

2

THE LEGGERS

Helen Veidt's father had always claimed the Beatles would be responsible for the end of the world. Of course, that had been in the Mid-1960s, and the major concern for Veidt Sr. had been the unblemished honour of his only daughter Helen. And considering that, at least according to an article in the Daily Mirror, two thirds of Britain's teenagers made out while listening to Lennon and McCartney songs, Veidt Sr. felt he had discovered an unalterable truth..

Bloody teenagers couldn't wait long enough to get into each other's pants (merely the fact that women had started to wear pants was another indication of Armageddon) with people singing about sex all the time, so he had told his wife Eleanor.

It was strange this memory came back now, more than thirty years later, to Helen Veidt. It was always strange for a child to acknowledge that a parent was right about anything. But when she saw the Leggers outside ripping apart an ignorant tourist couple who had stayed out on the streets of Edinburgh after the curfew, she thought Veidt Sr. could have been right about the end of the world.

It hadn't been the Beatles, of course. It had been the Leggers who had been responsible for Armageddon. All the Beatles had done was making a practical joke, probably after having had one joint too many in their studio. So, Helen thought to herself, Paul McCartney had probably sat down and told John that it would be a good idea to have something extra on their next

album.

„You know,“ Paul said, „something that people will laugh about. Don‘t take us so bloody seriously. Some are starting to think we‘re like the second coming or something.“

„You mean we‘re not?“ Ringo asked.

„Shut up, Ringo.“

So they smoked another joint, and perhaps another, before John (in Helen‘ s mind it was always John, he was the head of the group. Ringo was the heart, George the hands and Paul, well Paul was the one she hoped would get into her pants) came up with an idea.

„You know, we could record a whole song backwards.“

Paul asked, „Backwards?“

„Yeah, backwards,“ John replied. „People buy the album, they hear it for the first time, they think we‘ve gone mental. But if they play it backwards, they can hear it.“

Another joint made its round.

„Naw,“ George said. „Too far out, man, even for us. Record company won‘t go for it“

„Course they‘ll go for it,“ Paul snorted. „We‘re the bloody Beatles.“

„Maybe not a whole record,“ Ringo said

„Hm?“ asked John.

„Maybe,“ Ringo explained, „if we just use a line, play it backwards, record it.“

„Hm,“ said John

„Hm,“ said George.

In the meantime, Paul had smoked up a little bit too much. He looked green in the face and burped ominously. After the third burp, Paul threw up all over the studio floor.

„I think I‘m going to die,“ he whispered.

„Paul is dead,“ Ringo said.

„Hm,“ John said.

„Hm,“ George said.

„That‘ s a good idea,“ John said.

Thirty years later, Helen Veidt had stood in a little record shop at the Grass Market in Edinburgh, Scotland, buying the Beatles‘ *White Album* for her son‘ s 16th birthday. At least that‘ s what she told herself when she put down the one hundred pound bill for an LP that looked like it had been to hell and back. Of course Adrian‘ s taste was somewhat different from her own, with his record collection primarily consisting of Marilyn Manson, the Torturers of Pain and Rotting Skullfaces. And there were moments when Helen thought that Armageddon would have to start soon, since her son was as thin as match, dying his hair black and wearing skirts and Chanel make-up. Whenever she thought that, however, she reminded herself of what her father had thought of her taste in music.

Times changed.

„You sure this is the real thing?“ she asked the record shop‘ s clerk, a boy as young as her son, perhaps even younger. He wore a pony-tail and hadn‘t shaved, in the desperate attempt to grow a beard. Two dozen hairs were evenly spread around the boy‘ s chin, placing themselves strategically at the spot where pimples would grow within the next few days.

The boy smelled of sweat of freshly smoked pot.

„This is even better than the real thing, lady,“ he smiled. „You think we would sell the real thing for such a high price?“

„It‘ s not real?“ Helen asked. The boy had already snapped up her money with the swift and perfected moves of a card player. One hundred pounds for a fake, she thought. Fuck.

„Better than that,“ the boy said, „It‘ s surreal, lady,

that's what it is. We got this from one of the people down in London who actually worked at the studio when the Fab Four recorded the album. And you know what? The one that hit the record stores wasn't the real thing. This one is. We legged the original recordings."

