

On the run



By John D

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Note from the author

In November 2011 I wrote a story, *Secrets*, for National Novel Writing Month and published that book in mid-December. I asked for feedback, and got some, mostly around the fact that I had missed half-a-million grammatical errors and thought little more of it; I was disappointed with myself and understood the need for editors. I had been given a stark lesson in reality and I felt a little demoralised as I knew I had not done as good a job as I should have done and even though it had been downloaded thousands of times, I had actually got very little feedback. I had no problem with people rating as “one star” but would have quite liked to know what they found so abhorrent as I wanted to learn and become a better author.

Then the e-mails starting coming through again in mid-January; in the space of two days I got more e-mails than I had got in the previous four weeks: people were downloading my book and more than that, they were liking it, but from where? There was a common theme, most of the feedback was appended by “sent from my iPad” or “sent from my iPhone” and I checked the Apple iBookstore: I was there because my book had been accepted into Smashwords Premium Channel for distribution. I was also on Diesel eBooks, Sony, Barnes and Noble and Kobo. I barely stopped smiling that night; it was unexpected.

But as the positive feedback continued, I started to climb the charts and within a few days was in the top five free books. I was above all but one of Dickens books on the day of his 200th anniversary of his birth. I was overwhelmed and ever so excited, the chart was made up of established authors like Jane Austen, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Robert Louis Stevenson: it was like Barnet being in the FA Cup Quarter Final! Suddenly, I felt compelled to write more and loved reading the feedback, good and bad. Thank you to all those that did, and I did try to respond to anyone who e-mailed me.

I learned a lot from writing *Secrets* and took from the feedback that I needed an editor, needed to tone down the sex scenes and also be more descriptive with the characters. I've tried to incorporate that in this book and for that reason I have taken out a sex scene to leave just five (I apologise in advance for Chapter XVI); everything has been evaluated in far more detail.

So this is one of the seven ideas for books I had and is written because, and only because, I got feedback to tell me what people liked and what they didn't about *Secrets*. In this book, three people set about stealing from a mad Ukrainian gangster and then have to evade the Police, the heavies and anyone who is prepared to double-cross them for a slice of £800,000 in used banknotes, some jewellery and three priceless Argentinian artefacts.

I would like to thank my wife for her understanding while writing all of my stories; she laughs at me as I can leap up from doing anything (well, almost anything) to scribble something away for “processing” later.

I would especially like to thank Bill, Turbo, Rick, Joey and Steve for proof-reading this book and pointing out any errors I have made.

Please note that the book is written in British English, so “apologise”, “dialled”, “colour”, etc are not spelling errors it is just that that my ancestors had cultural disagreements with other adopters of our language which is now confusing whole swathes of the planet centuries later; thanks for that, guys.

The setting for this story starts off in Merseyside and is expressly designed to be around 75 short scenes aggregated into chapters. This should make it easy to read where the reading is stop-start (such as public transport or a busy office)

This eBook, has been released to be freely downloaded and I would ask my readers to

drop me a line and let me know what you think of the story; I cannot hope to improve as an author if the readers don't tell me where I succeeded and where I failed! I can happily accept criticism, but I do need feedback. **So please, even if you hated every word, I still do like to be told; I am a big boy, I can take criticism!**

Kind regards, thank you for reading and until next time,
John D

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Chapter I

Six years ago.

The judge cleared his throat and coughed, staring at the teenager in the dock of the Crown Court. "James Prutton, you are found guilty by this court of armed robbery, contrary to the Theft Act 1968. You have been a career criminal and a community nuisance since you were twelve and I am not disposed to show you leniency despite your relatively young age of sixteen. Your crime was a vicious and violent act against a peaceful community and you perpetrated a wicked and terrifying crime that has tormented your victims. Furthermore, we note that you have shown no remorse, and have not been prepared to cooperate with the Police to either recover the stolen goods or to locate the other perpetrator."

The sixteen year old in the dock wiped his face and glanced up at his family sat in the public gallery. There was no denying fear was etched on his face and the judge looked at him. "I have read the pre-sentence report and have noted your nineteen previous convictions. I therefore have no alternative but to commit you to a significant custodial sentence of ten years and one month."

"Ten years?" A blonde woman cried from the gallery. "You tell him Jamie. Who did this with you." Jamie stared at the judge who admonished the mother, reminding her that she was in court and such interruptions were not permitted. She sat back down and dried her eyes. Oliver sat speechless in the gallery as he watched his twin brother be sentenced to a youth prison and felt his arm be squeezed by his crying mother. He looked back to see his brother's girlfriend wiping her eyes and purse her lips together, rubbing her face. She threw her brown hair back and ran her hands through it.

"Sorry," she mouthed at the convicted criminal and Jamie looked up at her, blowing her a kiss as he was led away, down the stairs. Tara Prutton sobbed, her blonde hair falling over her hands and she stared down on the court and then spun around to face her son's girlfriend.

"This, this your fault," she told her, getting up and pushing her hands into the face of the teenage girl. "Ya did this."

Emma shook her head. "No," she cried and stepped backwards to avoid the flailing arms of the irate mother. "No I didn't."

Tara climbed up onto the chair and swung her arm at Emma who was backing away from the irate mother. "You fucking liar," she screamed as two court officials opened the door to the gallery. "You led 'im on. He's got ten years, you fucking beetch. Ten fucking years." Emma pushed the blonde mother away and court officials descended on the two brawling women. "Ya did it with 'im, right?"

Emma shook her head and Tara glared at her with her dark brown eyes and brought her hand up, slapping the teenager as hard as she could in the face. "You fuckin' liar." Emma shrieked and with as much force as the off-balance girl could muster smashed her fist into the face of Tara Prutton, who lost her balance and fell off her chair and against the wooden trim of the gallery.

Oliver cried out, and Emma backed away into the arms of a court official while a policeman grabbed Tara, her face leaking blood from where she had fallen against the furniture. The two women were forced out of the gallery, lead away into the exits screaming abuse at each other as Oliver looked dazed; what had just happened?

He stood there, motionless for a moment and then looked at the emptying court staring at him. He was in shock; he brother had been sent to prison and his mother had just been

arrested.

“Hey kid, you OK?”

Oliver bit his lip and looked down at the reporter filing her pencil into her notebook. He nodded and the woman got up to shake his hand. “Chrissy Fuller, press.”

Oliver shook it and muttered under his breath that he was “Oliver.”

“I know. I've been watching you through the trial. Bet it's not easy seeing your only brother put away like that.” Oliver shook his head and the reporter flashed her beautiful smile. She glanced over at the door to the public gallery. “You fancy a coffee? There is a coffee shop just outside and I want to speak to you. Tell me what James was really like?”

Oliver hesitated and the reporter took off her glasses and then looked at him out of the corner of her eyes, before placing the spectacles in her breast pocket. Oliver glanced at her large breasts and she pushed her chest out slightly. “I'm not sure—” Oliver muttered and wiped his eyes.

“Listen kid, Jamie is going to be all over the papers tomorrow now the reporting's been lifted. He is going to be big news and my editor wants to me to write about him. But I want more than that. I want to see the real Jamie Prutton 'cos he dain't look a bad kid. Help me, or my editor'll do a hatchet job.”

Oliver licked his lips and sniffed. She stared at him, and pulled her blouse down a bit further, watching his expression shift. He nodded without uttering a word.

Chrissy guided the reluctant teenager to the small café and sat down in the corner with him, buying him the largest hot chocolate the small café served, along with a cookie. She clandestinely unbuttoned her top two buttons in the queue, and then flicked the Dictaphone on in her handbag as she put the tray on the table.

She looked into the tearful eyes of Oliver. “It's OK,” she said soothingly, touching his shaking hands and rubbing them gently. “Tell me about James. What is the real James like?”

Oliver hesitated. “Jamie, he umm. Well he ummm.”

“The whole world is going to see that he is one of the youngest people ever convicted of armed robbery, and that he has a string of convictions, what's the truth, Oliver? Why does he get involved? Is it problems at home?”

Oliver took a sip of his hot chocolate and rubbed his nose before speaking in a quiet voice. “He doesn't read too good, he's no good at school.” Oliver paused and stared at the chocolate chips in the cookies and gave a brief shrug. “Teachers said there was no point in him coming to school so he stopped going. I mean I don't mind school, it's a bit shit most of the time but some of the work's OK but he just hated it.”

“So you blame this on the teachers?”

Oliver shook his head. “No, I blame it on him. He was fine at home, he'd be the nice guy, always looking out for me.” Oliver bit his nail and then looked back at the reporter. “When a few of the lads got a bit heavy with me, Jamie sorted 'em out. He was cool. I mean he got suspended 'cos he beat 'em up in school, like. But he only did it 'cos they were beating me up. But after that they chucked him out of the army cadets; drinking and smoking at camp. He got caught screwin' one of the gals as well, proper lost it. And he went to shit as he had nowt to do – nathin'. And then Mum started shoutin' at 'im. So it all got a bit shit at home for 'im. He went out with the girl you saw up there. He stopped doin' CDs and the like in the 'igh Street, and well he moved onto bigger things.”

“The warehouse in Mill Lane?” The reporter asked.

Oliver shrugged. "Yeah. Emma wanted a new PlayStation for her birthday. He told me she said he could have a blowjob every day if he got her one. But 'e got caught. Mum just went crazy and he stormed out and did the Post Office."

"With whom?"

Oliver snorted. "I dunno. I could give ya ten names, they'd all be as likely."

"Not Emma Wallis then?"

Oliver shrugged and took a sip of his hot chocolate. "No idea. I reckon Ian, he was always 'anging around and he 'ad guns an' all. But Jamie wouldn't tell the filth so whoever it was got the money and Jamie got jail."

Chrissy licked her lips and tapped away. "Tell me about your family?"

Oliver peered into his chocolate. "There's nowt to tell," he said and then proceeded to spend the next thirty minutes telling all his family's secrets to the reporter. He felt he could trust her as she was nice and understanding and watched as she listened to everything he said.

Chrissy was lovely, Oliver thought and she even gave him a lift home in exchange for a recent photo of Jamie.

* * * * *

"Where's that fuckin' toe-rag?" Jamie asked with a smile as he came through the lounge door and greeted his twin brother. Jamie pulled out a torn piece of newspaper from his pocket and held it out, entitled "The teenager robber: The truth." Oliver groaned.

"I know," Oliver said, looking at his brother who had bulked out in muscle considerably since he had last seen him, as well as maturing considerably in the face and having his hair cut short. "She was so nice."

Jamie glanced up and read from the paper. "James Prutton, known to his family and friends as Jamie, had been arrested nineteen times before being arrested for committing this armed robbery. A perpetual truant, Jamie struggled at school unlike his twin brother Oliver who is set to get at least five good GCSEs.' And I love this bit ... 'allegations of violence have also been levelled against Jamie.' You spake to a fuckin' reporter didn't you?"

"Ahh well, sort of," Oliver muttered and Jamie grinned. "She was so lovely at the time."

"Ya fucking retard."

"Twas sixteen," Oliver replied instantly and Jamie just chortled, patting his brother on the back.

"Well apparently I was a dangerous nutter and well scary. That gets ya respect inside, ya know. Big respect. So well done bro."

Oliver forced a weak smile at his brother who returned a pair of quizzically raised eyebrows. He had not seen Jamie since the day he was sent down, although he had written to him an almost weekly basis; Oliver found prison too daunting to visit and Jamie had to contend himself with the odd trip from Emma for a couple of years, as well as trips from his Uncle and his mother.

Tara entered the lounge and looked at her son; she had been parking their car at the end of the road after picking Jamie up from the prison where he had served his custodial sentence. "Ya stayin' 'ere, ya go straight, ya 'ear?" Jamie was told firmly by his mother.

"I ain't goin' back to jail," Jamie replied instantly and then helped himself to a lager from the small pile in the corner of the room.

“Ya better not,” Tara told him. “And tomorra, straight down to job centre. Ya get ya-self a job, like?”

Jamie rolled his shoulders and snorted. “Yeah, I know. You've been mitherin' me since I got awt.”

Tara screwed up her face but didn't respond and walked over to get herself a drink from the pile of beer cans. Jamie celebrated his “coming out of prison” with his Uncle, mother, brother and half the street, as well as a Fish 'n' Chips from the local takeaway before going upstairs to the bedroom he still shared with his brother, slightly tipsy.

It was decorated just as he left it, and he opened his drawer to see clothes that would barely fit him, or still be remotely fashionable and scooped them onto the floor..

“Feel weird?” Oliver asked as he came into the room. Jamie turned and looked at him. His brother had aged and matured, he had a well defined sideburns and a manicured beard. His brown hair was styled fashionably and he had bulked out slightly; he had grown up from being a geeky sixteen year old and at the mercy of every bully in the inner city school they went to. He looked and dressed well.

“Fook yes,” Jamie replied, slurring his speech. “You ain't a ugly weak shit any more, right?”

Oliver shrugged. “Was I before?”

Jamie nodded, and then saw himself in a small mirror; he looked tired and he looked downtrodden, nothing like his brother. For a split second he envied Oliver and watched as his twin brother changed into some shorts and slid under the covers of the duvet. Jamie ran his hands through his short hair and sat down on his bed, throwing off his tracksuit bottoms and T-Shirt. “Hows ya working?”

Oliver yawned. “Good. Just working on reception at moment, answering calls and stuff. But it's fifty quid a day.”

“Fook. Decent money,” he replied and stretched his 5ft 11in body in the rickety bed. “I got dole office tomorra, bet they try and chuck me on a course.”

“You said you did a trade in prison,” Oliver told him and Jamie grunted.

“Useless it was, bloody useless. I learnt sweet F A.”

“What do you want to do?” Oliver asked and kicked the wall with his bare feet. “I can see if they got any work at my place.”

Jamie smiled. “I wan me dole; I wan the pub and then I wanna get laid,” he replied with a grin. “I got years of catching up to do.”

Oliver grunted and Jamie gave a wry smile; Oliver had always hated talking about girls to his brother as it was the one area of life where Jamie was, and always had, been more successful than him. It had taken Jamie all of six hours to remind Oliver of his failings.

* * * * *

Jamie sat down at the desk and stared at the middle-aged woman complaining about her computer. “Bloody things,” she muttered and he forced a smile. He had only come in to “sign on” but had been told he had to have a meeting with a counsellor before he could claim anything which would be a week away.

His protestations led to the manager offering him an appointment that afternoon as they had had a cancellation and Jamie had reluctantly accepted to be interviewed by “Mary” who was sneering and clearly not wanting to do this any more than Jamie did.

“I hear that you have just been released from prison,” Mary said with a disapproving air to her voice. “Which was a long sentence and that you are looking to get back into work.”

Jamie grunted. "I just wanna sign on," he muttered and Mary looked up. "Get me dole."

"It's called Jobseekers Allowance," she told him as if she was a headmistress chastising a naughty school boy. "But we need to have you seeking a job before we can give you it."

Jamie sniffed. "Look, I 'ad a look on your noticeboard, like. And you ain't got nothin' for me."

Mary tapped away at her computer for a moment. "So what did you learn whilst you were inside?"

Jamie sneered. "Nuttin'. Did nothin' for years. Except I found me dad and gave 'im a batterin'," he replied with a smirk and the woman snorted.

"Pardon?"

"Yeah, met him. First time. Nasty little fucker," Jamie lied with a smirk and tapped the desk with his fingers. "I mean, how else would I meet 'im. Lazy little cunt."

Mary recoiled at the use of the expletive and glared at him. "Please don't use that language," she asked and then straightened herself. "I mean, what trade?" Mary asked in a patronising voice and then squeaked. "I mean, what did they teach you inside?"

"Oh woodwork, or somethink."

"And that is something you want to pursue. Excellent, as ..."

"No," snapped Jamie. "I couldn't do it. It's fuckin' bollocks."

"I told you not to swear at me," she said firmly. "Or I will terminate this interview. You need to tell me what do you want to do then? What skills do you have?"

"Nowt," Jamie replied.

"GCSEs?"

Jamie shrugged. "No," he muttered with a sneer. "Got sent dawn 'fore me exams, dain't I?"

"Can you cook?"

Jamie shook his head and screwed up his face. "No. Now can I have me dole?"

The woman sighed. "I don't give you benefits. It comes from another office. But they won't process anything unless we have completed this form."

Jamie gave a sigh and rubbed his dirty hands together. "Ya messin'," he muttered in annoyance and then slipped his hands inside his tracksuit bottoms, to idly grope himself, an action that was not lost on Mary who rubbed her nose and averted her eyes, staring at the screen.

Jamie left the office after an hour thoroughly dispirited; he was sure it used to be easier to claim benefits and what with the promise of several courses he didn't want to attend, he was feeling that life outside wasn't nearly as easy as he had hoped.

Instead, Jamie idly walked up the hill towards the estate he lived on and stopped at the park; he knew Emma used to live on a small flat in a tower block that had since been condemned and was awaiting demolition.

He wandered into the local newsagents opposite the desolate building and called out to the gentleman behind the counter. "Hiya mate. I'm looking for an Emma. Emma Wallis. She live 'round 'ere, still?"

"Depends who's asking," came the response and Jamie smiled.

"And old friend," he replied furtively.

* * * * *

"Hiya babe," Jamie coolly said to his ex-girlfriend as she walked past. He wiped his hands on his tracksuit bottoms and looked at her. "Remember me."

"Well I am not likely to forget am I?" Emma replied back and looked at him. "You look good for someone who has just spent a third of his life in jail."

He nodded towards her bandana that was tying her hair back and her athletic physique. "You look pretty good for someone who got all of the money and none of the sentence."

Emma's face flashed a smile. "Well I wasn't stupid enough to get caught, was I? I told you to be careful and not go shooting ya mouth off. Ya had to tell everyone, and to take the woman's necklace and keep it. Fuckin' amateur."

Jamie snorted. "Yeah, twas sixteen then. Word is, is that you've made a nice little packet while I've been gone." He jumped down from the wall and put his hands on her waist, but Emma pushed them off, her face turning angry.

"You ain't touching me Jamie. And yeah I've made a bit of cash, but ..."

"You owe me," Jamie said firmly. "I want my share of the post office job."

Emma gave a waspish grin. "Certainly. You do know that all the twenties we nicked, well they aren't legal no more. They like Monopoly money."

"I want my share. I did porridge and got extra 'cos I didn't grass ya up; you owe me."

"But even if ya had, they had nuttin' on me. I had me house raided anyhow 'cos I was a known accomplice and they found nothing," she said with a smile. "I got thrown out 'cos of that but they got fuck all 'cos I ain't stupid to keep shit under me mattress."

"I still could have dropped ya in it. Ya owe me, babe. Ya owe me big time."

Emma shrugged. "Meb-bee. But ya didn't 'cos ya know I'd have buried ya alive if ya had," she teased, mimicking Jamie's colloquial tone of voice.

Jamie grunted and looked at Emma. "And I ain't had a shag for six years," he told her, grabbing his crotch and looking at her. "You can give me one for old time's sake."

Emma pursed her lips. "Really? A good looking guy like you with cute buns, I thought they'd all be queueing up to have a go inside."

Jamie sneered. "I ain't into that, babe. And we got seven grand away. I want my three an' 'alf."

Emma raised her eyebrows. "You know the score. We might 'ave got seven, but we ain't going to clear more than four when it is washed. Twas stolen money, so when it is been 'round I've got less than four."

"OK I want me two grand."

Emma snorted. "Six years inside for two grand. A fiver a week. Fuckin' pitiful."

Jamie took a deep breath. "I heard you are making proper money now. Two grand'll be nothing to ya."

Emma glanced at him and then gave a grin. "Actually, I've been waiting for you to find me 'cos if you want I got a job lined up," she told him. "I have the place, I just someone to do it with."

"Me?"

Emma smiled and then looked at him. "Yeah, if you've got the bottle. 'Cos I ain't got no partners any more. And I need some inside information from someone, and need ya to

help me get it.”

“Who?”

“Your brother.”

Chapter II

"Listen up," Emma said as she passed a bottle of beer to Jamie, who gave a dramatic sound of appreciation and then looked at the small table in her flat. "This guy is Jaroslav Doszak, not a very nice Ukrainian living up in a big house in Warrington."

Jamie looked at a photo of a man and another of a house, cut out from a newspaper article and raised an eyebrow at her.

"Now he went on trial for sex trafficking and got off; those are from his trial last year. Word is, is that he runs the cocaine around Cheshire, brothels in Liverpool. He also runs a double glazing company from his house, and I reckon he channels his cash through that so it looks legit."

"Sweet."

"Quite. Now he has three main passions. One is violence, the other is money. And the last one is trading in erotic art."

Jamie shrugged. "Weird."

"Yes. He has bought loads of art of naked women at auction and there was some war in Argentina and Paraguay ages ago, and three figurines of naked ladies about this high..." Emma brought her hands up about four inches apart and then continued, "...were made of gold. They were squirrelled out of the country and have been in a private collection but our friend, Jaroslav, bought them at auction five years ago. They are going back to auction next month."

"OK. How much?"

"He bought them for three hundred grand." Jamie whistled. "Well they are of some General's daughters and the Argentines, they want them back."

"So why don't they just buy them?"

"Bidding could reach seven fifty, maybe even a million. There is a cheaper way."

Jamie looked at Emma. "You?"

Emma smiled. "Yes, I know they are wanted and know they will be bought off us in Argentina. We just need to get 'em there."

"Why's he selling 'em?" Jamie asked and Emma smiled.

"Cause there has been some interest in them. He knows he will get a good price and one of his passions is money. If you could treble your cash in five years, you'd take it, right?"

Jamie nodded and looked at her. "So what do we know about breaking into stately homes?"

Emma glowered at him and glanced over at the pictures on the table. "I don't know, what do we know about raiding stately homes? I can't think," she taunted.

Jamie sighed and held his hands out in an aggressive pose. "So you and ya gang?"

"My gang got picked up two weeks ago. They did over a footballer while he was kicking balls abroad. I fuckin' told them not to but they just went ahead and did it, so I ain't got a gang no more. They busted 'cos they dain't think."

"Oh," he muttered. "So this is getting us back togetha then?"

Emma took a deep breath. "For one time only. We do this, we should clear fifty, seventy grand each. Maybe a ton. And then it is debt repaid."

“Right. OK. So what's this got to do with me bruva?”

Emma gave a grin. “He is working at the double glazing company on reception. He can give us all the information we need. Inside info and the like. I applied for a job up there to get a look but I got nowhere.”

“Yeah right,” he said, getting up. “Oli won't give us jack. We ain't doing it if we need Oli.”

Emma took a deep breath and pointed aggressively at her ex-lover. “OK. You go back to nicking CDs and DVDs off Woolworths or raiding Post Offices or whatever you think you can get away with, because this is a big job and it ain't going to be easy but I've done a couple of big houses in the last few months and I got a few contacts. I ain't raiding houses every month for a few grand for the rest of me life 'cause one day me luck's gonna run out. So I wanna do a couple of big jobs and this is a big job. Serious notes going on here.” Jamie went to speak but Emma snorted. “And if we do this then we clear a few notes and it a shite-site easier than fucking with Benefits Office, ya get me?”

Jamie nodded. “Oli will give us fuck all,” Jamie told him and Emma put her head in her hands and ran them through her hair. “We do it but we need to do it without Oli.”

“Just ask,” she told him. “If he says no when we ask then I got an MP's house as a backup. Few watercolours at taxpayer's expense.”

* * * * *

“It can be done,” the old man said peering out from behind his spectacles and turning the object in his hand. “But it will not be cheap.”

“I know,” Jaroslav said, his thick set eyes boring into the grey-haired man inspecting the three statues. “How much and how long?”

The man grunted and inspected them again. “This detail here, it takes time. I have three men,” he said and clicked his fingers behind him. “Three men, and they work day and night for weeks to do this.” Jaroslav looked at Mikael, his favoured henchman, and then at the forger setting them on the table in front of him with his gloved hands. “And who does it have to fool?”

Mikael sniffed and Jaroslav flicked his head towards him with a scowl. “Everyone, maybe.”

“So that take long time,” the forger announced. “You want it in Gold?”

Jaroslav shook his head and the man licked his lips. “So I get weight right but different metals and alloys. He picked up his pen and jotted some details down as Jaroslav clicked his fingers and Mikael passed him a bundle of English banknotes.

“Three more,” Jaroslav said. “One when we get it and two when the fakes 'ave sold.”

The forger looked at Jaroslav holding out the bundle of banknotes and sighed. “How long?”

“Two weeks,” Jaroslav announced and the forger rubbed his nose, shaking his head.

“It can't be done.” Jaroslav scowled and glared at the man, rubbing his hands together. “Can't be done,” he asked and then glanced at Mikael, slightly taller than him but at least ten years younger. The henchman looked menacing in his long trenchcoat and Jaroslav gave a nod of the head causing Mikael to crack his knuckles.

The Italian forger simpered, his frail body nervous and his hands shaking. “It too soon. For four weeks, I do. Maybe three, but two Mr Doszak, it take a long time to do this to a good standard. It take long time.”

Mikael moved past Jaroslav and pushed the forger back into his chair. He stood behind him, pushing down on his shoulders and the forger squealed.

"I ask again," Jaroslav said in a firm voice. "Two weeks."

"Two weeks it tough. But I try." Mikael squeezed the shoulders and he cried out in pain.

"OK Mr Doszak, I do, I do."

Mikael let go and Jaroslav nodded towards him with a smile. "Perfect. I send boys 'round next Monday," he told him accentuating his Ukrainian accent. He waited for Mikael to open the door to the studio for him. "And when they come, put them in vault. I want auction people to see in vault. It helps."

"Yes, boss," Mikael said robotically and held open the door to the car.

"It's disgraceful," the forger cried, the moment the two men left. "I am 63 and they treat me like that," he said to his partner. "It never should have happened. He has no respect. It disgusting."

The young man nodded and the forger pulled out his tape measure; he was not going to see his wife, children and grandchildren for days, he just knew it but if he failed Mr Doszak he would never see them again.

"I'll order a pizza for us," his young apprentice said. "We ain't getting any tea are we?"

* * * * *

Oliver glared at his brother. "Are you off your soddin' trolley? You promised Mum that you would go straight, Jamie."

Jamie scowled and spoke in a lower voice. "I will. After this one. Dis perfect. Look listen man."

"No," Oliver said firmly and gestured with his hands as he spoke. "No. You've already said. You want to steal some priceless statues from some mad Ukrainian gangster, my employer no less, and you want me to help you. Me? You've gone stir crazy. Have you heard what he does to people who cross him?"

Emma swung her legs over the side of the desk chair and knocked over the pencils on a desk holder with her thighs. "Yah shouldn't believe all the rumours, Oli."

"Yes, but I do believe these ones. Most people have rewards for information leading to the capture or arrest of someone they don't like, he has rewards leading the removal of their internal organs. I am very fond of my organs. Why can't you just go back to nicking from sub post offices if you want to get banged up? At least Postman Pat doesn't extract pieces of you for retribution. Or payment of old debts."

"Cos they've closed 'em all," Emma said wistfully and then gave a coy smile. "No one thinks of armed robbers when they are closing down post offices, do they? It's politicians banging on about old people this, and postman that, poor Jamie and I don't get a fookin' thought."

"Right well, no offence, but I don't want anything to do with this hare-brained scheme. And when you are arrested, as you will be, don't mention my name 'cos I quite like it up at the Manor. It's good money and easy work."

Jamie sneered. "The Manor, eh? Anyway, with the right stuff from you on the inside, I ain't gonna be nicked."

Oliver took a deep breath. "You said you only did one post office but you got caught. Your record is pretty shit, Jamie. Every time you did something you were arrested for it."

"Ah well. Was sixteen wasn't I?" Jamie asked rhetorically and gave a grin at his twin brother. "And yah baund ta make a few cock-ups when ya young, ain't ya? But I've been inside for six years now, and I got me-self an education. From the pros like."

“Six years. Do you want to do that again?” Oliver looked at his brother's ex-girlfriend swinging her legs and glanced up at her. “And you trust this guy not to get you arrested?”

Emma gave a grin. “I ain't ever been to court. I trust me-self not get me-self nicked. Which is why we need ya, Oli. Cos the other job we got lined up we ain't gonna get any inside info so we bound to get collared.”

Oliver gave a groan and Jamie patted him on the back. “Hey, just a few things and then we'll be out of ya hair. And I won't tell no-one where we gets our intel from. Promise.”

Oliver bit his lip and rubbed his eyes. “No. I am not interested in getting arrested.”

Jamie and Emma gave audible groans and Jamie threw his hands up in the air. “Ahh come on,” he hissed. “Grow some balls. It's a bit of info, like, and we'll cut you in.”

Oliver sighed. “I am fine. I am not doing it. I remember them raiding the house and getting pulled into the street. And then being arrested as they thought I did it the job with you and all that. I am not going through that again.”

“Ya want to live with Mum all ya life? What about that bird ya kept banging on about in ya letters?”

A tortured smile flickered across Oliver's face. “Vicky, what about her?”

Emma smiled. “Well if you get us what we need, and we can do the job, then we'll give you some readies.”

Jamie snorted. “Woo 'er; take to an 'arvester or a MacDonalds or owt.”

Oliver slowly shook his head. “We aren't. Well she's in Scotland at Uni.”

“Ahh, well, enough to get a girl to get ya laid,” his brother offered. “All we're lookin' for is some plans and whatever ya lay ya hands on for security system. Tell us and we'll make it worth ya while.”

Oliver sighed and Emma raised her legs, so her skirt rode up and her knickers were clearly visible to Oliver sat on the bed. “And get us in the building, if ya can.” Oliver groaned in despair and closed his eyes as he thought. “We'll give you enough to get a girl to strip for ya, and screw ya fuckin' brains out,” she teased. “Enough to 'ave a good time, night after night after night. Be a big man.”

Oliver gulped and pushed down on the crotch of his trousers with the palm of his hand to disguise his excitement. “Any girl?”

“I promise,” Emma said with a smirk and glanced down at the nervous looking man. “Girls love guys who take them out in flash cars or stuff. We can give you that.”

Jamie glanced up and gave a grin, Emma was twirling her brown hair that tumbled down her face, around her finger and slowly licked her lips. “Well I can't get much,” he told them. “I mean I am just the temporary ... the temporary receptionist. I don't know much.”

Emma gave a wry grin. “Then what do you know? About the vault for starters.”

“Well I believe the vault is protected by access cards like this one,” he pulled out his work ID and passed it to Emma who glanced at it and then looked at Jamie.

“RFID,” she murmured.

“Well it's the same system in the house that's in the offices. Our boss, he's just flown to Barbados for two weeks, but he was around when it was put in and he told me 'bout it one lunchtime. Proper state of the art kit. But obviously that card won't let you into the vault which is in the main house. It's underground and protected by all sorts of security so you won't get in.”

Emma looked at Jamie. "We'll see about that. Keep going."

"Well we do the cards on reception, like but there are special areas of the 'ouse I dunno what gives access to. Like zones nine, ten, eleven and twelve mean stuff in the Manor but I don't give access to them."

"Can you?" Emma asked, her eyes lighting up.

"Can I what?"

"Can you give access? Is it don't or can't?"

"I dunno. I ain't tried. Maybe.."

Emma looked at Jamie. "We might be getting ourselves a ticket to the vault," she said with a smile. "That'll be crackin'."

* * * * *

Emma tapped on her dining table and looked at Jamie who was finishing his lager spread out on her sofa, watching TV and glancing at his host suspiciously. "What's bothering ya?"

Emma bit her lip and rubbed her nose. "Nuttin'," she said firmly and then looked at her watch. There was a knock at the door and Emma leapt up with Jamie eyeing her warily; she was up to something. Jamie heard talking and then Emma came in with a beautiful blonde girl who looked no older than 18.

"Hi," Jamie squeaked and Emma looked at the girl.

"This is Honey," Emma told her friend. "You can have my bedroom."

"Ya what?"

Honey swung her hips seductively as she walked, her long coat hiding any trace of what she was wearing and she held out her long hand towards the man spread out on Emma's couch. "Well come on," she said softly, her eyes staring at the bulge inside Jamie's black tracksuit bottoms. "We've only an hour."

Jamie looked back at Emma who grinned at him. "It's a coming out present," she told him. "And ya said ya needed it. It's ma treat."

Jamie gulped; it had been six long years since he had sex with anyone, would he remember how to? His heart skipped a beat as the lovely Honey led him into the well decorated bedroom of Emma and he turned to face the blonde girl as she sat him on the bed.

Honey cooed at her classy surroundings; Emma's room was not large but was tastefully kitted out in cream walls and oak furniture, which looked like it should belong in a middle-class terraced house not a one-bedroom flat on a run-down estate in Runcorn.

The girl possessed a genuine smile, and long golden blonde hair that tumbled down her face to the tops of her shoulders. Jamie gazed into her deep blue eyes and then at the rest of her body hidden by the shapeless long coat. Honey slowly unbuttoned her outer garment, watching him twitch in anticipation and squeezed his hand; he was clearly nervous and excited.

Honey slid the coat from her shoulders and Jamie gasped when he saw her DD-breasts and just a skimpy set of cream and black briefs. "You like?"

Jamie nodded, he was speechless, and Honey stepped forward, rubbing her breasts into the face of the eager gentleman who grunted and closed his eyes, feeling the soft, smooth mammaries of the escort glide over his skin.

Honey stepped back and knelt on the side of the bed pushing him back and lowering his

tracksuit bottoms to his ankles. He blew him a kiss as she extracted a condom from her waistband that she placed on the tip of his cock and rolled it down with her mouth.

Jamie gasped in delightful shock as Honey's mouth slid up and down his sheathed member. It felt very good and he could not remember anything being as wonderful; she was better than Emma when she did it to him the one and only time and he gripped the edge of the bed. "Oh fuck," he muttered under his breath and closed his eyes, savouring the delights of the experienced escort as she gleefully ran her tongue over his rubber-encased glans.

He felt his muscles start to tense and Honey stopped and looked him.

"Emma said this was a coming out prison present?" Jamie nodded and she glanced at him. "How long for?"

"Over six years," Jamie admitted.

"That's a long without sex. Breaking and entering?"

"Yeah I did that," Jamie muttered.

"Then break your losing streak and enter me," she said with a grin and Jamie laughed at the cheesy joke Honey had uttered. It was a bad pun, but it broke the ice and soothed his nerves. He moved to allow Honey to sit on the bed, and then adjusted his body swinging his legs over her and prepared himself to enter Honey in the "missionary position." Honey raised her legs slightly and guided the man into her soft hole, sliding the gusset of the thong to one side. She gave an exaggerated grunt as he slid in and then a gasp.

Honey clearly liked over-exaggerating the enjoyment she got but it stroked Jamie's ego and she ran her long fingers over his T-shirt covered torso. He grunted and closed his eyes as his rod slid along Honey's opening. His entire body tingled and he gasped, mewling out loudly as Honey's internal muscles gripped his member; he had forgotten how good sex felt.

He looked into the contorting face of Honey and gazed into her lustful eyes. He could feel a tightness, a tension on the back of his testicles and increased his speed, ramming his member into the glistening opening with more force and energy.

Honey did enjoy the passionate actions of Jamie and groaned, gripping his buttocks and squeezing. "Oh fuck," she muttered and felt Jamie's legs shake.

His face was a twisted mess of relief, and he called out as his loins released a powerful flood of intense energy. "Oh ... oh ... oh shit," he cried as his penis pumped several waves of semen into the well at the tip of the condom.

His fast, rampant action slowed considerably and he looked into the eyes of the escort smiling back at him. She pouted and then kissed him on the neck. "You were wonderful," she gushed and slid out from underneath him, passing him wet wipes from her bag.

"Yeah, you were crackin'. Ahh it's been awhile."

Honey grinned and bit her lip, watching him as he tied up the condom and threw it into Emma's bin in the corner of the room. Honey stretched and kissed him on the cheek.

"Doesn't he go down?" Honey asked and looked down at Jamie's erect cock.

Jamie pushed his chest out. "Nah, he's always ready," he boasted.

"Well I won't be a minute," Honey muttered. "Just got to go and freshen up in the Little Girls' Room."

Jamie nodded and watched the half-naked escort get up. "Don-nee be too long," he muttered with self-assurance, and watched the girl glide out of the room, her wonderful

body enchanting him. Jamie lay across the bed panting and closed his eyes thinking about the previous few minutes.

“How is he?” Emma asked the prostitute and Honey laughed.

“It's proper been awhile. He shot his load in no time.”

Emma chortled. “He was always like that before. Few seconds and it was all over. Mind you, he would always want to go again and again. Like being fucked by the Duracell Bunny.”

Honey giggled. “It's OK. He's not the first guy who comes quickly that I've had. And if he can manage it, I got time for another go.”

Emma smiled and looked at her watch. “Well you said an hour,” she told him. “That's ten fucks for Jamie,” she teased and offered Honey a drink, which she declined.

“But when I've done this, the slate is clean, right?”

“Yeah,” Emma promised. “Completely clean.”

Chapter III

Oliver passed his busty colleague and co-receptionist a cup of tea and then sat down at his desk, typing in his six digit code to let him onto the computer system. The girl thanked him and leant over to get a pen from his desk. "Mr Doszak is coming in today, you might want to look smart if you see him."

"Cheers," Oliver replied, and took a sip of his coffee. The tales of Jaroslav Doszak were varied and numerous but all had the same violent and uncompromising ending where the crazed Ukrainian would hit someone or fire an employee at a moment's notice. Oliver was a temporary member of staff; he could be fired in an instant and he sat straight up in his chair.

"How was ya weekend?" Charlotte asked, removing the headset and adjusting her seat.

"Good, yeah. Jamie is settling back in."

"Yeah, I meant to ask about that. Has he found owt?"

"Nah. That's bugger all jobs out there but he's only came out on Thursday. He's proper screwed but he's got shackled up again with some bird he used to knock about with so he's 'appy at the moment."

Charlotte gave a grin and then recounted her weekend in graphic and worrying detail. She got exceedingly more explicit, watching Oliver squirm with embarrassment as she told him about her three one-night stands and then the lewd activities the big girl had done in the local nightclub and her own flat.

Oliver shifted uncomfortably in the seat and listened; he would give anything to get a date with a girl, especially one as dirty as Charlotte, but never seemed to pluck up the courage to say anything. He was 23 and still a virgin and that depressed him; he wanted to be like his peers, and like his brother. Hearing Charlotte, who was younger than him, happily tell him of her dozens of sexual partners each week, and her ease of getting a date, made him yearn for female companionship even more. He felt unfulfilled.

The phone buzzed and Charlotte picked up her headset while a postman walked into the small reception, decorated in garish white PVC and chrome, and passed a small bundle of letters to the outstretched hand of Oliver.

This gave him a reason to walk around the offices, distributing letters that was normally Charlotte's job, before returning to his seat and she glanced at him. "I need a slash," she muttered and got up. "That tea's gone straight through me." She left Oliver alone in the room and he looked around the empty reception.

He nervously opened "My Computer" and then clicked on the network drives. He had seen that the security on the file system was pretty poor and guessed he was able to access every file stored on it. He clicked on the Search button and entered "plan" into the box.

The hard drive whirred away as it searched on the network drive and entries started appearing. Oliver didn't have time to check what they were and he had to just wait for the search to finish; his USB pen drive in his hand in anticipation. He heard the bathroom door open and then a gasp. "Hello Mr Doszak," Charlotte's voice drifted and a large, well built, scary gentleman entered Reception and nodded towards Oliver who politely copied Charlotte in greeting him.

He looked at his computer, his shaking hands hovering over the "X" button as the search finished; he had well over 100 files and he pushed his USB pen drive into his computer by his knees. His hands were clammy and his stomach tickled with the butterflies inside as he

selected all the files and copied them to his pen drive. He wasn't used to doing things against the rules and getting away with it, and he knew Charlotte would be back at her desk any moment.

Charlotte was busy asking Mr Doszak how he was, and her brown-nosing gave Oliver precious seconds with which to complete the file transfer. In the nick of time he had the USB pen drive out of the computer and filed away in his side pocket; Jamie better be grateful.

Charlotte grinned as she sat down. "That Jaroslav Doszak is such a nice man," she muttered and Oliver shook his head.

"He wouldn't go for you," he replied with a smile and Charlotte giggled.

