

PASS THE PARCEL
BY
PHILIP TURNER



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When Nicki and Jeff Jenner arrived at their country retreat with Guy Duggleby, armed men were waiting for them. They deduced that their mutual friend Toby Ryun had been using Jeff's name at the gambling tables again – his usual ploy for changing his luck.

Guy recruited Bob Kane to look into the matter. The two friends soon found themselves caught up in a scramble to retrieve a handful of forged US dollars before premature disclosure ruined a scheme to unload \$2 million in forged notes across Europe.

The hunt for Toby took Guy and Bob to the South of France and a sudden death in their hotel room. They soon found themselves involved in a private battle between the French police and a US Treasury Department agent, an abduction and a struggle to remove the threats of violence to their friends by reaching a deal with the forgers.

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The Savage Jaw

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The author asserts his moral right of identification.

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Thought For The Times

Made wary by imposters,
men look for something wrong
even in the righteous.

from the 5th Century *Panchatantra* tales,
trans. Franklin Edgerton.

1. Misguided Intruders

Beyond the splash of the headlights, the night was an all-absorbing velvet shroud. Flat, Kentish farmland sprawled out beyond the concrete and wire fences on both sides of the minor road. Guy Duggleby had followed the route south from Ashford countless times in his thirty-five years, but he never felt confident about locating the turn-off for Horton Grand. The village's signpost had succumbed to the combined forces of wet rot and a gale fifteen years before and it had not been replaced.

Guy knew that he had to look out for some trees on the left but he could never remember whether he wanted the first or the second clump. It was one of those annoying pieces of vital information that refuse to stick in the memory. If he took the wrong turning, he would make a fool of himself. One of the two roads petered out in a field – at a strategic point on a shallow hill at which the ground no longer became boggy after heavy rain.

Guy followed the cat's eyes round a sweeping left-hand curve. In the distance, he could see a billowing, darker shape against the clear, star-filled sky. Decision time was approaching at forty-five miles per hour.

"Have they got round to putting up a sign for you yet?" he passed casually over his left shoulder to his passengers.

"Not for us," replied Jeff Jenner. "The local authority reckons it can't afford one – even though they've shoved the rates up again."

"The farmer's put one up, though," added Nicki, Jeff's wife. "After he got up one morning and found three caravans parked by the stream."

"Gypsies?" said Guy.

"Holiday-makers," replied Nicki. "They were quite indignant when he told them to move on."

"Not very politely," chuckled Jeff.

"In the end, he had to call the police to frighten them away when they threatened to chuck him in the stream," finished Nicki. "They seemed to think his farm was open to the public because he's got what looks like a bit of public road rather than a muddy track."

"Cheeky sods!" laughed Guy.

He had allowed his speed to slacken gradually during the brief conversation. The first stand of a dozen trees raced up to them. Guy's headlights picked out a large sign.

Neat letters, drawn a foot high in white paint, informed him that there was *NO UNAUTHORIZED ENTRY* to Higher Gilbert's Farm.

Problem solved, thought Guy.

He made a mental note to include a figure '2' somewhere on the Jaguar's dashboard. Perhaps a neat engraving in the walnut facing would do the job.

"Last lap," he added aloud as he made the correct left turn into a narrower lane, which ran between straggling hedges.

The Jenners' country retreat lay a mile and a quarter further on through an even deeper gloom.

"Home for half ten," remarked Jeff, glancing at the dashboard clock. "Think we ought to keep this chauffeur on, love?"

"He's crashed seven cars that we know about," Nicki pointed out. "I don't fancy being in number eight."

"You can always get out and walk any time you feel like it," said Guy, contriving to sound hurt.

"Knowing you, you wouldn't stop first," laughed Nicki.

Guy made two right turns among the lane's routine snaking. The lane crossed a mediaeval stone bridge with an incongruous weight restriction sign. Nothing big enough to threaten it seemed likely to be able to negotiate the approaches.

Beyond the narrow ribbon of black, slow-moving water were modern bungalows with roofs of green slate. Half-timbered houses crouched irregularly in a double line at the heart of the village. Guy turned right again at the pub, heading towards Dorn Wood. Grey stones, turned a murky shade of yellow by the widely-spaced street lights, took over as the building material of choice.

"Are you for coffee?" asked Jeff as Guy drifted to a halt at the Jenners' wrought-iron gate. "If you've got any room left after that huge meal we had."

"I had plenty of time to digest it at the cinema," said Guy. "And it might help to keep me awake."

"Sure you don't want to stay the night?" invited Nicki. "It won't take a minute to make up the spare bed."

"Thanks anyway, but I think I'll sneak up on the family," Guy decided. "I can manage another thirty-nine miles. You go on. I'll catch you up. I just want to take a look at the exhaust. I think your road bashed it a couple of times."

"I'll put the kettle on," said Nicki.

"About time you got yourself a new car," added Jeff.

"Sure!" scoffed Guy. He was a roving representative of his family's light engineering business and he liked to divide his life into periods of work and periods of pleasure in order to devote his full attention to the task in hand. Thus he assigned eight or nine months of the year to the concentrated slog of drumming up a year's work for the small factory.

After necessary office work, he devoted the rest to spending his commission and pursuing other interests. The comfort and familiarity of his ageing Jaguar helped to ease him through the many thousands of miles on motorways and lesser roads.

Leaving their friend shining a torch at the underside of his car, the Jenners clicked through the garden gate and hurried five yards to their country front door. It was a chilly evening towards the end of a wet spring. A sense of wrongness tugged at Jeff as soon as he had opened the door. His fingers travelled automatically to the switch. The hall light made the couple blink.

There was a man on the staircase, sitting on the third step – a man with a gun, which was pointing at the Jenners with an unwavering aim. Jeff and Nicki came to an uncertain halt just beyond the doormat.

“Keep coming,” invited the man with the gun. He seemed quite young to the Jenners, perhaps ten years younger than their early thirties, and he spoke with an unconcerned air of absolute authority. “Kitchen.” The gun twitched to the youngster’s left.

He meant the room which the Jenners called their living room. The kitchen proper was to be found beyond the door in the coral-strand wallpaper.

“What’s your game?” asked Jeff, letting his voice rise as if out of control but hoping to warn Guy.

He left the front door ajar, instead of closed to as he would normally do, as another signal that all was not well. Jeff led Nicki down the hall, trying to keep his body between the gun and his wife. The weapon looked very unwieldy and off-balance with its long, black, sound suppressor. Someone else switched on the living room light.

“Just get in here and don’t screw us around,” said an older voice with an American accent.

The Jenners turned to see two men standing by the chest of drawers, both in their forties and well dressed. The youngster with the gun could manage only fashionable. The chalk stripes on his washed-out blue suit looked strangely distorted, as if the garment had been designed by Victor Vasarely.

“Jeff!” gasped Nicki Jenner, her mouth falling open.

A gentle tornado had caressed the room. Every drawer and cupboard gaped, but their contents had not been tipped out.

One of the intruders was short and wide, and he had a black moustache, which formed a sinister pencil line along his full top lip. The Jenners took in jet black hair and bushy eyebrows, which met above his nose. He was the American. He was holding a pair of dark blue passports.

“Who are you?” demanded his companion, a man with a long, thin

face, taking his hand away from the light switch. He was the tallest person in the room. His accent belonged to the London area, like the youngster's.

Jeff Jenner opened his mouth; then closed it again, thrown off balance by a totally unreasonable question. "More to the point," he managed then he had collected his thoughts, "who the bloody hell are you and that are you doing here?" *And what's Guy doing?* he asked himself.

"We're asking the questions," said the youngster curtly, stepping into the room. His gun robbed the words of their unconscious Gestapo humour.

"Your wallet," said the thin-faced man. "And the handbag."

Jeff surrendered his dark brown notecase, reaching slowly and carefully into his heavy tweed jacket. It was not a time for heroics or non-co-operation. The intruder tucked Nicki's handbag under his arm and went through the wallet, looking at credit cards, a cheque card, the blood donor's certificate book and an old identity card issued to go with a travel season ticket. Jeff had retained it because it could offer a photograph to anyone who doubted his identity. Nicki's handbag and her wallet received a similar scrutiny.

"He's Jeff Jenner all right," said the Londoner.

"That's what these say," nodded the American with the moustache, tapping the passports.

"But he can't be. He looks nothing like him," continued the Londoner. "He's not tall enough. And his hair's lighter. What are you doing here?"

"We live here!" insisted Nicki.

"Not according to your driver's licence," said the Londoner.

"We live there too," said Nicki, referring to their flat in London.

"Rich bastards," said the youngster with the gun. It was just an observation. There was no emotion in his voice. Jeff Jenner felt cold suddenly, colder than the unoccupied chill of the house.

"When's the last time you were in France?" said the stocky American, looking through one of the passports.

Jeff exchanged glances with his wife, who shook her head. The tense atmosphere in the room did not promote clear thought.

"Six months ago?" said Jeff. "The beginning of last December."

"That's right," confirmed the American.

"They must know him," decided the Londoner. "If he gave this place as his address."

"Know who?" asked Jeff.

"Shall I unload this shotgun, or that?" called Guy Duggleby's well-bred voice from the front door.

The youngster in the strange, chalk-striped suit spun round to cover

the living room door with his unwieldy silenced pistol.

"You jerk!" said the American in a soft snarl. "Out!"

The tactical withdrawal through the kitchen and then the back door went off swiftly and smoothly, as if well rehearsed. Suddenly, the uninvited guests were no longer there. Jeff and Nicki Jenner just stood and stared at the kitchen door as it swung closed under the influence of gravity and a little subsidence.

"Have they gone?" said Guy, poking his head into the room. "You two had better sit down. You look positively bleached."

The Jenners drifted over to the settee and sat down, looking bewildered. Guy carried on across the living room and disappeared into the kitchen. The back door closed and a solid bolt slid into its socket with a reassuring thump. His face set in a thoughtful expression, Guy returned to pour out three generous measures of brandy. Three damp glasses and a whisky bottle out of its appointed piece told him that the visitors had also been sampling the Jenners' hospitality.

"They got clean away, which is probably best for all concerned," said Guy, distributing glasses. "Here, get outside of this."

"How are you doing?" Jeff asked his wife.

"I've just about got over the shock," said Nicki with a thin smile. "Anyone have any idea who they were?"

"We might have found out if Guy hadn't frightened them away with his imaginary shotgun," said Jeff.

"Want me to run after them and tell them it was all a joke?" suggested Guy as he pushed into the kitchen to put the kettle on for their coffee.

"Not tonight," said Nicki.

"Did you get a look at them?" called Jeff.

"No one I know," called Guy. "And I had a bloody good look at them through the gap in the curtains before I saw them off. That shotgun wasn't really loaded, by the way."

"What's the point of imagining an unloaded shotgun?" demanded Nicki.

"You know Guy, he'd rather bluff you than hold a winning hand," said Jeff.

Guy decided not to mention the neat, .25 calibre automatic pistol in his jacket pocket – a trophy from a trip to the United States. He had been indulging in some target practice at a quiet spot on his way home. Jeff's warning had sent him to the Jaguar's dashboard to retrieve the weapon.

"Do you think you could manage sketches of those three?" he called as he spooned ground coffee into the filtering device taking extra care not to spill the dark grains onto the worktop.

"I don't see why not." Nicki handed her glass to Jeff and crossed the

living room to the chest of drawers in search of a sketch pad and charcoal drawing sticks. Having located her drawing materials, she carried on round the room until she had closed every other drawer and cupboard door. "There doesn't seem to be anything missing," she added to Jeff.

"They say you feel violated after a burglary," he observed. "But this looks like they were looking for something in their own home. Nothing smashed up."

"You're like the tart, JJ," Guy called from the kitchen. "Didn't know she'd been raped till the cheque bounced. I should have a look upstairs before you relax."

The Jenners left the room at a trot. They returned a few minutes later, looking relieved. The house was small, just two up, two down and the bathroom extension tacked on to the back. Checking for losses took very little time. Guy was sitting at the dining table, adding milk from a bottle to a steaming cup of filtered coffee. Two more cups, a bowl of sugar and an open tin of shortbread fingers had also arrived from the kitchen.

"If they did take anything, it's something we won't miss in a hurry," said Nicki. "You should have let me do that," she added when she noticed the cups.

"You're supposed to be making some sketches," Guy reminded her. "While we try and make some sense of this."

The Jenners joined him at the table. Nicki slid an ashtray over to Guy. His hosts had been moderate smokers until the great parenthood fiasco. Having taken in all the propaganda about the effects of smoking on an unborn child, Nicki had decided to break the habit before becoming pregnant. Jeff had been shamed into following her example.

They had given Nature every chance to take advantage of the situation for three years. Then they had concluded that one of them was infertile. Prolonged failure had dulled the urge to found a dynasty by then. They had not bothered to find out if their suspicion was correct, and if it was, which was infertile. But the great effort had not been entirely wasted. Neither had backslid into the ranks of smokers.

Guy lit a long, thin cigar and took a notebook from the right inside pocket of his jacket. He believed in thinking on paper at the start of a problem. "Right, what have we got? Three men. If you locked up properly here, one of them knows a bit about burglary."

"Which means he's either a crook or a spy," said Nicki, sketching busily.

"Or a locksmith, or an associate of crooks like an ex-copper, or someone in the security business, or someone who's taken the Open University course in case he locks himself out of his house," listed Guy.

"The two older blokes, they look as if they've been around a bit. And their clothes suggested they're used to quite a bit of money. The young lad seemed to know how to handle the gun. And himself. Could be ex-army. And having him along proved Adolph and Bertie don't like getting their hands dirty."

"Which one has the moustache?" chuckled Nicki.

"It'll have to be Adolph, Bertie's too English for a Yank." said Jeff.

"Which makes the young one something beginning with C. Claud." Nicki added name-labels to her sketches.

"I take it you didn't dash over to the phone box out there and scream for the police?" said Jeff, making a statement out of his question. "And we're not going to now?"

Guy shrugged. "I don't see much point. They'll be well away from here by now. And there's only evidence of identification to put them here. Juries tend to want a bit more than that after all these TV programmes that prove a dozen witnesses will give you twelve different versions of an accident."

"Fingerprints," said Nicki. "Theirs should be all over the place. We can't have messed up all of them with ours."

"Didn't you notice they were all wearing gloves?" Guy asked her with a smile.

"No," said Nicki, surprised.

"Light-coloured supermarket washing-up gloves."

"One of them was smoking," said Jeff. "I caught a whiff of it as soon as I opened the front door. I've only just realized what it was."

"Was it some obscure and exotic tobacco?" said Guy. "Which you could recognize in a smell test like some latter-day Sherlock Holmes?"

"Just an average cigarette, I think."

"So there's no point in looking for ash to turn over to a real Sherlock Holmes-type expert on the subject? And what could the police charge them with anyway? They didn't break anything and there's only our word they entered the place. They'll have hidden the shooting iron. And they didn't try to rob you, or blackmail you or even threaten you."

"And they shoved off before we found out that they wanted," added Jeff. "Not really worth getting the local bobby out of bed."

"But there's no reason why we shouldn't follow up their visit," said Guy. "We've got three nice pictures. And the number of their car."

"How did you get that?" frowned Nicki.

"There was a dark green Land Rover parked down the lane. About ten years old, but they were built to last. I took a little look around before I made my dramatic entrance. That was probably what I heard driving off as I bolted the back door."

"I didn't hear it," said Jeff.

"Me neither," added Nicki.

"You two would make lousy witnesses," chuckled Guy. "You didn't even notice their gloves."

"There was a bloke pointing a gun at us," protested Jeff.

"I know," smiled Guy. "That's why he was there. All you were supposed to see was his gun."

"What about these, then?" Nicki slid her sketches across the table.

"That's there they were a little unlucky," Guy admitted. "They didn't know one of you is a trained observer. But I bet you couldn't tell me that colour shoes any of them was wearing. All you saw was their faces."

Nicki Jenner creased her tanned features into a fierce scowl of concentration, then she had to admit that Guy was right. "Even so," she added, "we know that they look like, the sound of their voices and the number of their car. That must prove beyond any reasonable doubt they were here. If I were a copper, I'd arrest them on that evidence and worry about that to charge them with later."

"The next thing we have to consider is why they were here," said Guy, moving to the next item on his notebook agenda.

"They wanted Jeff," said Nicki, darting an uncertain glance at her husband. "But then they didn't."

"Unravel that for me," invited Guy. "I didn't hear too much of what was said."

"They were looking for someone called Jeff Jenner," Nicki said slowly. "But he's taller than Jeff, and his hair's darker – no, lighter."

"And he's just been to France," added her husband.

"And who does that sound like?" asked Guy.

"Bloody Toby!" said the Jenners together.

"Toby Ryun up to his old tricks again," nodded Guy. "Pretending to be Jeff again. And making quite a good job of it."

"What's he got himself into now?" wondered Jeff.

"It must be something to do with gambling," said Guy. "He reckons using your name is a sort of good luck charm that ends a losing streak. And Adolph and Bertie could be professional gamblers. They look like fairly successful ones, too. I wonder if Toby's been helping his luck a little?"

"You think he might have got in over his head?" said Nicki with a worried frown. "He's a bit of an idiot at times, but he wouldn't cheat if it's serious."

"I can't really see him getting into that sort of trouble," said Guy. "He usually plays with what he can afford to lose. Which is pretty heavy gravy, by anyone's standards."

"And he's got his old man to pick up the pieces if he hits a really bad streak," added Jeff.

"So what are we going to do?" asked Nicki.

"I'll do some digging," decided Guy. "See if I can't find out who your visitors are. I should be able to do something with their car number. I know a bloke who knows a copper. And once we know where to ask, we should be able to see if anyone recognises Nicki's excellent portraits. You haven't signed them, love."

"I don't want anyone finding out who drew them," retorted Nicki. "You don't think they'll be back in the morning, do you, Guy?"

"I doubt it. They'll be streaking off somewhere to an alibi. Finding no trace of Toby here will have confused them somewhat. And they'll expect the police to be lurking about."

"But they won't be?" said Jeff.

"You can call them if you want," said Guy. "Don't let me stop you. But it might be an idea to find out what Toby's been up to first. And you might be dropping yourselves into trouble."

"Us!" protested Nicki.

"Stop and think a minute," grinned Guy. "It's a pretty thin story. Armed men dropping in to ask you about someone impersonating Jeff. The police are bound to think you know a lot more than you're telling. And have you down the station. To make statements on the face of it, to give you the third degree when they've got you trapped."

"Yeah, I wouldn't put that past them," said Jeff. "They're a bloody suspicious lot. But then, they're paid to be."

"Right!" Guy drained his cup and pushed the drawings back across the table. "Give those a spray with that fixer stuff to stop them smearing and I'll be pushing on. It'll probably take most of the morning to go through my latest batch of orders with my esteemed relatives. Then I'll head back to the big city. That's where we'll find all the answers."

"What about phoning Toby and asking him what he's been up to?" suggested Nicki.

"You can try it," said Guy. "I shouldn't expect too much success, though."

"All right, I will." Nicki went into the hall to use the telephone.

"I think we'll move back to town," Jeff said to Guy. "We're a bit out of the way here if more of Toby's friends call. I'd like a chat with him myself. To warn him the next time he calls himself Jeff Jenner, he's going to get a bloody good thumping. If not from his pals, then from me."

"You'll have to catch up with him first," chuckled Guy. "I'm willing to bet he's strolling around somewhere, blissfully ignorant of all the fuss he's caused. If you're worried at all," he added in a lower tone, "I can put you up at the family pile for the night."

"Thanks for the offer," murmured Jeff. "But as you said, they're not

likely to be back in a hurry. Not if they think they have to establish a decent alibi. And I don't want to worry Nicki unduly. Any luck?" he added as his wife returned.

"Not much," Nicki rejoined them at to the table. "The porter at his block of flats said Mr. Ryun is out with his cousin Belinda. Which means Toby's disappeared off somewhere and he doesn't know where or for how long."

"Oh, well," said Guy. "I'll drop round at your place in town tomorrow evening with whatever news I have."

"Come for dinner," suggested Nicki.

"Thanks, I will," Guy told her with a smile. He thought very highly of Nicki's cooking. "Any particular time?"

"Half six for a quarter to seven kick off," said Jeff firmly. "If you're late and you find me dead of hunger, you'll be expected to chip in for the funeral expenses."

"I'll get one of the lads in the workshop to knock you out a nice set of brass handles, JJ," grinned Guy. "See you tomorrow. Make sure you lock up properly. Ah, thanks, love."

Guy took charge of the preservative-sprayed sketches, which Nicki had rolled up into a relay-race baton. Jeff escorted their guest to the front door. As Guy's car moved off into the night, he set the deadlock and slotted a bolt into place, then he added the chain for good measure. Then he made a tour of the ground-floor windows, making sure that the catches were locked and beginning to wish that they had invested in shutters.

"You're sure we're doing the right thing, not calling the police?" said Nicki from the doorway as her husband checked the kitchen. She felt more comfortable with Jeff in sight.

Jeff shrugged. "There's not much to show them now. No signs of forced entry. We've closed all the drawers and cupboards. And Guy's gone. That wouldn't please them too much, a witness dashing off without talking to them. No, all they could do is thrash about a bit, which wouldn't get them very far. And that wouldn't put them in a very good mood at this time of night."

"It's that they're paid for."

"And as Guy said, we might be dropping Toby into even more trouble than he's already in."

"I can't see Toby getting mixed up in anything crooked. Except by pure accident."

"If you're really worried, I can still phone them."

"Perhaps if we lock up so they can't get in without breaking something. And sleep with the phone extension under the pillow."

"That should do it," nodded Jeff. "But as Guy said, they'll have shot

off to establish an alibi, just in case they need one. And they're bound to assume this place will be crawling with cops for ages . . ."

"Assuming we've done what normal people would do in the circumstances," Nicki finished. "Like call the police. We should have borrowed Guy's imaginary shotgun."

"Not if the place is crawling with imaginary cops," laughed Jeff.

Contrary to expectation, the intruders did not streak off too far. Billy Kemp, the young bodyguard, drove for ten minutes at a respectable pace then he pulled in to the side of the road half a mile beyond the village of Newston.

"This okay?" he asked. "There's no one following us."

"Never thought there would be," said Lucky Cotton, the long-faced Londoner. He reached up and switched on the Land Rover's interior light. "Well, what do you make of that?" he added, turning half round in his seat to look at his partner, who was sprawled on the right rear bench seat. As Guy Duggleby had deduced, they were indeed professional gamblers.

"I reckon we're looking for a wise guy," growled Rolf Weinbaum, scratching an itch at the corner of his mouth, just beyond the end of his slimline moustache. He had spent six months of his forty-three years in and around New York and he had returned home with the accent. "But we've got to get that green stuff back. And quick. Before that son of a bitch tries to spend any of it."

"Those two have got to know him," decided Cotton.

"If he knows the address of their place right down to the postcode, damn right they do," agreed Weinbaum.

"We should have asked at the hotel. Did he have a proper passport or was he using one of those sixty-hour identity cards? Anyone can get one of those. All you need is a photo of yourself and a bit of cheek."

"We could have asked that lot who he is," said Billy Kemp in his usual emotionless voice. "That other geezer wouldn't have used his shotgun with the woman there. Bloody hell, he wouldn't have used it anyway. It's okay blasting bunnies and birds, but doing a bloke's something else."

"Well, anyway," said Cotton. "I reckon we've done a bit of good. What would you do if some bum borrows your name and gets the likes of us chasing after you?"

"Kick his head in," growled Weinbaum between puffs at a squat, green cigar. His name was as genuine as his accent. He had borrowed it from a New York pool hustler.

"Right," nodded Cotton with a thin smile. "They won't phone him, they'll want to see him. Maybe not to kick his head in, but definitely to

have a go at him face-to-face for dropping them in dead lumber.”

“So?” grunted Weinbaum.

“So it’s late. And it’ll be later by the time they get rid of the blue-bottles. They won’t be doing anything tonight. But if we tickle them up in the morning, they should go running straight to the bloke with the green stuff. All we have to do is follow them and collect.”

“It’s not that easy to follow someone with only one motor,” observed Kemp. “What if they spot us? And phone nine double nine?”

Billy Kemp was not afraid to chip in to the conversation when he thought that he could make a useful contribution. He was young, fit and hard, and a former soldier. A bullying corporal had gone too far once too often with his personal brand of harassment.

Kemp had spent some time in the glasshouse before his dishonourable discharge. The corporal had spent roughly the same length of time in hospital. As well as an expert marksman, Kemp was a graduate with honours from his unarmed combat courses.

“What we need in an electronic assist,” said Weinbaum, taking advantage of his North American orientation. “If we bug their car, we won’t have to stay on top of it.”

“I know a bloke. Back in the Smoke,” Kemp volunteered.

“The same bloke that taught you to do locks?” said Cotton.

“Right,” nodded Kemp. “He’s a sort of private eye. He can hire us a magnetic transmitter to stick on their car and a direction-finding receiver. He’s got a load of stuff like that.”

“Okay then,” said Cotton. “You get the bug and the other thing and we’ll get back here early. And follow them to their pal.”

“Early?” groaned Weinbaum. “Mornings and me don’t mix.”

“If we don’t get that green stuff back, you could be seeing every morning for a long time to come,” said Cotton. “They kick you out of bed very early in Wormwood Scrubs. That’s if Scotty and Jobbo don’t catch up with us first.”

“I know, I know,” groaned Weinbaum. “If they find out we’ve been borrowing their loot, we might end up propping up the daisies.” He liked to distort slang phrases to reinforce his American accent with apparent unfamiliarity with English usage.

“That’s something to take seriously,” cautioned Cotton. “That Jobbo’s a bloody mad sod. Doesn’t know his own strength. And they’ve put a lot of time and money into their scheme. If we screw it up for them, they’re going to come looking for us . . . What do the Yanks call it?”

“Loaded for bear,” supplied Weinbaum. “What about him?” He aimed a thumb towards the driver’s seat. “Our one-man army corps?”

Billy Kemp shrugged. “There’s only one of me. And I have to sleep sometime. If this Jobbo bloke’s going to have a go at you, the odds are

on his side. He can chose where and when he makes his move. In five minutes or five weeks. Day or night.”

“Knowing bloody Jobbo, it’ll be five seconds,” interrupted Cotton.

“Okay, let’s lose the negative mental attitude,” said Weinbaum. “All we have to do is do a good job tomorrow and we’re in the clear.”

2. Playing Tag

Jeff Jenner was not an early riser by nature, despite his wife's best efforts to create the habit. It was not unknown for him to open his eyes at half-past seven and find himself well rested and wide awake, but he usually closed them again and slept on for a further hour.

In the greenish gloom of the larger bedroom of their country retreat, the events of the previous night came flooding back. He glanced at his wife automatically. Nicki was still curled up and fast asleep. Jeff slid carefully out of the bed and dressed quickly.

Feeling a bit of an idiot, he sneaked into the other bedroom, which served as Nicki's cluttered studio, and eased open one of the drawers of an ancient chest.

Tucked away at the back, out of range of a casual burrow in the junk, was a flick-knife. It was a souvenir from a holiday in Spain – bought more as a toy and an interesting curio than as a weapon. Sharpening pencils had dulled the blade but it still looked suitably menacing.

Jeff tucked it firmly into his right palm and rested his thumb on the trigger button. The knife was one of the sort that fires the blade through a 180° arc from the handle to the open and locked position. He made a mental note not to close his fingers over the handle until he had released the blade.

As he checked the windows, Jeff's mind churned through the standard flick-knife debate – was it better to carry the weapon with the blade out, ready for use, or should he reserve the sudden appearance of four inches of slightly blunt stainless steel to surprise an intruder and thereby gain a small advantage. The latter, he decided. If the intruders were armed, they might shoot on sight at a man with a knife, just to be on the safe side.

He had wedged or balanced slivers of matchstick at strategic points on all of the doors and all but one of the windows. Nothing bigger than a rat could crawl through the louvred window of the bathroom, and the glass panes could not be removed to allow an arm to reach for the catch, which was locked anyway. His markers would not keep intruders out, but they would provide a useful warning to beware or to phone the police – if the intruders were hiding in the cellar, if they gave him time to dial, if they had not cut the phone wires . . .

That's enough of that! Jeff Jenner cut short his catalogue of potential crises.

Neither of the bedroom windows had been disturbed. Jeff sneaked downstairs. Each of the ground-floor matches was still in place. Chuckling softly in self-mockery tinged with a little relief, he tucked the flick-knife into his pocket. He put the kettle on a low light and carried on to the bathroom extension. He was feeling quite comfortable, but he knew that by the time a wash and shave had woken his skin and a cup of tea had roused his digestive system, he would be ready for breakfast.

"Who chucked you out of bed?" laughed his wife's voice as Jeff was transferring bacon to a plate in the oven. The grill pan clanked as he twitched in surprise.

"That you creeping up on me again?" he complained.

A chair scraped on the lino behind him and Nicki's voice deepened into a sinister chuckle. "What's for breakfast?" she added, having cleared a path to the bathroom.

"Stuff," said Jeff unhelpfully.

Nicki gave him a good-morning kiss in passing to tell him that a husband who made the breakfast was both clever and considerate, and he could have the job for life if he wanted it.

Two men were watching his house from the edge of Down Wood as Jeff Jenner poured out the last of the tea in the large pot. A slight undulation in the furlong of flattened grass and sprouting bushes hid the ground floor of the house. Billy Kemp had climbed to a perch at a fork in a dead elm tree and he was peering through a pair of binoculars.

"They've just about finished their breakfast now," he reported. "I wouldn't kick *her* out of bed."

"Hmm!" grunted Rolf Weinbaum, who saw no point in discussing the merits of unavailable women. He had tried to convince himself that the morning was just a better lit development of the previous night but he still felt heavy and out of place. His body functioned best between noon and about four or five o'clock in the morning, and it could not be fooled into accepting seven-fifty a.m. as any sort of acceptable time to awake, never mind out and about.

"Are we getting back to the car, then?" suggested Kemp.

"Yeah, okay," growled Weinbaum.

The Land Rover had been parked ten minutes' walk away for the best part of an hour and a half. Billy Kemp had had no qualms about slipping through a day that was just an hour old to plant the hired electronic tracking device on the Jenners' car. The ex-soldier had a sixth sense, which warned him whenever he was under observation.

He could slip smoothly across open ground, pausing to become a shapeless hump when a casual glance was turned in his direction, and knowing by instinct when it was safe to continue. His talent had not

been put to the test so early on that particular Thursday morning, but he had scouted the area thoroughly before approaching the house, just in case some tired copper was waiting in ambush.

Cotton and Weinbaum had been switching the receiver on at intervals to assure themselves that the cheeping transmitter was still sending out its pulses. And then a restless Weinbaum had set off along the path at the edge of Down Wood to find out what, if anything, was happening at the Jenner house. He and Kemp had arrived in time to see the wife drawing back the bedroom curtains.

Heavy rain had fallen in the night. Billy Kemp had been sensible enough to wear waterproof, tree-climbing outer garments. Rolf Weinbaum's pale biscuit-coloured suit acquired a further dusting of dark, wet spots as he and Kemp retraced the rambling track at the fringe of the wood.

"They're up," said Weinbaum as they bounced into the back of the vehicle.

"Having their breakfast," added Kemp.

"We'll give them a few more minutes to sort themselves out," decided Lucky Cotton. "Then you can phone them."

"I'm phoning them?" said Weinbaum.

"I reckon your Yank accent ought to get them thinking about gangsters and stir them up a bit," grinned Cotton. "Are we having some coffee?"

Billy Kemp took the hint and unscrewed the cap of a large vacuum flask. Weinbaum fortified black coffee with half an inch of *Canadian Club*. His companions settled for milk and sugar. They half-listened to the *Today* programme on Radio Four, each leaving it to the others to start a conversation.

Eventually, Cotton drained his cup and nodded to Kemp, who started the engine and drove up the road to a crossing. There was a telephone box beside the signpost. Weinbaum heaved himself through the Land Rover's rear door and reached into his trouser pocket for change.

When a ringing noise began, Nicki Jenner glanced at her husband but made no move to leave the table. "Phone," she remarked to no one in particular.

"It's all right. Don't strain yourself," said Jeff with false solicitude. "I'll get it." He pushed through into the hall and perched on the chair beside the coat rack. "Hello?" he said cautiously, deciding against giving his number to the caller – who, presumably, knew it anyway.

"Remember me, Jenner?" hissed an American snarl. "A certain hotel in the south of France? It wasn't too smart ducking out like that. Some friends of mine want to talk to you. They'll be there in a couple of

hours. Get smart, pal. Stay put. You won't like what happens if you get them any madder."

Before Jeff could say anything, he heard a loud click. Then the telephone began to purr into his ear.

"Who was it?" asked Nicki as he returned to the kitchen. "Jeff?" she added sharply, catching her husband's thoughtful frown.

"A Yank. Something about a hotel in the south of France. Toby's play-mates are coming here for a word with him. If we don't stay to talk to them, they're going to get even madder."

"They're not going to be too pleased when they find he isn't here. We're not staying, I hope?"

"I certainly don't fancy the idea," Jeff admitted. "But where do we go now? If we go back to town, they'll find us there. I don't think they'll actually try anything physical at first, but they'll keep pestering us. I'd better phone Guy."

The Duggleby family home was a country house set in five acres of grounds. It was two hundred years old and stood on the outskirts of Failsham, in Sussex. The first owner had acquired his wealth just too late for the personal services of Capability Brown, but the grounds had been designed by one of the expert's disciples. It had been considered a triumph of man's mastery over Nature for a long time. Now, some experts cited it as a prime example of the destruction of a natural landscape by an owner with more money than sense – or good taste.

Guy's maternal grandfather had decided at the age of thirteen that he was going to become rich enough to be able to live in Wilmington House. The motoring boom of the Twenties and Thirties, the demands of a country at war again and the same ambition in Guy's father had driven them to expand their specialist engineering business until the company had been able to take Wilmington House off the hands of its impoverished owners. Allen-Duggleby, Ltd. had acquired its new headquarters in the year of the foundation of the National Health Service.

Brian Allen had retired the following year at the age of sixty-six, having achieved his life's ambition. He had enjoyed the life of a country squire at the big house for five years, leaving the running of the business to his son-in-law. Peter Duggleby had fathered two sons and two daughters, all of whom had joined the family business after university and worked their way up from the bottom on a merit basis. Their father believed that an understanding of a business can be achieved only by trying a variety of the jobs involved. He also refused to carry passengers, even if they were family.

