

The Watchers

An Autobiography
of Monumental Proportions

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*Dedicated to John Wood,
without whom this book
would have been considerably delayed.*

CHAPTER ONE

To go over this story again is difficult. I have gone over it my mind a thousand times. I've explained it to numerous doctors, councillors and Community Psychiatric Nurses. I have explained it to friends, whose tired expressions of dutiful patience still haunts me a little, as they have now passed on. Suicides mainly. Not many people see mental illness as a terminal condition, when the method of death involves taking your own life, but it is assured in some cases that given a certain degree of severity from the outset some sufferers are destined to die sooner or later, by their own hand. That sounds pretty terminal to me.

So where, when and how it all began is where every story should begin. But the fact is there were many beginnings and very few real conclusions. I would argue that this is normal. This is where life and fiction are different. Life is messy, random and impossible to pin down. Fiction is structured and planned, with a beginning, middle and an end. I actually thought at times that my life could be structured in this way, because my life reflected fiction. My life had so many elements that I could see in films, music, history and literature that it should be like a piece of historical fiction. I suggested that perhaps films have an element of prediction in them, that their archetypes were saying something about some future king, who would once and for all sort out all the problems of the earth, and the people on it and other creatures. But this wasn't to be. After all this time and bitter experience I am succeeding in my quest to normalise my life again. Get back to core values and work on my future, rather than the future of mankind. But I would argue that such a person, with a history of visions and nightmares and epiphanies of such intensity and realism, is in fact destined for greater things. A kind of Churchillian sense of destiny has followed me since I was a small child of four or

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five. But so far the world is disinterested in such claims, and my efforts have gone largely unnoticed. What is a worse fate than a future king with no kingdom, no subjects, no trembling councillors to shout at and cast into oblivion for telling me the truth about my own inadequacies? No, I am a solitary king. Master of none, and overseer of nothing but the darn washing up and the desperate search for something to do to pass the time. The torture of the comfy chair; the tyranny of structurelessness and boredom.

The beginning was to all intents and purposes a revelation of such blissful and yet painful realisation of destiny, that I can barely recall it without getting the hairs on the back of my neck standing up. I have a churning stomach in anticipation of retelling these events again. The human experience would be a lesser thing without this tale, even though many have experienced it over the centuries. I have never seen a rendition of it on television, in a film or a book. I often wonder why not. Perhaps most that experience it are too terrified to relive it? Or more likely they have taken their own lives on the come down, because after the high there are horrific lows. Maybe their doctors have given them such fearful amounts of medication that they have not got the concentration needed to get it all down on paper? Or maybe no agent or publisher has ever been brave enough to take it on? Overall it is worth printing and is definitely worth reading, as every human being should know some of what I know, for their own sakes. If not that of their loved ones, because it may well hold the secret to survival. Survival from what you may ask? If you look around the world I think now more than ever you will see a world threatening our survival. It is these things that became so important in psychosis, almost immediately.

Do you remember the good old days when the mentally ill were a complete enigma to us? When they rounded up all the mentally ill and put them in big asylums with all their needs taken care of. They had swimming pools, barbers, canteens and sprung floored ballrooms. They even had hectares of land to roam and were never seen again, as they lived out their lives protected from the world inside their own mini societies, within their own grand Victorian buildings. In those days we

imaged they were locked up in a castle on top of a hill surrounded by mist. Inside they would be wrapped in a straight jacket and chained to wall in a padded cell. That their ramblings were haphazard words and actions determined by cycles of the moon. It would come as no surprise to you that given this backdrop, at the age of twenty-one when I suddenly became psychotic, I had no clue what was happening to me. It crept up on me like a very large mugger, who would spring out of the shadows and rob me at knife point. The long black shadows of his overcoat would consume me and make me disappear from view. And it consumed me completely. I realised that I was destined for greatness. That I was the Messiah. Mind you, I didn't know who the Messiah was. I'd never referred to Jesus Christ as the Messiah before. All I remember from Religious Education and tri-annual visits to the local church as a child, was not wanting to be there and not wanting to listen to any of the information I had been given. Because to me God did not exist and neither did Jesus or any of the prophets. I was an atheist. In fact I was a devout, card carrying, evangelical atheist, who would revel in winding up Christians about their faith. I enjoyed having two generations of my family's devout atheism and all the counter arguments against religion that had been passed down from my grandfather, to my mother to me. And let me put this knowledge in context. My grandfather was and is one of the most intelligent people I've ever met. He'd really thought it through. He knew the Bible as well as anyone. So it was a lifetime of argument, study and rational thought that had been carefully passed down to me via my mother that had informed me and had dictated the accuracy of my opinions. I blasted the Christians at school and any others I met along the way, with this unchallengeable argument. Imagine my surprise then, to find out I was the Second Coming of Christ. I hadn't believed in my own existence. It would be have been funny if it hadn't have been so painful.