"I know, no guy in this place would," she moaned and looked wistfully at her colleague. "Even if there are some nice guys 'round here."

Oliver kept breaking out in cold sweats throughout the day, he was nervous as he had the USB stick in his pocket and he knew if he was searched they would find all the content. Instead he tried not to think about it but was grateful when 5pm came around and he got to leave the offices.

He wasn't expecting to see Emma waiting for him in her battered Ford Transit; he was used to walking the mile to the bus stop on the main road or scrounging a lift from Charlotte, but Emma waved at him from a car parking space she was squatting in and he walked over.

"I got it," he told her. "Well I got what I think you wanted. Plans." He held up his USB key and Emma threw the van into gear and they left the mock Georgian mansion, heading for her flat.

"Excellent," she said softly and flicked on the radio as she swung the van into the country lane and sped down the narrow road. Emma teased him when she saw the amount of data on the USB drive; he had captured the company plan, some plane landing times, someone's trip to Lapland as well as the floor plans for a refit of the double-glazing offices. The architects had helpfully included the floor plans for the manor house as well and Emma grinned; they were not incredibly detailed but they would enough for her plan her entry and her exit.

"We could really do with some keys," Emma told Oliver as she poured over the plans on the laptop. "Some keys would be pretty awesome."

Jamie looked at his brother and gave him a look. "Well can ya get them?"

"Oh yeah," Oliver muttered. "And I'll also get them to leave the safe unlocked and preferably lend us his Porsche so we can make a quick getaway."

Emma looked up and scowled. "So a 'no' then."

"Hell no. If they know I gave you door access cards they'd chop off me balls."

Jamie shrugged. "Who cares? You dain't use 'em do ya?"

* * * * *

Jaroslav waited as his two henchmen opened up the car boot and pulled out a restrained figure from the car. His eyes widened when he saw Jaroslav and muffled into his gag. The short-haired, brutish henchman, Mikael pushed the victim onto his knees into the mud and Jaroslav nodded towards the prostrate gentleman.

With a yelp, Mikael swung an iron bar and it hit the victim's back and he fell into the mud, hollering in agony. The two men hauled him back to a kneeling position and he looked at

Jaroslav with fear etched on his dirty face; Jaroslav had not dragged him to the woods to give him a whack with an crowbar.

“You, you fuck with me,” Jaroslav said firmly and glanced around the darkness; it was eerily quiet in the wood where he was dishing out the retribution the man so sorely deserved. “You think you can fuck with me and you not die?”

A gag was torn from the mouth of the man and he held out his hands in front of him, crying. “I didn't do it,” he wailed. “It was Paula. She swapped 'em. I didn't know.”

Jaroslav snorted and looked at the two suited men either side of him. “He think me stupid. You can't take my drugs and give me shit in return,” he told him in a deep Eastern European accent. “You take piss.”

“We searched his flat, boss,” the younger man said. “We found no drugs, no money, nothing.”

Jaroslav turned to face the young Paul and then looked at Mikael. “Did I ask him?”

“No boss,” Mikael muttered and scratched the top of his head.

“No. No I fucking did not,” he told the young henchman, and started waving his gun towards the 22-year-old Paul who pursed his lips together. “So shut the fuck up.”

Paul nodded and Jaroslav turned back to face the crying man in front of him. “So you better tell me, where are my drugs?”

The man sniffed. “We sold them.”

Jaroslav took a deep breath and took of the safety catch on his handgun, aiming it at the hapless figure. “So where is my fucking money?” He shouted with his voice echoing around the trees.

“I don't know. I thought you had it,” he wailed and Jaroslav looked at him. “I gave you the bag.”

“You lie,” he called out and pointed towards his two henchman with the gun, making a swirling motion. Mikael and Paul glanced at either and turned to face the car; they knew what was coming.

Jaroslav took aim at the helpless figure. “You mess with me. I give you top class cocaine and you fuck with me. I fuck with you.”

The victim shut his eyes, tears streaming down his face. “Please no,” he begged. “I have little girl.”

Jaroslav glanced over at his henchmen, clenched his fist and smacked the man on the nose as hard as he could with his gloved hand. There was a cry and he felt to his side, blood streaming from his open wound. Jaroslav sneered and walked past him, turning to fire his gun into the ankle of the man.

There was a piercing scream and a loud cry, as Jaroslav clicked his fingers and Paul opened the back door of the car, the smoking gun placed inside the vehicle.

“You got seven days,” he told the screaming man before he got in and then waited for Mikael to get into the driver's seat. “Tell Sam to find him in two hours and if I don't get my money, you take child. And you sell her. I get my money some way.”

“Yes, boss,” Mikael said and started the car, picking a path out of the wood between the trees.

* * * * *

Oliver sat down at his desk and nodded towards Charlotte, the curvaceous receptionist

who was on the phone and passing a call through to a senior manager.

She smiled as she put down her headset. "Mr Jones, he's gonna go crazy," she said in a low voice. "They put some windows in this old girl's house last week and one of them fell out last night in the winds."

Oliver gasped and smiled, running his hand up and down his hairy chin. "Betcha it was Howard," he said with a smile and typed his password into the system.

"Can ya do us a favour?" Charlotte asked, squeezing her hands together and then releasing them. "I gotta phone these peeps back and then set up a meeting room for Mr Doszak. Can you create the cards for the contractors coming today?"

Oliver nodded and gave a coy smile. "Sure," he said and took the bank of deactivated spare cards. "How many."

Charlotte passed him a list with an apologetic look. "All sorts coming today. I just got the list. Some room upstairs being refitted."

Oliver almost groaned; there were half-a-dozen names on the list and he started by signing into the door access system with the Administrator account and password. He looked over at Charlotte, twirling her hair with her fingers and scanned the first deactivated card typing out the name "Greg Fields" and assigning them 8am to 6pm access to zones one to eight.

This was fairly standard access and it was not an arduous task, it was just that he had to set each zone up separately on each card and the system was not exceptionally fast or well-designed. He soon created all six cards just as Charlotte was leaving to set up the meeting room. With a glance towards her, he set up a seventh card to have 24 hour access everywhere and then an eighth card likewise with names of "NULL" which took a lot less time when he cloned it from a "Full Access" template.

He glanced up at the system; there were several cards with 24 hour access everywhere but a number were just assigned numbers and not names on the display. He briefly wondered who the other people were, Jaroslav and his family were certainly a few but there were pages of the users.

He closed the system down as he heard Charlotte enter the reception and dropped the two access cards into his bag open underneath the desk; his heart was beating furiously and Charlotte smiled as she came into the pod. "You look as white as sheet," she told him, sitting down. "Just like you've seen a ghost." Oliver stuttered in return and she just giggled. "Yes, I would love a cuppa," she told him and watched him get up to make a drink.

The day dragged for Oliver and although he fastened his bag shut when Charlotte wasn't looking kept glancing down at it. He was sure that someone would ask why there were two extra cards created and why they had unrestricted access to the offices and the manor house but nothing was said and Oliver almost ran out of the building.

Jamie and Emma were waiting for him at Emma's flat and Oliver slumped down on the chair and put the two access cards on the table. "For one week, these will get you anywhere," he promised. "Then, after that, they will automatically disable."

"Fuck," Jamie exclaimed and Emma glanced at him.

"Everywhere."

"Everywhere, zones one to twelve. Everywhere."

Emma looked a printout and then looked at Jamie. "These will get us into the vault if we can get into the house."

"Am I done now?" Oliver asked and Emma gave a kiss and a smile.

"Yeah, maybe," she told him. "And thanks. I'll make sure you get a few quid." Emma promised and Oliver nodded.

"Don't get caught," he warned them. "Or else I will be in the shit."

They shot him a flier as he left the flat. Oliver was, even more, an accessory to the crime. He was getting in deeper and deeper and he knew that if Jamie didn't do it perfectly, Jaroslav would blame him as Jamie's brother and Oliver did not want to be on the bad side of Jarolsav: it was not a happy place to be.

* * * * *

"Tone," Emma called, holding out her arms and knocking her fist into that of a scruffy looking black man. "How ya doin'?"

"Yeah, cool," a voice said underneath a hooded sweatshirt and Emma smiled at the beady eyes looking at her. "I heard your gang got busted?"

Emma looked around the small park they were in and nodded, her long brown hair and sweet face covered by her own hooded sweatshirt. "They got careless," she muttered. "Real careless." She sneered at the face underneath and he grunted.

"D'as shit," he muttered and Emma rubbed her nose.

"I'm wanting an alarms man," she told him. "Do over a vault in a big house."

Tony rubbed his face and stared at her. "Me?"

"Tone, you are shit hot at alarms, and I know there is a system that I will need to knock off."

"I is straight," the man told her and Emma laughed.

"Ya say that every time."

He scowled at her and she shrugged. "Yeah, well I got a little girl now and so I ain't wanting to ga back inside, ya hear me?"

Emma nodded and looked away from him. "It's worth fifty thousand at least."

"Fifty?"

"At least."

He hesitated and glanced over at the girl stretching her feet. "Ya lying gal?"

Emma rubbed her nose. "I ain't lyin'. Fifty, at least. Maybe seventy five."

"So what's the deal?"

Emma looked at him. "Ya interested now?"

"For fifty G, then yeah?"

Emma opened her hands and then rubbed them. "Three statues. Worth a fortune. Get 'em to Buenos Aires."

"Buenos what?"

"Buenos Aires. It's in Argentina."

"Argentina? That's fuckin' miles away, ain't it?"

Emma shrugged. "That's why the job is worth a few bob. I gotta get past the alarm system, maybe. It's a stately home and I have a way in. It should be fine but I would like to have the bells nobbled."

Tony looked at her. "And dees statues," he spat in his ethnic drawl. "They like, 'ow big?"

He waved his arms around and Emma grinned, bringing her hands a few inches apart.

“Solid. Gold,” she muttered and Tony stared at her wide-eyed. “And very, very old.”

“Sweet,” he muttered and then looked her up and down. “But you no messin' with me?”

“I not messin' with you. I show you later,” she said and gave him an invite to come to her flat which he declined.

“Jeanine, she give me shit if I go to your flat. She already thinks me is nobbing the girl from the pawn shop.”

“Well I gotta go to the gym,” she said with a smile, glancing at her bag. “It's empty in the day. You allowed to come?”

Tony grunted. “Yeah. Give me twenty,” he told her and she watched as he skulked off to his flat to retrieve some athletic gear. Tony would not have been her first choice but he knew the score and he had worked with her before so she felt she was in safe hands with him, even if he was a little unpredictable.

“Oh, and one more thing. The guy we are doing over is Jaroslav Doszak.” Tony's face fell.

Chapter IV

Emma sat on the tree, her binoculars glued to her eyes watching the Manor house. She had four different locations all around the property but all of them were at least a mile away where she could see the property from different viewpoints. After a week of spending hours up trees, she was becoming confident she was understanding the timetable and itinerary of Jaroslav and his employees.

Jaroslav and his four henchmen were the most difficult to predict as they seemed to come and go as they wanted without adhering to a pre-set pattern and she realised there was little she could do to second-guess where they would be at any point in time. The mistresses or “sluts” (as Emma called them) of the Ukrainian were easier to predict as he had two living with him and at least another two who lived off-site, and they had a fairly regular timetable.

The brunette came to see her lover Thursday and then Monday, both times in the late afternoon and stayed all evening, while the blonde girl went out on the Saturday afternoon and then the Tuesday evening. It took Emma a good few hours to figure out that the blue top she was wearing was so she could watch a local football team as a supporter. She had no idea if she went to the stadium or just to a local pub, but when they played, she went out.

Emma built up a very detailed account of everyone's movements, including the gardener whom she had known would be gone long before she started the raid. She also spied the odd van or car that would stop overlooking the property and stay there for hours but along with the family of squirrels who regularly ran across the garden it was simply not relevant to her spying. She did wonder if a competing gang were also scoping out the property but she made sure she wasn't seen by them and they never stayed for as long as she did.

She brought Tony along a few times to watch so he had an understanding of the property but he seemed more interested in the women, and then got Jamie to come and visit. She began to worry about their temperament when Jamie got bored and was even worried whether they had the ability to do a job as big as what she was planning, but she had little choice. There was not time to get a new “crew” as her window of opportunity was small before the auction house got the art and it disappeared out of sight. The two men were risks, but the rewards were such that it was worth it.

She was plotting to take some art worth over three-quarters of a million pounds from one of the most dangerous men in England and knew that they would need to be at their best to even get in, let alone get away with it.

Emma had stayed out of court because she was always very careful who she worked with: they had to be professional and sound and she would not take any unnecessary risks. This job was a big risk, but the payout would be worth it, and she even thought that it would mean she could take a year out travelling. She might even stay in South America.

* * * * *

Tony took a deep breath and drove up the drive of the Manor in Emma's battered Transit van that she had begrudgingly lent him. Jumping down and dressed in a blue workmen's outfit, he grabbed a clipboard and a toolbox from next to him and walked into the entrance, glancing at Charlotte.

“Hello love,” he muttered with an air of inappropriate familiarity and looked at her breasts in the tight material. “Mayflower Plumbers, something about a leaky duct.”

Charlotte scowled as he spoke and glanced down at the Visitor's List. “You are not on the

list," she muttered and turned to Oliver who shrugged.

"I ain't heard nothing," he added and Tony signed the guestbook and held out a pass. Oliver froze, it was one that he had given to Emma and Charlotte's scowl deepened.

"I already got me-self me key," he told her and Charlotte sighed and looked at Oliver. "I was 'ere last night. Got called out from pub, missed the footy."

"That can't be right," she muttered as Tony held the white credit-card sized plastic to the door and it beeped to let him in. "Visitor's don't keep the passes," she added. "Someone's not done somethin' right."

Oliver puffed. If they checked the pass on the system they would see that it was created by him when he had to do the temporary passes at the beginning of the week and questions would be asked. He panicked and spluttered. "Yeah, but, the, um, it, um ..."

Charlotte giggled. "I love it when you get tongue-tied."

Oliver's mind whirred as he frantically thought through the ramifications. "OK, if he got the pass then it must have been given to him by someone quite senior," he argued and Charlotte nodded.

"Yeah, probably."

"I'll check and make sure it is handed in or deactivated at the end of the week," Oliver added and Charlotte didn't respond as she had a phone call to deal with.

Tony had made it past the main door and had worked his way along the sales office to an interconnecting door to the main house. There was silence and quietness as he swiped his card in front of the sensor and walked through.

Oliver had clearly known what he was doing when he created the pass and he appeared in a small lobby which led into a corridor. There was a CCTV camera in the corner of the room and he glanced up at it and then strode confidently down the corridor and through a big security door. The main house was big and Tony had a rough diagram Emma had supplied to him of the layout of the floors he needed to visit.

He had seen on the electrical and wiring plan Emma had found in a bundle of documents Oliver had given her exactly where the alarm system was wired up to and he made his way to a small security office near the front door; it was staffed but the alarm system was held in a cupboard just outside and he nervously opened the panel as he could hear the guard talking.

He took a couple of pictures on Emma's phone and then silently closed the panel before sliding away from the security guard. He heard a noise and slid into an alcove and then watched a pretty girl walk past him without noticing his shape pressed up against the wall. Tony worked his way back to the door and then passed through it, with the help of his access card; he was nervous, he heard of Jaroslav Doszak and did not like the idea of being caught skulking around his house.

He returned to reception and then nodded towards Oliver and Charlotte, sliding over his pass. "Cheers love."

"You fixed it?" Charlotte asked and he just grunted,.

"Course," he said and leant over the counter. "I can control any leaking plumbing."

Charlotte giggled and he raised his eyebrows at her, blowing her a kiss. He returned to his Transit van to drive to see Emma at his local café who was waiting for him.

Emma nodded at him as she entered and he swigged from his can of fizzy cola. "So you can knock out the alarm system?"

“Easy,” he replied, sliding Emma's phone over to her. “Piss easy.” Emma squinted and he sat back in the chair. “But I want 'alf.”

“Half?” Emma exclaimed, her smile disappearing.

“Alf,” he said. “I is big and ya can't do it without me. And Jaroslav is a fuckin' nutter.”

Emma sighed and held her finger out, jabbing it into his chest. “It's a third each or ya not on the job.”

“I done all the spying. I want half. Call it danger money”

Emma rubbed her chin. She had already said to Tony that she was definitely taking at least a third as it was her idea and she had done all the planning. He wondered if this Jamie be happy with a sixth, and looked at her inquisitively. “Why half?”

“Cos ya ain't doing na job if I don't get half.”

Emma took a deep breath and nodded. “I'll speak to Jamie,” she promised and he got up from the table.

“Me isn't waiting for too long, ya hear me?”

“I hear you,” Emma snapped. “Where's pass?”

“Gave it to ya friend on reception.” She scowled and watched as he left the café and started walking down the hill towards the flat he shared with his girlfriend and two children. Tony glanced behind him as Emma emerged from the café and he turned around to face her, walking backwards as three police men came running past, bundling Tony to the ground,.

“Tony Walker, I am arresting you on suspicion of theft, burglary and breaking and entering,” she heard from the me-lee and groaned; she was about to find out just how crucial Tony was to the operation.

* * * * *

“Oliver,” Jamie called gesturing to his brother, who stormed past him with a scowl.

“You gave that guy a pass to go swanning in. Questions were asked.”

“What guy?” Jamie asked and Emma shook her head.

“Our alarms expert. Who has been nicked.”

“Nicked?” Oliver squealed. “Right well I want out. I want ...”

“He was nicked for a job he pulled two weeks ago,” Emma snapped. “Nothing to do with this one. It's fine.”

“So, what do we do 'bout alarms then?” Jamie asked.

“Right well I need to take care of the alarms. Shouldn't be too much of a problem as I've been studying the plans and they are little basic. We just need one more for the distraction.”

Emma looked at Oliver who was shaking his head. “No way.”

“What?”

“No way. No way am I being part of your raid.”

“Too fookin' right,” Jamie added and looked at Emma. “You've lost ya marbles if ya think he can do it.”

Emma sighed. “They go to the auction house soon. It's now or never Jamie. Shit or get off the pot. I need someone I can trust.”

“What?”

“I mean, if we don't go tomorrow night then we aren't getting our fifty, or hundred thousand each. And I've spent too much time planning this to not do it.” Jamie grumbled and then muttered something about Chelsea or Drake. “I ain't working with anyone I don't know,” Emma said firmly. “I need to know they are good.”

“Chelsea is cool,” Jamie replied and Emma rolled her eyes. “She'll be fine.”

“The answer is no. I need someone who has been around the house, and the only person is Oliver.”

“But ...”

“But either him or we don't do it.”

Jamie threw his gloves down onto the floor in anger and scowled at Emma, ignoring his brother. “For fucks sake.”

“I am not doing it,” Oliver told her, his heart beating angrily and shook his head. “I don't want to do any time. I want to settle down.”

“I ain't doing no bird,” Emma said forcefully. “I ain't planning on getting caught. The job is easy as I've been back through the plans you got. Jaroslav clearly reckons that no-one will nick from him so his security is a bit amateurish.”

Jamie grunted causing Emma to glare at him. “Well it's not that easy.”

“Listen, I did over a five bedroom detached in Dorset last year and that had more security than this place. All we need is the code to the vault.”

“Oh is that all?” Oliver taunted. “Look, this is a bad idea. Just leave it.”

Emma rolled her eyes. “I can reset the alarm system if we have to but I'd rather just walk in, it's easier.”

“Well I still don't want to know,” Oliver said resolutely and Emma glanced at him and then Jamie.

“Look Oliver, we can probably do it without you, but we need two people to cause distractions and if we have to scarper we need someone who knows the layout 'cos if the shit hits the fan, I want to go to the double glazing offices 'cos there will be fuck all people there.”

“I don't want to break in to Jaroslav Doszak's house and steal his statues.”

“You'll get money. And respect.”

Oliver screwed up his face and got up to leave. “No way, I am not corruptible.”

Jamie grunted and swore at him. “Stupid fuckin' cunt.”

Oliver shook his head and Emma sighed. “Jamie, tell me how many times have you got laid since comin' out?”

“Four,” Jamie lied and looked at Oliver, sensing Emma's trick. “The girls love a bad boy.”

“I've said I want a nice girl to settle down with. And I'll find her, but I won't if I am doing time or propping up the M62. So I don't want to do it.”

“If I do it, then I'll go straight,” Jamie promised and Emma bit her lip as Oliver swung around to face his brother.

“You're supposed to be going straight anyway.”

“Yeah but with the money from this I will go straight.”

“Please Oli,” Emma begged. “Hey, just help us do the distractions and then we'll leave you in the garden on your own.”

“On my own?” Oliver shrieked and Emma opened her hands.

“OK come inside then. Please.” She passed him a bottle of beer and then looked into his eyes. “For the kudos, the sex and helping out your brother.”

Oliver took a deep breath and pointed at Emma. “If this goes wrong I am going to blame you,” he told her. “But OK. I'll help you with the distractions.”

“Oh and if you can find out the security code before tomorrow night it'll be a big help,” Emma said quickly and turned to the plans in front of her before Oliver could register a protest.

* * * * *

Oliver glanced up at Charlotte messing around with the some chairs in the reception area but wasn't really listening to what she was saying. He had been distracted as he had taken the post around the offices in the morning and run into Jaroslav Doszak talking to his a familial member who had come over from the Ukraine. They had been on their own in Jaroslav's office but Oliver had heard everything that had been said from outside the door, which included the admission that Jaroslav had shot a drug dealer the week before.

Oliver went white; he ignored half of the boasting about Jaroslav's brothels but he knew if they were caught it would be him, Jamie and Emma getting shot in the woods. The raid was a bad idea.

“You OK?” Charlotte asked and Oliver nodded as he came out of his trance. “You've been daydreaming all day.”

“I'm fine,” Oliver muttered and Charlotte grinned, before continuing with the story Oliver hadn't been listening to.

“Of course, he said he wanted to see me again, but I had to tell 'im, ya hear me, what sort of gal d'ya think I am?” Oliver rolled his eyes as he pushed Emma's USB pen drive into the computer while Charlotte could not see the screen and dragged over a thousand files from the Search window to the folder window that had popped up.

“Indeed,” Oliver muttered as she held out her hands waiting for a response to her rhetorical question.

Over a thousand files were copied to his USB pen drive and looked at her. “I mean, he might have got laid that night and in the morning, but I don't just date any bloke who wants to. I got standards, so when he starts spouting off about anal I was out of there, but he's been texting me all day.”

Oliver stretched his arms and sighed. “You don't want it?”

“Do I 'ell, not on a first meeting. He gotta take me out somewhere posh before he fucks me up the poop-shute.”

Oliver looked at his workstation and carefully dropped the pen drive into his rucksack underneath the table. He laughed at his co-colleague and then looked up at the clock. “Nearly going home time.”

“Well he said he wants to meet tonight so I tell him, that's fine but I tellin' 'im to expect nowt.” Oliver sucked in air and looked at her.

“Is that likely?”

“It is fuck,” she replied quickly. “After being 'ere all day, course I wanna get laid. But I ain't no slut. He 'as to work for it.”

Oliver couldn't stop smiling and saw the battered Transit of Emma in the car park outside through the double-glazed windows. "Hey is that ya brother?" Charlotte asked and Oliver nodded.

"Yeah."

"He looks well fit," Charlotte cried and looked at Oliver. "He can take me on a date any day."

"Well he's been inside. Had lots of gym access ain't he?"

Charlotte cooed at the man in the Transit. "Oo, that bird of his is pretty nice as well. That businessman the other week, he asked me on our first date, to do a threesome with his mistress at a hotel room he'd just booked."

Oliver screwed up his face and Charlotte giggled. "That's a bit ..." Oliver didn't know how to finish the sentence but Charlotte guessed and continued.

"I know. Even worse, she was well mingin' and she didn't shave herself. It was like going down on a cat." Oliver rolled his eyes and she giggled. "Or maybe a pussy."

Oliver shut down his workstation and stretched as Charlotte laughed at her own joke; he had been in the chair all day and his muscles had tensed up. He had been nervous since he arrived, panicking about the job they were about to pull on his employer later that evening but Charlotte's incessant talking about sex had certainly taken his mind off of his problems.

The more Oliver knew about Jaroslav the more he didn't want to know; he was an evil, malevolent bully who dominated and threatened everyone. He was a nightmare to be involved with and Oliver just could not believe that he was going to be complicit in one of the biggest heists in the local area. Charlotte glanced over at the clock. "Fuck it," she cried and walked back over to the small door that led to their pod. Oliver picked up his bag and bade Charlotte farewell; in truth, he guessed it might be the last time he ever saw her, but she gave a gentle wave and he wished her the best of luck for her date that night.

"Right, I've got hundreds of files," Oliver announced as the door closed and passed Emma her USB memory stick. "Everything that relates to security, alarms, the fucking works."

"Crackin'," Jamie said and passed Oliver a can of beer from the behind the seat as he drank from his one.

"Oh, and Charlotte thinks you are well fit," Oliver said with a smile on his face.

"Course. She's only 'uman. Is she sexy?"

"She'll sleep with anyone," Oliver told him and Jamie grunted.

"Cept ya," he replied and Oliver scowled at his brother. Emma drove the three miles to her small flat, parking in a side street. She pushed the pen drive into her laptop and started looking through the files immediately.

Jamie and Oliver ordered a curry from the local takeaway and Emma grumbled when they told her she had to pay for it as neither Oliver or Jamie had any money on them. "I'll give it ya back," Jamie told her and Emma started looking through the files.

"Isn't worrying about alarms a bit of a big thing to leave until the last minute?" Oliver asked as he strummed on the table, the beer giving him drunken confidence to suggest Emma was fallible. "I mean, isn't it, a bit like, fucking crucial?"

Jamie threw his empty beer can at him. "Shut up. What the fuck do you know about breaking into houses?"

Oliver grimaced as the can struck him and he put it down on the table, wiping off the drops

of lager from his shirt. "What the fuck do you know about breaking into houses?" Oliver replied. "It was warehouses and post offices."

Jamie blew air through his lips. "Course I know. I did a few, didn't I?" He turned to Emma, leaning back on the sofa and pushing his neck as far back as it would go. "Love, what we doin' 'bout 'larms if there fuck all on that?"

Emma didn't answer and looked at Oliver. "You have here the tender documents for the alarm system, and design and stuff." Oliver shrugged and Emma smiled. "I know most of this stuff but there's a bit about the key."

"Right."

"I got the code it was set when they set up the vault but not sure what it will be now."

"So ... we can't do it?"

Emma sniffed. "We can try it. If it's wrong, I'll go and try and override the alarms."

Oliver sighed; he didn't like the sound of "try" but his musings were interrupted by a doorbell and their arrival of a takeaway dinner. He returned to see Emma smashing up her USB stick and watched her place the remnants in her fire, before turning it on and filling the room with acrid smoke. "What ya do that for?"

Emma gave a snort. "Cos if the Police ever do get involved and link me to it, I'd rather not have the plans on a USB stick lying around." Oliver hummed in realisation and she cocked her head. "Don't tell me you still got your USB drive from before."

"It's in my drawer at home," Oliver replied. "Well it's 16 gigabyte. Cost me an arm and a leg."

Emma snorted. "Well if Jaroslav uses it to find out you robbed him, it will cost you an arm and a leg," she joked and then had to reassure the panicking man that she wasn't serious. "Look, after the raid there will be nothing linking you to the crime, so go to work tomorrow."

"You are joking?" Oliver asked and Emma gave a snort.

"If you don't it will look real bad," she told him. "Go to work, act as nothing happened. Anyway, I have something to leave behind." She pulled out a little packet of matches with some cigarette butts and held it out. "There are from the Gold Lounge – Jaroslav's big rival. I'm going to leave them near the gate with a half smoked cigarette. When he finds 'em he will instantly think it's a rival brothel."

Oliver nodded. "I am not sure I do want to go to work. I was distributing the post today and heard all sorts of things from Jarolsav's office."

"What?" Jamie asked and Oliver thought.

"Oh I heard him talking to some guy and explained about how he gets his girls in, and where they are living. All sorts. I think twas his cousin, from Kiev, but he was bigging himself up and then he starts talking about poppin' someones knees off. He's a fuckin' nutter."

Emma smiled. "Yeah I know. But his security is piss poor."

"Yeah 'cos no-one wants to get caught nickin' from Doszak." Emma pursed her lips and told him that she wasn't planning on getting caught, and left him to his dinner. Oliver barely ate any of the curry and had to evacuate his bowels three times as they got closer to leaving the flat.

Emma and Jamie had been out and bought everything they needed, and on the dining room table were all the clothing and equipment they would require in three neat piles.

"OK," Emma said, picking up one of the three rucksacks and looking at her two

companions. "We better go."

Oliver yelped but grabbed the bag he was given and Emma told him to change into the clothing she had provided; it was jet black with a balaclava. He had trouble undoing his trouser zip but changed and put his clothes in his bag. The two men followed Emma out of the flat in silence; there was a nervous anxiety to them.

Oliver rubbed his hands to stop them from shaking and they climbed into Transit.

"Here's to a profitable evening," she muttered as the battered van sparked into life and she forced it into first gear with a grinding sound.

Chapter V

“You can't just leave me here?” Oliver asked and Jamie looked at Emma. “I could, ya know, cause a distraction here.”

“You know what to do. And you know the building,” Emma replied firmly. “Weren't you listening on the way over, I explained it twice for you.”

Oliver grunted and Jamie shook his head. “Told ya he wasn't up for it. Bet ya he pisses himself on th' job.”

“Shut up,” Emma snapped. “Now, I have a way-in and out I want but if we have to take a detour out then you know the building. And anyway, I think I might need you to sort out the dogs.” Oliver yelped and the female burglar glared at him. “What? You like dogs. I remember that little Jack Russell you used to dote over.”

“Yeah, a Jack Russell. Not like these dogs, I've seen them. They are big ... man-eating dogs.”

Jamie laughed and even Oliver smiled. “Look, there is nothing that will go wrong, I've got everything I need,” Emma promised. “And anyway, I've been watching the 'ouse night 'n' day. They are only out a bit, but I can't be in two places at once. And if they are there I'll give you meat to keep them happy.”

Oliver gulped. “I'm not sure about this.” Emma leant in and kissed him on the cheek.

“It'll be easy,” she promised and opened the van door. “Come on.” She pulled out her backpack, and waited for Jamie and Oliver to get down. “We ain't got all night.”

“Well actually love, we have,” Jamie teased and Emma snorted.

“Yeah, I was hoping to have as much time to get away as possible,” she told him. The road was eerily quiet and Oliver looked at her.

“This isn't the Manor,” he told her. “This is, actually where is this?”

Emma chortled to herself and crossed the country lane, pushing aside the branches of a tree in darkness by the side of the road and pushed the switch on her torch. “We are in the right place,” she told him firmly and pulled herself up to the branch and then onto a wall next to it, before jumping down.

“So where's she gone?” Oliver asked his brother and there was a sound of metal being prised apart and a gate swung open a few feet from where they are standing.

“I thought we'd come in the back way,” Emma told him. “Best not turn up at the front asking if we can rob 'em.”

“Too right,” Jamie answered enthusiastically. Oliver nervously traipsed through the wrought iron gate and Emma leant over to slide his balaclava down, telling him that there was no point in him having it if it wasn't over his face.

They watched as she emptied out her cigarette butts and matches from a plastic sandwich bag onto the ground underneath the gate and she trod it slightly into the mud. “That'll throw 'em,” she whispered and put the sandwich bag back into her pocket.

Oliver was scared as they walked across the grass, keeping to the shadows. Emma had turned off her torch, preferring the light of the moon and the Manor came into view. Oliver gulped.

Emma looked back at him. “Fuck, I was nervous on my first job, but just do as we said, it'll be fine. I've done this loads of times.”

Oliver nodded and Jamie looked at Emma. "If this goes tits up 'cos of 'im I'll swing for ya," he muttered and Emma ignored him, running along the shadows to a small bush twenty yards from the patio and the house.

"OK. I am going to get inside and open that door there," she whispered glancing at a piece of torn paper and nodding towards a small door. "It's not protected by an alarm that one but is locked."

"OK."

"But I think there will be people in there," she said nodding towards a room opposite, so that's why we need the distractions."

Oliver's hands felt clammy and he sighed, nodding his head. He was scared; he didn't want to be in the undergrowth of his crazed employer's address, he wanted to be at home in front of the fire with a nice cup of cocoa. How did he let his brother talk him into this?

Emma looked at her watch. "I want you to do them exactly three minutes after I climb in through that window," she told them and Oliver looked at her. "I mean it three minutes. Exactly. To the second."

"But that window's not open," he told her and Emma just gave a snort and a promise that it soon would be.

Emma climbed up the drainpipe, her hands slipping as she made it to the first floor, and then the second. Jamie and Oliver watched from the bush as she got along side the window, and ran her hands along it before prising it open effortlessly.

"Fuck," Jamie cried. "She's got skills. That's insane."

"Ya just jealous," Oliver said nervously and watched as their partner disappeared through the window; he wouldn't have minded if Emma couldn't have gained access and they had to go home but glanced at his watch. "Fifteen seconds past," he whispered and watched as his watch ticked forward. The two brothers held their breaths waiting to hear alarms of the house or shouting but there was nothing.

"Scared?" Jamie asked from underneath his balaclava.

Oliver nodded. "Terrified. I know what Doszak is like. If this isn't perfect I'm going to be dead."

Jamie patted him on the back and left the silence to hang in the air for a few moments. "But dis perfect. And then we are well sorted, for life. And Emma, she is sound."

"I hope so," Oliver muttered. "Cause this is the stupidest thing I've ever done."

Jamie glanced at his watch and flicked his finger towards the gate. "Off you go bro," Jamie whispered as two minutes passed and Oliver tentatively edged his way along the undergrowth and around the house. Five seconds past; he had ten seconds and he looked up at the small gate and manicured hedge that stood in his way.

The gate creaked open, and he shuddered, listening for any movement but there was none, and the two cars were sat on the gravel drive as Emma told him they would be.

Keeping low to the ground, Oliver ran across to the first one, a BMW and pushed hard on the bonnet like he had been told to do, but there was nothing. He did it again and then had to almost jump on the car for the alarm to sound.

His felt his stomach lurch and he slid off of it, pressing down on the sports car for it to the same and dived through the gate, seconds before two voices appeared at the front door.

Oliver tore around the house and came face-to-face with Emma propping a door open at the side of the house. "Hurry," she hissed and Oliver slipped inside. Jamie was already

waiting, holding a can in his hand that he put in his backpack. "Ready?"

She listened and guided them down a dimly-lit corridor opposite and then to her right down a marble staircase. They reached the bottom, and turned to see Oliver lifting his balaclava up to scratch underneath. She knocked his hand away and hissed. "Don't."

"But it itches," he moaned. "Itches really bad."

"Tough," Emma hissed and whispered to Oliver's brother. "You need to keep an eye on him."

The entrance to the vault was just in front of them and they walked towards it. Emma suddenly swore, she had tripped over something and the undignified squawk from under her feet shot towards the vault door. "It's Vlad," Oliver whispered. "Jaroslav's mistress's pussy."

Jamie sniggered and Emma looked through her balaclava at Oliver. "Vlad? As in the Impaler?" Emma asked and threw the cat a couple of squares of meat she had in a bag in her pocket as it hissed at her.

"Putin," came the response. "You know ex-KGB." Emma snickered, and went to ask why a Ukrainian businessman named his cat after a Russian president when they arrived at the vault and she muttered. "This is it here."

Jamie went to press the white door access card against the scanner, but Emma knocked his hand away. "Sssh," she silenced him when he went to object and pushed the door. It swung open, and she turned her torch off.

"Silence," she whispered and crept along the stone passageway, glancing either side at the statues that lined the path to the vault. There were two flickering lights that weakly illuminated their path although Emma kept to the right hand side in the shadows until the chamber at the end came into view.

"Why was the door unlocked?" Oliver asked and Jamie clamped his palm over his brother's mouth.

"Shut it," he hissed firmly the terrified man. "Just shut it. Or y'all get us all nicked. Or killed."

There was a terrified squawk from the unwilling robber at the last comment, but Emma glanced up at the CCTV cameras before spraying them with an aerosol; it was almost pitch black and Oliver asked what she had done.

"Tis an obscurer," Emma whispered. "Makes it look like it's through a bathroom winda and out of focus. In case lights come on."

Oliver sniffed and wiped his face. He had never been as scared as he was and looked around the almost pitch black chamber. There was a wrought iron vault in front of him and a dozen statues of naked women in marble around it. A control panel on a small plinth stood two feet away from the door and Emma glanced at it.

Emma strode forward and typed the six digit code – 418592 – into the control panel and looked at Jamie. "Get ready," she whispered and pressed the green button.

There was a whirring sound and the three of them held their breath in expectation. "Wait," she muttered and rubbed her hands together. There was a momentary pause as time stood still for them, waiting for the red light on top of the vault to glow green.

A high-pitched siren went off and the main lights flashed on. Emma looked Jamie and Oliver. "Oh shit," she called and started up towards the passage. "Hide," she called out when she heard voices shouting on the other side of the door and looked down to see Vlad staring up at her. "Get behind the statues."

The cat howled when she picked him up and then sprinted silently down the passageway back into the chamber. Oliver had already taken refuge behind a large feline statue in the very corner of the chamber and Jamie was cowering behind a naked woman. Emma dumped the tabby cat on the plinth and slid behind a statue next to Jamie, peering between the legs of the stone nymph.

The large figure of Jaroslav appeared seconds later with two large, bulky men and he laughed the moment he saw the cat looking scared on the dashboard. He clicked his fingers and a large brute of a man stepped forward and pushed the cat off the panel which made a thoroughly dissatisfied growl as it landed on its feet.

“Zhee fucking cat,” he shouted. “Turn zhee alarms off,” he barked and the man picked up the terrified animal and walked back down the passageway.

Jaroslav looked around the room, and then walked over to the the plinth, typing in his six digit number and walking into the vault as it swung open. A radio crackled into life and the henchman spoke to Jaroslav walking inside his giant safe. “Control say there is a problem with the camera there,” he said in a professional voice. “Everything is washed out.” Jaroslav looked up at it and touched it before looking back at his henchman.

“It's looks OK,” he told him and looking around the room smiled at he looked at the statue Emma was hiding behind, who felt as though he was looking straight at her. “Get the security company to look tomorrow.” He grabbed a briefcase from the vault and then pulled the vault door shut, spinning the wheel on the front and pressing three buttons on the panel. “These go nice in Kiev,” he said, nodding towards his companions and holding up his briefcase, and then glanced around the room before striding up the passageway.

They heard a click at the end of the room and Emma peered out. The lights remained on for another twenty seconds and then dimmed; the only illumination coming from the flickering bulbs in the passageway. “See I told you it was a bad idea,” Oliver blubbed.

“Oh shut up,” Jamie replied and glanced at his ex-girlfriend. “Nice work with the cat.”

Emma didn't respond to Jamie or to Oliver's weeping and just stared at the control panel, typing in a six digit number number. “What ya doing?” Jamie hissed and Emma turned and gave him a raffish smile as she pressed the green button.

“Didn't you watch as he typed it in? From my angle it was perfect, open enough to see him type his digits but not shielded by his body.”

“So what's it then?” Jamie asked as there was a click from the door.

“123456,” Emma replied with a grin. “The classics are always the best.”

The light glowed green and Emma spun the wheel 180 degrees. The security door swung open when she pulled on the wheel to reveal a small box room, holding three shelves in a U-Shape.

Emma walked in, looking around the vault and then at the set of shelves bathed in muted red light. Jamie gasped and Emma strode forward picking up the three light-blue statues.

“We shouldn't be here,” Oliver wailed from the doorway but Jamie just looked inside the vault. Emma picked up a small box of jewellery containing three necklaces and emptied it into her bag and then glanced over at two hold-alls on the floor.

Jamie opened them and they both gasped – the bags were stuffed full of banknotes and he slid one of them over to Emma.

“You didn't say anything about any money,” Oliver told him and Jamie just shrugged. “Just the statues.”

“We versatile,” Emma whispered in response and they glanced around the vault before

leaving it's empty steel shelves and leaving the door open. "I want a jackpot."