Guy had a talent for selling and he loved to travel. He was not the sort who can settle into a nine-to-five job with four weeks' holiday on

top of national holidays. Fortunately, his relatives were prepared to allow him to set a target for orders, work all hours until he had filled that portion of the company's capacity, and then disappear for up to a month to recover.

Two business flats had been split off from the top floor of the east wing of Wilmington House. Guy lived in one of them when he was in the area. His sister Joan occupied the other. The twins, Tom and Mary, were both married and had set up homes in Failsham. The rest of the family lived in the west wing. The centre of the house had become offices and larger rooms for meetings and conferences.

On that Thursday morning, Guy had reached a peak in his sleep cycle. He was very close to wakening when a double ringing pushed him to the brink. Without opening his eyes, he stretched out an arm to his bedside cabinet. "Ah, yes?" he grunted into the receiver.

"Is that Guy? Or a camel with a hangover?" asked a vaguely familiar voice.

"It's the middle of the night. How the hell should I know?" Guy protested sleepily.

"It's gone eight," laughed Jeff Jenner. "Listen, are you awake yet?"

"Listen to what? Or am I supposed to be able to hear something?" returned Guy, being awkward.

"I had a threatening phone call just now," said Jeff, plunging to the heart of the matter. "From a Yank. Something about Toby ducking out of a hotel in the south of France and annoying some pals of his. He said they're coming to talk to us. They'll be here in a couple of hours and we're to stay put till they arrive."

"Ah!" said Guy significantly.

"So that do we do?"

"Evaporate. Bloody quick."

"But where? They'll find our place in town easily enough."

"I suppose you can camp at my place to save you a hotel bill. As long as you promise to keep your sticky mitts off my best wine."

"Thanks, Guy. What about the blokes on their way here?"

"I should have a word with that woman on your left. Mrs. Marney. Mention, very casually, you saw some suspicious characters hanging around last night. Ask her to keep an eye on the place in case they nick the family silver. Make a joke out of it. Those Yanks won't dare get up to much with her twitching her curtains next door."

"That's a good idea," approved Jeff.

"Not bad for the middle of the night. I really don't think you have anything to worry about."

"That's that I keep telling Nicki."

"And trying to believe yourself?" chuckled Guy. "I'll be at the flat in

time for that dinner you promised me. So you can tell your dear wife she's not getting out of it. Any other little problems you want solved?"

"Well . . .," drawled Jeff.

"Give me another ring when I'm properly awake. Cheers, JJ," Guy reached out and dropped the receiver back into place. Then he squirmed back into the shelter of his duvet and waited for sleep to overtake him again.

"Did you get all that?" Jeff Jenner asked his wife, who was sitting on his lap with her head against his in order to hear Guy Duggleby's contribution to the conversation.

"I'll have a word with Mrs. Marney while you pack," said Nicki. "With any luck, I won't be gone more than half an hour."

Joyce Marney had a tendency to go on and on about obscure aspects of life in Horton Grand, and to report in great detail on triumphs and tragedies in the lives of people whom the Jenners knew vaguely or not at all.

"I know, I'll take her some of those strawberries," added Nicki, providing herself with an excuse to call on their neighbour. Not that one was needed – Mrs. Marney was glad of a chat at any hour of the day. "I'll tell her you bought far too many."

"I can't trust my hubby to buy anything," said Jeff in a high-pitched whine. "He goes absolutely mad when I give him a shopping bag. Send him out for half a pound of mince and he comes back with a frozen side of beef. And then he tells me how much we've saved . . ."

"If that wasn't absolutely true, I'd laugh," said Nicki as she headed for the kitchen.

Lucky Cotton stifled a yawn. Rolf Weinbaum was slumped along one of the rear seats of the Land Rover, snoring gently. Only their one-man army and driver, Billy Kemp, was alert and watching the monitoring device for the bug stuck to the Jenners' car.

The receiver was the size of a miniature cassette recorder. A red light glowed to show that it was switched on. The needle of a dial in the upper half hovered at about the centre mark, indicating that the transmitter lay directly behind the Land Rover. There was also an audio signal, but it had been turned down at Rolf Weinbaum's request. Its monotonous bleeping had been getting on his nerves.

"I think they're on the road now," Kemp warned when he noticed a deflection of the needle.

"About time," yawned Cotton. He reached over to flick the switch below the dial.

The cheeping of the audio signal was strengthening to warn them that the Jenners' car was approaching their position. Billy Kemp started the

Land Rover and moved up to the crossroads. He waited at the signpost, pretending to consult a map, until the Jenners had swept across his bows. He turned left to follow the red Rover. The quarry had rounded a bend and moved out of sight, but the small transmitter continued to report its position.

"Are we going at bloody last?" rasped Weinbaum from the rear seat.

"You can't have scared them as much as you thought," chuckled Cotton. "They'll be on their way in five minutes, you said. Forty-five minutes, more like. That's ten quid you owe me."

"Screw you," muttered Weinbaum. "Wake me up for lunch."

"Don't you want a bet on where they're going?"

"It's obvious," yawned Weinbaum.

"Where do you reckon they're heading, Mr Cotton?" asked their driver.

Cotton shrugged. "Could be anywhere. Could somewhere local, could be miles away."

"London," grunted Weinbaum.

"Aha! The oracle speaks," chuckled Cotton. "Want that ten quid you owe me on that?"

"Twenty. I might as well make a profit on the deal," said Weinbaum.

"Now will you shut the hell up and let a guy grab some sleep?"

"You're a proper charmer in the morning," laughed Cotton. "Twenty quid on London, then?"

"Hang on, what's your side of the bet?"

"I reckon the man's local. The other Jeff Jenner."

"In that case, I say they go more than fifty miles. Twenty quid on that. Okay?"

"Okay, I'll buy that."

Billy Kemp allowed himself a faint smile. His employers were always making bets but he had never seen any money change hands. They either kept a mental account or they forgot the score at the end of each day.

Mile after mile slipped by. Kemp held the Land Rover between half and three-quarters of a mile behind the Jenners. There was one awkward moment then he swept round a corner to find the gates of a level crossing closing in front of him. Lucky Cotton cursed individually each of the fifty-six wagons that made up the goods train.

The weakening audio signal reached a feeble mutter, then it faded completely. After reaching the stop on the left, the needle flicked back to the centre of the directional dial and remained there. Urged on by Cotton, Kemp shot across the lines as soon as the barrier had lifted clear of the car. Three minutes of hard driving later, the needle drifted to the left and the cheeping of the audio signal began again.

The small convoy reached Lewisham. "Have we done fifty miles yet?" asked Rolf Weinbaum. "We're been going for hours."

"At least," confirmed the driver.

"Heh, heh!" chuckled Weinbaum, coming back to life. He rubbed delicately at the inside corners of his eyes with his index fingers. "Time for lunch yet?"

"It's only just gone ten," replied Cotton.

"The number of quids you owe me," remarked Weinbaum.

Billy Kemp moved closer to the Jenners' red Rover. He had been warned that the transmitter's signal would fall off in built-up areas. The procession travelled through New Cross, Camberwell and Kennington, across the Thames at Vauxhall Bridge and roughly westwards.

"Jeff," said Nicki Jenner as they reached Victoria Street.

"Hmm?" invited her husband.

"We're being followed."

"Oh, yeah?" chuckled Jeff.

"No, really, we are. That green Land Rover's been two or three cars behind us for the last ten minutes."

"Maybe they're just going in the same general direction."

"Maybe they're following us," insisted Nicki.

"Okay, let's find out." Jeff flicked his indicator switch and turned left, towards the coach station.

The car behind him continued straight on. A taxi turned left to follow them – and so did the Land Rover. Jeff turned right, towards Belgravia. The Land Rover was held up for a few moments by the traffic, but it also turned right.

"Well?" demanded Nicki, both worried and triumphant.

"Even if you're paranoid," admitted her husband, "they can still be after you."

"What are we going to do about it?"

"We can try to lose them."

"This isn't America. If we try racing them, we'll either hit something or get arrested."

"So we do something subtle," said Jeff, watching the green shape in his mirror. "Have you got your seat belt fastened?"

"Yes, of course." Nicki checked the magnetic buckle. "Jeff, what are you going to do?"

"Nothing drastic," chuckled Jeff.

He drifted down to a traffic light, then amber-gambled an abrupt left turn. The Rover shot along a length of empty street, then turned right. Jeff took the third turning on the left, went right again, and turned left finally onto the King's Road.

He made as much speed as possible into Chelsea, then he headed

north, aiming for Guy Duggleby's corner of Kensington Gardens.

"Well?" he remarked to his wife. "Anything illegal or drastic?"

"Aren't you clever?" beamed Nicki in mock admiration. She turned round in her seat and scanned the road behind them. "I think you really have lost them."

"Now we'll get to Guy's place as fast as possible without attracting the law."

"Do you think they've been following us all the way from Horton Grand?" frowned Nicki. "No, they can't have. We'd have spotted them sooner. Wouldn't we?"

"We came along some pretty empty stretches of road. Anyone following us would have stuck out like a sore thumb."

"In that case, how did they get onto us?"

Jeff shrugged. "If it's them and they really were following us, there's probably some very reasonable explanation."

"Right," mocked Nicki. "All we have to do is think of it."

Half a mile away, Lucky Cotton thumped. the monitor for the transmitter stuck to the Jenners' car. The red light continued to burn, proving that the batteries in the receiver had not run down. A vague chirrup emerged from the device, but the needle of the directional dial remained obstinately at the mid-point of the scale, no matter which way the receiver was turned.

"The bastard! He's got away," muttered Cotton.

"So much for your bloody bug," snarled Weinbaum.

Billy Kemp shrugged. "It's the buildings. Like I said, they're blocking the signal. Like I said, you have to stay close in town."

"He must have spotted us," decided Cotton.

"My private eye mate reckons you need six vehicles to do a proper job of following someone without getting spotted," offered Kemp. "Different sorts of vans as well as cars."

"You're a big help!" snarled Weinbaum.

"So what now, Mr. Cotton?" asked Kemp.

"About all we can do is go to their place, wait for them to come home and ask them where they've been," Cotton decided. "Stop at that phone box over there. I'll know their address when I see it again."

"Maybe we can get a drink? And something to eat?" suggested Weinbaum, finding a bright side to the disaster.

3. Lost And Found

As Guy Duggleby had anticipated, he spent the whole morning discussing his latest batch of orders with his relatives, who formed the management team of Allen-Duggleby, and with the members of the workforce who would be involved.

Most of the orders were fairly routine, well within the capabilities of all concerned, but Guy had a talent for spotting unusual applications of the processes and techniques that the firm could offer. As well as selling the services of the company to customers, he had also to assure his colleagues that he was not dumping an impossible or uneconomical job into their collective laps.

The meeting in the conference room opposite the main work-shop broke up towards half-past twelve. Guy bashed together a sheaf of papers and pushed them over to his secretary, making a symbolic gesture out of the movement. He had been on the road for a month. He intended to take at least a week away from work to recover.

He was just about to make a dash for his flat, having checked through the paperwork in his office, when a large hand dropped onto his shoulder in an arresting manner. Big brother Tom had trapped him. Guy stifled a groan unborn and forced his moderately handsome features into a carefully neutral expression. Biting back a grin, his secretary retreated into her own office.

Tom Duggleby was two years older than Guy but his looks and attitudes suggested a much wider gap. He was the equal of his brother's six feet in height, but broader and more solidly built than Guy. His sandy hair had retreated to mid-crown. Guy's much darker hair was also sneaking back – but much more slowly.

Tom's preference for a conventional three-piece suit added to the image of a prosperous businessman in early middle-age. He felt as undressed without his jacket as Guy felt over-dressed wearing one indoors. Tom looked as if he might insist on creases in his pyjamas. His younger brother cultivated an air of casual but elegant comfort, which suggested that he owned a wardrobe of formal clothes but that the particular occasion did not warrant opening it.

"You have been busy, young Guy," said Tom in what would have seemed an annoyingly patronizing tone to an outsider or anyone other than his brother. Guy was used to the gruff, semi-embarrassment of his elder brother's compliments.

"Flogged myself to a pale shadow," agreed Guy. "Which is why I'm off to relax," he added pointedly, softening the blow with, "ulcers and heart attacks are for mugs."

"We were hoping to see a little more of you," suggested Tom. "The kids have been asking about their Uncle Guy." He had two teenage girls, thanks to an early marriage.

Guy shrugged. "They might even get lucky. But I have a little something to take care of first."

"We were hoping to have a family get-together at the weekend," Tom persisted. "I know mother would like you to be there."

Guy stifled another groan. The familiar weapons of persuasion were being trotted out one by one. First, his nieces. Then, their (Tom's and his) mother. And if the ladies of the family had no effect on the shameless renegade, then there would be the woman of mystery – his sister Mary's latest attempt at match-making.

"Mary's bringing one of her friends from the archery club," Tom added, blissfully unaware that he was following an entirely predictable pattern. He nudged Guy with a matey elbow. "Quite a cracker. Almost makes me wish I were single for the weekend."

"I'm afraid I may have to forego the pleasure," returned Guy with token regret. "My something just won't wait."

"Why, what are you up to?" asked his brother in a jocular tone. "Chasing some woman? Is she more important than your family?"

"Oh, no!" said Guy firmly. "I'm not telling you. I don't need any of my big brother's help."

"To do what?" asked Tom, edging towards sounding hurt.

"I don't need a helping hand from someone who's landed me in more hot water than soft Mick. If I breathe one word of what I'm up to, you'll be off making a nuisance of yourself, checking up on me to satisfy your curiosity. And dropping me in it at the same time," Guy added rebelliously.

"You should give a little more thought to your family," preached Tom. "You should be thinking of settling down a bit instead of getting yourself into trouble."

"I really don't have time to discuss this," said Guy, bringing the inquisition to a halt. "I'll see you when I see you. And why do you always assume I'm going to end up in trouble?"

He hurried away, leaving his brother struggling for more ammunition. Tom was an organizer. His plans ensured that work flowed smoothly and efficiently through the engineering works, but he also attempted to apply his undoubted talents to the family's affairs. The others had learned that it was easier to go along with the irresistible force of Tom's arrangements, but Guy was a rebel by nature – and by inclination when

Tom attempted to organize him. Guy disliked making firm plans for his leisure. He saw an invitation to a family gathering at the weekend as a nail pinning down a part of a flexible future. Yet the more he said no, the more Tom used the family as a blunt instrument of persuasion.

Guy was on good terms with everyone, and he had no objections to a good party, but having his immediate family, plus a few satellites from the neighbourhood, looking on and willing him to accept Mary's latest match was a bit too much.

Guy made his way to the car park at a purposeful stroll, nodding and calling greetings to the men taking an open air lunch on the grass beside the main workshop. He had started his working life as 'Young Mister Guy' to the older employees, and very much the boss's son. His contemporaries had viewed him as a whizz kid with a soft and well-paid job. But as the recession had started to bite in the area and jobs had started to disappear at other firms, the workforce had learned to appreciate the true worth of someone who kept the order books full and jobs secure. His irregular appearances were taken as good omens for the future.

Guy's car was a C-registration Jaguar, which had been preserved in near-perfect condition by careful maintenance and replacement. He liked to have plenty of room to spread out on his business trips. The trusty Jaguar had covered more than eight hundred thousand miles, half of them with Guy at the wheel, and it seemed likely to achieve the round million, given the car's famed *grace, space and pace*.

The security guard at the gate touched the peak of his uniform cap and raised the barrier as the silver Jaguar purred up to his cabin. Guy lifted a hand in acknowledgement and swept along the left-hand filter lane. Five minutes later, he reached the gates of Wilmington House. He parked in the long, matching stone garage and hurried up to his second-floor flat.

Pack some things, he told himself, starting a mental list as he poured himself a glass of dry sherry. *Do something about lunch. And phone Jeff and Nicki*. Freezing the list in his memory, he took his glass over to the telephone. He had to pause to think before carrying out the unfamiliar task of keying the number of his own flat in Kensington.

"Mr Duggleby's residence," said Jeff Jenner in his best butler voice when the ringing stopped.

"So you got there all right?" said Guy.

"Ah, it's you. Yes," confirmed Jeff. "There was someone following us when we got to town. But we lost them."

"Screaming tyres, the wrong way down one-way streets and generally terrifying half London?"

"Amber gambling and sneaky snaking," laughed Jeff.

"How did Nicki take all this?"

"Quite well, actually. She was the one who spotted the tail in the first place."

"I've always said she's wasted on a thickhead like you," laughed Guy, not taking the story too seriously. "Well, I've sorted out everything at this end. And I'm on the run from my dear brother at the moment. He's planning some sort of family occasion at the weekend. And Mary's inviting one of her chums from the archery club for my benefit."

"That sounds like fun."

"Doesn't it just? Anyway, I'll be in town in about a couple of hours. And home for about half-six for that dinner your charming wife promised me."

"She's doing a bit of stock-taking at the moment. Exploring your freezer, and so on."

"If you're short of anything, send out for it. There's a list of people who deliver in my phone companion. We don't want anyone finding out where you are now. It's a hell of a job, getting blood out of carpets."

"You cheerful sod!" laughed Jeff.

"Just trying to keep your spirits up," chuckled Guy. A confident *tap-tap tap* at his door drew his eyes across the sitting room. "Someone's breaking in on me," he added. "See you tonight, JJ." He replaced the receiver, then called, "It's open if you shove it."

Joan, the baby of the family, limped into her brother's flat and headed for the sherry. She had inherited her mother's auburn hair and slight build, and her untroubled outlook on life. Carrying a well-filled glass, she crossed to the telephone alcove and lowered herself onto the semi-circular bench.

"Hello, Bundle," Guy said with a smile of welcome. "Dad said you'd sprained your ankle to get off work for a few days. How did you manage it?"

"I was going backwards and someone put a wall in the way," said Joan with a wry smile.

"Should you be walking around on it?"

"Probably not. But it's all wrapped up so I can't move it. And it doesn't really hurt."

"Not with half a bottle of my sherry inside you."

"It's all that keeps me going, your sherry," said Joan, giving him a brave smile – which quickly developed into an impish grin. "Been ambushed yet?"

Guy replied with a dark chuckle. "Not half! Who've they fixed you up with?"

"I said I was bringing someone." Joan was approaching her thirtieth birthday without showing signs of getting married, much to the disgust

of the family's matchmakers. "I thought I might ask Bob."

"Just to annoy Tom?" laughed Guy. "I'll see if I can get him back in time."

"Are you roping him in to one of your expeditions?" groaned his sister.

"I may need a bit of a hand," Guy admitted. "This one's a little out of the ordinary. An alleged mutual friend has landed two more friends in a hot spot. It may get a little involved."

"You'd better not tell me any more. If dear brother Tom finds out I know something, he'll get the thumbscrews out."

"It's amazing how you put up with some people just because they have the same mother and father as you. What are you doing about lunch, Bundle?"

"You mean if I'm cooking. It's as easy to do it for two?"

"If you can manage it before you become plastered on my sherry. And your foot will stand it."

"I might just manage a bacon and egg sandwich."

"And can I borrow your car, seeing you're in no fit condition to drive? It's a bit less conspicuous than my Jag."

"If you break it, you'll have to buy me another one."

"Why do people keep accusing me of writing cars off?" Guy asked himself. "Nicki Jenner was at it last night."

"Because you keep doing it," laughed Joan. "And always, funnily enough, only to ones you've borrowed."

Lucky Cotton, Rolf Weinbaum and Billy Kemp had been camping in a pub car park for two and a half hours. The landlord had been keeping a suspicious eye on them. He had not been able to work out whether they were waiting for someone or up to no good. But he had done very well out of them in terms of bottles of lager, Scotch whisky, half pints of bitter for the lad and pub grub. He was prepared to let them spend the whole afternoon in his car park as long as they behaved themselves and kept buying.

The Land Rover was parked less than two hundred yards from the Jenners' flat in Sedan Place in Bayswater. Every fifteen or twenty minutes, one of the trio had switched on the receiver to check for a signal from the bug attached to the Jenners car. After an initial twitch, the needle of the direction meter had always returned to the middle of the dial and remained obstinately there, and the audio signal had refused to cheep.

As the waiting fuelled Cotton and Weinbaum's frustration, their quarries were just over a mile away, on the other side of Kensington Gardens, watching Guy Duggleby's television after their lunch and

feeling quite safe.

"You know what I think?" remarked Lucky Cotton, finishing his sixth bottle of lager. "I don't reckon they're coming back here."

"If you look at the map," said Billy Kemp, drawing Cotton's attention to his street by street guide of London, "they were heading in this general direction when we lost them."

"That could mean their pal lives around here too," interrupted Cotton. "What do you reckon, Rolf?"

"So what are we going to do about it?" grunted Weinbaum, accepting the theory.

"I reckon we should go out looking," said Kemp. "Take a turn along every main road in the area till we pick up the bug again. We just have to get close enough."

"Yeah, anything," grunted Weinbaum, who was beginning to slip from boredom into anger. He darted a venomous glare at the driver, envying him his cool detachment. Billy Kemp was getting paid whether or not they caught up with the Jenners and the man who had been impersonating Jeff Jenner.

"Okay, let's drink up," decided Lucky Cotton. "And get something done for a change."

Bob Kane was twenty-nine years old, just a few months younger than Joan Duggleby, and a confirmed exister. He lived in a self-created garret just off Ladbroke Grove, at the Kensal Green end. Guy Duggleby toiled up endless steep stairs, passing a series of poky offices and small workshops.

The banister on the final stretch of landing was broken, suggesting that there had been a struggle and someone had taken the long plunge into the stairwell, in the manner of a Western-film brawl, embracing a collection of firewood until thick but well-worn linoleum had broken both his fall and every bone in his body.

Guy pushed a door. Zebra stripes in black and grubby white squealed away from him. There was a strong smell of white spirit in the air, all but masking a hint of cannabis. Bob Kane was sprawled on his back on a decaying studio couch, gazing up at a series of sketches taped to the ceiling, which sloped down to a convenient viewing height at that side of the room.

"Good as a doorbell," remarked Guy, referring to the squeak.

"Well, burn my brain!" said Bob, swinging into a sitting position. "What dragged you into my gutter? Bring any booze?"

"I take it you're in one of your self-mortifying periods?" laughed Guy. He moved a jam jar full of dark grey water to an overcrowded table and made himself comfortable on the arm of an ancient leather armchair.

"One is not exactly prosperous at the moment," Bob admitted. "In fact, one is bloody near broke. Got ten pee?"

"You can't gas yourself with the North Sea stuff." Guy fumbled in a pocket of his anorak and flicked a silver coin across the room. He sent half of a four-pack of light ale after it.

"Cheers!" Bob plucked objects out of the air. He tucked the coin away in his shirt pocket. "My gas meter sneers at anything less than fifty pee, anyway. No, I was thinking of phoning your sister and getting myself invited down to your place for a cheap weekend. I even trimmed the old beard from bird's nest to intellectual in her honour."

"I'll have the dosh back, then." Guy held out a hand. "Joan was thinking of phoning you."

"That sounds like she wants to annoy big brother Tom." Bob made no move to return the coin. "And what are you doing up here at the roof? Looking for porters for a spot of mountain climbing? Crew for a boat? Co-pilot for a hang gliding expedition?"

"I'm about to do the Jenners a favour. I might need a bit of help if you're not too busy." Guy looked around carefully. "Which you don't seem to be," he concluded.

"Things is bloody slack at the moment," complained Bob.

One of his main sources of income was creating designs and messages, which the couple below him silk-screened onto sweatshirts and teeshirts, or made into badges for sale to tourists and fans at rock concerts.

His clients were also trying to start a fashion for wearing very large teeshirts, adorned with the name of a group, over outdoor clothing, like a surplice. Unfortunately, they were into the second week of an early Spanish holiday.

"Go on," Bob added, emptying his first can, "what's the story?"

"Pretty much a mystery right now. Two blokes and an armed body-guard called on Jeff and Nicki at their country retreat last night. We think they're gamblers. They were after someone called Jeff Jenner, but taller and with lighter hair. Who was at a hotel in the south of France."

"Sounds like that mad sod Toby Ryun. Calling himself Jeff Jenner to change his luck."

"That's what we figured. He's got something these people want. And there was a menacing phone call this morning. They're pretty keen to get it back, whatever it is."

"Sounds interesting. What do we do?"

"I've got the number of their wheels, a Land Rover. The first thing is to find out who they are and get to know a bit about them. Like how serious their threats are likely to be. I've got a bloke working on that. He usually digs out information on companies and the people who run

them. But he likes a bit of variety. I don't suppose you've heard from Toby recently?"

"Fraid not."

"Nor has anyone else we can think of. We need to find him."

"An advert in the personal column of the *Telegraph*?" suggested Bob. "He always reads that, no matter where he is. I wonder what he's been up to?"

"Could be they tried to play him for a sucker. You know – the high-stakes poker game in a hotel room or somewhere. Let the mug win a few bob to encourage him, then skin him. Toby tends to jump in with both feet and think afterwards, but he's not short of low cunning. It could be he spotted what they were up to and refused to pay out."

"And the old school tie is coming to his rescue?" grinned Bob.

Guy shrugged. "Helps to pass the time."

Toby Ryun and Jeff Jenner had been in the same House as Guy at their minor public school. Although gulfs of two and three years respectively separated them from Guy, they had come to know him as someone to be wary of – like all of the prefects. One of Guy's duties had been to make up the four House teams on sports afternoons. Jeff had been as keen a sportsman as Toby had been a confirmed skiver.

Old boys' reunions had maintained a thread of contact when the boys had become men. Jeff's marriage to Nicola Forbes, one of Joan Duggleby's friends from her art school days, had brought him deeper into Guy's circles. A decent win on the football pools followed by a series of successful speculative investments had raised him to a level at which he could keep up with Toby Ryun's inherited wealth and Guy Duggleby's hard-earned success.

Bob Kane was another of Joan Duggleby's friends from art college. Joan used her training in Allen-Duggleby's advertising and customer service departments, designing promotional literature, catalogues and instruction manuals. Bob preferred the freedom of teeshirts and badges. His shameless sponging off the likes of Guy's younger sister lacked voracity. Although wary of him at their first meeting – Bob had warned him that he could not afford to return the favour if Guy bought him a pint – Guy had recognized a kindred spirit.

Both had chosen a way of life that suited them, but they had approached the problem of freedom from opposite directions. Relentless hard work paid for Guy's periods of liberty. Bob Kane's needs were so minimal that he could make Guy's average monthly salary last for a couple of years. He believed in making the most of periods of prosperity and he practised stoicism when times were hard.

Guy had finished one can of beer. Bob lobbed two empties at a broad wicker basket full of empty bottles and tins. "I don't like the sound of

an armed bodyguard," he admitted.

Guy tossed the last can across the room. "Here's some Dutch courage. But I'd be prepared to bet the gun was just a frightener. The average person on this side of the Atlantic has never seen a real gun, let alone had one shoved in his face. And put yourself in Toby's place – what would you do if someone shoved a gun in your ribs and suggested you could get dead in a hurry if you didn't cough up what was owing?"

"I'd do the sensible thing and cough up. And so would Toby."

"But he put a spanner in the works by calling himself Jeff Jenner."

"Right," nodded Bob. "So what do you want me to do?"

"You could stick a message in the paper. Something like: 'Toby R. Where are you? Imperative contact you. Bob K.' Then you could take a turn round to the Jenners' place to see if there's anyone hanging around there."

"I may need a bit of taxi money," said Bob apologetically.

"Taxi?" scoffed Guy. "The bloke who'd rather wear his shoes out than waste money on buses?"

"I could probably save a fortune walking five miles to Fleet Street," agreed Bob. "If we can afford the time."

Grinning, Guy took out his wallet and extracted a slim wad of £5 notes. "Don't drink them all at once."

"Are these something new, these blue pound notes?" asked Bob innocently. "I don't think I've seen one before."

"Come on," chuckled Guy, "I'll give you a lift to the Tube station."

"And what are you going to be doing in the meantime?" Bob pulled on a threadbare denim jacket over a thick, Army surplus jersey.

"I'm going to take some pictures of the three blokes to my investigator."

"Photos? They lined up and let you snap them?"

"No, these are genuine Nicola Jenners." Guy produced the rolled sketches from an inside pocket. "You might as well have a look at the opposition."

"When we were at art college, people were always asking us what good it all was," Bob remarked. "I should have told them we were learning to do portraits of gamblers and gunmen."

The afternoon was well advanced. Billy Kemp felt that he knew every main road in Bayswater, Notting Hill, all three parts of Kensington, Brompton and Chelsea. The bug monitor had not uttered a single cheep. Rolf Weinbaum was starting to make noises about the battery in the bug having given out.

Kemp had told him twice that it was brand new and he personally had tested it. With dogged patience. Lucky Cotton was using a felt-tip

pen to mark the streets in his London guide as they were eliminated from the search.

Kemp turned off Cromwell Road and followed Lexham Gardens past the hospital to Stanford Road. He was cutting into smaller and smaller segments, a large area black-bounded by Marloes Road and Gloucester Road.

cheep, cheEP, CHEEP, CHEEP, Cheep, cheep, said the monitor. The needle of the meter leapt to the right-hand stop.

Kemp took his foot off the accelerator as a reflex. A loud blast on a horn behind him brought his attention back to the road. He had to travel all the way up to Kensington Road before he could make the first of two right turns which would allow the hunters to sweep past their quarry on the eastern side. Lucky Cotton decided that the signal was coming from a cul-de-sac called Truro Place. He left the vehicle to investigate on foot.

An earphone and a generous length of wire allowed him to tuck the receiver into his jacket pocket like a transistor radio and follow the strengthening cheeps without becoming conspicuous. Just before the entrance to a block of flats, on the southern side of Truro Place, there was a dark cavern. *Headroom 7 Feet* warned the sign over the entrance to the car park.

Cotton set off down the ramp as if he had every right to do so. He found the Jenners' car parked in an area reserved for visitors. The bonnet was quite cool. The car had been there since morning – probably parked within a few minutes of Jeff Jenner giving Billy Kemp the slip.

Cotton bounced back to the Land Rover and thrust the bug monitor and its earphone into the dashboard locker. "Sedan Place. Let's go," he told the driver.

The vehicle was facing the wrong direction. Kemp had to head away from their destination until he could turn round.

"What we going there for?" growled Weinbaum.

"I reckon they're holed up in a place called Branwell Court," Cotton explained over the back of his seat. "It's four floors, three flats to a floor. And there's a bloke in the lobby to stop you knocking on doors. So we're going to find out who this bloke Jenner knows at Branwell Court. Then Billy's going to drop in on Jenner's mate tonight to ask him what he's done with the dough."

"Yeah!" grunted Weinbaum in admiring approval.

"How do you switch this off?" Cotton had retrieved the matchbox-size transmitter from the Jenners' car.

"Pull the ends apart as far as they'll go," explained Kemp. "Then let the spring pull it back together." Cotton followed the instructions – and

seemed quite surprised when the monitor ignored the deactivated bug.

After a detour around the eastern end of Kensington Gardens, Kemp added the Land Rover to a short line of cars. The long block of flats looked very much like the one on Truro Place. Different colours had been used for the window frames and the panels on the balcony railings, but the same marble texturing had been applied to the concrete shell.

The Jenners lived on the third floor of Gordon Court. Some bulky items of furniture were being delivered. Cotton and his companions helped to manoeuvre a settee into the ground floor lobby, then they sneaked onto the staircase while the porter's attention was diverted. Billy Kemp worked on the front door of flat 3a for five eternal minutes.

Letting out his breath in a long sigh of relief, Lucky Cotton headed straight for the telephone. On a pile of half a dozen directories, he found an address book with an op-art cover. He began to turn pages, scanning addresses written in a rounded, feminine hand and square capitals, looking for a mention of Branwell Court.

Rolf Weinbaum located the drinks cabinet and helped himself to a generous measure of 12-year-old malt whisky. Billy Kemp wandered idly round the spacious sitting room, looking but keeping his hands to himself. He scanned the titles in a tall bookcase and came to the dining table. He had found a collection of envelopes in the hall, pushed to the wall by the flat's door. He dropped onto a dining chair and flicked through the Jenners' mail.

Among the bills, he found blue sky and blue water divided by golden sand, and a village which the photographer had thought was picturesque. The dark green stamp on the other side of the postcard was French. Someone called Toby had sent the card. Kemp was just about to read the message.

"Aha! We've got him!" called Lucky Cotton. "There's a Guy Duggleby lives at flat 40, Branwell Court."

"And you reckon he's got the dough there?" growled Weinbaum.

"Billy can ask him when he pays a call on him tonight," said Cotton. "If he can still talk after Jeff Jenner's thumped him for pinching his name and dropping him in it."

Weinbaum took his whisky glass into the kitchen to wash and dry it. Billy Kemp squared the bundle of letters neatly, hiding the postcard again. He posted the bundle through the letter-box after relocking the front door of the flat. The Jenners would never know that they had had visitors.

4. Time To Travel

An ancient poster clung in tatters to the front of the shop on Robfield Road. Peeling and weathered, enough remained stuck to the grey boards which covered and protected the display window to tell passers-by that the business had moved. The address of the new premises had long since vanished. Two years' grime obscured the shop's name board. Two years' rust had sealed the padlock on the solid front door. Anyone who knew that the shop was still in use went round to the back.

Metal screens or thick boards covered the windows at the rear of the row of shops to protect them from vandals, thieves and would-be squatters. The fifteen-yard strip of hard earth between the shops and a row of sagging lock-up garages gave stone throwers plenty of room to swing their arms. Behind the garages, railway lines met around a sewage works. Walthamstow lay three-quarters of a mile to the east, beyond the River Lea and the long complex of reservoirs above Hackney Marshes.

A car turned left at the end of Robfield Road and bounced round to the rear of the line of shops. It was six years old, rust-spotted pale blue, and it looked as if it had trouble breaking the speed limit. It was unlikely to attract anyone but the most desperate joy-rider, but the driver locked his door carefully before hurrying over to one of the abandoned shops.

Scott Hamill was a well-worn forty-seven-year-old, who believed in dressing for comfort rather than to impress other people. He was tall and he carried the bulk of a man who drank much and took very little exercise. He saw himself as a criminal mastermind, a planner rather than a do-er.

The padlock on the back door of the shop had been removed and refastened to the heavy staple. Hamill turned a key in the mortice lock and pushed. The door opened heavily but silently on well-greased hinges. He locked it again and turned hard left. A flight of dusty steps of bare and worn wood took him up to the first floor of the shop.

