

It was a Chinese croupier who found Tomas face down on the steps of Manchester's Royal Infirmary at four o'clock on the Tuesday morning. She'd been kicking around in casualty with a suspect fractured wrist since ten and was making her fags last by smoking them one an hour, on the hour. The paper said she'd thought Tomas was a drunk at first, only he didn't answer when she called across to see if he was OK. Then she saw his shirt was covered in blood from neck to waist and there was a thick sugary pool dripping from the step he lay on down to the next, and the next step after that.

1

I got out of Strangeways at half past eight on the Friday morning and Terry met me at the gate.

He walked up to me, stopped a couple of feet away then shifted from one foot to the other. Either he was nervous or he wanted a piss.

‘Hello, mate.’

He'd put on some weight and there was more colour in his face than when I'd last seen him inside eight months ago, but he still looked pretty fit and hard, and his fine brown hair was clean and recently cut and getting flicked at by the breeze. He was wearing crisp designer jeans, ironic seventies shirt and jacket and new trainers. And none of it copy gear, I'd bet.

I looked past him down the slope to Bury Road. Cars and the good noise of traffic, straightgoers on the pavement doing that brisk efficient stride they use on the way to work in the morning, the quick-step one where they stretch their legs a little bit further, moving with purpose in anticipation of a new day - bang, bang, bang, I'm a straightgoer.

I looked back at Terry.

‘Fuck off.’

‘What?’

I was already past him and down the slope. I heard him skip shuffle behind me and his breath as he caught up.

‘I thought we were mates.’

‘We're not.’

‘I thought –’

I stopped walking. ‘Just fuck off.’

I did the straightgoer stride down the hill, looking for a cab on the main drag. Off the slope by the car lot, I glanced over my shoulder to see the little shit yapping along behind me. 'I just wanted to meet you out of the nick. What's the matter?'

I grabbed his mile-wide seventies collar and slammed him up against the chainlink fence. Then I leant right in so we were nose to nose, and now he was frightened.

'Hey, mate -'

'No. No mate. Not since you stuck us in it.' I shook him with each word. 'Captain Cocaine.'

'I told you, there was no malice.'

I jabbed a finger at the nick. He thought I was going for his eye and flinched right. 'Eighteen months. In there. Down to you. Because you took some charlie. Coke, Terry, on work. On a piece of work.'

This time, his nut made the fence sing.

'Going on a piece of work means to burgle and to thieve, Terry. It means chopping up the prize and then going home and spending it out. And then living to tell the tale. It doesn't mean getting nicked and doing time, down to you. And your charlie. Coke to keep you going. Which got found. By filth. And got us nicked. Do you understand?'

He nodded a quick and frightened yes.

'Today is about seeing my son and my daughter, Terry, maybe going for a walk where I want to and smelling air without the stink of piss in it. This is my ordinary world, Terry. Not yours. So fuck off.'

I let go of him. But I didn't walk. Nor did he. Instead, I saw him sold and branded and wearing a scold's bridle.

'I've been chucked out. Janey chucked me out. I've got no money. And nowhere to go.'

So that was it. Girlfriend slings him, he's got no dough, he comes looking for me. I thought it was meant to be the other way round when you got out of the nick. You came out, someone gave you money. Not like this.

Terry's dad was a safebreaker we used to call Yoda, and he'd been a very good friend to me - he even saved me from a ten stretch once.

Yoda was dead now, so his son had his father's credit and I didn't have the choice. That's why we walked to Victoria station together and went into the buffet and I told him to sit down, and went up to the counter to buy tea and biscuits. Then I looked at the shelves and thought, *All this choice*, so I scooped up a plate and went back along the food counter opening little plastic windows and metal lids and putting food on to a plate, just because I could. Eggs, bacon, sausages, tomatoes, chips, baked beans, hash browns, toast, butter portions, jam and marmalade, more eggs, bacon, eggs, pig's knuckle, hip bone, thigh bone, knee bone, ankle bone.

Now bear the word of the Lord.

I wasn't hungry. I'd had my porridge in the nick. Have your porridge on the last morning, or you'll come back for it. That's what they say. I paid and walked the tray over to Terry. 'Here.' I banged it down. 'Just stay here.'

I looked round for the toilets. A few seconds later I was standing in one of the pissy cubicles going through my cash. They give you a week's social when you get out of nick. Fifty quid. Leon had sent me in three hundred a couple of weeks ago, and I still had most of that. So I counted out two and trousered the rest.

There was a payphone just outside the bogs. I phoned Carol, an old mate who owed me a couple of favours. Yes, Terry could stay for a few days. Then I went and dropped the dough on him. A tenner slipped off the fold and went on his plate, soaking up the baked beans. He looked up at me like a dog wanting a Bonio. I gave him Carol's address and the SP and told him to behave himself. 'None of your crap,' I said. 'No liberties. Understand?'

He nodded, then looked at the dough.

'A twoer. Against your half of our last parcel.'

'What about the rest?'

'I'll be in touch. If it wasn't for your dad, I wouldn't even be talking to you.' Then I stuck my face in his and spat. 'Taking fucking cocaine on work. You prick.'

He squirmed in his seat, half twitched and half smiled some sort of

thanks. Then he picked the tenner off the beans and tried to smile at me again. I made for the door. As I pulled it open I glanced at him. He was sat there licking the sauce off the money.

I did the straightgoer stride again, away from Terry and the station, then I did a left, crossed over, glanced back to check I was alone and doubled back for Marcus's shop and my whip-round. He'd sent me the postcard saying he was holding it this time round and I was to come and get it. A couple minutes more and I was there: six massive, carved wood thrones and an equally heavy-looking table on the pavement. The street doors were locked back. He was open.

I went in and down a thin gap between a pile of office chairs and a stack of bathroom cabinets. I turned left at the last cabinet and walked past three lifesize copies of the *Venus de Milo*, except the last one had arms. Marcus popped out from behind this, brushing Brillo-pad grey hair out of his eyes and tugging at one end of a large brown thing.

'Need any help, Marcus?'

He looked over his shoulder, then straightened up and stuck his hand out. 'Do you want to wait in the office a minute? Sort us out a brew?'

Now I could see a young lad at the other end of the brown thing. About twenty, spotty and with John Lennon bins on his nose. A student, probably. Straight, definitely.

'When you're ready, Marcus.'

