performance to the possibility of taking that fiction and making it real-life was an inevitable consequence.'

'Like the crazy living in their own world?'

'Sort of. More like we lived in that world already. I was already doing the free love, drugs and blood thing, complete with coffins and death. John, Paul and George were already so disengaged from the real world – they had been since teenagers – that to them their own understanding of the world and their own place within it, was seriously compromised.'

'You think that they were affected by some mental disorder? The three of them?'

'Yes, though I'm not sure about Ringo. Their sense of importance was probably justified too. So, yeah, there is no doubt, The Beatles were living in their own world. In fact the world was morphing into their own world.'

'They were so powerful that society was changing because of them?'

'Exactly. But they were fucked-up people, totally. They had survived Hitler, the bombs, the rationing. They despised the elites and the feeling was mutual. They were forced to betray everything they represented just to play the game of those with power. How do you think a group of four boys full of hatred for the establishment and the hegemonic classes would develop given the power, money and influence they had?'

'I'm not sure. Maybe you have lost me Susan.'

‘John, Paul and George, they hated what they had become. They hated those they worked for. They were trapped, and bored. The only thing that they wanted to do was to put right the wrongs, as they saw them.’

‘And you wanted to kill the world?’

‘Mmm, yeah. A match made in heaven. I told them about some of the stuff that crosses my mind. Well, really, it was stuff that just flowed into it that night. The earlier moment of cognition that we all experienced, had the flow-on effect of sending us all onto some higher plane of consciousness. The ideas came from nowhere. Blacks should be equal, but they have no experience. Law enforcement should be taken down. Riots would explode across America then the globe. War would follow. Finally, global peace. John called it the “Fellowship of Man”, you know, imagine it. George, just wanted a war on the Piggies. Paul was thoughtful – you could tell because he got that smiley face and twinkle in his eyes. I do remember that night, he started talking about a “decent into hell”, you know, with the riots everywhere. He kept repeating the words. Then suddenly, he said the words, “Helter Skelter”. It wasn’t a remarkable statement, John simply replied, “It’s coming down fast”.’

‘Meaning what?’

‘The riots. They were happening more and more. It was coming down, faster and faster. The faster they happened the faster the Blue Meanies, and the Piggies would be killed.’

‘This was in sixty six?’

‘Yes. Two years before The White Album; three before Tate-La Bianca. From that night I devoted myself and all my energies to my thoughts. I never wrote them down, other than to write the odd letter now and then to England. When I met Bobby through Anton, and later Charlie, I had my ideas pretty well sorted. Bobby was more of a Sadist than me. I mean that rather than having any intellectual justification of his dark fantasies, he simply became fixated upon them, living for the performance so to speak.’

‘The Beatles kept in contact?’

‘George did. The Beatles went back home and for about a year I stayed in San Francisco, performing at the Church of Satan’s Hellfire club with Bobby. Then we met Charlie. That was early summer, spring of sixty seven. George showed-up with Michelle Phillips and Mama Cass and we had a great time. You know that George and Mama Cass sort of got on really well?’

‘No.’

‘Yeah, amazing to see, they clicked. Michelle Phillips though, I didn’t know what to make of her. Beautiful, but, I don’t know. I’m not sure. Charlie liked her, I know that.’

‘Mama Cass and Michelle Phillips? Charlie knew them?’

‘Not really, I knew them because Mama Cass lived next door. She showed me how to make Caesar Salad and cook and stuff. I think that without her I’d have starved! Michelle met Charlie because of Mama Cass. They disappeared for a few hours the night we all met - the time George was there.’

‘I’ve seen the television interviews with George about that visit. He said it was awful.’

‘That’s what he said, in public. For us, I mean *all* of us, he was the one that mattered. In fact there is a video I think of George surrounded by us. We were devoted to him. Whatever he wanted he got given.’

‘Did that include drugs?’

‘Yeah, mostly hashish though. I don’t think he touched LSD that trip.’

‘What did George do there?’

‘We talked about things, mostly about karma, how happiness comes from pain and death. They gotta balance. Charlie was excited, I’d never seen him so hyper. I think he rang that Beach Boy guy and he came ‘round too.’

‘I heard that they knew each other.’

‘Oh, more than that. They spent all their time together. Lived together. Charlie is a great composer you know.’

‘Huh. Okay, Susan, can I record this, please?’

‘It’s not something I want on record.’

‘Yes, but you are dying. What you know needs to be put down on the record. Future generations have to know about what actually happened. Do you want to die and have what you know disappear with you? It would be a travesty.’

‘What are you going to do with them?’