Helen frowned. She didn't understand what the boy was talking about. Legged?

"We got bootlegs," the boy explained. "The name of the store, you know? The Leggers. We get you records no one else can. That's why people all over the world come over here. Sold twenty of these babies to the States just yesterday. Retro, lady. It sells. What can I say?"

II.

Outside, the night was creeping up fast. The tourists that had been killed by the demons were only shadows among the garbage that had piled up. Helen was thankful for that. She had seen enough corpses in the last two years since the beginning of the end of the world, starting with her own son. Edinburgh now only had two thirds of its original population, although you wouldn't notice that during the daytime. The Leggers were tricky. Knowing very well that they were too vulnerable with the sunlight still being too strong, they used the skins of the people they had killed to protect them. Of course the skins were already rotting, so they wouldn't look healthy, but when Helen looked at her own reflection in the mirror, neither did she. Most of the people in the city had that greyish colour of someone who didn't trust to come out onto the streets anymore.

Of course, some had been intelligent enough to leave the city when it had all started. Moved to the West to Glasgow, or even down to Manchester or London. And while the people moved out, the army had moved in, with tanks, artillery and planes. The generals had planned to raise some hell. They didn't succeed.

Hell was already here, and it was here to stay. In the second year after the end of the world, The Edinburgh City Council decided to re-start the Festival. By then, of course, the Leggers had come to London, Paris and New York. It didn't really matter anymore where you were. There was no escape. Best to live with it.

Helen turned away from the window. BBC 1 ran a

feature on the Presidential campaign in the United States. Al Gore promised to fight the Leggers with all of the force the American military could muster. Helen wondered if that included nuclear missiles. The current president Clinton had tried that when the Leggers had showed up in San Francisco. The bomb had only changed the kind of hell that had taken over the city.

The radio played the Stones. It had only been Rock and Roll, but they liked it. The Leggers did. Helen nearly laughed. At least Marilyn Manson had only sung about the apocalypse, not caused it.

As suspected, Adrian didn't like her present. Helen, however, had been prepared for that, and had gone from „The Leggers“ to the Virgin Megastore on Princes Street to buy some comparatively cheap Metal and Goth CDs, based on the recommendation she asked for from the staff. So she smiled when Adrian's face turned into a grimace and pretended it had been a set-up from the very beginning.

„The Beatles, Mum?“ her 16-year-old has asked. „Be real.“

Underneath the school uniform, Helen knew, was a T-shirt that spelled out the truth according to Adrian. It stated to everyone who had x-ray eyes that he **FUCKING HATED OASIS!** And that he **DIDN'T THINK THE BEATLES WERE FUCKING WORTH ANYTHING EITHER!**

„I am,“ Helen replied. „That's why I've bought you some of these.“

The CDs hit the spot. Adrian's face brightened up immediately when he recognised some of the albums that she had bought him. He breathed, „Black Candle's first album? Oh, wow. You know how cool they are, Mum?“

„Too cool for me, I guess,“ Helen smiled.

„Too cool for words,“ Adrian replied. But then he

looked up and at his mother. „Not as cool as you, though.“

„You're welcome.“

„You don't mind if I play these tonight? Like, really loud?“

„I'm not that cool, kiddo.“

„Mum...“

Helen sat down with her LP. And now it was officially her album, with the sting of shame gone now that she had spend an additional 45 pounds for CDs that Adrian really liked. She hadn't spend any money on herself for...oh God, she didn't even remember how long it had been since she had used any of her money on herself. It had to have been at least five years, since the divorce that left her almost without a penny.

The Beatles. Better times. Before John, before Adrian. A reminder of a time when the only problem she had was to sneak out of the house without her father noticing. And how to screw with Peter, ah yes, good old Peter, after they had smoked a joint up on Arthur's Seat, with a bottle of cheap Italian wine, some bread, butter and cheese next to them. And John Lennon sang about the Man on the Hill. Helen closed her eyes. Suddenly she felt terribly old. And even those memories, as good as they were, had become faulty and changed with each passing years. She didn't quite remember Peter's eyes anymore, the man she had thought she would spend the rest of her life with when she was her son's age. She didn't quite remember his eyes.