I slid past him and turned left at a stack of fake Louis XV chairs and ducked into the little cubbyhole of an office. There were two gas burners standing in the corner and, as usual, it was incredibly hot. I pulled off my jacket, tugged out my shirt and flapped it around to get a bit of breeze up my chest. Out in the main shop there was thudding, scraping and puffing as Marcus and the kid dragged the brown thing out on to the pavement. I ferreted around for the teabags and grabbed a couple of mugs down from the shelf.

Marcus wasn't an out and out villain, but neither was he straight; he dabbled and he'd buy a parcel when there was something going. But he knew most of us and because he was half and half he was usually

out, which is why he got given the whips when they came. I turned at a scrape to see him kicking at a stone lion doorstep.

‘Leave it open, Marcus. Please. I've lost three pounds since I walked in here.’

He was in a long black winter coat, furry scarf and gloves and showed no sign of taking them off. I knew he wouldn't; Marcus would feel cold in the Kalahari desert. At noon.

‘You hot?’

The way he asked, you'd think we were druids on Salisbury Plain celebrating the winter solstice by dancing around naked.

‘Yes, I'm hot. I'm always hot here. Everyone's hot here. Name me one person who comes in here and says they're cold.’

Apparently genuinely bemused, Marcus stopped prodding the lion with his toe and made a thinking face. ‘I can't think of anyone offhand.’

‘Of course you can't. Because there isn't anyone.’ He considered this for a second, then shrugged. ‘Anyway, I've sent the lad away for half an hour so we can have a rabbit. I suppose we can leave the door open.’ He nodded at the CCTV above my head. ‘If any customers come, I'll just have to nip and see to them.’ Then he went deep inside his coat and pulled out a thick roll of notes. ‘Six hundred and forty five.’

‘Thanks, Marcus.’

‘Whatever, mate. You're welcome. You and a few others, always welcome.’

A beat.

‘Jack sends his best.’

‘Jack?’

‘Jack Keane. He's out.’

Jack Keane. Haven't seen him since . . .

Marcus waved a finger at the dough as it went into my pocket. ‘Very generous on that. Sit down.’

I crackled on to an office chair wrapped in plastic as he slid past for the kettle. ‘I didn't know he'd come home.’

‘Told me to tell you he's away for a couple of days and he looks

forward to a drink with you when he gets back. You and Jack go back a long way, don't you?'

'All the way to Foston Hall. Were you ever there?'

'I managed to avoid detention centre.'

'Christmas Day, it was. Jack and me down the block. Other people remember punk, Johnny Rotten, space hoppers and token king that year. I just remember PE at dawn, the kids who couldn't read and the smell of piss. And Jack. How did he look?'

'Fitter than a butcher's dog.'

'He always kept fit.'

'And it's been a long stretch.'

'Yeah, eight years.'

'That's right.'

We trailed off. He looked in his mug. I knew what was coming.

'I was a bit surprised to hear about the brown, pal.'

'It wasn't mine, Marcus. I don't go near heroin. Someone planted it on me.'

'Didn't know you had many enemies.'

'Well.' I got up and started to pull on my clothes. 'Thanks for everything, Marcus. Good to see you.'

'And you pal. Are you going to be in the club tonight?'

'No, I'm taking the kids out. Next couple of days, I suppose. Just need to get myself sorted. Fancy slipping back into things quietly. Know what I mean?'

Marcus nodded. 'OK, pal.'

I could have dwelt on the heroin that got me the extra eight months, but instead I went to Market Street and bought kecks, T-shirt, socks, shampoo, soap and deodorant. And a towel and trunks. Then I walked to the metro, bought a ticket to the swimming pool at Sale but got off at Stretford. My licence said I had to check in with probation, might as well do it now.

The place was a car-park from the out and a right feel of the nick on the in, especially the woman on the desk who looked me up and down like a dog screw. Pam Beresford was sick, she said, so I'd be seeing Mr

Kingsolver. Just then a door opened and a tall guy in his fifties stuck his head through, calling my name. He waved me in and went through the script at a rattle. I sat and tried to look attentive and nod at the appropriate times. It was all *yammer yammer yammer* automatic parolee supervised till the two thirds point of my sentence *yammer yammer* report once a week for the first couple of months *yammer yammer* Pam ill *yammer* Kingsolver away next week *bunny bunny* next visit wouldn't be for a fortnight.

A touch.

Yammer yammer behave myself at all times any nonsense and I'd be breached - back inside, that meant - *yammer yammer*. Prick. Then he flicked his hand at the door. The gesture said, You can go now. And a bit lively. I split.

There was a payphone outside on the corner, I dropped in some shrapnel and tapped out a number. Lou and Sam had been down to London on a trip with Sara since the weekend and we'd not spoken since. I'd been running images of seeing them again in my nut for the last few weeks. The answerphone picked up. Of course, half term, and with Sara at work, they'd be in bed. Where else would two teenagers be this time of day? I left a message and went for the metro. I spent the tram journey on the way to the pool fantasising about wide expanses of blue water, imagining how I would dive and roll at the deep end, changing direction under the surface and swimming round in circles, just because I could.

I pulled myself up and down the bath twenty times in all. There was no rush.

Apart from a loud knot of ten-year-olds in the shallow end, I had the place to myself. I made the swimming slow and powerful, felt the chlorinated water splash over my shoulders, face, ears and mouth. I spat water out every other stroke, and kicked harder than I needed to. At each end of the bath, I flipped over on to my back and looked at the foaming wake I'd kicked up behind me.

After I'd done the twenty, I did one more to bring me down the deep end again. Then I dived under the water and kicked my way to the

bottom. I swam a full width and emerged gasping for air at the other side, went down again and barrelled underwater, came up for a quick breath, kicked myself back under. This time I went right down to the blue-tiled bottom and rolled over on to my back, holding my nose and looking up. Cheeks bulging with air, I could see vague shapes of light above, hear my heart beating through the blood vessels in my ears. I came up and swam to the corner.

The kids had cleared out and now I had the place completely to myself. I swam a few more lengths, slapping the water hard with my feet and churning up a line of white horses behind me. Then out and into the changing rooms, which smelt of disinfectant. Not the sort they use inside, there was a flower in there somewhere.

A few seconds later I was standing naked under a hot shower, soaping myself up and starting to scrub the stink of nick from my skin. I lathered up face neck shoulders arms stomach arse thighs and legs, stood on one foot then the other, working the soap round ankles, across soles and between toes. The water clicked off and I lathered my ears till they squeaked. I hit the button and felt the water again, then the creamy lather loosened on me and started to slide down to the tray, swirled round my feet and schlepped down the big steel plughole. Head tipped back, I opened my mouth, feeling the shower jet rain onto my face, sluice out my pores, run off my chin and fall onto my chest. Endless steaming hot water. And no one to keep an eye out for.

