

## **Hawkins: Chasing Shadows.**

Beryl Buxton

## Part One

The sign read 'Hawkins Agency', but not very clearly, for the gold lettering was badly faded and had practically merged into the dull green background. The door to the agency was situated in a small back street in a quiet section of the business city.

James Harland sighed as he surveyed the door on which the paint was as badly faded as on the sign. So this was his inheritance: And only last week he had heard that Bernie Tall from his college days had inherited a sweet three million pounds from his uncle; that Charlie Sweeney now owned and managed Mid-Northern Tire Company, so with the good news of fortunate friends raising his expectations he had hurried down to inspect his own legacy. 'Thank you, Uncle John.' he thought ruefully as he pushed open the door. And it even squeaked a small protest from ancient hinges.

The inside seemed just as neglected as outside. There was a small reception area which contained a desk, filing cabinet and a door, which presumably, led to the main office. The only relief from the air of resigned dinginess which pervaded the place was in the bright colors of the clothes of the girl who rose to greet him as he entered.

“Good morning,” she smiled pleasantly. “Can I help you?”

James looked at her approvingly. “I hope so,” he answered cheerfully. “I hope someone can help me, because,” he looked around and shook his head, “I think I shall need a lot of help.”

The girl smiled again, but less expansively this time, and looked efficient and inquiring. Actually, behind the cool exterior, she was wondering why this place seemed to attract such strange types. Perhaps, she reflected, it was because it was quietly tucked away from the main thoroughfare. Why, only last week there had been that man who had wanted her to find him a full grown aspidistra because, he said, aspidistras reminded him of his favorite aunt and he was lonely. He had also been a little drunk. And it was very hard now that John Hawkins was not.... she thrust away the thought and the sadness it brought and gave her full attention to the young man who was now staring about him with an amused smile on his lips.

“Well, If we knew just what it was you required, perhaps we could help you,” she said briskly. He turned to her and chuckled. “If I knew what was required perhaps I might even help myself.”

She smiled wanly back at him. Oh, it was definitely going to be one of those days, she sighed inwardly.

“Is that the door to the office?” he asked, and without waiting for her reply, he strode

toward it.

“You can’t go in there.” she said, recovering from her surprise to quickly move into his path. Which was a bit silly, she realized immediately, for he was at least six feet tall and he seemed as broad as a house as he towered above her. He gazed down at her with amusement. She stared defiantly back at him, although she didn't feel half as defiant as she looked.

“My name is James Harland,” he informed her helpfully.

“And I'm sure that’s very nice for you, but you still can't go in there,” she said doggedly. How she missed John Hawkins: if only he were here now.

“I can see that they haven't kept you very well informed,” James laughed. "Didn't Uncle John ever mention me?”

“Mr. Hawkins never.....” she paused. Harland? She seemed to recall, very vaguely, something about a Harland. John Hawkins had spoken once or twice about a nephew: a restless, thoughtless, ne'er do well was how he had described him. But a cheerful soul. John had chortled, and the only one in the family with the courage to do exactly what he wanted to do. Which, according to John Hawkins, was precious little.

James brought her out of her reverie as he thrust a letter into her hand.

“This is from Uncle John's trustee's. It will explain everything while I take a look around.” And he stepped around her and went into the office, leaving her feeling rather foolish and a little indignant.

The office was not much bigger than the reception area outside. In front of a high, wide window was a desk accompanied by two chairs, a battered old safe was pushed into a corner, and that, as far as furnishing was concerned, was that.

James sat in the chair behind the desk and swiveled around. At least the chair was comfortable, he thought idly. “Lord of all I survey.” And he smiled because all that he surveyed did not induce a very lordly feeling, quite the opposite.

He tried the drawers in the desk and they were all empty, as was the safe when he looked there, having found the keys on the desk. The whole place seemed cold and bare, and that didn't seem like Uncle John. James felt a little depressed. He had been very fond of his uncle, but this place did not hold a trace of his pleasant, slightly eccentric character. It was just an empty room and James did not find it very welcoming.

He was deep in thought and frowning slightly when the girl entered. She placed the letter on the desk and stood silently looking down at him. It was a few moments before James became aware of her presence and when he did he started and smiled guiltily.

"I'm sorry, I was miles away. Thinking of Uncle John," he apologised. "Though why I should I don't know, there is nothing here to remind me of him." he added.

"That was your uncle's idea," she explained. "He wanted to leave the place exactly as he had found it twenty years ago, so he left instructions that everything was to be removed. Everything," she emphasized. "Although, if I had known it was to be you taking over I might have kept a few things. He had one or two items another man might have found interesting." And she colored slightly.

"I'll bet he did," James grinned. "Have they been packed away or sold?"

"They went up for auction, the proceeds to go into the business,"

"Good. And what other instructions, if any, did he leave, Miss....?"

"Ormonde, Sally," she introduced herself.

"Were you ever called Sandy?" he asked interestedly.

"No. Why ?"

"Your hair color. You would have been called Sandy if you were a boy." James informed her.

"But I'm not a boy, and I never have been," she said helpfully, a little defiant still because she suspected that he was amusing himself.

"No. I don't suppose you ever were," he agreed. "Now, about further instructions."

"None, really. Except that the business is to stay the same, and the name is to remain unaltered."

"What is our business, by the way? And how is it? he inquired."

Sally shrugged her shoulders. "Anything and everything, I suppose. And it's not very good at the moment."

"If it ever has been good." James remarked, glancing around the room.

"Your uncle managed. And enjoyed it." Sally said loyally.

"He could enjoy anything. And just what type of agency are we? Why isn't it on the sign and in the adverts?"

"Ah. Your uncle maintained that if we gave the agency a specific title, such as employment, marriage, or detective, we should only receive one type of customer, but if we just left it as Hawkins Agency everybody would, or could, come to us."

"And did it work?"

"Only too well," Sally answered wryly. "Your uncle wouldn't know from one day to the next whether he would be digging ditches or working as a butler in a stately home."

James chuckled delightedly. "They sound like the sort of situations that John's muddled

thinking would lead him into. Now, is there anything else that I should know?"

"I don't think so. Oh, yes. Your uncle paid me six months salary in advance and asked me to stay for that length of time."

"And will you?"

"Of course: I promised," Sally said indignantly.

"Of course," James nodded, looking pleased about it.

"I'm glad your salary is paid, I wish mine was," he added sadly.

"You'll have the money from the auction soon," she told him.

"Any idea how much that will be?" he asked.

"No." she answered shortly.

"Pity. Well, Sandy....."

"Sally," she interrupted warningly.

"....it looks as though we are working together. And the first thing I think we should do is have a cup of coffee. Do you think you could manage that?"

"Yes, I'll take the money from the petty cash. And that's down to fifty pence now," she added as she saw his interest.

"Then let's hope the auction money comes through soon."

Sally hoped so too, as she walked to the nearby café. She had no idea what James Harland had been doing lately, if anything, but she could see that it had not been paying him very well. It was interesting, if slightly disturbing, to have an employer who had even less money than herself. She only hoped that he was prepared to work for his money. But she need have no worries on that score, as she found on her return.

"Ah. good. You were quick. We will just have time to drink this before we leave," James greeted her.

"Leave?" she asked, puzzled.

"Yes. There was a 'phone call while you were out, Brown's Brushes, we are to go to their demonstration stall in Willmer's store. Quick work, eh?" He was pleased with himself. "But I daresay you've done dozens of the things, or similar," he added.

"Me? I've never done anything like that in my life," Sally exclaimed.

"But you must have done things like this with Uncle John," he insisted.

"Your uncle always worked alone. I am a receptionist," she said pointedly.

"But you've got to come. They asked for a man and a girl, a pretty girl, and I don't know any other pretty girls," James said persuasively.

“No.” Sally was adamant.

“Yes. They want a couple and we are a couple. Besides. I haven't the faintest idea what to do,” he admitted.

“Neither have I. And I'm not going to be ordered about.” she stated angrily, banging her cup down. “I shall leave now.”

James surveyed her gravely. “So much for your promises,” he said sadly. “Your six months didn't last very long, did it?”

“I didn't know then what it would entail,” she flared at him.

“A promise is a promise under any circumstances. But I understand. I release you from your promise.”

“That's very generous of you, but it's not for you to release me from anything. I didn't promise you anything. And I'm never likely to.” She paused and James could see that she was wavering. He assumed his saddest expression and waited silently.

“I'll help you just this once,” she said finally.

“Good girl, let's go.” James said delightedly.

“But I don't know what good I shall be. I know nothing of demonstration stalls,” she wailed as he took her arm and hurried her out of the office before she could change her mind.

“We can learn together,” James said cheerfully.

The demonstration of Brown's Brushes was easy, simple, foolproof, in fact. Or so a representative of Mr. Brown would have James and Sally believe. The stall had been erected to bring to the unsuspecting public's attention a new, revolutionary electric shoe brush and polisher, which sprayed the polish and shined perfectly with absolutely no effort from the wearer of the lucky shoes.

“Well, that seems easy enough,” James smiled. They had been shown how to use the electric 'Blackit' brush by the representative before he had hurried off on other, more important business: It was his tea break. There was just a hint of relief in James' voice as he leaned nonchalantly against the frame of the stall and waited for their first vict..... customer.

“I'll reserve my judgement,” Sally said, eyeing Brown's 'Blackit' brush with suspicion.

“Oh, come now,” James laughed. “It's really very simple, a child could use it. Why, with a little practice even you should be able to manage it. Yes, ma'am,” he said, moving toward a customer and away from Sally before she could think of a suitable retort. The customer was a large, fur coated

lady of obvious wealth. Sally noted the lady's petulant mouth with a feeling of foreboding. James prattled on about the merits of the 'Blackit' brush and finally convinced the woman that a demonstration was necessary. She settled herself in the chair provided and lifted one foot for James.

“Think it would be wiser to take off her shoes,” Sally whispered as James picked up the brush.

“Just leave it to me,” he murmured confidently, patting her arm condescendingly. The demonstration was, to Sally's surprise and relief, a complete success. The woman gazed admiringly at her sparkling shoes and commented favorably upon Mr. Brown's 'Blackit' brush.

“Yes, madam, a marvelous little machine.” James remarked snugly. He was holding the machine and he gave it an affectionate little pat, which was unfortunate, because he patted the starter button. A fine spray of black shoe polish squirted slowly, but very effectively, all down the front of the woman's snow white blouse. James dropped the machine in horror and left it jiggling merrily about the floor as he hurriedly produced a handkerchief and tried to wipe away his mistake. For this piece of thoughtlessness he received a resounding slap across his left cheek.

“I beg your pardon,” James stammered, red-faced. “I never thought - I mean....” But the woman was not listening to his excuses, she was too busy airing her complaints at the top of her voice to her rapidly increasing audience.

“The manager,” she was demanding hysterically.

“Where is the manager?” Sally had retreated into the furthest, and most dimly lit, corner of the stall. From there she had watched events with an embarrassed horror. She watched the manager appear; a large stern faced man with the air of a criminal court judge about him, and she shuddered. There would be no sympathy for them from that quarter, she decided wearily.

James was completely demoralized. He stood with bowed head as his former customer and 'Blackit' admirer raged to the manager about 'that infernal machine' and the incompetent idiot who operated it. In fact, James looked so defenseless that Sally felt compelled to push her way forward to his assistance.

“It Was purely accidental.” she explained to the stern faced manager as she picked up the 'Blackit' brush.

“My colleague merely patted the machine like this.” She imitated James' action. But the machine was heavy, too heavy for her to hold in one hand. It slid slowly from her fingers. She grabbed at it despairingly, but too late. The manager's stern face contorted into a howl of pain as the machine; activated by the fall, danced it's merry jig over his toes and sprayed polish up his trouser leg. Sally backed away in alarm as the man spluttered angry threats and stumbled out of the way of the insane

'Blackit' machine. Sally felt her arm taken firmly and someone propelled her roughly through the laughing onlookers. She was quite convinced it was the police and that she had been arrested. Once clear of the crowd she looked up to see the face of her arresting officer. James stared solemnly down at her.

“I think,” he said, glancing quickly around, his eyes sparkling with boyish laughter. “we had better make a run for it.” And they did. Sally hanging grimly on to James' sleeve as they made a swift, undignified, but very effective exit.

They arrived back at the agency fifteen breathless minutes later, sally closed the door firmly and leaned thankfully against it. “Never, never will I be able to set foot in that store again,” she declared. “And as for you, James Harland....”

“What you need is a nice cup of coffee,” he interrupted hurriedly as he slipped through the door and back into the street, preferring to take his chances in the hostile outside world than to stay and listen to what he was 'And as for.'

When he returned with the coffee Sally was in a much calmer frame of mind. She received the coffee he offered with a disdainful sniff and studiously avoided looking at him.

“As you tried to point out to the manager, it wasn't really my fault,” James began diffidently after three minutes of silence.

Sally glared at him.

“Well, perhaps it was,” he amended quickly. “But really, such a fuss over a little thing like a dirty blouse. It could easily be washed.”

Sally gave him another withering look.

“No? Then I would have bought her another one,” James said stoutly. “At least it was only her clothes the 'Blackit' blacked, it didn't tango all over her feet.”

“I have never been so embarrassed in all my life.” Sally said quietly. “It was utterly humiliating and I shall never appear in public in your company again. Never!” She turned away abruptly as if to terminate the conversation.

The telephone rang.

James looked at it, then at Sally.

She shook her head. “You can face the music,” she said with relish.

James picked up the 'phone. “Yes?” he inquired tentatively. But it wasn't an angry call



from Willmers, Sally realized with disappointment as she watched James' face brighten considerably.

He Picked up a pen and hastily scribbled on the pad before him, then replaced the receiver with a pleased air.

“Another customer,” he informed her cheerfully.

“Really?” Sally said disinterestedly, and turned away to busy herself with some papers on her desk.

James looked at her thoughtfully for a few moments, a puzzled frown slowly being replaced by a scheming little smile. He composed his face and cleared his throat.

“Miss Ormonde,” he started formally and that threw her off her guard immediately, “I realize that this morning must have been quite a strain for you and I think you should take the rest of the day off. Also, I would appreciate it if you would allow me to make my apology over dinner tonight. I thought the Paladin Club.....?” he finished questioningly.

“Well, I...you...,” Sally was completely at a loss.

“Please,” he insisted.

“I...very well. And thank you,” Sally smiled. She was thinking how pleasant he was after she had been so unkind. There might well be a spark of decency in the man after all.

“No, thank you,” James said gallantly. He tore from the pad the page that contained his telephoned instructions (Major and Mrs. Smith. Eight o'clock, Paladin Club.) and pushed the pad towards Sally. “If you will write down your address I will pick you up at seven-thirty.” And he smiled disarmingly.

Sally smiled back. For some reason she felt a small tingle of premonition. She accused herself of harboring vexations and sternly dismissed her uneasiness. Which was unfortunate.

The Paladin Club was one of the most fashionable nightclubs in town. It was plush, expensive, but informal and discreet, and from her seat in a corner booth Sally had seen at least six famous show business personalities relaxing as she was. As a waiter removed the remnants of an excellent meal, Sally sighed contentedly and smiled across at James, or rather, the back of James' head, for he had turned and was staring at a couple seated two tables away. Sally frowned. James, she had noticed, had been paying considerable attention to this pair all evening. And she did not find it very complimentary!

“Friends of yours?” she asked sweetly.

“Eh?” James Whirled around and stared at her with some confusion “Friends? No, not at all,” he laughed, a little forcedly.

“I’m not surprised,” she said, still sweetly.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized. “I haven’t been very good company for you this evening.”

“You certainly haven’t,” Sally agreed calmly.

Out of the corner of his eye James could see the couple he had been Watching leave their table and make their way toward the gaming room.

“How would you like to visit the gambling den?” he asked lightly, standing in anticipation of her answer.

“No, thank you,” Sally answered.

“You will enjoy it.” James took her arm and helped her from her chair.

“I don’t want to enjoy it,” Sally said, sitting down again.

“You do.” James insisted. taking her arm again.

“I do not,” Sally answered stubbornly. “And I will not.”

“You’ve got to,” James said desperately as he watched the pair he was so interested in disappear into the gaming room.

“Why must I? And why do you want to follow that couple?” Sally demanded.

James sighed and sat down resignedly. “They are Major and Mrs. Smith. You might have noticed the necklace that Mrs. Smith was wearing?”