He found Jobbo Wright sitting at a trestle table, which was covered with a surprisingly white cloth. Wright was smoking a cigarette with quick, impatient pulls and frowning at the cardboard carton in front of him. Ten years younger than his partner, Wright was a hard man who wanted everyone to recognize his toughness. His hair was dark, worn long with an aggressive but greying quiff. As usual, his shirt was rolled

up to the elbows to display the tattoos on his meaty forearms.

"Are you sure about this?" demanded Hamill as he reached the head of the decaying staircase, continuing the telephone conversation which had sent him hurrying three and a half miles to the north of his home in Dalston.

"I counted it three times," said Wright impatiently.

Hamill drew up a hard-backed chair. "Let's have a look."

Wright turned the carton onto its side and shook it carefully. Loose United States banknotes spilled out to form an irregular heap. Hamill scraped the mound to his left, then he began to count, making piles of twenty notes of the same denomination on his right.

He was sorting through a mixture of very good forgeries of fifty and one hundred dollar bills. Hamill, Wright and three others intended to exchange them for genuine currency during the summer tourist season. Their two French partners were sitting on a similar cache of forged notes across the Channel, waiting for the signal to go ahead.

The fifth member of the conspiracy was Inky Fergusson. He had handled the practical side of the conspiracy – operating the photographic, printing and cutting machinery, which Hamill had bought at auctions over a period of six months and giving technical advice on where Hamill could buy paper that would pass muster and inks.

The gang had manufactured two million dollars during the winter – one million in hundreds and one million in fifty dollar bills. The plates were safely hidden away and over twelve thousand pounds' worth of equipment, bought with the proceeds of a series of small robberies, had been sold on at a modest profit.

Most of the illegal fortune was stored in two cases designed to hold about forty long-playing records, one on the outskirts of London, and one on the French Mediterranean coast. Each case contained 135 bundles, each made up of one-hundred notes, and it was reinforced with straps in case the flimsy locks failed under a weight of around thirty pounds. Each group of conspirators was planning to dispose of a minimum of \$100,000 during the summer; half in hundreds and half in fifties.

Hamill and Paul Boulay, his French counterpart, were torn between two methods of disposing of the notes. Selling them at a discount to third parties would get rid of the whole lot, but let others into their secret and reduce their profits. Their other alternative was to release their quality product in trickles over several years. Preserving their secret, however, involved putting themselves at risk.

Hamill had come up with the idea of posing as tourists and allowing themselves to become the victims of greed. If shopkeepers would allow them to buy an item like a bottle of spirits with a large denomination

note, they were prepared to be overcharged on the exchange rate. Potential targets would be people who would not know a forged US banknote because they were barely familiar with the real thing – holiday traders who were prepared to take advantage of an ignorant foreigner and swindle him with a smile.

Boulay had suggested using casinos and clubs to change money. One member of the gang would buy chips with dollars and pass them on to a colleague, who would cash them for the currency of the country. They would start off with one-hundred dollar bills, and when the government of the country concerned issued a warning about forgeries, the conspirators would pack away their hundreds and switch to fifties.

As every note had its own, individual serial number, Hamill and Boulay were confident that they could keep up their activities for five or six years, and at least until all of the present stock of forged notes had been distributed and the partners were rich.

Jobbo Wright had assisted during the printing of the notes. Inky Fergusson had used him as a pair of hands. Wright had been fascinated by the facsimile fortune. The sight of him trying to wipe a dirty mark from a note which Fergusson had discarded as not up to standard had prompted Hamill to give him a job after his own heart. The dollars needed a certain amount of handling to take the edge off their crisp newness.

Hamill found vastly amusing the sight of his roughneck partner playing happily with the forged money when he was allowed to do so. If left to his own devices, the hard case would have reduced the notes to limp rags. But Hamill knew better than to allow his mirth to break through to the surface. Jobbo Wright was liable to thump first and think afterwards if someone laughed at him.

And so Hamill had thought about his distribution plans as Wright, his large hands encased in grimy cotton gloves, had counted notes into rough heaps, crumpled and smoothed some, folded others, trampled on one or two with his size eleven shoes, and generally added a calculated amount of artificial age to recent creations.

Muttering to himself, Scott Hamill counted the last few bills. He had regrouped the piles of twenty notes into stacks of one hundred. There should have been five stacks of hundreds and ten of fifties. The last stacks of each were fifty and fifty-one notes short respectively.

"You're right," growled Hamill. "Seven and a half grand light."

"Not much out of a hundred grand," remarked Wright, pleased that his counting ability had been confirmed.

"Enough to screw up our plans if whoever's got it starts spending it and the cops are waiting when we dump ours. When did you last count this lot?"

"Dunno. Not for a couple of weeks. Maybe even a month."

"So who's got it?" Hamill stared thoughtfully at his partner.

"I ain't!" retorted Wright hotly, prepared to defend his honour with his fists.

"I never said you did," said Hamill quickly. "Could anyone have got in here?"

"He'd never find the stash," said Wright confidently. "And if someone did, why didn't he grab the bloody lot?"

There was a fireplace on the left-hand wall of the first-floor room. The money was stored in a compartment built into the chimney breast from the left-hand alcove. It was not the sort of hiding place that could be found by accident.

"There's only three of us over here know about the money," mused Hamill. "You, me and our old printing pal, Inky."

"Must be him," decided Wright. "Are we going to have a word in his ear?" He smacked one large fist ominously into the palm of his other hand.

"Just hang back on that," cautioned his partner. "We want him to do some talking before he gets bashed to bits."

Inky Fergusson was approaching his fortieth birthday, but he managed to look ten years older. He wore gold-rimmed glasses and he projected a studious air. His habitual expression was a blank half-sneer, which made him look like a villainous bank manager who had just enjoyed refusing some hopeful customer an overdraft. But as he knocked on the door of the small first-floor flat which Lucky Cotton had borrowed, he was looking both thoughtful and nervous.

Rolf Weinbaum opened the door clutching the inevitable glass. He cultivated a hard-drinking image as a tool of his trade as a professional gambler. Mugs invariably responded to his presumed alcoholic fog and plunged deeper into the trap. The scowl on his pale face did nothing to reassure Inky Fergusson.

The flat consisted of a sitting room, which included a kitchen alcove, and a bedroom. The tenants had a part-share in a very basic bathroom at the other end of the landing. Fergusson stumbled slightly as a frayed edge of dark green carpet tugged at his left toe. Lucky Cotton turned down the sound of a portable television but he kept part of his attention on the screen.

"Well?" asked Fergusson in a reedy voice. "I heard you was back. Did it go okay?"

"There was a bit of a problem," Cotton admitted.

"You didn't lose any of the money?" gasped Fergusson in sudden panic.

"Not exactly *lose* it. Not all of it," said Cotton, glancing at Weinbaum. "Yeah," growled his pseudo-American partner. "We kinda know where it is. But we won't have it back till tomorrow."

"How much you lost?" Fergusson demanded in a thin squeak.

"It's not lost. About five hundred bucks," Weinbaum admitted.

"Where's the rest of it?" Fergusson demanded.

"Here." Cotton took a folded wad of notes from his inside pocket and tossed it to the visitor.

Inky Fergusson licked a bluish finger and began to count, wishing that he had never become involved with the scheme. Like most confidence tricks, the plan's foundation was the exploitation of human frailty. For the past two weeks, Cotton and Weinbaum and two helpers had been lurking in the casinos of southern France, looking for rich mugs of the sort who would be attracted by the glamour of a poker game in a hotel room.

In effect, they were offering their clients a chance to live out a scene from the movies. The forged dollars were bait and allowed to pass through briefly the greedy hands of an inexperienced gambler as an encouragement. Using cash instead of chips created a more informal atmosphere and took away any suggestion that the game was one of a regular series, part of a new venture intended to lift the organizers out of a lean patch.

Everything had worked well at first, and then the group had encountered a mark who had called himself Jeff Jenner. Nothing but trouble had followed.

Inky Fergusson had been confident that Scott Hamill and Jobbo Wright would not notice the loss if he borrowed a few of the forged dollars until the gamblers had worked up enough of a stake to be able to carry on without them.

The process of changing the forged dollars into genuine currency was not due to begin for two months, and a slice of the profits from each game – the equivalent of seven or eight hundred pounds – was an irresistible temptation. The fact that some of the dollars had gone astray was cause for genuine alarm. If Scott Hamill ever found out, he would be annoyed – perhaps annoyed enough to allow Jobbo Wright to break a few legs.

"You're five hundred and fifty bucks light," said Inky Fergusson after recounting the wad of notes. "One hundred and nine of the fifties."

"We know," growled Weinbaum.

"We'll get it back tonight," added Cotton.

"We're all in dead trouble if you don't," said Fergusson. "Scotty's got a lot invested in his scheme. If the blue-bottles get hold of any of the missing stuff, we're going to be in a hell of a lot of bother."

"Ah, stop panicking," sneered Weinbaum.

"Just put that lot back," said Cotton. "They're not going to notice ten notes missing out of hundreds. And they're not likely to start dividing it up into working units while Jobbo's messing about with it."

"I dunno," muttered Fergusson nervously. "Put this back short and Jobbo's sure to count it. Sod's Law, that is."

"We could make up what's short with real stuff, I suppose," said Cotton. Their scheme had yielded dollars and sterling as well as French francs.

"And what happens when the numbers and dates aren't any of theirs?" countered Weinbaum, looking for a reason not to part with any of his profits.

"If they count them, they're not going to look at numbers and dates of issue," rushed Fergusson. "I gave you seven and a half grand, and I reckon I should get seven and a half grand back. You can have your stuff back when you catch up with the rest of it."

"I don't know about that," rumbled Weinbaum.

"I think Inky's got a point," decided Cotton. "And it won't be for long. We might as well cover ourselves."

Inky Fergusson left the flat in an unsettled frame of mind. He had seven thousand five hundred and fifty mainly forged dollars tucked away in his inside pocket, and his agreed percentage of the proceeds from the poker games in his wallet.

He knew that his complete peace of mind would not be restored until he had replaced the final instalment of forged notes. But his most immediate worry was making his way to Tottenham without being mugged.

The night was wet, slicked with recent rain, chilly and uninviting. For Billy Kemp, it was a perfect night for climbing without witnesses. A series of windows ran up the side of Branwell Court, which contained Guy Duggleby's Kensington flat. The windows marked half-landings of a stairway, and offered a pathway to the roof to an agile young man who preferred not to use one of the conventional entrances to the block of flats.

Kemp had acquired a hook-ladder – a telescopic pole fitted with hinged treads and a double-pronged hook at the top. Non-slip pads on the hooks allowed him to place the ladder firmly on the next higher window sill and make the climb to the roof in easy stages. The narrow alley was just too wide to be climbed by bridging between the walls of Branwell Court and the next building.

From forty-five feet nearer the sky, the path of cracked flags in the alley looked no more than two feet wide. Kemp could look down from

high places without being afflicted by vertigo. He crept to the front of the building and peeped over the three-foot parapet.

Most of the flats were in darkness. From his position at the corner, he could see light escaping from behind curtains on the second floor. The occupants of the three top flats had not stayed up to greet one o'clock in the morning.

Jeff and Nicki Jenner were in bed in flat 4c, but not yet sleeping. Guy Duggleby had dropped in at his home for long enough to change his clothes and enjoy Nicki's dinner. His investigator had come up with one name – Billy Kemp. A man in the security business had identified the ex-soldier, who freelanced as a bodyguard.

As for his employers, the people likely to know the subjects of Nicki's other sketches did not come into circulation until well after dark. Guy had gone out again to ask a few questions of his own.

Kept from sleep by swirling thoughts, the Jenners were discussing, between long silences, where Toby Ryun might be lurking. It was during a thoughtful phase that Billy Kemp climbed down to the balcony of their refuge and slipped past a supposedly burglar-proof lock. The sound of a faint creak intruded into Jeff Jenner's thoughts. He was about to dismiss it as imagination when the bedroom light came on.

Nicki sat up with a small squeak of shock. Jeff found himself slipping out of the bed to tackle the intruder. Then he saw the gun with its long, sinister, sound suppressor.

Billy Kemp came to a dead stop just inside the bedroom, just beyond the curtains. He knew the people in the bed. There was no one else in the flat – just the real Jeff Jenner and his wife. His revolver stung automatically to cover the husband, who was sliding out of the bed.

Nicki Jenner let out another squeak then she saw the gun moving to point at Jeff. She reached out blindly. Her hand found a small alarm clock. Left-handed, she flung it at the intruder. Caught off guard, Kemp just managed to close his right eye before the clock hit him. Pain and tears blinded him for a moment. His finger tightened on the trigger. A bullet smashed into the wall, inches from Nicki's head.

Swept along by survival instinct, Jeff grabbed the sheet. Uncoiling, he flung himself at the gunman, taking the sheet with him like a net. His momentum carried Kemp to the floor with a dull thud. The silenced pistol flew across the room. Jeff's knee drove relentlessly into Kemp's body, forcing the air from his lungs in a tortured gush.

Jeff pressed the edge of the sheet against his throat to prevent him from drawing another breath – and held it there until the wiry intruder's tongue protruded and his desperate writhings ceased.

"Is he dead?" gasped Nicki. She was kneeling on the end of the bed, staring at Kemp's congested face.

"I don't know," panted Jeff, exhausted by his brief but violent struggle.

The gunman was unconscious, but his chest had started to rise and fall again and he was beginning to look healthier.

"What are we going to do with him?" said Nicki.

"Tie him up. Then find Guy," Jeff decided.

"What about the police?"

"He doesn't look the type to talk to them," replied Jeff, drawing in deep gulps of air in an effort to steady his breathing. "Are you all right?"

"Scared to death." Nicki attempted a brave smile. "Let's tie him up before he comes round again."

Using some nylon parcel string found in the kitchen cabinet, the Jenners trussed the intruder like a roasting fowl, hoping that quantity would make up for lack of experience with human-size chickens. Jeff's third attempt brought Guy to the other end of the telephone line. Guy advised the Jenners to pack and to be ready to move out as soon as he and Bob Kane reached the flat.

The prisoner was awake but groggy, and he had been allowed to drink a glass of water to ease the congestion in his throat. Guy Duggleby closed the bedroom door on him and listened to a brief account of the Jenners' adventure. Then he handed the keys of his sister's car to Bob Kane.

"Take these two crime-fighters back to their place," he ordered. "To pack for somewhere a bit warmer than London is at the beginning of May."

"Yes, sir!" snapped Bob, saluting American-style with a final flick-flourish.

"You know Grant Hardy?" Guy added to Jeff. "Demon asset-stripper during the week and weekend Captain Bligh?"

"The bloke with the boat," nodded Jeff. "Yes, we've met at parties."

"Cruiser," corrected Guy. "Don't call it a boat while he's in earshot. Anyway, he's flying down to Juan-les-Pins in the morning. For a spot of blue water sailing in the Med. He tried to get me along as part of his crew. I think the best thing to do is hide you two away for a while. And where better than on a boat at sea?"

"But what if they're watching our place?" objected Nicki. "His friends." She tossed her head towards the bedroom door.

"I don't see why they should be," said Guy with a reassuring smile. "They want Toby, not you."

"Then why is *he* here?" persisted Nicki.

Guy shrugged, trying to be casually. "Perhaps they think Toby lives here. After all, you came straight here after their visit. And you said

someone was following you this morning. Maybe you didn't shake them off after all."

"And they sent the kid to wake Toby up," added Bob. "To drag him out of sleep, nice and confused, shove a gun in his face and get him to cough up the money he owes before his brain stopped whirling. Only these two weren't asleep," he added with a grin in Nicki's direction.

"And Mr. Kemp was so surprised to see them," continued Guy as Nicki was wondering whether she was blushing visibly, "he let them brain him with my alarm clock and strangle him with one of my best sheets."

"Do we really need to go running off anywhere?" wondered Jeff. "If they're really looking for Toby?"

"Point one," listed Guy, "they keep tripping over you two. Which might make them mad enough to bash you about a little. Point two, if you tell them they really want Toby, to save your wife from a battering, and then say you don't know where he is, they might thump you anyway to make sure you're not holding out on them."

"All right, points taken," said Jeff. "We'll take the sea cruise."

Shepherded by Bob Kane, the Jenners left for their own flat. Guy telephoned Grant Hardy to tell him that he would be carrying two more passengers-cum-crew members. Then he turned his attention to the hole in his bedroom wall.

He used a meat skewer to dig a blunted piece of lead out of the brickwork. The bullet had loosened an area of plaster six inches across. Guy moved the bed out of the way and used a razor blade to cut a diagonal cross in the wallpaper. He brushed the loose material away, then he fetched a packet of plastic filler from the kitchen.

The repair screamed for the eye's attention. An irregular white patch peeped from the heart of curled-out petals of shaded coral wallpaper. But there was nothing more to be done until the filler had hardened.

Guy returned to the living room and investigated the balcony doors, which the intruder had left slightly ajar. His burglar-proof lock had not proved much of a challenge to Billy Kemp. Guy made a mental note to get some lock-bolts fitted.

The night was damp and chilly, and the wind seemed stronger than at pavement level out on his balcony. Looking for a rope, he was surprised to find what looked like an aluminium Christmas tree. He examined the ingenious construction briefly, then he hooked it back onto the parapet of the roof.

He could hear muffled scraping sounds when he returned to the living room. The prisoner was trying to wriggle out of his bonds. Guy turned his mind to the problem of what to do with the uninvited guest. He saw no point in handing Kemp over to the police, who would only

start asking awkward questions. And Guy wanted the intruder to take a message to his employers.

Decision made, Guy strolled into the bedroom and perched on the end of the bed. The prisoner ceased his struggles and looked up at him warily, as if expecting to be kicked, and bracing himself for the impact.

"Just how much were you sent to collect?" asked Guy, trying a direct approach.

Billy Kemp looked at him. There was no defeat in his hazel eyes, just patient acceptance of a temporary set-back. The security consultant had said that Kemp was a good, strong, reliable boy who knew how to keep his trap shut.

"We might give it to you if you promise not to pester us any more," encouraged Guy.

This is the wrong bloke, Kemp told himself. *Again.*

Guy Duggleby was in his middle thirties and six feet tall – the same height but slightly older than the man who had made off with five hundred and fifty forged dollars. His hair was darkish blond, not dark brown, he lacked bushy sideburns and he looked much harder than the playboy who had burned Cotton and Weinbaum.

His employers, Kemp decided, would make lousy detectives if they ever went into the business of looking for missing persons.

"Lost your tongue?" prompted Guy.

The telephone began to chirp. Guy picked up the bedroom extension and half turned away from the prisoner as if in an unconscious attempt to gain privacy. But he could still see Kemp out of the corner of his eye.

"It's me," said Bob Kane in a throaty whisper before Guy could give his number. "We're about to move on to Captain Bligh's place."

"Why are you whispering?" Guy asked with a frown.

"Because it's a secret mission," chuckled Bob. "I found a postcard with their mail while they were packing. Guess who it's from."

"I'd rather not," returned Guy, noting that the intruder's covert squirmings had all but released him from his bonds.

"You're not alone, yes. Well, it's from you know who. Tell you all about it when I get back. You've not done anything about the visitor?"

"That may not be necessary. You've not thought who it is these characters might be after?"

"Are you talking to me or him?" asked Bob.

"No, I haven't thought of anyone either," continued Guy, giving Kemp his message. "Obviously, it's someone who knows Jeff, but it could have been at a party. We might not know him and Jeff might not remember him." Backing a hunch that the prisoner would run when he had worked himself free, Guy turned away from Kemp a fraction more. He was holding the telephone in his left hand and his right hand was thrust

into the side pocket of his jacket – apparently casually, but gripping his small automatic pistol, just in case.

The bedroom door scraped across the carpet.

“Hang on a minute,” Guy muttered into the receiver. Then he threw it onto the bed, yelled: “Hoi!” Then he set off in leisurely pursuit of Billy Kemp.

The balcony door was standing open when Guy reached the sitting room. As he had anticipated, Kemp had preferred to escape using his Christmas tree ladder and remove an interesting piece of evidence at the same time. He had also collected his gun from the chest of drawers. Guy had unloaded it before placing the weapon within grabbing range of a departing intruder.

Feeling moderately pleased with himself, Kemp started to climb towards the roof of Branwell Court. Recovering his gun was a bonus. The weapon was clean and untraceable, and therefore expendable, but a replacement would be costly and professional pride was involved. He had just cleared the balcony rail then the ladder slipped.

Kemp found himself falling. The ladder clattered into space. He landed on his back across the balcony rail – and slid. He made a grab for the wet railings. His fingers gripped for a moment, then slipped. Below him, the telescopic ladder crashed through the windscreen of a parked car.

Kemp twisted in mid-air, like a cat, and grabbed at the railings of the next balcony. His plunge ended with a jolt which seemed to stretch his arms by six inches. His body swung inwards. The deck of the balcony delivered a painful blow to his ribs.

Battered but undaunted, Kemp lowered himself until he was gripping the bottom of the railings. Then he swung his body and released his grip. He landed on his feet on the first-floor balcony, and paused to catch his breath.

The sound of a splintering windscreen had drawn a small crowd, even at twenty-past one in the morning. As he climbed over the railings of the first-floor balcony and lowered himself to arm’s length at the base of the curved bars, Kemp counted six people around the car. He dropped ten feet to the pavement, landing with a faint thud.

A man in pyjamas and a dressing gown had removed the telescopic ladder from the opaque windscreen. He was holding it upside down and demanding to know where it had come from. Kemp glided over to him, plucked the ladder from his loose grasp and ran for it.

He had rounded the corner of Branwell Court and he was racing along the narrow alley before any of the crowd had looked at him closely enough to be able to give a worth-while description of the wind-screen smasher.

Guy Duggleby withdrew from the edge of his balcony before anyone on the ground thought to look up. The young gunman's agility had impressed him and he was beginning to realize how much of a chance he had taken in allowing the intruder to free himself. A gun in the pocket was all very well, but Kemp might just have beaten him to the draw. Guy had been on the telephone, however.

A sudden silence would have prompted the person at the other end to send reinforcements – but Kemp might just have decided that he had time to attempt to extract the information that he required.

Thrusting aside might-have-beens, Guy returned to his bedroom, resolving to be more careful in future, and picked up the telephone receiver. "Still there?" he asked.

"What the hell's going on?" demanded Bob Kane. "I was just wondering about sending the police round to scrape you off the wall."

"Mr. Kemp was doing his Houdini act," explained Guy. "He's gone now – I hope, to tell his employers we don't know who's been impersonating Jeff. Are you ready for off?"

"To Grant Hardy's place? Any minute now. I'll be back in about forty minutes. Are you going to wait up for me?"

"Doubt it. I hope you can grope your way to the spare room."

"Good job I was in bed till lunchtime, building up the strength for all this nocturnal driving."

"I'll have a bit of floor ready for you then you get back," Guy promised with a chuckle. "See you, mate."

Guy rang off feeling that they had made some real progress. His investigator had been able to put names to the other two faces sketched by Nicki Jenner the night before. He knew that Lucky Cotton and Rolf Weinbaum were indeed gamblers who were not above giving Lady Luck a helping hand. They were said to stop just short of outright fraud, but only just, and to deal strictly on a cash basis.

They made a fair living out of their suckers but they were not destined to become enormously wealthy. 'Small-time, but could be a nuisance', was the investigator's opinion of the opposition, whose luck had been all bad recently.

Guy drifted into the kitchen to make himself a sandwich. A lot had happened since dinner. The Jenners would be safely out of the way soon. Nicki and Jeff had too much at stake to risk further involvement with men who were prepared to back up their arguments with guns. They lacked Guy Duggleby's reckless streak, his willingness to take a risk for its own sake.

The Jenners assumed that they would spend perhaps forty more years together. They had a future to protect. Guy had never been prepared to settle for a long, quiet life.

And there was news of Toby, he reminded himself as he plugged in the kettle for a final cup of tea. When Bob returned to Branwell Court, he would be bringing Toby Ryn's postcard to the Jenners and a clue to his whereabouts. Once they had caught up with Toby and found out what all the fuss was about, Guy and Bob would be able to stop improvising and make some proper plans.

Guy had a feeling that the message which he had sent via Billy Kemp would delay rather than discourage Kemp's employers.

5. Inky Takes A Trip

After his unsettling meeting with the gamblers, Inky Fergusson had headed straight for the shop on Robfield Road. He approached the rear of the building cautiously. His torch showed him that the hasp on the door was trapped in position over the staple on the frame by a large padlock – which meant that no one could be inside.

He let himself into the shop, relocked the back door and hurried up to the first floor, following a spot of light from his torch. He inserted a ball point pen into a hole in the plaster on the left of the chimney breast. A locking bar moved back, allowing him to open the concealed compartment. He dropped his borrowed and genuine notes into the carton without removing it. Then he slid the door back into position and removed his pen from the hole.

As he passed through Stoke Newington, heading back into town, Fergusson shed some of his load of guilt and apprehension and began to consider how to spend his windfall. He kept telling himself that it was unlikely that Scott and Jobbo would look closely at the funny money before he swapped the last few notes. And his percentage of Lucky and Rolf's scheme had put a healthy bulge in his inside pocket.

He reached his home after a twenty-minute drive. Chuckling softly to himself, Fergusson slipped and skidded down the smooth, wet stone steps to his basement flat. His key found the lock. Something crashed to the floor when he pushed the door open. Baffled, he slipped into the flat and closed the front door – and found himself tangled up with a piece of string. The neck of a broken milk bottle was still attached to a noose on the end of the length of string.

Suddenly, the room seemed full of people. Scott Hamill and Jobbo Wright had appeared from the bedroom, summoned by their crude intruder alarm. Wright pushed Fergusson into the armchair and stood over him, arms folded and showing a menacing display of muscles and tattoos.

"There's two ways of going about this," remarked Hamill. "You can tell us right out. Or you can tell us after Jobbo's rearranged your face."

"Tell you what?" squeaked Fergusson, lifting a hand as if to protect his glasses.

"What you did with the seven and a half grand that's missing," said Hamill in a level but menacing tone.

"What seven and a half grand?" protested Fergusson.

"We counted the money," growled Wright. "Both of us. It's fifty hundreds and fifty-one fifties light."

"You can't have counted right," said Fergusson nervously. "I ain't got it."

"Turn your pockets out," said Hamill.

Wright smacked a fist into his left palm. Fergusson tumbled the contents of his pockets onto the arms of the chair. Hamill picked up the wallet and thumbed through a respectable wad of British banknotes.

"All right, there did you get this?" he demanded.

"Down the dogs," muttered Fergusson.

"You been flogging those bucks?" accused Hamill.

"Me? 'Course not!" protested Fergusson.

Jobbo Wright leaned forward and slapped him across the face, left and right, in quick succession. The blows were not particularly hard by his standards, but they stung red marks onto Fergusson's cheeks.

"Well?" prodded Hamill.

The story tumbled out. The gamblers' scheme had sounded like a quick and sure way of making a few hundred pounds. No one could have predicted that they would lose a few of the forged dollars that they had been using for *flash* cash. And Cotton and Weinbaum had assured him that they would recover the missing notes almost immediately.

Hamill perched on the end of the table and noted down names and the address of the flat which Lucky Cotton had borrowed. When Fergusson ran out of things to tell him, Hamill scratched at an itchy nose and stared at the printer, who seemed to have shrunk to look like an old and scared shrew.

"What are we going to do with you, Inky?" Hamill remarked, almost to himself.

Fergusson decided on impulse to make a break for it. He shot out of his chair – to meet Jobbo Wright's fist. His lungs emptied with an explosive gush. Fergusson dropped straight down to the tired carpet.

"Where was he going?" Wright asked himself.

"Jump first and think after," said Hamill. "Inky's been doing a lot of that recently."

"What are we going to do about the missing bucks?"

"First, we make sure he really did put most of it back. Then we remind his pals getting the rest back is a rush job. If the phuzz get hold of any of it, our operation's off for this year. The Frogs aren't gonna like that."

"Yeah," agreed Wright. "Hard pair, them Frogs. They'll want to break this daft sod's back."

"We'll look after him," said Hamill. "I reckon a broken arm should be enough to remind him to keep his sticky fingers off the bucks."

He was still puffing and blowing, but Inky Fergusson had just about recovered his breath. If he was to be knocked about, he decided, he might as well try to run for it again. Uncoiling from his foetal position of agony, he rolled to his feet and launched himself towards the door. The dangling bottle neck hit him in the face. Then he was outside with Jobbo Wright pounding in pursuit.

Fergusson tried to tackle the steps two at a time, swinging his arms wildly for balance. The last greasy step betrayed him. The sole of his foot made contact and slid backwards immediately. Jobbo Wright stopped dead in his tracks as an involuntary back-kick drove a wet shoe into his face. Without thinking, he grabbed the leg and twisted. Inky Fergusson fell seven feet onto unyielding stone flags – and landed on his head.

“That was clever,” said Scott Hamill from the doorway. “I think you’ve done for him.” He squatted beside the body and tried, without success, to find a pulse.

“It was his own bloody fault,” growled Wright, unrepentant. A little squirt like Inky Fergusson could not be allowed to get away with kicking him in the face. Wright raised his head like a cautious periscope out of the sunken courtyard. Slitted brown eyes scanned the street for signs of movement. “No one about. We can scarper if you want, Hang on.” He ducked down as a car charged along the deserted street with typical nocturnal indifference to the speed limit.

“If we leave him here and let it look like an accident,” mused Hamill, “we’ll have to tidy his place up a bit. So it doesn’t look like it’s just been searched.”

“I don’t fancy hanging around here,” said Wright.

“Or we could make him someone else’s problem.”

“Like whose?” invited Wright, scanning the street again.

“Suppose we dump him on his two mates? Lucky Cotton and the Yank? As a sort of hint we mean business when we say we want the bucks back right away?”

“Yeah!” grinned Wright.

“And we can use his car. It’s parked right outside.”

“Yeah!” Wright’s grin slipped. “You remember the address of their flat? I’m buggered if I do.”

“Bloody hell, Jobbo,” sighed Hamill. “You must have been standing in the sieve queue then they handed out memories.” Even though he had taken written notes during their interrogation of Inky Fergusson, the address remained fresh in his mind.

Wright just shrugged. Scott Hamill could not smash half a dozen roof tiles with his fist using one downward hammer blow. And he looked as if he had been standing in the lard queue then muscles had been

handed out. When it came to trouble, Wright knew that muscles were of more use than a memory.

Hamill pushed to his feet and moved to the stone steps. Treading carefully, he climbed until he could scan the street. It was chilly, damp and deserted. And the drizzle had stopped.

"His keys." Hamill snapped his fingers as much to attract Wright's attention as to reinforce the command.

Jobbo Wright thrust a large paw into Inky Fergusson's right-hand jacket pocket and tugged out a large bunch of keys. He flipped it to his colleague. Hamill attempted to pluck the keys out of the air one-handed, but he managed only to deflect them. Metal rang on atone.

"Butterfingers," chuckled Wright in an undertone. He hauled the body to its feet. Wedging it against the wall, he turned and hauled Fergusson onto his back like a sack of coal. Above him, a car door clicked open.

"Right, hurry up," called Scott Hamill.

Wright powered up the damp steps. After a little tugging and struggling, they managed to arrange Fergusson in a fairly natural pose on the back seat. To a casual glance, he was wedged in the corner, fast asleep – or given the hour, perhaps dead drunk. Hamill slipped onto the front passenger seat and prepared to issue directions.

He knew that he was an indifferent driver, and the clutch of Fergusson's car always gave him trouble. It was better to let Wright drive than to imagine his inward sneers at the senior partner's poor efforts.

They drove at modest speed, covering four miles in just under eight minutes. Boldness, Hamill had decided, would carry them through. Wright parked neatly on another empty street, outside a massive terraced house. The flatlet which Lucky Cotton had borrowed was the first-floor front.

Hamill stepped out of the car and climbed three steps to the common front door. It was old, warped and a poor fit to its cracking frame. Pushing back the tongue of the lock proved a simple task. Wright followed with the body. He had draped Fergusson's right arm around his own neck and he was carrying the dead printer easily on his left hip.

They mounted a flight of stairs confidently but making no more noise than necessary. Hamill listened carefully at the door of flat three. They had seen no lights from the road, and the gap at the bottom of the door was dark.

The door of the flat was as poor a fit as the front door. It had a strong mortice lock, but only a fraction of an inch of the tongue engaged the fitting on the door frame. Just in case the flat contained a light sleeper, Wright propped the dead printer against the door. If someone wrenched it open, he would find himself with a corpse in his arms – which, according to Scott Hamill's plan, would give the intruders time

to beat a retreat. Wright inserted a steel bar between door and frame and levered gently.

With a faint splintering crack, the door sagged open. He managed to grab Fergusson before he thudded to the dark and threadbare carpet. It was the work of moments to drag him all the way into the flat and then ease the door shut again. Hamill led the way back down the stairs, forcing himself not to hurry. Wright stamped down the three steps to the pavement, leaving his partner to guide the front door shut without slamming it.

They abandoned Inky Fergusson's car at a point which left both of them with a ten-minute walk home. After wiping the door handles and the steering wheel as a routine fingerprint-removing operation, even though they were both wearing gloves, they parted company.

They had demoted Inky Fergusson from partner to casual acquaintance. Scott Hamill and Jobbo Wright would express surprise if anyone told them that Inky was dead. They had not seen him recently. And one person fewer knew their secret.

When he reached Lucky Cotton's retreat at nine o'clock in the morning, Billy Kemp was not surprised by the untidy sight of Rolf Weinbaum, blanket-wrapped and sprawled on the settee. He nearly tripped over the unexpected visitor on the floor as he was putting away his keys. His suspicions were aroused when the man whom he had just kicked failed to react. A closer inspection revealed that the guest was not breathing, and that he was cold and stiffening.

Irritated mutterings answered when he hammered on the bedroom door. Lucky Cotton emerged, wrapping himself in a towelling beach robe in lieu of a dressing gown. His thin face was slightly puffy, as if his blood had not had time to drain to his legs after level sleep.

"What's all the bloody noise about?" growled Cotton.

"Who's your friend?" Kemp nodded to the body on the carpet. "And what's this about? I found it on the floor next to him."

"It's Inky," said Cotton groggily, accepting a folded slip of paper. "Is he pissed, or what?"

"More dead than pissed. So you know him?"

"He printed the funny money we're looking for," said Cotton blankly. "How did he get in here? And what happened to him?"

"From the looks of him, he fell on his head," said Kemp after a brief but expert examination of the body. "And anyone could get in here. The Sleeping Beauty's no watchdog." He directed a glance towards Weinbaum's back. Neither Kemp nor Cotton was keeping his voice down, but the phoney Yank continued to buzz on, deep in sleep, undisturbed by their conversation.