A shower is a good place to do you if you're stripped off and they're dressed.

A pack of boy scouts ran and skidded into the changing room a few minutes later, and it popped up that if I stayed here much longer someone would try and do me for loitering, so I stepped out of the jets and wound the towel round my waist. Then I went across to my locker, pulled out my gear and the new stuff I'd bought. The kids weren't looking my way, so I squatted down quickly and pulled my money out from under a bench where I'd stuck it in the space between a support and the wall, twisted up in a plastic bag.

There's a lot of thieves about, you know.

Into a cubicle and locked the door behind me. I could still hear the kids outside, but at least I wouldn't be nonced off by Brown Owl.

I towelled dry, then went into the M&S bag and took out the stuff I'd bought. Breaking open the pack, I pulled on the socks first. They stretched over my toes - clean, fresh, new. The boxers were snug and the T-shirt was a soft, perfect fit. Strangeways was off my skin.

I pulled my the rest of my clothes on, then bundled the towel and bits into one plastic bag and the old underwear into another. I opened up and stepped out. The scouts had gone, leaving berets and green and yellow cravats and woggles hanging all over the shop.

I sat down on the bench for a moment. The facts were this: if I wanted to strip off and swim again, I could. If I wanted to go and sit up top and listen to the kids laughing and larking around, I could. If I wanted to buy a paper, and read it or not read it, or go into a shop and change my mind about what I'd come in for, I could. No more doors where someone else had the keys. I was out, I was having dinner with the twins that evening and I'd be paying. There was a half share in a decent parcel coming my way. I had some plots on the back burner, and that would be more money - and I knew more work would be coming my way, it always does when you've got a good reputation. And - without giving myself too much of a reference - I did have a good name. The swim had reminded me I was pretty fit. The divorce had been half civilised and Lou and Sam had taken it well.

Terry was a downer, he'd put us away last time. And I'd been fitted up while I was away, to hell with that. The main thing for now was that Strangeways was lifting off me. I walked out through reception and on to the street, jammed the prison gear into a bin on the pavement and walked for the metro. I had an appointment with a brass I knew up in Altrincham called Harry.

Harry was not that pleased to see me. She'd been busy since breakfast, and the punter now sitting in her work bedroom was overrunning; he was having a cry because he was cheating on his wife and his girlfriend.

'Didn't expect you for another hour.'

'Do you want me to come back?'

'No - kitchen and keep quiet.'

She prodded me in and closed the door. I made myself a brew and spent half an hour taking the tops off her washing liquid and fabric stuff to smell the lemons and flowers, looking in her cupboards and unscrewing spice jars for the thyme and oregano and chillis. I found some coffee beans and dropped them into my palms and crunched them together and stuck my face right in for the crisp bitter scents. I breathed them all in deep, proper smells, healthy smells, not the antiseptic nose of the nick.

'What are you doing?' Harry was standing in the doorway. I'd not heard the front door go.

'Sorry, Harry,' I dusted the coffee bits into the sink. 'You don't get good things inside.'

'I guess not.' She flexed her arm and winced. 'I hate it when they keep themselves from coming. You can feel them tensing up. So they can get an extra few seconds of me touching them. Idiots.'

She took a couple of steps as if to touch me, then mugged she'd forgotten and swung away to the sink, arm outstretched like a Dalek and washed her hands with the Fairy.

'How are you, anyway?'

'I'm fine, Harry.'

Harry's father and mother were both Thai, her real name was something that started with Arayatera and went on for about fifteen minutes. She'd been here for a ten stretch and her English and accent were near enough perfect. I'd known her for years, but it still surprised me when I got her wholesome Manchester tones.

'Just fine? Just out of the nick and just fine?' She dried her hands on a kitchen towel, then flipped up a blue pedal bin lid, balled the paper and slung it in. She folded her arms and leant on the sink. 'You'll be wanting your phone.'

'Did you get the chance?'

'It wasn't difficult.' She went into a drawer and brought out a slim silver model. 'I charged it up first thing and stuck twenty quid on it as well.'

It came across with the charger.

'Thanks.'

'And this.' She held out a card with an eleven digit number on it. I glanced down and up again, but I didn't reach out. 'Don't you want it?'

I reeled it off to her.

'I keep forgetting your memory for numbers.'

'Police can't look inside your head.'

'Anything else I can do for you?'

'Just wanted to be in a non-nick place, Harry. For a bit.'

She nodded. Then her eyes fixed on mine and moving slowly, she slid her bare feet the couple of steps she needed to be right in front of me, one foot either side of the chair. She put her hands on my shoulders and bent at the waist, bringing her cheek and neck up close to my face. I felt the warmth of her skin an inch from my nose, breathed in her perfume, strong and sharp. All flowers and fresh air with the edge of alcohol. She moved again, and the motion seemed to release a fresh cloud of scent from her skin. She almost brushed her cheek against mine and I felt her eyelashes tingle against my temple. Then she straightened up and took a couple of paces back, her eyes fixed on mine as she sat down opposite at the table. The kitchen seemed very quiet and restful, the only sound was a gentle ticking from the clock on the wall. She held my gaze a while longer, looked down and the spell was broken. I noticed I was very tired, the swim had taken it out of me. I yawned.

'Sleepy?'

I nodded. 'Just a bit. I had a dip on the way here, to lose the smell.'

'You want to go to bed?'

What was this?

'To sleep.'

Oh.

'No. No thanks.'

'OK, I'll make us something to eat then. Go and lie down in the living room. I'll call you.'

She sat back and stretched her arms above her head. This made her

left breast half slip out from under her satin wrap. She looked down, then at me and pulled it closed.

‘You’ll be needing some money too, I suspect.’

‘No Harry. I’ve got my whip.’

‘You’ll be through it by lunchtime tomorrow. Especially if you go and spend it on another tart like me.’

I let that one hang in the air, she went on.

‘Some of us are expensive. Pay us enough money, and we’ll give you so much time and attention . . . ‘ She tugged at her belt. ‘You’ll hardly notice we’re a whore.’

She threw her long black hair up and it fell over her shoulder like a horse’s tail.

‘Will five hundred do?’ she said. ‘I owe you some favours. You haven’t forgotten, have you?’