Sally nodded. “Rather vulgar, but very expensive,” she pronounced.

“Very,” James agreed. “That’s why we are guarding it.”

Sally stared at him in amazement. “Guarding? Do you mean that we are working? Agency work?” she demanded to know.

“I knew you wouldn’t mind,” he said pleasantly, helping her up from her chair. This time she was too taken aback to sit down again.

“You...are....despicable,” she fumed in a low voice as he guided her across the room.

“Please don’t thank me now,” he murmured, smiling down at her. Inside the room James pushed a pile of gambling chips into her hands and, after a brief glance around, led her to a roulette table at which the major and his wife were seated.

“You play and I’ll watch,” he instructed her quietly. Sally stared at the whirling wheel, the bouncing silver ball, the numbers and colored squares beneath glaringly bright lights, and she tugged his sleeve urgently.

“I don’t know how to play.” she whispered.

"It's easy. Just place your chips on the number you think will win," he told her impatiently. She did as she was told.

"No, not all of them," he panicked, as she placed all her chips on number five square. But it was too late, the bet was laid and the wheel was spinning.

"We are now broke," James groaned, watching the wheel with loathing.

"You should be more explicit," Sally said defensively. The wheel slowed down, the ball bounced and jumped and settled .....number five!

"Well I'll be blowed!" James said in amazement.

"Have we won?" Sally asked anxiously. As if to answer her question the croupier pushed a pile of chips towards her, thirty-eight times as many as she had staked.

"Good girl," James said pleased. But the win had its disadvantages. The major's wife had glanced up and recognized James as the man who had been staring at them all through dinner. She whispered something to her husband, who looked up and nodded grimly. Meanwhile, Sally had placed another handful of chips on number seven and had won again. James stood behind her admiringly.

"What's the next number?" he asked eagerly, ignoring Major and Mrs. Smith for the moment.

"None," said Sally firmly, deciding it was a silly game and that she was bound to lose if she continued playing.

"One it is," James said, mishearing, and placed a pile of chips on number one square.

"I said none," Sally repeated. "Oh. Sorry. Thought you said one," James said. disappointed.

"That's a quarter of our winnings gone," she accused him.

"Not necessarily. We haven't lost yet," James pointed out.

"You're not the only one who can play this game, you know." The ball stopped on number nine.

"We can't expect to win every....." James stopped. The major and his wife had gone. He glanced around the room, there was no sign of them.

"Come on." James scooped up the chips that they had won, he hurriedly cashed them in and then rushed Sally out into the car park. Across the wide tarmac space the major and his wife were also hurrying, glancing apprehensively over their shoulders as they did so.

"Ah, there they are," James said with relief as he spotted them. I'll just ask them where they are off to now."

"Just a minute," he called, striding towards his charges. They didn't wait a minute. In

fact, they didn't even wait a second, they took to their heels and ran towards their car.

“Extraordinary people,” James observed as the car roared quickly away.

“Well, I suppose we had better follow them, it's what we are being paid to do.”

Sally and he jumped into the car that he had hired for the evening and they roared off in pursuit.

The chase was fast and furious. On reflection, Sally thought that James, even though he was driving a car strange to him, would most probably have caught up to the major in another few minutes. If the police car had not stopped them!

James started to explain to the policeman why he had been driving so fast, but it sounded so melodramatic, even to his own ears, that he began to fear that he might be accused of drunkenness. So did Sally. She nudged him firmly in the ribs as a warning to keep quiet and James accepted her silent advice and received his ticking off meekly.

“We will never catch the major now,” James said when the policeman had finally driven away. “Would you like to return to the Paladin and try your luck again?” he asked hopefully.

“I would not,” Sally answered. “I just want to go home before you land me in any further trouble.” James stopped the car in front of Sally's flat. He counted out the money they had won and gave her half. Then he took a few notes from her. “For expenses,” he explained.

Sally took the money back from him. “I've been on agency business all evening” she told him cheerfully. “Let the agency bear the expenses.”

“I shouldn't think we'll get any expenses,” James said glumly. “We did lose our clients,” he reminded her.

“You lost the clients, so you can lose the expenses,” she laughed. “Goodnight.”

But they hadn't lost their clients, as they found out next morning when James 'phoned the major's secretary to explain about the previous evening.

“Good morning, Mr. Blackwell, please.” There was a pause and Sally watched a frown arrange itself on his face. “But surely he does. I spoke to him only yesterday. Some business we were to undertake for the major. Of course I'm sure I have the right number. Major Smith, yes. That won't be necessary.” And James put the 'phone down hurriedly.

“Trouble?” Sally asked anxiously.

“I don't know.” He looked puzzled. “Shouldn't think so. Practical joke, perhaps.”

“For heaven's sake! Will you stop talking riddles and tell me.”

“But it is a riddle. It seems that neither the major nor anyone connected with his office employed us yesterday.”

“Then who were you hounding last night?” Sally asked in dismay.

“Heaven only knows,” James said. “But we were lucky they didn't report us to the police. That would have been even worse than the Wilmer fiasco.”

“Nothing could be as bad as Wilmers,” Sally shuddered. “And those poor people! They were out for a pleasant evening together, expecting a nice quiet night out, when you come sleuthing sinisterly around. They must have been terrified!”

“Steady on!” James protested, stung by her accusing tone. “I don't usually go around hounding people, you know. Although I can see that it might look that way to you,” he conceded, seeing the doubting expression on her face.

“oh, it does look that way, very much,” she said fervently. “And your worst victim is this poor girl who works with you!”

“Well, my poor girl, I can promise you a morning of blissful peace and quiet because I have to go out; and I may even be gone for the whole day. But I'll try my best to get back to you,” he added sarcastically, as she smiled broadly at the thought of his absence.

“Do try your hardest to get back early. Then I can be sure that you will be late!” she called after him. He shook his fist at her as he closed the door behind him.

Sally's morning of tranquility lasted just over an hour, then the door opened and James entered grinning happily. Sally closed her eyes and wished desperately; but when she looked again he was still there. And worse, so was his happy expression, which alarmed her more than any look of anger or hate could ever do.

“No!” she said emphatically.

“But I haven't asked you yet,” he protested.

“Ah-ha!” So you were going to involve me in another of your hare brained schemes.

“Don't ask me, I've refused.”

“Very well. But I'd have thought you would have enjoyed Jamaica. It's not often one gets the chance to work abroad. Still, I don't think I'll have any trouble finding someone to accompany me.”

Sally looked at him distrustfully. “Jamaica,” she repeated, disbelievingly, but with just a hint of doubt in her voice.

“Nice Place. Sea, sand, very exotic, pity you don't want to go.”

“You're not going to Jamaica,” she said firmly. She stared hard at his sad and innocent

face. "Are you?" she asked pleadingly.

"No, I'm not. But it would serve you right if I was." he backed warily away as she picked up a heavy marble paper weight and raised it threateningly. "Don't you dare, we have a very important agreement, and you won't be able to go without me."

"I'm not going anywhere with you. Except Jamaica, perhaps, or somewhere similar. So go away from me until you have arranged it."

"This is silly. We're going to be late." He passed her coat from the rack.

"We are going to a wedding," he explained. "And you like weddings. Every woman likes to go to a wedding. Don't you?"

"I don't. You go, I'll stay here. It will be safer for me that way. With you around, the best man will probably end up married to the bride's father!"

"You are needed. Do hurry, there isn't much time. And if you won't go voluntarily, then I shall carry you out," he threatened.

"You wouldn't dare!" She looked into his eyes and she wasn't so sure. She sighed resignedly. "If it's that important to you, I'll go to your Wedding. I know I shall be sorry," she predicted wearily. But Sally didn't regret her decision, she was glad she had decided against her better judgment. They were met at the registry office by a blushing, shy young man with a pronounced nervous stammer, and his equally nervous looking bride to be.

"Are we in time?" James asked the young man, who nodded happily and led them into the registrar. It was explained to Sally that the young couple were Donald Weston and Carol Maws, and that their best man and maid of honor had been involved in a slight accident. No one had been hurt but the accident meant that they would not be able to make the appointed time for the wedding. James, who had been passing when Carol had burst into tears on receipt of the bad news, had offered to help.

"Sandy and I..."

"Sally."

"...are only too glad to help. Actually, it's our business helping people. Hawkins Agency, at your service," James informed the flustered pair. Carol blushed violently and lapsed into silence. Donald nodded enthusiastic agreement.

"Don't know what we should have done," he echoed, glancing nervously around.

"Are you expecting someone else?" James asked him.

"No. Not at all. No one else to expect. At least, I hope not," he finished cryptically. Sally sat next to Carol, who pulled continuously, nervously at her gloves. There seemed to be an air of tension that was out of proportion for the occasion. It was as if, Sally guessed shrewdly, the accident

had been the last straw that almost, but not quite, thanks to James, had been disastrous. Whatever her troubles Carol's face wore a set, determined look, and Sally's heart went out to her. This was no morning for worries: She reached out and tucked a loose lock of hair away from Carol's face.

“Oh dear, does it look too awful?” Carol asked, raising her hand to her hair. “I wish there had been more time.”

“You look lovely,” Sally reassured her honestly.

“Mr. Weston, Miss Maws.” Donald jumped violently at the sound of their names being called by the registrar's assistant. Sally took Carol's hand.

“What ever is troubling you can wait for a little while. The world can manage itself on your wedding day. You just concern yourself with the only people who really matter.”

Carol nodded and her eyes filled as she looked at Donald, who seemed to grow calmer and more self assured under her gaze.

“Thank you, Sandy,” Donald said, as Carol slipped her hand inside his arm. Sally couldn't correct him for the feeling that had welled up inside her.

James took her hand, squeezed it gently, “It's very kind of you. I don't know what we should have done...”

And Hawkins Agency followed the young couple into the flower filled registrar's office.

“That was nice of you, James, to concern yourself with those two,” Sally said, as she waved Donald's car away.

“Entirely selfish. I adore weddings,” he answered flippantly. “I can't resist the opportunity to gloat over some poor chap who is even more unfortunate than myself.”

“There was obviously something worrying them. I wonder what it could be,” she mused, falling in step beside James and strolling through the sun bright streets.

“And don't suggest last minute nerves,” she warned.

He laughed loudly. “Well, I felt nervous and it wasn't my wedding.”

“No, seriously, it was something more than that, much more.”

“It's not our business” James said brusquely. “And I don't think they will allow it to interfere with their honeymoon.”

“Men! You are so basic. There are other things to marriage, you know.”

“I agree. And I don't think that they will allow these other things to interfere with their honeymoon either,” he said, tongue in cheek.

He glanced at his watch and frowned. “My punctuality is becoming a nuisance. I am

rapidly becoming known as the late James Harland. I'll have to leave you to make your own way back to the office," he apologized. "I have, or had, an appointment. See you in about an hour." he waved, threaded his way across the traffic jammed road, and disappeared down a side street.

Sally strolled leisurely through the lunch time streets, stopping at her favorite home bake shop to pick up something for her lunch. She bought the lunch time edition of the local paper from a corner paper seller, who grinned broadly, if somewhat crookedly,

As he commented on the sun's ability to bring all beautiful things into the open. Sally received the compliment smilingly. It was a beautiful morning and she felt vaguely dissatisfied and reluctant to return to the confines of the office. She glanced idly at the headlines of her newspaper as she walked. And stopped dead in her tracks!

Staring back at her from the front page was the face of James Harland, a police artist's impression, crude but unmistakable; alongside James' portrait was another, a girl, herself! The two pictures were captioned by one word in large, black, frightening letters: **TERRORISTS.**



## Part Two

Sally folded the paper, glancing guiltily around as she did so. Now the brightness of the day was her enemy as she hurried toward the safety of the agency. She felt as if a hundred eyes were staring her, as if fingers were being pointed accusingly. TERRORIST. TERRORIST. The word seemed to thunder and rolled around her, following even when, controlled by panic, she started to run.

She reached the agency and slammed the door behind her. Inside was cool and dimly lighted, and there was safety from prying eyes. Calmness and reason returned with the feeling of safety. Terrorists? Just who were they supposed to have terrorized? She spread the now crumpled paper on the desk, smoothed out the pages and sat down to read it fully.

The report concerned a Major Smith and his wife, whose car had been forced off the road by unknown assailants. Mrs. Smith had been thrown clear when the car had crashed, and the major had been able to free himself and crawl away from the wreckage. The man and woman who had caused the crash had proceeded to fire pistol shots into the petrol tank of the crashed car, causing it to explode. They had then driven away at high speed, apparently satisfied with their night's work and unaware that their intended victims were unhurt, except for a few scratches, and severe shock in Mrs. Smith's case.

The victims had been able to identify their assailants because they had noticed their interest earlier in the evening. The reason for the attack was not known, but the major had recently been involved in a large military exercise that had uncovered the headquarters and secret arsenal of a militant organization known as the U.F.L.F. It was believed that the cowardly, and vicious attack on the major had been a reprisal attack by this organization.

The police had launched a massive manhunt to track down the armed and extremely dangerous pair.

Sally leaned back and shuddered with relief. So that was it: The misunderstanding could easily be explained away. She felt like laughing aloud at the absurdity of it all. Terrorists indeed! But she did not feel like laughing when she thought of the horror the major and his wife had faced the previous night. She reached for the telephone with the intention of calling the police and clearing things up immediately. She paused with the receiver in her hand, then replaced it slowly. A gleam came into her eyes as she thought of James' reaction to the news. He should suffer, she decided. It was all his fault and he deserved a shock as sharp as the one she had received. He had tangled their lives up in this situation, let him sort it all out.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when James strolled into the agency. He found Sally

calmly working at her desk.

“Any news?” he asked hopefully.

Sally shook her head and continued with her work.

“Never mind.” James sounded rather deflated. “I suppose we can't expect something to happen every day.” He went toward his office and Sally called him back.

“You might care to glance at this newspaper,” she suggested casually. “It may contain something of interest.”

He took the paper and was poring over the sports news on the back page as he disappeared into his office. Sally watched the open door with interest. She hadn't long to wait. Less than two minutes later James popped his head around the doorway.

“Wretch!” he exclaimed. “This is obviously a likeness of you. What have you been up to with this criminal looking type next to you?”

Sally burst out laughing. James stood and read the article thoroughly.

“I was going to ring the police earlier, but I decided to leave that chore for you.” she teased. He looked at her and something in his eyes chased her laughter away.

“You didn't phone, did you?” he asked sharply. Sally shook her head and she felt fear touch her again as she watched James read over the front page again, slowly, carefully.

“It will be all right? We can easily explain, can't we?” she asked anxiously.

James looked at her thoughtfully and her heart sank. It would not be all right, she knew. James' stern face, the worry in his eyes told her that much.

“I'm sorry, Sandy. I don't think it's going to be quite as simple as you seem to think. I wish it was though,” he sighed.

“Sally! But why isn't it that simple? I don't see any difficulty about explaining what really happened,” Sally said, puzzled by his attitude.

“And what can we explain? That we did follow the major all evening? That we actually chased after him when he drove away? It doesn't sound very innocent, does it?” James pointed out.

“But the policeman who stopped us: Surely that's a point in our favor? You said yourself that we would never catch the major after that delay. And the policeman will have the time in his note book.”

“Ah, yes. The policeman,” James said thoughtfully. “I wonder why he stopped us?”

“Because we were speeding, of course,” Sally said impatiently.

“But the major passed him first going just as fast, if not faster, than we were. And yet we were stopped. No summons, just lectured. Or delayed,” he finished meaningfully.

"I don't believe it," Sally said firmly. "You're letting your imagination get the better of what little good sense you possess. Bogus policemen: That is too fantastic for words."

James shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps," he said, but his tone implied that there wasn't any doubt in his mind.

"But I shouldn't phone the police, not just yet. After all, we were identified."

"This is ridiculous" Sally protested. "When we followed the major we were working....." She stopped and looked at James triumphantly. "That's it: We were working: Who phoned you? Who was it that employed us?" she asked eagerly. "Surely that's all the proof we need?"

"I shouldn't build your hopes too high," James said gently.

"This whole affair is beginning to...."

"Who employed us?" Sally repeated impatiently. "We have got to get to the bottom of all this, and quickly."

"We were employed by the major's secretary," James sighed wearily. "I haven't the phone number, but the address is Stratlang street. But Sandy...." He stopped.

Sally wasn't listening to him as she thumbed rapidly through the directory.

"Who shall I say is calling?" she asked as she dialed.