"I'd say this guy's a strong hint. Read the note," Kemp added.

"Five-fifty bucks light. Inky's going to have company if we don't get it back," Cotton read aloud.

"Sounds like he talked before he fell on his head. What do we do with him?"

"We gotta dump him, and quick."

"A bit chancy, dragging stiff around in the daytime. He must have snuffed it a good few hours ago if he's stiff as a board now."

"He wasn't here when we turned in about half-two."

"Doesn't mean he wasn't dead then. There's some big boxes at the back of the supermarket. The ones the dustmen won't take away if they don't get a bonus. We could shove him in one of them when he softens up. Then dump him."

"Right, you go and lift one. We'd better shove him in the bedroom for now, though."

When the front door closed behind Kemp, Cotton looked at his partner. Rolf Weinbaum was lying on his left side, facing the back of the settee, still fast asleep. It would take a determined effort to wake him much before noon. Not feeling sufficiently energetic, Cotton decided to let him sleep.

Routine carried him through his morning ablutions and into his clothes. It was disturbing to have a dead body parked under the bed. Cotton found himself stopping for every slight noise, expecting it to be followed by the sound of large policemen knocking on his door.

He had neither killed Inky Fergusson nor brought him to the flat. The gamblers were in no danger of being shoved in gaol for murder once the police had thrashed about for a couple of days and assembled some solid information, but they would assume that Cotton and his associates knew the killers and they would ask a great many awkward and time-devouring questions.

The unseen but ever-present corpse radiated a very definite message. Scott Hamill and Jobbo Wright had so much at stake that a human life meant nothing to them. It was not in the forgers' interests to bring the police into the affair, but Cotton could not help checking each car that travelled along the street, looking for men in uniform and people with too much interest in where he was living.

Billy Kemp returned with a sturdy carton, which had once contained a Japanese combined music centre and LP storage rack. "Nothing big enough at the supermarket," he explained as he manoeuvred the box through the doorway. "I had to go down to the back of the cash and carry."

"We'll never get him in there!" protested Cotton.

"Course! We don't need a coffin shape, you know," grinned Kemp.

"We'll be able to fold him up in a while."

Cotton remained sceptical. Confidently, the younger man opened the box – and found it full of cardboard packing, plastic bags and polystyrene worms. Two of the polythene bags would swallow the body. Cotton was worried about it starting to smell before they got rid of it. He had seen a film on television, in which two men had been trying to dump a body. A small pack of nosy, sniffing dogs had attracted a suspicious copper to an old steamer trunk.

Much to Cotton's surprise, Kemp was able to fold himself into the carton as a demonstration, and he was an inch taller than Fergusson. The fit was snug, and strategically placed bags of polystyrene worms would wedge Inky firmly in place. Rolf Weinbaum continued to sleep heavily through the experiment.

Cotton shunted the carton into the bedroom and deposited in a corner to place it as out of the way as possible in the small flat. Inky Fergusson was quickly cocooned in plastic bags. Then Cotton and Kemp went down to a café on the main road for coffee, leaving Weinbaum in charge of the flat. Kemp had a report to deliver on his mission in the early hours of the morning. Cotton knew, without being told, that it had not been a resounding success.

Guy Duggleby and Bob Kane had remained in their respective beds until well beyond the start of the business day. The kitchen clock was edging towards ten o'clock as they prepared a late breakfast. A letter with a French stamp had raised their hopes for a few minutes, but it had turned out to be a hotel report from Toby Ryun dated two days before his postcard to the Jenners. He seemed to think that the hotel in question gave good value, but he made no mention of adventures with hotel-room gamblers.

"Here it is." Guy stabbed at his New Oxford Atlas with a finger. "He sent his postcard from a piece about seven miles from Montpelier." He flicked through a tourist guide to France until he came to the section on Provence. "It's a rather minor resort on the shores of the sunny Med. He doesn't say much. 'Got a good story to tell. Well worth a dinner, Nicki! Love, Toby.' Not giving anything away."

"Mmm," mumbled Bob, his mouth full of fried egg and tinned tomato. He also had bacon, two sausages and a pile of baked beans on his plate. When the food was free, Bob tended to make a pig of himself to stoke up for leaner times ahead. But, to his credit, he had done most of the cooking and he had promised to tackle the washing up.

"The weather's not too bad there," added Guy, who had just a fried egg and two rashers on his plate. "According to the paper, it's sunny and the temperature's in the high sixties. The best way out there is to

fly. We can land at Nîmes, or maybe a bit closer. And I can put in some of the hours I have to fly every year to keep my pilot's licence."

"You still got your pilot's licence?" asked Bob, amazed. "I thought they'd cancelled it for reckless driving years ago."

"Passport. Did you ever get one?" Guy ignored the crack.

"Yeah. If it's not expired." Bob reached for the large teapot and filled his cup for the third time.

"If we land somewhere small, they won't bother asking for it anyway. So it doesn't matter if it has expired."

"There's your modern, dynamic executive for you," grinned Bob. "So little to do, he has to invent problems just so he can knock them down again."

"Suppose we get going in a couple of hours? Will that be enough time for you to pack?"

"I'm more worried about preparing my stomach for the right lunch. Terribly confusing if it's expecting English and you feed it a load of French nosh."

"Don't forget to tell it to expect wine instead of beer. Unless you really want to chance French beer."

"Good point. One thing occurs to me. How am I going to take messages from Toby if he's sending them to Telfour Grove and I'm in France?"

"All worked out," said Guy with a confident smile. "We lock up everything breakable, then we lend this place to my little sister for a party. In return for a firm promise to check your place for messages from Toby at regular intervals."

"I'm sorry you told me that," sighed Bob. "If Joanie's having a party here, it's one she doesn't want your wet blanket of a big brother to find out about. Which means it's going to be great. I've got a good mind to stop here."

"There's not going to be a party if you're here to take the messages in person, is there?"

"Sod your logic. I thought she had a broken leg? Joan?"

"Sprained ankle. Which has recovered, almost."

"Oh! Can I borrow Joanie's car to get my things?"

"You've still got the keys," Guy pointed out. "If you get back here in about half an hour, I should have fixed up a set of wings and the rest."

"Do I get to finish my breakfast first?" complained Bob.

"It might be an idea to pack that as well to keep you going on the journey," laughed Guy. "Otherwise, we could be here until tea-time, waiting for you to finish that lot."

Bob replied with a grunt and attacked another sausage, refusing to be intimidated.

The drive to a private airfield just outside Caterham took less than an hour. After crawling through parts of London in the last hour of a Friday morning, it was a relief to reach quieter roads and build up a decent speed. Bob had acquired a white crash helmet, on which he had found time to print his surname in large, black, stick-on letters, fighter-pilot style. The rest of his flying gear consisted of a pair of dark brown knee-boots and a close-fitting coverall in olive green.

Guy had chosen to fly in a dark blue safari jacket, black cords and very ordinary, waterproof, black suede shoes. In Bob's opinion, he was letting the side down. Bob thought that a flier should look the part and he had pretended to be outraged when Guy had enjoyed a good laugh at his friend's outfit.

Helmet tucked under his arm and with a large, well-stuffed shopping bag slung over his left shoulder, Bob followed Guy from the parking area to the airfield's club room, hiding behind a pair of mirror sunglasses. While Guy busied himself with such details as his flight plan, the state of the weather along his planned route and paying for the hire of their aircraft, Bob browsed through the museum.

RAF Crowfield had been decommissioned at the end of World War Two. Two squadrons of Hurricanes had been based there through the Battle of Britain and for four more busy years before moving across the Channel to France at the Christmas after D-Day. Many of the pilots had bequeathed their trophies to the new civilian management as a memorial to their dead and to remind visitors of the airfield's history.

Bob found it a strange experience to look at twisted and scorched fragments of metal with numbers and swastikas on peeling paint, knowing that they had once been parts of real aircraft and that men had died to bring them to earth. Holes which were neat punctures on one side and ragged peaks on the other had been driven by bullets, fired by one man trying to kill others. In the museum, the real world collided forcibly with images from cinema and television screens.

Then Guy introduced his friend to a piece of living history, to a retired airline pilot called George. The balding former pilot was in his sixties. He had been in his early twenties during his Hurricane days. By the time he had reached Bob's age, an infinitely older twenty-nine, George Fell had survived a world war and he had exchanged his Hurricanes and Blenheim and Lancaster bombers for civilian passenger aircraft. Bob found that a very sobering thought.

It was not until he and Guy were in the sir and heading for the Channel, as George Fell had done many times in his younger days, that Bob caught up with a significant observation. His outfit had drawn a fair number of grins and outright sniggers from others at the airfield. Only George Fell had not found comical, the excitement of a novice about to

take to the air in a small aircraft.

Bob had been expecting an executive passenger jet and a flight time of around an hour. Two and a half hours of aerial sight-seeing after take off, Guy entered the circuit over a small airfield just to the north of Montpellier. Bob could boast an hour at the controls of a twin-engined, propeller-driven aircraft by then, and he was convinced that there was nothing much to flying – as long as the navigator knew his job. Even so, Guy did not think that he was ready to try a landing.

“I can’t see the runway,” remarked Bob as Guy skimmed down towards a grassy field.

“People have been using fields since the Wright brothers,” Guy told him. “No expensive concrete and no problems with wind direction.”

“I don’t think he’s joking,” Bob told himself.

“I’m not going to prang this bloody thing just to have a laugh at your expense,” scoffed Guy.

“That’s what you say now.” Bob slid into his crash helmet and fastened the chin-strap. “Watch out for cows.”

The landing was smooth and uneventful. After one gentle bounce, the aircraft settled onto the grass, slowed and drifted across the field to join three others parked in the north-eastern corner of the field, beside the buildings.

Bob attracted a few Gallic grins, but nobody seemed to care whether or not the apparition in olive green and dark brown boots had a passport. Smoking a *French Blue*, Bob watched Guy surrender the keys of their aircraft and arrange a lift into town. Their driver was a petite, dark-haired girl. She was well tanned and she showed a lot of even, white teeth when she smiled. She looked a lot like a refugee from an American TV series set in sunny California.

Bob decided that Céline was about twenty-five and the sort of person worth getting to know. Unfortunately, she assumed that his French was as fluent as Guy’s and attributed his reticence to shyness. When her attempts to talk him out of his shell failed, she turned her attention to Guy. Bob sat in the back of the battered Citroen, wrestling with odd scraps of the conversation but missing most of the sense, and hoping that their driver had an English-speaking friend.

Céline dropped Bob and Guy on the Rue de Verdun in Montpellier. Not terribly hopeful, they called in at the hotel where Toby Ryun had been using the alias Jeff Jenner at the beginning of the week. Bob was surprised to find the clock in the foyer an hour fast. Guy, a seasoned traveller, was surprised to learn that his friend did not know that the independent French could not possibly keep British Summer Time.

As they had feared, ‘M. Jenner’ had left the hotel without booking out and without leaving a forwarding address. The manager admitted to

Guy that he had been thinking about informing the police until a messenger had delivered an envelope containing a brief note in poor but very imaginative French and two travellers cheques signed and countersigned by a Mr. Ryun.

Two men had called on the morning after his departure, asking for M. Jenner and saying that they were friends of his. But they had declined to settle his bill, proving that they were not terribly close friends. Almost apologetically, the manager mentioned that 'M. Jenner' still owed the hotel sixty-two francs.

Taking the hint, Guy produced his wallet. He normally kept a supply of travellers cheques and a few hundred pounds in francs and Deutschmarks handy for business trips abroad. One advantage of being a major shareholder of the family firm was that he could borrow the company's funds in an emergency.

Once his books were straight, the manager became more inclined to talk about 'M. Jenner's' fickle friends. Both were about forty. One was shortish and solidly built, an American with a ridiculous moustache. The other was a much taller, an Englishman with a long, thin, sinister face. He was describing Rolf Weinbaum and Lucky Cotton. Guy shook his head to tell the manager that he did not know 'M. Jenner's' holiday acquaintances. He decided not to ask how they had acquired a guest's home address. It was obvious that someone had been bribed or distracted to allow the gamblers to look at Toby's registration card.

Leaving the hotel, Guy and Bob made their way to the northern outskirts of the town, to a garage recommended by Céline. Guy hired a corrugated runabout in a sadly anaemic shade of salmon pink. The car had seen better days but it would allow the visitors to pass themselves off as natives – until Bob opened his mouth.

Guy located the Rue de la Loge and then the N586. Toby Ryun's last position, as reported to the Jenners by postcard, lay on the coast eleven and a half kilometres to the south-east of Montpellier,

Toby had arrived at the hotel in Palavas at 12:30 am, booked in under his own name and left the next morning. Just to confuse the issue, he had given the Jenners' country address again. Guy was relieved to hear that Toby had settled his bill in full. Toby had left no clues as to his next destination. The search party had reached a dead end until Toby responded to the message in the *Daily Telegraph's* personal column.

Bob had acquired a menu while Guy had been talking to the receptionist. As he tried to work out what the dishes contained, using the *Practical Tourist Dictionary* at the back of Guy's pocket guide to France, his stomach kept rumbling to remind him that breakfast lay over six hours in the past. The next stop was a table on the hotel's rear terrace.

"What do you reckon to this?" Bob asked ten minutes later. "Good, isn't it?"

Guy nodded. His mouth was full of Camargue beef, which had been cooked for a night and a morning with tomatoes, black olives and local wine – according to his guidebook.

"What's that an opinion on, the food or the wine?" grinned Bob. He glanced to his left, out of the shelter of the large, striped umbrella which protected them from the powerful late-afternoon sun. Beyond a wall of light coloured stone, the deep blue of the sea swept away for miles and mile to the scattering of pale clouds on the horizon. They were about thirty feet above beach level in a good vantage point for enjoying the view.

"Both of them aren't half bad," said Guy after swallowing. "We could do worse than stay here till we hear from Toby via Joan."

"As long as he hasn't shot home."

"No, I've got a feeling he's still hereabouts. And probably feeling quite clever at burning off a couple of crooks."

"Sounds all right to me, staying here. You didn't happen to get the phone number of that bird with the car? What's her name, Céline?"

"The one that fancies you? For no apparent reason?" grinned Guy. "Yes, I've got her number. So I can tell her where to report with a friend for me."

"Fancies *me*?" said Bob suspiciously. "After all the chatting up you were doing in the car?"

"I was telling her your life story," laughed Guy. "She seemed to find it rather interesting. Especially when I told her your father, the duke, has disowned you. I think she feels sorry for you."

"If you're going to tell a lie, make it a bloody big one," approved Bob. "Can she speak any English, by any chance? Or am I stuck with a phrase book in one hand?"

"Nearly as good as what I can," replied Guy. "But she thinks you can speak French. You seemed to be smiling in all the right places in the car."

"Maybe I should have gone on the stage with such a massive acting talent," said Bob, helping himself to more wine.

6. Following On To France

After living with a dead body for a day, Lucky Cotton and Rolf Weinbaum had grown almost accustomed to the late Inky Fergusson's threatening presence. In the event, the half-expected tribe of policemen had not arrived to search the building in response to an anonymous telephone call.

It was not in the interests of the owners of the missing forged dollars to bring the law into their private dispute. Yet the nagging fear remained that anger, frustration or impatience would stir Fergusson's former partners into doing something impulsive or stupid. Cotton had convinced himself that Fergusson's death had been an accident during his interrogation, not deliberate, but it was clear proof that Scott Hamill and Jobbo Wright could run out of self-control.

As he headed for Cotton's borrowed flat, Billy Kemp kept thinking that it was an odd way to spend a Friday night. Darkness was falling as he left White City Tube station. He could hear successive snatches of the BBC TV news as he plodded towards the flat, which lay between the White City Stadium and QPR football ground.

Kemp was thinking of pulling out of his job. Working for Cotton and Weinbaum seemed destined to go wrong no matter what he did. Thanks to bad intelligence, his climbing expedition had ended in disaster – and it could have proved fatal. And he had been sent to break in on the wrong man for the second time in a row. Now, the people whom his employers had crossed were fooling around with dead bodies.

Neither the Jenners nor Guy Duggleby, their only leads to the mysterious imposter, could be contacted. Their telephones just rang and rang, and Duggleby's overheard conversation had suggested that they might not know the imposter anyway. Through no fault of his own, just because the luck was against him, Billy Kemp could see himself being dragged down by a couple of losers. It was time to bale out.

He let himself into the house, using the keys which Cotton had provided to save himself the trouble of a journey up and down the stairs to answer the bell. Kemp's employer had decided to dump the body at the Jenners' country retreat, at their house in Horton Grand. Cotton was assuming that the house would be empty for some time.

Putting time and distance between Inky Fergusson's death and the discovery of his body would help to confuse the issue. And the resulting kerfuffle would get back at the Jenners for knowing a trouble-maker, no

matter how slightly.

Rolf Weinbaum chewed on a short, green cigar and watched Cotton and Kemp pack the body into the music-centre carton. His card-dealing hands were too delicate for crude manual work. Nobody took any notice of the trio as they struggled downstairs with the carton and loaded it into the back of the Land Rover. Weinbaum held doors open as his contribution to the task.

Kemp took the wheel and headed for the south-eastern corner of Kent. Several long breaks and some unhurried driving doubled their previous journey time. The Land Rover rolled over the mediaeval stone bridge on the outskirts of Horton Grand at one o'clock in the morning. Every house was in darkness.

Rolf Weinbaum was driving. He turned right at the centre of the village and ticked to a halt after twenty yards. Cotton and Kemp worked the carton out of the back of the vehicle. They waited until the Land Rover had moved out of sight. Then they shuffled up the garden path to the Jenners' front door.

Something crunched under Billy Kemp's foot as he followed Lucky Cotton into the house. When they had dumped the carton in the hall, opposite the door to the living room, he risked a spot of light from a pen torch to scan the floor. He had trodden on a postcard.

"What you doing?" muttered Cotton impatiently.

"Trodden on this," whispered Kemp, picking up the postcard to smooth it. A dark green stamp caught his eye. "Hang on. This might just be something."

"What's that?" murmured Cotton.

"This postcard. There was one like it in their place in town. From a bloke called Toby. He sent it from France."

"Show me," invited Cotton.

'Don't know whether you're in town or at your country retreat,' read the message. 'So I'm sending a card to both. Having a pretty rum time. One meets some fairly weird people in French hotels. The story's worth a dinner when I get home. Regards to Jeff and love to Nicki, Toby.'

"Okay, let's go," Cotton tucked the card into a pocket.

Billy Kemp ghosted noiselessly into the night. The front door was a little stiff. Cotton eased it shut. It stopped moving before the lock clicked. Unwilling to risk the noise of slamming it, he just left the door looking shut from a distance and hurried down the garden path.

"Remember that phone box we used on Thursday?" he told Weinbaum when the expedition caught up with the Land Rover at the stone bridge. "Head for it."

"Who we calling?" growled Weinbaum.

Cotton told him about the postcard. "I'd say it's this Toby bloke we're

looking for. So I'm going to ask this Guy Duggleby if he's seen him yet."

"It'd better bloody be him," said Weinbaum. "I'm getting teed off chasing one bum after another."

"Feel like jacking it in?" suggested Cotton.

"This guy's got some lumps coming," growled Weinbaum. "And you saw what they did to Inky. That Jobbo Wright can hit."

"Phone box coming up," announced Kemp.

Cotton approached the box, fumbling for change. Someone had broken the light bulb but he had borrowed Kemp's pen torch. The general background of the sky and the Land Rover's headlights made it superfluous. Guy Duggleby's telephone rang and rang, as it had been doing all day. Just then Cotton was on the point of hanging up, a female voice answered with the number.

"Guy there?" asked Cotton.

"Guy?" repeated Joan Duggleby over party sounds. "No, he's in France at the moment,"

"Where in France?" prompted Cotton then no more information seemed to be forthcoming.

"Where?" repeated Joan, as if the party was giving Cotton's voice on the telephone plenty of competition. "He didn't say. The South, I think." Guy had been vague deliberately to make life difficult for brother Tom if he decided to send out search parties. "Who's calling?" added Joan.

"Jack Carter," improvised Cotton. "When's he back?"

"He didn't say. Jack who? Do I know you? I'm Guy's sister."

"No, we haven't met. Tell Guy I'll ring again in a couple of days. Cheers, love." Without waiting for an acknowledgement, Cotton hung up and returned to the Land Rover.

"If he's gone to France," said Rolf Weinbaum when Cotton had reported on his conversation, "that Toby creep must be there as well,"

"And maybe not too far from where he posted the cards," added Cotton. "Let's go, Billy. I think we'd better jog back to Frogland. And it puts a bit of distance between us and Jobbo bloody Wright."

Kemp moved up to the crossroads and turned towards London. Then a thought struck him. "Bit dodgy, me getting to France," he remarked. "Passport's run out. I wasn't planning to renew it till the summer."

"That's okay," said Weinbaum. "We can pick up all the talent we need on the spot. Saves us your fare."

Kemp shrugged. "Okay." He was out of a job but he would be free of a pair of losers in an hour and a half.

After a late start to their Saturday morning, forgers Scott Hamill and Jobbo Wright set out for Shepherd's Bush. There had been no reports on the radio of a body being found in a flat less than half a mile from

Wormwood Scrubs Prison. They concluded that the gamblers had managed to dispose of their late partner unobtrusively. Having underlined the urgency of recovering the missing forged dollars, Hamill and Wright wanted a progress report.

The other first-floor tenant opened his door to discover who was doing all the hammering. He told Hamill and Scott that their friends had gone. Cotton and Weinbaum had been on their way out with baggage as the neighbour had arrived home after an extended Friday night out.

Just for the sake of completeness, Hamill and Wright spent an hour driving round and asking questions. They ended up at a block of council flats. Both lifts were out of order. They had to climb five flights of stairs to reach the flat of Sally Darwin, Billy Kemp's older sister. Wright rested a thick finger on the bell-push. Much to the visitors' surprise, the lad himself opened the door.

Billy Kemp recognized trouble right away. The Law was his first thought. He dismissed it immediately. Even though both men were a couple of inches taller than Kemp, the right size for coppers, the tubby one with sandy hair looked about fifty and a little too old to be climbing lots of stairs.

His partner was thirty-odd and a hard man who wanted the world to know it. Coppers hardly ever roll up their shirt sleeves to the elbow to show off the tattoos on their massive forearms.

Placing his foot behind the door to prevent an invasion, Kemp braced himself against the frame and waited for the callers to say something. Despite his outwardly relaxed pose, he was ready to defend himself should the need arise.

"We want a word with you, chum," said Hamill confidently.

"Yeah?" said Kemp, unimpressed.

"The car's downstairs," Wright added with a hard stare.

"So?" said Kemp, implying that he had no intention of descending five flights of stairs to be thumped.

"Hello," said a small voice from the region of Kemp's left hip.

"Go and watch telly, love." Kemp turned his niece round and gave her a shove in the right direction.

"Baby sitting, eh?" said Hamill.

Kemp just looked at him, waiting.

"We're looking for your mates. The card sharps," said Hamill.

Kemp shrugged. "They're not here."

"Maybe you'd like to tell us where they are?" suggested Wright, flexing his muscles.

"What's it worth to you?" asked Kemp.

"What's it worth to *you*?" retorted Wright menacingly. "An arm? Or maybe a broken leg?"

"Do me over and you'll get hurt too," said Kemp confidently. "Both of you. And you won't find anything out."

"Yeah?" sneered Wright.

"All right," interrupted Hamill. "It's worth a tenner."

"I was thinking twenty," said Kemp.

"You take twenty quid off us, then tip them off by phone," sneered Wright. "Some deal."

"I'd have a job," chuckled Kemp. "They might be on a plane right now."

"Going there?" demanded Hamill.

"Twenty quid," retorted Kemp. "Ta!" He accepted four £5 notes. "They've shot off to the South of France. Looking for a bloke called Toby. He's the one with their dough."

"Our dough," growled Wright.

"Where in France?" asked Hamill.

"I'd better write it down for you," said Kemp. "Then you can work out how to say it. Sounds a bit like palaver."

Hamill passed him a newspaper and a ball point from the breast pocket of his jacket. Kemp wrote the name of the town and the hotel shown on Toby Ryun's postcard in the margin of the newspaper. A hand tugged at his belt as he returned pen and paper to Hamill.

"Uncle Billy," complained a small voice. "I don't want to watch telly no more."

"Go and switch it off, then," suggested Kemp.

"Anything else you want to tell us?" suggested Hamill. "Value for money, like?"

"The bloke they're looking for, Toby, he's about your height, five ten or eleven, early thirties, with short, dark hair," volunteered Kemp. "And there's another bloke called Guy Duggleby in the picture. He's a mate of this Toby. He's gone to France too. Probably to warn him."

"What's he look like?" prompted Hamill.

"Six foot, longish, fairish hair, in good shape, looks about thirty."

"And there does he fit in?"

Kemp shrugged. "It was a proper botch-up. This bloke with the dough, Toby? He was calling himself Jeff Jenner then he got into the shaving game in France. And when we checked out the real Jeff Jenner, this bloke Guy shoved his nose in."

"Can I do some painting, Uncle Billy?" asked his niece, back for another look at the callers.

"Okay, but put your apron on," said Kemp.

"Can I have some water?" persisted his niece.

"Kids, eh?" remarked Hamill. "Right, let's get going."

"Ta'ra, Uncle Billy," mocked Wright.

"Up yours, pal," returned Kemp, a challenge in his eyes.

"Come *on!*" said Hamill impatiently then Wright seemed inclined to stay to do battle with the younger man.

"See you around, pal," threatened Wright, allowing himself to be dragged along the deck to the stairs.

"Anywhere, anytime," returned Kemp. "Okay, I'm coming, pest," he added to his niece as she tried to drag him to the kitchen for painting water.

Guy Duggleby was the first to wake after the Friday night out with Céline and her friend. He had spent an hour the previous evening ringing round hotels in the area, searching for Toby Ryun – without success. Bob Kane managed to keep his eyes open through a modest Continental breakfast of coffee and warm rolls with deliciously fruity jam. He closed them again as soon as they reached the beach.

The official holiday season had not yet started but a fair number of the citizens of Montpelier had turned out to enjoy a warm Saturday. Lunchtime came around at the end of an inactive morning. Two paths climbed up to the hotel from the beach – a steep staircase cut into the rock of a sheer cliff, and a winding, quarter mile trail.

Torn between hunger and a natural antipathy towards exercise, Bob was not sure whether to feel relieved or dismayed when Guy chose the short way up to the hotel.

The waiter brought a telephone for Guy and a chilled bottle of Cassis for Bob. While his friend poured and sampled the wine, Guy placed a call to his sister in England. At first, Joan sounded as if she were shouting from the far end of a long tunnel. Then the line cleared magically.

"Where are you exactly?" asked Joan, reducing her voice to a normal level.

"Classified information," returned Guy. "Big brother Tom must be polishing his thumbscrews by now. Heard from Toby yet?"

"Big brother Tom's at the police station at Ashford," said Joan, sounding worried. "What's going on, Guy?"

"I don't follow you," Guy admitted. "What's he doing in a cop shop?"

"He found a body at Jeff's place. At Horton Grand."

"Whose body?"

"No one seems to know."

"I don't know anything about it either, Bundle," Guy assured his sister. "Start at the beginning."

"Where are Jeff and Nicki?" persisted Joan. "The police are looking for them."

"I can imagine. They're on a boat. Come on, what's all this about?"

Realizing that she would get no sense out of her brother before she had supplied an explanation, Joan Duggleby collected her thoughts. "Tom phoned me at your place this morning. He was worried about you not showing up at his family occasion. He must have driven over to the Jenners' place to see if you were hiding with them. From what I could gather, the front door was open. So he went in."

"For a nosy. That's just like him. Sorry, Bundle, go on."

"He found a big box in the hall. And when he had a look inside, he found the body."

"What sort? Male or female? No one we know, I hope?"

"All I know is it's an unidentified man. They made Tom look at the body, but he didn't recognize him. Anyway, Tom started to drag the box out of the house. I don't think he knew that he was going to do with it. But the Jenners' neighbour had seen a suspicious stranger going into the house. And when he started making off with big boxes, she phoned the police. By some miracle, there was a panda car about half a mile away. And that's how Tom was arrested."

"They don't think he did it?" scoffed Guy.

"Did what?" remarked Bob Kane.

Guy flapped a hand at him to request silence.

"No," said Joan, "of course not. By the time he'd got one of our solicitors to the police station, they'd found out the man had been dead for at least a day, maybe two."

"So he was done in yesterday? Or maybe even on Thursday?"

"Who? Who?" insisted Bob.

"Tell you in a minute," said Guy. "Joan? You can tell the police the Jenners were in London from Thursday morning till Friday morning. So they can't know anything about a body at their place in Kent."

"But there are they now?"

"On Grant Hardy's boat. Probably at Nice. I'd better get in touch to break the news. Tell the police they'll phone them sometime today. At Ashford."

"They're not going to like that."

"It's the best we can do for the moment."

"Just that are you up to, Guy?" demanded his sister.

"I'll be able to tell you that then we catch up with Toby," said Guy. "Is your ankle still okay?"

"Is that a hint you want me to go round to Bob's place to see if there's a message?"

"Something like that."

"I hope you know that you're doing," Joan sounded worried.

"Listen," Guy assured her, "no one we know has anything to do with the box or its contents."

"I only hope the police will believe that."

"You don't think *I* put it there?"

"Well . . . , no."

"Well I didn't. I'll phone you again later to see if you've heard from Toby."

"All right. Look after yourself, Guy."

"What body?" demanded Bob as Guy replaced the receiver.

"Tom found a body at the Jenners' place when he was snooping around, looking for me," laughed Guy. "I know it's not funny, but you can't help laughing."

"It might stop him poking his nose in next time," chuckled Bob. "Who was the late lamented?"

"No one seems to know. The police are looking for the Jenners to assist them with their inquiries."

"Good job they've got a rock solid alibi. So that now?"

"Now, we're going looking for Captain Hardy and his boat. Which means bombing over to Nice."

"How far's that?" Bob glanced up as the waiter's shadow fell across him.

"How far is what, M'sieu?" asked the waiter in decent English, assuming that the question had been directed at him.

"Oh!" said Bob. "Er, Nice. How long would it take to drive there?"

"About three hours, M'sieu," supplied the waiter.

"Looks like we're flying again," said Guy. "We can eat on the move."

Guy returned to the telephone to confirm that Grant Hardy's cruiser was at Nice, then he contacted the airfield near Montpellier. Bob and the waiter went into conference mode to organize a packed lunch. The weekend was turning out to be much more active and entertaining than Bob had dreamed.

He ordered refreshments with the abandon of someone on expenses and not used to that blessed state. Through years of diligent practice, Bob had purged himself of sensitivity. Guy Duggleby had plenty of money, Bob Kane had none.

Guy had invited him along on the trip and he knew very well that Bob was broke. Thus Bob could let his friend pick up all of the bills with a clear conscience. His total lack of embarrassment meant that he did not feel obliged to make a token contribution to their expenses, even though he was in no position to do so.

Two hours later, Guy landed at the aeroclub at Nice. Bob's new-found French friend, Céline, had come along for the ride. The two of them were so busy continuing Bob's French lessons that they hardly noticed that their journey had ended. Two teenagers agreed to give the visitors

a lift to the city for a small consideration. The car dropped them off at the Hôtel Luxembourg, on the seafront Promenade des Anglais.

The trio crossed two wide carriageways and a central reservation packed with flowers and palm trees on the way to the beach. Céline had telephoned a friend in Nice before take-off to arrange their next lift. Her friend, Doc, was waiting for them at the water's edge with an inflatable dinghy. He was tall, despite sounding like one of the Seven Dwarfs, a Canadian medical student in a pair of denim jeans which ended in ragged fringes just above his knees.

A battered straw sombrero and greyish training shoes completed his outfit. He could switch effortlessly from French to heavily-accented English – which was clearly not his first language.

The group exchanged greetings as the newcomers boarded the dinghy under the curious stares of beach idlers. Then Doc heaved his passengers afloat. Squatting in the stern at the outboard motor, he seemed to be all arms and spindly legs. Bob passed him one of his French cigarettes and clicked his lighter into life.

The Canadian smiled appreciation, then he returned his gaze to straight ahead. Half a dozen small craft were zooming around close inshore in the Baie des Anges, four of them towing skiers. The rule of the road seemed to be: *Solid craft have nothing to fear from inflatables and therefore need not avoid them.*

"Which boat is it?" Céline asked. She was clinging to Bob's arm in a way that was more possessive than for support.

"That one." Bob stretched out his free arm. "The midnight blue hull with the gold stripe." He darted a glance at Doc. The Canadian had said hello to Céline with a much-more-than brotherly kiss, but he seemed not to be showing any signs of jealousy. With a mental shrug, Bob settled back to enjoy the close presence of an attractive woman.

Two yachts and the cruiser were bobbing at anchor in a defensive triangle – either for company or for protection against the marauding speedboats. Most of the members of the three crews had picked a piece of deck and were enjoying the sun. A lack of wind had allowed thermometers to creep up to seventy or so degrees.

"Ahoy there, Admiral," called Guy as the dinghy bumped against Grant Hardy's vessel. "Permission to come aboard?"

A round face with a beard which clung to the jawline like a long, black caterpillar peered down at the visitors from the flying bridge. "Sling your hook, matey," Hardy advised through a broad grin. "What brings you to this part of the world?"

"Words with your toiling masses," replied Guy, waving a greeting to the Jenners, who were dressed for either swimming or sunbathing.

Leaving Bob to entertain Doc and Céline with the aid of a bottle of

Chablis, Guy took the Jenners and their host into the main cabin for a conference. Hardy's wife and another couple were ashore, shopping. Frowns and a vulnerable widening of their eyes followed Guy's announcement that the police wanted to talk to the Jenners about the body that Guy's brother had been found at their country home.

"This can't be some of your fun and games, young Guy?" said the bearded Hardy. His guests had been stunned into silence.

"Nothing at all to do with me," Guy assured him. "The stiff was obviously dumped some time after Jeff and Nicki left on Thursday morning. And the chances are it would still be there, undiscovered, if brother Tom hadn't been snooping around, looking for me."

"So that's our next move?" asked Jeff. "Catch the next plane back home?"

"The police at Ashford will be expecting a phone call from you," said Guy. "I suggest we ring them right away, then play it by ear."

"Bang goes the weekend," sighed Hardy.

"Oh, I don't know," countered Guy. "They can hardly hold it against you if some inconsiderate sod dumps a stiff in your house when you're out."

"But will that stop them trying?" Jeff asked cheerlessly.