‘No.’

‘Six hundred with the phone and time on it. Give it back to me when you can.’

It was easier to say yes. ‘Thanks, Harry.’

‘Don’t mention it.’

She went to the corner of the kitchen and, squatting down sideways to me, pulled up the lino and lifted a floorboard. She was a good-looking woman, not much more than thirty. I got a glimpse of her right breast this time as she pulled out a roll of notes from the cash box under the floor, straightened up and stood it on the table in front of me.

‘Stick that down your pants or wherever you’re keeping your money these days.’

‘Thanks.’

‘OK.’ She shooed me like I was some geese. ‘You know where the sofa is. Go and lie on it.’

Down the corridor I went into the living room, took off my jacket and shoes, then lay down on the soft grey sofa, punching a pillow into shape under my head. In the kitchen, I heard cupboards being opened and pans moved around.

Harry was a brass, but she did it solo. That’s pretty unusual - even the

expensive ones like her generally have a pimp. But Harry was a trained kung fu nutter and knew how to break arms and legs. No need for a maid, then. Another difference was that she planned to get out before she turned thirty-five. Lots of girls say that. What made her most unusual of all was that she probably would.

Twenty minutes later, we were sitting at the kitchen table finishing off the bacon and eggs she'd whistled up. The eggs were slightly burnt round the edge of the whites and the bacon was crispy and done under the grill. The salt came out of a mill and I could feel each individual crystal on my tongue. I clinked down knife and fork and Harry whisked the lot away, replacing it with a bowl of chocolate pud from the microwave. She'd got changed into jeans and sweatshirt and was now leaning on the counter crunching her bare feet as her own pudding heated up. The machine pinged and she sat opposite me again. 'So what are your plans for the rest of the day?'

'Couple of people to see, drop in at my place, then I'm taking the twins out for dinner. What time is it?'

She twisted round in her seat, spoon poised at her mouth. 'Clock says half past. But I keep it twenty minutes fast.'

'Why?'

'Hooker time. The punters always take their watches off. The later they think it is, the more in a hurry they are to leave.'

'Clever.'

'If I was really clever, I wouldn't be a whore.'

I became fascinated by my chocolate pudding.

'Anyway, I'm finishing early today. I'm studying.'

'Studying?'

'Open University course. History of Art. I've told you before.'

'I remember,' I said. 'Can I use your phone?'

'Go ahead.'

I picked up the handset, punched the number in and got the machine. I left another message saying I'd ring again later.

'No one home.'

'Half term. Teenagers.'

'They won't be up yet.'

'Seems not. Thanks for the food, Harry. And the dough.'

'No problem.' She picked up a cloth and started to wipe off the table. When she got to my cup, she first wiped round it, then lifted it and handed it to me. I understood I had to take it into the living room and get my boots on there. By the time I was back in the kitchen she already had her books out on the table and was leafing through a pile of notes.

'Thanks for everything, Harry.'

'I'd like to chat. But I've got to work.'

I nodded and scooped up the bag with my swimming gear. She walked me to the front door, we said our goodbyes and I left.

Harry lived in the Downs, one of the better areas of Altrincham on the outskirts of Manchester. Quiet, broad, sloping streets with trees, leading to parades of shops and restaurants. I took out my new phone and punched in Leon's mobile as I walked down. Leon was my best friend and my teacher. It was Leon who introduced me to proper villainy more than twenty years ago and showed me how to make a proper pound note. He was also my ex-wife Sara's current lover.

The call went straight to his voicemail. I hung up. I don't trust answerphones, the wrong ears might get the message.

Then I rang Casey, my fence. He'd been shifting the stuff I nicked for years and was currently holding a parcel for me. I asked if I could drop by. He said yes, so I grabbed a taxi at the station and gave the driver the name of a hotel about fifty yards away from the big man's gaff in Sale. In the car park, I handed a tenner over the back seat and asked him to wait. Then I went in the main entrance, walked through the lobby and slipped out the side door off-show from the front. A couple more minutes and I made Casey's front door. It started to rain as the hall light went on the other side of the glass, and I saw him glide down the corridor towards the spyhole. He opened up and leant on the frame in outline. 'You were quick.'

'Hello, Casey.'

'We're in the back.' He waved me in, locked up and then sort of

danced down the corridor in front of me singing 'Fly Me To The Moon' in the club style. Casey was six foot five and a slightly fat version of the wrestler he'd been when he picked up the bronze at the Commonwealth Games sometime in the seventies. He flicked the dining-room door open, spun on the ball of his right foot and went 'Ta-da!'

'Are you taking something, Casey?'

'Just glad to see you on the street, that's all.'

It was getting dark now and the only light was a lamp on the dining table, papers spread its ten-seat length. The room smelt of fresh polish.

'Hang on a minute.' He *dooby-dooby-doed* to the corner, switched on a lamp and spun round. He'd grown a beard. Shaggy, flecked with grey.

'You've grown a beard, Casey.'

'Clever boy.'

'It makes you look like a wino.'

He gave me the sort of look that had probably once been a signal to Giant Haystacks that he was about to start bouncing off the ropes before he was very much older. 'I thought Orson Welles.'

'Sherry commercial Orson, perhaps. Not *Citizen Kane*.'

'I know you're trying to wind me up. It's not going to work.' He started snapping his thumbs and sing again. I caught a few words: *show - view - Jupiter - Mars*, then: 'Do you want a brew?'

'Please.'

He scatted out into the kitchen and was back a few seconds later with a tray of coffee. He tried to swing and pour at the same time, but it slopped into the saucer, so he gave the Rat Pack moves a body-swerve and settled for humming 'Volare' while he served up. We made space among the papers for our cups.

'How was the Big House?'

'The same. Terry was my main problem.'

'How?'

'On to me all the time. Sorries and apologies right and left.'

'And rightly so. Did you know he was on the charlie?'

'No, so he can't have been on it for long. He met me this morning.'

'Met you?'

'On the steps. Bird's chucked him out, so he says.'

'Did you fuck him off.'

I took a mouthful of the coffee. It was pus.

'You sorted him somewhere to stay, didn't you?' He chuckled and pulled at his beard. 'You bloody soft lad.'

'I did it for his father.'

'Course you did. You really are a straight face, aren't you? Keep the code, stick to the rules. I think you're the straightest face I've ever known.'

'I owe Yoda and Yoda's dead. So his son has his father's credit.'

'So what does Terry actually have to do to get struck off your Christmas card list?'