"Assassination Inc.?" James suggested.

Sally glared at him.

"No? Better pretend to be from a news agency. The major will have had plenty of those calling him, one more won't arouse suspicion."

"I do think that you are exaggerating our position. It seems to me to be a matter.....Hello, Major Smythe's office? This is Amalgamated News here, I'm checking on a rumor that the major had a hired, private bodyguard last night and....not true? I see. Who is this speaking; please: And no one else would have....yes, I understand. Thank you. Miss Thorne." Sally put the phone down and turned slowly to James. She stared at him, past him, deep in thought.

"That was Miss Thorne," she said quietly, "the major's secretary. They did not hire any one to guard the major last night."

"The secretary who hired us was male. A Mr. Blackwell. And I wish I could get my hands on him." James said grimly.

"Then who hired us? And why?" Sally asked fearfully.

"The who I don't know: the why....I think the paper explains that well enough. We are obviously scapegoats."

Sally stared at the paper and the sketch of herself stared lifelessly back at her. Suddenly

it seemed that James had not been exaggerating, that this nightmare was complete reality. More real than the truth, and would seem so not only to herself but also to the police and public.

“Oh, James, what are we going to do?” she asked hollowly.

“I don’t know. Yet. But I do know that we are not going to panic.” He reached over and squeezed her hand reassuringly. ”

“Remember Willmer's and it won't seem so bad,” he suggested, with more levity than he really felt.

Sally looked at him in dismay. “Please don't joke about it,” she said sharply, pulling her hand away from his. “I can't see anything funny about being hunted by the police as would be murderers. But then, I have a very conventional sense of humor.”

“It's a relief to hear that you do have a sense of humor, no matter how small or conventional it may be,” James retorted, equally sharp of tone.

“Better mine than yours, which is warped and twisted and, and irresponsible!” Sally snapped back.

For a moment James seemed ready to answer in Kind, then he started laughing. “I'm sorry,” he said gallantly, bowing low before her. “Bickering isn't going to help us at all. We're in this together and we must stand together. After all, in the whole wide world I'm the only one who really believes that you're innocent, who knows you are,” James said mockingly. "By the way, you are innocent, aren't you?” he added quizzically.

In spite of herself, the situation, Sally found herself smiling “You are impossible, completely impossible,” she told him.

“And you do believe that I an equally innocent?” he asked keenly And the humor had disappeared from his voice. “After all, I could have sneaked back with a female accomplice after I left you last night. I might be guilty.”

Sally's gaze searched his face as he waited unsmiling for her answer. She saw in his lean, firm jaw, strength: in his wide mouth, laughter, even when, as now, he did not smile. His eyes held a glint of humor, with a hint of seriousness, perhaps even coldness, buried deep in their brownness. But she did not see, and knew that she would never find, cruelty, hate, anything hurtful. She returned from her thoughts to find him still looking at her intently, waiting. She flushed and smiled and turned away in confusion.

“That's a nice, positive answer, I must say.” James said, amused.

“The subject of your guilt was your suggestion. It would never have crossed my mind if you hadn't brought it up,” Sally said stiff: wondering why it was that she always felt that he was quietly

laughing at her.

“Thank you. It will be better if we are honest with each other from the very beginning.”

“The beginning of what?” Sally asked.

James shrugged “That remains to be seen,” he said softly.

“And will we end up in the major's position?” Sally tapped the newspaper. “It scares me. Who would do such a thing?”

“It doesn't give me a very comfortable feeling,” James admitted. “But whoever it is that we are up against is pretty adept at organizing such things. You must admit they've done a good job of framing us.”

“It's frightening.” Sally shuddered. “And so is your admiration for them!”

“Strictly professional admiration. You should realize your enemy's strengths.”

“I still think that we should go to the police and explain everything.” But she said this with more hope than conviction.

James looked at her thoughtfully. “I can't go to the police,” he said finally. “But you can. In fact, it might be the best thing for you to do.”

“But if I can go, why can't you?” she asked.

“There are some things.....“ he spoke slowly, as if undecided, then he shook his head firmly. “It would be better if I didn't. But give me a few hours before you turn yourself in, will you?”

He jumped from the desk and strode purposefully into his office.

“Will you scrape together all the cash we have. And quickly,” he called out to her.

“What are you going to do?” Sally followed him slowly into the office. He was kneeling in front of the safe, his back to her, and he was very still.

“Do?” he answered quietly, almost absently. “I'm going to find whoever it is who got us into this mess.” He stood up and turned slowly. “And I think I had better start quickly, before the net closes in on me.”

Sally gasped.

He was holding, rather gingerly, a black and ugly looking pistol. “Strange the things that turn up when we are out of the office.” He spoke lightly, but his face wore the frown that came with worry.

Sally watched him silently as he stood there holding the gun. He was concerned, obviously, about his predicament, puzzled and alone, and yet he seemed somehow fully aware, in control, strong. Sally realized with surprise that she had more faith in him in a situation like this than she would have in his ability to manage simple, everyday tasks. 'Each man to his own trade.' she

thought, her instinct telling her that danger was no stranger to James Harland. He pushed the gun into his jacket pocket.

“I’ll get rid of this thing at the first opportunity. And now I’d better move fast. The police will be here shortly, and expecting to find this thing.” He patted the gun in his pocket.

Sally nodded agreement.

“I’ll go now. When they ask, you know nothing about me or where I’ve gone.”

“Which will only be the truth. Where are you going?” she asked.

He laughed. “To tell the truth. I don’t know. Somewhere” He smiled encouragingly, his hand reaching out to touch her hair softly.

“Take care of yourself, Sandy.” And he left.

It took Sally ten seconds to reach her decision. As the door closed behind James she felt suddenly, for the first time during this waging nightmare, completely alone. It didn’t matter where James was or was not going, anywhere seemed more attractive than where she might go on her own. She grabbed her coat and ran from the agency. James heard her running footsteps and turned, watched as he waited for her.

“Will you stop calling me Sandy. My name is Sally,” she panted as she reached him. “And I’ve changed my mind.”

“You can’t change your mind: Go back, you’ll be safer.” He turned her around by the shoulders and pointed her towards the agency.

“I will not go back,” Sally insisted, whirling around to face him.

“You must.” He turned her around again.

She spun full circle and glared up at him. “You got me into this, James Harland, you can jolly well get me out of it. And I’m staying around to make sure you do it properly.”

“For heaven’s sake,” James began, looking about desperately as if in search of a solution. He stopped and, taking her arm, pulled her quickly into a shop doorway.

“There’s someone at the agency,” he whispered warningly. He peered cautiously out at the man ringing the agency door bell. Sally followed suit.

“Why it’s only....”

James cut her short. “It’s about time we became a little distrustful,” he said meaningfully. “Until we know who we are dealing with we must suspect everyone. It will be safer for us that way.”

Sally fell silent. He was right, of course. She wondered if he trusted her. The man at the agency door finally decided that an answer was not forthcoming and he turned and walked up the street

toward Sally and James. He walked slowly, as if uncertain of his destination. He passed the doorway without noticing the two figures, so preoccupied was he with his own thoughts.

James stepped out into the street. "Enjoying your honeymoon?" he asked quietly.

Donald Weston jerked around and stared with startled eyes. The two men watched each other, one cool, appraising; the other flustered, obviously disturbed.

Sally stepped forward. She took in the situation at a glance. Donald Weston was worried stiff. His face wore a hunted, desperate look. Sally recognized the feeling, she was sure her own face had worn a similar expression sometime during the last few hours.

"Heartless beast," she murmured as she passed James and went toward Donald. "Sorry to have startled you. At least I am. Some people enjoy that sort of thing." She glanced back at James, who raised his eyes in a silent appeal to heaven.

"Were you looking for us?" Sally asked. Donald Weston allowed his breath to escape in a loud, relieved sigh.

He nodded. "I need your help," he said simply. "Please, I've no one else to turn to. It's Carol... she's missing."

"It's her father. I know it is," Donald said bitterly, staring into the spinning coffee James had placed before him. They were settled in a quiet corner of a small coffee shop.

"But why? And how?" James asked, puzzled. "You've only been married a matter of hours, how could he spirit her away from under your nose?"

"You don't know Carol's father. Bernard Maws is a very determined man, and he does not approve of me. He doesn't approve of anyone as far as Carol is concerned. There isn't a man on earth good enough for his daughter."

"Maws? Is that the industrialist?" James asked.

"The same," Donald answered.

James whistled softly. "From what I've heard he's a formidable opponent."

"He's ruthless," Donald flared. "He's a man who gets his own way. Every time."

"But how could he take Carol away? Surely she wouldn't leave you against her will?" Sally asked.

"I don't know what happened." Donald still seemed to be dazed. "We were at the station waiting for the train to Westerlea, we've booked a room there. Honeymoon, y'know."

James leaned forward with increased interest.

“I only left her alone for a few minutes, no more than that. When I returned she had gone, her luggage too. Mine was still there. I waited but she didn't return. I phoned the flat but there was no answer. I didn't know what to do. Then I remembered you, Hawkins Agency.” He shrugged. “And here I am.” He looked at them expectantly, hopefully. Sally couldn't bear his gaze, she felt so powerless to help him. So she, too, gazed hopefully at James, who was staring thought-fully into the distance as he juggled several thoughts around in his head.

“Did Carol have a flat of her own?” he asked Donald. “No. She shared her father's. He wouldn't allow her that much freedom. He kept her close by him always.”

“And what will you do now?” James asked.

“Why, I shall have to stay here at home, in case Carol tries to contact me.” Donald seemed surprised by the question.

James nodded. “Right, we'll see what we can do for you.” Sally snorted disdainfully.

“Have you forgotten that we are....” James silenced her by giving her ankle a brisk tap with his foot, old fashioned but effective.

“I'll need your telephone number, your address, and...” James winced as Sally's foot crashed into his shin in retaliation. “...your tickets to Westerlea,” he finished. “My train tickets?” Donald asked, surprised. “Yes. You won't be using them now, will you?”

“No.”

“Then we will. What's the name of the hotel? And are you known there?” James asked. The hotel was the Slavion and neither Donald nor Carol had stayed there before. “Excellent,” James commented. “And can we borrow your luggage? Just for a night,” he added hastily as Donald looked at him dubiously. “There are, ahem, good reasons why. Take too long to explain,” he said airily.

Donald passed over the tickets and the key to the left luggage locker where his suitcases were deposited. “I'll have to go now,” he said apologetically as he stood up. “I don't want to be away from the flat for too long.”

Sally smiled understandingly. “We will do our best for you. Try not to worry too much,” she told him sympathetically.

“We will be in touch tomorrow,” James promised.

“Thank you.” Donald turned and threaded his way past the tables and left the café.

“Poor boy,” Sally said, as she watched him leave.

James seemed preoccupied as he slowly sipped his coffee. He remained silent for a few minutes while Sally waited patiently. Then he put down his cup with a suddenness that caused her to



jump.

“Well, we had better be moving Mrs. Weston,” he said gaily.

Sally stared at him. “I beg your pardon,” she said icily.

James grinned at her mockingly.

“No! definitely not,” Sally said firmly.

“Most definitely yes, Carol,” James said with relish.

“I won't!”

“You have no choice. And the police won't be looking for a honeymoon couple in Westerlea, will they? You should be glad that I've found somewhere for you to lay your head tonight.”

“I should be glad that I'm going on honeymoon with you?” Sally said increaulously.

“No fear! I'll find somewhere else to stay. Alone.” James sighed patiently. “It's either me or the police, because they are bound to catch you. And you decided to accompany me. Remember? So you have to abide by my decisions. And I have decided that we are Mr & Mrs Donald Weston. For tonight, at least, so pick up your coat and come along, Carol darling.”

Westerlea is a small, quiet fishing village not yet discovered by the great holiday-making public, and so still manages to retain a lot of its old world charm and serenity even at the height of the summer season. The village nestles safely against the base of the high, green hills that surround it on three sides and offer protection from all but the sea storms. All of the narrow streets slope steeply down to the half-moon harbor, with its jumble of masts and colored sails and ever gently swaying mass of crafts of all shapes and sizes.

The train pulled into Westerlea station at eight p.m. For two of the passengers the journey had been tense and worrying, and completely uneventful. Sally Ormonde adjusted her headscarf to cover most of her hair and stepped apprehensively down from the train, closely followed by James Harland carrying two rather small suitcases. She walked briskly to the ticket barrier where a bored collector took the tickets she offered him without even glancing at her face, which she thought uncomplimentary, but infinitely preferable to an admiring stare. Still with James in tow, as they had arranged that it should be, she proceeded to the taxi rank and climbed into a waiting cab.

“Slavian Hotel, please,” she requested, her voice betraying just a little of the strain that she felt.

The taxi driver shrugged. “Just as you like, miss,” he said in a resigned tone. “But it's hardly worth it.”

Sally looked at James in alarm. He motioned to her to be calm and settled back in his seat, his face impassive, his manner cool. To Sally the taxi driver's words sounded ominous but their meaning soon became clear. The cab stopped less than a hundred yards from the railway station.

"There's a minimum charge," the driver warned, obviously expecting to haggle over the fare.

"Fair enough. And here's a minimum tip," James said gaily, adding his smallest coin to the exact fare.

"You are mean," Sally reprimanded him, as the taxi pulled away.

"Not mean, thrifty with the mean natured," he corrected her. "What kind of a welcome was that for a honeymoon couple?" he asked her indignantly.

The hotel reception area was deserted of any guests. At the desk an elderly, motherly figure stood behind a plaque proclaiming her as one Mrs. Beaton. She beamed upon them at their arrival.

"Mr. and Mrs. Weston? Oh good. We were expecting you earlier. Nothing went wrong at the ceremony, I hope?" Sally shook her head and felt very guilty.

"Oh good! It would have been a shame to have had the most important day marred even a little. If you and your husband will follow me, Mrs. Weston." Sally's new title was spoken with exaggerated emphasis and Mrs. Beaton chuckled happily as she led them to their room. Sally looked balefully towards James, who smiled sheepishly and busied himself to the point of engrossment with the suitcases. The room was splendid. Or would have been splendid, Sally thought, under different circumstances. As it was, the Splendor was tinged by the undertones of falsehood.

"I'm sorry you've missed dinner, but if you're hungry you can obtain quite a pleasant meal in the cocktail lounge. Or you could eat out, of course," Mrs. Beaton said, as an afterthought.

James thanked her, and told her they might be down later.

"Quite. The last meal is served at eleven o'clock." Mrs. Beaton looked at them wisely and was chuckling to herself again as she left the room.

Sally's face was crimson. "I can't carry on like this. I won't: It's so...so... dishonest! And deceitful, degrading, demoralizing, and excruciatingly embarrassing!"

"It is a bit grim" James admitted. "And I don't like to deceive any more than you do. But I see no alternative, short of actually giving ourselves up to the police, that is."

"That alternative is beginning to look very attractive, compared to this," Sally muttered as she looked about the room. And looked again. There was only one bed: But of course, this is a honeymoon room, she reminded herself. And even if she had forgotten, he would not have.

“That sofa looks very comfortable,” she remarked casually. “Do you think so?” James grinned.

“Oh yes. Large too.” Sally moved across and bounced experimentally on the sofa. “Lovely.” was her verdict.

“I’m glad you like it so much. That decides the problem of who is going to sleep on it tonight. I didn’t fancy the idea myself but I would have offered. Chivalry, I suppose. But now I’ll take the bed and you can have your lovely sofa,” James said cheerfully.

“That’s not fair: I want to sleep in the bed, too.” Sally complained. “

“Miss Ormonde! Please: You don’t realize the implications of your suggestion,” James mocked.

“Fool! You’re to sleep on the sofa.”

James sighed pretended relief. “For a moment I thought you were taking this honeymoon arrangement seriously.”

“The only thing I’m taking seriously is your caddish attempt to deprive me of my rightful bed.”

“But you love the sofa so,” he reminded her.

“You wouldn’t be so bad mannered as to hog the bed all to yourself.” Sally insisted.

“I would.”

“But where are the gentlemanly instincts that your mother no doubt attempted to instill in you?” Sally appealed.

“I’ve mislaid them,” James confessed sorrowfully. “Temporarily. They will return after a good night’s sleep in a comfortable bed. Besides, I’m much too tall to sleep on that tiny thing.” He smiled happily. “I’m glad we’ve got that sorted out. Now, are you hungry?”