"We going to close it?" Oliver asked and Emma shook her head.

"He did something on the keypad when he closed it and I didn't see what it was," she replied. "I'd rather not set the alarms off again, we won't get away with a second time."

"But won't it go off?" Jamie asked and Emma shrugged.

"No fuckin' idea. But we'll be out of here in three minutes," she promised. Emma looked down the passageway and then putting her arms through her full backpack and throwing it over her shoulders jogged down towards the closed security door. Emma pushed the door access card Oliver had got them and it registered with a red light and a derisive tone.

"We are so fucked," Oliver tearfully cried and Jamie punched his brother in the top of his arm.

"Shut up," he snapped and looked at the door access panel. "Can we break it, from the inside?"

Emma shook her head and looked at Oliver. "Are you sure that this is the right sort of card?"

"Yes," Oliver replied and pulled out his wallet, sliding out his work card. "It's just like mine, look. And it is set up for 24 hour access everywhere."

"Well it bloody isn't," Jamie barked back and Oliver screwed up his face.

"I set it to expire on the sixth. That's today."

"Yesterday," Emma grunted and looked at him. "That's fuckin' yesterday."

Jamie snatched Oliver's card from his hand and pushed it against the panel. It glowed green and the door unlocked. "Nice one," he told him and grinned as they pushed the door open and stood at the bottom of some stairs.

"But that shows I was here," Oliver howled and Emma turned to face him gesturing wildly with her hands. "But it does," Oliver hissed. "They'll know it was me. I don't want to go to prison. I don't want to die."

Jamie pushed his brother up against the wooden panelling, holding him menacingly by the throat. "Shut it," he threatened, pushing a fist into his face and then glanced at Emma.

"Let's get the fuck out of here," she barked and, keeping to the wall side of the spiral stairs, tiptoed up the first few steps looking up.

Oliver followed, his feet echoing as he slapped them wearily against the marble and Emma put a finger to her mouth glaring at him. "Sorry," he muttered and slowly the two brothers inched their way up the stairs to get into the house. Emma froze when she heard some voices but they passed through another room, and she looked back at the two men beside her.

"This balaclava is still itchy," Oliver moaned in a low voice, but Emma had ran across the room and was alongside the opposing wall, making her way around the small corridor to the door they had come through.

"Come on," Jamie hissed at his brother, and a little louder they moved alongside the wall to reach Emma who was busy picking the lock to the door. Jamie reached up and picked up a handbag on a coat-stand, smiling at Oliver. "Bonus," he whispered.

"They've locked it," she whispered in annoyance but took out some metal implements and fiddled with the lock until it clicked. "Bingo," she whispered and opened it.

There was a barking sound from outside and Emma froze, listening. "It's a dog," Oliver

whispered in panic, and Jamie reached into his backpack side pocket and took out a freezer bag.

“Just in case,” he whispered and they quietly left through the door and onto a small patio. Light streamed across the garden from the windows and Emma looked around before running across the patio and leaping over a low wall to drop down onto the flower bed beneath.

She landed with a soft thud and listened. There was silence and she looked up, her eyes just reaching the top of the wall and gestured for Oliver and Jamie to do the same. Oliver landed with a squawk and was spread out in the flowerbed, his foot catching on the wall as he tried to leap over and landing face first in a row of pansies.

Jamie gave a muffled laugh as he landed. “You fucking retard,” he muttered and they started moving across the garden. Jamie threw the meat he had got onto the grass and a small shadow sprinted across to devour it gratefully. “Bloody cat,” he muttered. “It’s for the dogs.”

“Be fuckin’ grateful that there are no dogs,” Emma told him with a chuckle and they ran to the edge of Jaroslav’s property and through the large gate, pulling it shut.

* * * * *

“I am so fucked,” Oliver moaned the moment he got into Emma’s Transit van. “They will only need to check the logs and see that it was me.”

“Yeah,” Emma replied. “And when we used the card to get in, they will just look back and see who issued it. You were always going to be in trouble.”

“No. We all login as Administrator but I bet Charlotte did my card. She is always giving people complete access everywhere. But I am so fucked now. It is either me or Jamie nicking the card from me. I am a dead man.”

“It’s your own fault. A week you said, not six days. Set the card up right we wouldn’t have used yours.”

“Well I can’t go to work tomorrow,” Oliver said. “I need to go home, get a change of clothes and come with you.”

Emma snorted. “We ain’t goin’ to your house,” she said. “But we did it. We got lots of stuff.”

“But—”

Oliver stared at her and Jamie gave a grin. “But we got loads of cash and the statues. Fuckin’ stop mitherin’ man, we must have a cool half million here. And I got some old lady’s bag.”

Emma groaned as he pulled out a phone and wallet, and Emma threw the phone out of the window with a snarl. “Do you want them to triangulate your position,” she barked at him and Oliver whimpered. “You stupid cunt. Do you ever learn. And no logging into Facebook and saying that you’ve just raided Doszak.”

“I’m not going to,” Jamie muttered.

“Sort of fuckin’ stupid thing you’d do,” Emma barked. “See you with a picture of all the cash, the statues and our location.”

“Yeah, and you said nothing about nicking any cash. Three statues worth fifty thousand each is all you said,” Oliver told her.

“Yeah well, what can I say?” Emma replied aggressively. “We hit the jackpot. What is it with you two, bickerin’ like old ladies.” She turned the key in her ignition and the van lurched into life. The van turned into the country lane and she accelerated purposefully to

put some distance between herself and the property.

“Well it's me that is going to get majorly fucked. I don't want a life of crime. I just want to settle down with a nice girl like Vicky and ... and I can't do this.”

Oliver burst into tears and Jamie glanced at his friend. “Shall we dump him now? By the side of the road? It'll be for mercy, he can call Jaroslav and beg for forgiveness.”

“And to think what Mum will say? She will kill me. Kill us.”

“If Doszak doesn't manage it first,” Emma joked and spun the Transit into another country lane, even narrower than the first and sped up to 80mph.

“Can we slow down please?” Oliver asked but Emma just ignored him and got the van up to ninety. “Please.”

“Will you belt up?” Jamie snapped. “I want to get some distance between me-self and the mad Ukrainian.”

“Yeah, and this van, it's done 100 thousand miles, and about ninety's been at this speed,” Emma chuckled.

Oliver gulped and held onto the dashboard as Emma threw the van into a corner and he was propelled against his brother. Emma went up on the grass verge and struggled to get the van under control, but they made it to the main road and turned onto it, just as two Police cars shot past them. “Well I guess our little adventure has just been discovered,” Emma told them with a smile and headed towards the motorway. “But I thought it would take them a little longer.”

“Might not be us,” Oliver said hopefully and Emma shrugged.

“I didn't think Doszak would call the Police, so it might be nothing. But who cares, we got tracks to make to a cottage.”

She eventually pulled up forty miles away in a small cottage near the Welsh border. Jamie was asleep and Oliver had cried most of the way there, before moaning that he would never get to have sex as he would going to jail.

“Is that really all you think about?” Emma moaned as she slammed the door in the remote location.

Jamie woke with a start and Oliver climbed over him. “Well a bit. I just want to meet a nice girl, settle down. Have a family.”

“There is nothing great about a family,” Emma replied. “Getting up ten times a night, changing nappies. It's a bit nasty if you ask me. If you want to change shit filled nappies work at an old peoples home.”

Jamie rubbed his eyes. “Oh, we are here.”

“Yes,” Oliver said firmly and caught up with Emma. “I just want a life, is that so much to ask?” She grunted as she unlocked the desolate cottage. The wind howled around them and Oliver shivered the moment he got inside. “You got yourself a third-share of hundreds of thousands. Go have that life in the Caribbean around pretty women and not in miserable England.”

Oliver's teeth chattered. “Hasn't this got any heating?”

“Yes,” Emma replied and flicked a switch on the side of the fire in the front room and putting her backpack down on the floor. “Get us a beer, love,” she called out. “I put some dinners and beer in the fridge.” Oliver returned with two bottles of weak lager, a bottle opener and a pint of water in a dusty glass for himself.

She emptied out her backpack on the floor and then looked at Jamie who did the same.

He cheered as he did so and downed his beer, shouting out, "fucking awesome," as he watched the bundles of money fall onto the floor.

Emma picked up his bag and emptied a few bundles that remained and gave him a piercing look only for Jamie to shrug. "How much?"

"They look like bundles of five grand," Emma said and started counting. They were mixed between parcels of ten, twenty and fifty pound notes but it was a big pile and Emma eventually looked up, interrupting a bickering conversation between Oliver and Jamie with a smile. "Seven hundred and ninety thousand pounds. Well probably eight hundred to be honest. But fuckin' loads"

Jamie whistled. "Well fuck the statues then. We got the jackpot."

Emma looked at him with a tortured look. "You stupid twat. What happened to that money from the Post Office job?"

"You 'ad it."

"Oh well done," Emma summarised and then crossed her arms. "Look, we had away seven grand. But it was all in twenties. And it stopped being legal two years ago. That money is only as good as how long it takes you to spend it."

"Right, so does any cash we get for the statues."

Emma rolled her eyes. "We can get anything we want for the statues. In whatever we want. We stuck with these pounds. So if we need to wash it, 'cause you can't stick it into ya Bradford and Bingley account and them not to ask where two fifty large ones have come from. If ya wash it, ya lose lots. So statues, at fifty or seventy grand a piece, they worth a lot."

Jamie scowled; he clearly didn't like being spoken down to, and he watched Emma dividing the money. She hid the jewellery out of view and slipped it into her bag as Jamie's eyes were on the giant pile of cash in the centre of the room. She glanced at Oliver who saw her and gave him a slight nod with a pout of her lips.

"I want a necklace," he told her. He held out his hand expectantly when Jamie went to the toilet and she gave him one of the necklaces and slipped it into his pocket; it weighed a bit and had a beautiful blue stone in the middle. "It looks lovely," he muttered and Emma just flicked a smile.

"Yes they do, don't they?" Emma replied.

"Look old."

Emma sniffed. "Yeah, they probably are."

* * * * *

Emma sat in the farmhouse-cum-cottage twiddling her thumbs. Oliver had spent most of the day crying and lurching from one emotion to the other. He threatened to consider turning them all in for a lighter sentence only for Jamie and Oliver to come to blows.

Or blow, to be more accurate: Jamie smacked Oliver and nearly knocked him out as the incessant whining got to him. Jamie's entertainment had been to flick between the rolling news channel on the television and a pornographic magazine he had found in the cottage. Emma had had them leave their mobile phones in her flat which caused a degree of annoyance from Oliver as he had "e-mails to check." Emma groaned.

"So what are we doing here?"

Emma wondered herself. The raid had been on the rolling news channel as a "breaking news" and was the primary news item all morning. It had shown little sign in being

replaced as the headline news story. This was partly because Jaroslav Doszak was well known but also that the value of goods stolen was sizeable. However, Emma mostly put this down to a rampant lack of news being newsworthy and thus they were treated to repeat showings of the house with a reporter claiming all sorts of rumours.

She dismissed some of them immediately – there was no way there was over 50 officers working on the investigation, or that the statues were worth over two million pounds, but did quite happily believe that the Police were considering whether it was an inside job.

She was surprised that it had hit the news; she was sure Jaroslav would not want the Police anywhere near his property, especially given what he was rumoured to be up to but obviously the rumours were just that, untrue fabrications and he was clearly happy to get the Police involved to find them although she didn't doubt if the coppers did manage it, then Jaroslav would not just allow British justice to take its course with his own brand of retribution.

In essence, Emma wanted to wait for when they were no longer the number one news item; the cottage had been chosen because of its remote location and the fact that she could park the van out of sight, and that she had paid in cash with a false name added to its safety.

Of course, she had worn a disguise when she had rented the property but she still didn't like the idea that the Police had gained significant exposure on the local media and was certainly grateful that the rental offices had been in the next county and therefore on Midlands news networks.

"Til the heat dies down," she told him, answering his question.

"When will that be?" Oliver whimpered. "Cos Doszak is gonna kill me."

Emma nodded and glanced at the Jane Austen in front of her. "Only if he finds you. I was kind of working on not getting caught. I was thinking tonight after we had a good sleep."

"Right. And how are we getting to Argentina?" Jamie asked, the escape plan clearly only becoming relevant to him once they actually completed the job.

"We get to Poole, I have a boat lined up to take us to Argentina," Emma promised. "An old friend of mine," she said with a smile and looked back to the book. "But I want to travel down tonight when the roads are empty and we've had a good night's sleep."

"But if we leave it they will know they need to look for the van?" Jamie suggested and Emma gave a grin.

"I was sort of going to nick a car from the village, or put some false plates on," she told him. "But I really, really do not want to be out while there is a picture of me on the front page and it is daylight. You remember the old Spicer Boys. Well Eric got nicked last year 'cos they went out while they were on the news and were spotted. It's not midday yet. So give it 'til nine or ten o' clock and I can ring Paolo on my new mobile, and we can travel down overnight. It'll be simple."

Jamie and Oliver scowled, and even Emma started to wonder, but she trusted her judgement; after all she had never been charged or convicted of a crime, ever. She trusted her gut instinct.

Chapter VI

"Size 10 feet," the officer proudly told his Inspector as they walked past the flowerbed and underneath the Police cordon. "We've measured them. There is no tread to talk of, but the perpetrator definitely had size 10 feet."

The Inspector smiled. "Correction, he or she was wearing size ten shoes. We have no idea of the size of his or her feet."

The officer scowled. "Maybe, but if he is wearing size ten shoes, then surely he has size ten feet," the officer asked, clearly irritated by the Inspector's pedantry. "And I don't think it's a girl with size ten feet. Not unless she comes from Chernobyl."

Inspector Richard Williamson gave a broad grin. "What happened?"

"The owner of the house, a local businessman called Jaroslav Doszak, I believe you've met but he is in Kiev at the moment."

Richard snorted. "I know who owns it. Let's just say we've met professionally," he replied as they walked into the main house. "But he had some bloody good lawyers."

"Well he was out of the house the guy reckons, he left first thing to fly to Kiev for a business trip according to the housekeeper. They must have been watching the house as apparently he went down to the vault before he left and everything was OK."

"What time?"

"About 10:30pm, they reckon."

The Inspector nodded and peered into the corridor leading to the vault, nodding to the forensic crime officer. "Anything?"

"Nothing," he replied, dressed in white protective suit. "Some cat hair and that's it."

"So, vault is fine, obviously Mr Doszak has been to collect his passport from the vault, and by morning his precious statues have gone."

"That's about the gist of it, yes. Although it was the housekeeper with the associate who found the vault open and phoned us. Mr Doszak left very late last night for his chartered flight, he is coming back as we speak. The auction house arrived early to collect the statues as they were going under hammer at the end of the week. And someone didn't want to pay the guide price."

DCI Williamson snorted and pointed to the wall. "CCTV. Can we see the tapes?"

The officer chuckled. "They seem to have avoided them. Three shadows in the distance from the one across the garden and that is about it really. The camera up there," the officer said, pointing to the wall, "is not working. Richard Williamson snorted. "Inside job?"

The Inspector looked behind him and then nodded. "Maybe. Do we know why it's not working?"

"Something sprayed over it, the forensic guy reckons. Some sort of hairspray like substance to mess with the lens."

"Probably a professional not an inside job then. Anyone working for Jaroslav Doszak would be mad to steal from him."

The sergeant smiled. "And one more thing, one of the temporary receptionists hasn't come to work today, he was due in and isn't answering his mobile. Name of Oliver Prutton. We are sending WPC Meadows 'round to have a word."

The Inspector took a deep breath and shook his head. "Oliver Prutton, we don't know him,

do we?"

"You might know his brother, sir. Jamie Prutton. He came out last month."

"Ahhh," cried the Inspector. "Yes, we do know the Prutton family. Ahh well, that could be interesting. Yes, let me know what happens on that one."

The two men walked out into the garden and saw a dozen faces pressed up against the office windows watching them. "Quite the attraction, aren't we?" The Inspector muttered and then looked up and down the garden. "If they came out there, then they could have got out over there." The Inspector pointed to the large gate at the end of the garden, scarcely in view and strode towards it.

The officer strode to keep up, almost running as the Inspector walked at a fast pace down the manicured garden. The gate was unlocked and the Inspector raised his eyebrows, looking at the large tyre print on the side of the road. "Get a cast of these," the Inspector ordered. "It might be nothing, but it might not be. And if they came out here, then they might have hit the traffic cameras on the main road."

"Yes sir," the officer parroted and felt his phone vibrate, answering it with a quick bark of his surname. He smiled as he had a brief conversation and turned to face the Inspector. "Sir. There was a card used last night at 23:02. A door access card, to gain access out of the vault."

"Belong to Oliver Prutton?"

"Yes sir."

"I wonder if our friend has been helping his brother get up to his old tricks again," the Inspector wondered out loud. "Right let's go and see him. Bring him in. After we have a cast of that."

He walked back and stopped at the gate, looking at the floor and stopped. "Get me an evidence bag," he called and turned his head. "There is a cigarette butt here and some matches."

"Oh," came the response and the Inspector scowled.

"They don't look too wet so they've not been here too long. Either our friends are very stupid, or we were meant to find this," he said with a smile. "But let me know what's on this."

"Sir," a voice called and the Inspector walked over to the officer holding out a handbag. "This must be the housekeepers," he told him and the Inspector smiled.

"Get me that cast ASAP and get Oliver and Jamie picked up. They came out through here, I want forensics down here too. Now I need to see DI Hargreaves, make sure we don't tread on any toes," he said, rubbing his chin, and nodding towards the junior officer.

* * * * *

"And we go live to our reporter on the scene, Jenny Phillips, what can you tell us?"

The reporter stood under the obligatory umbrella as the rain bounced off the pavement around her and looked sternly at the camera. "Well full details of the raid have been emerging in the last few minutes. Last night three burglars broke into this mansion house behind me, went into the safe, and stole three valuable statues made of solid gold that are due to be auctioned later this week. The Police have been here since this morning, we have had forensics and sniffer dogs all around here, and the owner of the statues, a local businessman, is said to be quite distressed and cutting short his business trip to the Ukraine."

"Quite, right," Jamie said, mimicking her voice and Emma scowled into the cold baked beans she was eating for lunch; Oliver couldn't work out how to turn the gas on to the cooker and Emma couldn't be bothered to check to heat through the beans so they all had cold tinned food for lunch.

"Any news on the gang who did this?"

"I am joined by Inspector Richard Williamson from the Merseyside Constabulary, any news on the likely perpetrators?"

A tall, smart man looked directly at the camera and gave a nod, his steely eyes bearing into Oliver who shuddered. "There are many leads and at the moment we are focusing on who had access to the vault, but it is early days and we are scouring the local area. There is a couple of people we are anxious to speak to and there will be arrests soon."

There was a shriek from the corner of the room and Oliver put his head in his hands, but Emma just turned up the volume on the television to listen to the reports. "Right, we got to get out of here," Jamie said and Emma shouted at him to sit back down. "They will see he's missing," Jamie panted.

Emma hummed. "I didn't expect them to know so quickly but I told you, I rented this farmhouse. I did it in cash, and I said I was staying alone. They haven't mentioned the Transit and they haven't said they are looking for me or even you. So just sit tight and think."

"I think I should have nothing to do with him," Jamie mumbled and Oliver threw his arms down.

"You have nothing to do with me? You were the one that roped me into this. You were the one that said it was easy."

"You said it was easy," Jamie looked accusingly at Emma. "You said it would be a piece of cake."

Emma shrugged. "It has been. It was easy. The job always is. It's getting away with it that so many people fuck up on. You of all people know that."

Jamie glared at her. "I don't want to go back to jail. I want to get out of here. You said you had a way out of Britain, let's do it."

"And I don't want Doszak and his heavies coming after me. 'Cos I am a dead man if they do," Oliver panicked.

Emma groaned and nodded. "OK. Well let's leave now. But if we get picked up on the motorway as we get spotted I'll kill ya." The two brothers looked at each other and Emma picked up the new pay-as-you-go phone and turned it on, before dialling a number on a piece of paper, looking at Jamie out of the corner of her eye.

"It's ringing," she muttered and waited for the familiar voice of Paolo. "Hello," a meek voice answered and Emma cleared her throat; it was Paolo's wife.

"Is Paolo in please?" The woman burst into tears and sniffed.

"I'm sorry, who is this?"

Emma hesitated before supplying her name. "He is expecting my call."

"Umm ... he died yesterday. He had an accident in his boat."

"Oh I am so sorry," Emma genuinely enthused; she had met Paolo when she had travelled to Sandbanks for a job through a mutual friend and had become enchanted by his mischievous demeanour and ever-smiling face. "I didn't know. You have my sincere condolences."

“His funeral will be in four days time.”

Emma hummed. “I would love to, I might be tied up.” The wife sniffed and Emma bade her well for the future. “Fuck,” she said the moment she hung up.

“Oh shit,” Oliver cried, looking at the expression on Emma's face. “What's happened?”

“He's kicked the fuckin' bucket, 'asn't he?” Jamie asked and Emma nodded, staring at the skirting-board.

“Yeah. Right we need a Plan B.”

“Plan B? You said you had everything planned,” Oliver snapped and Emma shook her head.

“I did,” she snapped back and then sighed, looking at them. “OK. Lets split up, take a bundle of cash each and a statue. And meet in Buenos Aires in a months time.”

“Split up?” Oliver said with a whimper.

“Yeah, make it harder to catch. We'll blend in more. And I don't want to be seen with you two if we have to work our way out of the country.”

“Us two?” Jamie asked. “This was your gig.”

“And you have in your hand a quarter of a million. How's that for payment for a poxy two grand. Now get this place cleared up, I'd rather the Police not know we were here if they come lookin'”

“But you said,” Jamie murmured and Emma looked at him.

“Just do it. You were always shit at the getting away with it part. We leave in thirty minutes.”

* * * * *

“Dimtri,” Jaroslav said with a nod around a small table. Thick cigar smoke hung in the air of the back room of the brothel and the Russian brute nodded. “And Mikael. I want them found.”

“The Police are looking Boss, it looks like an amateur job and they will find them.”

“I don't want dem in prison. I want dem dead,” he yelled in his Ukrainian accent and banging his fist on the table. “They took my statues and they took my necklaces and they took the money.” There was some nodding around the table and Jaroslav looked at his two henchmen. “Getcha men. And find me them.” There was a brief nod and Jaroslav took a big puff from his cigar. “If they tell about the money in there, I have Police everywhere. If they tell about the necklaces, I go prison. I want them rubbed out.”

Both of Jaroslav's henchmen got up and Jaroslav pointed his cigar at Mikael. “And the stupid cow 'oo phoned up Police. I want her out of 'ere.”

Mikael smiled. “Yes boss.” Dmitri fidgeted and Jaroslav glared at him.

“I told 'er. Stay there, not say anything,” the Russian henchman said gruffly and sharply. “While I phone you. But she phone police with auction people. Her handbag gone.” He waved his arms around animatedly as he spoke and Jaroslav snorted.

“I trust you,” Jaroslav barked. “I trust you to watch things. While I gone to Ukraine. You imbecile.”

“She's being thrown off now,” Dmitri told him and Jaroslav snorted. “She not coming back.”

The thick set Ukrainian smiled and puffed again on his cigar. “Good,” he muttered. “But I want dem lot dead.” The four suited men nodded at their boss and Jaroslav waved his

cigar around. "If Police find dem before we do, we fucked. And I fuck you. I fuck you and you and you and you," he shouted, pointing his cigar at each one of them in turn. "I want their livers. I want their families fed their remains."

"Oliver Prutton boss. Eees pass was used. Eeee is working on windows."

Jaroslav snorted and turned to the bespectacled man sitting next to him. "Yuri, I want to know everyt'ing 'bout dis guy. Families, everyt'ing. And you lot, fuck 'im up."

He gave a grunt to indicate that the meeting was over and they got up to leave. Mikael strode out and the young Paul looked at him. "How are we going to find them?"

"They will 'ead for the airport or the sea," Dmitri suggested. "But they will need 'elp. So we go to his home."

* * * * *

"What are you going to do with the Transit?" Oliver asked as she pulled away from the little village train station Jamie had asked to be left at. Emma could hardly pronounce the name, but it was not far from the Welsh border, and she was glad to be able to drop him off somewhere where no-one was looking.

"Got plans," she muttered and swung the van into the corner. It creaked as it mounted the soft earth at the side of the road and Oliver gripped the dashboard.

"So what do I do when I get to Buenos Aires?"

Emma gave a grunt as she clearly didn't think Oliver would get to South America by himself. "Ask for General Bastos," she told him. "Everyone knows him and he will buy what you have."

"General Bastos?"

"General Bastos," Emma repeated with a sly smirk.

"And where can I find him?"

"Buenos Aires," Emma told him unhelpfully. "I am going to drop you off at this town," Emma told him and he squinted.

"Where?"

"Whitchurch," Emma replied, pointing to a traffic sign. "It's a small town but there is a station there," she guessed and Oliver grunted. He clearly had no idea what he was to do or where he was to go so being in the middle of nowhere made no difference to him or to Emma. "Look, if you don't want to do anything in Argentina, just wait until we get there and we can get a price together."

Oliver sniffed and Emma patted him on the knee. "How do I get to Argentina?"

"Get yourself a passport or hitch a lift. I don't know," she unhelpfully suggested. "But if you do it, you will have a great life. Maybe, you don't want to go there, but get yourself out of Britain where there's no extradition treaty," she told him. Emma just hoped he wouldn't be caught in the next four hours to give her a chance to get as far away from the Prutton brothers as she could. She wished him luck and watched as he dropped down ungraciously from the vehicle in a side street.

Emma sped away, watching him standing there alone, in her wing mirrors; she knew he would probably be caught and she would put good money on him being caught that day. He looked lost and he looked isolated.

Emma drove her van out of the town and onto a country lane. She stopped in a small layby and pulled two fake number plates from behind the seat, and then jumped down from the van; the road was quiet and she pulled out a screwdriver from her pocket.

The old number plates were rusted onto the vehicle, and she snapped one of the heads off the screws but she had come prepared and before any car came along the road, had swapped the number plates over to a set she had had made in Liverpool.

The number plates she had chosen belonged to a small builders not far from where she lived and knew that there would be no problem travelling on those plates; as long as she didn't look like someone who was criminal, the plate wouldn't flag up as lost, stolen or wanted.

Emma snapped the old plates in half and slid them under the hedge. If she was stopped for some reason she certainly didn't want the dirty number plates of a wanted vehicle to be found in her car. Of course, the Police could check the VIN number but changing the plates was a good first precaution, and she knew the name and address of the real owners anyway.

The Transit van started the moment she turned the key and she pulled out into the country lane, accelerating towards the motorway at Stoke. She was driving carefully as it would have not been good if a police officer had pulled her over for speeding and then arrested her; it would have been her being careless and she chastised people for being careless.

Instead Emma respected the rules of the road and approached the small town of Nantwich observing all the speed limits. Her stomach rumbled; she was hungry and decided to stop off in the town to buy something to eat preferring a small town to the service stations on the M6 motorway which would have been loaded with CCTV cameras.

Emma parked the van at the back of a supermarket car park and pulled her beanie hat over her hair, choosing to run inside and buy herself two sandwiches and a couple of cans of fizzy drink. Emma would soon be en route to the South Coast the moment she left the supermarket and had filled up her transport at the petrol station opposite.

Emma climbed back in her van and pushed herself into the seat, a police car had turned off into the car park and was heading her way. She closed her eyes and slid her keys into the ignition, watching as it drove past her.

Emma swore, and turned the key, waiting for the van to start when there was a loud bang, a whirring sound and metal grating on metal. Emma groaned, jumped down from her seat and opened up the bonnet, to see a grey belt flapping around. She tried to pull it, but the engine was too hot to touch and she recoiled to hear a voice behind her.

"Your cambelt's gone," a young police officer told her, and Emma's heart skipped a beat. "They aren't cheap to replace."

"I know," Emma said a little nervously and she peered around her at the engine.

"Yeah, you ain't going anywhere, love. You got AA?"

Emma bit her lip and nodded. "Yeah, I'll get a tow," she muttered and he nodded at her.

"You'll be OK then?"

Emma sighed, her heart was beating furiously and she nodded. "Yeah I'll be fine," she said. "Vans, eh? Cost a bloody fortune."

He glanced up at the Road tax disc and Emma rubbed her chin; she had put false plates on the vehicle but not changed the tax disc which had her registration number on it. She braced herself for him to shout, but the unobservant officer snorted and climbed back inside his police car, driving off towards the town.

Emma looked up at the sky, grabbed her lunch and loot, and ran off in the opposite direction.

Chapter VII

“Inspector,” Jaroslav said with an air of rigidity to his voice. “Your men been everywhere, but they, they not find them yet. My house, it turned upside down but for nothing.”

The Inspector nodded gracefully and moved a branch out of face as he walked down the path. “We thank you for your cooperation and patience,” he replied automatically. “And that is true we have not arrested them but we know Oliver and Jamie Prutton were involved, they have disappeared, as you would have expected.”

“And what about third person? Those statues, they worth many hundreds of t'ousands of pounds,” the Ukrainian replied with an annoyed edge to his voice.

“We are looking at known associates. Did you have much to do with Oliver Prutton, sir?”

Jaroslav snorted and then shrugged. “We see him every day.”

“He didn't mention Emma Wallis at all?”

The Inspector smiled to himself as Jaroslav tried to put on a thoughtful expression. “I no remember it,” he told him. “She take my statues?”

The Inspector cleared his throat. “Oh no,” he said quickly. “We don't know that. We just want to speak to her and we can't find her. She is a known associate of Jamie. We are combing through the CCTV taken from the main roads as we speak to trace movements.”

Jaroslav scowled; he had spent twenty minutes with the Inspector and the Police had barely made any progress. “Like last time,” he snarled. “You not find guilty man but go after wild goose.”

Inspector licked his lips. “There is a dedicated team, Mr Doszak. We will get to the bottom of the break-in,” he promised and was grateful to an interruption.

“Inspector,” a stressed voice called from the end of the garden and Richard Williamson nodded respectfully to Jaroslav and bade the Ukrainian gangster goodbye. “Inspector,” a breathless Sergeant cried, running up to his senior.

“What is it?” The Inspector turned to check Jarolsav Doszak was out of hearing range and pulled the young policeman to one side muttering quietly. “What?”

“You don't answer your Blackberry sir,” he muttered in an annoyed tone.

“Of course not,” the Inspector replied. “I'm at work. That thing stops me doing what I want to do.”

The Sergeant groaned. “Those tyre marks,” he told in him whispering. “They've come back and they reckon they are 185 in width but also quite deep so they reckon the vehicle was quite heavy. Worn a bit on the inside rim. And they think it's a Goodyear Cargo.”

“Goodyear Cargo?”

“From the pattern yes, which means we are probably looking for a van.”

The Inspector sighed. “A van on a robbery; don't shock me.”

“No, but more than that. Emma Wallis. She has a 1991 Transit in her name. DVLA just confirmed it.”

“Oh,” the Inspector muttered with a grin. “Do they take 185s or whatever?”

The Sergeant sighed. “They do indeed.”

“Put out an all forces alert, I want that van stopped.”

“Done that sir. An hour ago. I sent an email to your Blackberry to tell you.” The Inspector couldn't help but grin. “And we are coming through traffic cameras. It looks as though they headed for the motorway but I've got the Highways Agency looking further.”

“Excellent. At least they weren't heading for the airport,” the Inspector joked. “Well our airport. Might have been off to Manchester I s'pose.” There was a hum from both of them. “Oh and anything on those cigarette butts?”

“Yeah, just got that back. The DNA on them is from a 'Aidy Hamilton,’” he told him.

“Don't tell me Aidy was involved. He's not into robbery.”

A smile flickered across the Sergeant's face. “Ah well, we arrested him the day of the robbery for flashing some girls as he left a pub at nine and he was in court the day after. He was in the cells sleeping off too many beers when our gang did this place.”

The Inspector smiled. “The crafty buggers.”

“Quite,” the Sergeant answered. “Got to admire the thinking though. And you guessed it was a trap.”

The Inspector sighed. “Yeah. It was too convenient. But I reckon Emma is the mastermind. I know she's been involved in some other stuff but we've never been able to prove it, but she's professional. This is sneaky clever.”

“And to leave matches from the Gold Lounge,” the Sergeant added. “If Jaroslav had seen that, they'd be hell to pay.”

The Inspector took a deep breath. “I think that was the point,” he added. “They weren't for us, they were for Doszak.”

* * * * *

Oliver looked around the small town where he had been dropped off and glanced over at the sign. He had the choice between a bus stop and a train station and nervously decided on the train station.

He briefly considered trying to steal a car, but he had no idea how to do it, and any attempt would probably give call for someone to summon the Police to come and arrest him. In short, he needed to get to South America without a passport, but had no idea how to do it. He didn't even have any friends who would be likely to help him.

The shadiest person he knew, and the person he might have turned to for help, was Jaroslav, but in the circumstances decided that it was probably a bit of a risky thing to try and do – asking the man who he robbed for help in getting away with it – and then try to work out who he could trust. He came with one name and one name only, Vicky Hambleton.

Vicky, the only girl he had ever liked was sure to be interested in seeing him and he knew she would help him. She had helped him with his Maths homework once and had flashed the intoxicating smile that had endeared herself to him when she had finished. She was kind and gentle, lusted after by everyone who went to the College and exceptionally good natured.

Vicky would tell him what to do, and what to do for the best, but she was in Aberdeen which was a long way from Whitchurch. This meant train travel or coach travel, and Oliver wanted a disguise. The small town was a little short on disguise shops, a serious omission as far as the desperate criminal was concerned, but he was able to purchase a hooded sweatshirt and a newspaper to hide behind and walked up to the little station to buy a ticket to Chester.

Oliver might not have been a criminal genius but he worked out that a ticket to Aberdeen

from Whitchurch might get his remembered if the Police ever came to ask the ticket office about him and so he tried to blend in, buying a return ticket to the next town.

Oliver sweated buckets on the train, every single time someone moved and walked past him, Oliver twitched; he felt exposed and he felt like everyone knew who he was and was about to expose him. He tried to hide behind the broadsheet newspaper to make himself a little less obvious but he was nervous and almost leapt from the train the moment he arrived at Chester. He wanted to put some distance between himself and his fellow passengers.

Oliver was almost surprised when there was no Police officers waiting for him, and he got a ticket to go from Chester to Manchester. The old machine happily spewing out a ticket at him and he ran to go and catch the train.

This time Oliver tried to read the newspaper but there was obviously nothing about him; he knew he would be in the paper the following day but the raid had been discovered after the papers had been printed. He longed for his smart-phone that Emma had confiscated to check the news but he had nothing except the paper.

By the time Oliver reached Manchester he was worried again; the train had been packed and got progressively busier which meant he had someone next to him reading the news on their tablet. Due to his anxiety, he was almost hyperventilating and desperate to use the toilet when the female passenger read about the stolen statues and he gripped his bag tighter. He panicked that she knew that he was the thief and there would be Police officers waiting for him at Manchester.

Oliver could scarcely believe his luck when he reached the large station and it was busy with passengers not police officers and skipped down the platform. He wanted to get to Scotland and rationalised that a passenger making a long journey from the city of Manchester would not be considered out of place.

The machine refused to accept his money when he tried to put it in to purchase his single to Aberdeen, and so he queued up at the desk; he hated the automated machines anyway.

The coloured lady smiled at him when he got to the front of the queue. "Single to Scotland," Oliver said as his hands shook.

The lady smiled back and ran her fingers down her lips. "Which town, love?"

"Oh umm ..." Oliver panicked. If she did remember him, he didn't want her to tell anyone about Aberdeen, so where should he go? He needed to stay overnight anyhow and blurted out the first place he could think of. "Bleddingborough."

She laughed. "Edinburgh?"

Oliver nodded. "Yeah."

"Haymarket or Waverley?"

Oliver nodded. "Yeah. Umm. Yeah Waverley."

"Standard or First Class?"

"Standard," Oliver replied quickly; he didn't think he would blend into First Class

The lady pressed a few keys into her computer and looked at him. "You sure?" She had her finger over another button and he nodded before the price was displayed. Oliver fished in his pocket for some of the stolen money and gave her four £20 notes. She filed them away, gave him change and his tickets. "Have a safe journey," she shouted after him that made Oliver jump again.

He had twenty minutes so got himself a meal from the fast food restaurant and sat and thought on the platform; there was no way he was going to get to Argentina and he wondered if he would manage to get to Aberdeen. Every time he saw someone he was jumpy and worried and watched as a Policeman walked past him trying hard not to look suspicious.

If the Police would offer him freedom in exchange for his bag of loot he would take it like a shot and then he could go back to his old life. He just didn't know how to get that and do that without Jaroslav getting hold of him.

* * * * *

"Hiya mate," Jamie called out and released his grip on his old friend. He had acquired a knife from a local supermarket as he knew it wouldn't take too long for Jaroslav to catch up with him and had surprised Ian walking in his own garden.

"Fuckin' hell," Ian cried as he turned to face Jamie. "I thought ya were gonna fuck me up."

Jamie grinned at his old cellmate. "I was," he muttered and he looked at the bag he was carrying. "Ah, so ya been nickin' again." Jamie nodded and looked at his friend wearing just his underpants. "I saw it on the news."

"I need a false passport," Jamie said in a low voice.

"I bet ya do."

"Look, I know it's been awhile but ..."

"Fuck off, I ain't got those contacts no more. And I don't want the pigs comin' 'ere and fuckin' me up. I got me bird knocked up and I is straight now."

Jamie sighed and looked at him. "I stopped ya from getting an arse-full inside," he told him firmly, gesturing wildly with his hands. "I stopped Bubba tearing you a new arsehole. Ya owe me."

Ian sighed. "I got a nice flat 'ere and a crap job but I ain't doin' the shit I was doin'. I can't get ya a passport. And I don't want ya in me 'ouse."

Jamie took a deep breath and looked at Ian. "Can I stay for a night? It's fuckin' evenin'. Can I kip on the floor."

Ian sighed and groaned. "One night, man. But ya bad news."

"I got me-self a blade. I'll be fuckin' bad news if ya say no." Jamie was exasperated and he had travelled all the way to Telford to meet his cell mate for two years who had been released nine months before he had been only to find he had genuinely gone straight.

It had taken him ten minutes to find his old house and then another half-an-hour to find his new flat, all for nothing. Ian groaned at the insistent criminal and took a deep breath. "Ya got yourself twelve hours mate. I got me bird comin' over tomorra and I ain't havin' ya around."

Jamie nodded and waited for Ian to open his back door to follow him inside. "If ya want a passport then ya need to see Dave in London."

"Dave?"

Ian gave a smile. "The nutter on the cell opposite. Short hair. Hangs around in the East End gangs."

Jamie grunted. "Ya serious?"

"He's got contacts, ya know what I'm saying? And well ya ain't gettin' one 'ere," he was told forcefully and Ian flicked the television back on.

Jamie looked at him and glanced up at the noticeboard. "Fancy a pizza?" Ian gave a half-hearted laugh and nodded. "I got cash." Jamie reached up and pulled down a menu and opened it up.

"Yeah. OK. And grab a few tins from them as well," Ian asked and Jamie picked up the phone to order two pizzas and eight cans of lager.

* * * * *

"We are sorry for any inconvenience," the tannoy announced and Emma swore loudly at the screen on the crowded concourse. A few people turned to face her and she shrugged, shaking her head. Why did British Rail need to fail the day when she needed to get out of the town; it wouldn't be long before they looked at the abandoned van and worked out that the plates were fake. She glanced outside the station and saw a bus pull up. It wasn't her preferred choice of transport but turned to speak to the harassed station master. "Is there a bus station in this town?"

He nodded, and pointed towards a map on the wall. "Yes, but it's at the other end of the town. Just follow the ring road 'round. And buses stop outside." She smiled and thanked him.

Emma gripped her bag and walked out of the station into the town that had turned distinctly overcast and started following the ring road around the supermarket and towards the bus station on the north side of the town centre. She had only been on her own for an hour and was already having problems getting out of Cheshire; she expected Oliver and Jamie to be picked up within days but she wanted to get down to the South Coast before they were arrested. As it was, she was still within fifteen miles of them and the moment they were found, the Police would look in neighbouring towns. She needed to get out quickly and walked past the supermarket car park where the van lay abandoned.