But she would always remember the Beatles. The group had provided the soundtrack for her life. She reached out and slowly pulled the record out of its protective sleeve. For such an old pressing, it looked remarkably good. There were hardly any signs of use on the LP at all, with even the most minute scratches

having been meticulously taken care of.

The original recording, so the boy in the store had told her. Helen placed the needle to the beginning of the record and listened intently. She closed her eyes and tried to measure her memory of the songs against those new versions. The first song finished, the second one came and went, then the third. Helen opened her eyes, disappointed.

Nothing had changed. Until she reached the spot, that spot that had killed her first record she had owned, the first White Album she had bought. It was just a whisper when you played the record the right way, less than a line, but a little bit more than a background noise. And it was almost instantaneously over, before you had the chance to really listen to it.

Daed si Luap. One line, inserted into album, hardly understandable when you tried to play it backwards. Helen knew. Like most of the people she had tried numerous times to listen to this particular line, as if it was some kind of magical chant that needed to be decoded.

Paul is dead.

It had been John Lennon's voice, or so everyone back then had thought. And whether it had been a political statement, the first sign of some unrest in the group or just something that would piss off the proper authorities, nobody had been ever able to find out.

Until now.

A last minute appeal in the case against Sir Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr has been denied today by the High Court," the BBC evening news reported. „Although the three former Beatles maintain their innocence, the High Court didn't find the attorneys for the musicians had provided enough evidence for an appeal. Their White Album has been banned now for more than two years now....“

„First signs of Leggers have been reported in Aberdeen last night, where the demons have first mutilated a schoolgirl and ripped her apart. The schoolgirl, seven-year old Kirstie McLaughlin, was on her way home when she was ferociously attacked....“

„The European Union has tightened border control in order to prevent any further travel in and out of Great Britain. So far, Leggers have been sighted in Paris, Berlin and Rome, but local authorities have reassured the population that they will not allow what they call a 'British situation' on the continent.“

The news, Helen thought, were the same on all of the five channels. Where they had been reports about politics, scandals, crime and car crashes, there was now nothing but new updates on the Leggers situation around the world. The EU was desperate in its attempt to localise the problem, turn into something like the BSE scare at the beginning of the 90s, something that could be regulated by customs and controls.

But Helen knew better. The Leggers were everywhere. All they needed was a door to open for

them, a fool who remembered and played the record the wrong way.

The right way.

The little piece on the record wasn't right. Helen had played the White Album numerous times, and prided themselves to be one of the very few people who could say with certainty that the line that had been inserted by John, Paul, Ringo and George really spelled out „Paul is dead“.

But on this album, the piece was much longer. It sounded like a swarm of bees buzzing, with a cacophony of car crashes in the background providing the rhythm for this strange quire. In fact, none of it seemed to have any resemblance to human voices at all.

Helen's eyes sprung open.

She had a bad taste in her mouth. It was like having kissed the wrong person, something that she knew was forbidden but had somehow still enjoyed. She wanted to stop the record and wanted to hear it again. She needed to know what it was, and for the first time in a long time she longed for something.

„What was that?“ Adrian's voice asked from the other room. Helen's face burned. She almost felt as if she had been spied on touching herself. She tried to relax and breathe in and out calmly to bring down her heart rate.

John Lennon started singing „Back in the USSR.“

„What the FUCK was that?“ Adrian repeated.

„The Beatles,“ Helen replied.

„Cool,“ Adrian said. „Almost techno. Really not bad for the Fart Four.“

How many people had listened to this record all over the world now? Helen wondered when she finally turned off the television. There was nothing but a repeat of Hercules on. There were no new episodes.

The actor playing the lead, some strange American bodybuilder whose name Helen had forgotten, had been one of the first to be killed by the Leggers when they appeared in Los Angeles.

How many people had come to „The Leggers“ and bought records? Old -fashioned LPs, sometimes scratchy, sometimes in perfect condition, all of them somehow better than the original recording the people could have bought when they had been young.

„More than real,“ the boy behind the counter had told her that day, „Surreal.“

Hadn't he looked like one of them? Haggard, with his skin loose over his bones, like an old winter-coat that didn't quite fit him but was made for a slightly bigger person. Hadn't he had some strangely shaped teeth, almost like two or three rows of fangs that looked like somebody had taken a shark's jaw and implanted it into a teenager. And hadn't his eyes been too dark to be human?