"Hey up!" Bob called from the bow. "Phuzz approaching at five o'clock."

Guy led the group out of the cabin – to see a police launch driving at speed towards the cluster of larger vessels.

"Looks like we won't have to pay for the call to Ashford," remarked Jeff.

"Do you think it could have been those men who called on Wednesday night, looking for Toby?" said Nicki.

"You think they might have caught up with Toby?" added Hardy. "And put him in the box?"

"No, Tom knows Toby and he would have identified him," said Guy. "Let's not jump to any conclusions just yet. Personally, I think Toby's still running around over here, blissfully unaware of all the chaos he's leaving in his wake."

The police launch cut its engines and drifted alongside to nudge the starboard fenders of Hardy's cruiser. Two tough-looking gendarmes with battered MAT-49 sub-machine-guns hovered on deck, their weapons slung over their shoulders but ready to hand. Clinging firmly to a succession of hand holds, a sad-faced man of about forty worked his way to the rail of the launch and hopped clumsily across to the cruiser. He introduced himself as Inspector Cornille.

"Your passports, please," he added, sliding his eyes over Nicki Jenner's swim-suited figure with a certain seen-it-all-before-lots-of-times air.

The inspector was wearing a light-weight suit, but he looked fairly hot and bothered.

"What can we do for you?" asked Grant Hardy after identifying himself as the owner of the cruiser.

"An officer of your British police is flying here to interview M. Jenner and his wife and M. Duggleby," the inspector told him as he gathered passports.

"We were just about to come ashore and phone them," said Jeff, realizing that the statement sounded rather lame now that the vessel had been boarded by the French police.

"Hmm," grunted Inspector Cornille, accepting the story without necessarily believing it. He returned Bob's passport, frowning at his flying overall, and tucked Guy's into his inside pocket.

"Flying out?" said Guy. "When do you expect him?"

The inspector glanced at his watch. "In about half an hour."

"Are you arresting us?" asked Nicki warily.

"I have been asked by your British police to make sure you remain here to be interviewed," said the inspector, evading the question. "Are all these people your passengers, Mr Hardy?"

"Only the Jenners," said Hardy, tugging at his narrow strip of beard. "Mr. Duggleby and his friends came out in the inflatable to tell us about, you know, the body."

"Body?" repeated Doc. "As in corpse?"

"Some rotten sod dumped a stiff at Jeff's place after he left to come out here," explained Bob.

"And the cops want to give him the rubber hose treatment?" said Doc with a hostile glare at the inspector.

"About that," nodded Bob, keeping his expression serious.

Inspector Cornille ignored the frowns and settled down at the stern of the cruiser. He accepted a glass of chilled white wine and sipped nervously as the anchors were raised and the vessel headed for the harbour at the eastern end of the long waterfront, following the police launch. The inspector seemed more afraid of the cruiser sinking than of being grabbed and held hostage by the desperate characters aboard.

The procession rounded the vaguely Chinese lighthouse at the end of the mole, gave plenty of sea-room to a ferry bound for Corsica, and threaded a path through a scattering of pleasure craft. The cruiser tied up between two police launches at an oil-stained concrete jetty – which, as Grant Hardy remarked, saved him a fortune in mooring fees.

One of the armed gendarmes parked himself on a rope-polished bollard, rested his sub-machine-gun across his knees, and seemed to sink into a trance. Inspector Cornille gave Hardy and his passengers the freedom of about thirty square metres of irregular concrete.

After some argument, the Canadian called Doc was allowed to drive away in his inflatable dinghy. He had a business appointment with a pair of scuba divers. Then the inspector disappeared into one of the buildings beside the jetty. His prisoners, in fact if not in name, settled down to wait for the representative of the British police force to arrive.

7. Question Time

Gamblers Lucky Cotton and Rolf Weinbaum reached Nîmes International Airport at the beginning of a warm Saturday afternoon and set their watches forward one hour. They decided to postpone lunch until stomachs on British Summer Time started to drop hints. A bus took them into the city. They travelled the fifty miles to Montpellier by train, then hired a car for the last lap of their journey.

Cotton stopped at a café in Palavas. Leaving Weinbaum with the task of ordering coffee and cognac in American and French, he took the postcard acquired at the Jenners' house in Horton Grand over to the telephone. The Mediterranean was looking blue and inviting, despite its severe pollution problems. Cotton asked to speak to Mr. Duggleby. The hotel's receptionist told him that Mr. Duggleby had gone to Nice. Cotton turned down a chance to leave a message and rang off. Half of the afternoon had gone, but he was well satisfied with his progress.

"That was quick," grunted Weinbaum as Cotton slid onto the chair on the other side of the rickety table.

"Duggleby's staying at the same hotel." Cotton tossed the postcard onto the table. "And he's gone to Nice." He paused to allow his partner to comment.

"So?" grunted Weinbaum into an extending silence.

"He's gone to Nice," repeated Cotton. "That must be where this Toby's lurking. We should catch up with him tonight."

"And get the stuff back? So we can get back to business?" Weinbaum lost some of his air of boredom. He accepted that they had to recover the forged dollars, but the break in their fund-raising activities meant that there was no money coming in and none of the night life that went with it.

"And we get Inky's pals off our backs," added Cotton amazed that the message had got through to his partner at last. "So all we have to do now is wait for Duggleby to get back."

Two men were waiting for forgers Scott Hamill and Jobbo Wright then they arrived in France. The Frenchmen were average types with unremarkable features and shortish black hair, but they carried themselves with the confidence of police officers or men who were well aware of their own importance.

Hamill and Wright exchanged sombre greetings with their French

partners, then they followed them to a dark green van. Albert Montois took the wheel. He was about Jobbo Wright's age and weight, two inches shorter and he smelled of paint.

Montois set a south-westerly course, ignoring the motorway to avoid the irritation and delay involved in paying the toll. Paul Boulay lit a Lucky Strike, then put the packet away without bothering to find out if anyone else wanted a smoke.

Turning round in the front passenger seat, he directed a mistrustful frown at the Englishmen, who were sitting on a folded mattress in the back of the van. Boulay was around thirty and had already started to acquire grey hairs among his greasy black locks. When his brows contracted, he acquired a solid black line above his dark eyes.

"This can only mean trouble," he said in the American-English that so many Europeans acquire. "Your visit."

"Yes and no," returned Hamill cautiously. He had not discussed the reason for the trip to France on the telephone. "We've lost some of the money."

"Lost some money?" howled Albert. The van lurched violently as he started to turn round in his seat, then thought better of it,

"Hold on," checked Hamill. "It's not quite lost. And we didn't lose it."

"Explain," invited Boulay in a menacing tone.

"Inky used to know these two card sharps," said Hamill. "He lent them some of the dollars to flash around in front of their suckers. But one of the suckers waltzed off with about five hundred bucks. We're here to get them back."

"Inky *used* to know these guys?" said Boulay, picking up the stress but not sure how to treat it. "How long ago was this?"

"Beginning of the week," rumbled Jobbo Wright. "That was when they lost it."

"Inky's no longer with us," said Hamill with false delicacy to explain the past tense. "He had an accident, you know what I mean?" he added to imply the reverse. "Fell on his head."

"Ah!" said Boulay, slipping into a thoughtful expression when he had worked out that Hamill meant. He decided to opt for discretion and say no more about his English colleagues' poor security. "So what's the plan?"

"These card sharps are a pair of deadlegs," said Hamill. He went on to give a brief account of Cotton and Weinbaum's misadventures in England on the trail of the missing forged dollars. "So," he concluded, "we thought we'd better shoot over here and finish the job ourselves to get it done right."

"You know there the money is?" said the driver. Albert's English was just as North American as his partner's.

"Not exactly," Hamill admitted. "But we know where it's going to be. The card sharps and this Guy bloke have all shot off to this Palaver place."

"So when we get there, we get the bucks off the card sharps, bash them around a bit, and tell them to get lost," added Wright.

"And what if they haven't got the dollars?" asked Boulay.

"Jobbo thumps them anyway and we go after this Guy bloke," said Hamill.

"They had better have the dollars," murmured Boulay. "We went to a lot of trouble to get the paper right."

"And we went to a lot of bother to get the printing right," said Hamill, reminding the Frenchmen that the English branch of the conspiracy had just as great an investment at stake.

"If this deal collapses," murmured Boulay in the manner of an American TV gangster, "someone's gonna get very dead. Someone else."

He left the object of the threat vague deliberately. The Frenchmen saw themselves as hard men – at least as tough as Jobbo Wright. But they had never taken the risk of murder. That their colleagues had dared to take the ultimate sanction against a traitor in their camp had impressed Boulay and Albert.

They were even more impressed by the fact that Hamill and Wright were still at liberty and travelling quite openly under their own names. The Frenchmen had not thought their English partners capable of attempting a murder, let alone getting away with a successful one. In a thoughtful silence, the group continued towards the coast.

Inspector Cornille returned to Grant Hardy's cruiser with a foreigner in tow. The man was wearing a crumpled, dark blue raincoat, which looked still London-damp on a sunny Mediterranean Saturday afternoon. His features were pinched, but not quite rat-like, and the length of his hair suggested that he was preparing for an undercover operation far from the eyes of senior officers. The two policemen paused at the dockside and looked down at the cruiser. Six pairs of eyes returned their stares.

"This is Inspector Forward of the South-West Regional Crime Squad," said the Frenchman inspector by way of an introduction and combined warning to be respectful. "You can find your way back to the office when you have finished?"

"Yes, I can manage, thanks," nodded Forward.

The newcomer descended three steps to the cruiser as Inspector Cornille turned back to the brick and timber buildings. Grant Hardy introduced himself, Bob Kane, and Céline. Having studied the pictures in their passports, the inspector was able to identify the Jenners and

Guy Duggleby for himself.

Inspector Forward called the five interested parties into the main cabin one by one and took a statement from each of them. Apart from the usual slight discrepancies due to the failings of memory, he learned that the Jenners and their friends were able to account for their whereabouts in the time band during which the mystery man had died.

Lacking a criminal record, Inky Fergusson had proved impossible to identify from his fingerprints. A rather bad photograph had been shown on the television news. None of his friends and acquaintances had noticed a resemblance or taken the likeness seriously enough to suggest to the police that their corpse was called Inky Fergusson.

The Jenners and their friends looked at morgue photographs of the dead man. Inspector Forward's copper's instinct confirmed that their bafflement was genuine. None of them had ever seen the mystery man before. In each case, there had been apprehension before seeing the picture and visible relief when the image proved unfamiliar. And none of them had the slightest idea why the corpse should have been delivered, neatly packed in a music-centre carton, to the Jenners' home in the country.

At the same time, the inspector detected undercurrents of something other than the suspicious death of an insignificant character – someone in the printing trade, according to the pathologist who had performed the post mortem examination.

The Jenners had mentioned suspicious characters to their neighbour three days earlier – to their neighbour, the woman who had called the police round to arrest Thomas Geoffrey Duggleby, brother of Guy. Inspector Forward extracted descriptions from the Jenners of the characters whom they said that they had seen hanging around the village.

He was more inclined to accept Nicki Jenner's version when the descriptions varied because she seemed to have a better eye for detail. Still not knowing how much trouble Toby Ryun was in, Nicki had kept quiet about her sketches of the gamblers and their bodyguard.

Inspector Forward gained the impression that his witnesses were withholding a key piece of information, but he had covered the ground required for his investigation satisfactorily. Neither the Jenners nor their friends had murdered the mystery man. They were just another dead end. But he had three descriptions to show for his trip to France.

Jim Forward had missed another opportunity to go to a football match by working on yet another Saturday, and the season had just one more week to run. But he could enjoy a few hours in the South of France before his flight back to London. And there was a welcome chance to pick up a ration of duty-free goods on the way home.

As he climbed up to the dock, his briefcase tucked under his left arm, the inspector was telling himself that every job has its compensations. His host, Inspector Cornille, looked a bit of a miserable sod, but no doubt the French police could provide something in the way of hospitality more exciting than a cup of tea and a few biscuits.

"Well, that didn't hurt too much, did it," remarked Guy Duggleby when he judged that Inspector Forward was out of earshot.

"He was almost nice about it, in a sinister sort of way," added Nicki Jenner.

"Probably because Grant issued him with a glass of wine," chuckled Bob Kane. "D'you reckon we're not suspects any more? Or was he trying to lure us into a sense of false security?"

"I wonder if Rosemary's notice we've gone?" said Hardy.

"Knowing your dear wife's shopping habits, you could sneak off for a couple of days," chuckled Guy. "I suppose they'll keep us hanging around for a while yet. But some underling's sure to tell us to shove off before long."

Guy's prediction came true a quarter of an hour later. A stocky man in shirt sleeves and shiny, dark blue trousers distributed passports to Guy and the Jenners, and told Hardy that he was free to carry on with his cruise. Guy made a note of the cruiser's itinerary as the Jenners cast off with the casual skill of recent practice.

Clear of the Old Port, but before the turn half-left towards the sea, Guy, Bob and Céline left the cruiser and headed for a café and a telephone. They found both on the Quai Maréchal Joffre, between a junk shop and what looked like a betting shop.

The phone just rang and rang when Guy got through to his flat in London. Taking this as good news, he dialled his sister's private number at the family home. If Joan had returned to Failsham, then she had found a message from Toby Ryun at Bob Kane's attic flat.

Guy glanced to his left as double chirps began again. A bored waiter, who looked Italian but had a distinct Yorkshire accent, was delivering three cups of coffee and three generous glasses of marc eau-de-vie. The café was dingy and almost sinister after the dusty afternoon brilliance outside. Its surfaces had acquired a dull sheen from constant contact with human bodies. It was a place for real people, not tourists.

"Five one three two four?" said a slightly hoarse female voice.

"Hello, it's me," said Guy unhelpfully. "Got a cold?"

"A bit of one. Is this your one permitted phone call?" Joan Duggleby added with a laugh.

"I think one brother in clink is quite enough for any girl," returned Guy. "Is there anything in the paper about this stiff? The copper they sent out here was about as forthcoming as the bloke himself."

"There was a bit on the radio about him. Apparently, he died after a fall. And the police think he was moved at least twice after death. Tom was grilled by someone from the Drug Squad. Sounds like the coppers think someone has set up a distribution network. And they're borrowing places like the Jenners' house for meetings and deliveries."

"Sounds like someone's got a good imagination. Has our dear brother recovered from the shock of being nicked yet?"

"When he stopped shaking, he started breathing fire," giggled Joan. "It's all your fault, you know."

"Even so, I can't feel sorry for him," chuckled Guy. "He's always poking his nose in and trying to organize my bloody life. What's the betting this won't even slow him down?"

"About a thousand to one on. I take it Jeff and Nicki are in the clear now?"

"The coppers seem to have lost interest in them. Well, are you going to tell me there Toby is?"

"Is that a lucky guess, or have you heard from him too?"

"Deduction. I hope you left my flat in one piece?"

"It was a marvellous party," chuckled Joan. "The builders should have finished by the time you get back. Anyway, Toby's in the Venice of Provence, according to the guide book. At Martiques, which is a busy fishing town about thirty miles from Marseilles. He was quite cheesed then he found they haven't turned the Chateau d'If into a hotel. That's where they kept The Man In The Iron Mask, you know."

"Yes, I do. And the Count of Monte Cristo."

"That's not in the Telex. It looks like he sent it to Tony Vosper and he shoved it under Bob's door."

"That's one way of transferring information quickly and reliably. Okay, let's have the details," invited Guy. He took down the name of Toby Ryun's hotel, its address and a telephone number. Then he said goodbye to his sister and crossed the gloomy café to join Bob and Céline.

"If I had a torch," said Bob, "I'd be able to see if he's smiling or not."

"You mean he has something to smile about?" asked Céline, who had been astounded by the details of their adventure as supplied by Bob.

"We've found Toby." Guy tested his coffee and found that it was still drinkable. "Or rather, he's admitted where he is. I'll give him a ring in a couple of minutes."

"Why not right away?" objected Bob.

"That bloke's a bit bigger than me." Guy turned a thumb towards the telephone.

The man making a call looked about seven feet tall and built in proportion. He was not the sort to interrupt lightly.

Guy finished his coffee, then he approached the telephone again. Toby Ryun was not in his hotel, which came as no surprise, and he was not expected back until very late. Further, he was moving west to Arles in the morning. Guy left a message ordering Toby to stay put and await callers when he reached his next stopping point.

Suddenly at a loose end, Guy and Bob decided to allow Céline to show them a bit of Nice before they flew back to Montpellier.

Albert turned left, out of a minor road, exchanging insults with an inattentive road user who had drifted too close to his van. Scott Hamill gazed through the windscreen, examining idly the shops and pedestrians on his left. Between the groups of low buildings, he could catch tantalizing glimpses of calm blue water. Suddenly, he hammered on the seat in front and called: "Pull in, mate. It's them!"

"Who is it?" demanded Paul as Albert put his brakes on.

"Inky's pals," explained Hamill. "Sitting in that café, at the back, Calm as you like. Or their doubles."

"These are the two who lost the dollars?" said Boulay.

"Right," nodded Hamill. "They'll be waiting for this Toby or his mate Guy to show up."

"Are we going to take them?" said Albert.

"Let's have another look at them to make sure," stalled Hamill. "How far is it to your place?"

"We're nearly there," said Boulay.

"Okay." Hamill reached a decision. "They may know what Jobbo and me look like but they won't know you two. So if you and Al invited them over to the van. We can take them to your place for a chat."

"And when do we clobber them?" said Albert to underline the fact that he was a tough guy.

"Wait till we get out of town," said Hamill. "Let's take another look at them."

Albert made a U-turn on the quiet road. Two cars had just overtaken them. No other vehicles were in sight. He drove past the café again and parked almost immediately.

"That's them at the back," said Hamill positively. "The one with the moustache and the guy with the long face."

"I saw them," nodded Boulay.

He took a neat automatic pistol from under his seat and peeled away three strips of adhesive tape, which had held it securely hidden. Boulay jacked a cartridge into the chamber, then the Frenchmen climbed out of the van and hopped over a low brick wall.

Lucky Cotton and Rolf Weinbaum looked up, sensing company.

"There is a van at the side of the road, gentlemen," said Boulay with

official assurance. "My colleagues would like to talk to you."

"Yeah?" returned Weinbaum, refusing to be impressed. "Who the hell are you, Charlie?"

"I am the man with a gun in his pocket," returned Boulay, deciding not to waste time pretending to be a police officer. He lifted the muzzle of the weapon into view for a moment.

"You wouldn't dare use that here in the open," said Cotton with more confidence than he felt. "Too many witnesses."

"The more witnesses, the more different stories," said Boulay with a broad smile to show equal confidence. "And nothing they say will take the bullets out of your bodies."

"I ain't going for no ride with a bullet at the end of it," said Weinbaum stubbornly. "I ain't gonna make killing us any easier for you. You can take your chances here."

"My colleagues are more interested in talking than killing – at the moment," said Boulay.

"So what's wrong with right here?" said Cotton.

"All right," decided Boulay as a waiter arrived to hover over the newcomers. He ordered a bottle of wine and four glasses, waved a summons to the van and sat down. Things were not going according to plan. On television, the threat of a gun was always enough to persuade the hardest case to go for his ride.

"What the hell's going on?" demanded Jobbo Wright, craning past his partner to look at the cosy group in the café's yard.

"Looks like they're going to talk here," Scott Hamill interpreted, moving to the van's rear door. "Can't trust a bloody Frog to get anything done proper."

Cotton and Weinbaum put on expressions of suppressed fury when the number at their table increased to six. If numbers and weapons had been in their favour, they would have shown Hamill and Wright what they thought of people who dumped dead bodies on them. But under the circumstances, they could only sit and fume.

"Got them bucks back yet?" asked Hamill.

"We're working on it," Cotton told him with a scowl.

"Suppose you tell us there you're up to?"

With a shrug, Cotton launched into an account of their attempts to recover the missing dollars. Most of the ground had been covered before by Inky Fergusson and Billy Kemp, but the forgers heard him out in case he revealed something new.

The news came at the end of the account. The forgers learned where to find Guy Duggleby, that Cotton and Weinbaum believed him to be in Nice, talking to his friend Toby, and that the gamblers had hired a thief who specialized in hotels to visit Guy Duggleby's room during the

night to frighten the whereabouts of his friend Toby out of him.

"A proper cock-up all along the line," sneered Wright.

"Who did you hire for tonight?" said Hamill, cutting across his partner's insults.

"A bloke called Mordeau," said Cotton grudgingly.

"I know him," said Boulay after an uncomplimentary remark in his native French.

"Will he cough what he knows to us?" asked Hamill.

"He would cough to the devil if he pays him," Boulay told him.

"Okay," decided Hamill. "You two get lost. If we see you again, you're in dead lumber."

"What d'you mean, get lost?" demanded Weinbaum. "You've got five hundred and fifty bucks of our bread. What we gave to Inky with the funny stuff."

"Get if back off Inky," said Hamill with a thin smile.

"Aren't we going to thump them?" asked Jobbo Wright.

The disappointment in his voice was reflected on Albert's non-descript French face.

"You thump us like you thumped Inky and you're in a lot of trouble," bluffed Cotton. "We've got insurance."

"We're not going to waste any more time on them," said Hamill, apparently ignoring the threat, but taking note of it just the same. "They've had their chance and they've blown it. That five hundred is rent on our dough," he told Cotton. "And if anyone talks out of turn, you go down with us. Get lost." He made an abrupt shooing gesture with his right hand.

Outnumbered and outmanoeuvred, Cotton and Weinbaum scraped rubber-shod chairs away from the round table. It was a great relief to lose the responsibility of recovering the missing forged dollars – almost worth the loss of five hundred and fifty genuine ones. And they could get back to work instead of wasting their working capital on trips back and forward to England.

Things could have been worse, they realized. And, as Weinbaum remarked to Cotton as they headed back to Montpellier to surrender their hired car, they had stuck the forgers with the bill at the café for their coffee and brandy.

"What about this Mordeau?" Hamill asked Boulay, dismissing the departing gamblers from his mind.

"What about those two?" interrupted Albert.

"We can take care of them when we've got those bucks back," said Cotton, knowing that the gamblers would be out of reach.

"We should have thumped them," Wright told Albert, smacking a large fist into a grubby palm. Albert rumbled agreement.

"Later," said Boulay, realizing that the gamblers knew enough to demand caution on the part of the forgers. "Mordeau is dangerous," he added thoughtfully. "He acts tough, but he is a coward. And he carries a gun. If someone thinks he is tougher, Mordeau will shoot. I would not use him."

"I don't think this Guy bloke's going to try anything if he gets woken up in the middle of the night and this guy shoves a gun in his face," decided Hamill. "You know where to contact him to tell him we're running things now? Mordeau?"

"He goes to a bar called The Madrigal," said Boulay.

"I suppose we'd better go through with this."

"You think we are wasting our time?"

"Well, I've been trying to put myself in this Toby's place. He gets into a bent card game, but he comes out ahead. Then the card-sharps come looking for him. And this Guy bloke goes looking for Toby to tell him to watch out. But why should either of them think there's anything wrong with the money? This Toby might have blown it by now. Paying a hotel bill. Or in a casino. He might even be in gaol for passing it."

Boulay took a swallow of wine and exchanged glances with Albert. "It's possible," he admitted.

"Suppose you were on holiday and you came into seven hundred bucks? What would you do with it apart from spend it?"

"Paul would put it in his pocket and pretend he has no money," chuckled Albert.

"So what is your plan?" invited Boulay, glaring at Albert.

Hamill shrugged. "We let Mordeau go ahead, I suppose. Just in case."

"And what if this Toby has spent his winnings?"

"We're not planning to get rid of the dollars till about the middle of July. That's ten weeks for it to blow over after some bank spots the duds. If anyone does. And we're not stuck with a whole bunch of paper with the same numbers. Inky may not have been too clever at picking his mates, but he did a job and a half of the printing. It won't be a complete disaster if he has spent it. He's only got five hundred bucks."

"But it's worth the effort to find out if he still has the dollars," nodded Boulay. "In case we decide to sell them instead of change them ourselves."

"I suppose we'll have to thump this Duggleby to make him talk," said Jobbo Wright, laying claim to the job of thumping a fellow Englishman,

"Let's just hang fire," warned Scott Hamill. "We want this Duggleby to think those two mugs are still after him. We don't want to show him any new faces just yet."

"We will know him, but he will not know us," added Paul Boulay with a grave nod.

8. One Too Many

Guy Duggleby and Bob Kane reached their hotel rooms a little after midnight. They had spent the evening with Céline and a friend with the very unfrench name of Betty. An attempt to contact Toby Ryun at his hotel to confirm that he had received Guy's message had proved unsuccessful. Mr. Ryun seemed to be making a night of it too, which was nothing unusual. Guy heaved his suitcase onto the bed, peeled back the zips and threw back the lid. He stopped and frowned, his right hand in the act of reaching for a pair of pyjamas.

"Someone's been messing about with my gear," he remarked.

Mordeau had already carried out the first part of his assignment – a search of the room to find out if the address of someone called Toby had been left lying around.

Bob peered into his shopping bag, then he decided that the contents were in such a state of chaos that their disorder could tell him nothing.

"All my socks are the wrong way round," added Guy. "And this shirt's upside down."

"No kidding!" Bob came through the communicating door to peer at the disturbed articles.

"None at all," Guy assured him. "I've got my packing system down to such a fine art, I can do it in my sleep. I know exactly where everything should be. There doesn't seem to be anything missing, but some bugger's definitely been through my case."

"Think it might be that unknown friend who phoned you this afternoon? And wouldn't leave a message?"

"It's obviously not a thief. He'd have had my electric razor on principle. No, as you say, it could have been our friend looking for a lead to Toby. I suppose that was Mr. Cotton or Mr. Weinbaum."

"They seem quite desperate to find him, too."

"Which makes me wonder why they think it's worth all their trouble. I mean. Suppose they got him into a crooked poker game and Toby smelled a rat? And ducked out owing them a few hundred quid. It must have cost them that and more so far. Two round trips to London, hiring Billy Kemp and his gun, not to mention food, drink, hotels. If it had been me, I'd have written off the loss and looked for another sucker."

"Good point," nodded Bob. "Unless Toby owes them a few *thousand* quid. Assuming he didn't catch them cheating, pull a gun and dash off with all the money in sight."

"Even so, what's to stop him complaining to the police if they jump him and grab his winnings back?" continued Guy, ignoring the second suggestion. "They'd be out of business in France, and very possibly in gaol sooner or later. They'd be far better off keeping quiet about the whole thing."

"So what are they after?"

"That's the sixty-four thousand dollar question," sighed Guy. "I don't know. Suppose there's something written on one of the notes Toby won? An incriminating address, or a phone number, or something?"

"Don't ask me," grinned Bob. "You're talking to a bloke who never has a pound note long enough to write on it. Think he might come back, whoever was poking through your gear?"

"These characters seem to make a habit of nocturnal visits. The Jenners' place, my flat. Maybe we ought to be ready for a visit from a French Billy Kemp, or even the lad himself. Back in five minutes." Guy winked at Bob, selected a sock and strolled out of the room.

When he returned, slightly more than the promised five minutes later, the sock was full of damp sand.

"You expect that do-it-yourself cosh to work?" scoffed Bob.

"Want to try it?" Guy whacked the chest of drawers.

"No thanks," said Bob quickly. The thud of the impact had sounded very solid and incapacitating. "I had a look round just now. As far as I can tell, there's no bombs in the beds. But I wouldn't swear there isn't some nitroglycerine in your toothpaste. Which I'll have to borrow again because I forgot to buy some."

"They're not going to do anything too desperate," laughed Guy. "After all, we can't put them in touch with Toby if they blow us to bits."

"Ah, but it doesn't take both of us to do that. And don't forget, there's one dead body in circulation already. Did he fall or was he pushed? These guys might be a bit clumsy, and I'm planning to draw my old age pension, earned or not."

"Relax!" scoffed Guy. "We know they might visit us and we're ready to do something about it if they do. Don't you think the two of us can do at least as well as Jeff and Nicki did when Mr. Kemp dropped in on them at my flat?"

"Yeah," grinned Bob. "Not fair, that. Lucky they weren't on the job then he showed up."

"Right! Two hours on, two hours off guard duty," decided Guy. "I'll go first, unless you fancy it?"

"I'd rather get my head down for a while," Bob replied with a yawn.

Guy Duggleby, sprawled comfortably in an armchair just inside Bob Kane's room, tensed suddenly then he heard a faint, metallic scratching.

He had been expecting the visitor to come through the door from the corridor, but the noise had originated on the other side of the room. The balcony doors opened, showing for a moment a dark shape against a background of star-lit sea and sky. Mordeau paused for a moment to look at the S-shaped hump in the bed. An automatic pistol filled his left hand. Three inches of sound suppressor showed that he meant business.

Satisfied that the occupant of the room was asleep, the intruder advanced to search his clothing before waking him up. Guy had the connecting door open a crack. He let the intruder move past him, then he swung the door smoothly open.

The sand-filled sock caught Mordeau just behind his right ear. He pitched straight forward and landed half on and half off the bed. Guy looked down at him for a moment, surprised that his improvised cosh had worked so well. Then he picked up the gun and roused Bob.

Bob closed the balcony doors on a slightly chilly night and rejoined the curtains. Guy had switched on the lamp on the writing desk. He used a suitcase strap to immobilize the prisoner's legs and a nylon pyjama cord to secure his wrists. Leaving the prisoner horizontal, Guy and Bob made themselves comfortable and waited for him to come round.

"I think he moved," warned Bob when he had smoked half of a cigarette.

Guy flowed out of his chair and stood over the prisoner, watching him as he strained at his bonds to satisfy himself that there was no hope of escape. Relieved that further use of his cosh would not be necessary, Guy hauled the prisoner into a sitting position against the chest of drawers and returned to his chair. He was no expert at knocking someone out with a sockful of sand and had been a little worried about using too much force. Apart from a pained expression, the prisoner looked fairly healthy.

Mordeau had been carrying a flick knife in his otherwise empty pockets. Guy had confiscated it. He touched the chromed button on the side of the handle. A five-inch blade flashed out and locked with an ominous click. Mordeau's dark eyes followed every movement as Guy reached forward and unfastened the prisoner's dark blue shirt.

Pale, hairless skin, stretched taught over bony ribs, made a vivid contrast. The proximity of the knife increased the rate of rise and fall of Mordeau's chest and caused the breath to leave a big nose with a faint whistle. Guy rested the point of the knife between a couple of ribs and pressed gently – indenting, but not breaking the skin.

"Are you going to talk to us?" he asked casually.

The prisoner responded with a curse in French. The gist was quite

plain, even if the full meaning escaped Bob Kane. Guy, an experienced salesman and an expert in human reactions, could tell that the verbal defiance meant nothing. What counted was the fear in the prisoner's eyes. He was a hard nut with a soft centre.

Guy moved the knife forward a fraction of an inch. The waxen flesh gave, releasing a bubble of blood. Mordeau gasped – more in surprise than pain.

"I reckon I'm about six centimetres from your heart," said Guy calmly, switching to French. "I want some information from you. Like who sent you and where do I find them?"

The prisoner stared at the knife with wide eyes, but he remained silent.

"My friend is going to count up to ten," said Guy. "If I've not heard from you by then, the knife goes in one centimetre. Then we do some more counting. If you're not prepared to be sensible, you'll be dead two minutes from now. Start counting up to ten," he added to Bob. "Slowly."

"Un," said Bob, obliging in French. "Deux. Trois . . ."

"His name is Paul," rushed from the prisoner.

"Paul Cotton?" frowned Guy.

"Paul Boulay. Lucky Cotton has gone. I have to tell Paul where to find this man Toby."

"Hang on, start from the beginning," said Guy. "This Paul has taken over from Cotton and Weinbaum?"

"Yes." The prisoner started to nod, then thought better of moving any part of his body.

"What were you supposed to do when you got here?"

"Make you tell me where to find Toby, phone Paul, then keep you here until he says let you go."

"And why does this Paul bloke want Toby?"

"He didn't say." Mordeau was reluctant to give a negative answer in case it was interpreted as non-co-operation and an excuse to dig the knife into him again.

"Where do we find this Paul?"

"The house on the cliffs. A kilometre to the west of here. With dark green shutters and the tall chimney."

"Is this Paul in with Cotton and Weinbaum? A partner of some sort?"

"I don't think so. Lucky Cotton and the American paid me to do the job. Then Paul told me they've gone and I'm working for him."

"What is he? Some sort of gangster?" asked Guy, seeking to broaden his picture of the opposition.

"He has money, but no one knows where it comes from." Mordeau parted reluctantly with another negative. "But when he says you will do something for him, you do it, eh?"

"What's this about gangsters?" frowned Bob, picking out a familiar word with a distorted pronunciation.

"Our gambling friends are out of the picture," explained Guy. "There's a bloke called Paul after Toby now."

"Ah!" said Bob, putting together fragments of translation. "Carry on."

"That's about it," said Guy. "I can't think of much more to ask him. He's just a gopher."

"So what do we do with laughing boy?"

"Dump him back on the balcony and tell him to get lost. Unless you'd like to be half a hero? For catching a cat burglar?"

"The bloody phuzz'd keep us up half the night, asking daft questions we'd rather not answer. I'll get his feet."

Mordeau opened his mouth to say something as Bob took hold of his feet and spun him round on the seat of his black trousers to face the balcony doors. Then a spasm of cramp speared his right thigh. Mordeau's unsupported trunk arched backwards. His head caught Guy's nose. Guy was still holding the flick knife.

The blade had buried itself in the intruder's back before either of them had realized the danger. Mordeau's eyes bulged. A faint squawk of protest burst from his lips. Then he sagged limply onto Guy, staring accusingly at Bob.

"What the bloody hell!" gasped Bob.

Guy pushed the dead weight aside and groped for a handkerchief. His eyes were streaming and his nose felt as if it had been attacked by a maniac with a sledgehammer. Mordeau rolled onto his face.

"What the hell happened?" said Bob in bewilderment, staring at the knife in the intruder's back, more surprised than concerned.

"I don't know what he thought he was doing," Guy tested his nose cautiously. It was sore but the bridge seemed solid enough when he tried to rock it with finger and thumb, and it wasn't pouring out blood which, he had heard, is a sure sign of a fracture. "The bastard just dived right back at me."

"And spiked himself."

"And what?" Guy saw the knife and realized why he was no longer holding it. "Bloody hell!"

"Maybe he thought we were going to heave him out the window," Bob suggested, reaching for the knife.

"Bloody idiot. No, don't take it out. It'll stop any bleeding. The blade will plug up the hole. And it'll save the French coppers wondering how he was done in."