Her blood turned cold as she looked over the car park, the Police officer was standing next to it and talking on his radio; surely they hadn't worked out that it was her van and not her neighbour's vehicle already? Why was the Police officer so interested in her? Was he trying to be helpful? If so, he was being decidedly unhelpful by poking his nose into her affairs.

With as much speed as she could manage, Emma ran down a side road as fast as she could, leaping over an abandoned bucket on the pavement as she hared down the side street, skidding at the corner and flying down another road. It was a cul-de-sac of brand new houses, but she ran to the back of the car park, climbed the wall and dropped into someone else's garden. There was silence, and Emma trotted out into the road, and started running along it, getting her breath back.

She had no idea where she was going and soon reached a main road, but knew she had to be going in the right direction as the Sun was roughly behind her as she left the train station and it still was behind her; she was definitely heading north which is where she wanted to go.

She needed to stay off the main roads; if the Police worked out that the van was hers and she was wanted, then they knew exactly what she was wearing and what she looked like, and in what town. She needed to stay out of sight.

Emma darted into an alleyway and then ran along it, coming up to a street full of terraced houses. She could hear a siren in the distance, surely they hadn't spotted her already? She had seen no-one.

She barely stopped, sprinting out into the road to cross to the pavement which she heard skidding, and glanced behind her, just in time to jump out of the way of a battered Vauxhall Nova bearing down on her. Emma landed on the ground and gripped her bag; she hadn't

actually been hit by the car just had to leap out of the way of it.

The man stopped the car and leapt out, fumbling with his phone. "Oh my God, oh my God," he cried. "Oh stay there, I'll get you an ambulance."

Emma was shaken out of her shock and barked at him. "No!" He recoiled and she stretched her foot. "I'm fine. I'm just in a hurry."

"I'll give you a lift," he offered. "I am off to Stoke."

"Stoke?" Emma cried and he nodded. "Then I would love a lift."

"Gareth," he muttered and held out his hand. "Been seeing my girlfriend."

"Oh," Emma replied and she hauled herself up. "Stoke would be great."

"Yeah, she dumped me today. Got me to come all this way to say that she didn't want to see me any more."

Emma pursed her lips together and muttered "sorry" to him but he sighed and opened his passenger door.

"Are you sure you don't want to get it checked out?"

"No, I am fine," Emma told him. "Just need to make tracks."

"Well I'm so sorry. I just didn't see you. I was thinking about Marie and I don't think I was concentrating."

Emma slid into the passenger seat and waited for Gareth to start the car, to drive out of Nantwich. It might not have been her preferred choice of transport – a rusting car with less than a 1,000cc engine under the bonnet, but she was moving and she was with an unsuspecting member of the public.

She could be in a far worse position.

Chapter VIII

“Andrei,” Dmitri called as they rifled through Tara Prutton's house. She had screamed when she saw them but a swift fist in the mouth from the oversized henchman had stopped her and Andrei came over to his boss.

“What?”

Dmitri passed a USB memory stick in the top of Oliver's drawer and told him “to load it up.” Tara watched them, her eyes bulging as Andrei roughly retrieved her laptop and plugged in the memory stick.

“Careful,” she muttered and Andrei glared at her, as Dmitri rifled through Oliver's drawers, spilling objects over the floor.

“It's just porn boss,” he told him and then looked at a subfolder. “And some plans.”

Dmitri strode over and glanced at the filenames. “He do job,” Dmitri said gruffly and turned to the sobbing woman in the corner of the room. Andrei threw the laptop onto the bed so that it bounced up and hit the wall and Tara barked at them.

“Careful. It cost me a lot of money,” she told them firmly and Andrei picked up the machine and threw it onto the floor as Tara's eyes flew open.

“Where are they?”

“I don't know,” Tara cried. “I just don't know. They went out and never came home. Next thing the Police are here.” Tara burst into tears and Dmitri looked at Andrei; her tears looked genuine but Dmitri wanted to know everything. “I want friends. Name of friends.”

Tara sniffed and wiped her eyes. “Oliver. Some girl he worked with. He liked her. He liked some girl at College ages ago. He knew some guys down the road, but that's it. He loved reading.”

“What girl?”

“Oh I don't know. He liked 'er. Some girl on reception or owt. I dunno.”

Dmitri and Andrei looked at each other. “And Jamie?”

Tara wiped her eyes. “He um just got out. There's Emma, Sean, Ian, Freddie but he ain't seen any of 'em for years. He's been at job centre and with a new girl. He was talkin' 'bout her?”

“What girl?”

““Oney or somethin'. I dunno. He tells me nothin'.”

“Vatt about Prison?” Andrei asked.

Tara sniffed. “Ah some guy called Ian. They shared a cell but that's it. They good mates. Like brothers.”

“Ian who?” Andrei asked and Tara shrugged.

“I don't know,” she spat. “He never told me.”

“Where's 'e live?”

Tara looked at the floor and stared into the carpet; she knew, Jamie had told her, and she had never heard of it before. “Tel-something.”

“Tel-Aviv?” Andrei suggested and Dmitri scowled at him.

Tara shook her head. “I dunno. It was a long time ago.”

Dmitri took a deep breath and held out his hands, cracking his fingers together. "Telham?"
"Telford?"

"That's it, Telfard," Tara mispronounced. "Is it far away, like?"

"Fuckin' miles," Dmitri complained and picked up his mobile phone, dialling a preset number. "Ya better not be fuckin' with us," Tara was warned.

"I'm not," she added. "But I ain't seen them. I told the little cunt to go straight."

Dmitri was ignoring her and jabbed at his phone. "Paul," Dmitri asked the moment the phone was answered. "Ya near the Midlands?"

"Stoke. We had a lead but it's shit," the young man replied.

"Get to Telford. Your lookin for guy called Ian. Old cell mate of Jamie."

"What's surname?"

Dmitri looked at Tara and shook his head. "No idea," he muttered.

"OK we'll be there in thirty," Paul announced and Dmitri put the phone away.

"We'll be in touch," Dmitri promised and Tara looked at him.

"Why, I know jack shit."

"Maybe," Dmitri said. "But your boys have a big debt with Mr Doszak and he wants it payin"

Tara yelled as they passed. "Ya can fuck off if ya think ..."

Andrei didn't let the middle-aged woman complete the sentence smacking her in the mouth for a second time and watching her collapse against the cupboards, blood trailing down her mouth and the furniture. "Fuckin' bitch," he moaned at Dmitri. "Needs a good slap."

Dmitri nodded towards him and started walking down the stairs towards the front door.

* * * * *

The angry woman looked up from the sofa as Inspector Richard Williamson wearily opened the door to his lounge and clapped eyes on his wife. "Sorry love."

"That's all I ever get," she said, her brown eyes boring into her husband and scowling at his presence. "Sorry I missed this, sorry I am late, sorry I couldn't be there."

"I know," the Inspector muttered and his wife got up from the chair, to her full height of 5'8". The main lights were turned off in the silent room and she was silhouetted by the wall lights, her pose aggressive and waved her fingers in front of her at him.

"It was our 15th anniversary," she told him. "I'll be back for five, promise, is what you said."

"Yes, I know," the Inspector replied meekly.

"And you even ignored my phone call," she shouted. "I don't ask for much." A tear left her eyes and rolled down her cheek and she wiped it away.

"I didn't hear it," he told her truthfully. "I never check my phone. I got caught up in a press conference I was told to attend, I came as soon as I could. We do have a major Police investigation on."

He offered his wife a card and some flowers, but she shook her head and pushed past him in the doorway. "Don't bother coming to bed," she said with a firmness. "You can sleep on the sofa."

The Inspector slowly shook his head and went to speak but his wife pushed a finger in

front of her and told him that she didn't want to hear it. He sank down in the chair and closed his eyes; it was gone 9pm but he was in the Police force and she knew he was working on a major investigation that was being reported in the National news.

He pulled out a couple of witness statements from his bag and opened them; if he was going to be left alone then he might as well do something useful.

* * * * *

“No Mum, it's fine. I won't be home for tea as I am at work but I will find something to eat.” Mikael scoffed at his partner; he was trying to locate three hardened criminals and then kill them and his partner was talking to his Mum about eating enough vegetables. Frankly, it was embarrassing.

“No Mum, I've got enough clean underpants.” Mikael snatched the phone from Paul and threw it onto the back seat.

“We watch not we talk on the phone,” he snapped at his protégé in his Scandinavian accent. “We watch.”

The young Paul grunted. “She rings and she mithers,” he moaned. “And she always wants to know where I am.”

Mikael gave a snort and cocked his head towards the house they were watching. They saw a young guy in his mid-twenties walk up the street in a black tracksuit and then walk up the small steps to the property. He unlocked his front door, and Mikael turned to Paul. “That's him.”

Mikael picked up a black hold-all from the back seat of their car and got out of the vehicle, taking a look around the street to make sure he was not being watched. “Now remember. Just do as I say. Nothing more,” he warned his young charge and they knocked stoutly on the front door.

Mikael and Paul were smart; they were both wearing immaculate black trench-coats and smart trousers but Ian barely saw their clothing as the moment he opened the door he was propelled onto his back by the fist of the Danish henchman.

“Where's Jamie?” Paul asked.

“Jamie who?” Ian shouted nasally, his hand clamped to his nose and feeling a rush of blood fall through his fingers. “And you can't come in here.”

“We fucking can,” Paul said with a swagger and closed the door behind him. “I ask again. I ask one more time. And then I play. Where's Jamie?”

“Jamie. He not fuckin' here.”

“We know that; we already searched it, you fuckin' cunt,” Paul spat and Mikael gave him an annoyed glance before dragging Ian down the hallway to a dining room chair and threw him on it.

Paul entered the room carrying the holdall and Mikael extracted a pair of handcuffs. Ian got up to make a bolt for it but Mikael's fist in his Solar Plexus brought him under control and the two henchmen roughly restrained him to his chair. “Where is he?” Mikael asked and Ian shook his head, blood pouring onto his shirt.

Paul smiled and extracted a car battery from the bag with two long probes. Ian's eyes widened and Mikael roughly pulled down the black tracksuit bottoms he was wearing and sneered. “Dirty fuckin' chav. They never wear any fucking underwear,” Paul muttered.

Ian sniffed and cried out, spitting blood as he panicked. “What ya doing? Ya crazy. No. I don't know anything. He isn't here and what ya doing?”

Paul ignored the desperate man and attached the black probe to the underside of Ian's flaccid penis who cried out in pain as the clip pinched his skin. "It hurts. Not there, please not there. He was here. He left yesterday. He wanted a passport but I couldn't get him one so he's gone."

"Where?" Mikael asked and nodded towards Paul who gleefully held out the red probe. "Where?"

"Away," Ian cried.

Mikael crossed his arms and looked into the blood-covered face of Ian who sniffed and then spluttered. "Last chance, where?"

Ian blubbed and shook his head and Mikael nodded towards Paul who pushed the metal probe into the moist tip of Ian's cock.

Ian howled in excruciating agony, his legs flailing about as he desperately tried to kick Paul away but the young henchmen put his body weight on top of Ian's knees and Mikael stopped the chair from moving backwards. Ian let out another blood-curdling scream as Paul pressed the probe in again and the tortured body writhed, still desperate to escape the pain. Mikael ignored the sobbing and asked again as Paul withdrew the red probe. "Where?"

"Buenos Aires," came the response and Mikael raised his eyebrows at the crying man. "He go to London to get a moody passport."

"Who?"

"Dave, Dave Richards."

Mikael nodded and patted him on the head. "See, it not difficult." He looked at Paul who disconnected the black probe and packed it away in the bag. Mikael unclipped the restraints and waited for Ian to go to attack him but Ian wanted to put as much distance between himself and his torturers as he could and scampered to the other side of the room, his tracksuit bottoms being pushed against his tortured anatomy

"You going to clean them. Ja?" Mikael asked and Paul nodded.

"Course, don't want anyone to get an infection," came the response and Mikael smiled as they walked out of the house and passed a girl walking up the steps.

"You ain't getting fucked," Paul jeered at her and she scowled at him as he walked past.

"Ya what?" She cried and then ran inside the house as Paul walked towards the car.

"You know Dave Richards?"

"I 'eard of 'im," came the terse response. "But I know a man who know everyone in London." Mikael boasted. "He will know him and where we find him."

* * * * *

"Thank you," Emma said, eating her fried breakfast and Gareth smiled at her. Her journey with him since he had picked her up in Nantwich could not have gone better and they talked on the road to Stoke.

Emma had told him she was going on a round-the-country trip seeing new towns which he seemed genuinely interested in and she had to keep making stuff up. She knew her accent could betray her and she spoke about visiting Chester, Bolton, Lancaster, the Lakes before heading down South. She had not been to many of these places but described them as "nice" or "soulless" and Gareth seemed placated by her flimsy descriptions.

Once they got to the Staffordshire city of Stoke, Emma had no idea where she wanted to go and asked to be dumped at a hotel for the night, but Gareth offered her dinner and a

bed at his house. Emma hesitated, but rationalised if she they had found her van they might want to watch local train stations and Stoke wasn't as far away from Nantwich as she wanted it to be.

A night with Gareth and then she could try and blend in with the rush hour traffic to Birmingham and she had accepted his kind invitation; it did no good to be checking into a hotel where the Police expected her to be anyway.

Gareth cooked a lovely meal, steak and roast potatoes and Emma had taken a quick shower before watching a suitably violent film with him. Gareth was still emotional about Marie and Emma was happy for him to talk about her and their love than about her. She was a good liar, but every lie was a risk and it was easier if she didn't have to tell untruths.

She slept with one eye open in his spare room, there was something about him that was a little suspicious but she was undisturbed and woke up refreshed the following morning.

Gareth was cooking a fried breakfast for them both and she realised that she had to eat it quickly if she wanted to hit the rush hour traffic. Gareth smiled at her and passed her the unhealthy food and sat down opposite her in his small kitchen to eat a smaller breakfast.

Emma gulped down the food and had finished before Gareth had barely started. "Can I give you anything for your trouble?"

Gareth looked up and withdrew a long-handled carving knife from the chair next to him and held it out in front of Emma, his hands shaking. "Yes. You can give me the statue and what's in that bag."

"Oh fuck," Emma cried and held her hands out. There was something in Gareth's eyes that terrified her. "You knew."

Gareth gave a nervous laugh. "Of course I knew. I guessed but asked if you walked down Hadrian's Wall in Lancaster and you said ya had."

"Did I?" Emma exclaimed and screwed up her face. "So?"

"Yeah well Hadrian never built his wall there," Gareth told her, quite unnecessarily and waved the vicious weapon out in front of him. "So I knew ya lying to I checked the 'net on my phone last night. Ya Emma Wallis. And with the statue I can woo Marie back."

Emma groaned. "Ya kidding me, right?"

Gareth shook his head and then nodded towards the bag. "Slide it over."

Emma took a deep breath and sighed, picking up the holdall and swinging it from side to side to give it momentum. "This bag?"

"Of course," Gareth muttered and Emma threw it at his chest with some force, knocking the knife from his hand. In a shot, Emma had pushed him off his chair and up against the wall. She stared at him through her furious eyes and smacked him in the chest, watching as her double-crossing saviour frantically tried to breathe.

Emma looked at the bag and glanced at him with a snarl. "I can still get the reward," Gareth muttered and Emma punched him in the mouth, watching as he fell to the floor and hit his head on the wall, knocking himself out instantly.

"Fuck," Emma cried and grabbed her bag, running towards the door. She had not intended to hurt him at all, she just wanted to be left alone to leave Stoke and make her way to Buenos Aires. Why did people keep interfering with her escape plan? With a snarl, she turned back and saw him, grunting to herself and then left the house, closing the door behind her.

If she was lucky she had an hour or two, if not she had minutes. Sprinting down the

unknown road, she just wanted to find a train station or a bus. She just wanted to get out of Stoke before Gareth came to his senses and called the Police.

Chapter IX

Oliver took his new mobile phone out of its packaging and turned the basic device on, waiting for the manufacturer's logo to disappear. He glanced around his almost desolate surroundings, he could see the train station in the distance along with the hotel where he had stayed the night and the main road that passed it and waited for the phone to boot up.

He glanced at his piece of paper and typed the Merseyside number into his phone, waiting for it to ring. "Hi," he said with a sniff when a cheerful woman answered. "I'd like to talk to Inspector Richard Williamson."

"May I ask what it is about. We have a media team, and we have a ..."

"I am Oliver Prutton," he said, almost hyperventilating. "He is leading an investigation to try and find me. I want to talk to him."

"Oh," she muttered. "I'll see what I can do."

Oliver rocked back and forth on his bench, watching the horizon. He had paid cash for his phone and done all his research at an Internet Cafe; he was untraceable he thought, but still knew he might need to make a quick escape.

A police car turned off the main road and Oliver tensed only for it to pull up at the tiny station and stop. "Hello?" A male voice answered and Oliver was shaken to the present.

"Hi," he said. "Inspector Richard Williamson."

"Yes, I believe you have some information about Oliver Prutton."

Oliver sighed. "Yes, it is Oliver Prutton. You are chasing me."

The Inspector snorted. "In the interests of fairness I should tell you that this call is being recorded and will be used as evidence against you."

Oliver's heart was beating furiously and he felt butterflies in his stomach. "OK. Well if I give myself up, hand everything I have in, do I get to go free?"

The Inspector gave a whistle. "So how do I know this is for real?"

Oliver sniffed. "Cos you would have searched my drawer in the Double Glazing," he told him. "And on top was a half eaten pack of Rolos and a pack of cereal bars."

Oliver heard some papers being ruffled and then the Inspector spoke again. "This isn't like in the movies," he told him. "You don't get to ring up and barter. You committed robbery; you aren't going to walk away with a caution."

Oliver's face dropped and he groaned. "But I didn't want to. I was forced into it," he wailed. "I told them no."

"But you went and did it, right?"

"Yeah, but it was Jamie and his bloody ex."

"Emma Wallis?"

"That's her, I didn't want to but they forced me, said it was easy."

"You give yourself up and we can have a nice chat down here and tell me all about it," the Inspector soothed and Oliver grunted.

"No. I want one of those immunity thingies. I give you everything I took from my share. I got a statue and a third of the money. I ain't got much of the jewellery, Emma took that, but I don't want to go to jail."

The Inspector hummed. "What money?"

"What you mean, what money? That's what you want, right? We had away eight hundred grand. I got over a quarter of a million between my feet in a bag here. It weighs a load, now do we have a deal?" The Inspector didn't answer and Oliver asked again impatiently. "I want to know, if I give you everything, do I get to go free? And I got lots of info on Doszak, like about him shooting someone, and where his girls come in for his brothel. I want protection and change of identity as well."

"No kid, no can do. But it will look favourably when it comes to court if you have given yourself up. We will say you helped and cooperated admirably and assisted us," the Inspector said automatically, his mind whirring.

Oliver snorted, shouted "bollocks" down the phone and threw his new Pay-as-you-go mobile into the grass. He had to get out of Edinburgh and ran down the road to catch the train just pulling into the small station.

There was only person he knew in Scotland, and she was studying to be a vet in Aberdeen. He wondered what the lovely Victoria Hambleton would make of him arriving with a quarter a million in used notes, a valuable statue in his backpack and a mountain-load of problems; he was about to find out?

* * * * *

"Davey," shouted the blue-eyed young man. "How ya keeping."

"Alright, Jamie. I see ya been pulling old statues now. Ya were post offices not art."

Jamie smiled and jumped down from the wall in the tiny back garden Dave Richards lived in. "I can do owt, me."

"Ya can get caught."

"I ain't been caught. But I need a passport."

The teenager squirmed. "Well that could be."

"Fucking piece of cake you said in the nick. Come on, I know you got contacts, and I got the cash to pay ya."

Dave took a deep breath. "I might be able to sort sommat awt," he said with a jaunty tone. "But I need two days."

"How much?"

"Five grand?"

"Five grand," Jamie cried out and then lowered his voice. "Five grand for a passport?"

"Don't ya want it to get ya out of this shithole. If ya want it ta fool the plod ya need to stump up cash."

Jamie threw a bundle of cash at his old cell-mate and watched as Dave lit his cigarette and took a puff of it. "Ma kicked off when I light up in da 'ouse," he said, by way of an explanation and Jamie looked around.

"Can I kip on ya sofa."

"Ya better kip in me room," Dave replied. "Ma will turn ya in if she sees ya."

Jamie snorted but crept up to the small bedroom Dave called his own and then settled down on the floor, removing a strangely stained sock with tips of his fingers. Dave was happy to "rent" Jamie his floor for the bargain price of £200 a night and for this he was given breakfast, dinner and free rein of the house while Dave's Mum was out working.

Dave had helpfully provided Jamie with a half-a-dozen grooming products to help him change his appearance so he had very short blonde hair, a small goatee beard and thinner eyebrows for his passport photo which got the anxious robber asking questions as to when the magical booklet would arrive.

“Later,” Dave said confidently the following morning when Jamie asked about the passport for the fourth time. “I pick up later.” Jamie felt his bag, it had remained at the top of Dave's wardrobe since he had arrived and he went up to check on it, when he heard shouting from downstairs.

He glanced out of the window in Dave's bedroom and saw a heavy-set man on the doorstep. It was either the Police or Jaroslav and it meant he either lost his liberty, or lost his life. Jamie grabbed the bag and darted into the bathroom, opening the window wide, and locking the bathroom door as quietly as he could.

He glanced out, the coast was clear and he dropped down onto the roof of the extension and then into the small garden.

The two heavies, obviously sent from Jaroslav, saw him through the lounge window immediately and Jamie jumped over the gate and into the alleyway behind, sprinting down it and slipping the backpack over his shoulders. He felt his stomach lurch, he knew he was seconds away from a wrong move and being in deep trouble, and had no idea where he was going.

The alleyway gave way to a small road and he darted between two houses, looking behind him. The younger of the two heavies was chasing him and Jamie just sprinted, knocking over an old lady that the man jumped over.

Two cars had to swerve as Jamie emerged into the road of the High Street and then ran down it. The henchman seemed oblivious to the sounds of the horns, irritated at the two men who ran towards the centre of the inner city shopping street.

Jamie jumped over a car and tried to disappear down the back streets but he turned to see the tall man still thirty yards behind him. Jamie could feel his lungs burning, he wasn't used to physical exercise on this scale but knew he could not stop; he would die if he did.

His legs felt like ton weights but Jamie sprinted back up to the main street, and saw his salvation – an Underground station that was busy and ran across the road, nearly being hit by a bus as he did, and jumped over the unmanned ticket barrier.

Jamie nearly fell down the escalators, pushing people out of his way to cries of annoyance as he tried to get onto the platform. He didn't care what train he caught as long as he caught one. With as much effort as he could muster, he sprinted onto the Southbound platform and gave a relieved sigh as he saw a train approach.

Jamie jogged down to the other end of the platform to where a small crowd were sat on the bench; he knew Jaroslav's friend would be arriving shortly and didn't want him to know what train he was on. Instead, he stood behind the group as they embarked and watched as the doors closed and the train started to move. The tired Paul got onto the platform, looked in the nearest carriages and Jamie resisted the urge to wave; it would do him no harm at all for the man to not know what train he was on.

Jamie sat back panting, his eyes closed when the train entered the tunnel; he had escaped.

Jamie was still panting and out of breath when he disembarked four stops later; he had no passport, nowhere to stay and if Jaroslav had traced him to the Capital then the Police wouldn't be that far behind. He sat down in the park opposite the train station and thought, he still had the statue and the money. Feeling hungry, he opened his bag to get a twenty

pound note to get dinner, and pulled out the previous evening's edition of the Evening Standard, helpfully cut up into banknote-shaped pieces of paper.

"Fucking cunt," Jamie exclaimed that caused a female jogger to stare at him as she ran passed. "I'll fuckin' kill him," Jamie promised no-one and started striding towards the station once again. Ian would be a dead man.

* * * * *

Emma smiled as she sat back in the small hotel room; the Midlands was quiet and she had not put as much distance as she had wanted between herself and Staffordshire but she had done so quietly, sneaking aboard a couple of local trains and then stealing some hiking gear from an outdoor warehouse. She longed to catch a long-distance train but the experience with Gareth had shaken her, and she wanted to quietly blend in and make her way down the country.

She still had a rather sizeable problem in that she had no passport and no escape but it would do her no harm at all to keep moving but to not panic. With her matching navy hat, fleece and walking trousers, along with her walking boots she fitted in perfectly when she came to stay at a small hikers' hotel not far from the village train station. She had thought about walking the two hundred or so miles to the coast until people were no longer looking for them but the two miles from the station up the hilly road soon changed her mind. She would try and hitch a lift or steal a car to get her as far South as she could.

Emma checked into the hotel, paying in cash and went up to her room, watching the press conference where her photo was shown; they were no longer the main news item, but they were still on the news. She looked in the mirror; she didn't look much like the picture with her hat on as it hid most of her flowing hair. Her lips were not as puffed up and her eyes were a lot more tired and weary from the photograph taken over two years ago that was being displayed on the news networks.

Emma's stomach rumbled and she set her loot underneath the table in the room, and went downstairs to the dining room; it was crowded but her little table was in the bay window and asked the busy waitress for a simple burger and chips. She got some looks from the diners as she squeezed past them and felt self-conscious; had they recognised her from the television? Her picture was in the newspapers and many of the residents were reading them and she had just had her mugshot on television.

Emma picked up a newspaper from the window sill and started reading it. She was annoyed when the report had incorrectly guessed her age (she was not that old) and described her as a "known criminal"; she had not been convicted of a crime in her adult life. She sat and thought for a minute, keeping the paper up high so that she could not be seen.

There was no way she would ever see that story retracted and if she was ever in court, the assertion that she was a known criminal would be in the back of the minds of the jury. She would be guilty before she had had a trial and that was unfair. She might technically be guilty but she should be tried in a court of a law, not in the court of the Daily Mail.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the waitress bringing her some food and she put her paper down, thanking her and selecting the tomato ketchup to squeeze over her chips.

"It's shocking, isn't it?" The waitress said as the newspaper fell open. "Priceless statues they said on the radio. Reckoned some big shot was lined up to buy them." Emma was speechless for a moment; why did the waitress mention it? "Yeah," Emma muttered and glanced around the room, half-expecting two dozen faces to be looking at her and screaming "thief" at her. She was scared and the gentleman next to her kept looking over at her.

Her fears were allayed somewhat when the gentleman, sitting on his own, lent across from an adjacent table. "Alan," he said with a giggle. "I haven't seen you all week, it's been lovely up in the forest. Have you come for the birds or the walks?"

Emma gave a nervous smile and forced a titter. "I've been travelling," she said, taking a mouthful of the burger. "Might have a look tomorrow. And the walks."

"Oh well, then I can show you 'round," he replied enthusiastically and Emma looked at his mud splattered trousers, and faded jumper; he looked like a geography teacher with his unkempt black hair and tatty glasses. "I know a lovely spot right in the centre near the river and ..."

"Ahh well, I've got plans. I'm meeting up with someone." Alan's face flickered and he glanced at her hat, holding up her long brown hair and extended down over her ears to hide most of facial features. "Isn't it a bit warm inside for your hat?"

Emma shook her head. "No," she said and took a big bite of her burger. "I like my hat on."

Alan sniffed and stretched his hands out in front of him. "So where are you off to? You said you were travelling."

Emma didn't feel comfortable around him and she shrugged. "Inverness," she told him. "It's a race," she lied and Alan's eyes widened.

"Where from? You sound like you are from up north."

"Bristol." Emma put her cutlery on her empty plate; Alan was starting to worry her as he was asking awkward questions and she nodded towards him. "I'll see ya around."

Alan picked up his phone and pressed a button, holding it out in front of him. "Hey, if you do want to go to the forest tomorrow, I'll happily take ya." Emma looked back and nodded, the unwanted eyes of the dining room on the single girl and she slipped out of the door and ran up to her room.

"Stupid, fucking, twat," she muttered and entered her room, sitting down on the bed and slamming the door. She had to think about things; had she been recognised? Alan had certainly eyed her and had been reading a newspaper but then so had everyone. Emma looked again in the mirror; she looked nothing like her photo but took a deep breath. Her liberty for ten years was at stake and she couldn't be too careful.

Emma glanced out of her window and onto the car park thinking; a couple were getting into a taxi but other than that it was empty. If she had been spotted then the Police would surely be closing in, and they weren't. The car park was full of Volvo estates and 4x4 monstrosities, not blue flashing lights. Furthermore, it wasn't a big story in the Midlands; sure she was in the papers but they were only worth seventy five seconds on the national news instead of the six minutes on the regional news. In short, she wasn't newsworthy in the Midlands.

She ran through the conversation in her mind; she had barely spoken to the guy and he certainly didn't seem overawed at her, he was just interested in taking her to the woods and playing on his phone. He was harmless, surely? Emma took a deep breath and tapped her chin with her fingers; she was overreacting but something still didn't feel right.

She hadn't survived years without being charged with anything without being aware and smart; she needed to listen to her gut instinct and something felt wrong. Emma relayed the conversation for a third time in her head and then swore under her breath; it was the phone, Alan had held it higher than he should have done. He must have been taking a picture, of her.

Emma looked under the table and saw movement in the car park; three dark blue cars had swung into the car park and eight men were piling out of them. "Fuck," she screamed and

grabbed her bag, striding towards the door, stopping to open the visitors guide at the taxis page and leaving it on the table. If the Police were closing in, then if she could evade them it would help if she could leave a false trail.

The corridor was empty but she could hear voices coming from the main stairwell and ran to the fire escape at the other end of the poorly illuminated hall. She heard voices from the bottom of those stairs and looked up, quietly walking up them until she got to the second floor.

The second floor was deserted but unless she wanted to go onto the roof, she was trapped. She looked at the broom cupboard; it was locked but noticed that the roof hatch was missing a padlock. Without missing a beat, Emma swung her backpack on her back and climbed up the vertical ladder before closing the hatch behind her. She could see the unmarked Police cars in the car park and felt a breeze blow her backwards against a chimney.

It was not the first roof Emma had been on, but she was not used to being so high up and felt strangely exposed; not least because if anyone at the Police car looked up she would be seen. Emma scrambled around the back of the chimney stack, the wind carrying no sound from the ground up to her, and she looked around for another exit, or way down to the ground. If she walked back through the hotel she would now be recognised and the Police would be alerted.

Instead she stayed on the roof and looked around, until she saw a ladder poking up on the other side of the roof. She peered around the chimney stack and saw nobody in the car park and then inched her way out from behind the chimneys along the flat roof. Her heart was pumping furiously and her face was going numb with the strong winds blowing against her.

Emma could not see the car park as she slithered her way along the roof too afraid to look up in case the wind blew her off or she was seen. She got to the end of the ledge, her hands numb and her ankles tired and sore. She glanced over the edge of the building and saw that the small garden was deserted. She waited for a moment and then spun around, swinging her legs over the side of the building and grabbing hold of the ladder.

Adrenaline coursed through her veins and she breathed a sigh as she took her first step down, and then the second. The ladder creaked, it was old, but Emma held on and manoeuvred herself down it as quickly as she could, panting furiously. If she was seen traversing the side of the building then she knew she would be chased and arrested but jumped down onto the gravel and ran to the cover of the bushes on the side of the garden.

There was silence and she climbed her way over the shrubbery and slowly made her way out of the garden towards the edge of the car park, still hidden in the greenery. There was some activity by the Police cars and a harassed looking officer came out.

"The station," he cried. "She took a taxi to the station. We've just had the taxi company confirm it. I've got BTP going down there." She crouched down lower as six of the officers jumped into the two cars and skid around in the gravel before shooting out of the car park but at least two Police officers and one car remained behind.

Emma took a deep breath; she would need to get out of the area as it wouldn't take them long to realise she hadn't taken a taxi and glanced at the hotel. The Police car door was open and she peered through the twilight at it.

With a deep breath she looked back at the hotel, and realising that there was no-one watching the car, walked out, slipped into the vehicle and started it with the keys abandoned in the ignition.

Her hands shook as she slid the car into gear and left the car park. She had just crawled

along a twenty-five foot high roof to avoid going in a Police car and was now speeding out of the Midlands in one. The irony was not lost on her, but if she had to guess, it wouldn't be long before they noticed the Police car was missing and she wondered if it had tracking on it. She had fifteen minutes at a push, but it was fifteen minutes she almost didn't have.

* * * * *

The Inspector frantically dialled a number and barked down the 'phone. "There was a call to this number a few moments ago. I want it traced as a matter of urgency." He waited until he got a response and then thanked the secretary on the end of the line. "Oh and I want a copy sent to me and to DI Hargreaves."

"What is it, sir?"

"That was Oliver Prutton on the 'phone," he announced to his junior colleague. "He wanted to do a deal. We get the money and the statue back and he walks. How much money was reported stolen?"

The officer picked up the file and looked through it. "None, sir. Just the three statues and a necklace, sir."

"That's what I thought," he said staring out of the window and looking down on the car park below. "Now Oliver reckons he's got over a quarter of a million pounds in used notes in a bag at the moment. And that is a third of it. And he also reckons that he knows about Doszak's girls and him shooting someone, and wants protection."

Terry Rowlands whistled. "That's a lot of money to go missing and for it not to be reported."

"I know that," he replied with a rubbing of his chin. "What I want to know is why?"

"Well he is lying. Trying to get himself a deal. Or they did nick the cash and Doszak got them through dodgy means."

Richard Williamson sighed. "You would do well not to leap to conclusions," he told him. "But for the time being the theft of any banknotes has not been reported so I shall concentrate on the statues and the jewellery that has."

"But ..."

"But nothing, officer. I'll speak to our friends next door about Mr Doszak. In the meantime we still haven't found anything about the statues."

The telephone buzzed and the Inspector answered gruffly. "We have got a trace on that 'phone call, sir. It was made from Edinburgh. West Edinburgh."

"Edinburgh, any more specific?"

There was a grunt, and then he asked for a more detailed location, getting a street name but with a warning that it was "within four hundred metres of that location."

The Inspector scribbled it down and thought back to the phone call. "I heard a train," he said. "I heard a train or a main road. Get a map of Edinburgh up."

The officer loaded up the Internet and brought the street plan of the capital city, typing in the street name and looking. "Four hundred metres," the Inspector said. "From there. And there is a train line, and two main roads."

"So he could be anywhere."

"No, get the Scots on alert for him. He is near the airport there, so I bet he will try and board a plane."

There was a knock on the door and a WPC looked towards the Inspector. "The Press

Conference, sir. They are ready for you.”

The Inspector looked at his deputy, “I want the Scots on red alert and looking for the bugger. I want officers at the train station and airport.”

The Inspector took his seat the conference and looked at the barrage of microphones and cameras in front of him. “Good afternoon, gentlemen. Sorry ladies, and gentlemen,” he corrected glancing at a local reporter from the front of the crowd of reporters.

Inspector Richard Williamson delivered a confident assessment of the investigation – that they had a number of leads and had three people they wanted to speak to; the journalists were clearly impressed by his calm demeanour and were respectful with their questions.

“You say that you want to talk to those three, how close are to finding them?”

Richard Williamson gave a raffish smile. “We know Oliver Prutton is in Scotland,” he replied. “And we are closing in on him. If he is listening, or watching, then he needs to give himself up.”

“And the other two?”

The Inspector's smile disappeared. “We will catch them,” he replied tersely. “We are closing in on them,” he said with more confidence than he felt. “They are running but we are getting closer and we will catch them. They can't run forever.”

Chapter X

Dmitri looked at the hotel and then at his companion. "If she was here then she not moving fast," he said in his accent and then spying a Police officer in the corner of the car park suggested that they leave in Russian.

Jaroslav's Police contacts had told him that she had been spied in the particular hotel and Dmitri had hotfotted it down the motorway at unreal speeds to be stopped at a Police cordon at the remote hotel. He was not allowed to go any further unless he was a guest and didn't want to draw attention to himself, his partner and the car.

Andrei ran his hands through his hair and nodded, walking to their Range Rover. He would have quite liked to have a look through the room but it was sealed off for Forensic examination and the photograph that some guy had taken was most definitely not available.

He pulled out a map of the local area and then looked at Andrei. "She left. We know that. She not there, she stole car. Where would she go?"

"Motorway?" Andrei suggested and Dmitri shook his head.

"No. She not going anywhere fast. She had cars and she not moving quickly. She's still local," he said and cleared his throat. "She in next town or two."

"Worcester? Stourport? Droitwich?"

Dmitri cleared his throat again; the cough lozenges were not doing him any good and sucked in air through his teeth. "She'll steer clear of camera," he muttered and licked his lips. "Worcester then Evesham. She want go South but do so slowly."

Andrei hummed, glancing at the map. "She not been found yet. She get shock. Maybe she drive cross Wales."

Dmitri snorted. "We go Worcester," he said firmly and started his car. He had no idea where Emma was and she had had two hours to lose them, more than enough time to put 150 miles between herself and the hotel but he was sure she was within five; he just couldn't explain exactly why.

Andrei answered the phone that rang and he passed it to Dmitri. "It's the boss, sir."

Dmitri picked up the phone and cleared his throat. "Scotland," Jaroslav barked. "Oliver is up there."

Dmitri looked at Andrei and licked his lips. "She's gone from here, no leads, boss."

"Get your fucking arse to Edinburgh," Jaroslav ordered.

"Yes boss," Dmitri replied and looked at Andrei. "We go to Edinburgh; Oliver, he there."

* * * * *

Emma sat down in the sparsely decorated surroundings and felt the firm seat-cum-mattress. It was bare and basic but what did she expect given where she was? She sat down and stopped to think about the previous hour, it seemed so unreal.

Emma had taken the car out of the hotel and into the town. She had found the blue lights and siren meant she could speed past the traffic at incredible speeds, and even had a marked Police car move out of her way as she shot out of the town and towards the county town of Worcester.

She had no idea what she was going to do in Worcester; there was a train station possibly and she wanted to get out of the car as soon as possible. It did no good to be in a vehicle

that the Police would know the make, model, colour, registration plate and possibly be able to track the location of. She at least turned the sirens and blue flashing lights off to not draw attention to herself, but the speedometer barely dropped below 95mph and the car strained itself as it ate up the miles.

Worcester was much smaller than she imagined, and after she had queued up to traverse the only bridge across the river she abandoned the vehicle at the train station before fleeing into the town.

She reasoned that if the Police found their car at Worcester station then they would focus their attentions on a possible rail journey and not a future trip by car. It was getting to evening and there would be a finite number of trains out of the small town; she could end up being trapped if they knew she was on a train.

She headed back towards the river, she wondered about seeing if she could get a taxi ride to the South Coast but then thought it would be risky. By the following morning her escape from a local hotel would be all over the papers and it was nearly 7pm already.

She was crossing the road absent mindedly when she heard a siren and groaned. The Police car was coming straight for her and she dived out of the way, as the car screeched to a halt. For the second time in two days, she had been run over but this time by a Policeman!

She closed her eyes, waiting for the handcuffs to be locked onto her backs when a junior officer scrambled out of the car. "You fuckin' tit, you've run 'er over."

"Well I didn't see her there," came the response from the young man. "There is a zebra crossing over there. I didn't expect her to be in the road."

"You've always got to expect the unexpected," he was patronisingly told.

Emma slowly got to her feet, and pulled her hat down; they hadn't recognised her immediately and the two officers came running over. "I'll call an ambulance."

"No," Emma cried. "No I am a fine," she added in a more relaxed voice. She pointed her toes and stretched her ankle; it might be bruised where she landed on it, but the pain was nothing compared to ten years in prison.

"Listen love, we better get you checked out."

Emma shook her head. "No, you didn't hit me, honestly thank you but I am fine."

The officer stared into her eyes, and Emma became aware of a small crowd either side of the street. "OK well I need to give you a form in case you wish to make a complaint."

"I don't," Emma said quickly and then chastised herself. Her anxiousness was drawing attention and suspicion to herself. "I mean, he looks a good lad. And I was daydreaming as I was crossing the road," she added and the officer pulled out a notebook from his piece of paper.

"I need your name and address."

Emma hesitated. "Amy," she cried. "Amy Wallace."