In her dreams, when Helen returned to the shop, the boy smiled his shark-smile and greeted her with a politeness that should have been unknown to his generation. He hissed, „We ssssell them to every corner of the world. People want to hear them, all want to know, issssn't that why you have come here, Helen?“

And then he shed his skin, in a move too fast for the eye to follow, and attacked Helen. The claws, she thought didn't hurt. There was a cold sting in her back when they ripped her apart and opened her up as if she was an orange, peeling off her own skin.

„We ssssssell them,“ the Legger hissed when he held her tight in the mockery of a kiss. „We ssssell all of them.“

It wasn't just the Beatles, she knew. The government just needed some kind of culprit, and Paul, George and Ringo had been welcome to serve their time to distract from the real problem. But there had been

records by Jimi Hendrix, the Doors, the Stones, the Who and others that were only yearned for by people above thirty, who still had their old record players at home. It didn't work on CDs, the government had found out. Too late, of course, to stop the epidemic, but at least they had tried. You needed to listen to good old vinyl to make the enchantment complete. Needed to play the old vinyl backwards.

Helen knew.

Paul is dead. Her mind returned to this phrase the night she had bought the record. Paul is dead. If she decided to play the record backwards, she was sure that's what she would hear. She had heard it more than three dozen times before. Paul is dead. Only it was John Lennon who was rotting in an unmarked grave somewhere in upstate New York, while Paul would be reaching his bloody hundred, if he and his wife continued to eat raw veggies and save farm animals from extinction, somewhere down in England. And she was afraid to play the record backwards. The bloody thing had cost her a tenth of her monthly income!

No way she would endanger the condition of this LP in any way.

It would be the one line she knew anyway.

Paul is dead.

Sir Paul McCartney yesterday became the first man to be executed in Great Britain in over a century," David Frost said on television the next morning. It was a Sunday, and the news came in half-hour bursts that were mixed with some seemingly analytical tid-bits that sounded good because they were long enough to sound meaningful to anyone who was up early enough to watch, but short enough to still be understandable. „He maintained until the very end that he was innocent in the case that had been

presented against him and his former co-Beatles Ringo Starr and George Harrison. Both Starr and Harrison are waiting for their death sentences to be executed. We are talking about the new Legger sightings in London this morning with the Prime Minister Tony Blair who joins us from his bunker underneath Downing Street No. 10. Mr, Blair, it's a pleasure to talk to you again.“

The Prime minister looked - as usual - even less human than the Leggers in their human skin. His smile reminded Helen of them, to be honest. She wouldn't have been surprised, if Tony Blair had already started talks with the demons, dealing and wheeling some settlement that would make him look good.

“It's a pleasure to talk to you, David,” Tony Blair said into the eye of a robotic camera that presented the Prime Minister's bunker looking like an old-fashioned library.

“Prime Minister,” David Frost began, “wouldn't you agree that the death penalty was a somewhat extreme form of punishment for somebody who has served this country so often over the years?”

“Well, David,” Tony Blair replied, folding his hands as if to start a prayer. “It was certainly one of the most difficult decisions I have had to face in my time as Prime Minister. I grew up with Beatles songs, and like all of my generations, I have very fond memories of that time. But, and this is something, we mustn't forget, we are still talking about the man who willingly unleashed hell on us. And remember it has been part of New Labour policy that got us elected to do everything necessary to restore order throughout all of Britain. The curfews are only the beginning. We do have to understand David that we are still at war with those creatures. And war will ultimately result in all of us having to make some sacrifices.”

Frost re-adjusted his glasses in a perfectly calculated move that allowed the presenter to glance over his manuscript, before looking up again, addressing both the Prime Minister and the nation. "Talking about this war, Prime Minister, there have been numerous rumours in the press that you have already tried to establish contact with the so-called Leggers in a move to broker some kind of treaty."

Tony Blair smiled his Legger-smile

"It is too early at this moment for me to comment on this, David," he replied. "But you can rest assured that the government is doing everything within its power to bring an end to the current situation."

It had started in her dreams. In those dreams that took her back to her own time, when school was the only constant experience and everything else still remained to be tested, whether it was sex, drugs or Rock and Roll.