'He's got his dad's credit for now. And that's it. Now, let's talk about something else. How did you do?'

'All right, then. Sixty grand.'

'That's good.'

'Cash Wednesday, if that's all right.'

'It is.'

Just then, two small pairs of running feet belted from one end of the house to the other above our heads. I looked up and back as Casey thumbed at the ceiling. 'Au pair's playing with the kids.'

'Au pair?'

'Well, wife wanted one. Marta she's called. Spanish. Nice girl.'

Now the beard and Sinatra tribute made sense.

'How is Stella?'

'Huh?'

'Stella. Your wife, Stella.'

'Watching telly at the front. You want more coffee?'

'No thanks, one of those is quite enough.'

The feet pelted back again, and I glanced up at the ceiling. When my eyes flicked down I caught him looking at me over the rim of his cup.

'All right, Casey?'

'Yes, I - er.' He leant across the table and fished a thick white envelope from among the papers. 'There's a grand there. I had it about

me when you rang. Thought you might need some exes. I'll take it off the sixty.'

'Thanks.' I stowed the cash and sat waiting for what I knew was coming.

'So are you seeing the twins, then?'

'Why don't you just come out with it, Casey?'

'What do you mean?'

'Come on, how long have I known you?'

'I'm sorry, it's not my business . . . '

'The brown was planted, Casey,' I said. 'I don't know why, but it was stuck right on me.'

'Of course, right.'

I'd known Casey for ten years, and for the first time I was uncomfortable in his company. 'What else did you hear?'

'Nothing more than the spin. I was a bit surprised, that's all.'

'Yeah, so was I. Eight months surprised.' I drained my cup. 'I've got a taxi waiting, Casey. Got to go.'

He walked me to the front. No dancing this time.

The door swung open and there were two screws in the narrow gap.

'Routine search,' said the youngest, a spiny toerag of about twelve. Thin faced and wearing heavy specs. 'On your feet.'

Just behind him was an older screw called Katz who I'd known on and off for years. He seemed to be on a watching brief, minding the YTS boy. YTS took a couple of paces into the cell then stood face to face with me and said, 'Is there anything in your cell, or do you have anything on you, that you shouldn't have?'

I took in his anxious spotty face and their white rubber gloves. 'Of course,' I said. 'I've got a blade stuck round the s-bend of the karsi, and a quarter of blow up my arse.'

What I actually said was: 'No. Nothing.'

And I didn't. Not only was I too careful for all that caper, I only had two weeks left to do.

I emptied my pockets of snout and lighter, I pulled my shirt and

vest off and handed them to the bespectacled youth who fingered them uncertainly, then handed them back to me. I put both back on, then slipped off my strides and skids for their inspection. I wasn't being modest, the routine was for their benefit, so they couldn't be accused of springing a spin just to see you naked. For the sake of a little voyeuristic hom fun. Not that I have anything against gays, mind. I just don't want them to rain on my parade.

Strides and skids were fingered and also returned to me. Then socks and shoes came off and went up for inspection. Katz looked a bit weary by now, but the kid was starting to get into it. He checked the seams on my socks and the seams on my shoes. Then he checked them again. Rather disappointed, it seemed to me, he handed them back and told me to take my bedding outside and shake it over the landing. He followed me out as Katz started to run over my peter.

'We're not picking on you,' said YTS. 'This is just routine. Just routine.'

He made such a point of saying it that I almost expected something to slip out of my blanket and fall the ten foot or so to the suicide net.

Then Katz shouted me in. I turned, went back into the cell, and saw him standing over a sheet of newspaper spread out on the cell floor. On it were the contents of my wastebin. An old *Guardian*, scraps of paper, insides of toilet rolls. Katz looked straight at me and held his hand out. In his upturned palm was a wrapper from half an ounce of snout. This had been opened as well, and in the middle of the spread-out tin foil was a cluster of neat little handmade envelopes about half an inch across.

'What's this then?'

'We both know what that is,' I said.

'Twelve ninety, boss.' The driver was twisted round in his seat. 'We're here, boss. Twelve ninety.'

'I gave you ten already.'

His face dropped. Maybe he'd been trying it on. 'Oh yeah. Two ninety. Sorry.'

I got out and stuck the rest through the window. He snorted and

drove off and I crossed the road into the cul de sac. My place had been empty while I'd been away and the twins had kept an eye on it for me. The upstairs windows were lit, so the Wessons must be in. I wanted them to think I was still off 'on business', so I let myself in quietly, crept up the stairs to the first floor, opened my flat door double quiet and kept the lights off, standing for a moment to let my eyes adjust to the gloom. There was a pile of letters on the hall table, stacked up neatly by one of the kids. A couple more crackled under my boots. I squatted, dropped them next to the answerphone, called Lou and Sam again and got the machine.

'Lou, Sam, it's me again. Ringing about dinner tonight. It's about half four and I'm at home. Give me a bell as soon as. Bye.'

I hung up. There was something wrong here, but I couldn't work out what. I pushed open the lounge door and went in. Just then, and with an imagined click, the streetlamps came on. Now the room was a kind of pale yellow, with window shapes thrown across the deck and up the walls.

Everything was the same as eighteen months before. Widescreen telly in the window, red leather chairs now glowing in the yellow from outside, red leathertop desk and chair in the corner, white (now yellow) marble fireplace and the fake gas fire. Eight twelve-foot shelves down the walls either side of the bay window, some with books, some with pictures, some empty. A club chair by the fire. Low stack of *Cosmo Girl* and *Heat* and other Lou mags on the table. I pressed my foot into the Persian rug, felt it give into the red Chinese carpet underneath. The place smelt a bit musty, but it felt OK.

Leaving the lights off, I went into the bedroom and the bathroom. They were also fine. In the kitchen I put the kettle on and went back into the bedroom to change strides, shirt and shoes. A black leather jacket came out of the wardrobe and I transferred everything from the other. Still in the dark, I went into the kitchen and made black coffee, carried it along the corridor and stopped dead at the hall table as I realised what was wrong. The answerphone light wasn't flashing. I hadn't got a message from the twins.

I left the flat immediately, moving fast on to the main drag to look

for a cab.

Buckingham Road is a quiet residential slice of Heaton Moor - speed bumps, bay windows, the lot. I bought number forty five on a mortgage when Sara and I got married, but it had been in her name for years now. When we split up, the twins stayed with her - she offered them stability. My deal could involve prison waiting rooms.