Sally nodded mutely. “And I’m going to sleep in that bed,” she warned.

“You’re not. We’ll toss a coin to see who uses the bathroom first.” James won the toss and Sally hinted darkly at cheats never prospering while he whistled his way cheerfully into the bathroom.

The cocktail lounge was fairly crowded when they entered. It was a small room tucked away at the rear of the hotel, with a bar running the length of one wall. Small, intimate booths occupied the rest of the room. The lighting was subdued and the decor a tasteful theme in brown and wine red.

James led the way to a corner booth to ensure their privacy. They had hardly settled themselves when a waitress materialized to take their order. After a hurried consultation they both decided on steak.

“Can we afford it?” Sally leaned forward to whisper as the waitress left.

“Certainly hope so,” James whispered back. “I’m hopeless at dish washing.”

“Me too,” Sally smiled.

“Don’t worry, we’re guests. We can add the meal to our bill.”

“And who is going to pay the bill at the end of our stay?” Sally asked.

“Ah, now that’s a secret. In fact, it’s such a well kept secret that even I don’t know the answer,” James said confidentially.

Sally burst out laughing. “That’s for you to worry about, you do realize, Mr. Weston, that a husband is still responsible for his wife’s debts? All of them,”

“That’s not true: Is it? if it is true, I think it’s very unfair,” James protested.

“Oh, I don’t,” Sally said snugly, as she leaned back to allow the waitress room to serve her meal. “It means that we wives don’t have to bother our heads over silly little things like unpaid hotel bills. And even if it’s not true as a general rule, it’s certainly true in your case. Will you pour the wine, darling?”

After the meal they relaxed for the first time since they had read that fateful newspaper. And was it only that afternoon? Sally thought with surprise. It seemed like days ago and yet it was still only hours away.

“The longest hours of my life,” she remarked to James. “I still can’t really believe that it is true. I expect to wake up at any moment now and find that I am late for work.”

“It has been rather hectic,” James agreed. “But it won’t remain so. Staying concealed from the world will soon become boring and tedious; Your movements are constricted, you find yourself traveling by night, or early morning, the times when there are least people around. And that emphasizes the loneliness of your predicament, the fact that you are one of the odd ones out and must stay that way to survive.” James’ face was thoughtful, engrossed.

Sally listened without interruption, afraid that any word or interruption would break this fragile spell of intimacy. Again she had the feeling that she was glimpsing something deep and powerful, the heart of the man; depths usually carefully concealed. These were echoes of his past. a secret she had not yet been entrusted with. She doubted if anyone knew, really knew, James well. He kept his inner self hidden away and she knew that this was a rare unguarded moment.

“Even your fear of discovery eventually becomes a bore,” James continued quietly,

addressing her yet not really speaking to her, voicing his thoughts out loud. “You continue to play the game by the rules mostly because it's second nature to do so. Yet, inside you is a desire to be caught, to become once again a part of the world that you are hiding from.

It's like a childish game of hide and seek that has lasted too long and you are the last one remaining undiscovered. You just want the other kids to find you so that you can go home.” He stopped and looked across the table, his gaze piercing, searching for understand. Her hand reached out and timidly touched his fingers. She sensed rather than saw the startled look in his eyes and instinct told her to remove her hand from his.

“You shouldn't let me ramble on like that,” he reprimanded her, his serious expression melting into a shy smile. “Here am I talking gibberish when we should be discussing our present situation and deciding what can be done about it.”

“There doesn't seem to be much that we can do,” Sally said resignedly.

“Of course there is,” James insisted. “For a start, we need money and transport. That shouldn't be too difficult. A 'phone call in the morning should do the trick.”

“And then where do we go? What good will it do us?”

“That picture should look a little clearer, and brighter, after a night's rest,” James said firmly, sensing that her defeatism was more tiredness than despair. He helped her to her feet. “Come, my lady, your marriage bed awaits.”

Sally glared at him.

“Figuratively speaking, of course,” he added hurriedly.

As they left the lounge they were confronted by a small, elderly bank-clerkish man who stepped into their path.

“Excuse me, Mr. Jones, may I have a moment of your time?” he asked, diffidently.

“Sorry, old man, I'm afraid you've got the wrong chap. Weston's the name,” James told him cheerfully.

“The wrong name, perhaps, but the right man, I think. Eh, Mr. Harland?”

## Part Three

“The wrong names perhaps but the right man. I think. Eh, Mr. Harland?” The name was a whisper so low that even Sally did not hear. To James it sounded like a shout that would rouse the hotel. He turned to Sally.

“You go up, darling, I'll follow you shortly.” Sally didn't wait to find out why. It crossed her mind that the first one into the bedroom could claim the bed, and she hurried gleefully up the stairs.

“Don't look so alarmed, Mr. Harland. I have no wish to broadcast your identity,” the man reassured James. “On the contrary, I have as much need for your liberty as you undoubtedly have.”

“And why should it worry you if I'm caught or not?” James asked skeptically.

“Because I have a job for you, Mr. Harland.” The man looked up and James could see a spark of excitement in what he would assume to be normally mild and gentle eyes.

“I don't need a job,” James told him flatly.

“But you have no choice,” the man said mildly. “I take it that you don't wish me to inform the police of your presence here? Of course you don't. And I will not. And after you've done a small Service for me, why, I shan't be able to tell anyone anything. So you see, your safety is guaranteed, if you co-operate, that is.”

“But what is....” James started, puzzled.

“Dear me, where are my manners? I haven't introduced myself yet. Stewart is the name, Cyril Stewart.” He inclined his head courteously. “I'm very pleased to meet you, Mr. Harland. Now, you are probably wondering what it is that I have in store for you, yes? But this is no hour to be discussing matters of gravity. Morning is the best time, when one is rested and eager for the day's happenings. The hotel does an excellent breakfast, incidentally. I shall see you at nine.”

Stewart turned to leave, checked and turned back again.

“By the way, the last train has left. I know you haven't any transport of your own and I shouldn't advise you to try to obtain a lift. Alone you would be conspicuous, with the young lady you wouldn't travel five miles without discovery.”

“Don't look so worried, Mr. Harland, I shan't ask you to do anything you have not already done before. The last attempt quite recently, if the papers are to be believed. Good night, Sir.”

This time Stewart did not turn back but continued briskly to the door and out into the night.

James watched with trepidation as the slight figure disappear from view. This was an

unexpected and entirely unwelcome twist to affairs. A job? Assassination was the real name of Mr. Stewart's game, James thought grimly. Whom was he expected to kill? He shook his head impatiently. The name didn't matter because he wasn't going to do any little job, Cyril Stewart had picked the wrong man to play his game.

But Stewart was right about one thing: It would be wrong to try to leave the hotel tonight, much better to wait until morning: Whatever the problems the next day brought, they couldn't possibly be as bad as today's, he thought wearily as he climbed the stairs to his room.

Sally was asleep. In the bed, of course. The room was partially lit by one small bedside lamp. James crossed the room quietly and stared down at the peacefully sleeping girl, her hair disarranged, her face expressionless and childlike. Some of the fears and worries that clouded his mind diminished as he watched her, as though the restfulness that she had found in sleep was transmitted to him, easing his tensions with her peace.

He switched off the light and fumbled across to the sofa.

'Tomorrow, my girl, is my turn for the bed. And we'll see how 'lovely' you think this thing is then,' he thought sadistically as he attempted to make himself comfortable.

James awoke before Sally next morning. He was cramped, his left foot half frozen and the leg aching from hanging over the edge of the sofa half the night.

He struggled his weary bones upright and staggered towards the bathroom muttering dire threats against the still sleeping and intensely comfortable looking Sally, who raised her head, opened one eye sleepily and made a face at James' back, then snuggled down and promptly fell asleep again.

A hot shower and a clean shave helped to restore a little life into James' emptiness. After dressing, he went down to the telephone feeling, if not quite a part of the human race, then close enough to avoid detection.

He made four telephone calls and arranged a meeting for that afternoon. When he had finished it was eight-forty-five and the hotel guests were beginning to gather for breakfast. He was halfway up the stairs to rouse Sally when she appeared above him.

"good morning," he called cheerfully, halting and waiting for her to join him. A teenage girl with her parents giggled as she passed them, her mother smiled understandingly at Sally, and her father winked knowingly at James.

“Oh dear,” Sally groaned. “I thought all those awful jokes about honeymooners were just awful jokes. Don't tell me that they are really true?”

“Fraid so,” James said sympathetically.

“How insensitive!”

“And thoughtless?” James suggested.

“Certainly not that! Their thoughts are quite obvious.”

“Unfeeling, then,” James ventured.

“Unfeeling,” Sally echoed.

“But we won't let them spoil our honeymoon, will we, Darling?”

“We certainly will not. Why I think that this is....” She stopped and stared coldly. “You are a beast, James....”

“Donald Weston,” James hissed, noticing Mrs. Beaton bearing down upon them and not wishing to be called James within her hearing.

“Where?” Sally asked, looking around her.

“Nowhere. Me, you silly goose.”

“Good morning,” Mrs. Beaton hailed them.

“I trust you had a comfortable night? Of course you did.” She chuckled happily as Sally blushed scarlet. “Now, if you'll follow me, we will find a nice, quiet table where you can be alone.” She set off and they followed.

“I'll end up throttling someone,” Sally ground out as they crossed the dining room.

James grinned down at her.

“And don't laugh, it might be you,” she threatened.

“Here we are.” Mrs. Beaton stopped by a table. “You two get yourselves settled and ready for breakfast. You'll soon be full of energy again.” And she bustled off, still chuckling.

“I'll scream,” Sally said stonily. “I won't be able to control myself. Or I shall throw kippers or cornflakes over someone. Porridge! Yes, that's it! Order me some porridge and I shall hurl it at the next smirk I see.”

“Now,” James said soothingly. “it's a national pastime at hotels. And with a little luck it will be the last time.”

“It certainly will. I shall never never have another honeymoon as long as I live,” Sally said fervently.

“I don't think you're allowed them when you're dead,” James said knowingly.

“Don't provoke me. or I shall order the porridge,” Sally warned.



"I meant that we might be leaving here before nightfall," James explained. "I 'phoned a friend while you were still sleeping. In my bed, I might add."

"And it is a lovely bed. How was the sofa?" Sally inquired,

"You might still find out for yourself." he threatened. "Anyway, I'm expecting a car and some money this afternoon."

"Good"

"There is just one snag," James said thoughtfully.

"I knew there would be," Sally said with resignation.

"What is it this time?"

"Our little friend last night"

"The one who called you Mr. Jones."

James nodded. "He knows who we are."

"And he's gone to the police?" Sally asked.

"No. He wants me to kill someone for him."

"What?" Sally gasped.

"Seems so. He hinted at it pretty clearly."

"But why you? And who does he want you to kill?"

"He believes what he reads in the newspapers and he thinks that we really are terrorists. As for victim that he wants eliminated, I think we will find out soon enough." James nodded toward the door and Sally turned to see Cyril Stewart enter the room.

She watched him glancing nervously about the room, his fingers clenching and unclenching on the brim of the hat he held.

"Why, he doesn't look capable of harming a fly!" Sally exclaimed. "Are you sure that you didn't drink too much wine last night?" she asked suspiciously.

James looked indignant. "I shall ignore that remark," he said loftily. "You will soon find that I wasn't drunk, here comes Stewart now."

Stewart stopped before their table.

"Good morning, Mr. and Mrs., umm, Weston, isn't it? I trust you slept well?"

He acted more like the hotel manager than a threat to their freedom, Sally thought.

"Now, would you like to discuss our business now, or would you prefer to wait?"

"Sit down, Stewart. There is no point in waiting. What's on your mind?" James said curtly.

"Good, good. I like to get matters over and done with. Never put off until tomorrow. It

can save nine.”

“I beg your pardon?” Sally looked puzzled.

“Stitches, my dear, stitches.”

“Oh.”

“Precisely. Now, I know who you are and what your business is. And I make no apology for taking advantage of your situation.”

“What exactly do you want from us?” Sally demanded to know.

“Just a little of your time, my dear. There is an accident that needs to be arranged. It shouldn't be too difficult. and I want it to happen tonight. Please.”

“You are mad,” Sally stated.

“I'm afraid we can't oblige you, old man.” James said in a reasoning tone.

“Oh, but you must,” Stewart insisted, his tone just as reasonable as James'. “You have no choice. If you refuse I will go straight to the nearest police station and report your presence here. I must say, I'm tempted to do exactly that now, very tempted. But my circumstances determine that my head must rule my heart. However, it is an ill wind that doesn't blow hard enough to reveal one.”

“Pardon?” Sally said automatically.

“A silver lining, my dear.”

“Accident making does seem a bit drastic. Isn't there another answer to your problem?” James asked persuasively.

“I'm afraid not,” Stewart said sadly, and he did seem to be genuinely regretful. “I've given the matter my undivided attention for months and, unfortunately, an accident is the only way out. It's my wife, you see. She is very ill. No telling when she might go. We've been to dozens of doctors and specialists, but to no avail. They can do nothing. It's just a matter of time: a day, a month, a year, they are very uncertain.”

“But good grief, man, that's no reason to see the poor woman off!” James exploded.

“Shush.” Stewart looked warily around to see if James' outburst had attracted attention. “You really mustn't become so excited, young man. And I don't seem to have explained myself clearly. It is not my wife who is to have the accident.”

“I'm relieved to hear that,” James said.

“Good. No, the accident is to be mine.”

“What?” James looked startled.

“You are mad.”

“Oh dear, I hope not. Does it seem to you that I am?”

“Why else would you ask to be killed?” James demanded to Know.

“I suppose it does seem a little strange,” Stewart conceded. “But I do have a very good reason.”

“I'm afraid any reason, or all the reasons in the world, for that matter, wouldn't justify us murdering you.”

“You have my permission,” Stewart pointed out.

“We can't, we won't do it. And that's an end to it.”

Sally nodded agreement.

Stewart sighed loudly. “You are a stubborn pair,” he said, shaking his head sorrowfully. “Do you like prison? If you don't, not to worry, you will learn to tolerate it. You will have time to get used to it. One can grow accustomed to anything in twenty years.”

“Now, don't be vindictive,” James pleaded.

Stewart rose from his chair. “Why not? You are being foolish. But you shall have time to change your minds. I shall return this evening. I will expect you to have arranged a suitable accident. If not....” He shrugged his shoulders. “You deserve to be in prison anyway.” And he turned and walked away.

“What a pleasant madman,” Sally observed.

“Dangerous,” James corrected her. “And either way we lose. To murder, or to prison? That is the question.”

“Nice choice.” Sally smiled ruefully. “It looks as if the jig is up, doesn't it?”

“Not necessarily,” James disagreed.

“But you can't do what he wants, surely?”

“Of course not! But there must be a way out, there has to be. I refuse to be scuppered by a chance meeting in a hotel bar!”

“I don't see what we can do,” Sally said. “Except make a run for it right now.”

James shook his head. “That does seem attractive, I must admit. But we wouldn't last three hours. No, we have to find some way to neutralize our Mr. Stewart. Besides, we have to stay here at least until Freddie arrives this afternoon. We won't get very far without money.”

“It looks as if we shan't get very far even if your friend, Freddie, should bring us a million pounds,” Sally pointed out sadly.

“Cheer up, Sandy...”

“Sally.”

“...we're not caught yet. Look, I can't eat anything now. You stay and finish your

breakfast while I pop out for a general snoop around.”

“But I'm not hungry, either.”

“Force yourself, you have to keep up your strength. I'll meet you here for lunch, no later. If I'm not here by, say, one p.m., clear out. Quickly!”

Sally was about to ask where she should clear out to in the event of an emergency, but she didn't have the chance to. James was striding purposefully toward the door, she knew, anyway, that his suggestions, if any, would be just as vague as her own.

She sat there toying absently with a cold and greasy piece of egg and tried to make sense of her situation. Finding the exercise confusing and unproductive, she started to vent her frustration on a shriveled mushroom, when it suddenly dawned on her that Cyril Stewart loved his wife very much, or that was the impression that she had received. And if that was so, and his wife had very little time left, why should he want to leave her? And why did he keep insisting on an accident?

She stared thoughtfully at the mushroom and decided that she would like very much to meet Mrs. Stewart.

Daffodil Cottages was the collective name for a small row of tiny cottages with neat little gardens and an air of quiet gentility. The cottages seemed to have been set to one side of the village and forgotten about a long time ago. An Autumn feeling of fulfillment and contentment surrounded them.