Richard Bell had been her boyfriend (and that was how Helen knew that this had to be a dream; in reality, she had never come close enough to Richard to fulfil any of her fantasies), and they had been in her room, listening to records.

They both listened to several of the Beatles releases she had bought with her parents' money, but without their consent, including "Eleanor Rigby", "Paperback Writer" and the "Magical Mystery Tour", before Rich got out his newest addition, something from the Stones. Helen had never particularly liked

them, Mick Jagger always looking a little bit like a shark, with those huge lips and a tongue that lashed out with every syllable as if tried to French Kiss the whole world.

"You got to play it backward to really hear the words," Rich said. "To know what they're meaning." When he put on the record, it immediately played "Paint it Black." Helen leaned back and listened to some of the lyrics, before Rich started to scratch the record. It sounded as if a man would scream in pain when the needle penetrated the vinyl in a way that would sooner or later destroy the LP. "Please to meet you," hummed Rich to the tune. He had leaned back and closed his eyes, moving the needle with the perfection of somebody who had done this countless times before. He smiled. "Hope you'll guess my name."

And when he opened his eyes, they were no longer the colour of a summer sky, the way she remembered them, but glowing in a dark red, and his skin was...wrong. It was as if there was a thinner person underneath that flesh, always being in danger of being drowned in that mass, using all of it as a mask.

The chant continued. It was more real now. Helen's mind didn't distinguish between reality and dream anymore, the borderline had been blurred. Rich quite literally shed his skin and leaped towards her, now reduced to a thin grey body of claws and talons and teeth, oh, so many teeth.

She screamed.

And woke up.

The scream didn't end with the dream, it just changed its tone, Helen realised with terror. Instead of her own, raspy voice it sounded like the high-pitched voice of a teenager whose voice hadn't quite broken.

Adrian!

Her son's voice seemed to climb another few octaves, losing all of its human features and leaving nothing but a guttural testament of fear behind that ended in a horrifyingly wet gurgle that made Helen leap out of her bed.

When she saw Adrian, Rich was standing over her son's corpse and sinking his claws into the boy's back, carefully opening the body as if it was a candy bar still in its wrapping.

"Pleased to meet you," it whispered. And then continued to suck her son's body dry, in a matter of second, until all that remained was the empty shell of Adrian's skin, looking like a ready-made piece of extraordinary clothing – complete with hair, face and eyes. The thing slipped into it with extreme caution and the skills of somebody who had worn other people's skins for a long time, before it looked out of Adrian's eyes, now seemingly cold and reddish. And it was her son's voice, or at least close enough to fool his own mother, that continued the sentence. "Hope you know my name."

Then he leaped out of the window and onto the street. The glass engulfed him in a glistening rain, reflecting the bloody glow of the street lamps. Adrian laughed when he fell down three stories onto cobblestone, knowing that the legs of the thing that occupied him now would be strong enough to withstand the impact.

Her record, the record continued to play. Adrian must have played it. There was a scratch on the spot where it should have said 'Paul is dead'. Adrian must have played it backwards. Helen felt as if she was caught in a tight embrace, before she finally got up the courage to walk over to the window and looked outside. Some of the shards cut into her feet, but she didn't care. She still stood there when the Lothian police picked her up five hours later, looked at the

mess and charged her with murder.

The days were okay now, people said. You could go shopping during the days, could even walk down Princes Street and sit in the park and feed the pigeons, if you wanted to. But hardly anybody did these days. Staying too long out in the open, without moving, would indubitably turn you into a target. Nobody knew how many Leggers were still in Edinburgh. The bloody reign of the past two years could have been the result of perhaps a dozen, perhaps two hundred of those demons. People got paranoid very quickly.

Helen wondered whether the first one was still out there. It wouldn't wear Adrian's skin any more, of course, her son was dead and that mask would have started to rot within a week or two, losing its usefulness to the thing within it. If it were still out there, it would probably look like...

... a housewife, passing on the street, carrying three shopping bags and muttering to herself quietly...

...a tourist, constantly taking pictures and asking others to do the same, with him standing in front of the Scott Monument, the old Scottish Office or the new Scottish parliament...

...the boy at the check-out at Safeways, unshaven and showing off his hormonal imbalance by sprouting half a dozen pimples in places that would prevent him from being kissed by a girl for the next two or three years...