"And your address?"

"I'm not local, I'm here on a trip."

"Oh," the officer said, and glanced at his companion.

"It's 18 Amsterdam Place, Stoke," she said, making up an address as quickly as she could. "But I am fine, look." She wiggled her ankle and then stretched her leg. "Thank you, but I need to be off."

"We can give you a lift," the officer offered but Emma shook her head.

"I'm fine." She got to the edge of the road and the officer called out.

"Wait!" Emma took a deep breath and turned around in trepidation, only to see the officer hand her a piece of paper. "Just in case."

"OK," she muttered taking it and disappeared from the street as quickly as she could. She walked down the back streets and appeared in a cul-de-sac and swore; there was just the canal at the end and she looked around for a bridge.

A woman was navigating a small boat and Emma stopped to watch; could she take a boat down the river: they weren't fast but she would be moving. Her musings were interrupted when the woman threw her a rope. "Hold that love."

Emma grabbed hold of it immediately and pulled the boat in, slipping on some wet stones that caused a flash of pain through her ankles. She swore and the woman looked up. "I'm fine," Emma said pre-empting the question. "I got knocked over earlier; ankle is still a bit sore."

The woman peered at Emma. "You look like you need a cuppa." Emma went to speak and she cocked her head. "You're not local, are you?"

"Cheshire," she replied and was a little annoyed that her roots that she had always tried to hide had obviously slipped when she swore in her regional accent.

"Long way from home," the woman said and jumped onto the shore to tie the boat up. "I am just stopping for a breather then head upstream for a couple of hours." Emma hesitated the woman gave a wry grin. "Come on, have a cup of tea."

She held out her hand to Emma and introduced herself as Margaret. Emma nearly slipped on the boat, and wasn't sure where she should be going but getting out of sight until darkness fell mightn't be a bad idea she reasoned. "Amy," she lied, using the same false name gave the police officers and grabbed hold of the boat railings to stop herself from sliding about.

Margaret held open the hatch door, and Emma stepped down to a small seating area opposite a kitchen. Margaret put a kettle on a stove and turned to face her, watching as Emma slipped off her backpack and put it on the seat next to her.

Emma glanced at the seat to see a pair of discarded underwear. "Sorry," the red-headed middle-aged woman replied, and threw them into her bedroom. "I got changed in this room." Emma shrugged.

"It's nice," she muttered and silently liked the drawn curtains that prevented anyone from seeing where she was. "It's sort of, compact."

Margaret smiled, her waterproof trousers and red T-Shirt marked from her day on the canal. "Where are you off to?"

"Back up the canal. Towards Birmingham way. It's a long way, but I like to get away from it. It's only a few hundred quid to hire for the week and is pretty good getaway from it all." Emma nodded and the woman pointed down the boat. "I'll show you. Have you ever considered travelling on the boat?"

Emma grunted. "No," she admitted and the woman poured the water into the tea pot and then showed her the small bathroom and then a big double bed in its own room.

As Emma turned to leave, Margaret punched her in the face, and then threw her onto the bed, grabbing hold of her arms and elbowing her. Emma squealed, her hands trying to force the woman off of her, but Margaret was determined and pulled Emma's hands up to the headboard. "Stop. Fighting. Me," Margaret called.

There was a click but Margaret swore; Emma had wriggled her wrist out of the grip of the boater and was now pushing her off of her. "Get in," she squealed but Emma was sliding free, and using a volley of punches, had wriggled away from her and pounced on the woman.

With a click, Margaret became locked into the handcuffs that were around the bed and she looked on helplessly. "Well I met a couple of kinky men on the waterways," she said as Emma glanced at the hapless woman. "And I know you are Emma Wallis. I recognised you immediately."

Emma swore; she had been spotted by two members of the public in one day, after she had bought clothes to blend in. "How?"

"You look like your photo, love," Margaret replied. "Now get me out of here."

"Fuck off," Emma snapped and Margaret screamed at the top of her voice. Emma picked up the nearest item of clothing to hand and stuffed it into the open mouth of her victim. "Now, shut up or I will kill you. If you get me arrested I do ten years," she said bluntly.

Margaret gave a muffled cry and Emma left the room, and returned with some rope, tying the woman to the bed securely.

"I am just going to take this boat for a little trip," Emma told her. "Just to get me out of Worcester. But you know why," she muttered and left the immobile woman on the bed before sitting down to think about things as the kettle boiled: she wanted a cup of tea and to think before she did anything.

* * * * *

Jamie crept up the alleyway and looked in through the window. Dave was alone, and there was no sinister looking vehicle in the street. He stealthily followed the garden path and tried the back door but it locked. He glanced up and looked around the house; the bathroom window didn't look completely locked from when he went out of it, and Jamie hauled himself onto the extension roof.

Reaching inside the fanlight that was prised open, Jamie could open the big escape window and dropped quietly onto the bathroom floor below. He glanced at the splintered door and smiled as he knew his old double-crossing cell mate would have to explain that to his family.

Dave was playing on the games console when he looked up and saw Jamie standing at the bottom of the stairs. "Oh shit," he cried and Jamie held out his hand. "One, a passport. Two, my money. Three, my statue. And four, your fucking balls. I'll take three of those four now please," he said with a debonair effortlessness.

Dave snorted and Jamie hauled him up by his collar against the wall and punched him in the mouth. "Fuck off," Dave cried but Jamie hit him again and again.

"I've not come all this way to have you thieving it off me," he yelled and, even though his hands were getting sore, kept hitting him. "Now."

Dave slumped against the wall and Jamie watched as he scabbled to one side and pulled out a small bag from behind the fire, full of the stolen money and a statue. Jamie emptied the newspaper onto the floor from his holdall and wordlessly picked up the contraband and transferred it to his bag before zipping it up.

"And the passport?"

Dave shrugged, his hands clamped to his abused face. "There isn't one."

Jamie sighed and with as much force as he could muster punched his friend in the stomach. He fell to the floor and Jamie stood over him. "You fookin' bastard."

Jamie went to kick him in the teeth when there was a knock at the door and he looked towards it. There were familiar shapes behind it, and knew Jaroslav's friends had caught up with him again.

Jamie picked up the bag and ran to the back door; it was locked and he gave it a kick but it held firm. He tried again and again, but it wasn't budging and he looked around the kitchen for the key. It was hung up on a hook and he reached for it, sliding it into the lock when there was an almighty crash and two unhappy heavies entered the lounge.

"Ahh, Jamie Prutton," Paul said with a smirk, carrying an ominous looking holdall. He stepped over the prostrate body of Dave and glanced down. "Classy," he muttered derisively.

Jamie grabbed a long knife from the block on the side and held it out. "Come any closer and I'll kill ya."

"Just give us Mr Doszak's stuff," came the response and Jamie snorted.

"Stay there," he shouted but Paul continued to come closer and closer until he was within striking distance of Jamie. Jamie told him to go back but Paul just stood there and sneered. Jamie held firm and slashed at him with the knife, catching only his coat and then his hands. Paul jumped back from the knife and dropped the keys in his hand as the blade slashed his palm. "I said stay back," Jamie yelled. "Against the wall."

Mikael groaned; their weaponry was in the holdall that Paul had dropped in the corner of the room when he went after Jamie and he watched as the wanted man picked up the dropped set of keys on the floor, before inching out of the room through the back door.

Adrenaline pumping through his body, he just cleared the gate when the first bullet shot past his left ear and he dropped to the ground, sprinting down the alleyway and into the street, frantically pressing the "unlock" button on the keys he had picked up.

A 4x4 unlocked itself and Jamie jumped into the seat, slammed the keys into the ignition and spun the tyres and she shot off down the street, leaving half the rubber from the tyres on the road. There was a crash, as he hit two car wing mirrors and a third as a bullet shattered the back windscreen but seconds after he started the car he had escaped: in Jaroslav's car.

* * * * *

Oliver got down from the coach and picked his bag up from the hold. He had died his hair black and shaved off all his beard, as well as donning more fashionable clothes but was sure everyone on the coach from Edinburgh to Aberdeen knew who he was.

Everyone kept talking to themselves while Oliver re-read the news articles about the break-in repeatedly: it was strange, no-one appeared to be mentioning the missing money but instead about the statues – whose value ranged from £300,000 to priceless, depending on the newspaper.

Oliver walked out of Aberdeen bus station and then hesitated; it was cold and he had no idea where to go. He knew Vicky was in Aberdeen but no idea where in Aberdeen, or even which University. He took a deep breath and stared at the signs in front of him; Aberdeen looked bigger than he expected.

"You lost, mate?" A voice said behind him and he turned to see a smart teenager grinning at him.

Oliver spluttered. "Looking for a student, but not sure where she is."

The girl smiled. "University of Aberdeen is in that way," she said with a grin and pointed towards the corner of a small plaza. "Is she there?"

Oliver nodded and smiled, thanking her and started walking. He supposed if he could find the Veterinary Studies department then they might have a list of the people who were studying there, but his attention was diverted.

A Police siren wailed in the distance and Oliver immediately darted into a side street and sprinting along it, almost knocking over a guy carrying a tray of buns as he skidded around the corner, before setting off again, darting in and out of small streets and alleyways until he came to a busy road.

He was opposite the Library and went to leave when a thought hit him – Vicky would be on the Electoral Register and he strode confidently inside.

The librarian gave him access to the Electoral roll and he frantically searched under “Hambleton,” finding three Victoria Hambleton's in Aberdeen. Two of the three had birthdays in Oliver's year and he groaned; just when was Vicky's birthday?

He couldn't be sure but a quick look at the map had both girls living in adjacent streets and he picked the closest one, drawing out a map. He would have to be careful he thought, if the Police knew he might be in Aberdeen then they would surely know about the wonderful Vicky Hambleton. He tentatively left the sanctuary of Aberdeen Central Library and started walking towards the University.

The student areas of the town were noticeable and he approached a house, looking for any signs Vicky might be living there. He was not quite sure what he was expecting; the teddy bear he had secretly given her for Valentine's Day in the window would be a giveaway but he jumped when he heard a female cough and a voice behind him.

“What the 'ell are you doing here, Oliver? Did you really do that robbery?”

Oliver stared open mouthed at the pretty girl, her face awash with make up and a shocked face. He gulped. “Hi Vicky, you remember me?” He opened his bag and she peered inside, her eyes widening and then glanced at her house.

“No one is in, come inside.” Oliver gave a smile and watched as the beautiful girl unlocked her front door and pushed him upstairs to her bedroom, discarding her coat en route.

The light pink bedroom had a bright yellow duvet on a double bed, and there were book cases surrounding her room. She sat down on her bed, straightening her jeans and blouse before she became seated and looked at Oliver standing nervously in front of her.

“I've done something very stupid,” he told her and then wiping his eyes passed her the bag. “I've done something very, very stupid.”

“I know,” Vicky crowed. “So why are you here?”

Chapter XI

“He did vwaht?” Jaroslav roared, his fist clattering on the table causing the ceramic contents to clink.

“He took our car and then set it on fire.”

“You useless cunt, you 'ad him and you let 'im go. Why are you so fuckin' useless?”

Paul sighed and bowed his head as Jaroslav threw a table's worth of clutter onto the floor with a crash. “I surrounded by imbeciles,” he thundered and Mikael and Paul glanced at each other. “I vant 'im, I vant 'im dead.”

“We know 'e's in London,” Paul replied and took a deep breath. “And we know he ain't got a passport as he was after one. And we know 'e has the cash.”

Jaroslav scowled. “Of course 'e 'as the fuckin' cash. Vwacht sort of monkey is this?” He turned to Mikael. “You said he vas good.” The senior man nodded respectfully and Jaroslav jabbed at lit cigar towards the younger man. “You fuckin' gave 'im keys and then fire gun in crowded street.”

Mikael nodded. “We had to leave quickly but we shot out the back window,” Paul mumbled and Jaroslav shook his head.

“I vahnt to take you, out back and shoot you,” he threatened in his broken English and glanced over at Mikael. “And you. I'm better off doing this shit me-self. Why do I fuckin' pay you?”

Mikael nodded and awaited the further tirade but Jaroslav was interrupted by a phone call that he took. Paul and Mikael looked at each other, it appeared as though one of the massage parlours Jaroslav owned but allowed a madam to run had just been raided by the Vice Squad and he growled at the phone before throwing it onto a couch. “Fuckin' pigs,” he screamed and then shouted and Mikael in his native tongue. Paul watched him storm out of the room and turned to Mikael.

“What did he say?”

Mikael shook his head. “You don't want to know,” he said firmly. “But he is off to rescue his girls and we got a week to find them and get their livers.”

Paul pursed his lips. “We could just find a homeless guy and cut out his liver and bring him that. I mean, how would Mr Doszak know?”

Mikael looked at Paul. “I'll pretend I didn't 'ear that,” he told him. “If Mr Doszak found out that you had done that, he kill you. And he kill me.”

Paul rubbed his nose and then looked at Mikael. “If we don't find them, he kill us anyway.”

“And he wants his money and statues. How do you get that?”

Paul sighed. “Well it was just a thought,” he said defensively. “Cos there are loads of homeless guys. And we could say he hid the stuff, or that he shipped it out of the country.”

Mikael grunted and jabbed his finger into the chest of Paul. “Let's just catch the cunts,” he told him.

* * * * *

Vicky opened the door and fell inside, her hands laden with shopping bags and threw them on to the chair. “Wow, thank you so much,” she said and kissed him on the lips. “These are well good.” Oliver grinned at her as she ran her hands through his hair and then pushed him back onto the sofa.

"You're welcome," Oliver replied. "You looked pretty epic in the lingerie."

Vicky giggled and told him to stay sat on the sofa as she disappeared upstairs with the shopping bags, her eyes sparkling. Oliver gave a couple of deep breaths, he had paid for the entire day, with Vicky spending north of £1,000 in a variety of shops but he didn't mind: he liked Vicky.

At that point in time he felt that she was the only person on his side, everyone else in the world would want to nick his stolen loot, arrest him or kill him, Vicky was his one and true ally.

There was a cough in the corner of the room, and Oliver looked over. Vicky was leaning on the wall, her arm akimbo to touch her hips and dressed in just a matching lace bra and knicker set that left nothing to the imagination. Oliver gasped; it was the first time he had ever seen anyone in that state of undress and licked his lips.

Vicky looked like a goddess, her "B" cup breasts amply presented in the red bra covered with red stars and was completely sheer. Oliver glanced down over her immaculate body, glistening slightly in the light. Her thong was covered by a suspender belt that was holding up a pair of red stockings, accentuating her smooth, well toned legs.

She held out her gloved hands and wiggled her hips as she walked over to him, her calves tightened by the five-inch heels she had struggled down the stairs in.

Oliver's eyes widened as she kissed him again on the lips, sliding her tongue inside the young thief's mouth and sliding her hands over his T-shirt. "Ohh, ya sexy," she muttered in his ears and began to nibble on his earlobe.

Oliver mewed and, his hands shaking, touched her sides and then down to her suspender belt. "Ya look awesome," he muttered. "Incredible." Vicky giggled and pressed her body against his clothed torso and ran her fingers down his T-Shirt. She grabbed his hands and placed them behind her, sighing gently as he ran his hands over her smooth buttocks.

She could feel the bulge through his trousers and pressed her bra-clad bosom in his face. Oliver squeezed her buttocks and glided his hands over her pert cheeks; she sighed as he did and she looked down at him, sliding down his body to kneel on the floor in front of him.

She unbuttoned his trousers, licking her lips and looking into his anxious, expecting eyes. Oliver lifted his thighs off the couch and allowed Vicky to slide his trousers down to his ankles along with his Y-fronts. Vicky glanced up at the eyes of Oliver and then kissed the tip of his firm shaft.

He grunted and emitted a faint sigh as her tongue touched his manhood. He clenched his buttocks and she moved his thighs apart with the palms of her hand. She slid her mouth over the glans and pressed firmly on his pubic hair before gripping the base of his cock.

He groaned and she began to slowly slide her mouth down his penis to where her fist was gripping the base and she glanced up at him out of the corner of her eye. Oliver was panting and groaning, biting his lip as she moved down his shaft and lustfully looked at him.

Vicky slid a finger underneath his testicles and pressed down on his perineum. She felt his body tense and she gave a dramatic sucking motion on the tip of his cock, as she rolled her fingers over his perineum. Oliver's eyes widened and he ran his hands through Vicky's long, smooth blonde hair. She looked and smiled at him as she flicked her tongue over the tip of his cock.

Oliver grunted and she began to pump his member with her free hand while feeling up his testicles. He groaned and muttered in appreciation. She felt his thighs shake, his fingers curled up and his breathing became ragged. It was better than any self-induced pleasure

he had ever had and Vicky was unbelievably sexy in her new underwear.

She increased her pace and watched, Oliver was close to the point of no return and she ran her tongue over his purple head. Oliver groaned loudly and she felt his perineum tense before pulsing and a jet of creamy semen leave his erect cock and hit her on the tongue.

Oliver grunted and the second jet was caught by Vicky in her hand as she aimed his cock back towards Oliver's stomach, allowing a small pool of semen to pool on the base of his black T-Shirt.

Oliver was panting with his eyes closed and he opened them to see Vicky smiling at him. "Wow," he murmured and Vicky smiled back.

"Tell me," she said with a lustful look in her eye. "Have you had sex before?" Oliver shook his head, still panting, and Vicky got up from the floor. She pursed her lips and smiled at him. "Come on then," she whispered and took his hand. "Every girl loves to screw a bad boy."

Oliver could scarcely believe what was happening to him.

* * * * *

"We here about Tara Prutton," Andrei shouted and slammed an arm into the face of the middle-aged gentleman who nodded.

"Yeah, fuckin' years ago like. We 'ad a thing but I ain't seen her for over 20 years. Now fuck off"

"You shared house with her. We seen records. Now when was the last time you saw her boys."

The man's eyes widened. "What boys?"

"Her boys," Andrei shouted. "They steal from our boss. He no happy."

Dmitri looked around the sparse one bedroom flat and then looked at the man blubbering. They had found him half-drugged up and half-drunk before the short-tempered Andrei had started with his interrogation tactics and half-scared the man to death.

Dmitri was satisfied that the man knew nothing and nodded towards Andrei; Jaroslav had paid someone to do some digging and had come up with a Scot who had lived in Liverpool and then with Tara Prutton for a few years but he left shortly after Tara fell pregnant and they knew it was a long shot. They wondered if he was Oliver's father and Oliver had come up to see him but he clearly knew nothing, and the two suited men threw the middle-aged man onto the floor who cried out as he landed on his wrist.

"So what now?" Andrei asked as they got into the hallway of the block of flats and walked out to their new car. Andrei took the car keys from his pocket and unlocked the vehicle, just a figure from the shadows emerged and took them from him, bundling the surprised henchmen to the ground.

Dmitri reached for his weapon but the hooded man took a blade from his pocket and waved it in front of him. "Dinnae come ony closer. Ah will fuck yer heid up," the skinny man cried in his Scottish accent.

"We with Jaroslav Doszak. You heard of him?" Andrei cried and the thief turned to look at the man on the floor, aiming a kick at his ankles.

"Na," he shouted. "Git awa' frae me." He fumbled with the keys and tried to get a grip on them. Andrei called out and he turned to face him.

Dmitri slid his hands into his waistband, and slowly gripped his gun. From the angle he was at, Andrei was right behind the thief and if he fired he could easily end up putting a

bullet between his colleague's eyes. He needed the man to move towards the car.

The man snarled and looked at him. "Tis Scotland," he told him. "Nacht Russia." He took a step towards the vehicle and Dmitri fired instantly, aiming for his kneecaps.

The man dropped to the floor, screaming in agony and Andrei scrambled to his feet, grabbing the keys and leaping into the vehicle as Dmitri opened the driver's side door and started the engine.

"Get the fuck out of 'ere," Andrei called and Dmitri had the car already moving. It would be minutes before someone called the Police and the ambulance and Dmitri did not want to anywhere near the Edinburgh slum when they found the screaming car-jacker.

"What a waste of fuckin' time," Dmitri moaned.

* * * * *

Emma untied the bonds on two of the three knots and nodded. "OK, you'll work that one free in ten minutes or so." She threw five hundred pounds onto the bed and gave her a smile. "I appreciate the brass neck of it, even if I don't like it." Margaret's face lit up when she saw the money on the bed and struggled with her bonds. "Don't say thanks or nuthin'"

"You've tied me up for three hours. I'm supposed to be grateful."

"I don't care," Emma replied coldly, and retied her hair in a bandana. "You tried to fuck me over. I'd a good mind to cut your throat but instead I've dropped you five hundred."

Margaret's scowl didn't let up as she played with the knots and Emma left the room to walk down the tow path towards a road. The country lane lead towards the edge of the town, and Emma kept herself to the bushes, obscuring herself from being seen by passing motorists with the overhanging greenery.

She reached a small industrial park and looked up to see a dozen lorries sitting idle on the tarmac. Peering around the site, they looked like they would accommodate a weary criminal for the night, and barely seeing any life in the yard, except for a security hut with a light on, she climbed over the fence and sprinted across the yard.

There was a whistling and a cry and Emma darted between two trucks. "I saw someone," a voice yelled and a torch light flashed close to her. Emma looked underneath the vehicle from behind the tyre; there was a security guard walking towards her and looking underneath the vehicles. She jumped up and pulled herself onto the ledge between the cab and the truck. It was dirty and slippery but she moved herself to the other side of the cab.

"Are you sure? I'll get the infra-red scanners out, that'll find them if they are outside." Emma swore under her breath and looked around. She could climb on top of the truck but it was night time and very cold. Her memories of the roof on the hotel didn't make it appealing. She glanced down, and softly landed on the tarmac, her head bobbing about and she crept to the edge of the truck, peering around it.

The security guard was walking towards her, and she looked at the truck she had just climbed over, feeling the door; it was unlocked and she slid inside. It looked and smelt very new and she crept to the back of the cab where a bed had been slept in with blankets strewn all over it and pulled herself underneath the blankets, her body pressed up against the back of the cab.

"What's up?" A male voice cried and she heard and an exchange of voices next to the vehicle although she couldn't understand what was being said through the truck and the blanket. She closed her eyes, gripping her bag for all she could and then waited for quiet; she originally thought she could spend the night in the truck but it was decidedly more dangerous than she thought.

Instead the truck shook and the door opened. She braced herself for shouting and the blanket being pulled back, but instead the engine roared into the life, and she felt movement as music filled the cab and the driver yelled at the Security Guard through an open window. The truck was moving, and she just prayed it would be going towards a port and away from Merseyside and Worcester; it would be just her luck for her to arrive back near Runcorn!

Her heart was racing and she tried to peer out of the blanket; there was a large shape sat in the driver's seat and held her breath; desperate not to make a noise when the man cleared his throat.

"It's OK," he said loudly. "We are free of the depot. I can take you as far as Plymouth." Emma's heart skipped a beat; did he know who she was and she pulled the blanket back. He looked over his shoulder and gave a grin. "Oh, so I got the girl. I know you'd be one of you and I guessed it would be you, you've just been on the radio."

The driver's actions were surreal and she went to sit up but he told her to remain out of sight. "Thanks," she muttered.

"S'ok. When I was eighteen I went on the run for a bank job in Birmingham and some friendly trucker took me all the way to Scotland. Still got caught mind, but tell me, was that Russian bloke loaded? He looked a proper nasty piece of scum."

"He is," Emma found herself saying. "And thanks. I owe ya."

"If ya get caught though, I never knew you were there, right?"

"Sure," she mumbled and settled back down on the bed, with the blanket around her.

Chapter XII

"I never thought I would fall for you so quickly again," Vicky gushed and smiled at the man curled up underneath her nightie-clad body.

Oliver pursed his lips and looked up at her eyes; she was thinking. "Really?"

"Yeah, really. I mean it's not the money. You always had a wonderful heart. And so clever."

"Not that clever, you went to Uni I didn't," Oliver replied immediately.

"I just wish you'd asked me out at College, I really wanted you to but you never liked me."

"I did, I did," Oliver said quickly. "I always thought you were perfect. I s'pose I left it a bit too late now."

Vicky sighed. "No," she muttered. "It's not too late."

Oliver took a deep breath. "Well what happens now?"

Vicky gazed down at him. "For the next week, we just enjoy ourselves, I'm loving the sex and freedom." She gave him a coy smile and looked into his eyes. "Sorry I was out last night, I had something to do but tonight I'll make it up to you. And then we see about getting you a fake identity," she said confidently. "One of my house mates from last year is dating the local fixer. But I want to know if we do this, I don't want to go to prison if we get caught."

Oliver stared at her, and she raised her eyebrows. "You won't, will you?"

"If I am aiding a criminal on the run, I could be arrested. You have to tell them if you are arrested you told me nothing, and I didn't know about the money or anything. OK?"

Oliver nodded and Vicky squeezed him. The front door slammed shut as her house mate left the house and Vicky slid out of bed. "Ahh shit. I got lectures and I need to see Amy about getting you some fake ID. Go have a shower, I'll be back in ten or fifteen minutes."

Oliver smiled at her and waited for her to get out of bed before she guided him towards the door. "You sure?"

"Yes, I need to see her before she goes off to lectures. And make sure you have a proper wash," she told him. "If you want a deep long blowjob later don't have a minging cock."

Oliver snorted and Vicky put the tip of her finger in her mouth and sucked gently and seductively. "And you know I swallow."

The thought of the lovely Vicky giving him a blow-job had his little man instantly interested and he looked at her. She giggled at him and he shrugged. "What?"

"You. You'd think after the last couple of days you'd be worn out," she said with a smile.

Oliver smirked; it was certainly true that since he had lost his virginity, he had had an awful lot of sex with the student who had barely been able to control her libido. She had been warm and friendly, introducing him to all sorts of unbelievable new experiences and pleasures. She had certainly boosted his confidence and self-esteem: she found him irresistible – she said so. "Well you look lovely," he muttered.

"Well just give me ten minutes to talk to Amy and then I'll do us a breakfast in bed."

Oliver watched as she grabbed her phone from the charger, flashed him and then blew a kiss towards him. She shut the bathroom door and he stripped off his clothes; he had bought a few things in the market but everything was tatty and cheap – but he needed to blend in and didn't think wandering around in expensive designer gear was appropriate.

After a quick toilet stop, he turned the shower on and hot water came streaming from the shower head. He adjusted and stepped in, closing his eyes and allowing the refreshing jets to wash away his grime. It felt good to feel the warmth all over his body and he lathered up the shampoo and washed it out of his short hair.

He picked up a razor from the side and silently thanked Vicky for leaving him one out, scraping it over his face. It wasn't overly sharp, and it was pink, but it removed all of his facial stubble with the steam from the shower softening up the bristles nicely.

He considered the previous few days; he was lucky as he seemed to have landed on his feet. Vicky was happy to see him and wanted him. He knew he should have made a move on her when they were at College together but he had chickened out; she was too unattainable then as a College student.

Nothing could have been further from the truth and she was delighted that he had found her; she said as much. She seemed to love him as a criminal on the run and had spent the entire time he had been in Aberdeen looking after him. Oliver stepped out of the hot stream of water and picked up the nearest towel, drying his crotch and then rubbing his face. He danced as he dried himself and then wrapped the large beach towel around him, before opening the door to three armed policemen.

"Oliver Prutton. I am arresting you for robbery, Breaking and entering and Handling stolen goods," he heard in an authoritative voice before being bundled onto the hard tiled floor. "Anything you do say will be taken down and used as evidence against you."

Oliver groaned and was lead away to Vicky's bedroom to get dressed. He pointed out the bag to the Policeman watching him, who took it down as Oliver was handcuffed and lead away past the sobbing Vicky.

* * * * *

"Keep it, I don't want it," Geoff replied and Emma stared at her friendly truck driver.

"Pardon?"

"I got six years for a bank job when I was young, I don't fancy going back. You know I got wife and kids now."

"Oh," Emma muttered and smiled; he had told her all about his life and advised her to give herself up as they would catch her anyway. The bundle of notes she was offering would pay for his extension he needed doing for his new baby or even for his anniversary holiday he wanted to take but Geoff shook his head.

"I've taken a risk taking you this far," he told her and glanced in his mirrors. "The coast is clear."

"Cheers, I really do owe you one."

He smiled. "Always happy to help a damsel in distress. Just when you are caught don't mention my name."

"I won't," Emma promised and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

He smiled at her and wished her luck and then pulled out of the lay-by to complete his journey to Plymouth. "Think about it. I've been there. I was your age and was doing the same thing."

Emma pursed her lips, nodded and jumped down from the cab. She felt a tinge of regret but also of complete respect of her lorry driver. He had turned down a reward in not turning her in and refused to take any money from her.

It took Emma just two hours to hike to Plymouth; the Sun was rising and the vivid and

violent colours of the sunrise illuminated the sky. The port of Plymouth was on the other side of the town centre, and she treated herself to a fast food breakfast and a local paper. She was grateful to be able to use the toilets in the “restaurant” before finding out that she was still on the front page of the newspaper; she wanted to be forgotten.

She felt a bit sad that Oliver had been caught; he had never wanted to be involved but had managed to put himself in Aberdeen which she thought was a good effort nevertheless. He had been pictured going into the Police Station and was even called the “mastermind” which she thought was stretching the truth to breaking point; newspapers loved doing that she reasoned.

Interestingly, she read that the Police thought that she and Jamie were also in Scotland and she reasoned it did her no harm to be the best part of 500 miles between the Police and herself.

The ferry terminal was dreary and small; she had expected a whirlwind of passionate activity but it was quite desolate, and she sat idly waiting for inspiration.

A few people came and went but unless she had a passport then she wouldn't be going anyway and would be inviting arrest; but where could she get a false passport from in Plymouth? She didn't even know if she could get a false passport in Liverpool with her contacts, let alone Plymouth and she kicked her heels. She saw the smaller boats and wondered whether they could be coerced into giving her a lift, but she would be opening herself up to people she couldn't trust.

Emma wondered about being a stowaway; she was agile enough and with her slender physique and athletic prowess she reckoned she could probably hide but knew it was a one time only deal: if she was caught then it would be all over.

She mulled over a few options, could she hide in the hold of a lorry, or even a coach but then there were not many boats leaving the port transporting road vehicles. She clicked her teeth together, she was tired and uninspired, when something caught her eye. A minibus, full of ferry staff was working its way out of the terminal and she started to follow it.

It was rush hour, and nothing in Plymouth was moving pretty quickly, and so with a combination of running, and good eyesight, she was able to follow it for a mile to its destination at a small hotel on the edge of the town centre.

Emma wondered that if she could be “staff” could she get aboard and crept around the back of the hotel, her heart was racing and checked a couple of locked doors. There was a noise, and she darted behind a crate and a door flew open, for a man to come striding out in his chef whites and light up a cigarette.

With his back turned, Emma peered into the room, and seeing it was just an employee rest room darted inside and inched along the corridor. She heard voices, and without thinking, opened the nearest door and walked through into the laundry room.

She was surrounded by ferry uniforms and changing into her size as quickly as she could, she left the room and darted down the corridor to the front of the hotel.

“Sorry, did you get a room?” Emma was asked as she hovered in the porch, awaiting for the minibus driver and to blend in.

“Err ... no. I'm going shortly.”

“Oh,” the receptionist asked, puffing on her cigarette. “Oh OK that's fine.”

“You don't have a shower room, do you. My hair is so greasy 'cos I've just come off sea.”

“Back to back shifts, they a bugger aren't they?” Emma just smiled and waited for the

receptionist to finish her cigarette and passed her a key to a room on the ground floor. "Bus goes in ten minutes," she told her and watched as Emma walked off to the room.

Warm water was much appreciated by the determined woman and within ten minutes had liberated the hotel of their toiletries and had cleaned her body and hair, although her teeth still felt a little furry as they had not provided her with a toothbrush.

She only just made the minibus with the driver not caring that there was one extra person. She got some funny looks on the bus until one of her colleagues started talking to her, asking her if she was new. Emma hesitated and then shyly introduced herself as "Amy" and the more vocal members of the bus seemed to dominate the conversation.

This suited her; it wasn't in her interest to stand out to other members on the minibus as she certainly didn't want to be recognised and the arrest of Oliver had put her story back in the newspapers complete with a photo.

Emma froze as the bus went through the checkpoint. If she was asked for her passport, she wouldn't have it, but the bus stopped in the shadow of the ferry. Emma intentionally waited at the back of the group but started walking up the gangway with her new colleagues and towards the ship.

They all seemed preoccupied with their own friendship groups and Emma was deliberately shy and reticent to talk on the bus so they were happy to leave her as they strode up to the vessel. This allowed Emma time to take in her new surroundings and think as she walked up the steep ramp. The first thing she saw was a manager checking his staff onto the boat and her heart sank, slowing down. She realised that he had not seen her and looking back down the ramp saw more people coming up the ramp; she couldn't turn around and go back down even if she wanted to.

Emma took a deep breath, her heart was pounding in her chest and wiped her mouth, tucking her hair behind her ears. He was looking at her, and was no more than twenty yards away. "Come on," he barked. "You're late."

"Sorry," Emma said and skipped towards him. "Sorry, I'm a bit lost."

"Name?"

"Amy," Emma said instinctively.

"Amy who?"

"Wallace," Emma squeaked. He looked through his clipboard and then at the girl.

"You a temp?"

Emma nodded and gripped her bag tighter, ready to make a run for it if he got suspicious. He looked at her and then down the list again. "Feckin' useless secretaries," he moaned. "They always doing this. Have you got any papers from HR?" Emma shook her head and grunted; she was liking the direction that this conversation was taking.

"I was told to come here at short notice. Something about a girl breaking her leg," she said hopefully.

The manager grunted. "Arm. She slipped on the deck yesterday and she is stuck in Spain. OK, did your passport go with the lot that came earlier."

Emma smiled and nodded. "Yeah, they took it off me."

"And you know where you are going?"

"I think so," she replied, smiling for the first time she was dropped off at the terminal and he waved her onto the large sea vessel.

"Derek," he told her. "If you need any help, come and find me."

The only help Emma needed was to find somewhere to hide on the boat until they got to Spain.

* * * * *

The Inspector looked at the big whiteboards in the office and felt a hand on his shoulder. "Sir," the woman called. "Do you want a cup of tea?"

The well-built man grunted and then shook himself to the present. "Oh, that'll be wonderful Alice, cheers."

He looked back at the board and stood staring at it. He knew Oliver had been in Edinburgh before going to Aberdeen although they had not been able to trace any friends or contacts for Jamie or Emma in Scotland. The Inspector strongly suspected that Oliver's trip to Aberdeen was the inexperienced man just going in any direction away from the scene of the crime and ending up in a town where he knew someone; there was no indication that Vicky and Oliver had communicated for several months prior to Oliver arriving and Vicky had made it clear to the Scottish Police, by all accounts, that she had not invited him to see her.

He didn't believe Jamie was with Oliver as he would certainly have not been prepared to ring the Police and make an offer to give themselves up so they must have split up at some point prior to Oliver ringing him from Edinburgh. He would ask when Oliver arrived from being transported from Scotland to Merseyside.

This still left him looking at where the other two were – there had been a sighting of Emma in the Midlands but this was not substantiated and Jamie appeared to have disappeared off the face of the country.

In total, the three of them had avoided detection completely, despite being on the television and in the newspapers and something told him that the other two were still in Britain.

The phone rang and he ignored it; it would only be his wife and he looked back at the whiteboard. His colleague had been heading up an investigation into the criminal behaviour of Jaroslav Doszak and he knew that there would be men scouring the UK looking for them.

His musings were interrupted by the WPC bringing a cup of tea to the Inspector who was still looking at the figures on the board. "Cheers," he muttered and rubbed his nose.

If Emma was heading South and Oliver was heading North, could Jamie have gone East? Or West? He took a sip and set the cup down on the table. All he knew was that if he didn't find all three of them, Jaroslav would. and then he would be looking at conducting a murder investigation.

* * * * *

Jamie sat back on the chair and glanced out of the window of the fast food restaurant. He had deliberately put a dozen miles in the stolen vehicle but thought doing too many more would be dangerous; he didn't want to get stopped by the Police with his back window shot out.

He also didn't want the two henchmen chasing after him to get their vehicle back and had found some derelict land and poured some petrol over it that he found in the boot of the car; he knew that if he had been caught it would have been him doused in the petrol and it made him realise more than ever he needed to get out of England and out of the reach of Jaroslav.

He wondered if they had caught Emma or Oliver, or if his mother had experienced a visit from the henchmen. He doubted that anyone he knew would remain untroubled by the

vicious men and wondered if it had been worth it: the money was great but having a furious and homicidal gangster chasing the length of the country had certainly put a downer on the elation he felt.

Jamie felt worried: Jaroslav was a powerful man who no doubt had contacts all over the city and he knew that checking into the wrong hotel or appearing in the wrong café would cause a phone call to be made, and end up with his guts outside of his body. The only way it would stop would be if Jaroslav was stopped or Jamie disappeared.

He finished his burger meal and threw the rubbish into the bin, idly leaving the restaurant with his bag and walking down the road. He had seen a small hotel on a side street that looked like it primarily catered for foreign tourists (it had several different languages underneath an English "welcome" on the notice board) and he had noted they had vacancies. Jamie deliberately didn't get a room as there were a few people milling around outside and he wanted as few people to see him.

"Excuse me sir," a voice behind him said and Jamie turned without thinking. "Have you got the time?"

Jamie glanced at his watch and looked up just as a fist struck him in the face. Jamie howled and a knife appeared by his throat, and a hand delved into his jacket pockets. "Shut up," the voice hissed from behind a hooded sweatshirt. Jamie gulped, noted very little about the man, other than he was mixed race and had fearsome eyes boring into him. He felt his heart leap and the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. There were obviously a few banknotes in his inside pocket that got stolen but no mobile phone or keys or anything. "Where's ya mobile?"

Jamie glanced at the hand with the knife in it and shook his head. "I don't have one," he muttered, his heart rate quickened and the man snarled, grabbing the bag.

"I don't fucking think so," Jamie cried and the mugger jabbed his knife towards the determined man and then he struck him in the face with his fist and the handle of the blade. Jamie howled in pain, dropping his grip on the bag and the street robber started to run.

Jamie had to chase. If he didn't get that bag back he was a dead man as he would no longer have any way of getting a passport and getting out of the country. He would be sitting duck for Jaroslav or the Police; and if he was caught by the Police then Jaroslav would know exactly where to find him. His life would depend on the next five minutes.

For the second time that day Jamie sprinted, chasing after the energetic thief as he powered down the roads. Jamie kept his eyes fixed in the twilight as he darted in between the cars and then into a path that went over some waste ground.

Jamie didn't hesitate, he might not have known the area but if he got stabbed and died then it would only be a shortcut to what would happen when Jaroslav caught up with him. The bag thief looked behind to see Jamie gaining on him and tried to leave the lit path and go onto the fields but Jamie was too close and could still see him as he slid over the muddy ground. "Let me have ... the bag back ... and you can go," Jamie panted but the thief reached the end of the ground and just jumped over a small fence into the garden of an unsuspecting resident.

There was a shriek as first the bag thief and then Jamie ran through a family barbecue, knocking over a small child holding a sausage but as the thief emerged from the house into another street, Jamie was within striking distance.

The thief turned around to see Jamie within a few feet; Jamie wanted to slow, his lungs were on fire, but he needed to keep going. He could feel the lactic acid in his legs burning as he sprinted down the road. He was almost up to where the thief was and doubled his

efforts so he was just behind him and swept his leg across, causing the man to stumble.

He dropped the bag immediately and then hit the floor with a crunch. Jamie jumped over the bag, stood over the thief trying to scramble away when he launched a kick into the stomach of him. "Fuckin' kill ya," he cried but the thief took to his feet, and scabbled away from the exhausted Jamie.

Panting, Jamie picked up the bag, saw a little girl watching him from the window and gave her a wave. She smiled and waved back and with as much energy as he could muster he left the area in case anyone had called the Police.

Jamie didn't find the original hotel he had spied but stumbled upon a small B&B with a vacancies sign in the window and knocked stoutly on the door, covering his hair but not his face.

An old man answered and looked at Jamie. "Ya got any vacancies?"

He smiled and looked at him. "Sure, it's fifty pounds a night," he told him and Jamie breathed a sigh of relief and pulled out three twenties from his bag.