I took my finger off the doorbell and listened, then I rang again. A few steps back and I saw the downstairs curtains were drawn, then I walked halfway down the garden path and looked up. Bedroom curtains were back, but no sign of life. Back to the bell and I kept my finger on it till the end went white. Certainly long enough to wake sleeping teenagers.

Maybe they were due back from London tonight, not yesterday. But they knew I was out today, they knew we were going out. They wouldn't forget that, wouldn't miss it without letting me know. And no message on my machine at home? Lou left me a message if she knew I'd been away for the weekend, just to welcome me back.

Gas. I'll say I smelt gas.

I nipped down the side entry and dropped over the wall to number forty five. Up to the back, I found the spare key under the ledge and had the kitchen door open in a few seconds. Inside it looked a bit tidier than usual. Fridge humming quietly in the corner, clock on the cooker green in the dark. Down the corridor to the front room. As in my own place, I paused for a second and let my eyes adjust. Then I pushed the lounge door open. What I saw in the glow from the street hit me like an iron bar across the face. Breaking the habit of a lifetime, I turned the light on.

The room was completely empty. Not a stick of furniture.

I swung round, slammed on the hall light, took the stairs two at a time and tore the bedroom doors open.

Empty, all of them.

No sight of Lou, Sam or Sara. I slapped on the bathroom light, empty shelves. I opened cupboard doors, looked in the bathtub. Nothing. Nothing nothing nothing.

I half ran, half jumped down the stairs, noticed the lampshade had gone in the hall but the answerphone was still plugged in, shot round the house, looking behind doors, checking in cupboards, like I was expecting them to be hiding. Then I ran round again switching the lights off, slumped in the dark at the foot of the stairs and tried to think.

My ex-wife and children had gone and taken everything with them. And, it seemed, my brain had been replaced with handfuls of cotton wool. Trying to get my thoughts into line was like building a wall with this cotton wool, but whatever had happened here, I'd been turning lights on and someone could have seen and dialled three nines. I was on parole, and not in the mood to argue the toss about whether I had the right to be here or not. Get out, and swift.

I locked the door and stuck the key back, then went over the wall and I was on Buckingham Road again, walking fast. What the hell did I do now? Leon. Try Leon again. Straight to voicemail. What the fuck was going on?

Sara worked about half a mile away on the main drag. I started running, it started raining again and I was damp and sweating as I made her building. There was a courier in leathers just coming out, I slammed past him and took the stairs two at a time to the third floor where her PA Michelle was just pulling on a long blue coat to go home.

'Where is she?'

She took a second to recognise me. 'Oh, hello - er, she phoned in yesterday, said she had to take some time off.'

'They're gone, the house is empty, Michelle, where is she?'

Then a door opened and a tall meaty neck with five o'clock shadow came out, whisking it shut behind him. 'What's the fucking noise for?' said the neck. 'I've got Japs in there.'

'It's Sara's husband, Mr Bryant.'

Bryant turned, six foot of *I'll deal with this* white collar aggression. 'Do you understand what a fucking office is? Sara's ill, she's at home and you are out of order, so leave right now.'

I was still on prison time, and you don't let someone talk to you like that in the nick. I stepped towards him and he bristled up. Big and

beefy, he probably fancied his chances, I could see it running through his brain. *This guy's a villain, probably a bully too, I've heard enough about him from Sara, he doesn't frighten me, the prick.* He jerked his thumb at the door. 'Just go.'

I made to leave, then swung round and slammed an open palm into his face. The move knocked him back hard against the wall which actually shuddered. Then I grabbed him by the throat and made a fist.

'Whatever you know, tell me now.' I was thinking nick. I couldn't stop it. He gave it up in a beat. 'She phoned in sick, then she phoned in again and said there'd been a death in the family and she needed some more time off.' His tongue shot out and worked round his mouth. 'That's the truth. That's all we know.'

It was. Still on prison time, and I knew. I dropped him, his legs gave way and he slid down the wall to the deck.

'I'm sorry, Michelle.'

I took the stairs three at a time going down. If Bryant gave it three nines I was completely fucked. On my kind of licence they hardly needed an excuse to recall you and I'd just given them plenty - they'd have me back inside without the option. I hit the bottom, tore open the door and out on to the pavement. A few blocks down and I slowed, then managed to flag a cab for the centre. It was a black London-style, I slammed the divider shut and called Sara's mobile. Straight to voicemail.

'Sara, it's me. I don't know what's going on, but just call me - please. I'm on this number.' I left it and hung up. The twins didn't have mobiles, Sara was worried about brain tumours.

I called Leon, broke a rule and left a message. 'Leon, call me back as soon as you get this, whatever the time. Here's the number.' I rattled it off and saw we'd hit Deansgate. 'Stop here.'

I chucked the money at him and went into a bar. It was heaving and smelt of sex, there were bright lights and loud music, full of likely lads with gel-chopped number four crops and girls with plunging necklines, pierced navels and strappy sandals. Kids enjoying themselves. Of course, it was Friday night.

I pushed to the counter and got lucky. The barman - who'd been

flipping bottles around like a circus juggler - stopped and clanked them down on the metal counter in front of me.

'Beer, any beer,' I shouted.

'These are on promotion,' he shouted back.

'Fine, whatever.'

He flipped my glass into a double somersault and I dropped some coin on the counter. The first drink when you get out is usually very important, you take time over it. Right now, I didn't even notice the label. It was just the rent. I took the bottle and pushed my way through damp bodies to a corner where I could watch the door. A couple got up off a chair which they'd been squashed into, kissing enthusiastically. I slid into their seat, lit a cigarette and burnt it halfway down on the first drag. I tried to think, but I couldn't, I felt like something had been torn out of me; Lou and Sam were just seventeen and they'd gone. The twins were my life, the most important thing that I knew or had ever known. Even though they lived with their mum, I saw them both as often as we could, they had keys to my place, they could come and go as they wanted. Sometimes I'd go home and find one of them on the sofa because they'd had a row at school or home and wanted to be away from it all and be with me. Or just because we hadn't spoken in a few days and they missed me. And now they'd gone and I didn't know why. What if I never saw them again? The tear inside me got wider. If that happened then my life was over, might as well walk out of here and go and top myself now.

No, come on, think. Remember the rules: get knowledge. The first thing was to get knowledge. What did I know from seeing the house? I saw them all dead for a second, laid out on slabs, tags on toes. No, push that down, that wasn't it. And it didn't make sense. Murders would mean police tapes, watch on the house, a screw at my cell door at three in the morning. No, think about what you saw at Buckingham Road. It was empty, but it was tidy. Looked like they'd packed up to go. And the answerphone was still there, to take messages, make people think they were just out or asleep. You'd have to go round and get in to find the truth.