‘Whatever you say remains your property until you die. I have a form, here, for you to sign. You do not lose any rights. Everything is as we agreed beforehand.’

‘What does that mean Deborah?’

‘It means that you can stop, veto, the publication of what you say. I can’t do anything with the recordings unless you give the go-ahead.’

‘That includes anything, like books or newspaper articles?’

‘Yes, absolutely. Whilst you’re alive your knowledge remains your property. All I’ll be doing in recording them is making sure that your death does not mean the truth vanishes forever.’

‘Maybe I can do it.’

‘Recording what happened means the ideas and philosophies that you tell me are never lost. Future people may have access to your thoughts. And others.’

‘I sign down here, at the bottom?’

‘Yes. And put the date next to it. The twenty sixth of May, 2009.’

‘Done. I’ve signed my life away.’

‘No, you have ensured your eternity Susan.’

‘Call me Sadie.’

‘Start at the beginning.’

‘The beginning isn’t where you think it is.’

‘Sixty six, The Beatles, San Francisco?’

‘Yeah. What was going to happen in sixty nine had been, I don’t know, “pre-destined”?’

‘You mean that the killings were the consequence of earlier events?’

‘Yeah. Sixty four, when my mom died. Dad turned critical, you know, started drinking, forgot us kids existed.’

‘How did your mother die?’

‘The Big C. Cancer. Lasted about six months. I remember mom being fit, running around and happy, always smiling. Then almost overnight she changed, to being worried, short tempered and serious all the time. Sure, there were times when she tried to smile, tried to put on a happy face. But those times merely reinforced what she had been, what we were now missing out upon. Her moments of clarity and smiling became less and less. I don’t think I learned anything that year. It is like from April until the end of October my attentiveness at school declined. The summer vacation was sort of nice, but it was over before I knew it and mom’s decline was becoming obvious.’

‘My brother, Raymond he’s three years younger than me, was maybe too young to be aware of what went down. I was the one who had to look after him, dad didn’t care, and if he did he was not capable anyway. They sat Raymond and me around the dinner table when we got home from school. The afternoon had been warm and wet, a nice spring day. It stands out in my head because all afternoon I’d been feeling odd, sort of unreal, surreal I think the word is. Then dad picks us up from school and there’s mom, She’s sat at the table all tearful and fretting over something.’

‘They told you and Raymond she had cancer.’

‘They told us. At the time, in the seconds before they explained why mom was looking so ill and panicky, I thought with all my soul that any explanation, the truth, would make mom feel better. That knowing would make me feel better, relieved. That nothing could be as bad as *that*, how she looked could not be what she was.’

'I was wrong. If a few seconds earlier I had believed that knowing the truth would make things easier, then the truth crushed it. That the tightness in my heart in seeing my mom in pain would pass.'

'It didn't. Instead my heart broke and kept on breaking, every waking second.'

Chapter One – The Descent into Hell of Susan Atkins, 1964

‘I have cancer Susan. They can’t do anything,’ said my mom.

She was sat at the polished mahogany table in the unusually dark dining area. The number of times I had wiped-on the cream and buffed it off with a clean cloth was too numerous to recall. It must number maybe a hundred times. In fact if you ran your fingers, or if you’re more keen, your hand along the carved wooden designs on the sides and the legs you would feel the layers of wax. All of it put there by my own hand, ever since I could remember.

Running my finger tips along the bottom edge of the table I was sure I could feel that excess wax. If I just scraped a fingernail at the right angle I’d be able to see just how much wax I had put on the table. But that would be bad, daddy may catch me, and mom would be upset too. It was best to sit quietly and listen.

‘Cancer’. One word, begins with ‘C’. A capital ‘C’. ‘The Big C’. Somewhere I had heard that, though where I had no idea. Maybe on the radio, when we were allowed to listen on Sunday afternoons, once our homework had been checked by mom of course. I liked those times. Sundays were the best, when the new music came on and I sat there ear pinned to the little speaker, or if daddy was there, straining to hear the beat and exciting rhythms. Most of the time I dreamed of being left alone with the radio all Sunday afternoon so that I didn’t need to half listen to the chatter between mom and dad and half listen to the latest hits.

Come to think of it, it seemed unlikely that American Bandstand would be discussing The Big C, though there was the Big O and the Big Bopper, who knows, maybe there was the Big C also? Somehow, cancer wasn’t the latest hit though, I was a hundred percent sure.

Mom went on, my mind failing to catch-up with what she was saying to me and Ray. ‘The doctors say there is a chance I will see New Years.’ Mom left it there for a moment, the silence increasing in intensity when I noticed that she was avoiding my eye. Why couldn’t mom look at me?