"What do we do with him now?"

"We could leave him here in case Tom's on my trail."

"Brilliant idea!" scoffed Bob.

Guy reached over to wipe the handle of the knife thoroughly with a slightly damp handkerchief to make sure that there were no revealing fingerprints on it. "It might shock my dear brother into leaving me alone for good, finding another stiff. I don't know. I suppose we could shove him up on the roof."

"How do we get him up there?" objected Bob.

"Use the lift."

"What if someone sees us?"

"Who's going to be wandering around at this time of night? It's getting on for two o'clock."

"Security guards."

"Oh, rubbish!" laughed Guy. "You untie his feet."

"You know," mused Bob, "I always used to think the bloke who said: 'One dead body is one too many' was stating the blindingly obvious. But I think I know exactly what he meant now."

The lifts were ten yards down the corridor from Guy's room. Bob pressed the call button, then he held the doors open while they manoeuvred the dead man into the lift. Its efficient pace became an agonizing crawl for Bob. Guy seemed totally unconcerned by the fact that he was supporting one-half of a corpse.

Undisturbed, they reached the top floor of the hotel. Unchallenged, they carried the limp body up a flight of stairs to the roof. The door was doubly bolted but not locked. On the seaward side of the building, they found a knotted rope tied to a section of pipe. They lowered the dead man to the flat surface, sprawling him artistically on his face.

Guy hauled up the rope and dropped it beside Mordeau's body. Then, using his handkerchief, he fitted the silence pistol into the dead man's gloved hand, knocked down the safety catch and squeezed off two shots in the general direction of the sea.

"Well, that should give the local phuzz something to think about," commented Bob.

"Sure will," agreed Guy. "He's obviously up to no good with his rope and the gun. With a silencer, too."

"Let's hope he's got plenty of enemies."

"He looks the type to have more than enough."

"When d'you reckon someone will find him?"

Guy looked around, his eyes more or less accustomed to the diffuse glow seeping up from the street. "None of the other buildings are tall enough and close enough for anyone to see him. And I shouldn't think people come up here too often. Might be a day or two. Might be a week or two. Anyway, let's get our heads down. We've got a busy day tomorrow."

"I wonder where this bloke Paul fits in," Bob remarked at the door to

the roof as he slid bolts on the night and the body, remembering to use his handkerchief.

"Maybe it's his address or phone number on something Toby's got."

"And we're just going to give it back to him?"

"We might. Why, what else should we do?"

Bob shrugged. "I don't know. It just seems a bit of an anticlimax. So we might be shooting back home tomorrow?"

"It's possible," nodded Guy. "Depends what Toby tells us."

The house with dark green shutters and the tall chimney enjoyed a double view over water. Beyond the windows on the southern side, across an irregular tarmac path, ten yards of coarse grass ended in the infrequent remains of a wooden fence along the cliff edge.

Forty feet of glassy rock dropped almost vertically to a shelf of debris and the silver sand. To the north of the house lay one of the long, narrow lakes which run parallel to the sea shore. Linked by canals, the inland waterway is an alternative to the sea as a highway and not subject to the full violence of Mediterranean storms.

Built at around the turn of the century, the house was broad and squat. It seemed to crouch, gripping the rock with its foundations to withstand gales from the sea and storms off the slender lake. Its roof carved down through the rooms on the first floor to meet the walls at roughly chest height and reduced the upper windows to overhung squares overcrowded with bars of dark green wood.

Paul Boulay had bought the place because of its isolation and because its position on a slight rise commanded a good view of all approach routes. He was a criminals' chandler. He supplied specialized equipment for assaults on the property of others, or he sold the details of robberies planned by experts.

Scott Hamill had learned about him in the wake of a failed currency forging attempt in West Germany. The conspirators had made a good job of the printing but they had let themselves down with the paper. Boulay had assured Hamill that it took a very experienced examiner to tell paper supplied by himself from the real thing, and their conspiracy to forge dollars had been born soon afterwards.

On a warm and sunny spring Sunday, the atmosphere in the house was decidedly gloomy. Hamill and Boulay were wondering that had happened to Mordeau, the cowardly, gun-toting burglar. Their concern had depressed the spirits of Jobbo Wright and Albert.

As the brains of the counterfeiting conspiracy talked over their doubts and fears, their satellites had taken themselves to the opposite end of the old and massive kitchen.

Over a meal of fresh, warm bread, butter and crumbly, white cheese,

washed down with coffee spiked with brandy, Wright was teaching Albert to make a proper job of swearing in English and taking lessons in French cursing. They found mutual education an amusing and useful way to pass the time.

"Why hasn't that bastard called?" said Scott Hamill, more to his coffee cup than to his companion at the long, oak table.

"Eight-thirty," said Paul Boulay after a confirmatory glance at his watch. "He should have called five or six hours ago."

"You don't think he got lucky? Found a few thousand francs in cash on this Duggleby bloke and decided to spend it? Or Duggleby paid him off?"

"I don't know. I don't think he could pay him off. Mordeau knows he has to account to me."

"What if something went wrong? He might have been nicked. You know, arrested," Hamill added in response to a mild frown.

"No, we would have heard something," Boulay was very positive. "But he has enemies. He throws his weight."

"Around," added Hamill. "Throws his weight *around*."

"Right."

"Much?"

The Frenchman shrugged. "Plenty of people would like to slide a knife between his ribs or crush his skull. He does not try to be popular."

"We'd better slide over to the hotel ourselves," Hamill decided. "Looks like we'll have to tackle this Guy bloke ourselves."

"We will go to his room?"

"No, it'd be better to wait outside in the van. We can follow him to somewhere quiet, stop him and let those two batter him till he talks." Hamill glanced down the table to Wright and Albert, who were cackling loudly over a particularly juicy and filthy expression.

"Sounds a good enough plan," nodded Boulay.

9. Toby's Tale

Guy Duggleby and Bob Kane breakfasted on mountains of scrambled egg. They had enjoyed an unbroken night's sleep after disposing of the burglar. The hotel did not seem to be overrun with police. Either the corpse on the roof had yet to be discovered or the affair of a murdered burglar had been hushed up in order not to damage business. The two Englishmen were finding it difficult to believe that the body was there at all. Their adventure in the night seemed more like a dream than reality.

The seats in their corrugated French car were warm and sticky. Guy set a course directly away from the sea. Bob kept yawning to remind him that he rarely saw much of Sunday morning. He was quite surprised by the numbers of people at the churches on their route. Guy had to remind him that they were in a country in which nominal Roman Catholics outnumbered others by nine to one.

Large packs of cyclists were out and about. Bob ran his eyes over the girls purely to see how French crumpet compared with the English variety. Gradually, his attention focussed on the right-hand wing mirror, which gave him a rear view thanks to a slight bump received in the hotel's car park.

"Don't look now, but I think there's a green van following us," he remarked casually.

"You get that impression too?" said Guy.

"Are we going to do anything about it?"

"Such as what?"

"Try and lose them, for instance? Stop for some reason and see what they do about it?"

"Why bother letting them know we know they're following us? They're going to have enough of a problem when we get past Montpellier."

"Oh, yes," grinned Bob. "There's your executive brain in action again, thinking ahead."

"Don't forget, we mention we're hopping over to Aix-en-Provence. By the time that lot find out we're flying and get a plane of their own organized, we'll be long gone."

The forgers had just missed Guy and Bob at their hotel. The receptionist had pointed out the departing pale salmon car and informed them that

Messrs. Duggleby and Kane would be back after lunch. His pursuers had been surprised to learn that Guy was not alone, but they remained confident that it would be as easy to thump two Englishmen as one. Albert's odometer had clocked up just over twelve kilometres when the car which he was following turned right, off the road.

"Hello, there are they off to?" said Scott Hamill.

"There is an airfield," said Paul Boulay. "Maybe they are meeting their friend Toby here."

"Aren't we stopping, then?" said Jobbo Wright.

"At the top of the hill. I have some binoculars," said Boulay.

Albert roared up a slight rise and pulled onto the grass verge. A long, narrow copse shielded the western side of the airfield from the road. The four forgers tramped through long grass until they had achieved an uninterrupted view of the airfield buildings.

The pinkish car was parked with two others beside a long, low hut. Two men, one of them in an olive green coverall, dark brown boots and a white crash helmet, were talking towards the four aircraft parked in front of a double hanger.

"I don't think they are meeting anyone," warned Boulay, sweeping the aircraft with his binoculars. "I don't see anyone else."

The two distant figures unlocked one of the aircraft and climbed inside.

"Back to the car," said Hamill urgently.

The sound of a distant aero-engine drifted across the field and through the trees. Then a second engine coughed into life. Albert roared down the road and swung into the field. As he reached the long hut, the aircraft was skimming towards the copse, rising away from its shadow. Hamill slid out of the van as it came to an abrupt halt and rushed for the door of the hut. He slowed to a walk as he reached it. Two minutes later, he was climbing back into the van, a pleasant smile fading into a scowl.

"They've gone to look up a mate but they'll be back this afternoon," he announced, making himself comfortable on the mattress in the back of the van. "Where the hell's Aix-en-Provence?"

"We can drive there in one and a half hours," said Boulay.

"Then we've got to find them when we get there. No, it'll be easier to wait for them to get back here."

"Can't we follow them?" suggested Wright. "There's three more planes over there."

"I thought of that," said Hamill, surprised that Wright had. "There's only one pilot, and he's got a sky-diving job in half an hour. By the time we could get another one sorted out, we'd have no chance of catching them up."

"All this is taking time," said Boulay. "The longer this Toby has the dollars, the more chance he has to spend them. And we have a lot at stake."

"No more than us," Hamill reminded him. "We'll have a word with them this afternoon."

Guy Duggleby rejoined the railway, which had taken a looping excursion to the north. The light aircraft crossed two canals and the River Rhône before the gleaming metal threads brought it to Arles. Guy landed to the east of the ancient town, having flown half of the distance to his stated destination. Getting a chance to practice his school English helped to persuade a youngster with his dad's car to give Guy and Bob a lift into town.

They found Toby Ryun sprawled at a table in front of a café, within sight of the Hôtel Jules-César, looking as if he had been through a hard night. He was sitting on the sunny side of the street because he had heard that pollen collects in the cooler shade and he was mildly susceptible to hay fever.

"You owe me sixty-two francs," Guy remarked, lowering himself onto a not terribly comfortable chair. "Left over from your hotel bill in Montpellier."

"Hello, Big T," added Bob, smiling at the bottle of white wine in a porous polythene cooler-sock.

"Help yourself," said Toby, reaching for his wallet. He had no objections to owing money to tradespeople, but he made a point of never being in debt to his friends.

Bob poured with a heavy hand into two spare glasses.

"What's the occasion for the reunion?" asked Toby.

"We hear you've been impersonating Jeff Jenner again," said Guy, tucking away notes and change.

"Run of bad luck at the tables," nodded Toby. "A change of name brings a change of luck."

"Most of it bad for your friends." Guy ran through a condensed account of the highlights of the week – the persistent burglars, a body in the Jenners' country retreat, Tom Duggleby's introduction to the inside of a police cell and the meeting with Inspector Forward in Nice.

"I knew those two were crooks," said Toby, taking a fortifying pull at his wine glass. He was no longer looking just listless – he was also looking sandbagged. "I didn't know any of this would follow, though."

"Which two?" asked Bob.

"Let's have it in sequence," Guy interrupted before Toby could ramble.

"Was it the beginning of the week?" Toby asked himself. "Yes, it was

the night I burned off some ghastly Yankee widow at ratty. You know, baccarat," he added to Bob.

"I only know two people who play that," Bob remarked. "You and James Bond."

"You know the type," continued Toby. "Cast-iron corset, blue hair, husband safely at home under six feet of earth in a ten grand coffin with a built-in stereo and a bar, leaving her free to blow the family millions in foreign parts."

"Sounds a good reason to be merry," nodded Bob.

"She wasn't looking too merry then she stomped off," laughed Toby. "Leaving me with a very nice mountain of kilo-franc chips indeed. About ten minutes later, this type palled up with me at the bar. Reckoned he knew me slightly and invited me to a poker game, You know, big wheels in the hotel room, the Cincinnati Kid and so on.

"I lost a few hundred francs while I sized up the opposition. Then I started to win. Whether I was holding a good hand or rubbish. That's when I got the itch in the old wooden leg. Either my new pals were philanthropists who had never learned to calculate poker percentages, or old Toby was being built up for the big plunge.

"I'd lost about six hundred francs, but they'd let me win about two thousand dollars. One of them was a Yank with the proverbial roll big enough to choke a horse. He must have had about ten thousand dollars on him, and he was mopping up the old sauce at a fair rate. Anyway, as I said, I was well on the right side of even. Then I dropped five hundred bucks on the next pot, taking a bit of a silly chance. Finding out how much rope I'd got."

"Guy said it'd be something like this," interrupted Bob. "Could you actually see them up to something? Funny deals, mirrors, marked cards . . ."

"Chaps with hearing aids being told what I was holding by a bloke with a telescope across the street?" grinned Toby. "I've seen that done, by the way."

"What was it, then?" prompted Guy before Toby could digress. "The edge they had?"

"I think it was mainly psychological," Toby decided. "Making me think it was my night, no matter that the odds said. After all, they'd just seen me pick up a nice bundle from that ghastly Yankee vulture. I was supposed to play a little recklessly on marginal hands, which would give a good player a winning edge over me. Such as a Yank who wasn't quite as plastered as he ought to be. There was plenty of booze in circulation for everyone."

"Generous of them," said Bob, topping up glasses. "This lot got any crisps, or something similar."

"Savoury biscuits?" suggested Toby. He hailed a waiter and gave an order in very English French. "So, anyway!" he continued, tapping his right temple with his index finger. "I realized someone was about to get burned. I won fifty bucks on the next pot – I did tell you everyone else was chucking dollars around, not francs, at this stage? Much more romantic. Then I dropped a small bundle, won a bit, lost more. That was the pattern. Encourage the sucker with small wins, but keep up a steady drain."

"And then the old alarm watch went off. I'd set it while I was getting a drink – mostly tonic water, but they weren't to know that. I told them I had a phone call to make to the States and stuffed the old readies into my pockets, nice and casually, ready to stroll off with the seven or eight hundred bucks they'd left me with. So one of the two blokes running the game . . . I did tell you two chaps had fixed it up and the other two were just there to make up the numbers?"

"Not yet," said Guy patiently.

"Both fortyish. One shortish with eyebrows like blackened toothbrushes and a rather sinister 'tache. His accent was New Yorkish, but it didn't sound quite right. The other was fairly average looking, and a Londoner or near offer."

"One called Rolf and the other called Lucky? Those are the bloke's who've been messing us around," said Guy.

"And now you've got this bloke Paul Boulay on your tail," said Toby. "Ah, your biscuits, Bob. Merci, gaston."

The waiter deposited a plate of round, crinkly biscuits beside the wine bottle and returned to his lurking position. He made no attempt to correct Toby's French.

"So they let you stroll off with your winnings?" said Guy to return Toby to the point.

"Hardly," chuckled Toby. "They said I could use the phone in the bedroom. *Insisted* I use the phone in the bedroom. Of course, the door to the corridor was locked and I didn't have a key. So I strolled out onto the balcony, hopped over a couple of railings till I came to a lighted window and knocked politely.

"The old dear was about ninety, but she seemed quite pleased to see me. I suppose that's the French for you. Well, we chatted for a few minutes, then I made my excuses and left, as they used to say in the Sunday papers. I shot over to my hotel and beetled out the back way, as you know. The blighters must have been overcharging me if they wanted another sixty-two francs."

"Let's get this straight," said Guy. "You walked out on them ahead of the game? They're not looking for you because you owe them a bundle? Say, because you caught them cheating and refused to pay up?"

"A good seven hundred ahead," nodded Toby. "Dollars, though, not proper money. Still, it's hardly enough to justify them beetling backwards and forwards across the Channel looking for me. I'd have written it off to experience and made sure I picked up a proper mug next time. I'm sure they could have made good their losses in the time they've wasted chasing after me."

"Which makes their reason worth knowing. It could mean there's something incriminating written on one of the notes. Or they might be part of the proceeds of a robbery. Perhaps that's where Mr. Boulay fits in. Perhaps he did the robbery and lent some of the proceeds to the others to flash around."

"Yes, that makes sense." Toby admitted, laying aside a smile of either scepticism or amusement. "I suppose we'd better take a look at the jolly old loot."

"So you've not spent it?" said Bob, sounding surprised.

"I'm still living on my winnings from the Yankee vulture," beamed Toby. "No, I was thinking about having the other lot stuffed and mounted, as it were. As a sort of trophy. To commemorate getting the better of a bunch of crooks."

Bob Kane released a hollow laugh. A person in his income bracket changes \$700 into pounds and spends them. He cannot afford to hang so much cash on his drawing room wall.

"Where is it?" prompted Guy, keeping up the momentum. "The famous trophy?"

"In the hotel safe," said Toby. "Shall we take a look?"

Toby dropped a couple of notes onto the table, leaving it up to the waiter to get there before they blew away. Bob made sure that the bottle was empty, and trailed after his friends clutching the last few biscuits. Only the impossibly rich, or people in films or on television, abandon food and drink for which they have paid good money.

The hotel's safe was set in part of a cellar – a massive construction with thick stone walls. Instead of a large, cubical, steel coffer, Toby was surprised to find a bank of drawer-like deposit boxes. In his usual casual manner, he had just handed a large envelope to the manager, watched him count the contents and then trusted him to put the envelope somewhere safe. Toby had even let the manager look after the key to his box.

With much clanking of a gaoler's bunch of large keys, the hotel's manager relocked the grill in front of the deposit boxes and showed Toby and his friends to an adjoining examination room. Bob gaped at the thick wad of French notes. Toby and Guy turned their attention to the American currency. Toby had sneaked away from the card game with twenty notes. Half of them – a fifty dollar bill, four twenties and

five tens – were genuine, having been issued by the US government.

“There doesn’t seem to be anything terribly exciting written on mine,” said Toby, examining the last of the five \$10 bills.

“I suppose they wrote this on in the bank,” said Guy, referring to a figure 47 in blue ballpoint on one of the twenties.

“Maybe they’re loot,” said Toby with a larcenous grin. “Mind you,” the grin vanished, “I bloody well hope they’re not. The coppers wouldn’t let me keep them if they were. How do we check up on that? Discreetly?”

“I suppose people must still pay hotel bills in cash,” mused Guy. “Even in these days of plastic money.”

“That’s that I’ve been doing,” nodded Toby.

“So they might have a list of stuff to look out for. Maybe you could talk the manager into letting us have a squint at it?”

In fact, the hotel’s manager had a surprise in store for them. Instead of producing a huge list of numbers to look out for – computer-printed on green and white listing paper – he told Toby that the procedure for checking suspect currency was to enter the details at the keyboard of the hotel’s accounts computer and let the machine do the looking, which ruled out keeping quiet about any stolen notes.

The manager passed the dollar notes and appropriate instructions to an underling. During the delay due to the scanning process, Toby had time to tell the manager that he had won the dollars in a poker game and he was worried about being paid off in funny money. The manager nodded wisely, showing that it was something that he had encountered before.

Eventually, the underling returned to give Toby’s winnings a clean bill of health – and put the trio back to square one.

Escorted by the hotel’s manager, Toby returned his \$730 to his deposit box. The manager projected an air of willing co-operation through the whole performance. He was more than willing to go along with the whims of a client like Toby Ryun.

Not only did Toby have a deposit box full of French currency, which still wore the wrappers of the casino at which he had won it, he also had the manner and experience of a man who was wealthy beyond a windfall at the gaming table. He was the *Right Sort of Person*, and therefore worth encouragement.

“Well, what do you make of that?” asked Toby when the trio had claimed chairs in the hotel’s lobby for a conference.

“I really don’t know,” Guy admitted. “I suppose all that’s left to do now is to have a word with these chaps who’ve been following us around.”

“Doesn’t sound terribly safe to me,” murmured Toby.

"They can't do anything too drastic as long as you've got your winnings locked away here," Guy pointed out.

"Maybe they're on the phone," suggested Bob.

"What are your plans for the next couple of days?" Guy added before Toby could wonder whether Bob was serious about phoning their pursuers and he asked how Bob proposed finding out their telephone number.

Tody shrugged. "Looking up a few friends hereabouts. And then off to Monte on Tuesday for a party. I suppose, I'm building up my strength for that particular thrash."

"Make sure you leave a forwarding address next time you shoot off," warned Guy. "Phone my sister Joan and leave it with her."

"Okay," nodded Toby.

"So what happens now?" asked Bob.

"Have lunch here, I think," said Guy. "Then hop back to Palavas and see if we can't track down the mob in the green van."

Toby Ryun gave his friends a conducted tour of the Roman remains in Arles for about an hour and a half. They talked in circles about the events of the week, but they failed to make any sense of them. By lunchtime, they had more or less convinced themselves that Toby's winnings were part of the proceeds of a so-far undetected robbery.

The hotel manager had taken a close look at the notes and pronounced them genuine. He seemed to accept Toby's story of losing francs and winning dollars in the poker game with just a nod of understanding. According to a detective thriller, which Toby had read once, switching currencies was a sly way of unloading forged currency onto unsuspecting suckers. Guy felt sure that the manager would dismiss Toby as an over-imaginative foreigner and allow the incident to gather dust in his memory.

The trio ended up at a café on the Promenade des Lices after a four-mile stroll. Some friends of Toby's were waiting for him, looking bronzed and fit as they swatted early season flies. The walk had given Guy, Bob and Toby healthy appetites and worked up a thirst. But Guy had to keep reminding Toby's French friends that he was on mineral water whenever they offered the wine bottles to his glass. They were used to flying, but always as passengers. Their custom was fortification, not abstinence, before a flight.

Guy and Bob spent more time saying their goodbyes and finding a taxi to take them back to the aircraft than the duration of their flight back to Montpellier. Nobody was waiting for them at the airfield, and no dark green vans appeared out of thin air to chase them during the final lap of their journey in their corrugated runabout.

"You know what they say, the criminal always returns to the scene of his crime," remarked Bob as they approached the coast road and the Hôtel Bellevue.

"Just because they say it doesn't make it true," countered Guy. "I always thought that was a plot device for authors with no imagination."

"Not admitting for one moment we're criminals or we've committed a crime."

"Apart from the purely technical one of not reporting a death. If that is a crime."

"Anyway, unless you're planning a stroll on the roof, going back to our room can't be considered returning to the scene of the crime."

"Oh, no?" grinned Guy.

"Well, yes," admitted Bob. "But not to the scene of where the body is."

"I suppose there could be some justification for it. The criminal returning to make sure he's removed all the incriminating evidence. Or just to find out if the body's been discovered."

"We're not going to make that mistake, I hope? Do you feel guilty at all? I don't. Funny, isn't it?"

"I suppose it's the lack of intent. And we didn't actually do anything. He threw himself back onto the knife. We didn't know he'd spiked himself till it was too late."

"I can't help thinking there's some natural justice at work. A bloke comes swanning into your room in the middle of the night with a gun and a flick knife, and it's him who gets the chop."

"Hang on to that thought," warned Guy as he slowed down for the turn into the hotel's car park. "I think *les flics* are here ahead of us."

"Why is my confidence draining away suddenly?" said Bob.

"Cops make everyone nervous," said Guy. "It's what they're for, after all."

A gendarme with a large, dark brown holster on his left hip waved Guy to a halt at the entrance to the car park. He ticked off the names of the new arrivals on the list on his clip-board, and he had no answers for questions. The guests were asked to park and report to the hotel's reception desk. As they were going to do just that anyway – to collect their room keys – Guy and Bob followed their orders without protest.

Another gendarme just inside the lobby ticked them off his list. The manager of the Hôtel Bellevue was standing by the reception desk, looking as if the world could not end too soon for him.

"What's happened?" asked Guy – in English for Bob's benefit.

"There has been a robber," admitted the manager, who could apeak eight languages. The sentence sounded terrible in all of them.

"Good job we didn't leave anything worth pinching," said Guy.

"When was this?"

"In the night. Excuse me, M'sieu."

The manager stepped away as a tough-looking character in a leather jacket approached the reception desk. He had his five o'clock shadow an hour and a quarter early, and he looked like a gangster. His manner was abrupt and aggressive, as if he resented being a couple of inches shorter than Bob and Guy. He studied their passports, then announced that he would go up to their rooms with them, and observe while they checked their belongings.

Guy, Bob and the detective took a lift up to the third floor in a strained silence. The detective kept scratching the right-hand side of his jaw and making a sandpapery scraping noise. Bob caught Guy's eye and made a comment about Desperate Dan, which passed right over the detective's head. He was too fed up at having to work on a Sunday to be interested in the chattering of a couple of foreigners.

Their rooms were much as they had left them, except that the beds had been made. Guy unlocked his case and checked that his electric razor was still there. Then he looked through the wardrobe and the chest of drawers. Bob emptied his shopping bag onto his bed and pawed through the debris, mainly for the detective's benefit. He could not imagine a professional hotel-burglar stealing second-hand clothing.

"Everything seems to be here," Guy told the detective in French, reinforced by a nod from Bob.

"Nothing is missing? Watches, money, jewellery?" said the detective in a disbelieving tone. "Credit cards?"

"Nope." Guy showed him the watch on his left wrist, which was its usual home except when he was having a wash or a bath. "I haven't missed any money, but it's not something I leave lying around anyway. Everything's in my wallet, along with my credit cards. And I don't think either of us has anything you could call jewellery." He had never been one for rings and pendants, and Bob had never been able to afford them.

"You were here last night? Both of you?" said the detective.

"Yes, I think we got back around midnight," said Guy.

"And you heard nothing unusual in the night?"

"Not really," Guy said with a shrug, telling the exact truth. Invaders descending from the roof had become almost a usual event for him and his friends. "Did he get away with much? The burglar?"

"We're trying to find out," said the detective unhelpfully. "You will be staying here tonight?" The question was fairly redundant because the time was twenty-past three in the afternoon and long past the economical check-out time.

"That's right," Guy confirmed. "Why do you ask?"

"We may have further questions," said the detective evasively. "Thank you for your co-operation, Messieurs. Just one more question. Does your friend have a motorcycle?" Bob's attire had baffled him.

"No," smiled Guy, "it's a flying helmet, not a crash helmet. We came over here in our own plane."

"Ah!" The detective ran his eyes over Bob's olive green coverall and brown boots once more, then he let himself out of the room.

"Go on, what was that about?" Bob invited. "Something to do with aviation?"

"He wanted to know why you're dressed like a pillock," chuckled Guy.

"Cheeky sod!" Bob lit a cigarette. His hands were almost steady. "What's all this about burglars?"

"I suspect things are going on that we didn't anticipate," said Guy. "Let's do some finding out."

"All right. How?"

"By looking in where they know everything. The bar."

Bob changed out of his flying gear. He was wearing a fairly respectable pair of bottle green cords and his Army surplus pullover when they reached the bar. Guy was wearing a similar outfit in the pale blue of brushed denim, but he managed to convey the impression that his clothes had been tailored, not bought in an Oxfam shop.

They had no sooner ordered token glasses of white wine than they were pounced upon by a self-important little man. He was barely five feet six inches tall, he wore a fussy moustache and he put a terrible strain on the buttons of his shirt with a prosperous belly.

Having established that Guy could speak French, he let loose a torrent of information, enjoying immensely a chance to put his fellow guests in the picture. With interruptions to translate for Bob, Guy learned that the pilots of a couple of hang-gliders had spotted a man on the hotel's roof. When they had realised that he was lying in a rather awkward position, and that he had not moved for a good twenty minutes, they had swooped down for a closer look.

The police had arrived a few minutes later in a blare of sirens. Having made inquiries, the little man had learned that murder had taken place during the night. He was a minor public official from Montpellier, who was enjoying a long weekend at the seaside, and he knew most of the policemen.

According to the senior detective, two or more men had been robbing the sleeping guests, but there had been an argument on the roof of the hotel. One of the gang had been tied up for a while – the impressions of ropes remained quite distinct on his wrists – and then he had been stabbed to death.

About half a dozen guests had lost money and jewellery. The little man himself had lost five thousand francs and a valuable watch.

Guy thanked him for explaining everything, then he dragged Bob out onto the terrace and down the steep staircase to the beach. As they plodded along a belt of firm sand, half-way between sea and cliffs, Guy began to shake with suppressed laughter.

"What's up with you?" asked Bob when he judged that they could not be overheard. "D'you reckon that bloke wasn't alone? There was a hell of a lot happening last night."

"Don't be so bloody gullible," laughed Guy. "That fat bloke was as big a crook as our visitor last night. And so are all the others. He was on his own, our burglar. And those others are just out to do the hotel's insurance company."

"You reckon?" laughed Bob. "Maybe we should have had some of that. A valuable silver cigarette case, or something."

"That's our trouble. We don't think like crooks – always an eye open for a quick profit."

"So where are we going now?"

"I thought we'd do a recce of the opposition's HQ. You know, the house with the tall chimney and the dark green shutters."

"I know they reckon time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted, but what for?"

"To get ready for slipping back tonight to shove a note through their letter box. Telling them to phone us tomorrow. I think the quickest way to settle this is to tell them Toby's winning are for sale. For their face value, say, plus our expenses."

"You don't think we should bring the police in, then?"

"It's getting a bit late for that now. Rather too much has happened that we haven't told them. And *can't* tell them."

"Good point," Bob conceded. "Do you think that body at the Jenners' place could have been a warning? This could happen to you if you don't play ball?"

"Not really. It could have been an accident, like our bloke last night."

"True," nodded Bob.

"And it wasn't anyone we know – fortunately. And there was no threatening note, which you'd expect if it was Toby's pals behind it. No, I can't see any reason for the bloke to have been dumped there other than Horton Grand's a quiet spot and the Jenners were away. He may just have been in transit, as it were. Waiting for someone else to pick him up for final disposal."

"You mean, whoever it was might just have disappeared without a trace if big brother Tom hadn't shoved his nose in?"

"It's possible," nodded Guy.

Bob glanced to his right. It was not a topless beach, but some of the local ladies were doing their best to tan the maximum area. "Pasmatri na nyeyo," he remarked, recalling a fragment from distant evening classes in Russian. He nodded sideways, towards an impressive display of brown flesh on a pure white towel.

"Balshaya," said Guy, impressed by the mechanical properties of the sapphire bikini's fabric.

"Gromadnaya," countered Bob, evoking visions of cathedral domes.

"That must be it ahead," said Guy, returning Bob's attention to the job in hand.

They had covered three-quarters of the distance to the house with dark green shutters. The cliff on their right, which was thirty feet high at the hotel, had dipped almost to beach level. It was rising again as a fairly sheer face to a hump around two hundred yards further on.

"That could be their van parked outside," said Bob. "It's the right colour. Are we going to get close enough to check the number? And chance one of them looking out a window?"

"Don't fancy the idea," said Guy. "Hello, who do we have here?"

A youngster of about nine or ten was standing on a table of pale rock, peering out to sea with a battered brass telescope like a young sea dog, watching three idiots charging around the bay in speed boats, hoping that any two of them would collide. Guy asked if he could borrow the telescope for a minute. The youngster refused to part with it, suspicious of Guy's motives. Guy resorted to psychology.

He dug a handful of change out of his pocket and clanked it in his hand until he had attracted the youngster's attention. Then he turned his hand over and opened it. The youngster stared down at the coins on the sand, wondering whether he could grab a couple and make a getaway. Guy offered to hold his telescope while he picked up the coins. The youngster handed it to him and hopped down from his rock, accepting the deal.

"Yep, it's them all right." Guy swung the telescope from the van to the cliff in front of the house.

"Hang about!" protested Bob, noticing the change of direction. "I don't remember packing any climbing gear."

"You don't fancy a spot of nocturnal free-climbing, then?" laughed Guy.

"Not this side of the grave," said Bob firmly.

"M'sieu?" A grubby hand wanted the telescope back.

"Merci, m'sieu," said Guy gravely, returning it.

Considerably richer, the youngster returned to his perch. Guy and Bob headed back to the Hôtel Bellevue to find out if anyone else had been visited by the burglar.

The mystery of Mordeau's silence was cleared up for Scott Hamill and his fellow conspirators in the early afternoon. They were passing time at a café, waiting for Guy Duggleby and his satellite to return to their hotel, when the air filled suddenly with approaching sirens. Reluctant to draw attention to themselves by moving, Hamill and his companions watched a posse of police officers surround the Hôtel Bellevue and move in with relentless purpose.

The uniformed invaders forced clustering spectators out of the way to allow an ambulance to approach. Half an hour later, a stretcher bearing a dark blue plastic sausage disappeared into the ambulance and the vehicle departed without the benefit of sirens. Word had already reached the café that a man had been found with a knife in his back – not in one of the rooms, but on the roof of the hotel. Paul Boulay told Albert to circulate. He was a man of the people, who looked as though he had nothing better to do than hang around being nosy.

Albert returned a quarter of an hour later, fighting a grin. He sat down and tried for a serious expression.

"Well, that is it?" insisted Boulay.

"It was Mordeau," chuckled Albert. "Someone stabbed him."

"Who?" demanded Paul.

Albert shrugged. "No one knows. He must have visited some of the other guests on the way to the Englishman. Whoever was with him stabbed him to get his share. Mordeau took a shot at him, but there's no blood on the roof so he must have missed."

"You sure this Guy bloke didn't stick a knife in him?" said Hamill.

"That cream puff?" scoffed Albert, showing off a phrase picked out of an American film.

"How do you know he's a cream puff?" demanded Jobbo Wright, needled by the Frenchman's scorn for a fellow Englishman.

"All right, we know *you* could stick a knife in someone," said Hamill to head off a confrontation. "So where does this leave us?"

"I think we should go back to the house and wait there until the police have gone," said Boulay. "We'll come back to talk to this Guy tomorrow morning. Early."

As evening approached, a sultry stickiness filled the air. The police presence at the Hôtel Bellevue persisted until dinner-time so that guests who had been out on a day trip could be questioned. Ominous black clouds gathered out to sea and brought premature darkness when the sun had gone down.

The Jenners phoned Guy from Nice. He told them that he had seen Toby but he was still puzzled. Grant Hardy was flying home on Monday evening with his wife and the other couple. The Jenners were going on

to Monte Carlo. They had enjoyed a good run on the tables at Nice, and they wanted to try their luck with Nicki's system in Monte.

"That's bloody typical!" moaned Bob when Guy had shared the other half of the conversation. "They've made their pile and they're still bloody winning!"