"One room please," he asked in his best voice.

The man bit held the door open and had Jamie fill in a visitor's card which he signed as "Ian Richards" and then showed him to a small room containing a bed, sink, toilet and small shower, which Jamie gratefully used.

Jamie slept soundly in the bed and enjoyed the feel of freshly laundered sheets against his clean skin. The old man had been welcoming but had clearly not realised who he was as he was keen to talk about the virtues of the town around him and local amenities.

Jamie had an early night after locking the door; twice in the last 24 hours had someone tried to steal his ill-gotten gains and he was certain that a third attempt, if it came during the night, would also be doomed to failure. Jamie therefore, went to bed naked and hugging the bag containing his share of the loot as if it was a teddy bear.

The morning was introduced by an alarm clock the previous guest had set but Jamie emerged to a full English breakfast that the old man had cooked. "It's a nice day," he said cheerfully. "You going anywhere?"

"I'm going to see my girlfriend," Jamie lied; he had spun the old man a tall tale of how he had travelled to London to see "Evie" but they had rowed which is why he need to stay in a B&B but he had found disguising his accent hard so had tried to talk as little as possible.

As he left, the hotelier thanked him for his custom and asked if he would sign the guestbook located in the hall. Jamie gave a grin as he left the room and with a smile added "J Prutton – thanks for the stay." He wondered if he should add anything about the statues and the money guessing that it would end up as an "and finally" item on the news in a month's time but decided against it; it was, as Emma would have said, all risk and no gain.

He stepped out of the small hotel and walked towards the small High Street – he needed to get out of London and he needed to get a passport. He wanted to be somewhere where he would blend in, or at least people weren't looking for him and took the map of London out of his pocket. He wanted a town within reach of London so when he had a passport he could happily get to Heathrow quickly, but somewhere without a large Police presence or suspicious minds.

He glanced up towards the bus going towards Harrow and checked his map; it was going in the right direction – out of London – and he crossed the road to get on it.

Chapter XIII

“Interview commencing at zero nine fifteen with Inspector Richard Williamson, Sergeant Liam Wheeton, Mr Oliver Prutton, and his representative Euan Duffy.”

The bearded legal representative held up his hand and looked at the Inspector. “My client has indicated that his willing to cooperate with the Police investigation but has expressed a desire that the Police ensures that this cooperation is noted and recognised. Can you please reassure my client that this will happen?”

The Inspector nodded. “Any cooperation will be recorded and will be explicitly noted in court, if required.”

Oliver rubbed his nose and pursed his lips together. “Well you know most of it. I was roped in by Jamie. Him and this girl wanted to do a job and they needed plans that I got them. And then they wanted access cards and codes and then they promised to leave me alone. But their accomplice got nicked and I was told I had to do it.”

“Please note the clear coercion, officer,” the duty solicitor pointed out and both Police officers turned up their noses at him and allowed Oliver to continue.

“Well I had to set off the car alarms as a distraction and Jamie sprayed something onto their satellite to mess with the pictures. When we did that Emma let us in and we went down to the vault. The code we had wasn't right and it set off some alarm but the owner came down to check and he turned it off and took out a briefcase. We were hiding behind statues. When he left, Emma typed in the right number and the vault opened.”

“How did she know the right number?” the Sergeant asked and Oliver gave a brief smile.

“She watched Doszak type it in. Well we got out and made off to a farmhouse. I got a third of the money, some jewellery and one of the three statues.”

“Where is the money?”

Oliver shrugged. “It was in Vicky's room. I sort of found her and she promised to let me stay for a night. It was in a bag.”

The Inspector pulled up a small hold-all from the floor in a clear plastic bag and Oliver nodded.

“So where is it? This was empty, except for the statue.”

Oliver scowled. “It was full of money. Full of it.”

Richard Williamson looked at his partner and they began to probe Oliver's story, opting to have a break for ten minutes after an hour.

“So he is lying?” The Sergeant asked and the Inspector snorted as he waited for the vending machine to dispense his drink.

“I don't know. He seemed very certain about the money and the amount.”

“But we searched the whole house and found nothing.”

The Inspector took a deep breath and picked up the red-hot drink swearing at the thin plastic. “I'm aware of that. He had the statue, he got that from the vault.”

“Which is the only thing reported stolen. Maybe he didn't have anything else and just wanted to bargain.”

The Inspector sighed. “No, there was something in his voice, he meant what he said. The question is, where is it all now?”

“Jaroslav? I mean, we know he would have sent his own people to try and track them down.”

The Inspector shook his head again. “No. 'Cos if Mr Doszak sent people it wouldn't be to just find them, it would be to take them out. Whatever he stole, he has balls. Not many people would steal from Jaroslav Doszak.”

“Which is probably why the vault security was so bad, he thought no-one would dare.”

The Inspector had to suppress a smile. “Probably. Learnt the hard way though, didn't he?” The Sergeant smiled and allowed the Inspector to continue. “Right, let's go and find out a bit more about where Jamie and Emma are heading,” he suggested and took a swig from his tea that was still too hot to drink and strode back down the corridor towards the Interview Room.

* * * * *

“Dhere she is,” Dmitri muttered in his Russian accent and the two men got out of the dark 4x4, pushing the startled student up against the wall in a nearby alleyway. Vicky squealed but Andrei held a weapon to the throat of the girl who whimpered.

“What do you want?” Vicky cried and Dmitri looked at her.

“Dhere is zee money?” Dmitri barked and she shook her head.

“I don't know,” she muttered and the two men looked at each other with raised eyebrows.

“Where is it?” Andrei asked. “We cut you up, we no care.”

“I don't know,” Vicky wailed. “The Police searched my house and they found nothing. I don't have anything.”

Andrei snarled and Vicky shook her head; she was scared and worried as she had not seen these men before. They clearly knew about her brief liaison with Oliver prior to his arrest but she didn't want to be involved in Oliver's mess.

“What makes you think I have it?”

Andrei took a deep breath and he looked at Dmitri. “Cos Oliver he no have it when Police come,” she was told and Vicky shook her head.

“So, he ain't gonna give me some money to look after. He not mentioned it,” she told them and Andrei looked at Dmitri.

Realising that they were momentarily distracted, Vicky pushed them away and pulled a lanyard on her bag. She had to put her fingers in her ears as an excruciatingly loud noise pierced the calm of the street and echoed around the alleyway.

She looked at their shocked faces and aimed a kick into the groin of Andrei and then backed away down the alleyway as Andrei collapsed onto the floor screaming in agony.

Vicky turned her back to the two men and ran away, the piercing sound going with her as she desperately sought to put some real distance between herself and the violent henchmen.

* * * * *

“Inspector,” a young man called and ran the length of the corridor.

“Easy,” Richard called and watched as the man dodged a WPC and skidded to a halt breathlessly. He liked the energy and enthusiasm of the latest batch of police officers as they reminded him of when he had just joined the force 25 years previous, but always worried that he would see an accident sooner rather than later caused by their recklessness.

“That statue, the really expensive one, Oliver Prutton had,” he panted. “It isn't.”

“Isn't what?”

“The statue.”

“What?” The Inspector took a deep breath and looked at him. “What statue isn't what?”

“The statue isn't Mr Doszak's statue. It's not made of Gold and is a copy.”

“A copy?”

“Very good one, but not real. It's just been analysed and they've sent the report through.”

“Are you absolutely sure?”

The young officer was clearly annoyed by his Inspector's lack of belief and held out the fax for him to read. The Inspector whistled and passed it to his Sergeant who glanced at it and then at the Inspector. “So you think Jamie or Emma swapped it at the farmhouse?”

The Inspector shook his head, deep in thought. “No. But someone did. We know Mr Doszak bought the statues five years ago. So unless he bought fakes or if he swapped it.”

“But if Jamie wanted to double-cross him, get away with all three of them, could he have done it in the farmhouse?”

The Inspector snorted. “I can't see it. Jamie looked after Oliver, so it would be Emma. Emma could have swapped them after the raid.”

“So is Jamie's one a fake then?”

The Inspector sniffed. “Unless Mr Doszak had them made and he was planning to auction fakes.”

“They were verified the day before independently and the auction house would obviously do their own checks but it says they were good copies.”

There was a sharp intake of breath and the Inspector looked at his Sergeant. “Well something isn't right here, Oliver said when he phoned from Edinburgh that he had over a quarter of a million in cash, jewellery and a near-priceless statue. When we pick him up two days later he has nothing.”

“Well maybe, he had the copy made.”

“Why? It just doesn't make any sense. Why would he do that? But I can charge him with the burglary so let's get that done.”

“Yes sir,” came the submissive response and the Inspector left to ponder exactly what had been going on: something was not right.

“And I want to get to the bottom of the jewellery and the cash.”

“We searched the property and it is definitely not there,” the Sergeant told him. “And Oliver was certain it was with him when he was arrested, and that it came here.”

The Inspector took a deep breath. “I don't like what that might mean,” he muttered. “But Aberdeen were certain that there was nothing in that bag when they got it back to the station.”

* * * * *

Jamie slouched in the café in the little market town; he was far enough away from London to not be searched for, but near enough to be less an hour away. He still had a number of problems.

Number one, Jaroslav and his heavies wanted to kill him. They had traced him to Dave Richards but could go no further as he was out of known contacts who could help him so if he had no idea where to go, they could have no idea where to find him. Number two, the

Police wanted to stick him in prison for a decade. They had got nowhere near him so he was less worried about them but they had the ability to stick his face on Crimewatch and then he would have hours rather than days. Number three, he was stuck in the UK and at the mercy of Jaroslav and the Police until he could get a passport, which he couldn't do illegally without stirring up the problem of number one, or legally without being arrested by number two.

All in all, he felt devoid of ideas and munched on the croissant the shop had convinced him to buy when ordering a coffee. "Ya look troubled," the cheerful shop assistant told him as she cleaned the table; she barely looked older than eighteen and he nodded respectfully towards her.

"Nah, just a few things on my mind," he muttered and she smiled warmly at him.

"Do you want another drink?" She asked and he fished in his pocket for a couple of coins and thanked her, asking for a second cappuccino. "If you want something to take your mind of things, I am in the Vagina Monologues at the Town Hall tonight," she told him and passed him the local paper. "We got a very good review."

Jamie smiled and watched as the cheerful girl opened the local newspaper to page twelve and saw the picture of three girls surrounded by a number of people under the line "Youth Am Dram hits the G-Spot." She blushed and he looked at the picture; staring back at him was someone who looked just like him, which blonde hair and almost identical facial features.

"This guy," Jamie asked. "He looks a bit like me."

The girl grinned. "Tom? Ahh well, he is my boyfriend. But he is away at the moment, he's gone surfing in Cornwall while his parents are in Barbados. It's why he isn't directing the Monologues, I would have liked him but Ethan is doing a brilliant job."

Jamie smiled at her. "You two live local then?"

The serving girl bit her lip and nodded. "I live in Amersham and he lives in a little village outside. He was on the news as he was one of the people that helped when that farmer got done with messing up the horses. He lives in house opposite, ya see. Bedlam everywhere when it kicked off."

"Yeah," Jamie said instantly. He looked at her and she smiled.

"I mean I love doing the Am Dram and it's a big buzz, I have to fake an orgasm on stage." She blushed and Jamie looked up at her. "Ethan suggested that I actually put a vibrator up there but it was just weird, but it's such a buzz." She laughed at her double-entendre and smiled at her customer. "Really, really big buzz though."

Jamie felt bullied into buying a ticket for her production, but she had given him the exact location (of sorts) to a passport and his ticket out of England so gleefully purchased one from her. He looked at his watch and cried out in fake surprise as she passed him a ticket for two pounds. "I better be goin'. Thanks an all."

The girl looked a little disappointed; he café was empty and she obviously enjoyed talking to someone but Jamie ran out into the High Street and headed for a newsagents. He was annoyed with himself: all the time he was trying to get a forged passport and yet he was thief, why not steal one. It was hardly as if people always looked like their passport photos anyway, and here was someone who was almost a dead ringer for him.

All he had to do was find the house, break in and steal the passport: how hard could it be? First of all, he had to find the house where Tom lived and walked into a shop. "Hi, I wonder if you could help," he said in a posh voice. "I'm looking for a farm nearby where they had trouble with the horses?"

The man tapped behind his counter and looked at the young thief in front of him. "Spindles?" Jamie nodded and the man nodded towards a map on the counter. "If you buy one I can show you."

Jamie smiled and pulled out a five pound note and the man opened up the booklet-style map to a neighbouring village and pointed to where it said "Spindles Farm." Jamie grinned and he raised his eyebrows and then asked what Jamie wanted up there.

"A job," Jamie said instantly. "I'm a photographer working on the Sun." The man sucked in air through his teeth and Jamie licked his lips.

"Don't you go stirring up any more shit," he was warned and Jamie nodded respectfully before promising that he wouldn't.

"I was told to just get a picture of the house; we haven't got one you know what bosses are like," he replied, trying to disguise his accent. The newspaper owner forced himself to smile and Jamie thanked him, passing him the ticket to see the Vagina Monologues and gave him a smile. "I'm busy but it's supposed to be very good," he muttered and left the shop without saying anything else. The walk to the neighbouring village took Jamie out of the town and along country lanes, before having to leave the sanctuary of the village and turn into a very narrow tree-line road.

Jamie soon found the farmhouse which the girl had alluded to but there was only one house down the road. He set back off to that, and hoped that she knew what she was talking about as he climbed the wall and dropped into the garden and came face-to-face with a young lady reading naked in the garden who screamed when she saw him.

He was fortunate that there wasn't a neighbouring house for hundreds of yards.

Chapter XIV

"That's five Euros twenty please," Emma asked, and wearily rubbed her eyes. She had tried to escape from the clutches of the manager but he had sent her to the shop and had been serving the customers for the first six hours of the voyage and after a ten hour break, the last four hours.

The stop supervisor had barely taken an interest in her, and just allowed Emma to serve the passengers sweets, newspapers and chocolate bars. She took the money from an excited boy who had an armful of unhealthy snacks.

"Two minutes," her supervisor said in gruff tones. "We are nearly there."

"OK," Emma muttered and watched as the flurry of passengers frantically bought the essentials they would want before the shutters came down and Emma was asked to clean the shop with the mop and duster. Emma almost resented doing it as the supervisor played with her mobile phone and then idly rearranged some of the stock.

Emma felt a little aggrieved at the laziness of "her" manager but realised that it was an ideal cover and if she blended into the background she would be in Spain in a few hours.

Emma left the shop and went back to the staff room where she had used a locker to stash her ill-gotten gains. She was unsure of what would happen when she got to port and knew she had to have her wits about her if they started checking passports or bags.

She felt nervous and anxious. Everything since she had entered the house she had some modicum of understanding about. She knew about stately homes and quick getaways, she knew about stowing away and running from the Police. She knew about social engineering her way to get a free hotel room. She knew nothing about blagging her way into a country.

Emma did her best to hide her nervousness; she knew a train border agent would detect fear in her body language a mile off and waited; the staff room was almost empty as most of the staff would have to clean the ship and prepare it for a return journey but started reading a discarded novel to occupy her mind.

Ten minutes later, the ship docked and Emma was waiting on the deck, watching as the Spanish city came into view. She needed to change some of her pounds into Euros but there would have a hundred ways to exchange money the moment she got on dry land and just allowed herself to be sucked by the crowd down the gangway into mainland Europe.

Two guards watched as the posse of travellers sauntered past them and Emma's heart leapt when one of them shouted and pointed at her. Her stomach lurched and she went to make a run for it, desperate to get away but her legs didn't move and one of the border guards moved in.

She watched as his hands left his side and snatched a teenager in front of her, the bag caught up in his feet and leaving her grip. She jolted in fright, and looked at the guard who dragged the boy to one side and removed a knife from his pocket.

There was commotion and Emma, paralysed with dread, recovered to her senses and walked briskly into the port and then out into the town. She had a slight understanding of Spanish, her last boyfriend had been brought up in Madrid and she had gone to Ibiza but she had never read much of the language and didn't understand a word of what any of the signs meant or said. She wanted a station, some Euros and preferably a nice hot bath and a change of clothes.

Emma had thought hard on the boat; she would be docking in northern Spain and wanted

to get to Argentina. She considered trying to get to an airport but the lack of documentation would make flying impossible, especially with the security checks that she would be subjected to.

This left her with travelling by boat, which was far easier and slower until she considered the thought of getting a yacht. Hiring a yacht might be difficult but stealing a yacht would be easy and she knew that people sailed across the Atlantic Ocean on a daily basis in their expensive toys.

As try as she could, Emma could only think of Monaco and Gibraltar as being havens for big boats and neither were in Spain but decided to try her luck in Barcelona; it was a big port and she felt safer in Spain. She wasn't in Spanish papers and the Police would have no idea she had fled Britain. She would have to be careful but it would be safer.

Emma walked into the small town centre and found a back street bureau de change. She didn't want to get asked for ID at a bank, and although she was still in the uniform from the ferry didn't want to get asked too many questions. The Spanish gentleman gave her a pretty poor rate as she turned a few hundred Pounds into a worryingly similar amount of Euros but it was enough to buy herself a train ticket, a meal and some clothes.

Emma was out of Britain. Emma felt free and Emma felt safe.

* * * * *

“Sorry,” Jamie cried and had to put his hand over her mouth to stop her from screeching. The naked woman struggled and he lay her back on the chair. “Now if I take my hand off of your mouth you won't scream, will you?” She looked up at him, her eyes wide with fear and anxiety. “Will you? I am not here to hurt you, I promise.”

She shook her head and slowly Jamie removed it from her mouth and glanced over her flawless body and the romantic book she was reading. “Who are you?”

Jamie hesitated and licked his lips. “I just came as I'm a bit lost and thought I could kip in your shed.”

“Right well I am calling the Police.”

“Don't,” Jamie cried and put his hand over her chest to stop her from getting up. “Please. I've umm ... I've run away from home. Just looking for a few places to sleep until I get back on me feet.” The girl screwed up her face and Jamie glanced down at her. “I'll pay you,” he promised. “Just let me kip in your shed or on your sofa and I'll pay you, please.”

The girl looked at him up and down and sighed. “This isn't my house,” she said in almost perfect diction. “So I can't let you stay.” Jamie sighed and looked ruefully at her, but she rubbed the back of his hand. “Why have you run away from home?”

“I umm ...” Jamie stuttered and not quite sure how to finish the sentence licked his lips. “My dad told me not to see my girlfriend any more and we split up because of him,” he lied and glanced down at the romantic novel in her hand. “He didn't like her, but I loved her. She was perfect,” he muttered wistfully, his mind flashing back to how he thought when he was in prison and Emma stopped coming to see him.

“Oh why,” she cooed, ignoring her lack of clothes and Jamie admired the curvy, well-proportioned girl. She was no more than eighteen with straight jet black hair that came down to her ample bosom. There wasn't a blemish on her tanned body and Jamie couldn't resist staring at her shaved pubis and wonderfully tanned legs.

“Religion,” Jamie muttered. “She wasn't the right religion.”

The girl wrapped her arms around Jamie. “That's so sad,” she told him, pressing his face into her bare bosom and Jamie bit his lip and nodded. “You poor thing. How long were you

going out?"

Jamie puffed. "Well since I was eleven. She was ten. It was almost a decade." The girl dabbed at her eyes and Jamie hummed. "We had to keep it a secret, but they found out in the end." Jamie wrapped his arms around the girl and smiled to himself; he was quite enjoying be the storyteller.

"Oh it's just like Romeo and Juliet. It's horrible when parents do that. Where is she now?"

"Her parents. They sent her away."

"Away?" The girl squawked.

"Yeah," Jamie said, running out of ideas. "Back to umm, their country."

"Oh you hear about it all the time. Was it India or Pakistan?" Jamie nodded and she continued gushing over him. "You hear about it all the time. It's horrible. No wonder you run away from home."

"I ... umm ... well it knocked me a bit, so I took all the money I've earned and come running."

She sighed and held out her hand. "Rosie. I'm the maid. Of course you can stay the night."

Jamie smiled. "Yeah, sorry for scaring you."

"Ahh it's OK. You don't normally get a fit looking guy jump over the wall when you are sunning yourself in the garden but I am home alone all week so why not go naked?"

"No," Jamie muttered and looked at her wonderful body. "Why not indeed."

Rosie's phone beeped next to her and she growled at it, ignoring it as the beep was followed by an annoying ring. "It's the local gym," she moaned. "They have been on at me for the last four months because I got behind on my subs."

Jamie sat down next to her and looked straight at her crotch. "I'll pay for ya, if you let me stay for a night," he offered and Rosie licked her lips.

"I think you've suffered enough," she said as if it was a gentle chastisement. "I will sort it, I just don't get much money from the Reynolds and my car had an expensive MOT a couple of months ago, but the gym won't let me quit until I've paid up for the year. But I'll sort it, they can wait."

"No," Jamie said and pulled out a couple of notes from his inside pocket. "How much?"

The girl sniffed. "It's forty-odd pounds a month, but they want three hundred as they want me to pay for the next twelve months." Jamie sighed and counted out three hundred pounds and gave the crumpled money to Rosie.

Her eyes widened at the bundle of money Jamie had. "I can't," she said, sitting up and swinging her hips so that he uncovered genitals were straight in Jamie's eye line. He licked his lips appreciatively and then sighed.

"Yeah, course you can," he said and realised that the more Rosie saw him as a nice guy, she was less likely to believe he might be a wanted man. He was also quite keen for her to go to the gym to pay her debt and leave him with access to the house so he could retrieve the passport.

"Oh are you sure?"

"Yes," Jamie replied loftily. "Just go and pay it. It'll be load off your mind." Rosie gave him a naked cuddle and ran inside to put on a pair of short denim shorts, T-Shirt and ask him if he wanted to cycle to Amersham or stay in the garden.

"I'll stay here," Jamie asked. "I just need to think about some things," he told her and she

brought out a big jug of squash and a glass.

“OK. I won't be long. It's just a twenty minute cycle ride,” she promised and kiss him on the cheek as she left. “And I'll give you a massage later. Take your mind of your girlfriend.”

“Ex,” Jamie corrected her and Rosie apologised. Jamie watched the girl leave and then waited for two minutes before scouting around the house; she had locked every door, but she had left a window unlocked and he managed to get through to open it.

He was grateful there was no alarm and set about checking Tom's bedroom for a passport. Although Jamie had never met him, he immediately disliked him as he was a most untrusting fellow; he had locked all of his drawers but these were little match for Jamie and he soon prised them open to reveal loads of saucy pictures of his hostess from the café but no passport.

He groaned; people like Tom probably kept their important documents in safes and although he could break into it, he only had until Rosie returned and that was probably in less than ten minutes time.

He glanced through the piles of books to see if he kept it there, and in his desk and even under his bed. With a snarl, he went to close the door when he saw something on the bookcase; one of the books just didn't look right. It looked out of place and he walked over to it and slid it off the shelf.

It wasn't a book as it was made of plastic and as he opened the cover, saw a passport on top, along with a page of passwords and a credit card; it was a place to hide valuables where thieves wouldn't find them.

“Should ask for a fuckin' refund,” Jamie muttered as he pocketed the contents and went back into the garden, carefully closing the window behind him. It was nearly evening so he decided to stay the night with Rosie, get his massage and then travel to Argentina the following day. It would be so easy.

* * * * *

Emma dropped onto the boat and scuttled over to the corner of the cabin. It had been so easy when she had broken into the offices of the marina and seen a print-out from an e-mail program, sent by Lord Whittingham that asked for his boat to be ready for the following day as his eighteen year old son and friend wanted to sail to the Canaries to celebrate his birthday.

Emma was a little disgusted that Lord Whittingham was that rich that he could send his son away on a boat that cost hundreds of thousands or even millions of pounds (she didn't know) but it did occur to her that the Canaries were a lot closer to Argentina than Spain was.

The thought of a free ride was welcome and so she prised open the key cabinet with her knife, took the keys for “Celeste II” and closed up the cabinet. She snuck onto the boat as dawn was approaching and the harbour was starting to get busier. She had no real idea of when he was going to set sail of what the chinless wonder's son looked like but she found a small cupboard than ran the length of the boat and thought about hiding there.

The trouble was, Emma had no clue what they would load where and it seemed reasonable that if they were planning to cross the Ocean they would want to check the boat was seaworthy and have lots of supplies to load. In short, Emma had no idea where to hide, until she looked into one of the seven cabins and saw the cupboard containing all the spare linen. There was enough room at the top of the cabin for her to slide into and possibly sleep and then hide herself with the sheets.

It was awkward, uncomfortable in the tiny compartment but she was able to stretch out a

little and as light streamed in through the tiny crack, she drifted off to sleep.

The next thing she was aware of was a gentle rocking motion and she struggled to get free; she wanted to have a look to see where she was and she wanted to get something to eat and drink, as well as to go to the toilet. She didn't want to urinate over the bedding she was lying on.

The thought of food supplies and comfort breaks was not part of her plan but there was not enough room to move in the tight compartment. She tried to swing her legs free but the cabinet was fastened and while there was no lock she did not have the leverage to put enough force in her legs to prise it open.

Emma struggled and writhed, trying to force the cotton sheets out of the way but they steadfastly refused to move. She took out her knife and began to slide it along the sheets underneath her that had been compacted by the weight of her body. She was breathing furiously and worried about a lack of Oxygen in the cabinet. She grunted as she gripped the knife and ran it down the bedding for the tenth time.

She was cutting the cotton and felt it slide, but with so many slits and cuts in the bedding, it slid around more and she was able to force most of the cotton to the end of the compartment and swing her legs around. She was able to spy out of the crack and see that it didn't look like there was anyone in the room and she pushed the soles of her feet against the doors of the cupboard and pushed forward.

There was a click and the door swung open, allowing Emma to slide out and grab her bag from the shelf below where she had stowed it. Her legs were stiff and numb and she stretched before moving; her body hurt. The cotton sheets were completely destroyed and she bundled them up in the corner and shut the door before creeping out of the room.

The boat had quite a few sleeping cabins; many of them single beds and she wondered if she could just sleep in one of them and not be noticed. She wanted a leak first and wondered if she could just find a bottle and be extremely careful with her aim but realised there must be a toilet and it was preferable to use civilised facilities!

She had not appreciated the size of the yacht in the dark or as she wandered around it at night but with daylight walked to the end of the thin corridor. She looked up the stairs to the right and crept up them. It was a big boat for two people but this would aid her, she could creep about if there was only two of them and was less likely to be caught.

She heard a radio coming from directly in front of her and a voice, so she crept back down the stairs; she knew that there were two guys on the boat so she knew she had the rest of the boat to herself.

Turning into a room, she crept past a double bed and used the toilet on the other side of the room, giving a relieved sigh as she gave her bladder respite. There was a small galley next to the toilet and she peered into it and opened the small fridge to find something to eat and drink; she was hungry and thirsty.

There was a cough and she turned to face the source of the noise, coming from the other side of the galley. Two rugged boys stared at the wretched looking girl. "Who the fuck are you?"

Chapter XV

Oliver lay back on the chair and the Police Officer looked at him. "Oliver Prutton. I am charging you with," he started and Oliver sniffed.

"I know," he said firmly. "Robbery, Breaking and Entering, Handling Stolen Goods. I knew you would."

The officer looked at his partner and then at the duty solicitor who raised his eyebrows. "Let me finish," Oliver was told firmly and the Police Office reeled half-a-dozen charges that Oliver was being prosecuted for.

Oliver knew he would be charged and just idly walked down the corridor with the Police officer to his cell. He stared back at the officer as the door closed and took a deep breath, before bursting into tears; the events of the day finally catching up with him.

He knew that this moment would come the moment he agreed to do the job with Jamie and Emma and he knew he should never have got involved. He kicked the door in anger and then sat down on the mattress to think things through.

He was fucked; Jamie and Emma were probably in Argentina and he would be the one to carry the can, just like his brother did all those years ago. He wiped his face and stared into the door of his cell and bit his lip.

His brother, Emma, Jaroslav, the henchmen who tortured people, the policeman who stole the nicked money – they were all guilty too but they were free. It was unfair.

Oliver slept little that night and was in court the following morning to a packed gallery. He felt nervous as he looked up to see all the eyes trained on him, and he confirmed his name, address and date of birth.

The duty solicitor had promised him that he would try and get bail, and duly made the application to the judge. "My client has an exemplary record, your honour, he has shown himself to be of good character and this is an isolated offence. We will be requesting a suspended sentence at the trial and believe there is a good chance for him to be given such as a punishment. He is of no threat on bail, and we would respectfully ask that he is bailed until the trial date."

The judge looked at the prosecutor who shook her head and got up, pointing out that Oliver was a flight risk, had been attempting to go to Argentina and that the charges levelled against him were serious. The judge nodded as the prosecutor spoke and looked at Oliver, telling him that he would be held on remand until his trial date.

Oliver closed his eyes and rubbed them. A remand centre didn't sound that bad but it was still incarceration and was prison by another name. His duty solicitor had told him to expect it but he still didn't want it to go to a prison. The Police cell had been bad enough.

Oliver was taken to the back of an armoured van and put inside, handcuffed to a guard that didn't want to engage in conversation with him. Oliver felt like a pariah and felt the glare of several dozen camera flashes through the window as the van moved out of court. He looked scared and tried to duck them, closing his eyes as the journalists threw their cameras to the window of the van as it left court, but he still knew he would be in every newspaper the following day.

The journey to the remand centre was relatively short and soon the vehicle came to rest. Oliver was scared and nervous, but he had something to do: he had to fill in a visitation form as there was someone he wanted to see.

* * * * *

Andrei grabbed the student as she walked past and clamped a gloved hand over the face of the Veterinary Studies student. Vicky shrieked as Andrei pushed her into the back of the Range Rover and Dmitri put the car into gear and sped off down the road.

Vicky struggled to get free and hit Andrei in the face with her elbows. He yelped and she screamed before smacking the back of Dmitri's head with her fist. Dmitri leant forward and struggled to get control of the vehicle as it veered towards the pavement. "Fuck," he called out. "Sort that bitch out."

Andrei grabbed hold of Vicky who was screaming for "help" and smacked her in the mouth and threw her against the seat, ramming his palm into the face of the student to silence her. He pulled her towards him and wrapped his other arm around the throat of the young woman and pushed down.

"Fuckin' shut it," he spat. "Or I ... I strangle you."

Vicky spluttered and Dmitri swung the car into the corner, before speeding out of the city of Aberdeen. Vicky was scared and tried to kick herself free but Andrei gripped her throat tighter with his forearm.

Vicky bit the arm of the guy restraining her and he let go with a cry and she struggled free, aiming a fierce blow into his loins. He gave a blood-curdling scream and she smacked Dmitri around the back of the head, who swore at his companion for the second time.

Andrei grabbed Vicky as she frantically tried to get a grip on the door handle and bundled her in the foot well, his body stopping her from moving. She swore viciously at him and tried kicking the door with her free leg, but was unable to get enough leverage to do any real damage to the vehicle and they were speeding out of the city so no-one would hear her.

The Range Rover left the road and bounced along a small track in a forest and Vicky squawked, struggling again but Dmitri stopped at the side of the track and got out, opening the back door and pulling the scared girl out into the forest.

Vicky was thrown against a tree and she cried out in pain as the unyielding fir smacked into her back. She got to her feet and tried to scramble away but Dmitri pushed her back and pulled his jacket away from his waist to reveal a gun tucked into the waistband. "Think you run away from bullets? This time you will talk to us, no fuckin' tricks."

Vicky whimpered and Andrei got out of the car and stood a few feet away from Vicky on the other side of the tree to Dmitri and the car. They looked menacingly at her and she shook her head. "I told you, I don't know anything."

"Fuckin' liar," Andrei shouted and glared at her. "He had the stuff and he lost it at your house. We want answers now. And no more tricks."

Dmitri put his hand out to stop Andrei and Vicky burst into tears. "The Police have raided my home. Burglars have been in. They found nothing. If he had it, he lost it.. And I didn't ask for him to come. I don't know anything about anything. And the Police got the statues, I saw them."

Andrei cracked his knuckles and withdrew his gun, looking at Dmitri. "Start talking," Andrei told her and held the gun at chest level with Vicky. "You were his girlfriend."

"I wasn't," Vicky squealed. "I wasn't. I danced with him once at a College disco," she shouted hysterically and tears streamed down her face. "I barely knew him but he liked me so he came up here when he got into trouble."

Dmitri licked his lips and thought. "So where did he go?"

"I don't know," Vicky wailed. "He came up, begged to stay. I told him he could only stay

until the weekend and then he had to go. He had a bag with him and the Police took it. That is all I know.”

Andrei aimed his gun at Vicky's face and looked at the senior man who shook his head. “You lie to me, we fuck you, you hear.” Vicky nodded as Andrei lowered his weapon. “We stick a gun up your cunt and he blow you away,” he warned and Vicky nodded, rubbing her back and her abused face.

She watched as Andrei and Dmitri walked backwards and climbed into the car. “Where am I? You can't leave me here. It's miles to Aberdeen.”

Dmitri smiled. “We can do what the fuck we like.”

“But ...” Vicky called and watched as her abductors left her alone in the middle of the wood. She groaned and looked back behind her; if the car went that way down the track then that must lead to Aberdeen but she was many miles away and it was already starting to rain.

She pulled her jacket close to her; she was going to get soaked if she couldn't scrounge a lift.

* * * * *

“Ahh,” Emma cried and they looked at her. “I am wanting to catch a lift.” Her heart felt like it was beating out of her chest as they looked at her, this could be the end of her adventure and all her efforts to get this far wasted. She had done so well but they looked angry.

The two men looked her up and down, they were both well built and robust and tall. She guessed that they were in their early-to-mid twenties but wore good clothes and had well manicured hair. The shorter of the two, still easily 5'10” tall and with blonde hair shook his head slowly.

“Fuck awf,” the taller brown-haired boy and pulled down his brand new jumper. He looked across and Emma snarled.

“Ahh come on,” she begged. “I'll get out of your hair at the Canaries.”

“Canaries? We ain't going to the Canaries.”

Emma scowled. “Sure you are, this is Lord Whittingham's boat, isn't it?”

The two boys grinned and shook their heads. “No, he is in the boat next door.”

“Ahh shit,” Emma cried and ran her tongue over her teeth. “So where are you going?”

“Trinidad and then to Brazil and then back.”

“Brazil,” Emma cried. “You're going to Brazil. Ahhh, even better.”

The two men shook their head and then the elder taller one sighed. “We gotta take her back to shore.”

“Andrea will go fuckin' ape,” he replied in his well spoken voice. “We'll lose a day by the time we turn around. And when we report it, they'll search the boat and everything ...”

Emma exhaled sharply. “I'll be no pain. And I can pay my way. I was just enchanted by the boat,” Emma lied and glanced at the man. “Please.”

“We better speak to the girls,” they muttered and grabbed Emma's wrist dragging her up to the top deck where another guy was piloting the yacht in front of a console while two girls in very short dresses were lay out on the sofa. “We have a stowaway,” he announced.

“Pardon?” The two girls spun around and glanced at the dishevelled Emma. “Oh Cedric. You said we were good to go.”

"We were," a voice from behind Emma told her. "But we need to go back to port, report her and they will search the boat."

"But I don't want to go back to drop her off"

They all looked at her. "She wants a lift to Brazil," Cedric added.

"Huh. No way," the guy muttered who was with the controls. "No way, we could get in so much trouble."

"Could we just chuck her overboard?" The girl in the yellow dress asked and Emma's eyes widened. "Like the pirates."

"You what?" Emma squealed.

"Oh great, a Northern pleb," the girl spat back and looked at Cedric. "You promised us some debauchery young man. I didn't give up holidaying in the Maldives to take chavs half-way 'round the world."

Emma took a deep breath. "I ain't going to stop any funny business," she told her. "And I ain't no chav."

The girl scowled and looked to the man at the front of the boat. "Harry, deal with her."

Harry licked his lips. "Listen Peaches, we can't throw her overboard, so we will need to stop off and drop her off, or we can give her a lift. Confine her to a bedroom, maybe."

The girl snarled and then whined. "But I don't want her on the boat. She will spoil everything."

Emma licked her lips. "I don't want any trouble. I won't be any trouble, I promise."

The girl in the blue dress smiled. "Well maybe we could show her how to drive the boaty thing and then all of us can enjoy our time together even more."

The other girl snarled and they looked at each other. "I don't mind that," Emma offered and gripped her bag tighter.

"It's your call Harry, it's your Dad's boat," one of the voices behind Emma said and Harry snapped his fingers at the girl in the blue dress.

"Put her in one of the spare cabins," he told her with a smile. "We'll have a chat." The other girl threw her hands down dramatically and puffed out in annoyance. "One more thing," Harry said as the girl got up to lead Emma down the first staircase she came up. "What's ya name?"

Emma licked her lips, she thought about using the name of "Amy Wallace" but hesitated; there was little point, if they knew who she was then they would have said. "Emma," she admitted and Harry nodded.

"Well welcome aboard, Emma. Just a pity you didn't use the front door like everybody else."

"Yeah," Emma muttered. "Sorry about that." He smiled and she followed the short blonde girl down the staircase she had originally come up when she had heard the radio.

"Sophia," the girl said introducing herself and Emma smiled.

"Why did that other girl hate me so much?"

Sophia sighed. "Ahh well, Beatrice hates competition. And she likes Harry."

"I'm not interested ..." Emma started and trailed off as Sophia raised her eyebrows at her.

"Harry likes the ... umm ... well the sporty girl look."

“But I am not interested,” Emma started. “I am really not looking for a boyfriend.”

Sophia spluttered. “Neither is Beatrice.” She gave a tortured look and opened a cabin door. “We all go to the same college at Oxford, but we umm ... well ... we are all swingers. This is our Summer holiday of fun and games.”

“Oh,” Emma said in shock.

“Yeah,” Sophia replied going bright red in embarrassment. “And well, it's just a shock for her, you being here. We've known each other for two years and ...”

“You ain't come 'ere to study,” Emma finished for her and the girl gave a grin.

“No,” she muttered. “Well only the Kama Sutra.”

Chapter XVI

Rosie returned an hour later and came out to the lawn where Jamie was sat soaking up the rays of the Sun. He wasn't brave enough to be naked but was topless and the naked-again Rosie kissed him on the cheeks. "Thank you," she whispered. "You hungry." Jamie's stomach rumbled and she giggled, cocking her head and flashing him a smirk. "I'll assume yes then."

"I've only had a bread thing since breakfast," Jamie told her and she giggled.

"A bread thing? You mean a sandwich."

"No, a umm, it's French or Belgian or owt."

"Croissant? Pain au Chocolat? Brioche?" Rosie asked and he spluttered.

"Yeah. Something like that."

"Is pan-fried Salmon OK?" Jamie nodded and she stripped, leaving just her T-Shirt on before walking into the house. Jamie felt rude to stay outside and followed her in, complimenting her on the house.

It was a large property, and he looked around the lounges that were bigger than his entire mother's house. Every aspect of the decoration was refined and elegant, with plates and ornaments everywhere set against the light wallpaper and Mahogany beams. "It takes forever to clean," Rosie moaned as she came up behind him and slid her hands around his waist. She cooed in his ear and nibbled his ear. "Come on, come help me with dinner."

"Sure," Jamie muttered and put his bag down by the table. She heated a skillet with oil and threw in some chopped garlic and herbs before passing him the light pink fish.

"Six minutes on each side," she told him and then with the small saucepan boiling threw in some baby carrots with the stalks on. She laughed as Jamie asked her whether she should have cut them off, and took out a griddle to warm up with a teaspoon of oil.

"What the hell is that?" Jamie asked, pointing at the green shoots with strange tips. "It looks like fu ..." Jamie went to swear and then stopped. "like umm ... bamboo."

"It is not bamboo, or even fuckin' bamboo," she said with a smile and kissed him. "Don't tell me you've never had asparagus, Ian?"

"Err ... no," Jamie muttered and watched as she chopped the ends from them and put them in the griddle.

"Then it'll be a new experience for you," Rosie muttered.

Jamie took a deep breath; he had tried to be more refined and not to show his working class background since he had arrived as he felt in awe of the house, but Rosie just giggled and leant into him. "Yeah, it will," he told her and watched as the asparagus cooked and he flipped the salmon.