That first night I had a visit from two friends who were responding to an ongoing personal crisis. I had become the focus of attention for my best friend's pregnant girlfriend – Samantha; a woman he wanted to marry and I wanted to

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avoid. It was a very unfortunate position to be in. Not only had I resisted her attention, but I had also failed miserably to communicate with her about it. I just couldn't get the words out. My feelings were split straight down the middle. On the one hand I wanted to be a faithful and reliable friend, with a moral compass. Someone who just didn't have affairs. But on the other hand, I had never met anyone before or since with whom I had such a deep connection. Someone who understood me and someone I shared a life story with. We were both from large families. We were both from broken families. We both looked after our mothers when things went wrong and we were both set adrift into adulthood afterwards. We even had similar tastes in music and the same sense of humour. One time we were talking and realised that we would both notice abstract things, that a friend or relative would have lost, and for some inexplicable reason we had noticed this item earlier, made a mental note of where it was, then recalled it at will later when someone began frantically searching for it. Such a strange idiosyncratic trait that we shared. But it was more than that. I felt she was like a long lost sister. A twin, separated at birth. We made each other laugh and knew how to comfort each other.

That night my friends turned up with one purpose in mind. To hurt me. Gabriel and Aaron. Gabriel was my very temporary closest friend. Someone I had considered to have been very good to me. Someone who had offered me some respect, as if I deserved it. And Aaron. I hadn't been keen on this guy, and I think the feeling was mutual. A real trouble maker, but Gabriel's oldest friend.

Maybe they had a change of heart that night, but it seemed as if they had come round to do some serious harm to me physically and on the night they couldn't go through with it. This is of course speculation. But as if to disturb me further, they knocked on my front door at precisely twelve midnight. I looked at the clock and smiled to myself. I knew why they had come round. I knew what to expect. I crept down the long corridor that ran over half the length of my flat and for some barmy inexplicable reason I opened the door to them. I wished I hadn't.

I called through the door 'Who is it?'

'It's Gabs. Open the door'.

'What do you want?' I asked.

'You know what I want.' He replied. 'It's all right we're not going to hurt you. We just want to talk,' Gabriel said.

I heard Aaron say, 'Open the door Ben,' in the background. As I opened the door Gabriel grabbed me by the throat and pushed me backwards into the hall. I pushed back, pushing him to the threshold of the front door. He held my head down, and I pleaded with his friend to call him off. Then he pushed me into the flat again and up against the wall. He dug his nails into my skin and then let go. In a plaintiff whiny voice, I asked what he was doing. Why was he doing this to me? After all I had tried to do the right thing and he knew it. They'd had some Dutch courage at the pub, because I could smell it on their breath. But I was already ill by this point. I was in no fit state to fight off these formidable assailants. Both of these lads had a reputation for violence. I did not. Aaron punched me sharply in the mouth. I then looked down at my bike next to me. And Aaron looked down at the bike as well. It occurred to me that this guy had been beaten up in a church yard with a bike a few years back. He'd never forgotten it. I remember him telling me when we first met. Having seen enough he turned on his heels.

Gabriel said 'Stay away from my woman', like some Neanderthal. I knew him well enough to know that he wasn't a Neanderthal. But never the less, I immediately rang Sam and told her what had happened expecting her to be shocked and angry. But this wasn't the case. She had probably endorsed it in some way. She certainly knew what was going to happen to me that was for sure. I put the phone down and sat on my big yellow sofa. I switched on my hi-fi and put on 'In the Air Tonight', by Phil Collins which matched my state of mind some how. I lit a candle and switched off all the lights and sat there. I said to myself that I would play all my Phil Collins albums in a Phil Collins marathon and stay up all night. But instead I heard something in that music that terrified me. Something hidden, mysterious and apocalyptic. And I mean that in both senses of the word. Not just 'end of the world'