"Cheer up," laughed Guy. "Roulette is a pretty good way to lose it again."

"Don't bet on it," said Bob, looking out unenthusiastically at the black night. Rock climbing in very poor visibility wasn't something he felt that he would enjoy.

The storm broke at eleven o'clock. Rain lashed down like machine-gun bullets, coating windows with translucent streaks. Thunder crashed over the town. Lightning split the solid blackness of the sky. It was not a night for strolling along beaches and climbing up rock faces to deliver a note. Even driving up to the front door of the house with dark green shutters held no attractions. Guy and Bob retired early by holiday standards, intending to make an early start in the morning.

10. Bob Gets The Sack

Guy Duggleby and Bob Kane composed their note through breakfast on Monday morning. It was short and to the point: 'For sale, \$730. Price, £730 plus business expenses. Interested? If so, phone me. G.D.'

"That should do the trick," said Bob, folding the note and tucking it into the breast pocket of his anorak. "It seems a bit cheeky, just driving up and shoving this through their letter box."

"It's called direct action," said Guy. "I wonder what they can do in the way of papers around here?"

"You might get last week's *Sunday Telegraph* if you're lucky," said Bob. "Want me to get the car while you have a look?"

"Okay," Guy surrendered the keys. "Don't hit anyone."

With a hollow laugh, Bob headed for the car park.

Most of the French cars that he had seen came with enough dents to make the effects of one more shunt fairly unnoticeable. The town seemed quite busy at eight o'clock on a working day. Apart from the foreign names and phrases on the signs, and the fact that everyone was driving on the wrong side of the road, Palavas looked very much like his vision of a typical English seaside town.

"There's one of them," said Paul Boulay when Bob emerged from the hotel's main building. "He was at the airfield."

The dark green van was parked off the road, by the side of the low brick wall that defined the Hôtel Bellevue's car park. It had been there for half an hour.

"Where's the other one?" growled Scott Hamill.

"I can't see him around," said Boulay. "Bring him here. Use that. And this."

Jobbo Wright found a sack in the back of the van. He followed Albert, who was stuffing Boulay's gun into his jacket pocket. Bob Kane turned away from an inspection of cloudless blue sky and calm sea, and continued on towards the corrugated, pale salmon car. He was just putting the key into the lock on the driver's door when the lights went out.

"This is a gun," said a French voice, speaking English with an added American accent. Something prodded into Bob's back. "Keep walking."

Bob released an explosive sneeze. The interior of the sack was a dusty fog. He could still see his feet, and the man with the gun sounded as if he meant business. Almost at once, he was being bundled into a

van and a rope was being wound round the sack to secure his arms.

"Just sit quiet, mate," said an English voice. "If you don't want a bashing." The voice sounded rough enough to persuade Bob that its owner was more than capable of making a good job of the bashing.

Bob sneezed again. He had his eyes closed to keep the rain of grit out of them. Being kidnapped was bad enough without the added torment of showers of stinging particles at every movement of the sack.

The van started a few moments later. His kidnappers had exchanged muttered remarks, and one of them had got out of the van for a while, but Bob had not been able to catch the reason.

Guy Duggleby left the hotel by the side entrance, carrying a second-hand copy of the previous day's *Sunday Times* under his arm. He was surprised to see the rented car still standing where he had parked it after the trip to Arles. He was even more surprised to find the driver's door unlocked. Wondering that had happened to Bob, he glanced into the car – and spotted the note pinned to the dashboard with the ignition key.

"A straight trade, this guy for Toby," read the note. "Stay by your phone."

Guy stared at the sheet of paper, trying to absorb the message. And then a pale hand reached into his field of view and past him to pluck the note away.

"M. Ryun is in great demand," said a smooth voice. "I take it your friend M. Kane is 'this guy'?"

"Just who the hell are you, chum? And that's your game?" Guy said coldly, turning to confront the Frenchman.

"Police, M'sieu," the interloper replied simply and grandly. "They told me in the hotel you had just gone to your car."

The man was just above average height and a couple of stones overweight. His dark blue suit had seen a lot of service, and it would see a lot more. After a glance at the back of the note, which was blank, he tucked it into the right side pocket of his jacket. Then he produced an identity card from his inside pocket and flashed it at Guy.

"I suggest we go to your room and wait, M. Duggleby," he remarked in a tone that allowed no room for disagreement.

Guy locked the car and allowed the detective to escort him back to the hotel. He said nothing, waiting for the other man to speak. He felt reluctant to volunteer information until he knew the extent of the police involvement in their affairs. Everything had gone very badly wrong in just a few minutes. The good guys had been out-manoeuvred comprehensively.

The detective dropped into the armchair in room 317, leaving the bed

for Guy. He took a pipe from his left-side pocket, then he put it away again. He was around forty, two or three years older than Guy's brother Tom, and he had the same air of certainty that everyone else would fall in with his plans. But where Tom Duggleby was sandy-haired and solidly built, the detective was dark and had a drinker's pot.

"I am Inspector Girardin of Interpol," he announced. "I have been speaking to your friend M. Ryun."

"Not this morning?" said Guy, looking startled.

The time was just past eight o'clock. Any interview with Toby had to have taken place at least an hour earlier. And Guy could not imagine anyone getting any sense out of Toby Ryun at that time in the morning.

"No, it was last night," said the inspector smoothly. "I understand you and your friends were interested in finding out if some dollars were stolen? I take it you didn't know the hotel's computer asked a police computer about them?"

"No," admitted Guy, "but I suppose it makes sense. We just assumed the information was fed in manually from police lists."

"The advance of technology. You may be interested to know the notes are not stolen, to the best of our knowledge."

"We found that out yesterday."

"But," continued the inspector, rolling over the interruption, "one of them doesn't exist."

"What do you mean?" frowned Guy. "The clerk fed in the wrong number?"

"That was a possibility, but the wrong one," said the inspector with a superior smile. "M. Ryun did have a fifty dollar bill with the number in question. But it was not made in the United States of America. But your friend M. Ryun thinks the notes may be stolen and you will not tell him otherwise."

"The manager of the hotel had a look at the notes," Guy pointed out. "He didn't think there was anything wrong with them."

"I would think he has never seen a forgery of that quality before. But the number was conclusive proof. All banknotes are examined after printing and flawed ones are destroyed. If they are of high denomination, specially printed notes are substituted so that there are no gaps in the sequence of numbers.

"But the Americans have stopped replacing flawed fifty-dollar bills, as they have done with the lower denomination notes. Inflation has made them too common. They just make a note of the numbers of the ones destroyed in their computer records."

"That was a stroke of luck, finding a non-existent number in Toby's handful."

"Long odds come off sometimes, and they must have printed

thousands of notes. We were bound to come across their mistake sooner or later.”

“Unluckily for them, it was sooner. So that do you want us to do for you?”

“M. Ryun said you’ve been having trouble from people who want to contact him. We wanted you to put us in touch with them. But now they have kidnapped M. Kane . . .”

“It sort of changes things,” agreed Guy.

“When they telephone you, you are not to mention my presence,” ordered the inspector.

“Don’t worry. I wasn’t going to.”

Someone tapped on the door. Guy opened it. A large suitcase began to move towards him. Guy hopped out of the way. The man behind the suitcase was around forty, of rather slight build and obviously of Italian extraction. He looked like a middle-rank Hollywood Mafioso, who was either hung over or heavily jet-lagged.

In fact, Calvin North had just been rushed to the US Treasury Department office in Paris to take over from a colleague who had suffered a heart attack. After a brief word with Inspector Girardin, he attached a cassette recorder to the telephone, then he retired to Bob’s room to lie on the bed. He was a long way from getting himself attuned to the European time zone in France.

The call from the kidnappers came through five minutes later. Inspector Girardin rewound the tape, then he roused the sleeping treasury agent. Calvin North yawned into Guy’s room, scratching in his black and silver hair and trying to force an alert expression onto his olive-tanned face.

On the tape, a Frenchman who spoke English with an American accent asked Guy whether he wanted to trade. Guy told him that he was perfectly willing to swap Bob Kane for Toby Ryun’s \$730. The Frenchman warned him not to bring the police into the affair – the usual warning delivered by most kidnappers. Then he told Guy that he would call again in about two hours, and rang off before Guy could say anything more.

“We are going to make the swap, of course,” Guy said.

“Well,” said Inspector Girardin doubtfully.

“Look,” Guy put on a dangerous tone, “there must be more than seven hundred bucks of funny money around. If you try anything clever, they’re liable to duck out of sight with the rest. Which won’t go down very well with your bosses. And I doubt whether it’ll go down too well in the British newspapers, either.”

“Naturally, we will do everything possible to ensure the safety of your friend,” said Inspector Girardin, changing his tune in rapid French.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Guy in the same language. "Because that's the price of my co-operation."

"But at the same time, we must make every effort to capture his kid-nappers."

"Of course. You can't just let them go. I suppose your people took the forged dollars off Toby? We could do with having them on hand here then that bloke calls again."

"I must tell my superiors about the telephone call," said the inspector, refusing to discuss policy.

Tugging his pipe from his pocket, Inspector Girardin went into Bob's room and closed the communicating door. Calvin North, who was perched on the edge of the writing desk, used both hands to hide a massive yawn, then he leaned over to pick up Guy's telephone. He ordered a large pot of coffee for room 317, then he dropped heavily into the chair vacated by the inspector.

"Okay," he invited through another massive yawn, "what was all that about safety and your pal Toby?"

Guy summarized the remarks made in French, assuming that the inspector had reverted to his native language and put on a burst of speed to exclude and annoy the American.

"This deal is not going to be screwed up," said North positively, issuing a clear warning to both Guy and the absent inspector.

"Anyone who screws up and puts my friend's life in danger is going to be in more trouble than he can handle," retorted Guy in the dangerous tone which he had used on the inspector.

"Yeah, yeah," said North, not impressed by the threat. "Just as long as we understand each other. Know him?" He produced a photograph from the inside pocket of his pale check summer jacket and flipped it to Guy.

Guy studied the picture for a moment, then began to flip it back. "Never seen him before in my life. Hang on." He bent his arm again and took a longer look at the picture. "This isn't the bloke my brother found? At the Jenners' place?"

"Right in one. We think he's the guy who did the printing. Name of Inky Fergusson."

"Never heard of him."

"Didn't think you had. Suppose you tell me all you know about the guys who were bugging you and the Jenners in England."

"We gave the police statements . . ."

"Yeah, yeah. I've seen that crap." North dismissed the statements with a wave of his hand. "I want the straight dope. What you know, *all* you know."

"Or else?" smiled Guy.

The door of the bedroom opened at that moment. Inspector Girardin looked at the armchair, then at the bed, as if wondering what Guy and Calvin North had been saying about him in his absence. He looked a naturally suspicious sort.

"I have to see someone," he said importantly. "You will, of course, stay here, M'sieu," he added with a challenging look at Guy.

It was understood that Calvin North had also been ordered to remain on guard duty. The inspector danced a few steps with a waiter in the doorway, then he plodded heavily to the lift. He looked the sort of man who hates hot weather and the stickiness that it creates. The day was becoming warmer and heavier by the hour.

Calvin North allowed Guy to sign the bill, but he dropped a tip onto the cork-lined tray. The waiter pocketed the tip, inclined his head in a sketch of a bow which took in both customers, and ghosted out of the room. North poured into two of the three cups, then he clicked sweetener tablets into his cup. Guy stirred a lick of cream into his coffee.

"Okay," said North, pulling a face over his cup. "I wish these guys could make decent java."

"Nothing wrong with mine," said Guy.

"Okay," repeated North, "the straight poop. No written statements, no tape records, everything you tell me is for information only, off the record."

"It would be nice to believe that," smiled Guy.

"Look," yawned North, "I know you weren't one hundred per cent straight with that cop in Nice. Because you wanted to talk to this guy Toby first. I don't give a shit about that. I want the guys with the funny money and I want their plates. Before that French son of a bitch screws everything up. Nice little firm, Allen-Duggleby."

"What's that?" invited Guy, a trace of a laugh in his voice. "A sort of threat?" He put on an East-End gangster accent. "Nice little firm you got there, John. Pity if something happened to it, you know that I mean? Like if it got broken?"

"I was *going* to say," said North wearily, "co-operate with us and Uncle Sam could throw some business your way. We look after our friends. And we have a lot of people with a lot of buying power in your country."

"Aren't the French your pals?" frowned Guy. "I get the distinct impression you're trying to shut them out."

"The French!" scoffed North. "They were a pain in your asses in World War Two. Then they wouldn't let you into the EEC till you were too desperate to read the fine print. And now you're in, they're screwing the hell out of you. Who needs that sort of friend?"

"What have they done to you recently?" prodded Guy. "Or hasn't

Uncle Sam forgiven them for pulling out of NATO and making you shift all your bases to Belgium?”

“I think these bastards are going to bust their end of the deal and collect their medals. Even if they tip off the English end. I’ve been telling them since I got down here at zero four-thirty this morning, hold off till we’ve tied down all the loose ends. But will they listen?”

“Will they hell,” said Guy, answering a rhetorical question.

“Right,” said North, his flow stopped by the unexpected agreement.

“I find this very hard to believe. Surely the French end of Interpol is staffed with experienced and responsible cops?”

“They *say* they can bust their end and keep it quiet,” sneered North. “But things leak. And we don’t know how many zillions of bucks these guys have printed. The stuff I’ve seen is great. We have to get all these guys. And the plates.”

“How do you know they weren’t made in France?”

“We don’t know nothing, except Inky Fergusson hasn’t left England in a coon’s age. We haven’t had time to do all the digging for information. And people haven’t been levelling with us.”

“One of the disadvantages of levelling is self-incrimination,” said Guy delicately. “Hence the Fifth Amendment to your Constitution. If I tell you things, you tell Inspector What’s-his-name and he tells some Interpol mate at New Scotland Yard, and so on. I don’t think we’ve actually broken the law, but if we haven’t been as forthcoming as we might, certain British cops could get peevish and make life difficult for us to show us who’s boss.”

“I’m working with Inspector What’s-his-name,” North pointed out. “If you tell me something, it’s the same as telling him.”

“If you remember to pass it on?”

“Have we got a deal or not?” yawned the T-Man.

Guy told him about the mid-week visitors at the Jenners’ country home, and the subsequent identification of the gamblers Cotton and Weinbaum. He skipped through the search for Toby, mentioning the dark green van which had been following him and Bob but omitting the visit from the man who had been found dead on the hotel’s roof. The story ended with Guy and Bob spotting the van the previous afternoon, parked at the isolated house with dark green shutters and a tall chimney.

“Okay,” nodded North, twitching an index finger backwards and forwards to point at each of them in alternation. “This is between us two. You’ve told me, so you don’t need to tell that French son of a bitch. You don’t want to make trouble for yourself, do you?”

“Was that another rather crude attempt at blackmail? Because I’m getting a bit pissed off with them,” Guy added.

"Yeah, I suppose it was," North admitted through another yawn. "It gets to be a sort of reflex when you've not had any sleep for a couple of days. Okay, you concentrate on getting your pal back and forget about the rest of it."

The treasury agent dragged himself out of his chair and recovered a police-type radio transceiver from his suitcase. He went into Bob's room and closed the door firmly. Guy considered creeping over to the door to listen, then he poured himself more coffee. If the United States Treasury Department was fighting World War Three with the French branch of Interpol, Guy felt safer not knowing that Calvin North was plotting.

Bob Kane's coughs and sneezes eventually told his kidnappers that all was not well inside the sack. The van pulled over to the side of the road. It lurched as someone got out through the back door, which slammed shut again. Hands turned Bob. Then the securing rope was removed.

"Okay," said the French/American voice. "Keep facing the back of the van and you can take the sack off. Turn round, and I'll blow your goddam head off."

Bob struggled out of the sack. He was allowed to comb and shake the dust out of his hair and beard, and wash the grit out of his eyes with the aid of a piece of white rag and bottled mineral water. Then he took a long drink from the bottle to lay the dust in his throat.

"Okay, that's enough," said the spokesman. "Lean back. We're going to put a blindfold on you."

The view through the rear window was about as memorable as the interior of the back of the van. Deciding that he was missing nothing, Bob obeyed and leaned back. Another length of the white rag was round twice round his head and tied at the back. It formed an impenetrable blindfold, and it also muffled external sounds.

Two men climbed into the back of the van. Bob tried to follow its course, in the manner of Sherlock Holmes, by sound and the turns that it made. Shortly after the stop to change blindfolds, the van passed through a busy town.

A long time later – perhaps three-quarters of an hour but Bob had lost all track of time – the vehicle began to climb. Bob assumed, correctly, that they were travelling to the north.

He remembered from Guy's atlas that there was a huge yellow and brown area to the right of the Rhône valley.

The kidnappers' destination lay in the high ground. After a journey of sixty-five miles, Albert turned off the road and drove round to the back of a square stone house with a dark brown roof. It was another of Paul

Boulay's collection of retreats. It stood well back from the road on the edge of a small town.

"I could do with another drink," Bob remarked then he heard the driver apply the handbrake. "And a smoke."

"Get out," said the spokesmen.

The door at the back of the van opened with a faint but distinctive creak. Two hands guided Bob down to the smooth surface of the yard, and then to a low wall. A bottle was placed in his right hand when Bob had perched himself securely. To his surprise, one of the kidnappers pushed a cigarette into his other hand. He was even more surprised to find, when he lit it by waving his lighter in about the right area and inhaled, that it was one of the milder British brands.

"What happens now?" asked Bob, putting his lighter back into his pocket. He was growing quite used to his world of darkness, but his balance remained uncertain. He was always on the verge of falling over. And he was feeling more bored than frightened.

"You sit there until we tell you to move," said Paul Boulay, who had done most of the talking.

"All this is a waste of time, you know," said Bob.

"Shut up," returned Boulay.

"No, listen, we're willing to trade," persisted Bob. "We were on our way to deliver this." He reached into his anorak pocket and produced the note which he and Guy had composed at breakfast

"What's that?" said Boulay.

Albert plucked the note from Bob's hand and passed it to his partner.

"For sale, \$730 Price, £730 plus business expenses," read Boulay. "Interested? If so, phone me. G.D.' What's this about?"

"We were on our way to deliver it when you grabbed me," Bob explained in a patient tone.

"Deliver it where?" demanded Scott Hamill.

Bob turned his head in the approximate direction of the new voice, which was English and from the south-east. "To your place. Down the road from the hotel."

"What place is this?" said Boulay, admitting nothing.

Bob shrugged. "We saw your van parked outside it yesterday. The one you were following us in."

"Are you serious about this deal?" said Boulay sceptically.

"Why else would I have the note?" said Bob. "And I could hardly have written it on the way here."

"Why?" said Hamill. "Why do you want this deal? What's in it for you, exactly?"

"It's the easy way out for everyone," said Bob. "You know who we are, but we haven't a clue who you are. Yet. So at the moment, we have

to keep looking over our shoulders all the time and you have complete freedom of action. But if we sell you back the stolen money, we've got no evidence. And if we've got nothing on you, we can stop chasing each other around."

"What stolen money?" said Hamill.

Bob shrugged again. "All right, deny it. But it's perfectly obvious Toby's winning are part of the haul from a robbery no one's found out about yet. Those guys in the hotel were flashing it around to make Toby think they didn't need the grand or two they were planning to take off him."

"Real smart guy, figuring that out," chuckled Boulay, grinning at Hamill.

"We've got our heads screwed on the right way, me and Guy," agreed Bob. "We soon figured out what the game was."

"Sounds like we'd better phone this Guy again," said Boulay.

Leaving Bob armed with a cigarette and a plastic bottle of mineral water, Boulay led Hamill into the low-ceilinged living room of the stone house. They were wearing grins of relief. Nobody had spent the forged notes and the people who had them had worked out a completely wrong reason for their special value – a reason which threw suspicion in completely the wrong direction.

Whistling confidently, Paul Boulay dialled the number of the Hôtel Bellevue in Palavas. The switchboard put him through to room 317 with commendable efficiency.

"I hear you want to trade," he said when Guy had identified himself. "I got your note."

"If you hadn't been in so much of a rush, you'd have got it two hours ago," said Guy.

"Yeah, yeah," said Boulay impatiently. "Still want to trade? This guy we've got for the dollars? Your pal Toby can pay your expenses."

"If that's your best offer, okay. I'm not actually sure where Toby is at the moment. He may have gone back to England." Guy had not heard from Inspector Girardin for over an hour and a half and he felt the need to buy time. "We weren't expecting things to go quite as fast as they have."

"So how long will it take you to get the dollars?"

"We'll get them to you as quickly as possible. We'd rather not have them on our hands when someone finds they've gone. In case they think we took them. How about a word with Bob to make sure he's okay?"

"He's still okay." Boulay looked through the window on his left. "He's sitting on a wall, smoking a cigarette at this very minute. I will call you again before noon."

The phone clicked in Guy's ear. He replaced the receiver and rewound the cassette on the treasury agent's recorder. Then he woke Calvin North. Starting to look more alert after his nap, North ordered more coffee from room service and listened to the latest conversation with the kidnapers, which lasted just over one minute.

"What's this about your pal Toby going to England?" he demanded. "He was told to stay put in Arles."

Guy shrugged. "I was stalling. I've not heard anything from that Interpol bloke since he shot off."

"Maybe he's gone back home for his lunch break. And what's all this about a note and trading with them?"

Guy admitted that he and Bob had been planning to sell Toby's winnings back to their original owners, assuming that the dollars had been stolen, not forged. The treasury agent looked horrified by such a casual attitude to a crime against the sacred Buck. But he forced down a cup of French coffee then the waiter delivered it and went back to sleep instead of delivering the expected sermon.

Guy settled down with his *Sunday Times* and the rest of the coffee, filing a mental note to make sure that Interpol picked up the bill for Inspector Girardin's phone call and that the US Treasury Department paid for a share of the coffee.

Sixty-five miles away, Paul Boulay told Scott Hamill that the elusive Toby might have gone back to England, but that the dollars were still safe.

"Maybe he's scared of us," suggested Hamill. "Maybe he doesn't want a body dumped on him," he added dangerously.

"How will he know you have been dumping bodies on people?" countered Boulay. "Maybe you should go to England to be ready to deal with this Toby. We had better get back to the house to move our dollars in case M'sieu Guy goes looking there."

"What about him?" Hamill nodded through the window to the blind-folded figure on the low wall.

"I'm just wondering if we need him any more," said Boulay.

11. Dangerous Driving

Inspector Girardin returned to the Hôtel Bellevue at ten minutes to twelve. Roused by Guy, Calvin North pushed into Bob's bathroom to wash his face. He held a brief conference with the inspector in private, then he departed with his large, blue leather suitcase, leaving behind the cassette recorder attached to the telephone.

The inspector did not seem sad to see the back of the American. He scraped out a pipe with a metal stem and a screw-on bowl and packed it with tobacco while he listened to the tape and received further clarification from Guy.

The treasury agent had edited the last conversation quite skilfully, eliminating references to the note and the question of its delivery, and reducing the conversation to little more than an agreement to trade Bob for Toby Ryun's winnings. It was a matter of need to know – and the inspector, in Calvin North's opinion, did not need to know about the house with dark green shutters and a tall chimney.

Breathing billows of not too unpleasant smoke towards the balcony door, Inspector Girardin reached into his inside pocket and produced a brown envelope. "Voilà!" he said, showing Guy a single hundred and several fifty-dollar bills. "Aha!" he added immediately, slipping into a frown.

Guy was almost as quick on the uptake. "You've just got the forged notes there," he pointed out. "We're supposed to be trading all Toby's winning for Bob. It's a bit of a dead giveaway just giving them the duds back."

"Because you thought all of them had been stolen. And of course, we let M. Ryun keep the genuine notes."

"Maybe we can borrow a hundred and eighty dollars from the US Treasury Department? Or go and rob a bank."

The telephone began to ring as Inspector Girardin was forming a sneering groan as his comment on the idea of robbing a bank. Guy gave his room number, and learned from the hotel's receptionist that there was a call for him. Guy switched the cassette recorder on automatically.

"Hello, it's me," said a familiar voice.

"Nice to know you're okay," said Guy, expecting one of the kidnappers to come on the line right away.

"I'm stranded," added Bob Kane.

"What?" said Guy blankly.

"Some sods bunged a filthy sack over my head and took me for a ride. We hung about somewhere in the hills for a while, then they shoved me in a car. As opposed to the van that brought me to wherever it was, if you follow me?"

"With difficulty. Go on."

"Then we drove a bit more. I don't think we went too far this time, not that it's easy to tell with a blindfold on. We were going for well over an hour in the van. But this can't have been more than half an hour in the car. Anyway, they pulled up, dragged me out of the car and gave me a ciggy. I was just starting to think about firing squads, me with the blindfold on all ready, when the bloke told me not to take it off till I'd smoked the ciggy. Then the car drove off."

"What, you mean they just dumped you?" gasped Guy.

"Right," chuckled Bob. "They said there's no point lugging me around if we're willing to trade. But if there's any sort of double-cross, they'll be a bit rougher next time. And there were a couple of hints about not just us – they could pick on anyone from our families," he added in a more serious tone.

"That's a new twist to the game. And a reason to be even more careful."

"So! The next thing I knew, the car was shooting off. By the time I got rid of the blindfold, it was right out of sight. Well, I wasn't going to stand there smoking the ciggy like they said. I felt a proper twit. They'd dumped me in the middle of nowhere, just hills. So I started hoofing it. Then I managed to thumb a lift on a prehistoric lorry. I'm in some little dump called Pont-de-Causse. According to a signpost, it's twenty kilometres from Millau, wherever the hell that is. Sounds like something to do with Tintin's dog."

"Are we going to pick him up?" Guy asked the inspector.

"Who are you talking to?" said Bob.

"I suppose so," said Inspector Girardin, wondering if Bob had made a separate deal with the kidnappers – one which would deprive the French branch of Interpol of a chance to pounce on a gang of forgers.

"There's a cop here," said Guy. "He's been talking to Toby. In fact, he got here just in time to miss your kidnapping by a minute or so, Hang on." Guy retrieved his pocket travel guide to France from his suitcase and measured approximate distances with a thumb. "It's a hell of a way from here. Could take an hour and a half to get there."

"In that case," said Bob, being practical, "I'd better do something about lunch."

By twenty to one, Guy Duggleby and Inspector Girardin had completed more than half of their journey to rescue Bob Kane. Once past Lodève, the rising land had flattened out into a table dotted with

thickets of waist-high juniper and lavender bushes sprinkled with occasional ruins. A hill rose in front of the pale salmon car. Guy was driving. The inspector was slumped in the front passenger seat, smoking his pipe reflectively and taking in the scenery with the indifferent eyes of a city dweller.

The road ahead made a slight curve to the right, cutting round the flank of a hill instead of rising over its crest. Guy's eyes pulled back from the road to flick through a pilot's check of his instruments and displays. The speedometer was hovering around the 100-mark, giving an Englishman an exaggerated impression of speed. Inspector Girardin had glanced at it once or twice, but the road was thinly used. Guy was driving in an alert and competent manner, and worrying about speed limits seemed to be beneath an inspector of Interpol.

Guy had registered the car behind him on his previous instrument sweep. He had been aware of something red in the rear view mirror for some time. Now, it was close enough to identify as a Renault in the medium price range, which had a more conventional car shape than the cheap and cheerful 2CV – a shape which took away the illusion of a vehicle which was perpetually running down-hill.

The driver had put his foot down. Swirls of dust billowed in the slipstream wake of the red car, which was heavily splashed with obscuring mud. The sun was doing its best against the storm of the previous night, but some deep puddles remained on a not terribly well maintained road. Fresh, green grass fell away to the right of the road. Guy started round the side of the hill.

With a maniacal roar of high tuning, the other car caught up and started an overtaking manoeuvre. Then it swung across the road. Guy's teeth smashed together as the other vehicle slammed into the side of his car. The wheel leapt in his hands. Inspector Girardin let out a startled squeal as his pipe flew from his mouth and hit the dashboard in a shower of sparks.

As soon as the car was under control again, Guy accelerated instinctively to outrun the attacker – but the other car had power to spare. Inspector Girardin was fumbling for a gun, hampered by his seat belt, as the other car drew level again. Guy found himself in a familiar position suddenly. He had seen cars playing dodgems often enough on television – and he knew that the answer to his problem lay in ignoring instinct and taking an offensive posture.

He divided his attention between the road ahead and the steering wheel of the other car. When it started to turn towards him, he trod on his brakes.

The pale salmon car bucked its nose towards the road. Seat belts creaked under the strain of deceleration and bit into yielding flesh.

Bobbed of the resistance of a collision, a red flash shot across the road, cutting in on Guy.

"I really don't know why they never do this on TV," he remarked, treading heavily on the accelerator.

There was a crash and a violent jolt as bumper rammed bumper. The red car carried straight on when the driver was trying to steer to the left to follow the road. Guy trod on his brakes again. Tyres squealed on the dusty surface. Suddenly, the red shape had gone, taking a section of fence with it. Guy managed to stop with his front wheels just off the paved surface.

When he got out of the car, there was an overpowering stink of abused rubber in the dry air. Inspector Girardin was waving a pistol in one hand and using the other to slap at his suit to make sure that all of the sparks from his pipe had been extinguished. Showing its muddy underside to the Provençal sky, the red car lay sprawled on a clump of juniper bushes at the bottom of the slope with all four doors hanging open.

"Le Car by Renault," murmured Guy, waiting for the inverted vehicle to burst into flames. "Le Shunt by Duggleby."

"Come on!" urged the inspector.

"Perhaps they don't always burst into flames after a stunt like that on French telly," observed Guy.

Following the round inspector, who was built more for a desk than athletics, Guy scrambled twenty feet down the forty-five degree bank and approached the wreck. There was no sign of the driver.

"Well, what now?" asked Guy. "Look for him?"

"He could be hiding somewhere with a gun, waiting for us to do just that," decided Inspector Girardin in a rush of caution. "I see no blood in the car," he added, leaning forward and poking his fat bottom into the air. The interior of the vehicle yielded nothing of any immediate interest. "Let us press on. Whoever he is, he has a long walk. How would you describe him?"

Guy had to admit that he had received no more than a fleeting glimpse of black hair and sunglasses. The inspector released a scornful grunt, even though he had not even seen the other driver, and scraped mud from the rear plate with a twig so that he could make a note of the red car's registration number. Then he scrambled after Guy to the top of the bank and the road.

They stopped at the next town to report the incident at the police station and to initiate the recovery of the crashed car. Forty minutes later, without further incident, they reached their destination and began to look out for the released abductee.

Bob Kane was sitting in the garden of a café, shaded by a plane tree,

looking sleepy but none the worse for his ordeal. He waved a greeting to Guy, then he stared with frank curiosity at the round man with his friend. Inspector Girardin looked very over-dressed in his dark blue suit. Guy introduced him and explained his presence, then he asked Bob to tell them about his adventure.

Bob described his brief kidnapping again, filling in details and surprising himself with the depth of information that an expert interrogator was able to draw from him. They were interrupted twice by a waiter, who provided the new arrivals with coffee and savoury pastries, which looked like poor relations of Cornish pasties.

"And that's about it," said Bob, reaching the point at which he had been abandoned outside Pont-de-Causse. "They got me out of the car, told me there'd be a message waiting for me and Guy in a pub in Islington called The Sceptre at lunchtime tomorrow, and then I got the warning about no double-crosses and definitely no police."

"We didn't have much choice about that," Guy pointed out.

"Your best protection is to get these men arrested as soon as possible," commented Inspector Girardin.

"Hmm," said Bob sceptically. "Anyway, what now?"

"Let us be clear," said Inspector Girardin through a mouthful of pasty. "You said there were four of them, but you only heard two of them speak. One French and one English. The van drove away almost as soon as you reached your first stop. And the Englishman drove you away in a car. Not a small car because you had plenty of room for your legs."

"No, hang on." Bob closed his eyes, then pointed to his right to identify the source of a voice. "If he was sat there, giving directions, he couldn't have been driving. And he gave his directions in English, so the other bloke might have been a Brit too."

"Or bilingual," said Guy.

"That's not important," said the inspector. "You said they put something in the trunk of your car?"

"I've been thinking about that," nodded Bob. "It might have been their luggage. If they think Toby's gone home, and they want to contact us again in London, they might have been on their way home themselves."

"Toulouse is the nearest airport," remarked Guy.

"I suppose the other two may have shot back to their place on the coast in the van," added Bob.

"What place on the coast?" demanded Inspector Girardin.

"I told Al Capone all about it," said Guy before he could be placed under arrest for withholding vital information.

"Where on the coast?" demanded the inspector.

Guy told him there to find the house with dark green shutters and a tall chimney. Muttering under his breath, Inspector Girardin disappeared into the café to use the telephone. Guy took the opportunity to tell Bob about the in-fighting between the US Treasury Department and Interpol.

"Guess who put his foot in it?" grinned Bob. Then he slipped into a frown and pointed to the left-hand side of their hired car. "I didn't think our old chariot was as bashed about as that."

"Some clown tried to run us off the road on the way here," Guy explained.

"What, them? The blokes with the funny money? That doesn't make any sense."

"I've been asking myself that. Why. And I have to admit, *I* can't see any point to it either."

"Unless they didn't like you driving around with the phuzz."

"How are they going to know he's phuzz? He's from Interpol in Paris, not local. They won't have seen him before."

"He looks a lot like a cop."

"To someone who knows he is one."

"Still, we are dealing with a bunch of crooks. It could just be another of their lunatic stunts. Like that bloke Kemp climbing into your place in London. And the one at our hotel the other night . . ."

"The police don't know about them, by the way."

"Probably just as well. Not to mention our friends dumping bodies on the Jenners."

"Lunatic is certainly the right word for the last one, the one in the Renault. The others have had a clear motive for dropping in on us but I can't think what the last bloke's could be."

"Unless there's another bunch of bad guys we don't know about. What happened to him, by the way? Did your copper pal nick him?"

Guy explained how he had outmanoeuvred the opposition with fancy driving. "But when we got down the hill to the car," he added, "there he was – gone!"

"Bloody weird," commented Bob.

Inspector Girardin spent half an hour monopolizing the café's telephone, issuing orders or just waiting for it to ring. Guy and Bob sat out in the fresh air, watching the world go by. They completed the long drive back to Palavas towards the end of the afternoon. Inspector Girardin sat in the back of the car and smoked his pipe in silence through the journey. He was very annoyed about something.