Rosie dished the meal up on fancy square plates and drizzled a small amount of balsamic vinegar over the plates. Jamie sat down at almost gasped at what Rosie passed him; it looked so elegantly presented.

Rosie looked expectantly as he crunched into the vibrant green shoots and he gave a nod appreciatively. "It's not bad," he muttered and swallowed the chewed up remains of the unwanted green vegetable.

"I love asparagus," Rosie said and slid a shoot through her lips and kissed it seductively. Jamie adjusted himself and then started eating the pan-fried salmon; he was not used to

such luxury and it didn't taste much like fish fingers but Rosie watched him gleefully and poured them a glass of wine each from a large bottle in the fridge.

"Cheers," Jamie muttered and watched as the girl darted around the room, half-naked and with a smile.

"It's good to have company. I've been on my own all week," she admitted and rubbed the back of his hand with hers. She gazed up and looked into his face as he sat back sipping at the wine. "It gets so lonely up here."

Jamie nodded and then smiled at her. "So you go walking around without any keks on."

Rosie grinned at him. "Ahh well, you weren't complaining earlier, were you?"

"No, twasn't. Who would?" Jamie finished his fine and looked around the bare room. "So what's it like, round 'ere, like?" Jamie asked with pursed lips.

Rosie poured herself another glass of the wine. "I mean, I do like Tom but he has a girlfriend in the village. Sammy is nice, he is the master of the house, but he likes to take advantage, you know, and I just like the company of someone my own age." Jamie nodded and finished his glass; he was feeling tipsy as his alcohol tolerance had not returned from spending six years completely teetotal. She giggled and looked at him. "What's it like now, you over her?"

"Who?" Jamie asked immediately and then rubbed his eye, thinking quickly. "Yeah. I just don't want to be told what to do and when I find someone else to love, I want my family to accept her."

"Who would they accept?"

Jamie shrugged and thought back to his hypothetical family. "A nice girl I s'pose."

"Would they accept someone like me?"

Jamie gulped. "Errr ... well I dunno. I guess."

She giggled and downed her glass. "You are not the only one to have split up when their parents fucked up a relationship," she said with a smile, spitting out the expletive. "My dad beat up the guy who took my cherry."

"Oh," Jamie said and she gave a snort.

"Partly 'cos I was fourteen and he was thirty-two and partly 'cos we got strains over his brand-new Morgan." She laughed as she spoke but Jamie didn't know what to say and she just removed her top. "I promised you a massage," she said and held out her hand. "And it's better if you are naked too."

Jamie was guided by the tipsy girl to her bedroom and she watched as he undressed and exposed himself to her. She smiled when she saw his semi-flaccid cock and pushed him onto her single bed, taking a bottle of massage lotion and rubbing it gently over his back.

He purred as she pressed down on his muscles, forcing the tension from his aching body and gripping his sides with her warm thighs. She worked back then massaged his globes, and finally down his legs. She relished in his vocal enjoyment of her touch and happily turned him over to run her hands along his front.

She slid over his erect cock and let it nuzzle against her pubis as she touched his pectorals and then rubbed his shoulders. Her gentle rocking motion was moving his cock over her pearl and she felt tingles of gentle warmth shoot through her body.

Jamie was purring as her slippery hands glided over his nipples and she started rocking back on the erect shaft that was leaking pre-cum over her slit. He opened his eyes and she rolled her tongue around her lips giving him a sultry look.

Jamie groaned and wiggled his thighs as she moved her hand down his flanks. "You want it?" Rosie whispered and watched Jamie nod. "You definitely over her?"

"Oh yeah," Jamie muttered and Rosie tweaked his nipples with her slippery hands and then slid over Jamie's body to kiss him on the lips. Her hands glided along the bed and opened her top drawer.

"I'm sure I've got one in here," she told him and Jamie turned to look at her scrabbling hand, savouring the soft, smooth body of the girl lying over his torso. He ran his hands over the ass of the girl who gave a gentle moan when his finger found her crevice between her thighs and he gently stroked it.

She pulled up a small flat packet and looked at him. "I knew I had one," she murmured and Jamie smiled. "Yeah, well, it's been awhile," she said with a grin and opened the condom, leaning back and sliding it over Jamie's manhood.

Jamie watched and she climbed on top of him. "You OK?" Rosie asked and Jamie nodded; he was about to get laid and she asked him if he was feeling fine?

"Course," he muttered.

"I love going on top," Rosie admitted and guided Jamie's erect member into her waiting opening. He gave a loud groan of appreciation and she smiled as she bobbed gently down on it. She pursed her lips together and closed her eyes, before running her hands over his body.

Jamie grunted and cupped her breasts with his hands, tweaking her nipples and rolling them in his fingers. She mewed appreciatively and leant forward to give him better access and push his cock further back inside her. "Oh lan," she cried out as her pussy twitched and pulsed over the rubber-clad phallus she was rocking back on. "Oh lan, you are wonderful."

He grunted and closed his eyes, trying to keep up with the rhythm Rosie had set and felt his toes curl; he was near the point of no return already. She groaned and leant back further, causing his cock to caress her inside wall and then slid forward.

Jamie snorted and let out a deep breath. He gripped her thighs and felt his testicles tighten. "I'm coming," he cried and Rosie gave a smile, pressing her body down harder on the young man. Jamie gripped the maid with his hands and twisted his face before emitting a grunt of pleasure. He was desperately holding on to his release to intensify the sensation and held his breath as his muscles quivered. Rosie bit her lip and bounced onto his crotch.

He gave a lustful moan and she felt his cock twitch as he filled the tip of the condom with his seed. She smiled at his face, etched in intense concentration and immoral pleasure. She panted as she slowly rocked back to send a few shocks through Jamie's cock and then grinned.

"That's a thank you," she whispered as his hands ran over her perfect skin. "I mean it. You really helped me out today."

Jamie was panting and watched Rosie as she gently slid off the young man. "You OK?"

Rosie sniffed. "Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine," she said and removed the condom from Jamie, tying a knot in it and throwing it in the small bin in the corner of the room. She passed him a tissue and looked at him. "Men make so much mess when they get a stiffy, don't they?"

Jamie laughed, the lustful tension broken and she licked her lips. "Like girls don't leak everywhere."

Rosie gasped in mock outrage. "I don't leak anywhere. Well once but my boyfriend was trying to find my G-Spot and I ended up peeing everywhere." Jamie laughed as she smiled

and she kissed him again. "But that's a with a very weird guy. Very kinky."

Jamie grunted and watched as she kissed his neck and then nibbled his ears. "I suppose you want to sleep in here," she cooed and Jamie nodded with a wicked grin. "I know it's only a single, but I've slept with two people in a single before. And it's not as though we are fat or anything."

Rosie nodded and straightened out her duvet before going to the toilet and brushing her teeth. She settled down to be cuddled by Jamie, his arms wrapped around her, settling against her firm breasts. She allowed him to kiss her neck, but she was too tired for any more sex, and just allowed his erection to rub against the small of her back as she drifted off to sleep.

Jamie woke up just as Rosie was stirring and watched the naked girl leave the room and then return a few moments later. "I'll go get us breakfast," she said. "English fry-up OK?"

He nodded, watching her slide a dressing gown over her shoulders and flash a seductive smile at him. "That's sweet," Jamie told her and Rosie flashed a smile.

"And then we got the day to ourselves. I was thinking about a walk to the forest, frolicking in a stream, and then an early night." He grinned at her; he was supposed to be on the run but had found just the person to stop running for, albeit for only a few days.

"Wicked," he muttered and she flicked up her dressing gown to reveal her peachy ass as she left the room. He lay back in the bed and closed his eyes and then heard a car skid to a halt on the driveway.

Jamie swore and looked out of the window. A Police car had just pulled up and Rosie was downstairs making breakfast. Jamie threw his clothes on and grabbed his bag before sprinting down the back stairs as the doorbell rang. "I'll get it," Rosie called. He had twenty seconds if he was lucky and as quietly as he could, opened the back door. He had a passport, he was inches away from getting to Heathrow and getting out of England. All he needed was for time to stand still.

Jamie emerged from the garden and dived into the bushes and then climbed the wall; he wanted to get out of the village as soon as he possible. How did the Police know he was there already and he sprinted across the fields, stopping by the trees and out of sight.

He waited for the Police to follow him but there was no sound and after twenty minutes he ran down to the little lane that the house stood on. He was about to run down it when he heard a car and jumped into the undergrowth just in time to see the Police car go past with Rosie handcuffed in the back seat with a Police officer.

What had Rosie done? She had nearly blown everything for him, and she didn't look like much of a criminal! He had to suppress a giggle, if Rosie had told him what she had done then they could have run away together.

* * * * *

Emma did her best to concentrate on the controls but the loud, lustful sounds of Harry and John spearing the lustful Sophia had her turning her head to watch.

The five ex-students had eventually been glad of her arrival; running the boat was hard work and they had misjudged the amount of manpower they needed. She had helped with everything from cooking to steering to coping with the sails and was thoroughly enjoying herself.

She had been probed about her background but said nothing, and had been quite relieved when she found out the room where she had shredded the sheets was a spare bedroom and her handiwork had not been discovered.

Sophia had been unusually friendly with her, especially after they had left the Cape Verde Islands – a minor stop of fuel, water, supplies and condoms – and had relished working the night shifts with Emma, normally with semen on a part of her body.

Emma found the daytime sunbathing was better naked and soon started walking around the boat with nothing on (unless she was doing manual work and when she became grateful for the support her clothes gave her). Her nudity had not been treated as an open invitation for sex, and she had not been approached, although the manic debauchery that was happening everywhere when her sailing companions were not too tired, was always conducted in her presence.

Beatrice remained cold towards Emma despite her lukewarm attitude towards getting it on with Harry – who seemed to be more interested in the permanent horniness and selflessness of Sophia, but she got on well with everyone else. Beatrice worried Emma though; if she got jealous and started digging then Emma's past would soon unravel and then she would be in trouble.

Emma therefore decided to keep out of the sex games and feign a level of ambivalence towards them, which was not always easy – it had been a few months since Emma had had sex and she was enjoying the freedom of the voyage.

It was Sophia's birthday and her “present” involved three guys, a girl and an insane number of condoms and batteries that Emma found enchanting. She kept stealing a glance as Sophia's vocal climaxes echoed around the room; the blonde girl was insatiable.

Emma was startled when Beatrice arrived up the stairs and looked at her. She was wearing a T-Shirt that stopped just above her incredibly well manicured pubic hair and grunted at Emma. “They having fun,” Emma muttered and Beatrice flashed a smile over her cold expression on her face. “I know it's your turn,” Emma told her, “but I can cover for a bit longer.”

“You've been on eight hours,” Beatrice replied immediately. “And tiredness causes accidents.”

Emma took a deep breath. “Yeah, I know. But we've hardly seen anything all day, except a few birds. If you want to join in, I don't mind.” Emma reached for her bottle of water and looked up at Beatrice. “What I mean is, I'm cool, Beatrice.” Beatrice looked confused for a moment and Emma smiled at her. “I'm being nice.”

Beatrice giggled and looked at Sophia. “Has she been at it all evening?”

Emma nodded and looked back. “I'm surprised they are not worn out. Some stamina going on.”

Beatrice touched Emma on the shoulder. “Sure you don't want to have some fun?” Emma shook her head.

“Maybe later,” Emma promised and watched as Beatrice walked over to the orgy taking place in front of her eyes. She went back to the controls and slid her finger along her nipples and then down to her shaved pubis; Sophia had done it the day before on deck to whistles from the guys who watched.

She was feeling horny and interested but tried not to look back at them and block out the sounds of female orgasm. She could still smell sex in the air, and knew it was happening but she tried not to think about it. It was impossible; Emma had been on edge for fifteen days and she needed a release. Too often had she walked past or stepped over copulating couples. Sophia would happily stop anyone for a kiss, or a fondle and poor Cedric was looking decidedly worn out the day before.

Her body wanted in; her brain didn't but she had to concentrate on the controls and not let

her hands wander, but they were wandering. She felt the softness of the towel she was sitting on and licked her lips, pushing into the chair as the boat rocked with the swell.

She heard a cough and Sophia slid her hands down Emma's flanks, and started kissing the nape of her neck. "I told you, you'd want it," Sophia whispered. "Cedric and John are both free, which one?"

Emma groaned as Sophia's delicate touch swirled around her sides, and then cupped her breasts. She relished the smoothness and gentle caress and closed her eyes and groaned. Sophia chuckled but continued to kiss the sides of Emma's neck, occasionally sucking on her earlobe and gently running her hands over the smooth body.

Emma's groans got louder as Sophia pushed her body into Emma's back and ran her fingers over Emma's erect nipples. "So Cedric or John?" Sophia asked. "Or me? John can 'alf dive for oysters."

Emma wasn't listening, she was enjoying the strong movements of Sophia's hands who was gliding over her electrified body.

"I'll take control," Cedric offered and Sophia guided the horny Emma towards a sofa opposite Beatrice, who was on her knees eagerly kissing the testicles of Harry.

Sophia looked at Emma and nodded to John. Sophia sat down on the couch and pulled Emma on top of her, the brown hair of the thief coming over her face. "Give me the other end," she said clinically with a smirk and Emma looked puzzled before allowing Sophia to guide Emma around into a 69 position.

Sophia pushed herself into the seat, and put her tongue at the clitoris of the lustful woman. She groaned instantly and a male finger touched her accessible hole and slid inside. Emma squealed and grunted, calling out for someone to "go on."

John climbed onto the sofa and then positioned his stiff cock at Emma's opening causing her to squeal as it touched her. Sophia was swirling her tongue over Emma's engorged clitoris as the unsheathed cock slid effortlessly into the lustful woman.

Emma mewled as the stiff phallus filled her and then felt Sophia slide her tongue towards the top of her clitoris to give the intruder to her pussy a little more room. Sophia had to extend her tongue to still flick Emma's button but she could see the penis slick with Emma's juices.

Emma was panting and grunting as John started thrusting firmly into her; his hands resting on her waist. She gasped when Sophia's hands slid over her body and tweaked her nipples, waves of spiky pleasure shot through her body.

She could feel a warm tension gripping her crotch as John's angle rubbed his cock along her vaginal wall. She shrieked as he rammed it forcefully into her, and let her head sink to the seat of the chair, burying her face into the crotch of Sophia.

Sophia felt the nasal grunts of Emma vibrate through her pubic bone and slid her legs open but Emma's kiss went no further. Sophia swirled her tongue around the engorged clit and rubbed Emma's nipples between her fingers. There was a groan and a grunt.

Emma was in a dreamland; she had never been as horny and every part of her body was tingling. She felt electrified and did her best to try to meet the furious rhythm John had adopted. She rocked back and her muscles grasped his cock as it slid into her.

She was near the point of no return, and had a fierce tension inside her, she wanted to let go, she was nearly there. She hadn't orgasmed properly for years but she knew Sophia's expert tongue action and John's rhythmic thrusting of his cock was taking her there.

She panted, cried out and screwed up her face as her legs quivered and pubic muscles

tightened. She squeezed John's cock and then the tension exploded. A warm cascade of incredible pleasure engulfed her, and she yelled out in ecstasy, her voice echoing into the crotch of Sophia.

John felt the young woman's orgasm and grunted filling the robber with his seed; Emma's clamping on his cock had brought him over the edge and she lay there panting for a moment. Sophia kissed her opening as he withdrew and a small stream of semen flowed into her mouth; John had been ejaculating three times a day he had hardly filled Emma when he released, but Sophia swirled her tongue over Emma's clit.

Emma felt a wave of immoral lust come over her and pushed her face into the slit of Sophia, running her tongue up and down the moist opening of the blonde girl. There was a passionate cry from beneath her, as Emma's tongue flicked the pearl of Sophia and then Sophia clamped her mouth to Emma's opening, thrusting her rolled tongue into Emma's slick hole.

The two women brought each to orgasm, the sounds of their lesbian coupling filling the room and the feint aroma of arousal intensified. Emma looked up to see all four of their travelling companions watching them and Cedric smiled. "You hot," he told them.

Emma slid off of her selfless lover and watched as Sophia grabbed a towel to wipe her face. "Juices obey gravity," she muttered and then embraced Emma. "She is wonderful," she cooed.

"Lesbian lovers?" Cedric teased and Sophia scowled.

"Bisexual. And anyway, you all owe me a tenner," Sophia said proudly and looked at Emma. "Sorry. But I had a bet that I could get you to join in," she told her. "I knew you wanted to." Emma gasped and Sophia touched her on the arm. "But you were great."

"We should be in Brazil tomorrow and then a couple of days later, we hit Rio," John told her. "I thought we might stop in Buenos Aires for the day, we've made good time. You getting off in Recife or Rio?"

Emma couldn't stop smiling. "Well if I keep getting fucked like that, I might be tempted to stay awhile longer," she said, hoping that they wouldn't mind taking her to the Argentinian city.

Chapter XVII

“Single to Buenos Aires please,” Jamie said with a grin and put the passport on the desk. The young woman fumbled on her computer and then looked up.

“When do you want to leave, sir?”

“Today,” Jamie said confidently and looked at her. “Please.”

“We have a seat, sir. Do you want first class or standard class.”

“Oh standard,” Jamie told her.”

“Priority Boarding? Number of bags sir?”

“No, and one.”

She punched away at her keys and he slid his stolen passport under the counter for her to tap away. She glanced at the passport number and then slit back to him with a request for over eight hundred pounds. Jamie took a deep breath and opened his wallet, passing Tom's credit card under counter.

Jamie thought it looked less suspicious if he opened a wallet to pass a credit card instead of paying in cash and tapped in the PIN he had memorised from the sheet of paper. She printed out the tickets, sliding them underneath the glass screen and wishing him a safe journey.

Jamie nodded and put them inside his stolen passport, thanked her and left. The checking-in desk was on the other side of the atrium and he idled over to join a small queue; he didn't feel happy about giving the bag in as hold luggage but didn't want his hand-luggage to be scanned with the statue in it.

Jamie reached the front of the queue in no time, and passed his bag containing all his worldly possessions to the woman as well as his ticket who slid a tag around the handle of the bag and he watched it disappear out of sight.

The gruff woman grunted, passing him a boarding pass and pointing him towards a “gate” at the other end of the terminal. Jamie had half-an-hour before boarding officially opened but he wandered towards it anyway, passed the line of security personnel and the Police. He had never been that close to the Police Officer since the raid but they were looking for suspicious characters not burglars, and Jamie had changed his appearance considerably in the last few days.

Jamie helped himself to a drink with some change in his pocket as well as a burger and then bought some sweets for the outbound journey. He would be free of Britain once and for all in less than an hour. By then, he would be up among the clouds and en route to the South American country of Argentina, where he would be rich.

His flight was called and he walked purposely down towards the gate. Jamie could see the Departure Gate and almost ran towards it, his heart beating furiously. He nodded towards the security guard stood waiting as they went past and felt an arm go across his chest.

“Excuse me, sir.”

* * * * *

Oliver passed into the small room and the busty frame of Charlotte came running over.

“Oli, what the hell did you do?”

Oliver took a deep breath and licked his lips. “I got involved with Jamie and Emma,” he muttered and glanced over at the female prison guard watching over him. “They wanted to raid Doszak and I got roped into it.”

Charlotte took a deep breath and adjusted her top. "Yeah, I was speaking to ya mum the other day, she has been proper roughed up by Mr Doszak."

Oliver gasped in horror and shook his head. "She didn't know about anything," Oliver blurted out and rubbed his nose. "I've not seen her, she knows nothing."

Charlotte adjusted herself again. "Well I got a visit. And I don't work there no more. I got thrown out 'cos they reckon I was involved."

Oliver frowned. "But you knew—"

"Yeah Oli, I fuckin' know," Charlotte snapped. "But they didn't believe it. They said I needed to see stuff. And I was supposed to be doing the fuckin' cards wasn't I? So they reckoned I'd been bought off."

"But you know, well I barely knew. They just wanted some info on the house and stuff," Oliver explained. "And then I got roped in when this guy got nicked. I said no but they kept on."

Charlotte adjusted herself again and Oliver looked at the big-bosomed girl. "I thought you couldn't wear bras so I didn't but it's 'orrible without support," she moaned and Oliver stared at her big breasts straining at the material, punctuated with a small broach.

"What?"

"Yeah well, ya can. But I thought I'd get pulled if I had a bra on, carrying in drugs or owt."

Oliver shook his head and suppressed a titter, glancing around the grey, soulless room and then back at his visitor, illuminated by the window behind her and the feint light from an underpowered strip light above them. "I think you could have come properly dressed," he muttered. "But thanks for comin'"

"Well what happened?" Charlotte demanded, her face scowling at him. "I lost me job and got proper roughed up for you."

Oliver took a deep breath and stared at the table, clearly feeling guilty and wretched. "Well, we broke in, got the stuff – we had away over three-quarters of a million, the statues and some jewellery – but had to use me card to get out. Emma drove us to a cottage and then we split up."

"So where is everything?"

"Oh I dunno," Oliver said quickly. "I had over a quarter of a million but it disappeared when I got to the Police Station. They are saying it wasn't there, but it fuckin' was. I checked it before I went into the shower and five minutes later, I am nicked and I see the officer take the bag. By the time the bag is at the station, it's empty. The Inspector or someone had it away."

Charlotte licked her lips. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I am sure. But they kept saying that it wasn't reported so I can't have had the money, but I did. I was with a girl I used to go to College with, she went downstairs to make breakfast and then the Police turned up. It's a fuckin' disgrace. Bunch of bloody criminals. And they are doing me for not cooperating but I have been. I told them I was trying to get to Buenos Aires."

"Buenos Aires?"

"Yeah. It's where Jamie and Emma are going."

"So where are Jamie and Emma?"

"How the fuck do I know?" Oliver snapped and glanced up at her. "Sorry. It's all the Police keep asking. I was dropped off in a small town. Whitchurch I think it was. Jamie was at a

tiny village in the middle of nowhere and Emma took the van. But I think I'm the only one that's been caught."

"Yeah I know."

"Look, if ya see my mum, tell her I'm sorry," Oliver told her. "She ain't been to visit. Reckon she is proper pissed with me, but I didn't want to get involved."

Charlotte sighed and then rubbed her face. "The one thing I don't get is how you managed to get into the vault."

Oliver smiled. "Ahh well that was Emma. She set the alarm off, waited for Jaroslav to unlock the vault and watched him type in the code from behind her statue."

"Crafty," she muttered in grudging admiration.

"I know. She was proper clued up. Told us to keep movin' and not to stay in one place for too long. And so I am here 'cos I stopped with Vicky."

Charlotte pursed her lips together and then smiled. "Well I am workin' for a travel agent now. Met the manager in a night club, very fond of me and got me a job."

Oliver raised his eyebrows and sniffed. "In exchange for certain services?" He said with a grin and Charlotte giggled.

"So what's it like in here?"

Oliver shrugged. "It's not so bad. It's not prison so it's not hardcore. It's shit but it's OK, I s'pose. It could be worse. I mean, it hurt so much when they arrested me as I was getting it on with Vicky."

"Oh my God, they arrested you while you were shagging? And you always wanted that girl from the College."

Oliver smirked. "No, not while I was shagging Vicky, while I was getting on with Vicky. We really hit it off, and I always wanted a relationship with her, but I got nicked so it has sort of ended. But we have been shagging, just not when I was arrested." Charlotte smiled at him and grinned. "Anyway, I come in here, and it's big news. I've done over the guy who everyone is shit scared of, so they think I am a criminal mastermind. I've never had so much respect."

Charlotte laughed out loud and Oliver shrugged. "You serious?"

"Yeah. First day, this guy comes up to me, pats me on the back, says I've got balls of steel as Doszak had him beaten up. There's a dozen people in 'ere with big grudges against Doszak so I am proper flavour of the month."

Charlotte sniffed and looked at her watch. "Look sorry Oli. I gotta shoot. I'll try and see ya in a couple of weeks time, promise."

Oliver sighed; they had only had fifteen minutes but glanced at the guard walking towards them. "Ok cheers, for coming to see me."

"Ya welcome," Charlotte said with a grin and hugged her old colleague. "I will try and come again. It's good to see that you are OK, I was worried."

"Yeah I'm fine. I thought I'd go to pieces but it's been OK. I'd rather be outside though. In a funny way, the raid, the escape, Vicky, the arrest and stuff, it's sort of been crazy but I've dealt with it. And I'm stronger for it."

"Good," she muttered. Charlotte took one last look of her friend, licked her lips and then was escorted out of the remand centre. She crossed the road and sat in the back of a Black BMW and passed a broach to the thick-set man in the back of the car.

"You got 'im?" Jaroslav asked and Charlotte nodded.

"He knows nothin'. He is just as useless as before, but 'e said the cops nicked ya money." Jaroslav's eyes narrowed and she shrugged. "If ya didn't report it, it dain't exist to them. But he was dead sure. Watch it yaself."

Jaroslav nodded towards the driver and the car glided into the road and towards the city. "I will," Charlotte was told.

* * * * *

"Inspector," the Detective Chief Inspector said as Richard entered the room. "Please sit down."

Richard adjusted himself and then sat down in the chair where he was pointing and licked his lips. "You wanted to see me, sir."

"Yes." A tortured expression flickered across the senior Policeman's face and he took a deep breath, pursing his lips together. "This is a bit delicate and what I am about to tell you is confidential."

"Of course," Richard replied, sniffing and looking at the highly experienced man run his hand through his greying hair.

"DI Hargreaves has umm ... well he has a period of extended leave, and we need a senior officer to take over the Doszak case."

"Oh, nothing serious?" Richard asked, thinking about his colleague.

"Well ... it's private and personal. But he won't be with us for some time, so I want you to take the lead on this one. I know you have been looking after the robbery at his home recently so I believe you've spoken."

"Yes," Richard said, sitting up in the chair. "Yes, we spoke at length. His investigation had many more outside agencies than mine."

"Yes, well, that's regrettable," the DCI muttered. "But we are getting somewhere and so I want the two investigations merging. I gather that as your two haven't surfaced and Oliver is in court you will be winding your investigation up soon?"

Richard nodded subserviently and the Chief Inspector stared at him. "We want him this time. We are nearly there, just don't arrest him until you have all the evidence. His lawyers tied us up in knots last time, and I am not having this force looking like Muppets again."

Richard nodded. "Yes, sir."

The DCI nodded and then looked towards the door. "Good luck then," he told the Inspector and Richard got up, shook his hand, leaving the room.

He was going to get Jaroslav.

* * * * *

Oliver coughed and watched as the lady, now in her late twenties was brought into the visitor's room. She stared at him and gave him a smirk. "I'll be honest," she said with a grin. "I thought I would be the last person to get a visiting order from you."

Oliver shrugged and stretched. "Yeah, well. I am not a sixteen year old any more so you don't need to seduce me with hot chocolate and unbuttoned blouses." Chrissy laughed nervously and Oliver pointed to the seat opposite. "So before we start, how are you?"

Chrissy nervously sat down and Oliver enjoyed watching her squirm a little; she was not expecting him to be so friendly and she shrugged. "OK. I'm not working for the Sun any more. Gone upmarket, at the Mail now."

Oliver raised an eyebrow. "I know. I sent the visiting order, remember. I don't care what paper you work on now," he said candidly as he licked his lips and looked at her. "I know you came, partly out of a morbid curiosity and partly 'cause you wondered what I would tell you."

Chrissy shrugged and nodded. "I got a visiting order from the only person arrested for one of the most talked about robberies of the year. Of course I was going to come."

"And you want a story?" Oliver said without emotion and then answered his question with a nonchalant hand gesture. "Of course you do. And I know exactly what you will do to get a story."

Chrissy fidgeted and sighed. "So you have got me to come all this way for a lecture?" She asked him aggressively and Oliver shook his head slowly

"No," he told her. "But I am not the person I was six years ago. Hell, I am not the person I was six weeks ago. I won't be pushed around."

The journalist shrugged. "You asked me to come," she said and scowled.

"I know I did," Oliver said, rubbing his hands together. "And I know why you've come to see me." Oliver took a deep breath. "I want to talk to you. I want to talk to your newspaper."

Chrissy raised her eyebrows. "So, what do you want to tell me?" Chrissy held out her hands and pushed her chest out a bit further. "Cos I was working on a royal story. Can't say too much, but it's bestiality, going to be big. I dropped that to come here."

"I am sorry to have distracted you from such public interest news," Oliver replied with a dismissive smirk and then nodded towards her. "But I know what I tell you now, you cannot print until after the trial. But I am prepared to tell you everything so when I plead guilty, it's all there for you."

Chrissy bit her finger and pulled out her reporter's notebook. "Sure," she said and Oliver licked his lips.

"You remember how to write, can't use a Dictaphone this time," he said with a grin, confidently. Chrissy scowled and Oliver sat back in his chair tapping away at the desk. "You know Jamie, Emma and me, we broke into the house of the Ukrainian gangster, Mr Doszak."

"Gangster?"

"Oh yes," Oliver said with a grunt. "You will know everything about the raid and I will tell you about that if you want, but Jaroslav Doszak, he is violent and a bully. And he runs all the cocaine in Cheshire and the brothels in Liverpool."

"So, everyone knows he is a bit shady," Chrissy told him and Oliver nodded.

"Oh, of course they do. But when I was working there, I came in early one day and walked around with the internal post. I was there as Jaroslav spoke to his cousin. He was boasting and I heard everything. The person they get the girls through is Adam Miller. He runs a haulage company and manages to get them in from Eastern Europe – Georgia, Russia, Romania, Albania the like – and Jaroslav puts them in his brothels."

"But he was cleared of trafficking."

"I know he was," Oliver said firmly. "But the Pigs weren't looking in the right place."

"So," Chrissy asked. "What should I do?"

"Investigative Journalism," Oliver crowed. "Ya can't beat it. Look, the girls are kept in a house on Marshall Lane. I am not sure where it is, or how big, but they are there, I heard

that and he keeps them doped up on heroin. And I also heard that he fucked up some dealer big time, shot him in the leg three weeks back.”

Chrissy sighed and twirled her hair around. “It's not much to go on.”

“Yeah I know,” Oliver snapped but then looked at her. “I'll give you all my story now, but promise me you'll look at Doszak. Taking down Jaroslav Doszak would be big for you, surely? Reporter succeeding where Police failed.”

She hummed for a moment and scribbled what Oliver had told her onto her notebook. “OK I'll do some digging. If it checks out then we'll run it. Now your story,” she asked.

Oliver proceeded to tell her about the work they had done prior to the raid, what had gone wrong and then his trip to Scotland before being found at Vicky Hambleton's house. Chrissy was interested in the missing money that Oliver swore was in the bag when he was arrested and she promised him she would look into that as well.

Oliver sensed her uneasiness as the Prison Officer gave them a “five minute warning.” She puffed and licked her lips. “Why you?” Oliver asked, looking at her confused expression. “Cause you wrote up everything bad I told you about Jamie all those years ago and know you won't miss anything this time 'round.” He waited for her to make eye contact and then added with a smirk. “And I wanted to see if those tits had changed. They made quite an impression on me as a sixteen year old.”

Chrissy couldn't help but laugh.

Chapter XVIII

Jamie shook. "What?"

"Excuse me, sir," the Guard said and Jamie felt adrenaline course through his veins. Surely he wasn't going to get arrested yards from the departure gate? Surely fate would not be so mean as to let him get so close and yet so far?

He took a deep breath; he bet they had inspected the bag and found the stolen statue and the stolen money, and he was going to be apprehended. He wondered if he could sprint onto the plane, but knew the plane would not take off with him on board.

He was going to be stopped and his adventure would come to end. He had done well, travelled all the way to London and then got to departure gate of a plane to Argentina; he wondered how Emma was doing, but it would be all over for him.

"Your shoes, sir. The laces are undone."

Jamie gawped and looked down at his scruffy trainers. The guard was right, his right shoe didn't have the laces done up and he gestured towards him. "Cheers mate."

"You'll go arse over tit," he said with a giggle.

The guard smiled and watched as the rest of the passengers filed past Jamie retying his shoelaces before he rejoined the throng of travellers. Jamie's seat was in the aisle and after the obligatory welcome, the plane took off and Jamie was treated to a safety announcement by the alluring cabin crew. He got himself something to eat and then sat back enjoying the flight out of Britain to a country far, far away. The woman next to him went to sleep almost immediately and Jamie had not brought any entertainment but took to watching the in-flight film and then sleeping himself.

The descent into Buenos Aires was steep and turbulent, and Jamie was not the only passenger to feel nauseous, but the plane hit the runway with a jolt and taxied to the terminal.

He expected to have swarms of armed Police officers waiting for him, but there was no-one apprehending him as he got off the plane, showed his passport and filed into the baggage area to collect his stolen baggage. The Argentines seemed welcoming and relaxed as he walked past the security who happily waved him through and smiled at the passengers.

Emma had told him to find a gentleman by the name of General Bastos and after collecting his bag and ensuring that his loot was still present, he went to the bureau de change to ask and to swap some of his stolen British currency for Argentinian Pesos.

Neither the assistant at the bureau de change or the barman at an English pub in the city centre knew anything about General Bastos, and Jamie was half-tempted to stick all the money into a bank account and flog the statue to any pawn dealer: the statue was supposedly worth a small fortune because of what it represented but if Emma wasn't in the Argentinian city and he couldn't find her contact then he had no hope.

Instead, Jamie found a cheap hotel with a receptionist that spoke English and traded a couple of his Argentinian notes for a room for a couple of nights; the day was giving way to evening and Jamie wanted to get something nice to eat and some sleep.

He would find General Bastos in the morning along with a change of clothes.

* * * * *

Jamie threw his guide book into the corner of the room; he had been in Buenos Aires for

two weeks and found no-one – not Emma or General Bastos. He had got food poisoning twice and changed hotels twice but was getting very disillusioned with the Argentinian city: no-one seemed to like him when he told them he was English. Hadn't they forgotten about the Falklands yet?

Jamie had had a lead on General Bastos, being told in an English themed bar that he was very senior in the Argentinian military and to try and visit a large building in the centre of the city. He spoke at length to a ex-pat who did not seem to worry about why Jamie wanted to find the man as long as Jamie kept supplying him with beer, which he could amply afford to do.

The following day, Jamie went to the imposing building with the statue in his bag and tried to speak English to the border guard who looked at him blankly. He thought about showing the Gold statue to the uniformed soldier who kept shouting at him in Spanish, no matter how many times Jamie told him firmly that he didn't speak "their lingo" but decided that it probably wouldn't buy him a ticket into the building so kept his grip around the statue firm.

In the end, Jamie gave up and decided he would need to try with a translator and walked back to his small hotel room, opening his door with his key and setting the statue on the top of his chest of drawers.

"Ya fuckin' pain in t'arse," he told the figure of the half-naked girl. "Ya better be worth it," he warned her and walked into his en-suite shower; the day was not hot but the lack of rain had coated the roads in dust and as he had trekked back to his hotel, he got coated in dirt. He just wanted a shower and turned on the water.

It ran warm and let the warm water soak into his skin, looking up at the dirty shower head that the water dribbled out of. He took a leak in the shower, watching as the water coloured a mirky yellow and then disappeared.

He puffed; he had been trying to offload the statue for two weeks and find either Emma or Bastos to no avail. The four weeks Emma reckoned it would take was up in two days time and he decided, if there was no sign of her by then, not that he knew how they would meet, then he would try and leave the city.

He was not sure where he would go but he didn't like Buenos Aires and all he needed was a country that had no extradition treaty and a nice beach with nice girls; preferably one that would accept a criminal on the run and where his stolen money would go far.

Jamie came out of the shower, rubbing his face and looked at himself in the mirror; he needed to see a barber, his short hair was unruly and he looked unloved. He felt his stubble, he also needed a shave. Jamie opened the bathroom door to retrieve his razor and clapped eyes on the cabinet: his statue was gone.

* * * * *

Emma walked down the street in Buenos Aires. She had not expected to miss the five goofy companions she had spent the last three weeks with and although they asked if she wanted to come back with them, Emma needed to get to Argentina where she was safe.

Although she never tired of the near-constant sex, she didn't want it for too much longer anyway, she would chalk it down to a fantastic few days, a brilliant adventure and something to tell the grandkids about; she was not a swinger and she was not in possession of an over-active sex drive.

Emma had to slip past border control and then head for the city centre but she cleared them easily and was in the back of a cab speeding towards a hotel within a few minutes of kissing her maritime companions goodbye.

She worked out she had spent almost a month escaping England, but not all of the time

had been unpleasant and wondered if she might adopt ocean yachting once she had sold her statue.

Being so isolated had meant she had not caught up with the news and she began to think about Jamie. Oliver was going down for the job but she wondered whether her ex-boyfriend had had enough about him to not get caught.

Emma's cab came to rest outside a small hotel and the driver got annoyed when she tried to pay with pounds, but accepted a ridiculous amount of Euros instead. Fortunately for her, the hotel spoke English and were more than happy to accept British pounds for her stay. She smiled at the check-in girl – barely old enough to be out of school by British standards and had her bags carried to her room.

Emma emptied the loot on the bed; she would need to see about finding the General who she wanted to sell the statue to and saw a glistening of gold. For the first time she pulled out the three necklaces she had stolen and turned them over in her hand – one was ornate, with a blue stone in the centre, and very similar to the one that Oliver had taken. It was pretty and she slid it over her neck.

For years Emma had always resisted jewellery and making herself look pretty; her line of work made it quite inappropriate and she preferred to go the gym and do kick-boxing and Taekwondo, but a few days being appreciated by her lustful ocean-crossing friends had made her enjoy the thought of being pretty. Suddenly, she liked her body and looked at herself in the mirror.

* * * * *

Chrissy sat back in her car and glanced at the vibrating mobile. Her editor had given her permission to “check out” Oliver's claims but not to spend too long doing it, but she had been missing for two days as she sought to verify the allegations and he was clearly getting most annoyed with her.

Her initial enquiries had not been too promising; the road Oliver had mentioned was long and containing over 400 properties. Furthermore, there was a similarly named road in Warrington, St Helens and Bebington – all within twenty miles of Liverpool, but she had spoken to an old acquaintance in the city and he had pointed to a house on the south side of the city.

The address, the location of one of Jaroslav's brothels, was in one of the shabbiest parts of the city and she had watched from a distance from the safety of her car. After a couple of hours, of discreet comings and goings, a blacked out people carrier left from around the side of the property and she had started following it.

Chrissy didn't need to go too far and keep up with it as it sped away from her at an incredible pace and flew threw red traffic lights as part of the night-time journey but it travelled towards one of the roads she knew of and she arrived at the top of the street just as the people carrier pulled away; it had been parked in front of a half-derelict four storey building and she smiled to herself.

Obviously Chrissy didn't want to probe around the property late at night and she returned back to her hotel and began searching for Adam Miller on her Internet.

It wasn't even 4am but Chrissy couldn't wait and dressed in jet black to drive down to the haulage yard on the outskirts of the city. She parked her car a few hundred feet from the desolate building. It was eerily quiet although a security light swept the empty yard as she glanced through the wire fence.

Chrissy was surprisingly calm; it wasn't the first time she had broken into a property in pursuit of a story and simply pulled out a pair of wire cutters and walked down the alleyway

adjacent to the fence so she could not be seen.

It was easy to snip the fence open in the corner of the path and she pushed the wire back to allow a foot square gap for her to put her bag in and crawl through. The only sound in the yard was a bird singing as dawn approached and Chrissy pulled out a torch and slid open the nearest bin; it was full of rotting food rubbish and she closed it again. The next bin contained some paperwork amongst the cans and she stuffed all of it into her bag, rooting around to get the last few pieces. Chrissy went to rub her nose with her gloved hand and then recoiled the moment her eyes caught a fleeting glance of a piece of rubbish attached to them.

Chrissy found nothing of interest in the remaining bins and crept around to the Portacabin erected in front of where she broke into the yard and tried the door. It was locked, as expected, but she took out a set of keys and spun the lock. She looked behind herself, it was getting light and she knew she didn't want to be too long in the office as the working day for the hauliers could start at any time, and closed the door behind her.