Helen looked down and sped up. There was no use thinking that she would be able to spot it, much less to stop it. All she could do was stay alive and hope for better times.

At least now people knew.

They believed.

She was not crazy.

They had never told her this in her face, no, they

were too clever for that, all those clever psychologists with their ink blots and pills and analytical talks. They used words that Helen didn't know, but that convinced the judges (all of them, and there had been seven, all in all) that Helen Veidt was a danger to herself and to society.

"So you still maintain your story, Mrs. Veidt?" Christopher McKay asked her during one of the sessions, after she had already been convicted of murder and committed to a room somewhere in the basement of hell. Four by four feet and shared with a rat she had named Conolly, Helen looked up at the analyst she had to talk to once a week. "That it wasn't you, but this thing..."

"A Legger," Helen whispered and petted Conolly on the head. The rat looked at the man with a look that betrayed hunger.

McKay re-adjusted his glasses and pretended to look up something in his notebook. "Ah yes, that is what you call this creature, isn't it?"

Helen didn't reply.

"Do you still like to watch television, Helen?"

Helen looked away.

"You don't allow us to watch the telly."

McKay smiled. "No, we don't. Well, at least usually we don't. But I want you to watch something, Helen. I taped it for you. Maybe you can tell me what you think of it. Would you do that for me, Helen?"

When she still didn't respond, McKay turned around and walked over to the 17 inch television he had standing in the back of his office, three stories above hell, with four large Georgian windows and a view to the Forth.

"You tell me what you make of this, okay?"

The VCR started – a quiet buzz somewhere in the cabinet below the television, almost inaudible. The Channel 4 News was on. That's how Helen knew it had to be a recording. It was three in the afternoon,

more than four hours away from the Channel 4 News.

"In Edinburgh, the police is still concerned by what appears to be an almost cult-like following of Helen Veidt, the Murder-Mum, apparently responsible for more than three hundred killings within the past year. The toll might even be higher, if all of the person that went missing in Scotland's capital within the same time period are taken into account."

They had changed the news presenter, Helen thought. The new one was much younger than the one she remembered. She wondered how much in the world outside had changed. But she was afraid she already knew the answer. No, the question was how much would change in the future. Meanwhile, the man on the television screen continued. "The Edinburgh City Council has already considered cancelling the Festival, which would be without precedent in the fifty-four years of its existence. Joining us now from Edinburgh is Inspector Skinner, heading the two-hundred man task force that is trying to stop those murders from spreading even further..."

McKay stopped the recording. Helen's eyes were widened with disbelief.

"Become a celebrity, Helen," he said, "How does that make you feel?"

"I never," Helen began, stopping only to suppress her anger enough to not let it show in her voice, "never killed anybody. Not my son, not anybody else."

"Of course not," McKay replied. "It was the Legger who killed your son, stole his skin and left you behind alive, isn't that right? And that means that all of those other murders now...could they be the work of the same creature?"

"I don't know," Helen whispered.

"Think about it, Helen. Think about what you told the court. A creature that was being called from

hell...”

“I don’t know whether it’s from hell...”

“...from hell, that’s what you said, Helen, I have all of your testimony on paper, so please don’t change your story now, not when we’re making this much progress. This creature from hell is being called when you play the Beatles’ *Whiter Album* backwards. Isn’t that what you have said, Helen?”

Helen turned away. “I’m not crazy.”

McKay looked up from his notebook.

“No, of course you’re not, Helen. But you’re afraid you are, isn’t that true? You’re afraid that you’re a nutcase, because you can see things that others, let’s say people like me cannot. Can drive someone crazy, to know that, can it not?”

McKay went to his desk and reached into a drawer. When Helen could see him again, the psychologist held a white album sleeve in his hand. “That’s why I got this from the evidence storage, Helen. You recognise it? It is the one that belonged to you.”

Helen gasped. “They said they’d destroyed it.”

“No, we can’t destroy evidence. You want to know if you’re crazy, Helen? We can find out, right now. We do what you said would be necessary. See? I even got us an old-fashioned record player. None of those new CD racks, no...”