Who might know? Leon, he was the boyfriend. I couldn't find him and they all knew I was getting out today. Had they all gone off together?

I ripped out the phone and crushed in his number, then stuck it to my ear and got his voicemail again. I hung up and punched the table, think again. Her friends and their numbers burnt through my brain, they must know - and Steph. Her sister Steph and her husband Jan. Steph was very close with Sara, their son virtually lived round Buckingham Road when he was a kid. No way they couldn't know something.

I pushed out to the street and sweated a couple of minutes for a quiet call box just off the main drag. Steph and Jan were engaged, so I tried a couple of Sara's friends and got no answers. I left messages with my new number on a couple of machines, then tried again. Jan answered immediately, like he was sitting over the phone.

'Jan?'

'What do you want?' He sounded tired and angry.

'What's wrong, Jan?'

With the silence, I thought he'd hung up.

'Jan?'

'We don't want to talk to you. We have nothing to say. Just leave us alone.'

The line went dead. I dialled back and it was engaged. What was his fucking game? Well, whatever it was, he wasn't on. I'd lay money they knew more than me right now. I'd find out what their fucking problem was.

Dodging the traffic, I found a cab. Fifteen minutes later, I got dropped at the end of their road, kicked the gate at number sixty three, went up the path and buzzed. The door opened and Jan was there in silhouette. Couldn't make out his face, but he was wearing an overcoat like he'd just come in. Steph was slumped on the stairs in a long grey mac. She looked up to see who it was.

'What do you want, you fucking bastard?' Then she screamed and launched herself at me, thudding into my gut and punching and slapping my face. 'Get out you bastard, get out!'

She carried on hitting me, I covered my head with my hands and let her do it, Jan did nothing to stop her. I felt him standing to one side, letting his wife do what she wanted. There were slaps and thin fists on my head and shoulders, the backs of my hands, then it died away and I looked up. She stumbled back a couple of steps, dissolved into sobs and slammed her face into Jan's chest. He stared at me over her shoulder, and now I could see his eyes were red from crying. I took in the hall, saw Tomas's cycling helmet and his bike leaning up against the wall. I started to guess, the question was burbling out, but Jan spoke over me.

'Tomas is dead, and the police say it's because of you. You filthy dirty evil bastard, you killed Tomas, our son. You.'

I was in another cab. Lights people streets shops crowds clubs pubs cars buses street signs traffic lights flicked by the window. From a distance, I heard the driver ask where I was going. I heard myself mumble something to do with the city centre.

These are the facts. Jan and Stephanie had been out all day. They'd been out because they'd been organising the funeral of their only son Tomas. This is Tomas, who used to play football with Lou and Sam and sleep over with them in a tent in the back garden at Buckingham Road. Somewhere I have a picture of Tomas with Lou and Sam and a bird's nest they found when we all went walking in the country one Sunday in spring. Before I made them put it back, I took a photograph. It's about six in the evening, the children are tired after an afternoon's walking and running down hills and chasing each other. The sun is low in the sky and the shadows are long. The twins are seven and Tomas is nine. He's wearing a red jumper Steph knitted for him and he's stood in the middle of my two, giving a gap-toothed smile and holding the nest out to the camera, showing the eggs unbroken.

These are the facts. Tomas said he'd be staying at a friend's Monday night. The police rang the door about five Tuesday morning, Tomas was down at the Infirmary, shot. He was dead by the time Jan got up from the depot.

The copper who stayed with them for the statements was a DC from

Bootle Street called Sommerfield. He told them that Tomas had a couple of wraps of heroin in his pocket. Sommerfield said he'd had words with his boss, a chief superintendent called Hamilton Jacks.

Keith Hamilton Jacks. I knew him all right.

Sommerfield said Hamilton Jacks knew I'd been dealing seriously for some time, and that Tomas worked for me. Must have been working for me when he got shot, Hamilton Jacks said. Post mortem said Tomas was a regular heroin user. Sommerfield told them that dealers like me try to get their people on the brown to control them. Keeps them on a string, Sommerfield told them.

Jan and Steph hadn't even known Sara and the twins had gone, but they weren't surprised. Sara knew about Tomas, and Steph had told her what Hamilton Jacks said. She didn't want Lou and Sam near me any more.

This was when Jan reminded me that I was a lousy father and a lousy human being. Then he slammed the door in my face and I heard them both crumple into sobs as I waded down the path. The heaving followed me along the road and stayed in my head while I wandered looking for a taxi.

I was in trouble. Tomas was my nephew and Tomas was dead and the police had told his mam and dad that I was involved. And I was on probation and I'd slapped Sara's boss around so the filth could be knocking on my door to take me back to Strangeways any time. I'd be no good to no one back there, so I couldn't go home.

We were coming up Portland Street opposite the old Queen's. I told him to pull in, chucked a note over the back seat and jogged across the Gardens to Mother Mac's down Back Piccadilly where I bought a drink and sat in the corner watching the door.

Just after nine Marcus came in, still in the winter coat and scarf but with a double thick black beanie on his head this time. I wove through the boozers and grabbed him at the bar.

'Hello, thought you were out with the kids tonight?'

'Are you driving?'

'It's down the side.'

‘Let's go and sit in it.’

Marcus's red Merc was tucked down the side street pointing away from the pub, with a table wrapped in plastic strapped to the roof rack. We got in and he turned on the heater.

‘Are you going to the club tonight, Marcus?’

‘Later.’

‘I've got some proper trouble, Marcus. My nephew's been murdered.’

‘Oh, Christ.’

‘He was shot and dumped at the Infirmary around five Tuesday morning. I need your help, Marcus, I don't know who else I can trust right now. I need you to ask around at the club for me tonight, someone must know something. Don't mention my name, don't say he was my nephew, but can you see if anyone knows anything? Names, rumours, anything at all. Please.’

‘What's his name again?’

‘Tomas Warzyniak, nineteen years old. Royal Infirmary, Tuesday morning, early. The filth say he was dealing brown, but I don't believe that.’

‘Was he on the gear?’

‘They say so, I don't believe that either.’

‘OK, I'll see what I can do.’

I was sweating from the heater, so I cracked the window a couple of inches. ‘Have you got a pen?’