There was no proper road. The cottages looked directly onto a large field where cows were grazing placidly. Number six cottage was at the end of the row and it was here, according to the records in the village public library, that Mr. and Mrs. Cyril Stewart resided.

Sally walked cautiously down the cobbled pathway that served as both road and pavement and felt that her visit to Mrs. Stewart didn't seem now the excellent idea she had first thought it to be.

Sally stared apprehensively at the cottage. It seemed to look back at her with large, square eyes wise with age and filled with secrets. Sally wilted beneath the discomfiting stare of the little cottage and decided that, in fact, the cottage looked empty and there really wouldn't be much point in her knocking. Then the door opened.

“Can I help you, dear? Have you lost your way?” a kindly voice inquired. A startled Sally concealed her feelings from the small, elderly lady who now confronted her with a friendly smile.

"Mrs. Stewart?" she managed to croak.

"Why, yes, dear. But you don't look well at all." There was concern in Mrs. Stewart's voice. "You shouldn't dash about on such a warm day, you know. Come in, come in." She took Sally's arm and ushered her into the cottage.

"Your timing is perfect. I've just this minute put the water on the tea. Make yourself comfortable while I fetch another cup." And Mrs. Stewart hustled into the kitchen. Sally sat down and looked around the cool, bright room of chintz and brass and wood gleamingly polished by a hundred years of living. There was china on display, neat and colorful in the cabinet. On top of the cabinet was a small colored photograph of a family; father, mother and three small and impish looking children.

"My son and his family," Mrs. Stewart said on entering the room and finding Sally showing interest in the photograph, "bonny children, are they not?"

"They look lovely," Sally agreed.

"Yes, they do." Mrs. Stewart stared at her son and his family for a moment. When she turned away, sadness clouded her face. "I would so much like to see them before..." She stopped and rattled the cup and saucer heavily on the small table that held the tea things.

"They are in Australia, you know. John, my son, writes that he should be able to visit us in another three years at the most. That will be grand, grand." Her smile faltered only slightly, her voice did not alter, yet Sally knew what must be going through her mind: three years was too long. Her son might be too late.

"Here am I prattling on about my own! I haven't even inquired about your business. You must excuse an old woman her bad manners, miss....?"

"Sally."

"I'm pleased to meet you, Sally. And what can I do for you?"

"I'm not quite sure," Sally said slowly, as she accepted the cup of tea that was offered to her. "It concerns your husband."

"Cyril? Good gracious, there's nothing wrong, is there?" Mrs. Stewart was alarmed.

"No, no," Sally reassured her.

"Thank goodness. But he has been rather a worry of late. He's gotten it into his head that I should fly out to visit John. immediately. Well, we can't afford that on our pensions, however much we may wish it. But it has become an obsession with him and, knowing his nature, I was afraid that he might be in trouble. Cyril is a very determined man when he needs to be."

"Cyril certainly is." Sally agreed. "And I'm afraid that's why I'm here: Cyril's determination."

“Oh dear. He's not been after the insurance money again, has he?”

Sally nodded. She had guessed that was Cyril's intention.

“He is determined to collect it this time.” Mrs. Stewart sighed heavily. “Pass me your cup and while I fill it, you tell me what he has been up to,” she instructed resignedly.

Cyril Stewart followed James from the High Street to the hotel hurrying forward to tap him on the shoulder as he entered the lobby.

“Hello,” James greeted him. “I was wondering when you would show yourself.”

“Did you know that I was following you?” Cyril asked.

“Couldn't fail to notice you,” James said cheerfully.

“And I thought I'd managed quite well.” Cyril sounded disappointed. “But that's of no consequence. I must insist on your decision now, Mr. Weston, or Harland, or whatever your name is.”

“But you said I had until this evening.”

“I'm sorry, I must know now,” Cyril said firmly. “I don't trust you at all.”

“Go away, there's a good chap,” James pleaded. “You completely ruined breakfast for me and now you want to spoil my lunch. Do you like to be unpopular?”

“If you find me so irritating you should have no qualms about disposing of me, should you?” Cyril asked hopefully.

James threw up his hands. “What am I going to do with you, Cyril?” he asked helplessly.

“I rather thought a car accident would be...”

“Stop!” James commanded. He looked at Cyril Stewart and knew that it was hopeless to try to reason with him. “Come along and spoil my lunch,” he said resignedly. “Even though it is the last I'll have as a free man.”

“You mean, you won't do it?” Stewart asked incredulously as he followed James into the dining room. “I mean exactly that. But please wait until after lunch before you set the bloodhounds on to me.” James stopped before the table at which Sally and an elderly lady were seated.

“But you can't do this to me,” Stewart was protesting. “What kind of criminal are you?”

“Not a very good one,” James admitted.

“I won't have it! I'll make you do it. I'll...”

“Cyril!”

Stewart hadn't noticed his wife sitting at the table with Sally. He whirled around at the

sound of her voice.

“Hello, dear. Please excuse me for a few minutes, I have some business to discuss.”

“We know what your business is, Cyril Stewart. You ought to be ashamed.”

“I'm not, you know,” Cyril replied stoutly.

“That is quite obvious: Cyril, how could you?” she appealed, with, and Sally guessed that this was a well rehearsed ploy, a quiver of her lower lip.

“It was the best thing to do, dear,” Cyril answered, completely demoralized.

“But best for whom?” Mrs. Stewart demanded to know. Cyril placed an arm around her shoulder.

“It didn't seem such a high price to pay for your final dream,” he told her. Mrs. Stewart gazed up at him and her eyes were brimming over.

“You foolish man,” she whispered. “Without you here I shouldn't last long enough to make the journey. You still mean more to me than anything else, though I suppose that makes me just as foolish as you. Now, take me home and let's have no more of this silliness.” Cyril helped her to her feet and she took his arm.

“Hadn't you better apologize to these young people,” Mrs. Stewart suggested.

“Apologise? But they are criminals,” Cyril protested. “I should report them to the police.”

“Fiddlesticks! You will do no such thing. And you be grateful that they will not report you! Now come along home, before you do any more damage.”

James, who had been watching with bewilderment, sank slowly into a chair and watched them leave.

“I don't believe it,” he muttered. “He went too easily. It must be a trick.”

“I don't think Cyril will be allowed any more tricks,” Sally laughed. “I think we are quite safe from him now.”

James looked at her admiringly.

“I'm not surprised that I married you, Mrs. Weston. You are a genius. You can explain everything over lunch. And, oh, how I will enjoy this meal,” he sighed happily.

“I can't help but admire the man, even though he did spoil my breakfast,” James said. He stood before the door of their room and fished in his pocket for the key. He turned the lock and pushed

open the door. "In any other circumstances I would have..." He stopped so quickly that Sally, following, bumped into him.

"What is it?" she asked; peering around his broad shoulders to see the reason for his abrupt halt.

"I think the maid has forgotten to tidy our room," James said casually.

"Yes, Perhaps it's her day off." They stepped into the room and stood gazing at the chaos around them. Everything Seemed to have been disturbed; chairs and tables overturned, drawers pulled open and left, even the sofa lay on it's back. Donald Weston's clothes lay strewn around the room.

"It seems as though our unknown friends haven't forgotten us after all," James observed wryly.



## Part Four

Sally gazed wildly around the room, swallowed hard and tried to force down the feeling of panic that was rising within her.

“But why? What do they want with us now?” And her voice trembled a little, in spite of her efforts to control it.

“Perhaps they were looking for somewhere to leave the complimentary bottle of champagne that is customary for honeymooners,” James observed dryly. He walked to the waste paper basket, one of the few things that had not been disturbed, and rummaged amongst the papers it held.

“I think they were looking for this.” Again he held the ugly, black metaled revolver in his hands. Sally shivered.

“I thought you were going to get rid of that thing,” she accused. “And it doesn't make sense. Why should they go to the trouble of planting it in the office if they now need it so badly themselves?”

“Ah. Now, that would only make sense if this little thing was part of a larger consignment,” James mused thoughtfully, “and our friends have decided that they were a little rash in leaving it lying around and now they are being careful. But we shall take even more care of it. And ourselves.”

“Right.” He pushed the gun into his pocket and looked briskly about him. “You pack the bases whilst I create a little order in here. And quickly, quickly. The honeymoon is definitely over, Mrs Weston.”

“How did they find as?” Sally whispered.

“Pack.” He commanded.

“Postmortems can wait until we've time to deal with them.”

They left the suitcases in their room and went down to the bar. James brought a large brandy over to her.

“Good for shock, brandy,” he grinned at her.

“Oh? And I suppose you are not the least affected by anything short of a national disaster?” Sally flared at his condescending attitude. “The bulldog breed. Nerves of steel, and all that,

what?"

"Of course. That's why I have an even larger brandy than you." James sat down and raised his glass mockingly.

"Here's to your good health. I can see that there is nothing wrong with your temper."

"Nothing wrong with my brain, either. At least I have the good sense to feel frightened when I'm threatened."

"Hey!" James looked at her sternly. "Bickering isn't going to solve any of our problems."

"I'm sorry," Sally said, regretting her outburst immediately. "But it all seems so hopeless. They can find us wherever we go. They are just toying with us. And we don't even know who they are."

"They've found us once, that's all. Why, we haven't even started to hide yet," James said confidently. He glanced at his watch.

"Freddie should arrive at any moment, we will have transport and money. Then we'll see who is toying with whom."

"Yes," Sally sighed, unconvinced.

"And when you have finished feeling sorry for yourself, you might remember that we still have a client who needs our help. Which reminds me, I'd better 'phone our Mr. Weston now." And he strode off to the telephone kiosk, leaving Sally staring glumly into her brandy glass and wondering how they could possibly help anyone else when they didn't seem capable of helping themselves.

James returned shortly and sat staring absently as he sipped his brandy.

"What is wrong now?" Sally asked, resigned to the worst.

"The strangest thing," James said slowly, thoughtfully. "I 'phoned Donald Weston and he informed me that Carol's father has a place in the country. Scotland, to be exact. So, with my usual fiendish cunning, I assumed my broadest Scottish accent and 'phoned to speak to Mr. Hawes or his daughter."

"And?" Sally asked impatiently, as he took a slow sip from his glass.

"A rather peevisish voiced gentleman soon sent me packing."

"That's not so strange," Sally said waspishly. "You should be used to that be now."

"I haven't come to the strange part yet."

"You are the strange part."

"You see," James ignored her remarks, "I recognized that voice. But he wasn't working for Bernard Hawes then."

"It's not so strange to recognize an old crony. Which psychiatric hospital were you in together?" she asked politely.

"Oh, we've never met. No, the last time I spoke to him he was, supposedly, Major Smith's secretary and his name was Blackwell."

"What?" Sally gasped.

"Ah ha! I thought that would make you sit up and take notice!" James smiled, pleased with his effect. "That'll teach you to mock me the next time I have strange news."

"Oh, do stop mumbling on and on: Are you sure it was the same voice?"

"Positive. Absolutely so."

"Then we can go to the police: Can't we?" Sally asked hopefully.

James shook his head. "Fraid not, old thing," he said sympathetically.

"I am not an old thing: And why not?"

"Because you're a young thing?" James ventured.

"I meant, why can't we go to the police?" Sally spoke slowly her tone measured, her patience thin.

"Proof. The police are rather fond of the stuff, I gather. And who can blame them?"

"Could you try to be serious for just a few moments? Please?" Sally asked in a voice brittle with warning.

"Never been more serious in my life," James answered casually, his eyes betraying his words. "But what you don't seem to realize, young thing, is that we have been given our first break. The fox has broken cover, the chase is now on. And we can be the hunters for a change."

Sally stared at his excited face in disbelief.

"You are quite mad. I realize that now," she said calmly. "You sit there overjoyed at the prospect of chasing some person all over the length and breadth of Scotland and conveniently disregard the fact that untold thousands of policemen are chasing after you. Quite mad. I'm afraid."

"And you have pessimism down to a fine art," he retorted. "Why, you are the kind of person who would pack an umbrella and raincoat for a trip across the Sahara desert."

They sat glaring at each other, but before either could think of something further to say, they were interrupted.

"Hello Darlings."

Sally turned and stared in amazement. The man was standing, posing rather, against the bar, his hand held limply as he waved to them. His green silk jacket hung casually but perfectly on his bare, bronzed frame. Yellow slacks clung tightly to his hips and flared extravagantly to what seemed to

be exactly the right length as the bottoms cleared the floor by a hair's breadth. A yellow 'kerchief was knotted nonchalantly around his throat.

She turned to James, "That's not...?"

He nodded.

"Of course, it would be," Sally said. "And I was waiting for someone ordinary, unobtrusive, someone who wouldn't draw the attention of the whole room towards us. I should of known better."

"And who, do you think, is going to notice us two with a peacock like that around?" James demanded to know. "he even puts you right into the background." She didn't know whether that was a compliment or not. Knowing James, she decided it wasn't and watched fascinated as the man sauntered across the room to them.

"Hello, darlings," he repeated, as he lowered himself gracefully into a chair at their table and glanced around at his surroundings. "Quaint little cottage," he observed, "but not quite up to your standards, old mate."

"Freddie, this is Sally," James introduced. Sally offered her hand to share. Freddie took it and brushed his lips lightly across her fingers.

"You know, I've always maintained that marriage is too high a price to pay for a honeymoon. I'm pleased to meet someone who had their priorities right." He still held Sally's hand gently in his. She pulled it away primly.

"The situation is not what it seems to be, not at all," she replied haughtily.

Freddie laughed delightedly. "Situations never are, Darling. And neither are people. Or so I've found."

His smile revealed perfect teeth, highlighted by the deeply tanned skin of his handsome face. Velvet gray eyes laughed happily into hers, and his deep gray hair streaked with lines of silver. Freddie seemed to her to have strayed from old time Hollywood's celluloid fantasy world, larger than life and twice as beautiful, a once-upon-a-time prince.

Sally smiled back at his happy honesty.

"I hate to disturb this mutual appreciation society, but there are more important things to do than to stare into each others eyes," James interrupted their reverie.

"Impossible," Freddie, murmured, without taking his eyes from Sally.

"Freddie!"

"I'm surprised you're still here, old man. You don't seem very concerned, considering."

"Considering what, for heaven's sate," James wanted to know.

“This place will be crawling with the old Bill very, very soon. I passed three squad cars on my way here.”

“Thanks for the information. And so promptly. Urgently, is perhaps a better word,” James said sarcastically, rising to his feet.

Freddie waved his hand regally. “What are friends for, dear?”

“Trouble. Friends like you, at least.”

“Not very gracious today, are we, dear?” He passed James two sets of car keys. “Jackets and caps are on the seats.”

“Freddie, you didn't bring Bessie?” James said in dismay. “Of course. I have to get home tonight, you know. Take her to Bellberry station, there's a little Sports car waiting, red, registration letters are N.A.G. I thought that would be appropriate. But I was wrong.” He turned and smiled at Sally.

“Hired?” James asked.

“Yes.”

“And paid for?” Freddie looked hurt.

“Of course not. What do you think I am?”

“Freddie, they will be looking for it,” James said patiently. “Correct. First prize, but it was white when I hired it; and I've changed the number plates.”

“Why do you have to be so melodramatic? How many cars do you own?” James asked, taking Sally's hand.

“Six, I think. No, seven. But it's more fun, old mate. And I'll buy them a new one afterwards. Oh, the filthy is in the dashboard. Clothes in the boot.”

“Did Barret choose them, as I asked?” Barret is Freddie's man servant.

“Barret was busy spraying the car red. I chose them for you.”

James groaned.

“But don't worry, my old cocksparrow, they are very conservative. Similar to these I have on now.”

“I give up! I'll be in touch, whatever happens. I'll either thank or curse you, and it's beginning to look more and more likely to be the latter.”

“That's the spirit. Never say live, stiff upper chin, tally ho ho ho and a bottle of rum.”

“Fool,” James grinned.

“Be good to Bessie.”

“Who is Bessie?” Sally wanted to know as they hurried outside.

“One of Freddie’s eccentricities. You’ll see.” They went around the back of the hotel to the parking space. There were few cars there, the usual assortment of opulence and economy. Sally shivered as they approached a large, black hearse with a brass handled coffin in the back. Floral tributes were placed neatly around the coffin.

“I always think they look so depressing,” Sally said, “And fancy leaving a coffin unattended. I think that is disgraceful”

“Don’t worry. it’s only cardboard.”