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apocalyptic, but 'hidden meanings' apocalyptic. A huge storm cloud; a shadow had crept over the world that night. There was trouble on the way. A nuclear holocaust perhaps? And the drum solo at the end said it all. But there was more in that song. Something very personal and painful, but ultimately false. My first delusion was to believe that when I fell from a first floor window as a small child that someone had done it deliberately. Someone had tried to murder me. Perhaps my father or my older brother? The lyrics said 'I was there when I saw what you did, I saw it with my own eyes'. The candle lit room; the darkness that seem to slip away into the flat like a bottomless pit, as if suspended in space where light never penetrated, I opened my mouth as far as it would stretch, and I wailed and wailed, as if the entire world could hear me scream. And I believed they could. I believed that the media had discovered a new exciting global character. A Biblical character come to life in the twentieth century. A real Christ. Imagine that. Imagine if that were true and I was the second coming of Christ and that the great battle of Armageddon was imminent? Something had eaten me alive over my lifetime and to feel this way must have been due to some catastrophic event in my childhood. And of course falling from a window at eighteen months old was the only thing that was there. The major event that changed my life. It must have been attempted murder. I mean falling in an accident just wasn't dramatic enough for a new psychotic.

I knew then that music was tapping into something that was hidden. A message for me personally. That all this stuff had hidden messages that would guide me as I began a lifelong battle to wrestle sanity back from the world. A world that had stolen my life from me. A couple that had torn me in two. A triangle that had sent me into the most bizarre and frightening loss of reality, a severe and damaging nervous breakdown and descent into schizophrenia. And then imagine how the world would react. The global media would erupt into a frenzy, travelling from every corner of the globe to my front door. The British government would be under siege from the other governments of the world. The Middle East, the Americans, the Russians, the Chinese. Imagine the hardware

that would set off from their ports and airports that night to descend on Great Britain. Imagine the telephone calls, the frantic diplomacy that would have to take place. The sleepless nights at the Foreign Office and the Prime Ministers Office. The demands to know what was happening, who I was, what I was going to say, what I was going to do, who was really behind it. Was I really a Russian spy? Was I a plant of some shadowy conspiracy group? What did it mean? Who was going to gain in power, who was going to lose power? Who was going to manage my affairs? All these questions would have to be answered immediately and comprehensively. One thing was for sure. John Major would have to impose a blanket ban on any media reports of my identity and whereabouts. And every government on earth would have to follow suit. What would it mean now and in the future? How would it affect the global balance of power? How it would affect the stock markets and multilateral relationships? How would it affect global trade and so on? Right at that moment, just in my head and no where else, satellites were shifting in their orbits. Secret military intelligence were setting up sophisticated monitoring equipment in my home and Foreign Office diplomats from around the globe had booked themselves on the first available red eye flight to London to arrive the following morning. From now on, Ben was the Christ, the UK was Christ's base of operations, and the worlds governments wanted, if at all possible to wrestle control from the Brits, and own whatever and whoever I was. And that's where I have stayed ever since. Locked in this fantasy world, with the media watching me, and worlds governments watching me, and the worlds most powerful businessmen and women watching me and the worlds most powerful film and music stars watching me and me, watching me. And maybe even God – if He exists. What an almighty mess. But the mess had only just started to get complicated and dangerous. This was only the beginning. From a scale of one to a hundred I had barely reached ten on a Richter scale of nightmarish apocalyptic danger, dragging every military and civilian power broker racing to his computer or television screen on a minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day basis. Staying up for three nights in a row, or

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four nights in a row, so that they did not miss a single second of this unfolding drama. I would from now on, make powerful iron willed men tremble. I will from now on, bring the world to the very brink of destruction and all out war. I will create and witness miracles and will cry like I had never cried before or since. I will shout at the walls. I will influence and maybe even drive government policy all over the world. I will influence, influential people. I will choose who wins an Oscar. I will inspire a thousand works of fiction and ten thousand items of news. And will suffer so badly that I would pray for an early death every day for the rest of my miserable life. I would stand out in the open hoping someone would assassinate me and put me out of my misery. But it wasn't to be. I am still alive despite my efforts to smoke myself to death. Unfortunately I was strong enough to endure. And strong enough to figure out that this was all complete madness. Insanity, with structure, meaning and direction, but insanity never the less. So come with me and I'll show you just what the human mind is capable of. The economies of scale that will blow your mind. What miracles the human mind can create. What great feats it can achieve almost effortlessly. What mind bending truths; apocalypses (revelations if you will), might unfold if you read on to the end. Believe me as this rollercoaster of a ride, switches from ugly self destruction to beautiful and wondrous events in the blink of an eye, you will be amazed and you may wonder whether it is the truth.