The cabin was partitioned into two offices, a small kitchen and a tiny toilet, and Chrissy looked inside the main office. She photographed the whiteboards and tried some of the drawers that were all locked and she went to prise them open when she heard a noise and ran to the front door of the cabin, spying a man walking towards her. She turned off her torch and jumped into the toilet, pushing the door shut.

"Ahh dozy cow," the voice muttered and then answered a ringing sound in his pocket. "Ahh. Yeah, I'm in the yard now. Bout two 'ours. Four of 'em. Nah come over naw. Later's." There was a sound as a door closed and Chrissy sighed. Her own mobile was vibrating and left it to keep ringing in her pocket; she had to get out and waited for movement but heard nothing and slowly opened the door to the toilet soundlessly.

The soft noise of the radio was coming from an adjacent office and Chrissy tiptoed out of the toilet and opened the front door; there was a car moving in the car park and she jumped down and rolled under the Portacabin; her heart was beating angrily and she felt the coldness of the wet earth on her skin.

She crawled to the back of the Portacabin where she could see her entrance and thought about making an exit, but there was something in the man's voice that piqued her interest; what did he mean by "two hours"

It was cold and dirty underneath the cabin but she could not be seen as it was too dark and she could see quite a bit of the yard. Chrissy yawned, she was tired, but the adrenaline of what she was doing far exceeded any concerns about the physical environment she was in.

She had felt a couple of sharp objects – like cut glass – around her hands as well as some bricks that she had bruised her shin on, but she soon settled into a vaguely comfortable position, watching the still yard. Her phone went off again that she ignored and watched the tarmac in front of her as a few people came and went before the people carrier with the blacked out windows arrived.

Her heart skipped a beat, she was sure it was the same vehicle and she knew if the same car that ferried prostitutes to the brothel was also in the haulage yard then she had a clear link. She slid her camera out of her bag, turned off the flash and took a few pictures of the man getting out of the car.

He went into the office upstairs and although she could feel the movement above her with the boards creaking as they moved about. An hour after the man arrived she was beginning to get bored; she had been stuck under the cabin for over two-and-a-half hours and the adrenaline which masked the discomfort and pain had long since worn off.

Instead she was spending her working day stuck under a cabin watching nothing. She felt the cabin shake and her heart leapt. Two sets of feet could be seen from the cabin and she held her breath as they walked into the centre of the yard and then a lorry arrived, reversing into a space near the people carrier.

Chrissy steadied the camera and from where she was she would get a perfect view of the lorry as the doors were opened. She knew that this would be make or break for her and started taking pictures, as the back doors opened; the lorry was mostly empty and she felt disappointment.

Instead, she had been underneath the cabin to watch an empty lorry arrive and she started scrabbling back. There was little point in staying and making her getaway while the two men were at the other end of the yard was not a bad idea. She watched the two men go into the lorry and then froze, something was not quite right.

One of them put a large piece of wood to one side, and then a girl stepped out of the lorry. Chrissy fished for her camera and took the picture and swore when the flash went off; she had forgot to disable it as she turned it back on. She froze for a moment, but no-one appeared to have noticed and zoomed in on the dishevelled girl standing shivering at the end of the lorry.

She was soon joined by a second and third girl, each one shivering and clearly dirty and unclean. Chrissy wondered where they had come from, but they didn't look English and she doubted if they had access to proper sanitary facilities on the trip. Chrissy kept photographing them, and included a fourth girl – considerably younger than the first three – and then of one of the men leading them to the vehicle.

Chrissy photographed them getting into the car and Chrissy wriggled to the back of the cabin and got to her feet. She had to follow that vehicle and ran to the little hole in the fence, throwing herself through the gap she had made and that still had not been discovered. She was hungry, thirsty and desperately needed to use a toilet, and her phone was ringing, but she sprinted to her car in an adjacent street.

She knocked into a jogger who swore after her in a thick Merseyside accent, but Chrissy didn't stop and unlocked her car and started the engine as the people carrier went past her and she joined the road just behind the vehicle.

Chrissy had to be careful as the people carrier took a very indirect route to the house and Chrissy knew if she followed it, it would be obvious and so after a few minutes she gave up following it and drove to the end of the road where she could see the house; her car was chosen as it was a Ford Fiesta and was universally common throughout the UK. She was able to park up and get a good view of the side of the house and watched as the girls arrived only to be roughly unloaded and given to an elder woman, dressed in an apron.

Chrissy had the start of a story and took another dozen photographs before driving to her hotel. She needed to see the photographs she had taken and loaded them up on her laptop. They had mostly come out well and she instinctively let them load up to the newspaper file server while she satisfied her urge to use the facilities: her editor was going to love this, she knew. She could do an exposé and licked her lips as she looked back through the photographs again; there was something on the whiteboard with that days date and she zoomed in. "Tirana arr" against someone's name and there was another entry the following day "Tirana dep"

She could only speculate that "dep" meant departure and Chrissy took a deep breath and glanced at her phone displaying twelve missed calls; it went again and Chrissy picked it up.

"Sorry Rob, tied up," she told the editor who barked down the phone at her. "But I can't

“speak. I’m off to Tirana,” she told him. He swore and started shouting at her, but Chrissy hung up and started packing.

Chrissy was going back undercover and she was going to the airport. She was going to have a front page exclusive.

Chapter XIX

“Rosemary Bateman,” a Police officer said as he approached a small desk in the clinical custody suite. “Arrested for using forged money to pay a debt to a gymnasium.”

Rosie shook her head and looked at the stout man behind the desk. “But I didn't know it was forged. He didn't tell me it wasn't real. I didn't do anything.”

He looked at the two arresting officers and they shrugged. “She's been like this since we turned up. Swore blind there was a guy upstairs who had given her the money but there was no-one and no sign of anyone.”

“There was,” Rosie screamed and the man frowned and pointed a finger at her.

“Ssshhhh, save it for the interview and the judge. Now, name?”

“What?” A tearful Rosie asked.

“Name? What's ya name, love?”

Rosie sobbed and rubbed her eyes before giving all the details the Custody Sergeant needed to book her into a cell. She rang her boss, Sammy Reynolds, but there was no answer and she cried as she left a message on his mobile phone. She howled as she was thrown into Cell 7 – a cold, eerie room containing a raised mattress, a toilet and a small sink and she slouched down on the mattress and burst into tears.

Just what had Ian got her involved in? He had said he was running away from his angry father and had managed to get her arrested: all she had done was to offer him sanctuary, a hot dinner and a night of uncomplicated sex, was that so wrong?

Rosie sobbed for two hours, frequently wiping her eyes as the cell door opened and a young suited man came in. He held out his hand and she looked up to see him smile. “Sorry I'm a little late, your family sent us. Martin Wheeler from Parkin, Fox and Carver.” She looked blankly at him and he cleared his throat. “Solicitors.”

Rosie gave a relieved sigh. “Oh sorry.”

“It's OK,” the young man soothed. “It's fine, we need to go through with you what happened.”

Rosie took a deep breath and began to explain about Jamie coming over the wall, the story and the money he had given her, although she told the young Martin Wheeler that she had been lent the money not given. He nodded, and slid his finger through his short black hair, nodding as she spoke and taking notes.

“Well I reckon the Police won't want to prosecute,” he told her. “There is no evidence you knew anything about the forgery of the money and they will want to know a name if you have one.”

“Ian,” she cried. “Ian Richards. I told them this and they have a description”

Martin licked his lips and took a deep breath. “You see, I've been thinking. I reckon you were found by a guy on the run. Someone running from someone.”

“Yeah, his Dad.”

“Right, well I have had a look at people in the age range,” he said and showed her a dozen pages of photos printed from a desktop printer. “Sorry about the quality.”

“He had blonde hair,” Rosie told him and he interrupted her. “And was running away from his Dad 'cos he split up with a girl. Oh, and he had never had asparagus.”

Martin sighed and then pursed his lips. “Don't think I have any files on when was the first

time someone had asparagus.” Rosie gave a nervous giggle and then he looked at her. “These come from the Missing Persons Database and Crimestoppers but ignore the hair, you can cut or die hair. Look at the faces, the eyes and the ears and the like.”

Rosie shrieked. “Crimestoppers?” Rosie returned to the first couple of pages and she called out excitedly. “Him, that's him.”

“What?”

“There. He has blonde hair now, but that's him.”

“You sure?”

“I had sex with him,” Rosie replied and then apologised for being crude. “Yes that is definitely him.”

Martin adjusted his tie and looked at her. “James Prutton,” he read. “Wonder what he did.”

Rosie looked at Martin. “You mean to say I let a dangerous criminal into the house and, oh my God, into my bed. I'm so stupid.”

Martin touched the emotional girl on the arm. “Well I can sort out this. They will want a formal interview with you but I will be in with you and we will just explain what happened with the money and the guy and they should let you go. On bail at least.”

“Bail?” Rosie shrieked and he squeezed her hand. “Sorry. You must think I am really stupid.”

Martin smiled. “We all make mistakes,” he cooed and then looked into her eyes. “We all do silly things. You trusted a stranger, it's not the worst mistake to make, is it?”

He got up as the door was opened and looked to see the Custody Sergeant in the doorway. “They are ready for you.”

“Excellent,” Martin said and held out his hand to the young Rosie. “Come on, let's get this over with.”

Martin guided the young girl through the Police interview and let her explain about the man jumping over the wall and who they thought he was. The Police officers looked surprised when she claimed he was one of the most wanted men in England and had been in her bedroom only three hours previous but they suspended the interview and left to phone an Inspector Williamson 200 miles away.

An hour later, Rosie was back at the house with it being dusted for fingerprints and Martin was squeezing her hand. “See, I told you,” he told her and she bit her lip. “Told you it would all work out in the end.”

“Thank you,” she muttered back and looked at his deep blue eyes and smiling face. “You are so clever.”

He pursed his lips. “Well it helps if your client isn't guilty,” he told her and gave a sigh. “Even trainees like me can cope with clients who are clearly innocent.”

Rosie laughed and they watched the final crime of scene officer finish and remove a fingerprint. Rosie looked back at Martin who rubbed his nose nervously. “Well as you have no further need for me, if you want me I'll leave you my card.”

Rosie took a deep breath and nodded as he slid a business card from his wallet. “I don't want to be left alone in this house,” she muttered. “I think he will come back.”

Martin squeezed her hand and looked into her gaze. “He scarpered when the Police came. He won't come back to the scene of his crime.”

“He might,” Rosie said mournfully and Martin checked his watch. “If you don't have

anything to do I'd like you to stay the night." She cocked her head and she raised her eyebrows. "In the spare room."

"Well I was going to see the Vagina Monologues," he told her and she rubbed her hands. "My brother and this girl he is chasing want to see it and didn't want to go alone so I have been roped in."

"Oh that's my favourite," Rosie said instantly. "It's so funny and well, could I come too?"

Martin tried hard not to smile. "Of course. I don't suppose a meal at the pub is out of the question then?" Martin asked and the tired girl smiled for the first time that day.

"No," she grinned. "It most definitely is not."

* * * * *

"I still don't get it Sir," the Sergeant muttered as he swirled his tea around the mug. "I mean the statue was fake so did Doszak buy fakes or did he have copies made."

Richard sighed and looked out over the court gallery. "I've been wondering about that. I mean the guys reckoned it was one of the best copies they'd ever seen. Probably good enough to fool most auction houses. But I don't know. I can't see Doszak buying a fake and he did buy it at auction. I guess we'll know eventually."

"So is that it for the robbery investigation?" He asked. "I see you're running the other one."

The Inspector shrugged. "You know, I just don't know. I can't help feeling that, along with DI Hargreaves' undercover operation that they trampled on, Oliver and his friends may have hindered something Jaroslav wanted to do and he is going to punish 'em for it. We can't chase them forever and we got one of the little blighters. All credit to 'em though, they got in and got out again, and got free, even with us chasing them."

The Sergeant licked his lips and took a deep breath. "Sort of makes you wonder if they would have done it if they knew we were watching the 'ouse."

"Yeah, well, we weren't watching the gate were we? If they had come through the front we would have 'ad 'em."

"And if we knew the statues were fake we wouldn't have put loads of officers on it, would we? Probably would have got away with it."

"Probably not," the Inspector said idly. "But we caught him," he said, pointing towards Oliver and then rubbed his nose. "And the other two are on a wanted list but there's no point going for 'em. They could come back and as long as they don't get arrested they'd never get caught."

The Sergeant looked around the mostly empty Gallery. "No Doszak here then?"

"No. But then Doszak will be trying to catch up with them and I am not sure that is better. They dropped him in it."

The Sergeant smiled. "Yeah, 'cos thanks to them, Alice got to call us, we got to snoop around Doszak's house while Doszak was flying back from the Ukraine," the Sergeant replied. "Wonder if the young lad knows what a favour he did for us?"

"Probably not," chuckled the Inspector. "Nice having new people up here wasn't it?"

The Sergeant smiled. "Yeah, how is old Alice?"

"Back in Devon now. I spoke to her last week. Walking the beat in her little village again. She didn't like being undercover at the Manor, being housekeeper for a Ukrainian gangster, said it scared her. But she did a good job for us."

"She did, didn't she?" The Sergeant hummed and the court started to fill. "Oh recess over."

The judge waited for the parties to reassemble in court and cleared his throat, turning to the defendant. "Oliver Prutton, you have pleaded guilty to this court of burglary, contrary to the Theft Act 1968. While your representative indicates that this is a first offence, I cannot show leniency due to the gravity of the crimes committed. However, this court has heard that you have showed genuine remorse and the stolen item has been recovered for the victim, albeit that it is subsequently discovered to be a forgery."

Oliver went to say something but he got a stern look from the judge.

"In addition, I am minded to look upon your early guilty plea and level of remorse shown. I am also keen to look upon this as an isolated example, and accept your representatives case that it was familial pressure that led you astray."

Oliver wiped his face and glanced up at the public gallery; it was packed and he saw the familiar face of his mother gazing down at him with misty eyes. The judge continued.

"However, the seriousness of the crime cannot be diminished and your representatives desire that this be a suspended sentence is simply not appropriate. You will be detained for one year and eleven months."

"Two years," Oliver exclaimed and there a silence in the court.

"Yes Mr Prutton, one year and eleven months. And I hope that you will use that time to consider where you went wrong and how you will rebuild your life on leaving detention. You will have many years of life ahead of you and plenty of time and opportunity to rebuild it."

Oliver stared open mouthed at the judge, flanked by oak panelling and a myriad of assistants. He felt his hand being pulled and was guided down the steps towards the cells to begin a jail term. He was warned he might get jail but he really wanted a suspended sentence.

Instead, he was about to have to face his biggest fear. He was going to go to a prison.

* * * * *

Emma ran up the hill and looked back; it was the third time that day she had ran from the Police and while she knew they were almost certainly not looking for her she didn't want to be in their presence.

She looked back behind her to check; they were nowhere in sight and she breathed a sigh of relief, only to find herself falling over something small and wiry.

There was a squawk from underneath her and she turned to see a little boy looking dazed and tousled. Emma muttered an apology, first in English and then in Spanish. The boy, clearly under the age of ten, looked at Emma and went to scramble to his feet but Emma glimpsed a spark of Gold in his bag and she opened it.

It was a statue, an exact copy of the one in her bag and she instantly checked her rucksack. The little boy had been thieving off of her and she was about to give him a hiding when she felt the cold metal of her own statue in her bag.

"Where did you get this?" Emma asked and the boy shrugged, looking confused. He went to get to his feet, but Emma grabbed his hand. "Don-day si con-sig-way," Emma spluttered in her broken Spanish and the boy muttered something back which she couldn't understand.

In the end the boy muttered "o-tel" and she asked him to take her. She pulled out a handful of Pesos which made the reluctant boy smile and he lead her to a rundown hotel 400 metres away.

He pointed to it from over the street and then held out his hand for the money which she

gratefully gave him. His eyes widened as she realised that she had just given him over five hundred pounds but didn't care; she had found Jamie, and she wandered over the road. The receptionist was screeching as she entered and she clapped eyes on her former lover shouting back.

"Stolen," he said slowly. "Someone has been in my room."

Emma coughed but Jamie didn't turn around, he was too busy yelling at the manager. "Oi," Emma called and Jamie turned to face her.

"Do you mind love," he snapped and turned back to the owner of the hotel. "I've been robbed. Fuckin' 'ell, talk to me in English."

Emma sighed and walked over to the shouting man, pushing him back against the wall to get his attention. "Shut it," she said firmly and he looked at her for the first time.

"Oh Em ..." he blurted out and stopped mid-sentence and she looked at him.

"Yes, now I've got it."

"Got what?"

"It," she said firmly as the two people listened to their conversation.

"No, but I've been robbed."

Emma slowly shook her head and raised her eyebrows. "Yes and I've got it."

"Got what?" Jamie asked exasperated.

Emma sighed and leant forward to whisper in his ear. "The stolen statue." His eyes flew up and he looked at her with raised eyebrows.

"Ya mean."

She turned to face the two hotel employees and smiled. "Lo see-ento. El eh un poco ton-to," she said confidently and they nodded smiling, replying in their native tongue.

"What did you just say?" Jamie asked as she pushed him out of the lobby and towards his room.

"Oh that I am sorry, but you are a moron."

Jamie scowled and she pulled out the statue from her bag. "There are easier ways to introduce ya-self," Jamie moaned. "Breakin' in and nickin' stuff."

Emma snorted. "Ya got turned over by an eight year old."

Jamie shook his head. "I ain't believin' ya."

"Well we need to find this General," Emma told him and he threw up his hands.

"Yeah I know that."

"Well there's two of us now," Emma said with a grin. "So we should be able to get 'im."

* * * * *

The Prison Officer barely uttered a word to Oliver as he was guided to a cell on the second floor of the prison. The walls echoed with sounds of shouting and yelling, and there was a faint smell of humans – urine, sweat and faeces all mixed together. The burly gentleman jangled his keys and unlocked a scratched door.

A large man jumped down from the bed. "Dino, someone to stay with you," the Prison Officer said with a grin."

"Dino" grunted and waited for Oliver to be pushed inside the cell, watching him as he stumbled into the tiny room. It was painted grey, but the brickwork was clearly visible

behind it and there were two bunkbeds on the right hand side of the cell. Two small chairs and two cupboards adorned the left hand side and the door slammed closed behind him.

Oliver looked at him, his eyes piercing through his shaking body. He smelt of stale sweat and was topless, his muscles bulging out. He was wearing just a pair of shorts and had a shaven head; he looked brutal and Oliver gulped.

He reached for the first set of cupboards and Dino barked. "S'mine."

"Sorry," Oliver replied demurely, and went to open the other one.

"S'mine as well."

"Right," he muttered and looked up at him. He was scared and intimidated. "I s'pose I've got the bottom bunk."

Dino didn't answer but just smiled and cracked his knuckles together. "Oliver Prutton," the nervous man said and held his hand out to the brutal prisoner, who looked at his hand then at the burglar it was attached to. "Yeah, right," he muttered withdrawing it. "I s'pose you heard the job I pulled?"

Dino grunted, and opened his cupboard to take out a pornographic magazine. Oliver gulped; it wasn't women that adorned the front cover but muscled, naked men. He didn't feel very safe.

Dino laughed and waited for Oliver to sit on the bed and cleared his throat. "Mr Doszak says 'hello' and could you please tell him where his fucking money is," Dino asked in a calm voice and Oliver turned around to see Dino standing over him. Dino reached forward and grabbed him by the throat. "Tell me, or I can do this to you," he threatened and opened the magazine with his right hand on the centre page. "And I have a ten inch cock and no KY."

"I don't know," he wailed as Dino started pushing down his shorts. "I don't know. And I am not gay." Dino didn't care and pulled out his cock from his trousers. Oliver shook his head and backed away but the wannabe rapist advanced on him. "Get away from me," Oliver cried and Dino smacked him around the face, causing him to fall to the floor.

Dino grabbed him by the throat and pulled him to his knees, choking the robber. Oliver gasped and Dino forced his erect cock into the mouth of his cellmate. "Now suck."

Oliver's gagged for air, but Dino rammed his cock into Oliver who glanced up and instinctively bit down as hard as he could. Dino howled and smacked Oliver in the mouth who just bit harder. Dino reached for his knife, hidden behind the cupboard and plunged it into Oliver's body, who gasped and slumped to the floor, as two Prison Officer's frantically unlocked the cell door.

Dino was screaming, his manhood hanging limply from his body and blood poured out of his crotch. The officer restrained him while the other one knelt down beside Oliver, who lay lifeless in a rapidly expanding pool of blood. "Get an ambulance," he shouted into the corridor. "Knife wound."

Chapter XX

Inspector Richard Williamson banged on the front door as an array of light-bulbs flashed behind him from the gate. There was silence and he stood aside as an officer with a battering ram smashed into the door and shouted "we're in" as the door came off its hinges." Four officers and the Inspector poured into the house and fanned into the rooms.

The Inspector walked in and looked around, listening for any noise. He was annoyed; the raid had had to be hastily arranged and brought forward as some pesky newspaper had splashed across their front page something he had been working on and he therefore had to move fast.

Richard Williamson, and most of the Police force, knew about Jaroslav Doszak but getting him red-handed was hard. The newspaper may have beaten them to it, but he was nearing an arrest anyway for the attempted fraud of the auction house as well as the trafficking of a Russian teenager he had in witness protection.

There was a sound and Jaroslav emerged, naked except for a pair of boxer shorts and snarled at the Inspector watching him. "I told you last year I would get you," the Inspector told him. "And now I have."

"Fuck you," he shouted. "We humiliate you in court," Jaroslav muttered and the Inspector shook his head.

"Not this time. We got people on the inside." Jaroslav smirked and was lead away to get dressed before being taken to the Police station. Richard walked into the kitchen and then into the lounge. There was a commotion as an officer had to restrain Paul and then one of the half-naked girls got hysterical and started attacking a policewoman trying to encourage her to get dressed but the Inspector was happy; the rushed raid had not been a complete disaster. Jaroslav hadn't fled the country and he had more than enough evidence to charge him.

He looked out of the bay window and watched as a body dropped down in front of him. He banged on the glass and shouted at officers to go around the back.

Mikael ran past the house and started across the garden. He heard voices and looked behind him, he was being chased by two police man and one of them had two dogs. He swore, and doubled his speed, aiming for the gate that the burglars had come through.

Mikael had been awake and dressed as the Police officers arrived and although he had not seen the newspaper or even seen half of the local constabulary congregate outside his boss's home where he had stayed the night, knew instantly what was happening.

Mikael was always prepared for having to make a quick getaway and gripped the keys in his pocket. He had a key to the padlock on the gate and he had a hundred yard head-start although the dogs had closed that gap considerably.

The gate however, was in sight and panting he made it up the grassy slope and sorted the keys as he ran. He had the small key he needed and threw it into the lock. It clicked open and as the dogs converged on him, he had made it through the gate, and locked it as one of the dogs went for his fingers.

Mikael wasn't safe; he had a minute at best and he still had miles to go before he could reach any form of transport. He looked behind him, the gate was just out of sight and he dived into the field opposite. He couldn't see a Police helicopter but he couldn't rule out one being scrambled and ran across the thick vegetation that covered the field.

Mikael knew that if they got a Police helicopter in the sky then it would find his body heat

easily with the infra-red cameras and looked at the wood a mile away. It would be easier to hide in dense foliage and it was tough on the legs but he had to make to the small wood.

Because in the wood, hidden in the middle of the trees was Mikael's escape kit, containing a false passport, money and a mobile phone. He had only put it there the month before as he was concerned that Jaroslav's criminal interests were beginning to unwind but knew if he could get to the wood, he could be free.

He could be en route to Buenos Aires, where he would put good money on Jamie Prutton and Emma Wallis trying to sell their loot.

* * * * *

Vicky glanced down the road; she knew she was being watched and by whom but it didn't change anything. She walked confidently towards the small corner shop and bought a bottle of wine before walking back to the house. She entered the house, turned her bedroom light on and drew the curtains; she wanted them to think she was staying in for the night.

She placed the bottle of wine next to her packet suitcase on the bed, and quietly crept downstairs. The back door creaked when it was opened but she closed it gently and then silently slid open the back gate and began running down the alley. There was no-one about and she could see the 4x4 with its tinted windows through a gap in the houses, parked on the road.

Vicky continued down the pitch black alleyway and turned onto a path that crossed a small wood before giving way to a park. Within a few seconds she was into the wood, and finding her way to the back of the trees.

She reached into the hollow in a large Oak tree and located a small trowel that she had hidden and dug underneath one of its branches; the only light coming from the twilight which was barely able to penetrate the forest cover.

Vicky felt her heart racing and she frantically dug until she reached a small corner of a thick plastic bag and pulled it out. Mounds of soil landed over her trainers and she grunted as the wet earth clung to her treasure.

The Rubble Sack contained most of the bank notes Oliver had arrived with as well as the small figure and she shook it free from earth and then started fighting her way back to the footpath.

The sack was heavy and kept slipping from her grasp but she struggled home with it, and took it up to her room, before emptying its contents into her other suitcase, open on the bed. She looked at her alarm clock in her sparse room; it was 16:07. She had eight minutes and picked up her two suitcases taking them downstairs by the front door, along with her boarding pass and passport.

Vicky washed her hands and changed her clothes and then returned to the front door. Her hands were clammy, and she peered out through the letterbox; there was a space outside her house and she waited.

Two minutes later, a battered red Vauxhall Astra pulled up and she opened the door, grabbing her two bags and sprinted down the path. "Hambleton," she called out at the man nodded. Without looking down the street, she threw her bags into the back of the car and shouted. "Airport, quickly. I'm late."

Vicky pulled out a fifty pound note and passed it to the driver. "Tip if you can get me there in ten."

The taxi driver pulled out into the side street and Vicky glanced behind her; her early

evening taxi ride had certainly caused her stalkers to follow her but she knew that they would.

Instead, she just locked her two doors and sat bolt upright as her mad taxi driver threw her into bends and navigated the streets of Aberdeen with worrying speed.

This did not seem to affect the car following her, they kept up with the madcap pace of the middle-aged man, who was swearing violently at his clapped out car. Vicky rubbed her hands together; her heart was beating furiously and she retied the bobble on her blonde hair.

Her watch said she had fifteen minutes to get checked in and she held on as the taxi slid around the corner and into the grounds of Aberdeen Airport. Vicky extracted two more notes and slid them to the driver as he straightened out. He grunted, his beady eyes barely leaving the road. "That's for the ride," she said with a grin and watched as he pulled up directly outside the small terminal.

She grabbed her bags, opened the door and sprinted inside, just as the two men following her leapt out of their car. She slapped her passport down on the counter with a boarding pass and the woman looked at Vicky trembling with her bags on the conveyor belt.

"London Heathrow and then onto Buenos Aires," the cheerful girl asked and Vicky, still panting nodded. Oliver wanted to travel to Argentina as he was sure it had no extradition treaty with the UK and Vicky liked that idea.

"Yeah, boyfriend out there," she lied and watched as two long thin pieces of paper were fastened to her cases.

"You have two minutes," she told her and nodded towards the departure gate.

Vicky eyed the two men inching towards the gate to apprehend her when a man coughed.

"Excuse me, madam, did you pack these bags yourself?"

Vicky squeaked. "What?"

"Did you pack these bags yourself, madam?"

"Yes. I mean no. I mean, sort of," she shrieked and watched as Andrei and Dmitri melted away. She looked back at the interested man, his hand on both of her bags. "It's sort of complicated."

"Come with me please," he muttered and Vicky swore under her breath.

* * * * *

Oliver opened the paper from his hospital bed and smiled. The exclusive Chrissy Fuller had certainly got a lot of the newspaper. She was on the front page, as well as pages four, five, six and seven. "Sex Trafficking: The Truth" had a picture of the Ukrainian followed by intimate dealings of his operations.

Chrissy had certainly done her research from the information Oliver had given her. Pages four and five had how the girls were being trafficked across several European states and how the haulier had been getting them past corrupt Border Agency staff. The other two pages was how Jaroslav treated his girls and how they lived, with photos and interviews from two of the sex trafficked girls. Oliver licked his lips and looked up at the nurse coming to see him. She had clearly put in many days of work and he was begrudgingly impressed.

"How are you feeling Mr Prutton?"

"Fine," he muttered and the trainee nurse smiled at him.

"We'll soon have you out of here," she told him and flashed him a smile.

"Not that fine," he quickly responded and she giggled at him, flicking her long blonde hair out of her face. "That's my old boss," Oliver said pointing at Jaroslav in the paper. "He is a nasty piece of work."

The student nurse rubbed her nose and smiled, looking at the picture in the paper. "He your criminal genius."

Oliver sighed. "Not quite, we broke into his vault and nicked some statues. He wasn't happy with us, but he's been trafficking girls. I told her about it." He pointed to a small photo of Chrissy Fuller in the by-line. "She came to visit me on remand." He turned to a smaller item on page eighteen. "And she. She double-crossed me. She told me she loved me and she nicked all the money I had nicked. But she just lied."

The nurse smiled. "Do you know everyone in the paper today?"

Oliver scowled and turned it over. "Feels like it," he admitted. "It's good to see them arrested though."

The young nurse picked up Oliver's medical chart and cocked her head. "You're lucky to be alive, you know that. You came so close to being killed"

"I got stabbed," Oliver replied. "I guess that's not recommended."

She smiled and nodded as a female Police Officer entered the private room; she had been outside when the nurse had come in and stood waiting in the doorway as she attended to the patient. "You OK?" She asked the nurse.

"Fine," the young lady responded with a grin and tapped on the newspaper. "He's been showing me his old boss, and his old girlfriend."

"You flirting with her again?" She cocked her head and looked at Oliver, her short hair and battle-hardened face breaking into a smile. "She is too innocent for you."

"Me? Not likely."

"You might like to know that your cell-mate has lost his genitalia," she told him and Oliver looked at the Police Officer, a WPC Trott, with a disinterested smirk.

"As he was trying to rape me I am not likely to offer much sympathy, am I?" He said coldly.

The two women looked at each other and the nurse touched the machine monitoring his blood pressure. "Well he's on the mend. He'll be out of here by the end of the week. The Doctor will be 'round soon."

Oliver groaned. "I don't mind stopping for a bit longer," he said instantly. "To make absolutely certain."

WPC Trott shook her head. "You only got two years. With good behaviour and early release you'd be out of there inside eight months," she promised. "It could have been so much more, so be grateful and do your time. You've already done three on remand."

"Yeah well," Oliver muttered and looked at the newspaper. "Probably am safer inside than outside until he is put away," he muttered and tapped the picture of Jaroslav Doszak on the front page.

The student nurse signed the bottom of the clipboard and put it down. She looked at the Police Officer and then took a magazine from her bag. "Am I allowed to give him?"

She chuckled and glanced at the publication – it was a mens' magazine with a supermodel in a nurses' outfit on the front. "Yes," she muttered with rolled eyes and Oliver thanked her.

"Well you said to the Doctor you wanted some more reading material," the nurse explained and Oliver licked his lips.

"Thank you," he said genuinely and watched as the nurse blushed and left them in the private room.

"That's the fourth time she's come to check on you in four hours," the Policewoman moaned and stretched her legs in the chair.

"Really? I was asleep."

She gave a chuckle and looked at him. "Yeah. And I bet you she brings you dinner in half-an-hour."

"Well she did say she would come and visit me if I send her visitation forms," Oliver answered and averted his gaze to look at the nurse on the front cover. "I mean I should get a few visits allowed, shouldn't I? They won't take 'em off me, will they? And I don't think my brother will come and visit me."

"Yeah," the WPC replied. "Yeah, you'll get your visits."

"Mind you," Oliver said, holding out the magazine and smirking. "She looks much better in a nurse's outfit than she does."

* * * * *

"Two months," Jamie moaned and Emma grunted. "Three months and still nothing."

"Yeah well," Emma said reassuring him. "I didn't know the statues were fake, we've been fucked over there."

"And not even real Gold. It's shit."

"Well thank fuck we got loads of money or we'd be properly fucked," Emma replied and sat back in the arm chair of their rented apartment with her English newspaper. Jamie was idly flicking through a bundle of cash when he snorted.

"Hey," he cried, screwing up his face. "This money's not real. It's fuckin' fake," he said, looking at the money. "Totally Mickey Mouse."

"What dya mean, Mickey Mouse?" Emma replied and looked at the note on the table and holding it up to the light. "Fuck."

"Shit, 'ave I been spendin' moody cash?"

Emma moved the paper that had a report on the arrest of Jaroslav Doszak and then she looked again holding the note up to the light. "You are right, no watermark. No wonder he wanted it back and didn't report it as stolen," she giggled and then crossed her arms.

"Fuck. Guess that's why they arrested Rosie," Jamie mused and Emma looked at him, cocking her head to one side. "Which means you still owe me for the Post Office job," Jamie said changing the subject and she laughed. "I mean it, t'is was payback."

"Well nobody cares that we been spending it for three months."

"Well they foreign. I mean, it looked legit to us so they aren't gonna care."

Emma snorted and looked at Jamie. They had agreed to spend a few months in Buenos Aires while they worked out what to do; they were cash-rich but the reason for travelling – to sell the statues – had evaporated the moment they found out that they were fake. In truth, they realised they weren't even cash rich any more. "I suppose we better go our own way," she told him and then hummed.

"Yeah, what about what ya owe me?" He asked. "I mean you still owe me for the Post Office job."

"Ya could keep the cash. People let us spend it," Emma told him and then grinned. "How about I give you something priceless," Emma teased and ran her finger down his body.

“What would be priceless to you?”

Jamie grunted and Emma seductively took off her top. “Well that would be nice,” he muttered watching her naked breasts bob, punctuated only by the stolen necklace and then watched as she removed her trousers and panties, looking down to her shaven crotch. “That’s new,” he muttered and she shook her head.

“Well strip then,” she warned him and watched as he undid his trousers and threw his shirt and underwear to the floor. Emma sank to her knees and kissed the tip of Jamie’s cock and watched him sigh in appreciation. She licked her lips and then ran her tongue over the glans and sensitive tip.

He grunted, and put his hands on the back of her head, trying to guide her down the length of his shaft. Emma ran her hands through her hair, pushing his hands off and looked up at him. She pulled out a condom from her bag and gave it to him to roll down his cock while she looked in her bag.

“Whatcha want?” Jamie asked, his rubber-clad cock sticking out proudly from his body.

“This,” Emma cried as she liberated a long piece of fabric. Emma licked her lips and grabbed her old scarf and then pushed the man onto the bed with a grin. “Whatcha doing?” Jamie asked in alarm as she pulled his hands up to the headboard.

“A little trick I was taught,” Emma replied with a chuckle and looped his hands through the scarf, tying it tight. “From some old cow on a boat.”

“I’m not sure about this,” Jamie moaned and Emma flashed him a grin as she finished retraining him.

“It’s fine,” Emma said. “I want to be in control.”

“You’re always in control,” Jamie moaned and Emma shook her head and then slid back down the bed, positioning his sheathed cock on her slit and gently pushing down. Jamie groaned and pushed his head up so he could see but Emma closed her eyes and slowly allowed Jamie’s erect member to enter her.

She sighed, licking her lips and leant forward, pushing her body into him and holding the tops of his shoulders, as she ground her hips and rocked back and forth.

Jamie grunted and gave a dramatic sigh. “Oh Emma,” he cried out but the woman rocked back faster and harder; the warmth and passion inside of her was intense; the boat trip had awoken a side to her that she didn’t know existed.

She started playing with her nipples and leant back as her hips oscillated over Jamie’s erect cock. He was groaning, and mewling, his eyes a twisted mess of lust and passion. She closed her eyes and began sliding back and forth vigorously, slapping her partner on the chest with the palm of her hand. She looked into his eyes and he grunted.

She felt his cock twitch and knew he was filling the tip of the condom. She slowed down, allowing him to savour any aftershocks and then grinned. “Debt repaid?”

Jamie, panting and breathless, smiled. “Yeah, debt repaid.” Emma slid off of him, and kissed him, sitting on the bed next to him. “Aren’t you going to untie me?”

“In a minute,” she teased and flicked on the television. “I like you where I know where you are.” A British TV station, the last thing they had watched, appeared and Emma glanced at Jamie. “Wonder if we are still on the news, now?”

He laughed and looked at her. “We old news now, but ya know. I never reckoned we’d get away with it,” he muttered.

“No, in truth, me neither. I mean, I had the boat all planned from Paolo but things go

wrong. I suppose it sort of has. We can't go back to Blighty without being nicked. We can't stay here 'cos we are potless."

"Been fun," Jamie told her with a grin. "Prison'll be shit again."

Emma sighed and reached forward to untie the gentleman, picking up her knife from the side to slide over the knots. "And we turn to some news from Scotland. Over to Andrew?"

"Thank you Bob. Police have confirmed today one of the two missing necklaces stolen from a display at Warwick Castle three years ago has been recovered when a female passenger tried to board a plane in Aberdeen with it in her bag. The necklace is over 300 years old, and is from the Stuart monarchy, King William and Queen Mary. It is believed to be one of the two that Mary received as a gift from the people of Amsterdam. Now Police have said very little officially but our sources indicate that the person may be linked to Oliver Prutton, who was convicted last month of a robbery at the stately home where art worth a quarter of million pounds was stolen and that a large amount of counterfeit currency was found on them en route to South America. But the big news is, the necklace of Mary II, stolen during an armed robbery at a display at Warwick Castle, has been recovered, although the second of the two stolen is still missing."

Emma looked at Jamie staring at her naked breasts and then she glanced down. "A million pounds?"

"Untie me love," Jamie asked and Emma's smile turned into a grin.

"Ya know what, I think I might go see Argentina by myself," she told him and swung her legs off the bed as he struggled with his bonds.

"Emma," he cried and watched as she dressed in her jeans and stained T-Shirt. "Emma, this ain't funny."

Emma smiled, kissed him on the lips and then nodded. "Adios," she cried and left the naked man tied to the bed and struggling to free himself.

"Come here you fuckin' cow," he cried, but Emma was gone and running up the road with her bag of possessions. She turned around with a grin and felt a little empty; she had got the loot but did feel sorry for Jamie; he might be a bit simple and useless but he had managed to get half way around the world.

Emotion had no place in a ruthless business but nevertheless felt a pang of guilt. She squinted from a few hundred yards away as a black BMW skidded to a halt outside the hotel room and Mikael got out, holding a bag in his hand.

She closed her eyes; if she ran away she would be a millionaire, but could she leave Jamie alone to face the music with Jaroslav's henchman? Could she leave him to be tortured and beaten up for her?

Emma looked at the bag and ran back towards the hotel, it slapping against her sides; she might not have wanted to share the loot with her ex-boyfriend, but she wouldn't let him suffer for her. Like it or not, on that particular job they were a team and she pulled out a knife from her bag, ready to confront the sadistic henchman with.

She took a deep breath and sighed, hearing a yell and a cry of pain from Jamie as she entered the door. She would arrive in the nick of time and he better be grateful, she thought, although she knew full well that he would not be.

The End

So you managed to read the end of the book; thank you and congratulations, of sorts!

Please, please drop me a line even if it is just to say that it was no good; I do try and respond in person to every e-mail I get if there is a return address. I got dozens of emails about Secrets, especially from the iBookstore customers and it is the only reason why this book was written; lightbulbs might be powered by electricity but I am motivated by feedback!

So to Bruce, John, Steve, Quianna, Amber, Christian, Fatty, Alexandra, Tonya, Martyn, Lauren, Leon, Dawn, Thomas, Sam, Michelle, Heather, Chris, Lisa, Andy, Natalie, Benjamin, Nikita, Judith, Lindsay, Rachel, Jadine, Mal, Wendy, Deborah, Lauren, Will, Ed, Joseph and Holly and all those people who gave me feedback, reviews and constructive criticism, it made me want to write even more and this was written because of you. I hope the book, or at least the grammar, is an improvement on Secrets!

Kind regards,

John D

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Also available by the same author:

Secrets

Everyone has secrets: Katherine is pregnant but doesn't know who the father is, Joseph is screwing his secretary, Charlotte has a gambling addiction with a loan shark on her back, Gareth secretly likes unusual sexual practices, Paul is an embezzling paedophile, Lewis is infatuated with the Russian au-pair while Matthew knows exactly who the father of Katherine's baby is.