“What is?”

“The coffin. That thing that is giving you the shivers is Bessie.”

“Oh no!”

“Exactly how I felt. But we’ve no choice. This is Freddie’s idea of anonymity.”

They climbed into Bessie. Sally tried on the chauffeurs hat and it fell over her ears and eyes. James slipped on the other jacket and cap. Luckily, there was plenty of room for Sally to squat on the floor of the car. Luckily, because James was seriously considering using the coffin as her hiding place. So, with the jacket covering her on the floor. James started the car and they rolled slowly out into the main road.

A mile up the road they passed three police patrol cars parked and waiting patiently. James could guess who they were waiting for. He smiled grimly as one of the officers respectfully removed his cap. They drove slowly past. Through his mirror James watched the policeman replace his cap and step out into the roadway to flag down an approaching car. For once in his life, Freddie had been quite correct: Bessie was the perfect escape vehicle.

They reached Bellberry’s quiet railway station and quickly transferred into the waiting sports car.

“Phew, that’s much better.” Sally settled herself comfortably into the passenger seat. “I’m glad to be out of that morbid thing.”

“That’s no way to speak of dear Bessie,” James said, and he told her of the police roadblock.

“And that means someone has been telling tales,” he concluded. “They Were obviously waiting for us.”

“Your strange friend?”

“Probably.”

“Perhaps your Mr. Maxwell recognized your voice when you phoned,” Sally suggested. “And, rather than take the chance of you not recognizing his voice, he put the police on to us.”

“Probably.”

They drove for a little While in silence before sally said:

“When he knows we've escaped he will be waiting, expecting us.”

James, who had been thinking along the same lines, just nodded thoughtfully and concentrated on his driving as the little car sped along the quiet roads. They drove all day, stopping only once at a small roadside café for a hurried, greasy meal of sausage, egg and chips, washed down with a huge mug of hot, sweet tea. The car refueled, they drove on through the twilight and into the darkness of night and their future.

James drove relentlessly through the next day. He drove carefully, not wishing to be stopped for speeding, but resolutely, the miles flowing smoothly beneath the spinning wheels. They reached the lowlands in the afternoon and James slept for two hours, the car parked in a quiet country lane. Then they were off again the car engine growling into the dying day. Sally watched the sun set over a mountain-ringed loch and her heart ached at the beauty; the timeless, mysterious solitude. But then the night came and there was nothing to see except the twin beams of the car lights that glared through the darkness.

They went slower now, their way climbing upwards, twisting and turning and it was difficult driving along these strange roads.

James turned the car off the road a little way and stopped by the lochside. He switched off the engine and in the quietness Sally heard the gentle movements of the loch waters in the darkness.

“We must be close now. No use driving in the dark, we could go right past. We'll rest here for the night,” James said. He stretched himself as much as he was able in the confines of the small car and yawned deeply. He made himself as comfortable as possible and his eyes closed.

“And to think,” he murmured sleepily, “that I once objected to that lovely, comfortable sofa.”

The blackness outside the car was complete and enveloping. Sally stared into the night, listening to the sounds of the countryside strange to her. The car seemed small and fragile in comparison to it's surroundings, and she felt very vulnerable and alone as she looked across at James

sleeping form. She shivered as the cool night air began to invade the car now that the engine was off and the heater no longer working. She reached behind her for the car rugs Freddie had thoughtfully provided. She placed one carefully around James and wrapped the other about herself and settled herself for a long, night vigil, convinced that she would never sleep. But she did.

She awoke with a start and groaned at the stiffness and cramp in her body. It was morning and the sun was bright. She looked at her watch and it was eight o'clock. James was still sleeping peacefully and she took care not to wake him as she opened the car door and slipped quietly into the morning.

Everything seemed bright and fresh and clean, exactly the opposite to how Sally was feeling as she went to the boot of the car and rummaged amongst the clothes that Freddie had provided for James and herself. She chose a pair of blue jeans that looked as though they would fit her and a dark blue fisherman's jersey that definitely wouldn't, but which would be warm and comfortable in spite of its size. Pinned to a paper bag filled with newly purchased underwear was a note. JAMES WAS RATHER VAGUE ABOUT YOUR SIZE. HOPE YOU CAN MANAGE. It was signed Freddie. Sally took out a stretch nylon bra' sized 38-40 inches.

“Not only was he vague, he also exaggerated slightly,” Sally muttered to herself. “Still, they will have to do, oversized and violent purple though they are.”

A quick check proved her surroundings as isolated as she had suspected. She slipped out of her clothes amongst a clump of bushes at the water's edge and, for modesty's sake, plunged straight into the sparkling loch water. Modesty was forgotten seconds later as the brutal shock of icy cold water sent her scrambling and spluttering toward the bank.

“Sally.”

The sound of James' voice sent her plunging back into the freezing concealment of the water, where she knelt shivering with the water up to her chin.

“There you are,” James called from the bank. “That's a good idea. What's the water like?”

Sally managed to control her chattering teeth for a few seconds to answer, “Lovely” and lazily feign a couple of swim strokes. James disappeared behind the clump of bushes.

“Turn your back,” he called moments later, “I'm coming to join you.”

Sally turned her back. She heard two small splashes as he ran, then an almighty splash



as he plunged into the water. She scampered giggling to the safety of the bushes.

“Cooow.” James re-surfaced in a cloud of Spray. “Deceiver. Murderess!”

“Don't you dare come out until I'm dressed,” she called to him.

“I'll have to. I'm freezing to death in here.”

“You will have to wait for the changing room and you're not decent, what if someone should see you?”

“Oh, I'm decent, but I still hope no one catches sight of me looking like this.” Sally pulled the thick, warm jersey over her head and emerged from the bushes toweling her head. And stopped dead in her tracks. James stood with his arms clasped around his shivering frame, and water dripping from his bright pink, mack tartan, knee length Bermuda shorts.

“This is Freddie's idea of what the well dressed visitor to Scotland should use as underwear,” James said bitterly. “Now you can see why I would rather be caught naked” And he walked past her with as much dignity as he could muster, the baggy seat of his long shorts swaying with each step, and ignored Sally's hysterical peals of laughter.

Sally was lying on the sun warmed bonnet of the car, drying her hair in the sunshine, when James returned. He stood beside her and, without a word, hurled his dripping, pink bundle as far as he could.

“I know one shouldn't pollute the countryside,” he acknowledged, “But what if we were to have an accident or something? I should die of embarrassment if those things were found within half a mile of me.”

“They suited you. They made you look just as foolish as I know you to be,” Sally said banteringly.

“Oh-ho, did they? But not as foolish as the sight of you hiding behind bushes through which I could see quite plainly.” Sally sat bolt upright.

“You could not! Could you?”

James laughed. “I know now that you have a birth mark on the left side of your...”

She threw the towel at him. “Monster. I have not!”

“Truce,” he laughed, returning the towel. “And breakfast.”

“Hmmm, yes. I'm starving. I hope there is someplace near.”

James brought out a roadmap and, after studying it, they decided that a small village named Glenside was the nearest civilization. Inside the car James counted the large bundle of banknotes.

“Freddie may have an abominable taste in clothes, but he has impeccable taste as far as

money is concerned,” he admitted. He gave Sally half of the money. “Just in case of an emergency.”

“Thank you.” Sally took the money. “But my instinct tells me that you only want me to pay for breakfast.”

“You have the unnerving knack of being able to see through my most carefully laid schemes,” James laughed, as he started the car and headed toward Glenside.

Sally pushed away her empty plate and sighed contentedly.

“That was delicious,” she pronounced. “It was worth being so hungry for so long.”

James, who had been watching her eat for at least five minutes, smiled. “I thought you were never going to stop.”

“I need my nourishment. I'm a growing girl.”

“If you continue to eat like that, my girl, you will be growing in the wrong direction,” he warned.

They were seated in the tiny dining room of Glensides only hotel: a small gloomy looking affair, whose main feature was the dark wooden paneling which seemed to line every room in the place. They had acquired a room each, being registered by a thin, doom faced man named McColl. who was as gloomy as the hotel over which he presided.

“He should be re-christened McColic, James whispered to Sally as they had followed the man upstairs to be shown their rooms.

“Ye have na' got adjoining rooms, if that is what ye expected,” Mr. McColl triumphantly informed James when they reached the top of the stairs. “Yours is here, young lady, and t'ither's at the far end o' yon passageway.”

“Thank you, Mr. McColl.” Sally smiled demurely. The man nodded his satisfaction, as if Sally's pleasantness had confirmed his suspicions of James' dishonorable intentions.

“D'inna worry, lass, the locks are strong and the door is firm.” He shot James another glance of hostility as he made his way slowly back down the stairs.

“And the floorboards creak something awful if people try to sneak along the passage in the night,” McColl's voice floated up from the shadowy stairwell.

James stared after him in amazement.

“What kind of place is this?” he asked bemused. “The Society for the Protection of helpless Females?”

“It's the way you stare longingly after me,” Sally declared.

“Ha! That's not longing, it's despair,” James retorted. “Well, I'll go and inspect my cell. then I'll be back and we can decide our next step.”

“Don't forget. I'll hear the floorboards creaking if you try to sneak up on me,” Sally called after him.

Mawsland was once an old Scottish laird's manse. Bernard Maws had bought the building in a derelict condition and completely renovated the place. James stood outside the grounds and surveyed one of Bernard Maws' improvements, an eight feet high wall topped With three strands of barbed Wire. The wall completely enclosed the extensive grounds of the old house. He looked around. The road was completely deserted. He crossed and quickly climbed the tree that grew close to the wall and from the cover of the leafy branches he peered into the Maws' stronghold.

He was looking across a large expanse of expertly manicured lawn at the rear of the house. There was nobody in sight. James scanned the grounds carefully here: To the left of the gardens, almost hidden behind a thicket of trees and shrubs, was a small summer house. And reclining on a wicker chair on the porch was a small figure, a glass in her hand, a book on her knee. James shaded his eyes against the strong sunlight and tried to make out her face, but the distance was too great. He was almost certain that it was Carol Maws. Or Weston, as she now was.

The house and grounds still seemed devoid of any activity. James selected the strongest looking branch overhanging the wall and crawled carefully along the full length of the creaking, swaying branch and dropped safely on the other side of the wall. He remained crouched and quite still for long seconds until convinced that he had not been sighted, then, still half crouching, he scuttled to the shelter of the trees surrounding the summer house. He crept quietly to the house until he was near enough to make out the identity of the reclining figure. It was Carol. He stood upright and moved noiselessly up to the porch.

“Married life seems to agree with you. You look much more relaxed than the last time we met,” he said casually.

Carol jerked upright, the book falling from her lap, drink slopping from the glass she gripped tightly. She stared at him wide eyed and startled. James smiled pleasantly and waited.

“Thank heaven you've come. Oh, at last,” Carol gasped.

James remained silent and watched her quizzically.

“Did anyone see you arrive?” she asked anxiously, standing and glancing worriedly around the huge lawn.

He shook his head.

“Then you can help me. Please say you will. I need someone I can trust.” she took hold of his arm and pulled him inside the summer house. “We can't be seen now. And they watch me all the time. I can't leave the grounds without someone accompanying me. I'm virtually my father's prisoner here. Did Donald send you?” Her words were a torrent. She seemed hardly to stop for breath.

James nodded again and watched her closely, gauging her reaction.

“Will you send a message to him for me? No, a letter. I have one written but I haven't had the opportunity to post it. I'll fetch it from the house.” She turned at the door. “Please wait, please. I'm desperate to get word to Donald.”

James watched her hurrying towards the house. He looked about him and the grounds were still deserted. He thought of how easy it had been for him to enter these supposedly guarded premises and he smiled grimly. He must advise Carol not to consider acting as a future career. She would starve to death. And he must also leave this place as quickly as possible. He vaulted the low railing around the porch and moved swiftly to the rear of the summer house. But not quickly enough to avoid the roof collapsing on his head. Or is it a tree falling? he thought vaguely through the mists of pain. It was neither, as the figure standing over him proved. But James did not know because the waves of darkness had washed away his consciousness.

## Part Five

They had decided, or rather, James had decided, that he should go alone to inspect the Maws' residence, then he would report back to Sally and they would work out their plan of attack. That was James' idea, anyway. Sally had laughed sceptically at the thought of them attacking anyone. But he had gone and now she was alone. She paced her room impatiently, but not for long. Mr. McColl's creaking floorboards extended from the passageway into her room and every step seemed to bring a groan of protest.

She lay on the bed but she was too tense and nervous to relax. She should not have let him go alone, she decided. There was no knowing what he would get up to. And what could she do if there was any trouble? She was alone. A stranger in a strange land. And not a very welcome stranger, at that. What if someone should recognize him and report him to the police? Or recognize her? She shivered with apprehension. Then she took a firm hold on her thoughts. These were all ifs and buts and maybes. Why, it was like waiting to visit the dentist, all those groundless fears!

But dentists didn't arrest people, a small voice inside reminded her. No, that was true. And dentists didn't trade in guns, the voice went on, and neither did they chase their customers all over the countryside. Sally was defeated. There was no point in trying to cheer herself up, she decided glumly, but she wasn't going to sit here miserably waiting for a man who was probably sleuthing around quite happily and enjoying himself immensely.

She changed into a turquoise sweater two sizes too large and a bright yellow skirt that made her shudder, the only articles of clothing remotely her size, and ventured self-consciously downstairs.

At this time of the day a small bar was open in the dining area of the hotel and where she had eaten breakfast she was now served a sherry by the disapproving McColl. There were a few couples seated around the room, and two men leaning against the bar. One was obviously a local workingman, the other obviously not, dressed as he was in black suit, old fashioned wing collared shirt with cravat, and wearing a bowler hat. Sally regarded him suspiciously and wondered if he worked at the Maws' household, perhaps he was even the mysterious Blackwell. And she felt afraid and wished that she had asked for a brandy. The man glanced idly around the room and Sally no longer felt afraid of him. His face was aged but ageless, she could not determine his age but guessed at forty or fifty. His features were lined, but wise looking and friendly. He also appeared completely disinterested in her, or anyone else for that matter, and he turned back to his drink with that superior air that some public

officials and menservants seem to possess.

She looked at her watch and an hour had passed since James had left. It seemed like three to her. The drab room was oppressive to her, the quietness seemed only accentuated by the whisper of polite conversations, the loud ticking from the ancient clock over the bar. She drained her glass and decided to walk outside.

The sunlight was dazzlingly bright after the dimness of the hotel, the air was warm and still. The narrow, peaceful main street was lined with small houses and shops. A home made sign announced the presence of the post office. In the distance she heard the sound of farm animals. But again the peacefulness seemed ominous to her, the normality just disguise for sinister activities, and she wished that James would hurry back.

She heard the car and the sound was familiar. She turned to see the bright red vehicle speeding towards her. James was back! She smiled gladly as the car slowed and stopped beside her.

“And not before time, eith...” A stranger's face peered through the window of the car door.

“Mrs. Weston?” the man inquired. Sally nodded dumbly, her voice swallowed by her fear.

“Awfully sorry if I alarmed you. Your husband asked me to fetch you. There's nothing to worry about.” he assured her friendly.

“Seems there has been some sort of misunderstanding up at the house. It's all been straightened out now.” He opened the car door for her.

Sally stared at him suspiciously.

The man smiled back in friendly manner. Who was he? And could he be trusted? Her instincts told her to be wary. But those instincts had only been bred over the last few days, and were mainly a product of James' continuous prompting. She was by nature friendly and trusting. And she wanted to believe the man, she wanted a respite from the suspicions and fears. She smiled her relief as she climbed into the car.

“I'm glad everything is being cleared up,” she said, setting herself into the seat.

“Rather. Silly misunderstanding, but it's alright now.” The man slipped the car into gear and roared away. The man Sally had assumed to be a public official or manservant fingered his cravat and stared after the fast disappearing car thoughtfully. He had been standing outside the hotel sipping his drink in the warm sunshine when the car had pulled up beside Sally. He had watched with interest the exchange between Sally and the driver. He Went back inside the hotel and took his place at the bar beside the shabbily dressed workman.

James was awaking. The blackness that had engulfed him was slowly turning into a gray mist through which the throbbing in his head was increasing in intensity. He struggled to open his eyes but the brightness of the light pained him. He gave up his struggle and lay quietly waiting for his senses to return to normal. Through the grayness he could vaguely hear voices, blurred and murmuring, but growing stronger by the second.