‘In the glovebox.’

I opened it, found a pen and wrote my new number and Tomas's name on the back of a flyer for a car dealer in Hyde. ‘Call me on this number, no other.’

He folded it away in his wallet. ‘You should call Jack. If there's class A in there, he might know something.’

‘I know what Jack's game is, Marcus.’

‘Yeah, sorry.’

‘Thanks. Call me as soon as you've got something.’

‘OK, mate.’ He nodded outside, it was raining again. ‘Do you need a

lift anywhere?’

‘No. Thanks, Marcus.’

I jogged down Back Piccadilly as he fired the Merc up. There was one cab left on the rank in the Gardens. I slid back the divider and asked for the Alex Park Estate. ‘One of the avenues off Quinney. I’ll give you a shout.’

The guy clocked me hard in the mirror. The Alex was bandit country.

I managed to haul up some calm. ‘Just come from the hospital, need to talk to a relative.’ Which meant *I’m not at it*.

Fifteen minutes later, we pulled up on the main drag where it cut into Benny’s close.

‘It’s just down here.’

‘Yeah, and I’m staying here.’

‘Look, nothing’s going to happen.’

‘No, ‘cause this is where I’m staying.’

‘Okay, will you wait then?’

‘How long?’

‘About fifteen minutes.’

He looked at the meter. It clicked three fifty. ‘Fifteen and I’ll stop here for you.’

It was only spitting now. I jammed a score through the divider and got out. ‘Fifteen minutes,’ I said.

I got out and slapped a few paces away from the cab. Then I heard the motor fire and the slag shot off as a waterfall broke on my head, thick sheets building almost immediately to hail. Pressing into the shelter of some bushes, I snapped up my collar and saw a sudden movement down the street. Other side, a few houses along, a guy bobbed out into the light for a moment and it was Tomas, the sharp-boned body, the long hair like curtains. I wiped the water out of my eyes and peered through the hail again. He was gone. Then the rain slowed and stopped in a second.

I jogged the hundred yards down the street and hit the bell. It rang somewhere away in the house and I heard the old guy wheezing and

sliding up to the glass. Movement behind the spyhole, then clanking and bolts and keys as he opened up.

'Hallo there. Good to see you on the street again, mate.'

'Can I come in, Benny?'

'Yeah, yeah, course.'

The only light in his lounge was a chipped anglepoise on the coffee table shining on a Swiss Army knife, a tobacco pouch and some rectangles of blow a couple of inches long.

'When did you get out?'

'This morning.'

'And you want something for your head?'

'In a minute. I need a favour, Benny.'

Benny was an obsessive United fan, he listened to or watched every local news bulletin and read half a dozen dailies in case there was something in about the Reds. And because of all the lads in and out buying blow, he had a pretty good idea of a lot of stuff that never made it into the papers, local or otherwise. I told him about Tomas.

'Christ, I'm sorry mate.'

'OK. Have you heard or read anything about it?'

He blew out over his teeth. 'I read something, I think. Couple of days ago, young kid. Shot in the belly, dropped at the Infirmary. I think that was it.'

'Are you sure, Benny? This is important.'

'I know it's important, it's your nephew.'

'I need as much knowledge as you can get, Benny. Mainstream, or off the street. I've got a new number.' I wrote it down on a newspaper and laid it on top of the pouch and cubes of dope. 'Tomas Warzyniak. But keep me out of it, OK?'

'OK.'

'Soon as you can, Benny.'

He wrapped me an ounce and a half of Rocky. I paid him and went looking for a cab. Bad area, bad time. *Get out of sight*. I jogged for Stretford, scanning the roads for a paid lift. It started to rain again.

Half an hour later, and piss wet through I was checking into a B&B

on Chester Road round the corner from Old Trafford. The room was a box with a coat hook on the back of the door. I pulled my jacket and shoes off, opened the window, rolled a joint and lit it, then rang Leon again. Same as.

‘Call me, Leon. It's urgent.’

Then I thought of Leon's mam, Judith. He never gave her number out - she was getting bad on her legs and he didn't want her running to the phone. But I knew her well, she'd be OK with me. She answered on the eighth ring. I tried to sound casual.

‘Hello Judith, sorry to trouble you, love. But I got out today and I've been trying to get hold of Leon.’

‘I know it was today, I told him to bring you out here to lunch, but it was business he said. It's always business with you, I told him. I asked him who was going to meet you, but he said you'd be happy on your own for a bit. How are you?’

‘I'm fine, Judith. It's just that I've been ringing his mobile and getting the answerphone.’

‘He's got a new one a couple of days ago. Which one are you ringing?’

‘Must be the old one. Can you give me the other?’

‘Just a minute.’

I heard the phone laid down and a drawer being opened. Villains change their mobiles as often as they can afford it, normally he'd have told me.

‘Here we are.’

I wrote it down, then called it back. ‘I'll give him a bell right now.’

‘He has it off half the time, anyway. He's a mystery to me, that boy. Always has been.’

‘Can you take my new number, Judith? And ask him to call me?’

She wrote it down. It took a while.

‘Sorry to be a trouble,’ I said.

‘Trouble indeed,’ she was all mock indignant. ‘When are you ever trouble to this house? Goodnight and God bless.’

We hung up and I rang the new one. Voicemail.

‘Ring me the minute you get this, Leon. It's urgent.’ I spewed my number and hung up. Then I noticed I'd been tugging so hard on the joint it was nearly gone. And I'd stuck plenty in it so I felt dizzy. Then the blow whispered at me.

They've all done a runner. Sara, Lou, Sam, Leon. He's taken them all away to his place in Spain. To start a new life together.

What about the twins?

Plenty of language schools there, probably all been planned for months. That's why he didn't give you the new number. You've been away a year and a half, remember.

Fuck off. They don't need to run from me. Not together. And Leon wouldn't do that to me anyway.

Wouldn't he?

‘No,’ I kicked at the voice. ‘And he wouldn't do it to Judith, and she can't tell a lie to save her life. Except to the filth.’

I laid the spliff in the ashtray, then leant back and closed my eyes.

The cold woke me and I didn't have a clue where I was. Then it was, oh Christ blue bed cover grey curtain flock walls single bed Tomas twins Christ yes Jesus Christ.

I got up and closed the window, my watch said three fifteen. I picked up the phone to check no one had rung, tried Leon again. Nothing.

Then I undressed, crawled between the sheets, reached out and flicked off the light. Curling up in a ball, I tried to sleep.