As soon as Guy had found a place in the car park beside the Hôtel Bellevue, the inspector fired himself out of the pale salmon vehicle and practically ran to the neighbouring Hôtel Moderne. A round, blue-clad

figure disappearing at high speed was the last that Bob or Guy saw of him. A message with a telephone number was waiting for them when they reached the reception desk of their own hotel. Guy dialled the number. Calvin North, the US treasury agent, answered the rings. Guy gained the distinct impression that he had interrupted a shouting match.

In a rather abrupt fashion, North told him not to wander off and said that he would be over shortly. Bob and Guy retired to the terrace on the seaward side of the hotel for yet another cup of coffee. There was something about a trip abroad which permitted long dormant periods with coffee. At home, they would have been spurred by guilt into some sort of activity, even if it was only reading a book.

Calvin North was looking ruffled but not unduly perturbed when he tracked down Bob and Guy. His dark eyes were wide open and unblackened by French fists, and he looked as if he had caught up with most of his lost sleep.

"I'm surprised to see you in one piece," remarked Guy. "Inspector What's-his-name wasn't too pleased about you keeping quiet about the place down the road."

The treasury agent shrugged. "Only because Gut-Bucket's goons tore it to pieces and didn't find one goddam thing. Not even a home-made counter for the phone."

"You may think he couldn't find his dingus with a dipstick," said Guy, "but you feel a whole lot more comfortable telling a car rental agency how you came to bash their wheels about when you've got an inspector from Interpol standing by to back you up."

"I saw the scratches on the way over," said North dismissively. "Doesn't look too bad."

"I think the rental mob are glad we're going home tomorrow," said Bob. "To place ourselves at the disposal of some gentlemen from Scotland Yard."

"Yeah, I know," said North. "I'm going too. To tie down the English end of this deal."

"What about the French end?" said Guy. "There's still two or three of the mob that kidnapped Bob floating around."

"We'll leave inspector Gut-Bucket to scoop them up," chuckled North. "When are you two starting back tomorrow?"

"After breakfast, half-eight or nineish," said Guy. "We don't have to be at the pub in London till lunch-time, and we'll pick up an hour then we cross the Channel due to the time difference."

"Right," nodded Calvin North, telling himself that he would have to put his watch back then he reached England, not forward.

"Amazing to think it'll all be over tomorrow," said Bob, counting days to himself by folding fingers in towards his palm. "We've been charging

round like mad things for all of five days. But it feels like five bloody weeks.”

“You can’t say it hasn’t been different,” said Guy. “Did you get the forged dollars from the inspector?” He added to North.

“Hell, has he got them?” groaned the T-Man. “You’ll be contacted again after you get to England. Stay out of trouble till then.”

The US Treasury agent dragged himself away for another confrontation with Inspector Girardin. The Frenchman was convinced that North’s lack of co-operation had allowed the kidnappers to sneak back to their seaside base and move their forged hoard to an alternative hide-out. North maintained that the inspector had no proof that forged dollars had ever been stored in the house with dark green shutters and a tall chimney. Each clung to his point of view and the outcome was a solid impasse.

After an uneventful flight home, during which Bob Kane added another hour at the controls to his unofficial flight log, Guy Duggleby made a smooth landing at the former RAF Crowfield. They were transferring three cases of wine to the boot of Joan Duggleby’s car when a familiar figure ducked under the tail of the aircraft.

“Look out, it’s the Mafia,” warned Bob.

“There’s no such thing as the Mafia,” stated Calvin North. “It’s a vicious slander on honest Italian-Americans.”

“And that’s a story dreamed up by J. Edgar Hoover,” countered Guy. “So he could make the FBI’s crime figures look more respectable by refusing to admit gangs of Italian-American crooks had got themselves organized.”

“That’s nonsense anyway,” contributed Bob. “You’re either a Wop or a Yank. You can’t be both.”

“Do you think you should be seen talking to us?” added Guy. “What if the bad guys have got us under surveillance?”

“Who’s living in a dream world now?” scoffed North. “I brought you this.” He slipped a sturdy, nine-by-four manilla envelope from the inside pocket of his safari jacket.

Guy glanced at the contents, then he tucked the mixture of forged dollars and real notes into his inside pocket. “Did you make this up to seven hundred and thirty?” he asked.

“Yeah, yeah,” said North impatiently.

“You remembered the amount is seven hundred and thirty dollars? No more, no less?”

“Listen, fella, you’re dealing with the professionals here,” sighed North. “Not the goddam Frenchies.”

“I thought we were supposed to be meeting someone from Scotland

Yard?" Guy added.

"You're gonna be watched, but no one's going to approach you directly. Just pick up the message in London and do whatever they tell you. Let us worry about keeping up with you."

"I suppose you've got the car bugged?" said Bob.

"Talk to each other about any instructions you get and where you're going," continued North. "Whether you're in the car or not," he added to Bob.

"Does that mean you've managed to bug us?" frowned Guy, running his hands over his dark blue jacket, searching for bulges.

"No, it means he'll have lip-readers watching us through binoculars and blokes with high-powered directional mikes aimed at us," decided Bob. "CIA-style."

"You gotta give this guy an *I* for imagination," scoffed North.

"How else are you going to do it?" challenged Bob.

"When you've got rid of the envelope, go home," finished North, ignoring Bob's question. "Okay?"

Guy shrugged. "I suppose so."

"Good!" said North. "Just do what you're told and don't forget – Uncle Sam remembers his friends."

"You're worried in case we screw this up, just for a laugh, aren't you," grinned Bob.

"It's all right, we can handle it," said Guy patiently when the American began to simmer gently, marked by Bob's casual attitude.

"Okay," said North doubtfully, forced to take his word for it. He looked Bob up and down again, then turned away, making a point of not asking that Bob was supposed to be in his coverall, boots and crash helmet.

Bob dumped his shopping bag on the back seat of Joan Duggleby's car. "Good job the Customs vultures aren't hanging around," he remarked, patting the lid of the boot.

"Mmm?" said Guy, his attention focussed on Calvin North's driver – who had black hair and who was wearing a pair of dark sunglasses on a dull English morning.

"What's up?" Bob invited.

"Al Capone's driver," said Guy thoughtfully. "He bears a remarkable resemblance to the bloke who tried to run Inspector Gut-Bucket and myself off the road then we were on our way to pick you up."

"You reckon? Him and a million others in those shades."

"Yes, it's probably a coincidence. Come on, let's get rid of the plane and get into town."

Bob was still struggling to come to terms with the fact that an aircraft could be hired almost as readily as a car when Guy joined the A22 and

headed north. They reached Bob's flat on Telfour Grove at eleven-thirty, starting to think about lunch because their bodies were an hour ahead of British Summer Time. Bob changed out of his flying gear and secreted a mixed case of red, white and rosé wine.

Guy drove down Portobello Road to Notting Hill Gate, turned down Kensington Church Street, then followed the High Street to Victoria Road. He was glad to complete the two mile journey through heavy traffic. Bob helped him to transfer his suitcase and the rest of the wine to his third-floor flat. After telephoning Joan Duggleby at the family engineering works at Failsham to let her know that Bob and her brother were still alive and kicking, they headed for Islington.

The pub called *The Sceptre* was an integral part of a row of terraced houses, which started Guy wondering how the neighbours managed on a noisy night. He had left the car in a car park two streets away and he was playing spot-the-lurker with Bob. Neither had been able to pick out a tail during their first two hours back in England, but they kept looking.

Bob managed to claim a space at the bar and the attention of a cheerful man of about forty, who was wearing a dark blue sports shirt and wide, pearly-white braces.

"Got a message for Duggleby?" asked Bob, instead of placing the expected order for drinks.

"It's for you, is it?" said the landlord.

"We wouldn't know about it if it wasn't," Bob told him with a smile, shooting devastating logic at him.

The landlord produced an envelope from under one of the tills. "This ain't a bleedin' post office, you know."

Bob ripped the envelope open, scanned the brief message then passed it over his shoulder to Guy. "Why should you bother if it brings business in?" he asked, keeping his smile at a relentless level. "Two pints of bitter, four pies – that's two of each – and two packets of bacon crisps, please."

"A phone box," said Guy, buttoning the message into a pocket of his light anorak. "Stand by for a call, then on to another one, I'll bet. They're going to give us the runaround. And why wait till ten tonight? Or maybe it's because it's dark then."

"I don't think they trust us," said Bob, making room at the bar for Guy so that he could pay. "Wasn't there an episode of *The Sweeney* like that? I seem to remember poor old Jack Regan dashing from phone box to phone box and getting more and more shagged out. Until the commercials came on and gave him a rest."

"It's a pretty common plot device. Probably because it's also very effective in the real world. But I'm buggered if I'm doing it on foot

tonight. And I'm not breaking any speed limits either. If they try to tell me I've got a minute and a half to get to a box a couple of miles away, I'm going to tell them to get stuffed."

"You'd better watch out. Talk back to them and you might be next in line for a sack over your head. Or a trip in a cardboard box to the Jenners' country retreat."

"That's something I'm trying not to think about. We'll just have to hope Al Capone's mob are on their toes."

"I wonder where Sitax Road, EC1 is?" remarked Bob, recalling the instruction to talk about the message.

"Never heard of it," Guy admitted.

Two of the men in the pub had been drinking quietly and sparingly since twelve o'clock. They remained for a further quarter of an hour after Guy and Bob had left, then they drained their glasses and went their separate ways. The taller was a detective sergeant of Interpol. His blond companion, who had kept his voice down to a mutter in the pub to conceal his accent, drove two and a half miles to meet Calvin North on the Embankment at Blackfriars Bridge. The blond US Treasury agent, whose name was Elliot, found North and another agent called Stanway watching the traffic on the river.

Stanway was doubly in disgrace. Calvin North had wished to have an overweight inspector of Interpol removed from his hair because Girardin seemed destined to screw things up by doing too much too fast. Stanway had taken the wish too literally – and copied the four barons who had rid Henry II of a turbulent priest.

The noble knights had managed to write off Archbishop Thomas Becket quite efficiently. Stanway's attempt to run Inspector Girardin and his English driver off a French road had ended in conspicuous failure and it had cost Uncle Sam one automobile. Thus Stanway was in disgrace not only for impetuosity and lack of judgement, but also for incompetence. Now, North was holding Stanway on a tight rein and using him as a chauffeur – keeping him where he could keep an eye on the screw-up.

"Okay, what did you get?" North asked when the new arrival stopped on his right and gave his attention to a boatload of tourists.

"Every word." Elliot patted the breast pocket of his jacket. It contained a pair of spectacles with plain glass lenses. In their bulky side-limbs were concealed miniature directional microphones, which had been developed in a CIA laboratory in Virginia. "Twenty-two hundred tonight, a phone box on Sitax Road in EC1."

Stanway tugged a street-by-street guide of the British capital out of his left side pocket and thumbed through the index. "There's only one,

luckily," he announced. "On page 132. Yeah. Here it is. Near Saint Bartholomew's Hosp."

"Do we plant a surveillance device?" asked Elliot. "Should be a quick in and out with a look at a directory for cover."

"We don't go near it," said North, "That's up to the Limeys. But I shouldn't think they'll need to. You got the vehicles ready to roll?"

"Two cars, a black taxi, a Transit van, a three-wheeler van and a motorbike," Elliot recited. "If the Scotland Yard guys have got the same, we've got ourselves our own traffic jam."

Bob Kane and Guy Duggleby spent the Tuesday afternoon at a cinema, watching a double feature of science fiction films, which were so full of special effects and dazzling photography that the director had not worried unduly about a plot.

In both films, the good guys were placed in check by a set of unreasonable bad guys, suffered manfully to the point of defeat, and then, more or less with one bound, ended up victorious and free in time for the closing credits.

Guy could not help reflecting that real life is much less satisfying. He and Bob had been reduced from stars to extras in their personal adventure in the time it had taken Inspector Girardin to pluck a note from Guy's hand. They were doing all the work unpaid and with no prospect of finding out who won in the end.

A long and frustrating three-way telephone conversation with Guy's younger sister took place in the early evening. Joan was eager to hear the news from France. Guy and Bob felt obliged to stonewall in view of the serious nature of their assignment.

After a restless spell in front of the television, the pair left Guy's flat at twenty to ten. They reached the telephone box on Sitax Road about ten minutes early.

Feeling both excited and a little ridiculous, Guy and Bob sat in Joan Duggleby's car and watched the call box. A man entered it at five to ten. The watchers held their breath – but he flipped through one of the directories then continued on his way thirty seconds later. Bob compared the dashboard clock with Guy's watch for the umpteenth time, then he opened his door. Ninety seconds later, the phone began to ring.

Bob was just opening the door of the call box when he felt a presence. He glanced over his shoulder and met the spectacled eyes of a shortish man in a dark and crumpled anorak,

"The phone's ringing," said the man, attempting to push past Bob, who had stopped.

"I know, I can hear it." Bob stood his ground.

"Someone has to answer it." There was a sense of urgency and mission in the man's voice.

"Yeah?" said Bob, deciding that the stranger had not brought him a message and he was nothing to do with the scheme to return the forged dollars to their manufacturer. "Guess, what, I'm someone. Mind out."

Bob gave the man a push to move him clear of the door and slipped into the box. Frustrated eyes watched him lift the receiver and read the telephone number from the panel on the back wall.

"That Duggleby?" said a half-familiar voice.

"No, it's the one you bagged," said Bob.

The voice had a local accent. It gave Bob the position and number of another phone box.

"Is this going to be like some rotten spy film?" Bob asked, trying to sound amused and a little contemptuous. "A run-around to make sure the carrier pigeons aren't being followed?"

"Shut up and get moving," said Scott Hamill impatiently.

"All right, be like that," Bob told the dead and purring telephone.

A hurt stare followed him back to the car. Guy moved away from the kerb, leaving the man standing beside the box as if waiting for the telephone to ring again.

"The post office at Clerkenwell Green," Bob told his driver. "It's near there."

"Want to bet how many stops there's going to be?" asked Guy.

"Four," said Bob positively.

"Have you got inside information?"

"Two's not enough, three's too obvious and everyone will get fed up if it's more than four."

"It's a point of view. Who was your friend? The bloke you were talking to?"

"Either a cop or some kind of phone-nut, who hangs around public call boxes, waiting for someone to ring. Probably a nut if they've got the car bugged."

"You're sure about that, are you?"

"You've probably got a couple of thousand quid's worth of transmitters and microphones stuck all over your sister's car in obscure places. Could be very embarrassing for Joanie if they don't find them all first time. But if Uncle Sam doesn't cough up all the expenses he owes you, you can make a few bob flogging them. Spotted any tails yet?"

"Lots and none."

"I know what you mean," chuckled Bob.

To make life easier for the unseen shadows, Guy stuck to main roads. He drove up Aldersgate Street and Goswell Road, then he turned left onto Clerkenwell Road.

Bob spent ten minutes waiting for the telephone to ring.

During Bob's vigil, Jobbo Wright drove round the roughly triangular block and explored a few side streets to look for parked and occupied vehicles which might be shadowing the carrier pigeons. He found no obvious signs of shadows, but he saw no harm in being cautious.

In fact, a round dozen vehicles were weaving through the area, some driven by Interpol agents and some with US Treasury Department crews. But as they were always in motion, they escaped Wright's notice.

Having received a call from Jobbo Wright to tell him that the coast looked clear, Scott Hamill rang Bob's call box and moved him on to the next stopping point.

Guy continued along Clerkenwell Road, then turned right onto Grey's Inn Road. His instructions were to take the third turning on the left and then the fourth left. Bob crossed the pavement to make sure that they had reached the right phone box by checking the number.

Their street was fairly quiet. No more than one or two cars chose to use it in any given minute. The only pedestrians were small groups who had chosen to leave a nearby pub before closing time. Half past ten approached. Bob returned to the phone box and entered it – just in case someone intruded into the arrangements at the last minute. He kept the door open with a foot because there was a ripe smell which told him that someone had peed in it.

A couple of minutes went by before he noticed the trailing coil of wire. The receiver was in its natural place, on the body of the telephone, but one of society's surplus elements had rendered it useless. Bob picked it up and discovered that the bars of the receiver rest had been super-glued in the up position. Modem technology added to traditional mindless vandalism had torpedoed the plan.

Bob opened the phone box door wider and waved the useless fitting at Guy to tell him that they had reached an unscheduled dead end.

12. Million-Dollar Men

Scott Hamill jabbed the receiver rest down with an impatient finger and dialled the number again. Instead of the double burps of a ringing tone, he was rewarded with a continuous and derisory *booooo* noise to tell him that the number was unobtainable. Something had gone wrong since the afternoon, when he had sent Jobbo Wright on a circuit of the telephone boxes to make sure that a call could be received at each of them.

Hamill poured himself a drink from a half-empty litre bottle of duty-free Glenfiddich and tried to work out a course of action. His thoughts were interrupted by the ringing of his telephone.

"Something's up," Wright growled urgently. "They're just standing by their car, doing nothing."

"Some bastard must have wrecked the phone box," Hamill explained as relief flooding through anger that someone had sabotaged his plans. At least Guy Duggleby had had the sense to stay put and await orders from another source.

"So what do we do?" prompted Wright.

"You're sure they're on their own?" stalled Hamill.

"There's no one watching them," said Wright confidently as a motorcycle cruised past Guy's car. He was speaking from a central passage in a pub. He could just see Guy Duggleby's car through an open door and a front window.

"Hang on a minute. Let me think," said Hamill.

Jobbo Wright blew smoke into the warm, heavy air, finished the half pint of mild that he had taken the opportunity to order, and waited for the brains of the outfit to come up with the next move.

Standing with Guy Duggleby beside the wrecked phone box, Bob Kane lit another cigarette and eyed with envy the steady trickle of people passing on both sides of the road. Most of them had just emerged from a pub and Bob felt capable of murdering a pint. He could hear shouts of 'Time, please!' in the distance.

"How long do you reckon we should hang on here?" he remarked, just for something to say.

"They must know by now something's gone wrong," said Guy, attempting a sensible estimate. "We've been here twenty minutes now. Let's give them another ten. If we've not heard from them by then, I

reckon the only thing to do is sod off home and wait for them to set up something else.”

“That’s going to please Al Capone and his Uncle Sam,” chuckled Bob. “Do you reckon any of this lot are working for him? How about those two birds over there?”

Guy followed the direction of Bob’s stare to the strollers across the road, then he shrugged. “Who knows?” A taxi drifted across his line of vision. “Here’s a thought, You know you’ve been wondering if Uncle Sam’s boys have bugged the car and everything else in sight? What if the other lot have too?”

“You mean, what if they’re sat somewhere listening to you giving the game away? Then we’re really wasting our time. Are we getting back in the car? I could do with a sit down.”

Guy shrugged again. “Might as well.”

They returned to the car. Bob wound his window down so that he could flick ash onto the pavement. A taxi chugged past the car. Suddenly, a loose ball of paper shot past Bob’s nose and landed on Guy’s lap.

“Bloody cheek!” said Bob indignantly. He turned his head in time to see a tallish, powerful figure duck round a corner. “What does the sod think this is? A bloody dustbin?”

Guy smoothed out the beermat-sized scrap of paper and angled it to catch the beam of a street light. He started to laugh softly. “They’ll never make a James Bond out of you, chum. Look! It’s a message.”

“Well, burn my brain!” said Bob in amazement.

“Attention all listeners,” said Guy, preparing to read the solid capitals.

“WAIT 5 MINS THEN PARK BERNARD ST IN FRONT OF
TUBE STATION. HOLD GOODS UP AT WINDOW.”

“We could have done that bloody *ages* ago,” sighed Bob.

“Tell you what,” laughed Guy, “this knocks your theory on the head. If the bad guys have got us bugged like Uncle Sam’s mob, they wouldn’t be going through with this.”

“Unless they’ve worked out a foolproof getaway plan and they’re not bothered what the Yanks know.”

“You mean like the Italian Job? With Minis charging about over the rooftops?”

“I reckon a bloke on a fast motorbike who’s prepared to take a few risks could leave anyone else standing.”

“I reckon you might have something there,” nodded Guy. “Anyway, for the benefit of our listeners, we’re moving on in five minutes from now.”

Five minutes later, Guy started the engine and turned the car around. He drove up to the T-junction and turned left, then right then left again.

When he stopped again, one hundred yards short of the Russell Square Tube station, Bob cupped his left elbow in his right hand to brace the arm and tapped the envelope containing Toby Ryun's winnings against the window frame. Almost immediately, the envelope was whisked out of his grasp. The collector had rounded the corner that the car had just turned before Bob realized that the envelope had gone.

"Well, so much for that!" said Guy. "I hope it was the right bloke, not just some opportunist thief."

"If it was a thief, he'll get a nasty shock," chuckled Bob. "I wonder if they'll get away with it?"

"The trouble is, if we see a story in the papers about a gang of forgers coming unstuck, how are we to know it's the right gang?"

"Ask you Uncle Sam. Are you a member of any disgusting clubs near here? I could do terrible damage to a pint."

"Yes, there's a place we could crawl off to," nodded Guy. "I'll leave it up to you to decide if it's sufficiently disgusting."

"Attention all listeners," Bob announced. "Going off the air for a pint. Over and out."

Keen eyes watched Jobbo Wright pluck an envelope from Bob Kane's left hand. Another member of the Interpol team relayed the number of the collector's car to the fleet of pursuit vehicles. Wright passed the envelope to Scott Hamill and started the engine.

As he moved off, an agent of the US Treasury Department squeezed the trigger of an air rifle. The pellet smashed the nearside rear light of the car, which made it very much easier to follow at a distance at night.

A loose web formed around the one-eyed Cortina, checking it junction by junction as it threaded an easterly course. Hamill sorted the forged from the genuine totes with the aid of a short list. Checking through the collection of artificially aged notes in the shop in Tottenham to find the numbers of the missing ones had taken a long, long time.

"We've made a profit. A hundred and eighty bucks," Hamill remarked, tucking the genuine dollars into his wallet. He returned the forged ones to the envelope.

"One hundred and eighty!" crowed Wright like the scorer at a televised darts match.

He followed a Reliant van through a left turn onto Kingsland Road. Almost immediately, a cruising police car drew up alongside and the uniformed constable in the passenger seat wagged an index finger towards the side of the road.

"What do I do?" asked Wright anxiously.

"Pull in. See what they want," Hamill decided.

"Might be a double cross."

"There's only two of them. If they'd set the phuzz on us, we'd be bloody surrounded." Hamill locked his door and took the envelope and his lighter from their pockets. "But make sure I have time to burn these if there's any trouble," he added.

Wright followed the police car round a corner and off the main road. An inspector of Interpol made a frantic telephone call to the local information room to divert the uniformed men. One of the policemen showed Jobbo Wright his smashed tail light. Wright was reduced to indignant incoherence at first, but he managed to make plain what he would like to do to the vandal.

Suddenly, the driver of the police car called an urgent summons to his colleague. Hamill and Wright watched the vehicle speed away with lights flashing and siren yelling.

"What was all that about?" demanded Hamill, still holding his lighter within igniting range of the envelope of forged dollars.

"Some bastard's smashed one of my back lights," complained Wright.

"Is that all?" chuckled Hamill, surrendering to a wave of relief.

"*All?* What d'you mean, bloody *all?*"

"Calm down. It won't cost much to fix it. And you've got to see the funny side. Those two were inches from a lead to a million dollars. Just think what that would have done for their promotion prospects."

"Yeah, I suppose we've still got the luck with us," Wright admitted.

The procession continued – a one-eyed Cortina and a dozen assorted shadows. A quick-thinking Interpol officer had managed to shoot off half a dozen, black and white photographs of Jobbo Wright discussing his rear light with the uniformed police constable. Wright made a right turn, then a left turn immediately after the church. He drove on for two hundred yards, then he stopped in front of Scott Hamill's home.

The watchers noted that Hamill produced the front door key. The photographer added him to the collection in a variety of poses between the car and the house. The watchers had already had the vehicle's registration number processed. The Police National Computer had told them that the owner lived further west, in Hackney.

Wright went into the kitchen to fetch two cans of beer from the cupboard. "What's the game?" he demanded on his return. "I thought we were going to put those back?"

Hamill was kneeling in front of the fireplace. He fanned the forged dollars and touched his lighter to one of them. "These have brought us nothing but bad luck," he explained, turning the sheaf of notes to spread the flames. "We're well rid of them. And I don't think we should go anywhere near the main stock for at least a fortnight."

"Why not, if the phuzz aren't after us?"

"Just to be on the safe side."

"Safe from what?" persisted Wright. "You don't think those two have followed us or anything?"

"Just let's leave things be for a while. Okay?" said Hamill.

Wright shrugged, realizing that Hamill was serious. "Well, okay."

"And I think it might be a good idea to do a deal for the bucks instead of trying to cash them ourselves."

"It's gonna cost us a lot."

"Yeah, but if they're off our hands and no one can ever prove we had them. Too many people know about them already."

"Like Inky's card-sharp pals?"

"And anyone else they told. I'll have a word with Paul about it."

"What if he says your bottle's gone?" suggested Wright, unwilling to lose face in front of a Frog.

"Good sense has got nothing to do with having bottle," said Hamill firmly.

Agents from Interpol and the US treasury were already settling down to the routines of round-the-clock surveillance on Scott Hamill when Jobbo Wright left for his home, leading his quota of shadows. Patient waiting was the essence of that type of police work.

Hamill and Wright's home telephones would be monitored, their mail intercepted, all contacts with others would be logged and their movements would be recorded until they led their shadows to their guilty secret.

A similar operation was being conducted in the south of France – but only by agents of the US Treasury Department. Calvin North's team had watched Paul Boulay and Albert load their hoard of forged dollars into their van before inspector Girardin had learned about the house with dark green shutters.

The French conspirators had transferred the load to a house in Millau – the one at which kidnapped Bob Kane had broken his journey. The French would be allowed back into the operation eventually – to supply arresting officers – but not until Calvin North had located the printing plates and anything else that the English end of the conspiracy had stashed away for future reference.

A man with an American accent telephoned Guy Duggleby the following morning to ask him to be in his flat and available at lunch-time. When Guy called Bob Kane to pass on the message, a slightly breathless woman answered the telephone by saying, "Digame?" to prove that she had just returned from a Spanish holiday.

The badge and teeshirt couple were back. Bob had sold them several sets of silk-screens for their printing business and he was feeling slightly

wealthy – certainly rich enough to be able to afford the two bus rides to Guy's flat.

Calvin North and a companion arrived at twelve-thirty. Mr. Viedon had a terribly 'Home Counties' accent and he was clearly a senior copper, even though his exact status was never clarified. He was in his middle forties and he had a round, bland face. There was a touch of oriental inscrutability about him to contrast with North's suggestion of Mafia membership.

Mr. Viedon thanked Bob and Guy for their co-operation the previous night, and he made it clear that the rest of the affair was a matter for the police only. Silence was the order of the day, backed up by an unspoken threat that loose talk could lead to Bob and Guy being run in three times a day for very trivial offences.

Bob was inclined to scoff, but Viedon left him in no doubt that he would be in serious trouble if he jeopardized a successful outcome to the operation.

The police officer left for another appointment on a note of gratitude and warning. Bob retired to the kitchen to fetch three cans of beer. Calvin North had more to tell them.

"That bugger would be right at home in the Gestapo," remarked Bob, pulling a ring. "Is he the boss of the *Sweeney*, or something? I bet he scares his own blokes more than a mob of armed hi-jackers."

"No, he's Fraud Squad," said North, proving that he knew police-related rhyming slang and feeling slightly superior because he also knew that the Flying Squad no longer existed. It had been dispersed to outer areas of London, apart from the small Central Robbery Squad at New Scotland Yard. "He's an accountant basically."

"I could do with him to frighten my tax man," said Guy.

"That sounds like a cue to get my end of the caper sorted out," said North.

"Got all the bugs out of Joan's car yet?" asked Bob.

"There are no bugs in that car," North stated positively. "One of our people in France has given your pal Toby back the five hundred and fifty bucks we took to check up on and told him there's no heat on them."

"And Toby, being Toby, won't have made a note of the numbers, so he won't know if he's got the same ones back," said Bob.

"Our guy told him they were doing a double check on the big bills, which is why it took so long." North produced a thick wad of £20 notes. "Uncle Sam is prepared to pay you reasonable expenses for your help and inconvenience."

"Kin 'ell!" gasped Bob. "Are they real?"

Calvin North ignored the question. Guy made a list covering the hire

of aircraft and cars, hotel bills and anything else that came to mind. Seeing an opportunity to screw THEM for once, even if the target was the United States Government, not the British Government, Bob added a few items to the reckoning to cover loss of earnings and emotional trauma caused by his brief kidnapping. North paid up without protest then Guy's calculator had worked out a total.

"Okay, you guys," said North, tucking the much slimmed wad away. "That's it, as far as you're concerned. A French cop talked to you on Monday about your meet with this Toby. You spent the rest of the day doing tourist things, then you flew home yesterday morning. *You* didn't get kidnapped." He pointed a bony finger at Bob. "And the two of you weren't out delivering a ransom last night."

"Yon mean, once the police became involved, that was the end of it as far as we were concerned?" said Guy. "For further information, consult them, not us?"

"That's about the size of it," approved North.

"You'll never get Joanie to believe that!" scoffed Guy.

Calvin North frowned at him.

"Joan's his sister," Bob remarked. "Well known for getting her own way and finding things out."

"Don't worry, we'll keep our traps shut about your on-going operation situation." Guy promised. "How much funny money do you think they made?"

North shrugged. "Who knows? Could be millions."

"And when do you expect to move in on them?"

North shrugged again. "Weeks, months. We'll have to play this hand very close to the chest."

"Oh, well," said Guy. "We'll just have to keep an eye on the headlines."

After lunch, Guy sent a cable to the Jenners in Monte Carlo to tell them that it was safe to come home again. The reply arrived the following afternoon. It read: 'No thanks. We like it here. Hope your explanation better than Toby's. His was pathetic. Love, Nicki and Jeff.'

The Jenners returned to England on Saturday morning and drove to their house in Horton Grand to see what sort of a mess the burglars and the police had made of it. Their neighbour, Mrs. Marney, had swept the dusty footprints out of the hall. One week after the event, she was still full of Tom Duggleby finding a body in the house next door. The Jenners listened to every detail of the story, then they made their excuses and continued on to Failsham.

Tom Duggleby's plan for a family gathering had been put into cold storage for the moment. In fact, he was reluctant to speak to his brother,

which made Guy's task of fending off questions a little easier. His sisters, Mary and Joan, had called him a liar every way that they could think of, but they had failed to obtain a more satisfactory ending to the affair of Toby Ryun's winnings.

Joan had invited Bob Kane down for the weekend, hoping to seduce information out of him. Bob was hoping that he would be able to remain loyal to his generous Uncle Sam but making no promises.

Two weeks later, Scott Hamill and Jobbo Wright led an unseen procession to the shop in Tottenham. The premises received a thorough search after their departure. The rummage squad turned up one million dollars, at a first guess, in the chimney breast on the first floor. But the plates which had printed the forgeries were nowhere to be found.

British police officers and American Treasury Department agents had searched the homes of both Hamill and Wright during convenient absences – without success. The watchers returned to their vigil somewhat encouraged.

The following week, Hamill was observed talking to a man whom the officers from Scotland Yard quickly identified as a potential buyer of forged currency. On the Friday of that week, Hamill and Wright exchanged a British Airways flight bag for a bulky envelope – flat A4 size – at a service station on the M1, near Leicester. As soon as the deal had been completed, Hamill and Wright and their customers found themselves under arrest.

That same evening, French police officers, accompanied by agents of the United States Treasury, raided a house in Millau in the south of France and arrested Paul Boulay and Albert Montois. Guy Duggleby clipped a headline which read: 'MILLION DOLLAR PLOT' and the accompanying story from his newspaper the following morning. But he filed it away for future reference. Calvin North had contacted him on the night of the arrests to tell him to remain silent.

When questioned, Jobbo Wright and Albert Montois remained obstinately unforthcoming. Scott Hamill dropped hints about being just a middle man in the conspiracy. A message travelled across the Channel by legal messenger. Paul Boulay began to drop similar hints. He was a distributor, not the master forger.

Their story was supported by the fact that the gang could not be connected to any printing equipment. An attempt to link Hamill and Wright to the death of Inky Fergusson, a known and highly skilled forger, came to nothing due to lack of evidence.

The cases took five months to come to trial. Guy Duggleby preserved another newspaper cutting, which reported the first day of the trial of Scott Hamill (48), George Wright (37) and their customers for the forged

dollars. The headline called them 'MILLION DOLLAR MEN' and the somewhat hysterical text suggested that they could have seriously damaged the United States' economy with their forgeries.

At the beginning of the following week, Allen-Duggleby, Ltd. received a substantial order for the firm's precision fuel metering valves from the United States Air Force. Calvin North's promise was being fulfilled.

The trial in England was expected to last six or seven weeks in view of the mass of evidence to be considered. Reasoning that the shorter his sentence, the sooner he would be able to try again, Scott Hamill deprived the legal profession of several hundreds of thousands of pounds of the taxpayer's money and made a deal after the first week. His defence counsel had been making pessimistic noises about the outcome of the trial for months anyway.

With Paul Boulay's agreement, Hamill gave the police enough information to enable them to find the plates. The charges of aiding and abetting forgery became victims of the bargaining process and were quietly dropped. Hamill and Wright were gaoled for two years apiece for simple possession of forged banknotes.

Paul Boulay and Albert Montois received similar sentences in France two weeks later, and Guy Duggleby completed his set of newspaper cuttings. Suitably framed, he presented them to Toby Ryun on his birthday. Toby hung them in the drawing room of his London residence, beside a double fan of United States currency.

Calvin North took the plates to the United States on a US Air Force jet, and he was afforded the honour of placing them in a display case in the Treasury Department's black museum. Then he returned to his new base in Paris and the endless suspicions of Inspector Girardin, who remained convinced that the American had pulled a fast one on him at some stage during the Boulay case.

Toby Ryun's attempts to dine out on his adventure usually ended in failure. His friends had accepted the covering lie, and they were half convinced that Guy's newspaper cuttings, although perfectly genuine, had been collected to back up an amusing piece of fiction. Only Nicki and Jeff Jenner were prepared to believe the truth when it could be shared with them.

Guy Duggleby had dropped a number of hints their way because he felt that they deserved a glimpse of the events which had driven them out of their home and their native land. And, of course, Guy's younger sister had wormed the truth out of Bob Kane six months earlier – thus proving that money and veiled threats cannot always buy silence between friends.

Friendship is like money, Samuel Butler wrote, easier made than kept. Guy Duggleby's circle of friends remained intact. But the two million

dollars which Scott Hamill and his associated had made were consigned to a furnace shortly after the conclusion of the trial in France.



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