“... ‘fraid it seems that way, sir.”

“Good heavens, man, haven't you called the police yet?” The first voice James recognized as Blackwell's, the second he could not place but it had to be Bernard Maws. And yet he was asking for the police: That was wrong! It didn't fit the pattern. Maws wouldn't want the police here in his own home, not unless James had been wrong from the beginning. James struggled to clear his head, to make sense of the conversation.

“I thought it might be advisable to wait for a while, sir,” Blackwell was explaining smoothly.

“Wait!” Bernard Maws exploded. “Wait? My daughter's life may be at stake and you want to wait. Have you lost your senses, man?”

“There is no danger, sir,” Blackwell continued unruffled. “Miss Carol is perfectly safe. She has two men guarding her.”

“Then why the devil should we wait? Call the police immediately.”

“It does seem as though there are two of them, possibly more. It would be a shame to catch the sprat and lose the mackerel, sir. The other is sure to show his hand fairly soon. And I would feel much safer if we could hand over both the kidnappers to the police.”

Kidnappers? James thought in surprise. Just what was going on?

“Two of them, you say?” he said thoughtfully. “Yes, I see your point. But can we afford to take the chance?”

“There is not much of an element of chance now. This one is handcuffed securely, he is not going anywhere. And all the men are on duty now, security is maximum. There is no cause for alarm and no need for you to postpone the conference.”

“Good Lord: I had forgotten about the conference.”

“Understandable, sir, considering the circumstances.”

“But can I afford to go now?” Maws sounded worried. “If anything should happen I

could never forgive myself.”

“Everything is under control, sir. It's just a matter of waiting now. And, with respect, patience isn't your main virtue.”

“Damn right it isn't.” Haws laughed heartily. “You know me too well, Jenkins. And I know you even better. I think you are right. You can wait until tomorrow evening; no accomplice shows by then. you must call in the police. Or better still, ring me and I'll have a word with the commissioner, keep things quiet.”

“That seems to be the best way to handle it, sir. Shall I call for your car?”

“Car? Good grief: Is that the time? I had no idea. Yes, Jenkins, and tell him to be damn quick. I'll miss that flight. What will you do with this character in the meantime?” Maws gestured to James' still form.

“I thought the wine cellar might be the best place, sir?”

“Excellent. But make sure those handcuffs are secure. Some good wines down there. Damned expensive, too. Don't want it wasted on some kidnapping rotter.” James heard footsteps, the door closed quietly and there was silence in the room. He lay there digesting the conversation he had just overheard. Bernard Maws thought that he, James, had attempted to kidnap Carol, so he was obviously unaware of anything that Blackwell, or Jenkins as he now was, was up to. But why hadn't Carol informed her father? Has Blackwell-Jenkins holding her prisoner too? But that seemed unlikely. Or did it? No more unlikely than James lying handcuffed on the floor of a strange house waiting to be transported down into the wine cellar. James sighed. This affair was becoming as tangled as a bowl of spaghetti.

Sally: Was she safe? They knew of her presence, how could she be safe? James twisted and pulled frantically at the handcuffs on his wrists, the bonds around his ankles. It was useless. He lay back gasping for breath. It was going to take more than brute force to free him. The door opened.

“Good man, Harland. Just lie quietly while we move you to somewhere more uncomfortable.” James stared up into the face of Blacknell-Jenkins for the first time. Dark, mocking, eyes laughed at him from a public school face of impassive haughtiness. James opened his mouth for a stinging retort and Jenkins stuffed a 'kerchief into it.

“most obliging of you. Harland, old boy,” Jenkins laughed. Two large men who had accompanied Jenkins now stepped forward to lift James and carry him easily through passages and rooms and down a steep flight of stairs into the grape tinged darkness of the wine cellar.

“Be patient, Harland, you shall soon have company. And I am not referring to the rats.” Jenkins called. The door closed as James spat out the 'kerchief and shouted rudely. But no one heard



and the words echoed and died in the darkness.

Sally stared apprehensively at the high walls of Mawsland as they slipped quickly past the car window. The journey had been made in Silence. She had attempted a conversation but the man driving had merely smiled pleasantly and murmured "it's not my place to comment, Mrs. Weston." So she had sat in silence with thoughts that had become increasingly uneasy as the journey had progressed.

Now they turned in at the gate of Mawsland and two men stepped forward to stop the car, then, recognizing the driver, they stepped back and waved the car through. The car sped up the long gravel driveway and around to the rear of the house, where a man was waiting to greet her as she stepped from the car.

"Mrs. Weston?"

"Yes." She looked into dark, mocking eyes. The man's face showed intelligence, but was impassive, expressionless and cold. And she felt afraid of him.

"Follow me, please. Your husband is waiting for you." He turned into the house. She followed him through the kitchen and along a corridor, where he stopped before a small door. He took a key from his pocket and unlocked the door, then turned and smiled coldly at her.

"Why is that door locked?" Sally asked, stepping back a pace. The car driver, who had followed her noiselessly, grasped her arms tightly and she would have screamed loudly if Jenkins had not covered her mouth with his hand.

"Silly question, Mrs. Weston. You know quite well why the door is locked. But shall we stop playing games, Miss Ormonde? And if you want to curse me late to my name is Jenkins, better known to you as Blackwell, I believe. Take her down." Two more men appeared, one armed with a large torch, to accompany her into the cellar.

"And fasten them together. That should be interesting. They can accuse each other for their last few hours," Jenkins called.

The workman sauntered leisurely along the road with his shovel and pick slung over his shoulder. He was the same man Sally had noticed drinking in the hotel earlier. Now he turned off the road and walked toward the gates of Mawsland. Two men stepped forward and stopped him.

"And Where do you think you're going?" one asked him. The workman stared back with a puzzled expression.

"Ah'm awa' tee finish mah wurk," he announced in a broad accent.

“And what work is that?” the guard demanded to know.

“Tish: T'bludy wurk started this murning, ye ken. An' more a large hole, dinna ken what fur. Planting sunnat, maybe.”

The second guard laughed. “That's right, there will be something to plant very shortly. Okay, go through. And no wandering around, the dogs are out today.”

“We've had burglars.”

The workman nodded and sauntered slowly up the drive. Close to the house a guard passed holding tightly to a thick chain leash that restrained a ferocious dog from leaping upon the workmen. The guard eyed him keenly, then decided that the man must have been checked and passed okay by the man at the gate. He dragged the dog past and continued his patrol of the house.

The workman stopped at the side of the house. lowered his tools to the ground and began to busy himself with the shrub beds.

“Have you worked out your plan of attack yet?” Sally asked caustically, as she shifted herself yet again in an effort to find some degree of comfort. She was sitting on the cold stone floor beside James. She had no choice. One handcuff fastened one of her arms to James', another fastened one of her legs. And it was most uncomfortable.

“I do wish you would keep still for five minutes,” James complained. “You're worse than a fidgety twelve year old. And sarcasm serves no useful purpose down here, so kindly stop harping on any remarks I might have made earlier in the day.”

Sally jerked her leg viciously and was rewarded with a loud 'Ouch'.

“I'm not surprised that you don't want to be reminded of any earlier remarks, considering how foolish they've turned out to be.” And she jerked her leg again.

James moaned in the darkness. “I wish you would remember that these things are extremely tight around my ankle. I shouldn't be at all surprised to find that they have stopped the flow of blood to my foot,” he added morosely.

“I wish they were tight enough to stop the flow of complaints from your mouth. Anyway, shouldn't you be borrowing my hairpin now and picking the locks, or something?”

“I suppose I should,” James agreed. “Do you have a hairpin I could borrow?”

“No.”

“Oh well, it doesn't matter.”

“Have you got something else you can use instead?” Sally asked.

“No. It doesn't matter because I couldn't pick a lock to save my life.”

“Pick these to save my life, then.”

“Sorry, young thing, we'll have to think of something else.”

“You will have to think of something else, you mean. You got me into this, you...”

“I know, I know,” James sighed. “I can jolly well get you out.”

“Correct.”

Presently, James said: “I have been thinking. If we were to stand and walk as if we were in a three-legged race, we could get across to those barrels of wine.”

“No fear! The last thing I need is you staggering around drunkenly.”

“I don't intend to drink any, just open the tale and let it run out all over the floor.”

“And how would that help us?” Sally wanted to know.

“It wouldn't help, but it would make me feel much better. It's bound to be expensive wine.”

Sally shook her head; a gesture wasted in the darkness. “Try again, dear,” she said patiently. “And this time try to include a little commonsense in your suggestion.”

“Commonsense tells me that there must be windows somewhere in this room. And, because we came down stairs, those windows must be set high into these walls, somewhere near the ceiling,” James mused. “But I'll be blowed if I can make them out. Probably painted over.”

“Probably barred, as well.” Sally pointed out.

“Probably,” James agreed. “but we will have to find them to ascertain that fact.”

“And how do we find them? The ceiling looked pretty high to me and we are not exactly mobile.” She rattled the chain of the leg iron to illustrate her point.

“Don't do that!” James protested. “How can I think of escape when you are slowly but surely cutting off my left foot?”

“Sorry.”

“Don't be sorry, be careful. Now we will have to concentrate. And we shall have to find a solution quickly.”

“How quickly? How long have we got, do you think?”

In the darkness James' face was grim, but he answered easily: “From what I overheard upstairs there is no hurry now that Bernard Maws is out of the way, but this is not the place for nice people like us to hang about. So start racing your brains, young thing.”

The workman had finished the shrubbery along one side of the house and he moved sedately around the rear of the house to the other side. He dropped his spade and pickaxe to the ground and lit a cigarette, glancing around casually as he did so. A guard passed close by and nodded amiably to him. The workman nodded back. His eyes took in the large bulge under the guard's jacket. It's not burglars that they're expecting, he thought grimly, it's a war. They're armed to the teeth. He coughed violently and stared with distaste at the cigarette before throwing it away and picking up his shovel again.

He started work on the bushes and shrubs, prodding and turning with his spade. It was ten minutes before he found what he was searching for, and then he almost missed it, for it was hidden behind a large bush. He parted the leaves carefully with his spade, yes, there it was, and he grinned happily. It was perfect: old and rusted, hidden away behind this lovely bush, which he patted affectionately. He strolled back for his pickers. Returning to the bush he took out his cigarettes and lit one slowly, again using the exercise as an excuse to check his surroundings. There was no one in sight. He squeezed quickly behind the bush and stood quite still for many minutes. Nobody came, he had not been noticed. Then he crouched down and set to work.

The earth was loose and soft and he had soon cleared a space large enough for his purpose. He took up his pick. This was the crucial moment. If they were as old and as rusted as they looked his job would be easy. If not? He shrugged. There was only one way to find out. He set the pick in position and heaved cautiously.

Nothing happened. He pulled again. Nothing. He turned and peered through the bush concealing him. Everything seemed quiet enough. He would have to take the chance. He flung all his weight onto the pick handle and heaved with all his strength. It gave with a sharp crack and a shower of brick dust. He almost tumbled over. He crouched silently, breathing heavily. No one came. No one had heard. He took up the pick and with one sharp crack made space enough for his hand.

In the wine cellar Sally and James turned their heads and shielded their eyes against the sudden intrusion of light into their dark prison. Their eyes cleared in time to see a hand disappearing through a hole in their newly discovered window. Then slowly, complainingly, the window descended, the light from the descending sun flooded into the dark place. They stared in disbelief as a space

approximately three feet by four feet appeared high in the wall above them. Then a head appeared, the face shadowy against the brightness behind it.

“Hello, darlings.” a voice whispered. And Sally couldn't stop the tears that welled into her eyes.

“Freddie, you are the most beautiful sight in the world,” James whispered fervently.

“Always have been, old mate, you were just a little slow in recognizing the fact. Shall we go for a little stroll? I know the perfect spot, divine view, you'll love it.” They stood up and their chains clinked. Freddie groaned.

“Now there is a complication. You will have to come through the window together, I see. Will there be enough room?”

“More than enough,” James said resolutely. “Inches to spare.”

“Goodo. You can stand on these crates.” Freddie stopped and peered eagerly into the gloom. When he Spoke there was excitement in his voice. “I say, old mate, are my eyes deceiving me or does that label proclaim '59?” he whispered hoarsely. James glanced across at the crate he pointed to. He picked up a bottle and examined it.

“Yes. Its a 59.”

“Oh my, oh my! Pass a couple of bottles, there's a good chap. Barret will swoon when he sees them.”

“Freddie, we haven't got time to fool with bottles of wine,” James protested as vehemently as he could in a low Whisper.

“Pass them, or I'll come down for the crate and leave you two there,” Freddie threatened quietly. James sighed and handed him two bottles of wine. “Good man. Worth a few hundred a bottle these little beauties.” Freddie stared lovingly at dust the dirty, covered bottles. James said “Oh?” And two more bottles disappeared into James' pockets.

“If you two don't set a move on you will be in no position to enjoy your ill gotten gains,” Sally whispered urgently.

“You are so right, darling. Please forgive me.” Freddie reached down to help them up. Somehow, without too much noise, but with much struggling and twisting, scraping of elbows and knees, and in Sally's case a mouthful of loose earth which trickled into her mouth as she went to gasp for air, they managed to clamber out of the wine cellar and out into the evening. They crouched behind the bush, huddled together and gaining their breath back. Freddie was a long time recovering, or so it seemed. He was wuite still, with his arm around Sally, his head resting on her shoulder.

“Freddie,” James said wearily “Not now!”

“Mmmm?” Freddie lifted his head and looked questioningly at him, then down to Sally. “In the old days, the knight would have left him and just rescued the fair maiden, which is you. Unfortunately in this case,” he tapped the handcuffs and shook his head sorrowfully. “But perhaps next time we’ll have better luck.”

He looked carefully through the bushes. "Seems clear. I'll see if your car is still around the rear of the house." And picking up his shovel he sauntered from behind his cover.

They waited what seemed an age, apprehensively as the seconds ticked away. Suddenly there was the throaty roar of the red sports car. They were up and hobbling out from behind the bush as the car squealed to a halt beside them.

“Sorry, James, you know this is only a two seater,” Freddie called gaily. “I’m afraid there isn’t room for you. But you can run beside us if you like.”

The image of James running along side the car at ninety miles an hour set both he and Sally roaring and they collapsed in a tangled, tethered heap of laughter on the one seat as Freddie slipped the motor into gear and shot off down the driveway in squeal of tires and a shower of loose gravel.

The guards prepared to open the gates for the approaching car, until it drew near enough for them to identify the driver and passengers, but then it was too late to close the gates fully. The guards jumped aside desperately as the car smashed open the half-closed gates with a tearing of metal and a crashing of glass.

Sally Squeezed herself from under James' protective, if heavy, bulk and was discovered to her amazement that the car was still traveling. Freddie was singing about high roads and low roads at the top of his voice and seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. The front of the car was just a tangled wreck. Freddie negotiated a difficult bend with much skidding and sliding from the back wheels of the car.

He grinned across at Sally “Not bad, What? Considering the brakes aren't working properly.”

Sally gasped and hung tightly to the door handle as he slithered around another bend. Freddie frowned into the descending gloom of evening.

“We've got no lights either, and that is going to be a problem very, very shortly.”

“Then, instead of trying to fly the thing, try driving at a speed below foolhardiness.” James suggested dryly

“Please slow down,” Sally said.

“I’ll slow down,” Freddie smiled, “but will they?” He jerked his head to indicate behind

them.

Sally turned to see three sets of headlights bright against the darkening landscape.

“They can travel faster than we can, anyway. They're more familiar with these roads,” James reasoned.

“And soon it will be dark enough to conceal us,” Sally pointed out.

“All very logical but I don't think...” There was a loud explosion and the car lurched drunkenly and plunged off the road and headlong for the black loch waters.

“All ashore who's going ashore,” Freddie shouted warningly. James tore frantically at the door handle as the car plunged lazily into the cold, waiting water.

## Part Six

The car splashed to a halt and gurgled slowly into a three-quarters submerged position, the front sinking lower and inching slowly down to the mud bottom. James kicked open the car door with his free leg and he and Sally struggled awkwardly into the chilling water that reached up to their chests.

“Stay calm and move slowly,” James gasped, as he almost lost his footing in the thick mud of the loch bed.

“Freddie, vanish. Get yourself clear,” he called into the night. There was no answer.

“Freddie?”

Silence.