McKay carefully placed the record onto the record player. “We even have security cameras in this room, so this time there will be witnesses, regardless of what will be happening to us. Look up, Helen. Can you see the cameras? Oh, I’m sure you’ve noticed

them before.”

“Don’t,” Helen whispered.

“You’re not crazy,” said McKay. “Or are you? Don’t you want to find out?”

“Don’t”, Helen repeated.

The Beatles started to sing, and memories came flooding back to her, shattered fragments of the night Adrian died, feelings and thoughts and the fear she had felt when she had heard his scream. Helen felt her eyes welling up.

McKay stopped the record and carefully began to move it counter-clockwise. John’s voice turned into the dark voice of a stranger on the phone, all the words mixed up. It was the right spot, she knew. Oh God, how she knew.

And then the chant began.

And McKay could hear it. For those few seconds he felt the same fear. Helen could see it on his face. Those voices were something that nobody should have been allowed to hear. And in that moment Helen wished she was indeed crazy.

And then it was all over.

McKay released the record and the next song started.

“You see?” he said calmly. “Nothing happened.”

It was then that the *Legger* appeared, straight out of the record, thin and almost two-dimensional, a thin line that was hardly visible until he stuck it stuck its claws into McKay’s back, in the same way she had seen it before with her son. Helen started to scream. McKay’s eyes widened with shock and the pain while the *Legger* ate him, took the skin and ran out of the room, free at last, free at last.

The cameras continued to record everything.
No, she was not crazy.

The next time the record had been played it had been in a laboratory that was sealed up and surrounded by a SAS special task force. The Legger that appeared killed two of the soldiers before they could catch it and started their experiments. By that time, Helen had been released from the mental institution and Edinburgh had been placed under quarantine by the Tory government. Helen talked to several people, both in the government and in the military. She had even met Tony Blair when he was still in his office at Downing Street 10 and not in the bunker below. The Prime Minister had apologised for the treatment she had received.

“You must admit, Mrs. Veidt,” he had said while one of his aides had offered her a cup of tea, “that this whole thing is difficult to believe. I still have a hard time believing it myself, and I have seen on of those creatures.”

“I’m not crazy,” Helen said and drank her tea.

“Sometimes, Mrs. Veidt, and I hope you don’t take that personally” the Prime Minister said, “But sometimes I wish you were.”

They had offered her some money and a job in London, but Helen chose to return to Edinburgh, even if that meant that she had to be placed under quarantine with the rest of them. She didn’t mind. Her new prison was infinitesimally bigger than the ones she had spent most of the past year in. And it was still there, the one that had killed Adrian. She knew it.

All she had to do was wait. She sometimes thought she could see it on Queens Street, close to the Gardens. It was an illusion, of course, and one that she had learned to live with. The others in Edinburgh, of course, knew her. The first couple of weeks Helen

had to rely on police protection to do her shopping, her phone number wasn’t listed, and the name on the buzzer of her flat wasn’t hers, but with time, the threats stopped and the looks became, if not friendly then at least indifferent.

“The Leggers” had been closed and boarded up, the records taken out of their racks and destroyed. People all around the United Kingdom had begun to burn their old LPs and singles. The stench of burning vinyl filled the air almost constantly for another few weeks, after the government’s announcement. None of those measures, of course, could stop the Leggers. They were here, and they were here to stay.

Helen woke up and turned on the television. The telly, an old and therefore cheap set from the late 1970s had become her only source of information in this brave new world: instantaneous and accessible from your home, without the danger of having to go outside and getting killed.

She hadn’t left her flat in more than two weeks. Used dishes were piling up in the sink, and the stench of rotting canned meat and baked beans had become one of the other constants in her life. The morning news reported that the rationing would have to be tightened up again. There was more news about Legger sightings: Manchester, Birmingham and Newcastle.

Somebody rang the buzzer. Helen continued to stare at the television. The buzzer rang again and again, until it turned into a continuous buzz that superseded all of the other sounds in her flat.

“Coming,” she whispered. It was broad daylight. She was safe, she told herself. They didn’t like to be out in broad daylight.

But when she opened the door, Adrian waited for her in the hallway. Helen smiled. Her son returned the smile. He had become much thinner than she

remembered him and he smelled funny, but that could have been just her imagination. And when he smiled, he revealed several rows of teeth.

“You’ve grown,” Helen said.