“Did he get clear? Did you see him leave the car?” Sally asked urgently.

“No. But we can't go back,” James answered.

“We must: We can't just leave him in there,” Sally protested.

“And what use would we be if we did go back? One slip and we both drown. Now move slowly, carefully.”

They inched and slithered their way towards safety through the numbing water until they stood knee deep and within reaching distance of the grassy bank, where they stopped to rest.

Sally looked back and could dimly make out the shape of the car roof just visible above the water. She felt a sickness of sadness and frustration to think that Freddie might still be trapped and there was nothing she could do to help. Hot tears of anger hurt her eyes and she brushed away James' arm as he tried to comfort her.

“I know how you feel. But there was nothing we could have done, not shackled like this.” James said softly.

“We could have tried,” she said savagely. “We didn't even attempt to help him.”

James pushed her head down suddenly and they both tumbled awkwardly to their knees as a car raced furiously past, closely followed by two more, the headlights cutting brightly through the darkness.

They clutched at the grasses on the loch bank and pulled themselves up onto dry land.

“They will be back,” James said shivering violently. “We had better put as much distance as possible between ourselves and this place.”

Sally was reluctant to leave. She knew it was useless staying, she was powerless to help



Freddie, but it seemed less of a desertion just to stay and be near. James yanked the handcuffs angrily.

“Move,” he snapped, we’re no use to anyone, including ourselves, if we hang around here.” Sadly she turned and hobbled away from the sunken car.

Jenkins was in the leading car of the three. He grew increasingly uneasy as the miles dropped behind the speeding car and still there was no sign of his quarry. Finally he ordered his driver to stop. The other two cars pulled up behind moments later.

“They must have turned off the road.” Jenkins shouted. “There are no other routes they could have taken, so they must be holed up somewhere. We will find them on foot. Out of the cars.”

Twelve guards scrambled from the cars and the beams from their flashlights cut and probed through the night. It was thirty-five minutes later when there was a shout of discovery from the lochside and a man held the almost submerged red roof in the beam of his torch.

“Search it,” Jenkins ordered. A man splashed forward to the car. He returned several minutes later and shook his head.

“It’s empty. They’ve gone.” he reported.

“Pity,” Jenkins murmured thoughtfully. “Still, it can be of use later. And they can’t have gone far, not if they still have the ‘cuffs on. I want them found before daylight. Before this car is discovered.” And the beams of the lights resumed the searching and probing through the countryside.

They were lying in a small dip in the heatherland, resting. They had stumbled across the rough terrain for two hours, falling frequently over obstacles unseen in the darkness. They were cut and bruised, their clothing torn, and their energy spent.

Another violent bout of coughing wracked through James’ Body. He struggled to a sitting position. He was hot and burning, yet he shivered uncontrollably. He shook his head to clear his confused thoughts.

“We must go on. Go on,” he muttered hoarsely. Sally raised herself wearily and pushed herself to her feet. She stood waiting for James to rise. He tried; but he couldn’t, falling back and pulling her down again. She touched his forehead and it was burning.

“I’m sorry,” he muttered thickly. “I’m so sorry.” She gathered his shivering frame in her

arms and tried give him warmth as she murmured consolingly to comfort him. She had no warmth to give and her strength was gone, but he was comforted

And he slept. And she slept also. The sound of coughing came faintly through the night. Jenkins stopped to listen intently. The coughing sounded again and Jenkins noted the direction from which it came.

“Well, well. Someone has caught a nasty cold tonight.” H shook his head sorrowfully. “These people will go swimming, despite the weather.” The men nearest him grinned wolfishly and followed him as he made his way toward the sound. They found their quarry huddled together, sleeping.

“How touching: And I thought 'Babes in the wood' was only a fairy tale. But no, here they are. Slightly older, perhaps, but just as helpless,” Jenkins sneered. He prodded James with his foot.

“Come on, Harland, rise and shine.”

Sally stirred and blinked up into the torchlight.

“Hello again, Miss Ormonde. I was just rousing your companion,” Jenkins said pleasantly, and his foot crashed into Jones' ribs, causing him to groan in pain as he tried to rise.

“Stop it!” Sally screamed at him. “Can't you see that he is ill?” She was on her feet and she tried to strike Jenkins. He caught her arm and held her easily.

“Ill? Oh dear me.” Jenkins feigned concern. “Then he is very fortunate that I happened along. I have a cure for his illness, for all his ills. Yes, I can say with confidence that after tonight he will never suffer from another illness. And neither will you, my dear. Aren't you the lucky people?”

He pushed her and she fell heavily to the ground.

“Come on, Harland; get up.” And he swung his foot at James again. But he missed as James rolled enough to avoid his foot, then rolled back again, his foot shooting up powerfully and catching Jenkins in the midriff and sending him sprawling backwards to the ground. James got to his feet and stood unsteadily but defiantly glaring down at Jenkins. A man leapt forward and held James firmly as Jenkins rose and advanced towards him. Sally tensed herself, expecting Jenkins to strike out, but he only laughed mockingly

“You're a fool, Harland, that will only make it easier for me to dispose of you.”

“You don't need an excuse, madman, it's always easy to do something that you enjoy.” James answered. “Leave the girl alone.”

“Anything you say, sir,” Jenkins mocked, bowing low. “By the way, where is your friend? The one so handy with shovel and pickaxe.”

“With the police by now, I should imagine.” James bluffed.

Jenkins looked at him uncertainly, then at Sally. She turned her eyes away from him. But not quickly enough. Jenkins smiled slowly.

“No, I don't think so, Harland.” He was still watching Sally's face. “At a rough guess, I would say he is about seven feet down, burrowing into the mud at the loch bottom by now. Yes,” he turned to James, “I'd say that was a near enough guess, judging by the young lady's expression. Hell, shall we go and join him? Or rather, shall you go and join him.” And he turned and walked away, leaving his men to hustle Sally and James after him.

It was almost two hours later when they reached the spot in the loch where the car was. It seemed at least twice that long to Sally and James. They were footsore and near exhaustion when they stopped, sinking to the ground immediately to rest. Jenkins was waiting for them. He strolled across.

“Nice of you to join me,” he murmured, smiling. “How we can start the party. We didn't like to start without you.”

“Go to hell,” James mumbled tiredly.

“Tut, tut, Harland. Where are your manners? There is a young lady present, had you forgotten?”

“Go to hell,” Sally said defiantly”. And James smiled despite his tiredness.

“I'm afraid you two will be there before me. but don't worry, I will join you later. About forty years later, I hope.” He signaled to one of his men who stepped forward and unlocked the 'cuffs on their wrists and ankles.

“Now, if you would just step this way I'll have my men escort you to your car. No?” He raised his hand as if to stifle their protests, “I insist. It's least I can do considering the inconvenience I've put you to.”

They were lifted to their feet and half pushed, half carried to the waters edge. There came the sound of a car and the party stopped as Jenkins walked to the roadway to speak to the driver. A girl climbed out. Sally recognized Carol Maws and she turned hopefully to James. He shook his head sadly.

“I'm afraid not, young thing. I've come to the conclusion that she is as mad as the man she is talking to.” Jenkins returned with Carol.

“See how popular you are? Here is another friend who just had to say goodbye to you,”

Jenkins called to them.

“That is enough.” Carol said sharply. She turned to Sally and James. “I am informed that your existence is a threat to the organization that I represent. It is regretted that your existence cannot be allowed to continue.” Her voice was cold, emotionless.

“You sound like a parrot,” James said coolly. “Was that paragraph three, section eight of your rules and regulations? Have you learnt them all by heart?”

Carol shrugged. “There is no animosity towards you. It was not our intention at the start that you should die.”

“Merely serve a jail sentence for you?” Sally interrupted.

“Not even that. We used you to gain time and to cover our escape. You were unfortunate. But my concern is for mankind, my fight against injustice. In our battle for freedom there are going to be individuals who will suffer. It is unfortunate and it is regretted. You have my sympathy.”

“If you are so concerned about injustice, we think we have a case to be answered. Can we bring it to your organization?” James asked. Carol turned impatiently from them.

“Shall we get on with it?” Jenkins asked tiredly. “You don't want to disappoint all these people, do you?”

“Certainly not,” James answered “But we don't want to be selfish either. Why should we have all the fun? Won't you join us?”

“Yes,” Sally said, “in fact were quite prepared to let you take our places. How's that for unselfish?”

“Walk.” Jenkins snarled. “Your accident is waiting.”

They were pushed to the waters edge, into the water. And into sudden, brilliant, blinding light. Four high powered searchlights suddenly bathed the scene in ghostly daylight.

“You are advised to stand quite still.” a voice amplified by loud hailer boomed a warning. “Any action interpreted as hostile will be dealt with immediately. Do not move.”

And men in black uniform were swarming around gathering up a bemused Jenkins and his followers. Sally saw Carol being dragged screaming and kicking from her car. Now there was something Carol could really regret, Sally thought with satisfaction, and she would have plenty of time in which to regret. Through all the activity a small man walked determinedly toward Sally and James. He wore a bowler, a shirt with a high winged collar, and a cravat.

“Barret!” James exclaimed. “How in heavens name did you get here?”

“Master Frederick sent me, Mister Harland. May I express my relief at finding you and

the young lady unharmed?"

"You certainly may, good Barret. But where is your insane master?"

"He fears he may be suffering a chill and he refuses to leave the car, sir. He sends his compliments and requests the pleasure of your company in his automobile. I believe He has hot soup waiting," Barret added as an inducement to take up the invitation.

"We should be more than pleased to accept," James said cheerfully, "Lead us to nourishment, good Barret." he took two paces forward, one back, coughed helplessly and collapsed.

James missed the arrests of Jenkins guards, by now strangely docile before the mainly large, tough looking security men who were doing the arresting. The operation was being controlled by an elderly man with silvery hair and mustache, and a decidedly military bearing. Although dressed in civilian clothes the man was addressed as 'Colonel' as he stalked alertly from one group to another supervising the quick transport of the guards to places unknown.

The colonel came across to where James was sleeping peacefully, covered by Barret's overcoat, while that gentleman had gone to seek assistance, and watched over anxiously by Sally. He knelt down beside James' still form and after a brief examination he stood up and looking down at Sally proclaimed,

"Exposure. Bloody nuisance. Delay the report. Always the same, young Harland. Believe he's had his bonce bashed?"

"Yes." Sally was having difficulty following this staccato conversation, for the colonel spat out his words the way a machine gun fires it's bullets.

"Might knock in some sense. Not hopeful though. Thought we'd gotten rid of him. Never know where the blighter will turn up next." He shook his head disapprovingly and stalked off to more important matters.

Barret returned with help and James was carried to a waiting Rolls. As the door opened, a tremulous voice greeted them.

"Hello, darlings."

"Freddie! Thank heavens! We thought you were dead," Sally exclaimed, overjoyed. "Almost right, darling." Freddie leaned weakly back against the luxurious upholstery and pulled a large, thick blanket up around himself. "Three quarters correct, even. But I believe I shall survive." And he grinned wickedly.

Barret clicked his tongue disdainfully. "Mister Harland seems more in need of immediate attention, sir," he said pointedly.

"Barret! You are so disloyal," Freddie cried in a pained voice.

“A truthful observation, sir,” Barret said stiffly, as he settled James comfortably and covered him with a rug.

“Mister Barret is quite right, Freddie. You are being selfish,” Sally agreed, wrapping herself in a blanket as she climbed into the car.

Freddie closed his eyes. “The world is filled with ingrates,” he muttered pitifully.

“Stop being a baby and take James to a doctor,” Sally commanded.

Freddie opened his eyes in time to see a flicker of a smile ghost across Barret’s dignified features.

“Barret, how dare you derive such pleasure at the sight of your master being chided” he complained, it’s not correct. And it’s not good enough after twenty-five years of service.”

“Twenty-eight years, sir” Barret corrected him. He turned to Sally. “It was much easier twenty years ago, miss. Then, when he was in one of his little moods, a quick clip across his ear used to work wonders,” Barret remembered wistfully.

“Stop gossiping, men, and take poor James to the nearest doctor,” Freddie interceded hurriedly. “Before I lose my last shred of dignity.” He turned to Sally “How can I keep up appearances in the world with a man so willing to reveal personal secrets? If he had a picture of me as a baby naked on a rug he would show it to the most casual acquaintance just to embarrass me.”

“I do have such a photograph, sir,” Barret revealed. “I am saving it for an emergency.” And he closed the car door and walked with dignity around to the driver’s seat.

Sally laughed and leaned across to kiss Freddie’s cheek. “Don’t worry, I believe you will summon up enough dignity to prop up your appearances. For the world’s sake of course.”

“Thank you for your confidence, dear. It helps enormously.” And his laughing eyes told her that he didn’t give a hang what the world or anyone in it thought of him.

It was two days later. James had been installed in his hotel room and was well on the mend. McColl was treating him with a little less suspicion, having noted the string of important officials visiting him. Or perhaps it was because he knew that James was in no condition to creep along his creaking passage yet.

Sally and Freddie were sitting at James’ bedside. By now they had been able to piece together the whole incredible story. The official view was that Jenkins was the mastermind behind U.F.L.F., using Carol Maws’ burning fanaticism for social injustice as a means to gain control of the

Maws empire.

“But I'm not so sure,” James said shrewdly. “Carol's marriage was a blatant and calculated attempt to get her father's fortune. If he hadn't, in his anger at the news of her marriage, struck her from his will, she would never have gone back to him. Sometime in the not too distant future, Bernard Maws would have had an accident and Carol and Jenkins would have had enough money to finance a war.”

“They didn't do too badly as it was!” Freddie chipped in.

“They found a ton of armaments hidden in Mawsland, much to Bernard Maws' amazement. The foolish man had no idea what was going on right under his nose.”

“Foolish is the right word for him. I hear he is doing everything he can to get Carol off lightly. He may not succeed wholly, but he has enough power and influence to succeed partially. And if we are right, it won't be long before she is back to her old tricks again.

“And that is not a comforting thought,” James admitted.

“Yes, it's such a bore,” Freddie yawned. “Just lucky for us that they happened to pick on Hawkins' agency.”

“Lucky? What is so lucky about being chased and chained and almost drowned?” Sally demanded to know. “The only luck we had was you turning up at the right moment.”

“That wasn't luck;” Freddie laughed. “I had your car bugged. I could have followed you anywhere. You don't think I'd let old James here have all the fun, do you? No fear: I know by now when he is on to a good thing.”

“A good thing? By now?” Sally looked at them both with suspicion.

“Do you mean to tell me that you two have been involved in something like this before?”

James slid down amongst the bedclothes. “I think I'd better take my nap now. I'm beginning to feel a little weak.” he said hollowly.

“Quite right, old chap,” Freddie said hurriedly, quickly rising to his feet. He looked at his watch. “By George: Is that the time? I'd better be toodling along myself.”

“Freddie! Don't you dare...” Sally threatened.

“Bye, darlings.” And the door closed behind him.

Sally rounded on the the lump under the bedclothes that was James.

“I think I deserve an explanation, James Harland,” Sally said icily.

James' head appeared slowly from beneath the bedclothes.

“Speaking of explanations, can I leave Donald Weston to you? Be kind to him. And try

to persuade him that he is better off without Carol, although I don't for one minute think that he will believe you.”

“Ah. Doctor.” The relief in James' voice was evident as the local doctor popped his head around the door. “Do come in. Ormonde was just leaving.”

Sally stared at him. Thwarted by the doctor's presence, her questions would not be answered. But they would someday, she promised herself fervently. Someday.

“I wish that someone would tell me that I would be better off without you. I'd believe them.” Sally raised her eyes heavenwards.

“Oh, how I would believe them.”

“Don't forget that you have a contract for six months,” James called after her. She slammed the door behind her.

James smiled up at the doctor. “Women dislike secrets,” he said, by way of explanation.

“Really? I've always found that secrets have a great fascination for women. Just a hint of one and they will not rest until it has been well and truly uncovered,” the doctor observed.

James slumped back in his bed. “Thank you. You are a great comfort,” he sighed.



## Acknowledgements

This is another manuscript written by my father (in my mothers name) that was never published. It was long after my father passed away that I discovered a couple of old manuscripts. He had written lots of short stories for a small paperback publication (similar to Mills and Boon), all under my mums name, and these short novels were quite a nice surprise. Its been another 20 years before I finally got around (and technology caught up) to digitizing these stories. I hope you enjoyed them!

Gavin Buxton